

Gender Role Orientation of Athletes and Nonathletes in a Patriarchal Society: A Study in Turkey

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The purpose of this study was to compare the gender role orientation and gender role classification of female and male athletes to those of their nonathlete counterparts. A total of 463 athletes and 378 nonathletes completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The findings indicated that athletes score higher on the masculinity and femininity subscales than do nonathletes. Men had higher scores on masculinity than did women, whereas women had higher scores on femininity than did men. In addition, both men and women athletes were mostly classified in the androgynous category. These findings are discussed in relation to the competitive sport environment and Turkish society.

KEY WORDS: gender-role orientation; gender; sport participation.

Gender, it is argued, is a major social and theoretical category that, along with social class, race, age, ethnicity, and others, must be incorporated into all theoretically based social analyses of sport (Hall, 1988). Research and writing on the social construction of gender and masculinity through sport (Connell, 1987; Messner, 1992; Theberge, 1993) have highlighted the ways in which gender is socially constructed through engagement in sport practices. According to Theberge (1993), the centrality of body and physical performance to athletic experience makes sport a particularly powerful setting for the construction and confirmation of gender ideologies. Further, organized sport is clearly a potentially powerful cultural arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of men's superiority and dominance (Messner, 1994). Bryson (1994) argued that there are two fundamental dimensions along which sport provides support for hegemonic masculinity. First, sport links maleness with highly valued and visible skills, and

second, it links maleness with the positively sanctioned use of aggression/force/violence. On the other hand, the social organization of gender in society, because it defines the appropriate spheres of social activity and social roles for women and men, influences women's and men's participation in sport.

Women's participation in social institutions and sport goes hand in-hand with the development of gender-related research. Since the early 1970s, there have been increases in women's participation in sport because of new opportunities, government legislation that regulates equal treatment for women, the women's movement, the health and fitness movement, and increased media coverage of women in sports (Coakley, 1994). As a result of these developments, researchers in the sport sciences have begun to examine the relationship between gender role orientation and sport participation. Many researchers have indicated that sport participation is an important factor in gender construction, such that most athletes have androgynous or masculine gender role orientations (Challip, Villiger, & Duignan, 1980; Hall, Durborow, & Progen, 1986; Henschen, Edwards, & Mathinos, 1982; Lantz & Schroder, 1999; Myers & Lips, 1978; Wrisberg, Draper, & Everett, 1988).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the level of women's participation in types of sport that have been traditionally limited to men

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(e.g., wrestling, weight-lifting, kick-boxing, body-building), and this has been happening in many countries around the world. However, many sports have been considered inappropriate for women, and women who engage in gender-inappropriate types of sports are often perceived as acting outside of their gender role. It can be assumed that the close association between the attributes required for sport and the traditional concepts of stereotypical gender roles contribute to this attitude. The participation of women and men in the social institution of sport and the very shape of that institution are partly determined by the definitions of what men and women ought to be in society (Murphy, 1988). In Turkish society, as in other patriarchal societies, traditional attitudes about gender roles for women are put into practice by socialization (Dilek, 1997; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1982), and men and women internalize their gender roles (Kandiyoti, 1995; Koyuncu, 1988). Parents encourage their daughters to be dependent and obedient, whereas sons are allowed to be more aggressive and independent because they are expected to cope with the outside world (Ataca, Sunar, & Kağıtçıbaşı, 1994; Başaran, 1974). On the other hand, Turkish law endorses a patriarchal family model in which the husband is the head of the family, has the most say concerning the family's place of residence, and has primary responsibility for taking care of his wife and children (Hortaçsu, Kalaycıoğlu, & Rittersberger-Tilic, 2003).

