

The Study of Athletes' Body Perception and Gender Role

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ABSTRACT

In this study, it has been aimed to examine athletes' body perception and gender role. 120 male athletes and 120 non-athletic male university students participated in the study voluntarily. In the study, as the data collecting means, The Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-MBSRQ was used in order to determine males' body perception levels, BEM Sex Role Inventory-BSRI was used to determine gender roles and Personal Information Form developed by the researcher was used to ascertain personal features of the subjects. When the athletes' body perception levels are examined, the features of physical competence orientation, health orientation, appearance evaluation, fitness evaluation, health evaluation and body areas satisfaction have been found to be higher than non-athletes' ($p < 0.05$). On the other hand; no difference has been found between athletes and non-athletes in terms of appearance orientation ($p > 0.05$). When gender roles are examined, athletes have been found to have higher values than non-athletes' in terms of masculinity, femininity and social desirability ($p < 0.05$). To conclude; as well as considering sports as a factor increasing individuals' body perception level and gender role, it is also thought that athletes care about health, appearance and physical competence and are glad of body parts because of their muscled body structure developing due to the exercises and have flexible personality to show feminine and masculine features that the environment needs in terms of gender role.

Key words: *body perception, gender role, sports, sedentary*

Introduction

Body image is a complex phenomenon that includes physiological, psychological, and sociological components. Research has indicated that the degree of satisfaction with one's body image is related to one's self-esteem³⁷⁻⁴⁵.

Gender is one important structural characteristic influencing the social networks of older persons. Women tend to have larger and more diverse networks and more frequent contacts with network members than men do². Women are also more likely to organize their families' social relationships³⁸.

Research on body image has presented relatively consistent findings on age and gender differences⁷⁻²¹. Another explanation for the findings which have been concluded from the differences between athletes and non-athletes' body image ratings¹⁶⁻¹⁸ is that the individuals who are concerned about their body image or have negative body image may have already discontinued participating in that sport.

Social gender concept is social and psychological features and behaviors that belong to men and women²³. Social gender stereotypes can be defined as the tendency to think as if the people show same features although they are from various groups like race, gender, profession groups and they show diverse peculiarities. Four elements attracted his attention while Bem was determining gender roles. They categorized individuals into four groups; masculine (high masculinity-low femininity), feminine (high femininity-low masculinity), androgynous (high masculinity-high femininity), differentiated (low masculinity-low femininity). Femininity and undifferentiated gender role were associated with low self-esteem, lack of body satisfaction and low sexual satisfaction²⁶⁻²⁹. The masculine scale characteristics were: defending own beliefs, independent, assertive, strong personality, having leadership abilities, willing to take risks, and willing to take a stand. The femininity scale characteristics were; affectionate, sympathetic, and sensitive to needs of

others, understanding, and compassionate, warm, and tender²⁰. Davis et al. asserted that men would increasingly exhibit body image dissatisfaction to the extent that media images were impossible to achieve by natural means. Given the sociocultural emphasis placed on muscularity, many men have pursued weightlifting or bodybuilding as the means to this end.¹⁴ A drive for muscularity clearly exists among boys and men^{12–35}.

Gender role identity is the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to be masculine and feminine⁴. It is proposed and supported in the literature that individuals engaged in sports tend to have higher masculinity^{13–23}. Many studies have shown that females who were physically active were both high in masculinity and femininity. The interrelationships between body image, body satisfaction, gender role and self-esteem have been studied and to this point, research, although short of a cause and effect relationship, shows that these variables can directly influence one another work with body image and gender role identity has provided valuable insight into these interactions. There is a relationship between both gender and body image. Thus, it can be inferred there is a relationship between body image and gender role identity²⁸.

Individuals with masculine or androgynous traits tend to have higher self-esteem when compared to individuals with feminine or undifferentiated gender traits^{16–25–28}. It has been stated in the researches carried out with child and adolescent males about body image that many males' feeling dissatisfaction about their body areas and body satisfaction is positively related to self-esteem in males^{41,42}.

