

**DAVID OR MIA? THE IMPACT OF GENDERED HEROISM ON ADOLESCENT
GIRLS AND THEIR SPORT ROLE MODELS**

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between adolescent girls and their sport role models with a particular focus on gender. Social learning theory as well as gender theory are considered. Based on quantitative and qualitative data collected in Australia through two focus group interviews and questionnaires (n=357) the researchers found that gender influences the choice of sport role models of adolescent girls. When asked to nominate their role model, girls overwhelmingly choose a female role model, however, when their role model came from the sporting domain the percentage of female role models decreased. Further, qualitative comments support the notion that gender and gendered heroism play a critical role in the adoption of sport role models by adolescent girls. The authors argue that sport role models, in traditional gender terms, are ideologically contradictory. A trend towards acceptance of a multiple femininities and masculinities perspective may be a prospect for change.

David or Mia? The influence of gender on adolescent girls' choice of sport role models

Jess is an 18 year old girl from Indian descent living in the United Kingdom with a passion for soccer. On her bedroom wall hangs a poster of her hero, David Beckham. She often talks to him about her aspirations as a soccer player; he inspires her to pursue her dream. Her team mate Jules, on the other hand, admires a female soccer player, the American superstar Mia Hamm, who led her team to Olympic and World Cup victory. Gurinder Chadha, producer and director of the movie *Bend it like Beckham* starring Parminder Nagra as Jess Bhamra and Keira Knightley as Jules Paxton, shows amongst other themes, how sport stars can be powerful role models for adolescent girls. There is widespread popular belief that successful elite athletes, such as David Beckham, Mia Hamm, Cathy Freeman (Australian gold medalist at the Sydney Olympics) and Ian Thorpe (legendary Australian swimmer), are influential role models who can inspire adolescents to become or stay involved in sport and physical activity.

This paper explores the influence of gender on the relationship between adolescent girls and their sport role models. [When girls choose a role model and in particular a sport role model, the question is the extent to which gender matters or do they look beyond gender to focus on other qualities? The concept of role model needs clarification as different meanings are given in the literature (see MacCallum & Beltman, 2002, for a review). For the purpose of this study a role model is considered to be someone a person likes to imitate, to be like. It is a person who is perceived as exemplary and worthy.

Role models need to be distinguished from mentors and heroes. Although the concepts are related there are some pertinent differences (Maccallum & Beltman, 2002, Yancey, 1998; Javidan, Bemmels, Devine & Dastmalchian, 1995; Daloz, 1986). A

mentor is an advisor, coach, guide or confidante who has a personal relationship with the mentee. She or he plays an active role in supporting the mentee when facing challenging tasks or difficult periods. A mentor can be a role model for the mentee but doesn't have to be one. In contrast, a role model tends to play a more passive role, evolves over time and doesn't necessarily have direct personal contact. In fact, she or he may not be aware that she or he is the role model for a particular person.

This is also true for heroes, who are held in positive regard and described in terms of subjective admiration (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). Children and adolescents often talk about pop stars, actors and sport celebrities as their heroes, people they admire, however this does not mean that they necessarily wish to be like them. In the case of heroes, the observer may not wish to imitate or model the hero's behaviour. Jennifer Hargreaves (2000) agrees that heroes and heroines are men and women who are "larger than life" and "inspirational people" with extraordinary qualities. She adds that they are "socially constructed through discourses and meanings and values that change over time" (p. 1). This notion of socially constructed heroism is a most important one and will be further explored later in the paper as part of gender theory

Role modelling

In the psychology of learning role models are an essential component of the socialisation process. In social learning theory, also known as social cognitive theory, Albert Bandura (1986) states: "modelling has always been acknowledged to be one of the most powerful means of transmitting values, attitudes and patterns of thought and behaviour" (p. 47). People learn by observing the behaviour of others and the consequences resulting from that behaviour. Whether new patterns of behaviour occur depends partly on the observer's perceptions of self-efficacy, which is the belief about one's capability to act or perform in a certain situation.