Turkey has embarked on the road toward total secularization, relegating Islam to the private rather than the political sphere of life (Mutlu, 1996). Turkey is a country where Islam, as a patriarchal institution, prevails (with varying degrees of influence across different social groups) alongside the strong efforts of the state to secularize Turkish society. It is a country that has been largely transformed since the 1950s as a result of mass migration from the countryside to large cities, from the undeveloped eastern parts of Turkey to the more developed western parts, which now includes various combinations of traditional and modern elements (Erman, 2001). These transformations have influenced the values of the Turkish people. For example, although many researchers have defined Turkish culture as collectivist, individualistic values have very much increased among well-educated young people in Turkey (Göregenli, 1995; Üskül, 1998).

Relative to the situation of women in sport, as mentioned by Fasting and Pfister (1997), Turkey is a very diverse country, and the participation in sport,

as well as the general practice and experience of physical activity, varies considerably in the various regions of Turkey. Although elite female athletes outnumber elite male athletes only in volleyball, there is a growing number of female athletes in martial sports such as taekwondo, karate, and judo. This suggests that an increasing number of women prefer to participate in sports traditionally dominated by men. In their report, Fasting and Pfister (1997) also concluded that at least some parts of Turkey are changing, in that the younger generation is more active in sport and encourages their children especially girls, to enjoy sport, because sport is considered something positive. This continuing transformation and modernization process has led researchers to investigate the institution of sport as an important arena of gendered cultural practices in Turkish society.

Several researchers have previously examined gender construction in sport by comparing the gender role orientation of athletes and nonathletes in Western cultures, and these cultures appear to have socialization patterns for sport similar to those found in Turkish culture. In Turkey, interest in women's issues in the social sciences has been growing since the mid-1980s, and a number of studies have been carried out to investigate different aspects of women's lives, such as their education, employment, health, fertility, and political participation (Erman, 2001). In their attempt to explore patriarchy in the Turkish context, a small number of researchers have carried out studies of sport participation. Thus, the purpose of the present study was twofold: (1) to investigate the gender differences in gender role orientation in Turkish society, and (2) to examine the gender role orientation with regard to sport participation in Turkish society. On the basis of previous research, it was hypothesized that there would be significant differences in gender role orientation between women and men and between athletes and nonathletes, and there would be significant differences in gender role classification, especially with regard to the androgynous and masculine gender role categories.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 841 individuals voluntarily participated in this study. This number was comprised

by 463 athletes (241 women whose mean age was 22.05 years, $SD = 2.52$; 222 men whose mean age was 22.49 years, $SD = 2.32$) and 378 nonathletes (203 women whose mean age was 22.07 years, $SD = 3.20$; 175 men whose mean age was 22.26, $SD = 0.06$). The female and male athletes represented both individual sports and team sports. The individual sports represented were gymnastics (16 women, 31 men), wrestling (16 women, 26 men), taekwando (11 women, 6 men), tennis (41 women, 21 men), karate (27 women, 25 men), judo (11 women, 8 men), and track and field (6 women, 23 men). The team sports were basketball (26 women, 16 men), volleyball (38 women, 14 men), handball (26 women, 17 men), and soccer (23 women, 35 men).

The sporting experiences of athletes were measured by asking participants a series of questions related to their years of sport participation, sporting success, and training schedules. For individual sports, athletes were those who had placed at least third in a national competition, and for team sports, athletes were members of a team in the first or second league of the chosen sport in Turkey. Sport participants in this study were also defined as competitive sport participants. Participation at a competitive level requires a greater degree of skill and training in skill development. The average number of years in competitive sports for these participants was 8.76 years (Mean = 8.02 for women; Mean = 9.56 for men). In addition, the majority of sport participants were training 6 days a week.

The female and male nonathletes group consisted of university students who responded "did not participate in any regular physical activity" on the personal information form. They were selected from four different state universities in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. Female and male athletes were also studied at these same four universities. Socioeconomic status of athletes and nonathletes was not formally assessed, but the selected universities are considered to be representative of middle socioeconomic status.

