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GLOBALIZATION AMERICAN-STYLE AND REFERENCE IDOL SELECTION
The Importance of Athlete Celebrity Others among New Zealand Youth

Merrill J. Melnick
State University of New York, USA

Steven J. Jackson
University of Otago, New Zealand

Abstract   While there have been significant refinements in the scholarly development of the sport and Americanization/globalization literature in recent years, the individual, psychosocial consequences resulting from the intersection of global forces and local cultures remain largely unexplored. A sample of 510 New Zealand youth (average age = 14.5 yrs) was administered a survey instrument to identify their public heroes and heroines (reference idols), that is, celebrity others who are 'very important in your life'. Statistical analysis of these data as well as movie and television consumption patterns revealed that these youth are heavily influenced by global media in general and American popular culture in particular. The data suggested that the influence of popular American cultural icons (e.g. Michael Jordan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jim Morrison, Michael Jackson) extended well beyond simple admiration for some respondents to include impacts on beliefs, values, self-appraisals, and behaviors. It was concluded that focusing on adolescent reference idol choices and their identity-related consequences is a promising approach to understanding the influence of the 'global' on the 'local'.

Key words • Americanization • globalization • reference idol

The term Americanization is one of several used, including McDonaldization, CocaColonization and Disneyfication, to capture the process by which 'American cultural forms, products, and meanings are imposed on other cultures at the expense of the domestic culture' (Donnelly, 1996: 242). Not only does the process involve the importation of American national culture and products but it also extends to specific ways of defining and tackling problems, standards of knowledge, values and norms, ideals and behavior patterns (van Elteren, 1996). The power of US capitalism and transnational corporations to reshape the world in the image of American consumerism, freedom, and fun (Allen, 1999) is viewed by some as a form of cultural imperialism since, they argue, it occurs at the considerable expense of the importing culture and local population (Donnelly, 1996).

On the other hand, critics of the term Americanization (i.e. 'the idea of a global homogenization under the hegemony of American popular culture' (van Elteren, 1996: 65) are quick to point out that this interpretation is overly simplis-

tic, crude, insensitive to the process of accommodation, and 'unable to account for the intricate transformation of values and symbols when they appear in a different cultural context' (van Elteren, 1996: 65). In short, they argue that it is inaccurate to employ a concept of American popular culture that views it as an ideological monolith devoid of contradictions and conflicts.

In recent years, the discourse has broadened beyond a strict focus on American cultural influence abroad to the recognition that the process is much more complex and global in nature (Wilcox, 1993). Rowe et al. (1994) define globalization as a set of forces that produce a complex and irresistible system of world economic, political, and cultural interdependency. These forces are seen as a threat not only to national integration and community structures but also the collective identities associated with national spaces (Harvey and Houle, 1994).

Cox (2000: 1B) suggests that while 'globalization may still be looking for its "human face", . . . its American features are more glaring than ever'. His belief that globalization essentially means Americanization is buttressed by the fact that, worldwide, the top four name brands are American (Coca Cola, Microsoft, IBM, Intel); the top four investment banks are US institutions (Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, Dean Witter, J.P. Morgan); and the top four software vendors are US companies (Microsoft, IBM, Oracle, Computer Associates International).

In the 1990s, the study of Americanization and globalization processes within the sport context focused on transnational migration patterns of sport labor (Maguire, 1994a); the emerging development of a worldwide sporting culture (Houlihan, 1994); the internationalization of sports media (Bellamy, 1993; Williams, 1994); the relationship between global sport and social movements (Harvey and Houle, 1994); and the Americanization of specific sports (Hoehn and Szymanski, 1999; Jackson, 1994; Jackson and Andrews, 1999; Klein, 1991; McKay and Miller, 1991; Maguire, 1990).

While Donnelly (1996) makes a strong case that there have been significant refinements in the scholarly development of the sport and Americanization/ globalization literature, the individual, *psychosocial consequences* of the intersection of global forces and local cultures still remain largely unexplored (Andrews et al., 1996). For example, what is the impact on individual values, behaviors, and identities when media-created global heroes and heroines saturate a local popular culture? More specifically, what are the potential effects of geographically distant youth identifying with American popular cultural icons such as Tiger Woods, Venus Williams, Brad Pitt, Madonna, Matt Damon, Jennifer Lopez, and Julia Roberts? We speculate that, if youth are influenced by heavily mediated globalization processes, it should manifest itself in the television programs they watch, the movies they attend, and, most importantly, the public others they choose to imitate and model. The present study, which looks at the impacts of media others on New Zealand youth, should provide useful commentary on the current status of New Zealand popular culture, the globalizing impact of western media influences, and the psychosocial consequences of reference idol choice. Specifically, the researchers sought to address the following four questions. (1) Do New Zealand youth have public heroes/heroines and, if so, who are they? (2) To what extent are the choices made by New Zealand youth influenced

by global forces in general and American media in particular? (3) Do reference idols influence the lives of New Zealand youth? (4) Are there differences in the degree of influence exerted by American and New Zealand reference idols?

In subsequent sections, we set the stage for the investigation by offering some observations about: adolescence, identity, and the mass media; New Zealand's geographical isolation; New Zealand's place in the global village; and international mediascapes.