His notion of model-observer similarity is particularly relevant here. Model-observer similarity refers to the degree that models are alike to observers in, for example, age, gender and motor ability. Similarity to models enhances the observers' self-efficacy and motivates the observers to perform because they believe that if similar others can do it, they can as well. Generally, the more alike models are to observers, the greater is the probability that modelling will facilitate observers' behaviour (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1996). Several empirical studies strongly support the idea of model-observer similarity. For example, girls are far more likely to have a family member or friend as role model than an Olympic athlete because the sport star is perceived as different and too far removed from the girl (Lutter & Jaffee, 1996). The importance of parents as role models was a pertinent finding in a study by Babkes and Weiss (1999) on children's soccer participation. Parents who were perceived as positive exercise role models had a positive impact on their children playing soccer. Lockwood and Kunda (1999, 1997) conclude that 'superstars' were more effective when they were considered relevant, that is having similar characteristics to the observer. That is, the achievements of the stars needed to be attainable, otherwise instead of inspiration and self-enhancement, self-deflation may occur.

It is important to note that modelling is not a passive process. On the contrary, learning occurs within a particular social setting with the individual giving personal meaning to socially shared perceptions (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). In other words, the individual constructs his/her own social and learning environment. Diane Gill (1994) goes even further when she argues that *only* when the social context is considered can we interpret sport and exercise behaviour. Therefore, when examining the behaviour of adolescent girls and, in particular, the relationship with their sport role models, it is absolutely critical to look at their social environment. Gender is considered to be a crucial part of the social context to be analysed in this paper.

Gender

“Gender is a socially and historically constructed set of power relations” states Ann Hall in her classic work *Feminism and sporting bodies* (1996, p. 223). Gender involves notions of relationships, boundaries, practices and identities that are actively created in a historical and social context. Judith Lorber introduced the term “doing gender” to emphasise the idea that gender is actively created. “ Gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and it is the texture and order of that social life...it depends on everybody constantly doing gender” (Lorber, 1994, p. 13). The analysis of gender has moved from questions of distribution to questions of relations. Questions of distribution include those about participation rates of females versus males in sport, barriers to sports participation and equal allocation of funds and resources to male and female athletes. Although they remain important issues, the key to understanding gender inequity is the nature of social relations. Questions using a relational approach would, for example, focus on masculine hegemony in sport and how the “old boys network” can affect women in leadership positions.

Bob Connell (2002, 2000) also emphasizes a focus on gender relations rather than gender differences, however, in his analysis he identifies three main structures of gender relations besides Hall’s structure of power. They are production, emotional and symbolic relations. He concurs with Judith Butler(1990) that gender relations are continuously changing due to the unstable nature and crisis tendencies of these structures.

Connell uses the term “gender project” to describe learning about gender relations, giving meaning to femininity and masculinity. “Gender patterns develop in personal life as a series of encounters with the constraints and possibilities of the existing gender order. In these encounters the learner improvises, copies, create...”

(2002, p. 82). It could be argued that role modeling can be viewed as a gender project. Adolescent girls identifying with David Beckham or Mia Hamm play with the constraints and possibilities of gender relations. Definitions of femininity and masculinity form the basis of the relations.

Masculinity and femininity are idealised cultural symbols rather than stable individual characteristics or traits. According to Connell (2002) there are many groups in society who view gender as a dichotomy using terms as 'true femininity' or 'real masculinity' but, he argues, the great majority of us actually combine masculine and feminine characteristics. He continues by saying that it is clear from the current social research that there is no one pattern of femininity or masculinity but that there are multiple femininities and masculinities. These multiple patterns can be the result of class differences (e.g. business masculinity versus tradesman's masculinity) and ethnic diversity (e.g. different traditions amongst wife/husband relations between Asians and Europeans). Further these patterns develop and change continuously over the lifespan. The girl who loves to play rugby, the boy who wishes to pursue a career in childcare and adolescents who identify themselves as gay are all examples of the concept of multiple masculinities and femininities. At any time in history there are competing masculinities, some hegemonic and some marginalised.