Measures

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) developed by Bem (1974) was used to determine the gender role orientation of the participants. The BSRI is a paper-and-pencil self-report instrument that asks the respondent to indicate, on a 7-point scale, how well each of 60 attributes (20 masculine, 20 feminine,

20 neutral) describes himself or herself. The median-split procedure described by Bem (1978) was used to classify participants as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Participants who scored above the median (of the entire sample) for masculine items and below the median for feminine items were classified as masculine; those who scored below the masculine median and above the feminine median were classified as feminine; those who scored above both medians were classified as androgynous, and those who scored below both medians were classified as undifferentiated.

Kavuncu (1987) prepared the Turkish version of the BSRI. In her study, she excluded some femininity and masculinity items from the original inventory because of their inappropriateness to Turkish culture. The masculine items athletic, analytical, competitive, has leadership abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, self-sufficient, and strong personality were excluded, whereas courageous, honest, generous, responsible to family, authoritative, reasonable, prim, idealist, and does not express feelings were included in the masculinity subscale of the Turkish version of BSRI. The feminine items cheerful, flatterable, sympathetic, gullible, and childlike were excluded, whereas honorable, conciliatory, dignified, altruistic, and emotional were included.

Dökmen (1991) tested the reliability and validity of this Turkish version of the BSRI. In Dökmen's (1991) study, the validity coefficients were tested by criteria-related validity and were found to be 0.51 for femininity and 0.63 for masculinity. The reliability coefficients of the masculinity and femininity subscales of the BSRI were tested by the split-half method, and the coefficients were found to be 0.71 for the masculinity subscale and 0.77 for the femininity subscale.

Procedure

Nonathletes completed the inventories in their departmental classroom settings, whereas athletes were given the test during team meetings and camps. Permission was obtained from instructors and coaches for participation of their students and athletes. The inventories were given to athletes and nonathletes and collected from them by the researchers. Incomplete inventories were eliminated from the study. In all, data were analyzed for 841 of the 886 inventories returned from athletes and nonathletes.

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations of BSRI Masculinity, Femininity, and Neutral scores for Women and Men Athletes and Nonathletes

Group	Masculinity		Femininity		Neutral	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Women						
Nonathletes	89.26	14.79	105.40	13.16	86.20	8.06
Athletes	100.20	13.98	106.96	13.42	89.79	9.16
Men						
Nonathletes	95.73	13.92	95.57	14.29	84.73	9.01
Athletes	107.67	13.20	103.59	12.37	90.79	8.67

RESULTS

Means and standard deviations for masculine, feminine, and neutral scores of the BSRI are presented in Table I. Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to compare gender role orientation scores (feminine, masculine, and neutral) of female and male athletes and nonathletes. According to 2 (men/women) \times 2 (athlete/nonathlete) multivariate analysis, the main effect for gender was significant on gender role orientation, Hotelling's $T^2 = 0.19$; $F_{(3, 835)} = 51.67$; $p < .01$. In follow-up univariate analysis a significant difference was obtained in masculinity, $F_{(1, 837)} = 51.56$, $p < .01$, and femininity, $F_{(1, 837)} = 51.17$, $p < .01$, scores between women and men in which women scored higher on femininity items than did men; men scored higher on masculinity items than did women (see Table I).

A 2 (men/women) \times 2 (athlete/nonathlete) multivariate analysis (MANOVA) indicated that there was a significant difference in gender role orientation between athletes and nonathletes, Hotelling's $T^2 = 0.19$; $F_{(3, 835)} = 51.83$; $p < .01$. Significant differences were also found in masculinity, $F_{(1, 837)} = 139.15$, $p < .01$, femininity, $F_{(1, 837)} = 26.93$, $p < .01$, and neutral items, $F_{(1, 837)} = 63.11$, $p < .01$, between athletes and nonathletes. Athletes scored higher on the masculinity, femininity, and neutral items than did nonathletes (Table I).

