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The Portrayal of Female Athletes in Film

There are approximately 2,000 films featuring athletes or sports, however less than five percent of those films feature stories about female athletes. This lack reinforces the idea that female athletes and women's sports are not as important as their male counterparts. Films have been a reflection of how America views itself and how it wants to be presented on the world stage. Since the late 1800s filmmakers have sought to portray the drama, excitement, spontaneity and heroism of sports in film. Sports have a very important role in American culture, so much so that depictions of athletes in motion were one of the initial challenges faced by filmmakers.

This paper attempts to analyze the portrayal of female athletes in feature films. Working chronologically, the paper examines several key films from each decade looking in particular, at how patriarchy and masculinity helped to define appropriate "femininity" in that era. The result is an interesting look at male hegemony and its influence on society's perception and acceptance of female athletes. In addition, this paper explores the influences of mass media on the marketing of films about female athletes. An attempt is made to show that the mass media works against Hollywood's ability to successfully produce and market a film about women athletes.

Through the use of movie reviews, journal articles and other research materials, as well as the viewing of the films themselves, the author comprehensively examines the portrayal of female athletes in films.