Research utilizing these scales has mainly focused on the oppressive effects that sexist stereotypes and gender role prescriptions have on women. However, more recently, research has focused on how these sexist stereotypes and gender role prescriptions affect not only females, but also males^{6–9}. Gender stereotypes are typically beliefs that societies possess regarding physical characteristics, personality traits, gender-roles, occupational preferences, specific competencies and emotional dispositions¹⁴. Gender stereotypes are comprised of two sub-categories: descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes. Descriptive stereotypes are adjectives describing the two sexes separately. For instance, woman are typically described as being beautiful, weak, teachers, naive or caring, whereas men are described as being strong, assertive, competent, lawyers or the provider. The literature on gender prescriptive stereotypes seems to be consistent overtime in what is termed traditional roles both women and men are expected to exemplify⁴⁸.

Research also has come to a consensus regarding non-traditional roles for women such as career-women, athlete, or feminist. The literature on gender prescriptive stereotypes has also been consistent in identifying the traditional roles for men such as businessman, athlete, womanizer or blue color worker^{21–22}.

Marsh³³ notice that physical self perception is not an unreadable structure, but depending on several area or

sizes comprising physical activity, coordination, body fat, global physical self, sports competence, physical appearance, strength, flexibility, and endurance.

In a study carried out by Klomsten et al.³⁰, it was examined gender differences were examined in the area of physical self-concept. The researchers used the PSDQ and they anticipated boys to have higher scores on sport competence, endurance, and strength dimensions (e.g., stereotypical masculine characteristics) and girls to score higher on the flexibility dimension (e.g., a stereotypical feminine characteristic). But they found that boys had higher self-concept than girls in every size of the PSDQ with the exception of flexibility, where there was no difference between the sexes.

Clear results have been reached related to the changing effect of body exercise programs. Positive changes have been observed in the concept of entity and body perception of individuals after they joined aerobic programme³⁶. In written sources, many researches can be found that include the interaction of submission of identity with gender^{17–32}, frequency of exercise^{10,11–31} and the duration of exercise³¹.

Sports activities were classified according to their convenience to social gender. Sports that are acknowledged as more masculine are team sports, boxing, weight lifting and the ones that are acknowledged as more feminine are gymnastics, ballet and dance³⁹.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine body perception levels and gender roles of males between the age of 18 and 26. In this study, we sought to answer the following questions: Were there significant differences between body perception levels and gender roles of males athletes and non-athlete counterparts?

Materials and Methods

Subjects

The working group consists of 240 males, 120 of whom are male elite athletes in Volleyball, Basketball, Football, Wrestling, Boxing and Weight lifting branches and 120 of whom are non-athlete males.

Questionnaire

This research is done with the aim of determining the gender roles and perception levels of their bodies of male athletes who are involved in sports with the ones, who are not.

In the research, »Personal Information Form« was used to determine the characteristics of the athletes which was improved by the researcher, »Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire« which was improved by Winstead and Cash (1984)⁵¹ was used to determine the perception levels of males; »BEM Gender Roles Inventory (1974)«³ was used to determine the gender roles of athletes and non-athletes as data collection means.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF COLLEGE MALE SAMPLE

	Variables	Age	Frequency	Percent
Athlete	Age (year)	18–20 age	46	38.3
		21–23 age	25	20.8
		24–26 age	33	27.5
		26 age and over	16	13.3
	Experience (year)	one playing sports for 5 years and below	50	41.7
		6–10 years	27	22.5
		11–15 years	34	28.3
		16 years and over	9	7.5
	Matter use	Smoke	42	35.0
		Alcohol	2	1.7
		Vitamin	20	16.7
		None	56	46.7
	Companion time	1 year and below	20	16.7
1–2 years		14	11.7	
2 years and over		33	27.5	
Sedentary	Age (year)	18–20 age	34	28.1
		21–23 age	55	45.5
		24–26 age	28	23.1
		26 age and over	4	3.3
	Ones using matter	Smoke	60	49.6
		Alcohol	2	1.7
		Vitamin	12	9.9
		None	47	38.8
	Companion time	1 year and below	11	9.1
		1–2 years	20	16.5
		2 years and over	43	35.5

Multidimensional Body Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ)

Multidimensional Body Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ), developed by Winstead and Cash (1984) in order to evaluate attitudinal sides of body image, contains 7 sub-dimensions. These are) 1. Appearance Evaluation; 2. Appearance Orientation; 3. Fitness Evaluation; 4. Fitness Orientation; 5. Health Evaluation; 6. Health Orientation; 7. Body Areas Satisfaction. The MBSRQ, is a standardized measure of body image attitudes, using a five point scale from »definitely disagree« to »definitely agree«^{32,33}. The appearance orientation subscale is a 12 item measure of the extent of cognitive behavioral investment in one's appearance, including, for instance, efforts spent on »grooming behavior« – for example, »I check my appearance in the mirror whenever I can«. In this study, internal consistencies (Cronbach's α) of these two subscales were 0.77 and 0.83. Finally, the nine item body areas satisfaction assesses satisfaction with discrete body areas or attributes.