Gender and sport participation interaction was significant for gender role orientation, Hotelling's $T^2 = 0.02$; $F_{(3, 835)} = 4.28$; $p < .05$. This interaction was significant only for the femininity subscale, $F_{(1, 837)} = 12.24$, $p < .01$. Male nonathletes had lower scores on femininity ($M = 95.57$) than did male athletes ($M = 103.59$), female nonathletes ($M = 105.40$), and female athletes ($M = 106.96$).

When we look at the highest within-group scores on the femininity and masculinity items of athletes,

both female athletes and male athletes scored highest on similar femininity and masculinity items. For the femininity subscale, the highest scores among female athletes were on the following five items, listed here in descending order: honorable, loyal, warm, understanding, and compassionate. Among male athletes, scores on the femininity subscale were highest on the following five femininity items, likewise listed in descending order: honorable, warm, loves children, understanding, and loyal.

For masculinity items, female athletes scored highest on the following five items: honest, responsible to family, willing to take a stand, defends own beliefs, and self-reliant. Male athletes scored highest on the following five masculinity items, listed here in descending order: masculine, defends own beliefs, willing to take a stand, responsible to family, and honest.

In order to test differences in gender role classification between athletes and nonathletes, chi square analysis was conducted. The analysis demonstrated significant differences in gender role classifications between athletes and nonathletes, $\chi^2 = 208.21$; $p < .01$. Nearly one-half of female and male athletes were classified in the androgynous gender role category (44 and 49% respectively), whereas nearly one-half of female and male nonathletes were classified in the feminine or undifferentiated gender role category (40 and 50% respectively) (see Table II).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to compare gender role orientation and gender role classification of female and male athletes and their nonathlete counterparts.

The findings of this study indicate that there are significant gender role differences between men and women as expected. Men had more masculine characteristics than women did, whereas women had more feminine characteristics than men did. Turkish society is considered to be highly patriarchal with clear-cut gender role differences (Sakallı, 2001), and Turkish people still generally value patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1995). In traditional Turkish society, men are expected to show mastery over their environment and to support their family, whereas women are expected to be patient, to care for others, to maintain social relationships, and to be more concerned with affiliation and benevolence values (Başaran, 1992; İmamoğlu & Karakitapoğlu, 1999). Because women in the traditional segments of Turkish society are in a

Table II. Gender Role Classification of Athletes and Nonathletes

	Androgynous	Masculine	Feminine	Undifferentiated
Women athletes				
<i>N</i>	107	39	52	43
%	44	16	22	18
Men athletes				
<i>N</i>	109	58	6	49
%	49	26	3	22
Women nonathletes				
<i>N</i>	38	7	80	78
%	19	3	40	38
Men nonathletes				
<i>N</i>	29	46	13	87
%	17	26	7	50

dependent and subordinate position (Karakitapoğlu & İmamoğlu, 2002), it may be difficult for them to deviate from the traditional feminine role.

It should be noted that the femininity scores of three groups, except for male nonathletes, were higher than expected. This finding might be explained by the perspectives of the masculinity and femininity references of cultures. According to Agee and Kabasakal (1993), Turkish culture shows a greater preference for femininity as opposed to the masculine preference of the United States. Gürbüz (1988) has also argued that expressiveness as an indication of femininity is valued on both the individual and the cultural level in Turkish society. In an earlier study, Gürbüz (1985) examined the expressive and instrumental concepts as gender role opposites in Turkish culture. The most important finding of Gürbüz's earlier study was that both male and female Turkish respondents regarded a number of expressive characteristics, such as "affectionate," "cheerful," "gentle," "sympathetic," "soft-spoken," "eager to soothe hurt feelings," "sensitive to the needs of others," and "loyal," as equally descriptive of and equally desirable for the two genders. When we look at the highest within-group scores on femininity items in this study, we can see that both women and men scored highest on the femininity items honorable, loyal, warm, and understanding. According to Kağıtçıbaşı and Sunar (1992), from an expressiveness/instrumentality perspective, gender role stereotypes in Turkish society differ in important and surprising respects from the gender role stereotypes documented in Western societies.

