

The Influence of Gender-role Expectations on the Consumption of Women's Sports Media

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Background

Consumer psychology and the gendered-nature of media consumption.

- Gender, gender identity and gender-role attitudes influence consumption patterns, while brands have been argued to embody masculine and feminine personas (Grohman, 2009; Palen et al., 1999; Melnyk et al., 2009).

- Marketers spend millions of dollars to associate products with media and often target perceived gender differences (Eisend, 2009; Grohmann, 2009).

- Shrum (1999) argues that research on media consumption and content is critical to informing marketing communication literature.

Gender and Sports Entertainment.

- Sports media such as *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN are global brands that provide myriad opportunities for advertisers, corporate sponsors and also serve to promote consumption of branded sports entertainment properties (e.g. NFL).

- Marketing scholars suggest that research on sport consumers, whether it be spectators or participants, can offer insights on gender roles and consumption (Fischer & Gainer, 1994; Sherry et al., 2004).

- While Sherry et al. (2004) note that sport has traditionally been a masculine domain of consumption, female consumers in the U.S. have become an increasingly important target audience for sport marketers, given the exponential growth of their participation in organized sport and fitness activities.

- In recent years, certain print media concerns have been successful in targeting female consumers, with titles focusing on personal fitness, while publications dedicated exclusively to covering sports entertainment featuring female athletes have failed.

- Time Warner's *Sports Illustrated*, the highest-circulated weekly sports magazine, reaches approximately 5 million female readers each week, but the company's attempt in 2000 to create an all-female sports magazine, *Sports Illustrated for Women*, ended after 20 issues and less than three years.

- ESPN just launched espnW in October 2010. One quarter of ESPN's television audience is female, but less than 10 percent of its programming is devoted to women's sports. The women's version of ESPN was started as an Internet site, in hopes of build a female following to its female brand without having to attract an audience that would be large enough for a magazine or television network to be commercially viable.

- As with other sectors of the entertainment industry, branded sports properties, such as the WNBA, WPA and LPGA, are dependent upon publicity for their businesses to thrive.

- Given the above, there have been calls for marketing research that adds to our understanding of the social and psychological factors that affect gendered consumption (Grohman, 2009; McDaniel, 2004; Sherry et al., 2004).

Purpose

Building upon marketing research on gender and the thematic content of sports entertainment and other media (Eisend, 2009; McDaniel, 2004; Sherry et al., 2004), the current study investigates the degree to which consumers' gender-role expectations about women influence their interest in consumption of gendered product offerings, such as coverage of women's sports entertainment (which must compete in a male-dominated sector). In doing so, the research also accounts for the potential effects of demographic and psychological factors that could add to our understanding of the social and psychological aspects of gendered consumption in this evolving industry.

Method

Data Source

- Online survey responses by (n=789) individuals 18 and older from a gender-balanced national panel of consumers.
- Part of a larger study on the behaviors and attitudes of Americans with regard to sports-related topics.

Consumption of Women's Sports Media

Interest in Reading About Women's Sports Index

A multi-item measure was constructed to quantify interest in reading about women's sports. This summative measure is based upon respondents' interest in reading about:

- women's collegiate sports,
- women's Olympic sports,
- women's professional sports, and
- female athletes' personal lives.

Individual item values range from 1 for "very uninterested" to 5 for "very interested."

Gender-role Expectations

Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS)

- Developed in 1972; has become the most commonly used measure of gender-role attitudes (Spence & Hahn, 1997).
- 15 questions related to contexts that have traditionally been divided along gender lines.
- Individual item values range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and are valued from 0 to 3.

Results

Consumption Patterns

Table 1. Paired t-tests Comparing Media Interest by Gender

GENDER	INTEREST IN ARTICLES ON FEMALE ATHLETES		INTEREST IN ARTICLES ON MALE ATHLETES		t
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	
Male (N=447)	2.29	1.13	2.44	1.17	-6.96***
Female (N=442)	2.18	1.17	2.18	1.15	-.09

GENDER	INTEREST IN ARTICLES ON FEMALE ATHLETES		INTEREST IN ARTICLES ON PERSONAL FITNESS		t
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	
Male (N=462)	2.30	1.14	2.50	1.28	-4.14***
Female (N=453)	2.18	1.17	2.65	1.42	-8.77***

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. two-tailed test.

Regression Variables

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

VARIABLE (N = 789)	RANGE	MEAN	SD
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DEPENDENT VARIABLE:

Interest in Reading About Women's Sports Index	IRWS INDEX		
	4-20	9.01	4.60

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:

Demographics

Gender (Female=1)	0-1	.50	.50
Age (Years)	18-65+	52.03	11.82
Race (Minority=1)	0-1	.11	.32
Education 1 (Some High School)	0-1	.02	.13
Education 2 (High School Graduate)	0-1	.19	.39
Education 3 (Some College)	0-1	.39	.49
Education 4 (College Graduate)	0-1	.29	.45
Education 5 (Post Graduate)	0-1	.12	.32

Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles

Political Ideology 1 (Conservative)	0-1	.41	.49
Political Ideology 2 (Moderate)	0-1	.38	.49
Political Ideology 3 (Liberal)	0-1	.21	.41
ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN SCALE	1-45	31.97	7.55
Identifying Oneself as a Sports Fan	0-1	.26	.44
Played Sports	0-1	.54	.50
No children played sports	0-1	.84	.37
Only sons played sports	0-1	.03	.16
Only daughters played sports	0-1	.04	.19
Sons and daughters played sports	0-1	.09	.29

Nested Multiple Regression

Model 1 (Baseline):

Demographic and psychographic control measures related to gender, age, race education and political ideology.