Despite recent challenges to power relations, hegemonic masculinity is still demonstrated in the form of the hero who is strong, aggressive and brave. In our society elite male athletes are often perceived as heroes; they have strong bodies, are aggressive, overcome hardship and break records. According to Pat Griffin (1998): "For many people the male team sports hero is the epitome of masculinity: strong, tough, handsome, competitive, dating or married to the most desirable woman" (p. 25). On the other hand, different characteristics are ascribed to heroines. Hargreaves (2000), writing about heroines of sport, states that traditionally, heroines are caring, kind and selfless

and these feminine qualities are somewhat inconsistent for a sporting heroine. Female elite athletes setting world records through strength and aggression may not get heroic status due to the differential treatment of men and women in sport. That is, the achievements of men are glorified while the achievements of women are ignored or even downgraded. Hargreaves labels this as “gendered heroism” (p. 3).

Empirical studies support the notion of gendered heroism. Analysing the list of the top 100 athletes of the 20th century compiled by the ESPN television network in the USA, Billings (2000) comments that only 8 out of the 100 athletes were female. Although it is just a list, it represents history. For Billings, the gender bias is indicative of “A gender liberated society...that reverted back to old biases and stereotypes to stay true to the collective memory of American sports culture” (p. 416). McCallister, Blinde and Phillips (2003) agree that many traditional gender beliefs about sport remain in the 21st century. One of the main findings in their study into gender beliefs of adolescent girls was that athletes are mostly associated with being male. This was in contrast to the researchers’ expectation that following the significant increase in participation and visibility of women in sport and physical activity during the past two decades, adolescent girls would have less traditional views. They found, for example, that the girls could easily provide a list with characteristics of male athletes such as “big”, “tall”, “strong”, “muscles” “runs fast’ and “healthy” while, on the other hand, some participants struggled to list characteristics of a female athlete with 13% of them unable to mention even one characteristic! Further it is noteworthy that female athletes were often described in terms of appearance (“pretty”, “has long hair”) and personality (“nice”, “respects others”) as opposed to physical qualities when describing male athletes.

David or Mia?

Having considered role modeling and gender as two theoretical perspectives we return now to the exploration of the relationship between adolescent girls, their sport role models and gender. Does gender matter? From a social learning theoretical perspective the authors expect that girls will tend to select female role models based on the notion of model-observer similarity. However, when considering gender theory, it is debatable whether adolescent girls will choose female sport role models. One reason is that due to gendered heroism many female athletes are “invisible,” and if they are known, they may be marginalised and trivialised, and therefore not be attractive role models. Very little recent research has been conducted to examine this issue in detail. One exception is Martin, Richardson, Weiller and Jackson’s study into role models of United States’ adolescent athletes and their parents (2004). They discovered that the majority of adolescent girls (57%) chose a female as their sport role model unlike their mothers, who continued to mostly choose a male sport role model. Only 24% of mothers selected a female sport role model, which suggests a generational change for girls towards a preference for female sport role models. Further, it is noteworthy that 99% of the adolescent boys and fathers chose a male sport role model.

Another interesting related study, in a German context (Biskup & Pfister, 1999), investigated whether athletes were models for children aged 9-12. These researchers found that children predominantly chose models who represent traditional gender stereotypes. Television figures, actors, singers as well as sport stars were mainly nominated, with people from their direct social environment playing a marginal role. Boys selected role models based on qualities such as superiority [is ‘superiority’ a quality?], strength, aggressiveness and bravery, while girls tended to choose models based on appearance and positive social behaviour. In contrast to boys, girls rarely nominated a sport role model; they looked for their model almost exclusively outside the world of sport. In fact, sports women were hardly ever chosen by boys or girls. It is

noteworthy that the age group of the German study is younger (pre-adolescent) than our target group of adolescent girls.