BEM Gender Roles Inventory

BEM Gender Roles Inventory has been improved with the aim of determining the individuals and with the aim of determining gender role group features that individuals have. BEM Gender Roles Inventory consists of three sub-dimensions. 1-Femininity, 2-Masculinity, 3-Social Desirable. BEM Gender Roles Inventory consists of 60 questions with likert type 7 graded evaluation scale. BEM Gender Role Inventory; The BEM Gender Role Inventory (BSRI) provides independent assessments of masculinity and femininity in terms of the respondent's self-reported possession of socially desirable, stereotypically masculine and feminine personality characteristics. The BEM Gender Role Inventory is designed to provide an assessment of degrees of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny according to Sandra Bem's gender schema theory. Her theory states that people have a generalized tendency to understand and process behaviors based on sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema. BEM contends that gender typing is a product of society's insistence on the functionality of the gender di-

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT MALES' APPEARANCE ORIENTATION, FITNESS ORIENTATION, HEALTH ORIENTATION, MASCULINITY AND SOCIAL DESIRABLE FEATURES

			N	\bar{X}	SD	T	p
Body perception sub-dimensions	Appearance Orientation	Athlete	120	36.7083	6.82851	0.198	0.843
		Sedentary	121	36.5372	6.58665		
	Fitness Orientation	Athlete	120	34.0167	4.88005	5.958	0.000
		Sedentary	121	30.1157	5.27445		
	Health Orientation	Athlete	120	40.0917	5.86973	3.441	0.001
		Sedentary	121	37.5041	5.80248		

chotomy and gender-related behaviors³⁻⁴. The BSRI consists of a list of 60 personality characteristics and is self-administered. Participants are asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 7 how much of a given personality characteristic they believe to possess. Of these, 20 were selected with the mean social desirability ratings for males and females nearly equal⁴⁴. Socially desirable masculine traits included items such as »independent«, »assertive«, and »analytical«. Feminine traits included »understanding«, »compassionate«, and »loyal«. Furthermore, 20 additional traits were chosen that were no more socially desirable for males or females, 10 of which were positively valued (such as »conscientious« and »adaptable«), and 10 of which were negatively valued (such as »moody« and »jealous«)⁴⁴. In the original scale handbook, the Cronbach alpha (internal reliability) and test-retest reliability values of the sub-scales ranged between 0.75 and 0.90.

Statistical Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows; SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL). Standard statistical methods were used for the calculation of frequency and percent. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine if dependent variables were normally distributed. The Levene test was used to determine if there was homogeneity of variance. Mann-Whitney U and unpaired t-tests were used to determine significant differences for each dependent variable. For all analyses, the criterion for significance was set at an alpha level of $p < 0.05$.

Results

When Table 2 was examined, a significant difference has been found between athletes and sedentaries in

TABLE 3
ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT MALES' MASCULINITY AND SOCIAL DESIRABLE FEATURES

			N	\bar{X}	SD	T	p
Gender Roles	Masculinity	Athlete	120	1.12682	11.32409	3.176	0.002
		Sedentary	121	1.07602	13.44903		
	Social desirable	Athlete	120	93.6000	9.78199	2.234	0.026
		Sedentary	121	90.8595	9.25860		

TABLE 4
ANALYSIS OF SUBJECTS' APPEARANCE EVALUATION, FITNESS EVALUATION, HEALTH EVALUATION, BODY AREAS SATISFACTION AND FEMINITY FEATURES