We also found a significant difference in gender role orientation between athletes and nonathletes. Athletes had higher scores on both the masculinity and femininity subscales of the BSRI. On the mas-

culinity subscale, athletes scored higher than nonathletes, and male athletes had higher scores on masculinity than did the other three groups. In the competitive sport environment, there is a strong association between sport and "masculine" qualities (Cole, 1994). Choi (2000) explained this association by arguing that sport, like science and other male-dominated occupations, is highly competitive and individual and that both men and women need to be competitive, instrumental, assertive, independent, and willing to take risks in order to succeed. Socialization in sport encourages men to participate in competitive sports in order to develop masculine aspects of their self-identity, whereas women are often discouraged from participating in competitive athletics for fear of "masculinizing" their physiques, attitudes, and behaviors (Eitzen & Sage, 1997). This socialization process is true for Turkish society. As in Western countries, although parents encourage girls to participate in competitive sports in Turkey, this is usually limited to sports characterized as aesthetically appropriate, such as gymnastics and volleyball. However, growing numbers of female athletes in martial sports are also noticeable.

The differences in gender role orientation between men and women varied with respect to sport participation. When the mean scores of participants on the femininity subscale were analyzed, male nonathletes had lower femininity scores than did the other three groups. However, there was no significant difference in femininity scores between female athletes and nonathletes. This finding is consistent with the androgyny theory that suggests masculinity and femininity are independent constructs. This raises the possibility that femininity might not differ between athletes and nonathletes. Jackson and Marsh (1986) obtained a similar result and found

no significant difference in femininity scores between female athletes and female nonathletes. However, Oglesby (1978) has expressed the notion that sport is a process through which a combination of masculine attributes, such as independence and dominance, and feminine attributes, such as dependence (on other teammates) and subordination (to authority such as coaches or team captains), can reach a healthy androgynous balance. From this perspective, perhaps contemporary sport will eventually provide one avenue of increasing opportunities for both women and men to develop beneficial psychological characteristics that have been labeled as “masculine” and “feminine” qualities (Hall et al., 1986).

The similarity between the femininity scores of female athletes and female nonathletes is not completely incompatible with the argument that sport is related to masculinity. Richman and Shaffer (2000) found that masculinity was positively related to sport participation, whereas femininity was generally unrelated to either sports participation or physical competence. As indicated in the present study, masculinity scores of female athletes were higher than those of female nonathletes, whereas the femininity scores of these two groups were similar.

We can best understand gender role characteristics and behaviors in sport by considering the interaction between individual differences in masculinity and femininity, or between instrumentality and expressiveness, with relevant situational factors in varied sport settings (Gill, 1986). Competitive sport requires that individuals exhibit assertive, competitive behavior. The higher masculine scores of both female and male athletes in the present study probably reflect an overlap in competitiveness. Allison (1991) noted that ideals of femininity have conflicted with the ideal images of competitive sport: aggressiveness, strength, toughness, and achievement. However, in Turkey as in many other countries, women athletes are confronting the boundaries that bind social acceptance and gender identity and the questions of what it means to be a woman and what constitutes femininity. The ability of women athletes to possess masculine traits without losing feminine traits is important in becoming a successful athlete in a patriarchal society where women are expected to maintain the feminine status quo. Other researchers (Birrell & Theberge, 1989; Guthrie & Castelnovo, 1992; Markula, 1995) have also proposed that many women athletes try to conform to the accepted standards of femininity as objects of heterosexual desire.

One theoretical perspective that may partially illuminate the above findings is that of the multiplicity of selves. From this perspective, it is possible for a woman to engage in highly competitive sports without losing the perception that she is also feminine because multiple role identities can be maintained without conflict (Deaux, 1992; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Rosenberg, 1997). For example, Royce, Gebelt, and Duft (2003) have found that the femininity scores of female athletes were above the neutral point and were consistent with the multiplicity perspective and that female athletes reported experiencing their feminine and athletic identities as distinctively different aspects of self.