Adolescence, Identity, and the Mass Media

The impact of the mass media on adolescence and its most important psycho-social task, establishment of a personal identity, continues to draw the attention of researchers interested in this critically important stage in human development. The tendency for adolescents to turn to media others for personal sustenance and direction is partially related to the 'push–pull' nature of the developmental stage. On the one hand, there is the natural desire by teenagers to establish autonomy and independence from parental influences, but on the other hand, lacking sufficient psychological maturity, they require assistance from others (Jensen, 1985; Kimmel and Weiner, 1985; Lagemann, 1993).

If adolescents with their special need for 'external support systems' fail to find guidance and direction at home, school, or within local communities, the mass media are only too willing to oblige. With respect to the particular influence of television, Strasburger (1995: 7–8) noted that 'television gives teenagers "scripts" about how adults are supposed to act; it teaches them about gender roles, conflict resolution, patterns of courtship and sexual gratification, and methods of coping with stress'. Thus, it should come as no surprise that adolescents spend an inordinate amount of time watching television. For example, a random sample of 2900 American children revealed that they average 13 hours per week watching television versus just 1.2 hours engaged in leisure reading (Elias, 1998). And Strasburger (1995) found that by the time American youth complete high school they will have spent more time watching television (15,000–18,000 hours) than in the classroom (12,000 hours). According to Strasburger (1995: 12–13),

> . . . with its abundance of attractive role models, television provides a vast library of information regarding the adult world and how adults behave . . . In a sense, television functions as a 'super peer group' with all the potential for influencing behavior that this entails.

Deregulation worldwide and major technological advances have allowed US television entities to open new markets at an eye-opening pace, and sport telecasts have figured prominently in the expansion. Globalization American-style of worldwide sport, and the creation of large global sport audiences have been made possible by the development of what Maguire (1994b) calls, 'the media-sport production complex'. The overseas marketing of the National Basketball Association (NBA) provides an interesting case in point. Today, NBA merchandise sales outside the US are approximately $300 million annually; games are broadcast to 205 countries (including places such as Bosnia and Namibia), in 42 lan-

guages and reaching more than 650 million households; both preseason (Mexico, Israel) and regular (Japan) season games are played overseas (Lister, 1999), and David Stern the league commissioner is considering establishing a new league separate from the NBA, and placing franchises in major European cities. The aggressive international marketing of the NBA led Maguire (1994b: 476) to observe that the operations of the League 'correspond to the marketing strategies of other transnationals including The Disney Corporation and McDonalds'. Evidence that these marketing strategies are proving successful is borne out by the fact that a survey of 25,057 15–18 year-olds in 41 countries showed that basketball not soccer was their favorite sport (Hiestand, 1996).

If, as Harris (1994) believes, heroes are 'social constructions' helping define individual and collective identity, then certainly the mass media figure prominently in the process because it is through television, radio, magazines, and movies that heroes and heroines become known and available. According to Harris (1994: 1), the role of the mass media cannot be overstated in the making of public figures as they 'selectively shape heroes' images, exaggerating particular characteristics and minimizing others'. Increasingly, the mass media have come to play an instrumental role in producing, constructing and distributing the images and characteristics of celebrity others on a worldwide basis.

New Zealand's Geographical Isolation

In order to more fully assess the impact of global media influences on New Zealand youth culture, one must first recognize that this 'mere punctuation mark at the bottom of the globe' (Lealand, 1985), this 'last stop before Antarctica' (Lealand, 1985), is one of the most isolated countries in the world, with its closest neighbor Australia 1500 miles across the Tasman Sea. New Zealand is also a relatively young country (first Europeanized in 1845) which, although increasingly multicultural, is predominantly white European (locally referred to as Pakeha). The indigenous people, the Maori, constitute approximately 15 percent of the population, 90 percent of whom live in the North Island. According to Wilcox (1985a), this geographically isolated, small, young, relatively homogeneous nation provides an excellent natural laboratory for observing a country's struggle to define for itself an essential post-colonial cultural identity.

New Zealand's Place in the Electronic Global Village

The extent to which New Zealand is able to resist modernism will depend in part on how successful it is in withstanding the influence of globalizing media influences. To what extent the New Zealand Dream which emphasizes stability, practical, commonsense action, order, conformity, security in equality, and harmony between people and nature can remain intact appears problematic. However, Maguire (1994b: 401) points out that 'some cultures are so outside the global core that they either remain relatively unaffected or cannot interchange'. New Zealand's position in the world international economic order is unique in

that, while it is distant and isolated, globalization forces continue to play a major role in eliminating its geographical and communication barriers (Jackson and Andrews, 1999; Kelsey, 1999). In addition, New Zealand's small population forces it to be a heavy importer of media programming, most of which is currently American, British and Australian. Likewise, as a once British colony, its lack of 'natural filters' (e.g. language) make resistance to foreign influences, especially American, less possible (Anthony, 2000).

While it might once have been argued that the cultural impacts of global media on New Zealand popular culture are inconsequential (Wilcox, 1985b), such is not the case today. There are increasing signs that the commodified image has gained a secure foothold in the New Zealand lifestyle and national psyche (Allison, 1991; Atkinson, 1994; Silk and Jackson, 1999).

International Mediascape

McLeod (1991: 69) observed that

> . . . we have all become ensnared in this communications web, whether we live in the first or in the tenth world. Our lives are molded and modeled by these media, our symbolic worlds are determined by them, even our clothes are fashioned by them.