In a British context, Bromnick and Swallow (1999) examined the role models of youth aged 11-16 years. In line with Biskup and Pfister, they found that role models were primarily drawn from the media and sporting world: sporting heroes for boys and pop stars and entertainers for girls. While 40.6% of the boys selected a sport star, only 2.7% of the girls selected someone from the sporting world. Although the gender of the role model was not reported in this study, the researchers did analyse the gender of the hero (they distinguish role models – person one would like to be - from heroes – person one admires) and conclude that there was a strong tendency by both boys and girls to admire males rather than females. It appeared acceptable for adolescent girls to admire a man but not vice versa, which supports the notion of masculine hegemony in our society and the lack of famous female role models. In another study, conducted in a management setting where adults in middle management nominated a role model from senior management, it was discovered that models were primarily chosen on perceptions of effective performance in the workplace rather than gender (Javidan, Bemmels, Devine & Dastmalchian, 1995). In this case it seemed that gender was not an issue, with participants focusing on other attributes.

Although there are a number of studies conducted relating to role models, there are only few data available in regard to sport role models for adolescent girls and the issue of gender. It appears that findings are not conclusive. In addition, none of these studies are conducted in the Australian context. The present study attempts to shed light on this issue in what many consider 'sport-crazy' Australia.

Method

The study consisted of two parts. Part A included two focus group sessions to explore the relevance of role models for adolescent girls and to identify key areas for research investigation. Part B consisted of a survey that collected both qualitative and quantitative data regarding adolescent girls' choice of role models and role model characteristics.

Part A: Focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted with female students (years 9-11, age range 13-17) from two high schools in Sydney. The selected schools were located in different demographic areas. One was a non-government girls' school in the northern suburbs of Sydney (high socio-economic status), and the other school was a co-educational government school located in the western suburbs of Sydney (low to middle socio-economic status). The focus groups had 11 and 13 students respectively with 3-4 girls from each year group. Each group included girls from diverse cultural and linguistic background and had a mix of "sporty" and "non-sporty" girls as identified by the physical education teacher. The researchers facilitated the discussion in the focus group using a semi-structured interview schedule. The main questions were:

- Who is a famous person you admire or think of as your hero/role model?
- What are the qualities or characteristics of your hero (role model) in terms of age, gender, domain, sporting ability and personality?
- What sport or physical activities are you involved in and to what extent (club, representative, state, national level)?

The terms “hero” and “role model” were used interchangeably to encourage broad discussion of persons they admired or felt inspired by. The discussions were audio-taped and then transcribed verbatim for qualitative analysis.

Part B: Questionnaire

In the second phase of the research project a questionnaire was developed based on the information gained from the focus groups and focused more specifically on role models. The questionnaire contained four sections. The first section related to *identifying your role model*, the second one to *describing your role model*, the third to *interacting with your role model* and the final section related to *personal characteristics of the respondent*. Examples of questions are:

- Is there a person you think of as your role model?
- What is their gender?
- What is their age? (estimate if you are not sure)
- Tell us more about your role model
- Describe how you interact with or relate to your role model
- What is your main area of interest? (e.g., fashion, music, sport)
- What sport or physical activities are you presently involved in and to what extent?

The questionnaire was piloted with 15 female students attending year 9 at a Sydney high school. A different high school was selected for the pilot as the researchers wanted to avoid repeated sampling. After completing the questionnaire, the researchers discussed the survey with the students to assess the clarity and their interpretation of the questions. Any ambiguous questions were deleted or rephrased.