It is interesting that the femininity scores of male athletes in our study were higher than those of male nonathletes. The androgyny perspective may help to explain this. We would like to think that the sport environment can challenge traditional conceptualizations of both femininity and masculinity. Female athletes show that they can be strong and independent, just as male athletes can be. On the other hand, male athletes in the present study scored high on honorable, warm, understanding, loyal, and loving children, and this suggests that these can be properties of male athletes as well as female athletes.

In addition to femininity and masculinity scores, in the present study we also compared gender role classifications of athletes and nonathletes. Consistent with the findings of previous studies (Challip et al., 1980; Colley, Roberts, & Chipps, 1985; Edwards, Gordin, & Henschen, 1984; Hall et al., 1986; Wisberg et al., 1988) larger percentages of the female and male athletes in this study were classified as androgynous, whereas larger percentages of the female and male nonathletes were classified as undifferentiated.

We observed that approximately one-half of the male athletes in this study were classified as androgynous, and the next largest percentage was in the masculine category. However, among the male nonathletes; one-half were classified as undifferentiated, and the next largest percentage was in the masculine category. The distribution among female athletes mirrored that of the male athletes; nearly one-half were androgynous, the next largest percentage were feminine. Among female nonathletes, however, the largest portion was classified as feminine, and the next largest percentage was undifferentiated. These findings are inconsistent with those of Hall et al. (1986), who found that among

female athletes, the masculine gender category was the next most numerous after the androgynous category.

Contemporary investigations of gender role orientation have followed the lead of the early androgyny researchers (Bem, 1974; Constantinople, 1973; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975) in assuming that female and male participants in sports might be more masculine-oriented and more androgynous than female and male nonathletes. On the basis this assumption, several studies have indicated that both male and female athletes typically report greater endorsement of the masculine and androgynous gender roles than do male and female nonathletes (Colker & Widom, 1980; Del Rey & Sheppard, 1981; Hall et al., 1986; Henschen et al., 1982; Wrisberg et al., 1988). These findings are corroborated by the results of the present study.

In this study we did not examine the gender role orientation of athletes with regard to the types of sports. Previous researchers (Csizma, Whitting, & Schurr, 1988; Edwards et al., 1984; Wrisberg et al., 1988) have examined type of sport as a possible explanation of differences in the gender role orientations of athletes. It appears that perceptions of masculinity and femininity in the sport environment are influenced by the gender of the athletes who actually participate, as well by the physical activities involved. Therefore, additional work is needed to examine femininity and masculinity with regard to types of sport.

The limitations of the present study include the following. First, the findings may be relevant only for well-educated Turkish young women and men in urban settings. Kağıtçıbaşı and Sunar (1992) reported that it is difficult to make accurate statements about Turkish culture, because of the internal differentiation of Turkish society. Although our quantitative analysis serves mainly to describe the differences between women and men and athletes and nonathletes, it does not provide an explanation of underlying reasons. Therefore, in further inquiries qualitative analysis should be used to explain underlying reasons for the relationships among masculinity, femininity, and competitive sport participation. The second step of a future study could be an attempt to investigate how these socially constructed traits of masculinity and femininity—and the power relations in sport—impact on the sport experiences of all men and all women. As Fasting (1993) indicated, studies that do not include power analysis may easily end up repeating cultural interpretations.

In conclusion, we observed that there was a significant difference in gender role orientation between women and men and athletes and nonathletes. These findings are in part similar to the findings of studies conducted in Western societies. Patriarchy is still one of the most important characteristics of Turkish society, as in many Western societies; however, as Çileli (2000) noted, Turkey has been undergoing a modernization process on many fronts, which has resulted in fundamental economic, technological, and demographic changes. This helps to put the findings of this study in context, and suggests the possibility that, although gender role stereotypes may be reproduced in the competitive sport environment just as in other institutions of society, sport might also have the potential to reconstruct traditional conceptualizations of gender roles.

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