And Thompson (1999: 21) noted:

> If the media have altered our sense of the past, they have also created what we could call a 'mediated worldliness': our sense of the world lies beyond the sphere of our personal experience, and our sense of our place within this world, is increasingly shaped by mediated symbolic forms.

While recognizing the obvious contributions of an American-mediated popular culture to an ever expanding international mediascape and the creation of a standardized, globally shared culture, Jackson and Andrews (1999) also point to the complexity of global-sign consumption and the recognition of the local environment as a 'fluid and relational space'. In the same vein, Houlihan (1994) observed that the reach of the globalization process might be total or partial, and a local culture's response passive, participative, or conflictual. Globalization, he argues, is neither a unidimensional nor a unidirectional phenomenon. And Maguire (1994b: 402) makes the excellent point that 'people . . . are not blank sheets on which transnational corporations imprint their commodified tastes. Indeed, people do not have one fixed, unchanging identity . . . a dynamic interweaving occurs between the local, national, and transnational.'

How then can we determine the impacts of American media on the youth of other cultures? More specifically, how can we ascertain the psychosocial consequences of American reference idols on New Zealand youth? In the next section we describe the methods we used to answer these and related questions.

Methods

An 11-page paper-and-pencil survey instrument was developed for the purpose of identifying and describing the public reference idols of New Zealand youth. We define public reference idols as real or fictitious, socially distant points of individual reference (McEvoy and Erickson, 1981). The format and contents of the instrument were based on a compilation of ideas and suggestions drawn from the works of several researchers (Balswick and Ingoldsby, 1982; Dodd, 1993; Donne and McDonald, 1991; Harris, 1986, 1987, 1994).

Section I included questions about the subject's age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The latter was assessed by Elley and Irving's (1976) Socio-Economic Index, an objective measure of occupational status based on education and income. Section II included questions about the subject's heroes/heroines. Specifically, respondents were instructed to list all their heroes and heroines, that is, 'public figures, real or fictional, living or deceased, whom they personally admire'.[1] They were specifically instructed not to consider family members, friends, or personal acquaintances. Next, they were asked to 'select the one person whom they considered the *most important in your life at this moment in time*'.

Survey Instrument

In order to determine a hero/heroine's level of influence, we used McEvoy and Erickson's (1981) scaled typology for conceptualizing levels of influence of positive reference idols. The five ordered levels of influence are: Level 1, Simple Admiration (lowest level of influence); Level 2, Positive Identification; Level 3, Positive Criterion Source; Level 4, Positive Emulation; Level 5, Advocacy: Personal Sacrifice (highest level of influence). These labels of influence are not discrete or mutually exclusive but rather, each successive level reflects an increasingly stronger psychological investment or commitment on the respondent's part. A single representative statement was written for each of these five idealized stages of influence. A five-point, Likert-type response format allowed the respondent to 'agree very much' (5), 'agree' (4), 'cannot say' (3), 'disagree' (2), and 'disagree very much' (1) with each of the five statements.

Participants

In the spring of 1993, a letter of introduction identifying the researchers and describing the purpose of the study was mailed to the principals of each of the City of Dunedin's 11 general high schools. Dunedin is the second largest city in South Island with a population of 114,000. Specifically, one class of 9th graders and one class of 12th graders were requested for survey purposes. In all cases, permission was granted and arrangements made to administer the instrument. Over a period of two weeks, the researchers and their assistants met with each of the 22 selected classes and administered the questionnaire.

The average age of the 507 students who indicated their age was 14.5 (SD = 1.56); 13- and 16-year-olds accounted for approximately 85 percent of the survey sample. Of the 510 students who indicated their sex, 241 (47.3 percent) were

males and 269 (52.7 percent) females. Of the 496 students who answered the question, 'Which ethnic/racial group do you most closely identify with?', 441 (88.9 percent) chose European, 19 chose Maori or European/Maori (3.8 percent), six chose Pacific Islander (1.2 percent) and 30 chose Other (6.1 percent).

A total of 435 students answered the question, 'What does your father do for a living?' Approximately 52 percent ($N = 224$) were employed in the three highest status job categories (i.e. higher professional/administrator, lower professional/technical, clerical/highly skilled), while 48 percent ($N = 211$) were employed in the three lowest status categories (i.e. skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled). Just 51 (10.0 percent) of the students indicated they had a mother living at home who held a job. These jobs were similarly coded using the Irving and Elley (1977) Socioeconomic Index for the female labor force.

Results

Reference Idols by Respondent's Age, Sex, and SES

Subjects were encouraged to list all of their heroes and heroines. A grand total of 1509 were identified, an average of 3.59 (SD = 2.09) per student who answered the question. Whereas 420 (82.2 percent) identified at least one public figure whom they minimally admired, 91 (17.8 percent) either said they had none or left the question blank.

Cross-tabulations and chi-squares revealed no statistically significant interaction between respondent's age and naming a hero/heroine. A comparison of the younger (12, 13, 14) and older (15, 16, 17) age groups was non-significant. However, a significantly greater percentage of the older students listed five or more heroes/heroines ($\chi^2(1) = 11.92$, $p < 0.00$). While a greater percentage of male (87.7) than female (81.6) students indicated they had a hero, the interaction was non-significant; the same was true when males and females were compared on the variable, 'five or more heroes/heroines'. The sample was divided into higher (1, 2, 3) and lower (4, 5, 6) occupational status job categories to see if there was a relationship between SES and naming a hero. The interaction was non-significant for naming at least one hero/heroine, and for naming five or more.