Model 2 (AWS: Gender-role Expectations):

Tests the linear effect of consumers' attitudes towards gender-appropriate behaviors.

Model 3 (AWS Interaction Effect):

Tests the curvilinear effect of gender-role expectations.

Model 4 (Personal Lifestyle Variables):

Tests the impact of certain category-related consumer characteristics: a) identifying as sports fan; b) having played organized sports.

Model 5 (External Lifestyle Variables):

Tests the effects of having children that participate in sports.

Regression Results

Table 3. Regression Results

VARIABLE	Baseline MODEL 1	Gender- role Expectations MODEL 2	Interaction Effects MODEL 3	Personal Lifestyle Variables MODEL 4	External Lifestyle Variables MODEL 5
N = 789					
Gender	-.38 (.34)	-.67 (.35)	-.61 (.35)	.44 (.34)	.41 (.34)
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Race	1.41** (.53)	1.48** (.53)	1.48** (.52)	1.28** (.49)	1.22* (.48)
Some HS	.58 (1.28)	.65 (1.28)	.58 (1.27)	1.24 (1.18)	1.17 (1.17)
HS Grad	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Some College	.59 (.46)	.53 (.46)	.52 (.46)	.21 (.42)	.18 (.42)
College Grad	.38 (.49)	.26 (.49)	.32 (.49)	-.20 (.46)	-.22 (.46)
Post Grad	.50 (.62)	.25 (.62)	.31 (.62)	-.26 (.58)	-.36 (.58)
Conservative	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Moderate	-.63 (.37)	-.84* (.38)	-.80* (.38)	-.80* (.35)	-.76* (.35)
Liberal	.13 (.45)	-.35 (.47)	-.18 (.48)	-.14 (.35)	-.09 (.44)
AWS		.08** (.02)	.36** (.13)	.31** (.12)	.30** (.12)
AWS ²			-.005* (.002)	-.004* (.002)	-.004* (.002)
Sports Fan				3.87*** (.36)	3.84*** (.36)
Played Sports				.91** (.32)	.84** (.32)
No children played sports					omitted
Only sons played sports					1.16 (.94)
Only daughters played sports					2.01** (.78)
Sons and daughters played sports					-.09 (.55)
Constant	9.14	7.31	3.26	2.10	1.85
R ²	.02	.03	.04	.19	.20
Change in R ²	.02	.01**	.01*	.15***	.01*
F for R ² Change	1.76	9.68	5.13	70.70	2.92
Where Vertex Occurs for AWS Parabola			37.7	38.1	37.5

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. two-tailed test. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

Reliability, Validity and Regression Diagnostics

- Reliability levels:
Interest in Reading About Women's Sports Index: $\alpha=.94$
AWS: $\alpha=.83$
- AWS validity checks:
AWS-Gender: $r=.26^{**}$
AWS-Conservative: $r=-.26^{**}$
AWS-Liberal: $r=.29^{**}$
- With the exception of interaction-effect variables, all VIF values are less than 1.947.



Plots

Figure 1: The average Interest in Reading About Women's Sports Index score (Y) for each Attitudes Toward Women Scale score (X) and the best-fit parabola.

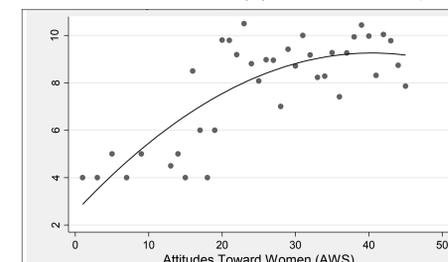
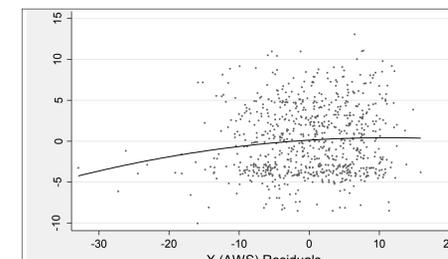


Figure 2: Added-variable plot of residuals for AWS and the Curvilinear Relationship Between Gender-Role Attitudes and the Interest in Reading About Women's Sports Index.



Implications

- The study adds to the marketing literature on gendered consumption, by exploring consumer behavior in a traditionally masculine domain of the entertainment industry, wherein various business concerns are trying to promote women's spectator sports and their athletes.
- The results in Table 1 are in line with the findings on gendered consumption by Sherry et al. (2004), as male respondents expressed significantly greater interest in reading about male athletes than female athletes, while no such significant differences were found among female respondents.
- Mean scores relevant to consumption of sports entertainment media also indicate that female respondents reported significantly greater interest in reading about personal fitness than about female athletes, which seems to have implications to gender roles (e.g. beauty and personal appearance).
- Hierarchical regression model results ($R^2 = .20$) in Table 3 suggest that respondents' gender did not play a statistically significant role in predicting their interests in consuming women's sports media content, while their psychological predispositions about gender roles were a significant factor.
- As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the relationship between AWS and the dependent variable is curvilinear, and for extreme egalitarian views there appears to be a point (38 on the 45-point AWS scale) after which interest wanes and begins to decrease.
- As might be expected, other forms of consumption in this domain significantly impact interest in women's sport media, as self-identifying as a sports fan and having played organized sport explained the most variance in the dependent variable.
- Interestingly, having a daughter who plays organized sports also has a significant positive impact on one's interest in reading articles about elite female athletes. However this is not the case for other family make-ups
- Future research should continue to investigate women as sport consumers, whether as spectators or participants, as well as looking at the marketing of women's spectator sports to men. It appears to offer a unique prism through which to study the social and psychological aspects of gendering and gendered consumption.