Subsequently a total of 357 female students from years 7-11 (age range 12-17) attending one of the two first mentioned high schools completed the questionnaires. The respondents represented a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds; the most

frequently mentioned were (in descending order): Australian, English, Italian, Irish, Chinese, German, Greek, Lebanese and Vietnamese which aligns with the predominance of cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the Sydney population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004). A teacher and/or researcher supervised the administering of questionnaires, which took place either after assembly or in mentor time in randomly selected class groups. Questionnaires were completed in 10 to 15 minutes. Responses were entered and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 11.5) software program where frequencies were calculated. Qualitative comments were manually coded, listed in categories and searched for themes or patterns. In particular, they were examined to see if they could further explain some of the quantitative results.

For both Part A and Part B, the relevant school authorities and parents had granted permission to conduct the research. The students were informed about the purpose, risks and safeguards, including how all responses would be treated confidentially. Further, approval was obtained from the university's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Results

In regard to nominating a role model 64.4% of respondents who completed the survey were able to name a role model. Another 23.6% did not have one single role model but named one or more people who had certain qualities they admired; they did not like to be like one particular person, however they liked aspects of several people who came close to being a role model for them. 12% of respondents identified themselves as not having a role model and thus did not nominate a role model with some of them explaining that they preferred to be themselves. One girl commented: "I feel that I

should work hard at aspiring to be the best person I can be and not someone else.”

Another one said: “Why should you spend your life trying to be like someone else?” The selected role models came from a range of domains (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1

It is noteworthy that a role model can be from more than one domain, for example, the role model can be a friend and a sports person. The majority of role models were family members of the respondents (41%), with the mother as a role model featuring frequently. Friends (21%) were also frequently chosen as role models. A similar percentage of adolescent girls had a role model from the sporting domain (8.4%) as from the acting/entertainment domain (8.1%). Less frequently mentioned were role models from the pop and music industry, public figure, teaching and coaching domains. Examples from the public domain include Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and Princess Diana.

Focusing on the group of girls with a sport role model it was evident that the models represented a range of sports, for example, Pat Rafter and Anna Kournikova from tennis, Cathy Freeman and Marion Jones from athletics, Ian Thorpe, Grant Hackett and Susie O’ Neil from swimming, Alyson Annan from hockey, Liz Ellis from netball and Joe Dimaggio from baseball. Matching the sporting domain of the role model with the sporting background of the girl it was interesting to note that more than half (56.6%) of the respondents chose their role model from a sport that they are currently playing themselves. Some respondents even mentioned that their role model participated in the same events or played in the same position as themselves. “Melinda Gainsford is an Olympic Australian sprinter for 100 and 200m. She is my role model because I do sprinting for 100 and 200m”, commented one girl. Another respondent said:” Liz Ellis is

the best netballer in the world. She plays Goalkeeper and Goal Defence, same as me...”

Gender of role models

In regard to the gender of the role models, table 2 provides an overview of the gender of the role models from all domains as well as the gender of the sport role models. The figures in the table indicate that a large majority (86.6%) of adolescent girls nominated a female role model when role models from all domains are considered. This is also the case when they chose a role model from the sporting domain (73.3%), however the percentage has decreased.

Insert Table 2

During the focus group interviews the researcher commented that she noticed that all role models mentioned so far were women to which the girls replied:

“Essential to look at other women, comes naturally”,

“I think of women to relate to”,

“Females are more like us”,

“Can’t have men, but I think of Don Bradman (Australian cricket legend).. he would be my role model if I was a male”.

On the other hand, one girl stated: “ Gender does not really matter, however, I am inspired by women who do very well because they often do not get paid for what they do....it is the men who are getting paid for what they do; they are always on TV”, to which another girl added: “They get more credit for it”.