Reference Idol's Sex

When respondents were asked to review their lists of heroes/heroines and choose the one person whom they considered 'the most important in your life', a total of 403 were identified. Of this total, 316 (78.4 percent) were males and 87 (21.6 percent) females. Cross-tabulations revealed that 89.8 percent of the males chose a same-sex hero while just 10.2 percent 'crossed over' and chose a female. For females, *six times* as many (66.8 percent) 'crossed-over' and chose a male public figure for their hero; just 13.2 percent chose a female ($\chi^2(1) = 30.16$, $p < 0.00$). Similar findings have been reported by other researchers interested in the hero × sex interaction (Gash and Conway, 1997).

Table 1   Work categories of most important heroes/heroines

Work category	Frequency	%
Athlete	190	46.7
Actor/actress	84	20.6
Musician/singer	40	9.8
Politician	18	4.4
Model	16	3.9
Writer/author	11	2.7
Religious leader	7	1.7
Explorer/adventurer	6	1.5
Other	35	8.6
Total	407	

Reference Idol's Occupation

A nine-category typology was constructed to include all responses to the question, 'What does your hero/heroine do?' Approximately three-fourths of all heroes and heroines chosen could be assigned to the broad category 'entertainer' (e.g. athletes, actors, actresses, musicians, singers). A total of 104 students (25.6 percent) indicated they either did not have someone whom they considered most important in their life or, left the question blank. See Table 1.

The majority of heroes chosen by males were athletes (55.0 percent). Far less popular were actors/actresses (19.9 percent), and musicians/singers (7.1 percent). Females also chose athletes first (32.8 percent), followed by actors/actresses (18.4 percent), and musicians/singers (11.0 percent). Very few students of either sex selected politicians, religious leaders, explorers/adventurers, scientists, educators or writers. Sex differences for the athlete category largely accounted for the significant sex × hero's occupation interaction ($\chi^2(8) = 38.55$, $p < 0.00$). The popularity of athletes as adolescent heroes/heroines has been previously documented by several researchers (Gash and Conway, 1997; Harris, 1994; White and O'Brien, 1999).

Reference Idol Choice by Nationality

The nationality of the celebrity other chosen as most important in the respondents life was identified ($N = 403$). Because Australian (24, 6.0 percent), British (27, 6.7 percent), and European (16, 4.0 percent) heroes/heroines accounted for only 67 or 16.6 percent of the choices, the analysis is focused on the American (145, 36 percent) and New Zealand (138, 34.2 percent) choices. A total of 53 or 13.1 percent of the choices either could not be identified or were invalid.

The influence of American popular culture on reference idol choice is clearly noted by the fact that slightly more American ($N = 145$) than New Zealand ($N = 138$) heroes/heroines were selected. Together, they accounted for 283 or 70.2 percent of the celebrity others chosen. Specifically, athletes (45, 31.0 per-

cent), actors/actresses (44, 30.3 percent), and musicians/singers (25, 17.7 percent) accounted for 78.6 percent ($N = 114$) of the American choices. NBA basketball superstar Michael Jordan was by far the favorite choice; in fact, he was the most popular choice (24) among the 220 *different* reference idols selected by the entire sample. By comparison, former New Zealand All-Black and professional rugby league star John Timu, the most popular of the New Zealand choices (8), finished a distant fourth to Jordan. Interestingly, former and current NBA players accounted for 36 (80.0 percent) of the 45 American athletes chosen. Other New Zealand youth favorites included former NBA player Charles Barkley; film stars Winona Ryder, Michelle Pfeiffer, Jodie Foster, Christian Slater, McCauley Culkin, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Clint Eastwood. Popular American television personalities included Pamela Anderson and Tori Spelling. And Jim Morrison, Michael Jackson, Jimi Hendrix, and Axl Rose were the clear favorites in the musician/singer category.

Respondents who chose New Zealand heroes/heroines clearly favored popular Kiwi athletes; the latter accounted for 78 percent of their choices. Far less popular were actors/actresses (7.3 percent), politicians (5.1 percent), and explorers/adventures (4.4 percent). This finding strongly suggests that sport is a very important component of New Zealand popular culture. The inability of the New Zealand entertainment industry to make big-budget, Hollywood-type movies or afford the development of local television programming helps ensure the dominance of local sport heroes/heroines among adolescent reference idol choices.

Reference Idol's Level 1 Influence: Simple Admiration

For the 406 students who responded, 375 (92.4 percent) indicated they either 'agree very much' or 'agree' with the statement, 'I admire my hero/heroine'. A total of 29 respondents couldn't say (7.1 percent); and, two disagreed with the statement. American ($N = 145$) and New Zealand ($N = 138$) heroes/heroines were then compared on the degree to which they influenced their admirers. A non-significant t-test ($t = 0.47$) indicated that American reference idols were just as admired as their New Zealand counterparts.

Reference Idol's Level 2 Influence: Positive Identification

For the 404 subjects who responded, approximately two-thirds agreed with the statement, 'I feel good inside when my hero/heroine is successful and unhappy and bad inside when my hero/heroine is unsuccessful'; only 29 subjects (7.2 percent) disagreed with the statement. When degree of influence of the American and New Zealand reference idol choices was compared, no significant difference obtained. New Zealand youth who chose an American celebrity other as their hero/heroine identified with their choice just as strongly as those who chose a New Zealander.