			N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p
Body Perception lower elements	Appearance Evaluation	Athlete	120	130.21	15625.00	6155.000	-2.049	0.040
		Sedentary	121	111.87	13536.00			
	Fitness Evaluation	Athlete	120	135.29	16234.50	5545.500	-3.181	0.001
		Sedentary	121	106.83	12926.50			
	Health Evaluation	Athlete	120	130.18	15621.50	6158.500	-2.049	0.041
		Sedentary	121	111.90	13539.50			
Body Areas Satisfaction	Athlete	119	138.62	16496.00	5043.000	-4.028	0.000	
	Sedentary	121	102.68	12424.00				

terms of Fitness Orientation and Health Orientation features ($p < 0.05$). In these comparisons, Fitness Orientation and Health Orientation features scores of athletes have been found to significantly higher than sedentaries' Fitness Orientation and Health Orientation features scores ($p < 0.05$). On the other hand, There could not been found a meaningful difference between the scores of athletes and non-athletes related to the Appearance Orientation ($p > 0.05$).

When Table 3 was examined, a significant difference has been found between athletes and sedentaries in terms of Masculinity and social desirable features ($p < 0.05$). In these comparisons, Masculinity and social desirable features scores of athletes have been found to significantly higher than sedentaries' masculinity and social desirable features scores ($p < 0.05$).

When Table 4 was examined, a significant difference has been found between athletes and sedentaries in terms of Appearance Evaluation, Fitness Evaluation, Health Evaluation and Body Areas Satisfaction features ($p < 0.05$). When the scores of athletes in Appearance Evaluation, Fitness Evaluation, Health Evaluation and Body Areas Satisfaction features were examined they have been found meaningfully higher than the scores of non-athletes ($p < 0.05$).

When Table 5 was examined, a significant difference has been found between athletes and sedentaries in terms of Fertility features ($p < 0.05$). When the scores of athletes in fertility features were examined they have been found meaningfully higher than the scores of non-athletes ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The findings of this study have shown that participation in physical activity have significantly high scores of Appearance Orientation, Fitness Orientation, Health Orientation, Masculinity and Social Desirable features. Male athletes scored higher than nonathletes.

Salokun⁴⁶ and Schumaker et al.⁴⁷ used different self-concept scales named »The Tennessee Self Concept Scale« in the studies. They have found significant differences in self-concept scores among high school athletes and nonathletes. Moreover Guyot et al.²⁴ found some differences in self-concept scores using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. Participation of boys in sports significantly correlated with higher scores on all self-concept subscales.

In addition, the results of the present study support the findings of Tiggemann⁴⁹, this study investigated the

interrelationships between weight, weight dissatisfaction, restraint, and self-esteem in a group of young adult women and men. The subjects were students at the Flinders University of South Australia, a tentative causal model proposed actual overweight to lead to body dissatisfaction, which caused the person to diet, with the resulting failures leading to loss of self-esteem. This model was confirmed by path analysis for women, but not for men. In line with self-concept theory, subjective overweight was more strongly related to self-esteem for women than for men, with restraint mediating this relationship. In the study carried out by Demirtas and Donmez¹⁵, considering male-female relations and mutual reactions, it has been determined that femininity features of women decrease with the longer companion time as well as the power of reactions given to the partner and relationship.

When the levels of athlete's body perception are examined in Table 2, it has been found that the features of fitness orientation and health orientation are higher than the non-athlete males. On the other hand, no difference has been found between athletes and non-athletes in terms of appearance orientation. As shown Table 3, when gender roles are examined, athlete males have been found to have higher values in terms of the features of masculinity and social desirable. Having much higher body perception levels than non-athletes', being an athlete, reaching some physical criteria, developing a much healthier body may be considered to increase the feature of the athletes' being glad of their bodies. Usually, in the results of previous studies, it was found that mean scores on satisfaction with body characteristics were higher for athletes than for nonathletes. In a study where athletes and non-athletes are compared in terms of body satisfaction, it has been determined that athletes are glad of their appearance²⁷. The findings of this study are similar with it. Besides, Martin, Sinden and Fleming³⁴, Gamage et al.²² have revealed that the ones who does exercise regularly have higher self-esteem presentations than the ones who hardly ever or never do exercise. The demands of competitive bodybuilding mandate behaviors such as intense weight training to gain lean muscle and intentional fat loss through a combination of aerobic exercise and dietary manipulation. To be successful, there is a contextually normative focus on body shape and body modification. Perhaps not all subgroups of men who exercise using weights are at risk of pathological body image disturbance, as some research suggests⁵. In another study related with body perception, body image depending on eating habits of male and female adolescents was investigated and positive increases were reported in life

TABLE 5
ANALYSIS OF SUBJECTS' FEMINITY FEATURES

		N	\bar{X} Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p
Gender Roles	Athlete	120	139.38	16725.50	5054.500	-4.078	0.000
	Sedentary	121	102.77	12435.50			

satisfaction levels and body perception levels of individuals together with diet in the research⁵².