Feminine and masculine qualities

The focus group interviews further showed that when girls select a role model, besides the performance of the sport role models, personality characteristics play a crucial part. According to the girls it is important that role models have a good personality, which meant to them being kind and not arrogant, playing fair and caring for others. This was further explored in the survey. When asked to describe in more detail their role model, respondents of the questionnaire provided a range of qualitative comments relating to personality characteristics of the sport star. Being friendly, kind and modest were commonly mentioned. "Susie O'Neil is a real role model because she is friendly and never boasts about winning a swimming race", said one of the girls. Another one commented: "Cathy Freeman is a great runner and also very kind". Several girls described their model as caring and giving. As one of the girls stated about Ian Thorpe: "He is caring and gives up his time for charity". Further, the qualities of being fair and good sportsperson were alluded to in comments such as: "She is a good sport". Referring to the rugby player Brad Fittler one respondent wrote: "He's the biggest champion in the world. He's beautiful, the best player, everyone loves him, he plays within the rules and is a great person. He's just perfect". One respondent sums it up for Cathy Freeman as follows: ' She is nice, pretty, fast and good sports woman". These qualities, friendly and kind, caring and giving, modest and being fair are often regarded essentially as feminine qualities. It is interesting to note that both female and male sport role models are perceived as having these characteristics. In fact, all but one female and one male role model were described with a feminine characteristic.

On the other hand, the personality of sport role models was also described in terms of masculine characteristics. Commonly mentioned qualities were being strong and fit. "Joe Dimaggio was strong, hitting hard, jolted the ball all the time". It was also illustrated through the voice of one girl whose role model was a Romanian gymnast: "

She is strong, powerful and never say die". Perseverance (never say die) was again mentioned in the following comment: "She has worked hard all her life, chasing her dreams..." Competitiveness, another essential masculine quality was evident in the following comment: "She is independent and is there to win" and "He's a world champion and one of Australia's best..." It is noteworthy that both female and male sport role models were perceived as having masculine characteristics.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the study it is evident that adolescent girls overwhelmingly nominate females rather than males as their role models. This is the trend when analysing the gender of role models from all domains (86.6%) as well as analysing the gender of the role models from the sports domain only (73.3%). Our findings correspond with Martin et al.'s results (2004) that adolescent girls tend to select female rather than male sport role models. The reason why girls look for female role models could lie within the theoretical notion of model-observer similarity (Bandura, 1986). Comments made by the respondents such as "Females are more like us" and "Essential to look at other women, comes naturally", strongly support the idea that girls are looking for similarities between their role model and themselves and that gender is a critical factor. The fact that the majority of girls selected a sport role model with the same sporting background gives further support to the notion of model-observer similarity.

The findings are in contrast, however, with Biskup and Pfister's conclusion that girls rarely nominate a sport role model and if they nominate one, it is rarely a sports woman (1999). In the current study a substantial group of girls (8.4%) did select a role

model from the sports domain and they were mostly females. It could be argued that there is a cultural difference – sport may be more prominent in Australian than in German society. The results are also in contrast to Bromnick and Swallows' study in which they found a tendency for adolescent girls to nominate males rather than females as their heroes (1999). Remember, though, that they focus on heroes rather than role models. The pertinent difference is that the girls may admire them but they may not wish to be like them.

Impact of gendered heroism and some contradictions

When comparing the percentage of girls who chose a female role model from all domains with that of girls who selected a role model from the sports domain there is a decrease of 13.3% (see table 2). It is likely that this is the impact of gendered heroism that is, sports women are less attractive as role models due to their marginalisation and trivialisation. This may explain why adolescent girls generally nominate females as their role models however in the case of sporting role models they select, relative to role models from all domains, more male role models. The comment "I think of Don Bradman... he would be my role model if I was a male" further suggests that if a female cricket star would have been more visible and celebrated, the girl may have adopted her as her role model. The other comments about sports men getting paid for what they do, being always on TV and getting more credit for what they do also support the notion of gendered heroism. Therefore the influence of gendered heroism may have contributed to the relatively small percentage (8.4%) of adolescent girls who chose a sport role model. [More evidence is needed to support the 'gendered heroism' effect]

We return now to the other part of the key question: Do girls, when choosing a role model, look beyond gender and focus on other qualities? The girls' comment that role models need to have a "good" personality is crucial here. Analysing the personality

descriptions of the sport role models it is not surprising that often masculine descriptors are used such as strong, fit, powerful and competitive. In this context English (1995) suggests that sport contains a male bias. She argues that “Speed, size and strength seem to be the essence of sport. Women *are* naturally inferior at ‘sports’ so conceived (p. 287). Hargreaves (2000) and Griffin (1998) concur that these are the essential qualities of a sport star which are socially constructed over time. McCallister et al. (2003) also concluded that, despite significant societal changes, adolescent girls still hold many traditional and stereotypical gender views in the realm of sport and physical activity.