Reference Idol's Level 3 Influence: Positive Criterion Source

For the 407 students who responded, approximately one-third said they use their hero/heroine's ideas, values, and/or beliefs to judge and give direction to their own. A smaller percentage (28 percent) said they do not use their heroes/heroines as normative reference points. The largest group of respondents (160 or 39.3 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. When degree of influence of the American and New Zealand reference idol choices was compared, neither group of respondents was able to say that they used their heroes/heroines to judge or give direction to their own ideas, values, or beliefs.

Reference Idol's Level 4 Influence: Positive Emulation

Somewhat more than one-half of the total sample (53.3 percent) *disagreed* with the statement that 'I try to act or behave like my hero/heroine'. Equal percentages of respondents either agreed with the statement (22.8 percent) or were not sure (23.8 percent). Comparing the degree of influence of the American and New Zealand heroes/heroines, we find that neither group tried to act or behave like their choice; both groups tended to *disagree* with the statement, more so in the case of those who chose a New Zealander.

    The findings for levels 3 (positive criterion source) and 4 (positive emulation) are clearly contradictory. On one hand, we have one-third of the respondents reporting they use their hero/heroine's ideas, values, and beliefs to judge and give direction to their own, but more than one-half say that they do not try to act or behave like their hero/heroine. What are we to make of the disparity? One of the difficulties of doing survey research is that it is all but impossible to tease out and explicate the contradiction between what respondents say and what they actually do. Clearly, the psychosocial influence of celebrity others (role models) on adolescent identity formation cannot be stated with any certainty based on these data. Only the deployment of more sophisticated research designs will yield the answers we seek.

Reference Idol's Level 5 Influence: Advocacy – Personal Sacrifice

For the 403 students who responded to the statement, 'I am willing to make a personal sacrifice (e.g. time, money, energy) in order to support or defend my hero/heroine', 153 (38.2 percent) said they would do so. Almost one-third indicated they could not say what they would do while a somewhat smaller percentage (30.4 percent) said they would not personally advocate on behalf of their hero/heroine. A comparison of the degree of influence of American and New Zealand heroes/heroines proved statistically insignificant. The modal response for both groups was 'cannot say', indicating that neither felt strongly enough about their choices to want to make a personal sacrifice on their behalf.

Summary of Reference Idol Influence Findings

For at least one-third of the total sample who were able to identify a 'most important' hero/heroine in their life, the relationship extended well beyond simple admiration. Some not only admired their reference idols very much but also emotionally identified with their successes and failures; used them as yardsticks to judge and give direction to their own values and beliefs; and were prepared to personally advocate on their behalf. For a smaller group of respondents, admiration also involved imitating their hero/heroine's speech, manner, behavior, and/or dress.

With respect to the degree of influence of American and New Zealand heroes/heroines had on their admirers, there were no significant differences between the two groups. For Levels 1 (Admiration) and 2 (Positive Identification), both groups indicated that they both admire and emotionally identify with their heroes/heroines the same. Similarly, both groups had difficulty deciding whether they use their reference idol's ideas, values and/or beliefs to judge and give direction to their own (Level 3, Positive Criterion Source), or are willing to make a personal sacrifice in order to support or defend their choice (Level 5, Advocacy). For Level 4, Positive Emulation, both groups tended to disagree with the suggestion that they act or behave like their heroes/heroines. Apparently, admiration of, and identification with, one's hero/heroine was not sufficient to also mean imitative or advocative behavior.

Television Consumption Patterns

Among the 424 respondents who indicated they had a favorite television program, a total of 65 *different* programs were identified; American programming accounted for 35 or 53.8 percent of the choices. Australian and British productions accounted for another quarter of their favorites; just 10 or 15.4 percent of the respondent's favorite programs were produced in New Zealand.

While the overwhelming choice was *Shortland Street*, a New Zealand evening soap opera which is also seen in Australia and the United Kingdom (102 choices), other favorites included the American programs *Beverly Hills 90210* (58), *Ren & Stimpy* (29), *NBA Basketball* (17), *The Highlander* (15), *The Simpsons* (14), *Hangin' with Mr Cooper* (10), *LA Law* (10), *Baywatch* (10), *Married with Children* (7), *Roseanne* (5), and *Batman* (5). See Table 2.

It should be also noted that the two-hour program *NBA Basketball*, formerly telecast every Sunday afternoon, from 12.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m., ranked among the most highly rated programs at the time the survey was conducted. Also of interest is the fact that just three television programs produced in New Zealand received four or more most favorite choices (*Shortland Street*, *One World of Sport*, *Mobil Sport*).