When the athletes' body perception levels are examined in table 4, the features of appearance evaluation, fitness evaluation, health evaluation and body areas satisfaction have been found to be higher than non-athletes. When gender roles are examined in table 5, athletes have been found to have higher values in terms of femininity.

BEM has described the personality trait of androgynous individual as in: developing feminine and masculine features highly means that these individuals have flexible personality that is suitable to show the feminine and masculine features that the environment needs⁴. The reason why athletes have more feminine and masculine features than non-athletic subjects is considered that athletes have some of the feminine and masculine features that the society accept as well as their own gender roles and athletes show androgynous personality.

It has been suggested that the individuals who have Physical Fitness have a tendency to have a positive body perception⁵⁰. It has been observed that positive self-esteem, self confidence, concept of entity and physical fitness applications of body perception were combined with each other. After the exercise, positive changes were determined in body image together with entity³⁶. The gender roles of male and female athletes were examined and it was determined that females and males playing individual sports showed androgynous and masculine features. It has been pointed out that health due to sports increases masculinity and this is acceptable for both females and males. It has been reported that masculinity slowly gives its place to the androgynous structure¹. The

findings of this study are similar with the findings of present study and support them.

A questionnaire was administered to 640 university students. The topics covered included SES, body definitions, behaviors related to body weight (such as exercise, dieting, starving, using diet foods, drug use, and bingeing and purging) and a social comparison scale. Age was not related to eating habits or body perception, whereas gender affected most such behaviors. Low SES was found to be a risk factor for unhealthy behavior related to body perception in males, whereas high SES was identified as a risk factor in females⁴⁰.

Conclusion

Results have indicated that feminine females evaluated their physical appearance less favorably than androgynous females, although physical appearance was equally important to both groups. The importance of the masculine component of gender role was reflected in favorable body image ratings of androgynous and masculine females in all domains (physical appearance, physical fitness, and physical health) and in the unfavorable ratings of feminine males in the physical fitness domain.

To conclude; as well as considering sports as a factor increasing individuals' body perception level and gender role, it is also thought that athletes care about health, appearance and physical competence and are glad of body parts because of their muscled body structure developing due to the exercises and have flexible personality to show feminine and masculine features that the environment needs in terms of gender role.

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ISTRAŽIVANJE PERCEPCIJE TIJELA SPORTAŠA I RODNIH ULOGA

SAŽETAK

U ovom se istraživanju proučavala percepcija tijela sportaša i rodni uloga. 120 muških sportaša i 120 studenata koji se ne bave sportom je dobrovoljno sudjelovalo u studiji. Multidimenzionalni upitnik MBSRQ je korišten pri određivanju razina percepcije muškog tijela, BEM inventar spolnih uloga BSRI je korišten za utvrđivanje rodni uloga, a osobni informativni upitnik za procjenu osobitosti i specifičnih karakteristika ispitanika. Kod ispitivanja razine percepcije tijela sportaša, vrijednosti koje su se odnosile na obilježja fizičke spremne, zdravlje, procjenu pojavnosti, kondiciju i zadovoljstvo dijelovima tijela bile su više za sportaše nego za nespportaše ($p < 0,05$). S druge strane, nije utvrđena razlika između skupina s obzirom na orijentaciju ($p > 0,05$). Kada se proučavaju rodne uloge, sportaši su imali više vrijednosti od nespportaša u kategorijama muževnosti, ženstvenosti i društvene poželjnosti ($p < 0,05$). Iz izloženoga možemo zaključiti da, osim što se sport smatra aktivnošću koja povećava individualnu percepciju tijela i rodni uloga, smatra se i da sportaši više važnosti pridaju zdravlju, pojavnosti i fizičkoj spremi te imaju fleksibilnu osobnost s obzirom na pokazivanje muževnih i ženstvenih karakteristika.