The most interesting finding is, however, that to be adopted as a sport role model by an adolescent girl she or he needs to display feminine qualities such as being kind, modest, caring and fair. In other words, sports men can be a role model for adolescent girls as long as they demonstrate essential feminine characteristics. In addition, sports women are equally described in both masculine and feminine terms. It seems that the “ideal sport role model” demonstrates relevant masculine and feminine characteristics.

Therefore, if one uses the traditional perspective of gender dichotomy, sport role models are ideologically contradictory. Earlier the authors suggested viewing role modeling as a gender project in which adolescent girls actively explore and play with identities, relationships and boundaries. Gender projects usually are not one-dimensional or smooth. [In the present study the girls face conflicts due to the complexity and contradictoriness of the gender relations – in light of what was stated in the paragraph above about ideal male and female role models, it is not clear in this paragraph how the “...girls face conflicts...or “...find it difficult...” On the one hand the female role model, as a sports person, is constructed as being strong, fit, aggressive and highly competitive. On the other hand as a woman and role model being an exemplar of traditional femininity, she is constructed as being kind, selfless, caring and giving. It

seems that girls find it difficult, at times, to adopt the image of a sports woman with both feminine and masculine characteristics as it does not comply with conventional gender dichotomy. This was also evident when, in McCallister's study, some girls could not even list one characteristic for a female athlete! Even if Connell's perspective of multiple femininities is used, it is unlikely that in current society, sports women would represent the hegemonic or dominant femininity.

Nevertheless there are prospects for change. The finding in our current study that a substantial percentage of girls adopted a female sports woman as their role model is promising. Taken together with Martin et al.'s suggested generational shift for girls' (as opposed to their mothers') preference for female sport role models, this could signify a trend towards acceptance of the notion of multiple femininities. It is debatable, though, if the trend of moving away from the gender dichotomy perspective towards the multiple femininities and masculinities perspective will continue. Monitoring this trend would be an important topic for future research.

In conclusion, the issue of gender in relation to adolescent girls and their role models is complex; it is not simply a matter of choosing between David or Mia as both male and female sports people can be powerful role models. The crucial point for adolescent girls is to perceive a similarity or match between the role model and herself which could include a combination of feminine and masculine characteristics. The most interesting finding of this study suggests that to be a sport role model for adolescent girls one need to demonstrate both feminine and masculine characteristics. From a theoretical point of view, this study has contributed to the notion of multiple femininities and masculinities. It appears that there is a trend for adolescent girls to challenge the traditional gender dichotomy perspective and move towards a perspective of multiple femininities and masculinities. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue in the

future. A society in which multiple femininities are accepted and respected is likely to increase the opportunities for girls' participation in sport and physical activity at all levels. Put simply, it would contribute to a better place for women and girls in sport and physical activity!

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Table 1*Frequency and percentage of role models from a particular domain*

Domain	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Family member	146	41.0
Friend	75	21.1
Sports person	30	8.4
Actor/entertainer	29	8.1
Pop star	20	5.6
Music industry	16	4.5
Public figure	10	2.8
Teacher	4	1.1
Academic/scholar	2	0.6
Coach	2	0.6
Other	22	6.2
Total	-	100

Table 2*Gender of role models in frequencies and percentages*

Gender	All role models		Sport role models	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Female	226	86.6	22	73.3
Male	41	13.4	8	26.7
Total	307	100	30	100