Movie Consumption Patterns

Of the 498 respondents who answered the question, 'How often do you go to the cinema?', a total of 273 respondents (54.8 percent) chose 'about once every couple of months'; 22 percent said they go about once a month; and 14 percent

Table 2   Most popular television programs

Program	Country of Origin	No. of Choices
Shortland Street	New Zealand	102
Beverly Hills, 90210	United States	58
Ren & Stimpy	United States	29
NBA Basketball	United States	17
One World of Sport	New Zealand	16
The Highlander	United States	15
The Simpsons	United States	14
Mr Bean	UK	14
Hangin' with Mr Cooper	United States	10
LA Law	United States	10
Baywatch	United States	10
Aussie League on 2	Australia	9
Movies	–	8
Mobil Sport	New Zealand	7
Married with Children	United States	7
Sex	Australia	6
Beyond 2000	Australia	6
Roseanne	United States	5
Batman	United States	5
Fresh Prince of Belair	United States	4
Tour of Duty	United States	4
Cheers	United States	4
Martin	United States	4

Note: Television programs chosen four or more times were designated 'most popular'.

said they attend at least once every three weeks. Another 8.6 percent indicated that they almost never or never attend the cinema. While it appears that movie-going is not an especially popular recreational activity for these youth, recall that American movie actors/actresses accounted for 44 or 31.2 percent of the American heroes/heroines identified as a most important public other. In comparison, New Zealand movie actors/actresses received just 10 or 7.3 percent of the choices made. Given the fact that it was not until 1977 that the New Zealand feature film industry was first launched (Horrocks, 1985), it is easy to understand why American movie celebrities were chosen four times as frequently as their New Zealand counterparts.

Interestingly, just two New Zealand male movie celebrities were chosen (Sam Neill, Martin Henderson) compared to 10 Americans (Keanu Reaves, Kevin Costner, Christian Slater, Clint Eastwood, McCauley Culkin, James Dean, Dillon McKay, Bill Murray, Steven Segal, Arnold Schwarzenegger). Parenthetically, with the recent success of New Zealand-produced full-length movies starring New Zealand actors and actresses (e.g. *The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors*, *Gladiator*), we may begin to see a shift in preferences toward local cinema reference idols.

Discussion

The number of heroes and heroines identified by this youth sample suggests that adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by easily formed impressions and a tendency toward idolatry. The fact that eight of 10 respondents were able to identify a public other whom they as a minimal condition admired, answers the first research question posed, namely, 'Do New Zealand youth have public heroes/heroines?' By contrast, Harris (1987) found that 95 percent of her American sample of children and adolescents were able to name a hero/heroine. Since it is largely through the mass media, particularly television, that youth come to learn about public celebrities, the difference can be accounted for by the American adolescents' greater access to both network and cable television. At the time the survey was conducted, these New Zealand youth have at their disposal just three television networks and no cable stations. While their access to both network and cable television networks may have been limited, we are quick to recognize the fact that these New Zealand youth had available to them radio, movies, a wide array of print media and the internet. The fact that so many were able to identify a public other whom they admire provides convincing evidence that they were not 'living in a vacuum'. Nevertheless, we predict that the advent of satellite television in New Zealand is likely to have a powerful impact on popular culture consumption patterns and reference idol choice in the future.

While the respondent's age and SES had little influence on choosing an admired other, the gender variable yielded some interesting findings. Almost 80 percent of the reference idols chosen as most important in the respondent's life were males, suggesting perhaps a dearth of public females for both sexes to admire. Such a finding is certainly not indigenous to the New Zealand situation. Balswick and Ingoldsby (1982) surveyed American adolescents and found that seven male heroes were selected for every one female heroine.

As expected, females were less likely than males to choose a same-sex reference idol. Whereas approximately nine of 10 males chose another male as their most admired public other, just three of 10 females chose another female. The fact that females were much more likely to make opposite-sex reference idol choices has been documented by other researchers (Gash and Conway, 1997; Harris, 1986). It may well be that 'female cross-over' was due in part to the much greater proportion of high-status males within the population of public others from which females could choose, i.e. there are more publicly well-known *male* athletes, politicians, militarists, clerics, educators, adventurers, and entertainers. On the other hand, our female respondent choices may have had little to do with availability. It is quite possible that some confused simple admiration with identification, and others identification with desire. As previously pointed out, the McEvoy–Erickson scale is simply a heuristic device for assessing levels of role model influence. As such, it lacks the structural rigor necessary for arriving at unequivocal findings.

Despite broader cultural definitions of socially acceptable 'feminine' and 'masculine' behavior today, adolescent boys and girls are still socialized in very different ways. The male socialization process places greater value and assigns more importance to aggressiveness, courage, valor, competitiveness, leadership,

performance, competence, and knowledge — the very qualities and characteristics most often associated with heroism. Related to this point, Kimmel and Weiner (1985: 439) observed that 'most late adolescent females are forming their identity primarily around interpersonal issues of intimacy, and most adolescent males are forming their identity around intrapersonal issues of instrumentality'. This would explain why males were more inclined to choose reference idols engaged in high visibility, highly valued instrumental pursuits. On the other hand, the fact that female respondents were more likely to cross gender lines in making reference idol choices may suggest that 'girls are far more willing to experiment with masculine and feminine possible selves than boys in the contemporary ebb and flow toward gender equity' (Gash and Conway, 1997: 365).

Consistent with the research literature was the finding that both sexes showed a decided preference for athletes as heroic public others (White and O'Brien, 1999). In fact, a greater percentage of athletes was selected overall (46.7 percent) than has been reported by other researchers. Because New Zealand views itself as a 'great, little sporting nation', the popularity of athletes as public reference idols is easy to understand. In a relatively small country such as New Zealand, a local athlete's success, especially in international competition, becomes doubly magnified by the mass media and likely to dwarf the accomplishments of others. It will be interesting to see whether the professionalization of rugby, netball, and cricket in New Zealand raises the profile of local sport stars even higher in years to come.

To what extent reference idol selection was influenced by global media in general and American popular culture in particular is answered by reviewing the television and movie consumption pattern data previously noted. Not only did American celebrity others prove attractive to these respondents, they also ranked very high among their most popular choices. Our findings revealed that just as many American heroes/heroines were chosen as locals. The 'reach' of popular American media should come as no surprise to those who study the influence of American popular culture on worldwide commodity-sign consumption. Rowe et al. (1994: 662) observed:

> It is American cultural products that have often seemed most strikingly to represent global culture and society . . . Pop music, comics, satellite news, T-shirt designs and Hollywood films, produced by an export-oriented 'consciousness industry' have infiltrated the officially resistant cultures.

On the same point, Robins (1991: 25) noted that 'global capitalism has in reality been about westernization — the export of western commodities, values, priorities, ways of life'. We would argue that one manifestation of this American-driven, globalizing process is the exportation of heroic public others to the far reaches of the globe.

Of particular interest were the specific public others favored by our youth sample. The overwhelming choice of NBA superstar Michael Jordan was predictable. Not only does he enjoy greater name recognition in the US than the President, but the popularity of this global icon on the world celebrity stage is no less impressive. For example, according to the *Guardian* (quoted in Williams, 1994: 392) Jordan was the first choice of British students when asked which of

several celebrities most influenced their values; and 'school children in China agreed that the greatest men in history were Chou En-Lai and Jordan'.

Especially interesting was the fact that Michael Jordan was chosen five times more often than New Zealand's own living legend, adventurer/humanitarian Sir Edmund Hillary. He and Sherpa guide Tenzing Norgay thrilled the world in 1953 when they became the first human beings to reach the summit of Mount Everest, the highest point on earth. Although his climbing days are over, Hillary continues to remain close to the Nepalese people through his tireless fundraising efforts to build hospitals and schools (Cook, 1993). Yet our youth sample clearly favored a professional basketball player who makes his living halfway around the globe.

Despite the strong showing of non-New Zealanders among the most admired public others, Kiwis did account for approximately one-third of the heroes/ heroines named. This finding supports Robin's (1991: 34) contention that 'the particularity of place and culture can never be done away with, can never be absolutely transcended'. Clear evidence of this is seen in the fact that several current and retired New Zealand athletes were frequently chosen as reference idols by these youth. For example, New Zealand rugby league star players John Timu and Inga Va' Aiga Tuigamala, and retired rugby greats Frank Bunce, Michael Jones, and Jeff Wilson were especially popular choices, along with cricket players Ken Rutherford, Martin Crowe, and Richard Hadlee, equestrian Mark Todd, Olympic downhill ski racer Annaliese Coberger, and netball player Leonie Lever. Although strictly speculation on our part, the choosing of local, popular athletes may represent, however indirectly, a form of cultural resistance against American hegemonic sporting practice by New Zealand youth.

The choice of many non-New Zealand heroes/heroines by our survey sample was also related to the fact that approximately 85 percent of its favorite television programs were overseas productions. For example, Michael Jordan and former NBA star Charles Barkley are made available by the weekly television program, *NBA Basketball*; movie actor Arnold Schwarzenegger is seen frequently on *Movies*; and Tori Spelling, a popular heroine, is seen weekly on *Beverly Hills 90210*, the second most popular television program. When we merge the hero/heroine choices with the most popular television programming, we see the influence of American popular culture upon local cultural taste, style, and preference. To the second question posed, namely, 'Are the reference idol choices of New Zealand youth influenced by American media?', we answer in the affirmative.

It was not surprising to find several American movie actors and actresses included among the most popular heroes/heroines chosen by New Zealand youth. Horrocks (1985) pointed out that one of the major problems faced by the New Zealand film industry since its inception has been a scarcity of Pakeha folk art, i.e. folk songs, legends, heroes, etc. It appears that the absence of Pakeha folk culture has necessitated the importation of films from overseas, especially the US.

A second factor working against the development of a popular, indigenous cinema has been the eschewing of 'national' films for cinematic projects which accentuate 'local' or regional conflicts. These raw, sometimes brutally realistic films are clearly not the stuff with which adolescent movie-goers can easily iden-

tify. Such films are unlikely to allow for the sharing of common daydreams or heroic myths.

A third and more obvious factor is an economic one. A small nation with limited financial resources cannot be expected to produce the expensive, action/adventure blockbusters favored by adolescents, and churned out every year by the Hollywood film industry.

These factors explain, in part, why these youth showed a clear preference for larger than life American movie stars for their favorite reference idols. The latter provide opportunities for New Zealand youth to explore vivid and fantastical worlds not readily available in their own popular culture. We speculate that the absence of fantasy, make-believe and the heroic from popular New Zealand art forms, including the cinema, may cause some adolescents to turn to western-mediated images for their heroes and heroines. Alternatively, New Zealand teens may simply be attracted to American movie stars because these heroic figures provide a point of contrast, i.e. they are so different from what is generally available to them.

These research findings help us answer the third research question, namely, 'Are the lives of New Zealand youth influenced by their reference idol choices?' With considerable caution we suggest they are. The data show that for *some* adolescents, certainly not all, the influence of their heroes/heroines extends beyond simple admiration to include their emotions, feelings, ideas, beliefs, values, self-appraisals, and behaviors. To the extent that public reference idols influence adolescents in these more meaningful ways, they may play a role in adolescent identity formation.

Recall that approximately two-thirds of the sample reported that they positively identify with their most admired hero/heroine (Level 2); almost one-third indicated that they use their reference idol's values and beliefs to judge and give direction to their own (Level 3); almost a quarter said they try to act or behave like their hero/heroine (Level 4); and approximately two-fifths indicated they would make a personal sacrifice on behalf of their choice (Level 5). The fact that the modal response for influence Levels 3 (Positive Criterion Source), 4 (Positive Emulation), and 5 (Advocacy) was 'cannot say' does not mute some of the impressive *individual* response patterns uncovered. For example, 23 respondents who chose a New Zealand hero/heroine as the most important person in their life *agreed* with at least four of the five influence level statements; and 31 respondents who chose an American hero/heroine responded the same. Thus, it may well be the case that reference idols help *some* adolescents define an ideological stance for themselves, a critically important developmental task associated with identity formation during adolescence. However, we hasten to point out that, on balance, these findings do not provide compelling proof that celebrity others in general, and athletes in particular, impact the lives of New Zealand youth in significant ways. More qualitative research methods are called for in order to more accurately answer the third question.

With respect to the fourth research question, namely, 'Are there differences in the degree of influence exerted by American and New Zealand heroes/heroines?', analysis of the responses to each of the five levels of influence revealed no statistically significant differences. Youth who selected American

heroes/heroines as the person most important in their lives were no less influenced by their choice than those who chose New Zealanders. In short, distal reference idols proved just as influential in the lives of New Zealand adolescents as proximal ones, although the degree of influence exerted by both was generally modest at best. Of particular interest would be for future researchers to determine whether US and New Zealand sport heroes/heroines represent the same or different *values* as perceived by their adolescent admirers.

While these findings provide some support for the contention that American popular culture has a 'global impact', the exact parameters of its influence as well as its significance are hard to gauge when only descriptive, quantitative data are available. Until researchers are able to understand how American media are actually received and interpreted by youth audiences around the world, we are not likely to fully understand or appreciate their psychosocial impacts on adolescent consumers.

How successful New Zealanders are in defining an essential post-colonial cultural identity for themselves in the 21st century will bear careful watching. We have suggested that one indicator of the extent to which worldwide commodified images impact on national identity is revealed in the heroes and heroines local youth choose to admire and model. What now seems called for is more in-depth analysis of adolescent cultural consumption patterns; more ethnographic work that examines a young person's lived experience; and additional investigation of intertextual linkages and patterns associated with youth resistance and transformation. Do those adolescents who most admire Michael Jordan wear Nike basketball shoes, drink Gatorade, and buy NBA endorsed clothing (LaFeber, 1999)? How are American/foreign products resisted and/or transformed and made sense of by local youth?

We view this empirical case study as a starting point for the continued examination of the global/local nexus as it manifests itself within the context of popular culture. We are quick to acknowledge that to focus on adolescent reference idol choices as one manifestation of the impact of the 'global' on the 'local' is not without limitations given the fact that the 'contextual terrain' is forever shifting and changing. Moreover, the criteria used for reference idol selection change according to age, gender prescriptions, and the introduction of new media technologies which shape not only what is available but how 'celebrity stars' are defined and produced. Although beyond the purposes of the investigation, examining which American-mediated reference idols enjoy the greatest longevity ('shelf life') within local adolescent populations would be an important line of inquiry.

It remains to be seen whether New Zealand youth continue to draw upon American popular cultural icons in the future or, whether New Zealanders are ultimately successful in creating for themselves a popular culture that reflects a unique local strain and flavor (Lealand, 1985). While some might argue that the power of globalization American-style 'with its many tentacled synergies and seductive selling appears unstoppable' (LaFeber, 1999: 6B), the dynamic and complex interplay among local, national, transnational and global forces surely rules out any facile predictions.

Notes

1. Researchers have long debated how best to ask respondents about their heroes and heroines. For example, how much overlap is there when someone is asked to name his or her 'heroes/heroines', 'the person they most admire', or 'the person they would most like to be'? The decision we made to ask our respondents to list their public heroes and heroines directly, and to define them minimally as 'people whom you admire' was based on Harris's (1994) observation that all of the aforementioned assessment approaches produce roughly similar results.

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Merrill J. Melnick is a Professor on the Department of Physical Education and Sport, SUNY Brockport where he teaches courses in sport and society, social psychology of sport and sport fandom. A founding member of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, Melnick is the co-editor (with Andrew Yiannakis) of *Contemporary Issues in Sociology of Sport* (Human Kinetics, 2001) and co-author (with Daniel Wann, Gordon Russell and Dale Pease) of *Sport Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators* (Routledge, 2001).

Address: Department of Physical Education and Sport, State University of New York, College at Brockport, Brockport, NY 14420, USA.
Email: mmelnick@brockport.edu

Steven J. Jackson is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Physical Education, University of Otago where he teaches courses in sport, media and culture and sociology of sport. His research interests include sport media, globalization and sport, and culture and advertising. A member of the editorial board for the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Jackson recently published (with David Andrews) *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity* (Routledge, 2002).

Address: School of Physical Education, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin, New Zealand.
Email: sjackson@pooka.otago.ac.nz