

**Investigating the role of gender in the  
relationship between narcissism and perception  
of athletes in Sanandaj**

دراسة دور الجنس في العلاقة بين النرجسية والإدراك البدني للرياضيين في سنندج

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## **Abstract**

One of the symptoms of the health of the soul is to know ourselves as we are and since the body's overall form is part of the composition of your physique, society's too much attention to athletes might cause the emergence of the sense of narcissism in them. Based on this probability, the present descriptive and field-based study investigates the relationship between narcissism and physical perception of athletes based on gender differences. The statistical population of the research includes all athletes active in sports clubs (gymnastics and aerobics) in Sanandaj, of which 294 volunteers were selected as the sample. The findings of the study indicated that there is a significant relationship between narcissism and physical perception in male and female athletes. For female athletes, their self-esteem was correlated with a correlation coefficient of 0.683 and for male athletes with a correlation coefficient of 0.734. In general, it can be deduced that extreme dissatisfaction with appearance may conceal mental illness, and disregarding it may have serious medical consequences.

**Keywords:** gender, narcissism, physical perception, athletes

## **Introduction**

Western culture promotes a narrow body as ideal form of physique for women and a muscular body for men (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004). These advertised images of the ideal male and female bodies, during the process of socialization, are made by the individuals, and they are pushing for achievement. One of the main concerns and controversies of researchers in recent years is the possibility of having and attaining the personality profile of athletes (Fibo et al., 2005). Narcissism is an important combination of personality traits and processes, characterized

## **Investigating the role of gender ..... (73)**

with personal insecurity masked under self-centeredness, mental obsession with ambition and success, the belief that you are always right, expecting the admiration of others (Ames et al., 2006), fantasizing about too much power, beauty and success, high sensitivity to criticism, and the tendency to exploit others in interpersonal relationships (Rosario and White, 2005). How to perceive one's physique is an important building block of the image one construct of his body. Physical self-concept is all the perceptions that a person has of himself and his abilities, and the perceptions that others have of him (Persian and Fouladian, 2009). Narcissism is characterized in part as an expression of concern over physical appearance. This acute concern about appearance is one of the main aspects of narcissism (Ruskin and Terry, 1988).

Since the general form of the body is derived from different elements of body composition, including body fat, muscle mass, height, and weight, of the individual, one of the channels through which we can establish communication with others derives from our body composition and physical fitness (Davis, 1997). A person's perception of his physical fitness is enhanced through strength, physical readiness, prepared, and being well-balanced. Physical activity and doing sports enlarge the desire for life; people become prolific and active and try to get as perfect as possible (Bayat et al., 2008). Success in sport results in self-esteem and a sense of inner power and leads to a person's perceived self-esteem (Goni and Zulacia, 2000). A lot of research has shown that competition and physical activity have physical, psychological and social benefits. Also, exercise and physical activity have the potential to affect self-perception mostly in a positive way (Lindall and Hausman, 2004; Bayat et al., 2008; Davis, 1997).

Narcissism has a long history both in the field of personality psychology and in the field of clinical psychology (Campbell and Foster, 2007). For the first time, narcissism has emerged as a clinical mechanism, as a kind of disorder from Freud's writings (1914). Later, Cornberg (1975) and Kott (1977) continued this clinical view of the narcissism that, shortly afterwards, led to its inclusion in DSM-3 as a personality disorder, specifically known as NDP. According to the definition presented in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Association of Psychiatric Disorders, 1994), narcissistic individuals are those who describe dreams of their importance, their ultimate success, power, cleverness, beauty, and ambition (Alizadeh et al, 2014). The most important characteristic of

## **Investigating the role of gender ..... (74)**

narcissistic personality disorder is self-centeredness and pride; some other attributes of this type of disorder include fantasy of the unlimited success of power or beauty and the need for glory to admire. When criticized, indifferent to others and threatened self-esteem, they face an exaggerated response of anger, shame, disgrace or futility (Shafie and Safarian, 2011).

In recent decades, subclinical discrepancies in narcissistic discernment have attracted increasing attention as a personality dimension. This demonstrates the strong ability of this diagnosis to predict a wide range of related and dependent variables, from emotional responsiveness to self-assessment of performance. One of the marginal issues, especially in the last few decades, is the high level of youth and adolescents' attention to improving the appearance of the body, with increasing muscle mass. This has led to an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition disorders and substance abuse habits among them. Some teenagers believe boys with more muscular physique are more attractive. Therefore, considering the importance of the subject, the present research seeks to answer these two questions; what is the relationship between each of the components of narcissism with physical perception in athletes, and also to compare the components of narcissism based on their gender segregation?

### **Methodology**

The present descriptive, correlational study was conducted in the field form. The statistical population of the research includes all athletes active in sports clubs (gymnastics and aerobics) in Sanandaj, of which 294 volunteers were selected, through cluster sampling, as the sample; one club was selected randomly from each district and, finally, 21 clients were selected out of all 14 eligible clubs. Therefore, 294 questionnaires were distributed among designated individuals. 234 questionnaires were fully answered and the results of the study were prepared based on these questionnaires.

Ruskin and Terry's 40-item narcissistic personality questionnaire was used to collect required data; this questionnaire consists of seven subscales of authority (8 questions), self-esteem (7 questions), arrogance (5 questions), exploitation (5 questions), self-righteousness (6 questions), self-sufficiency (6 questions), and self-centeredness (3 questions); Abadi's (1998) Perceived Physical Fitness Questionnaire (1998) with 12 items in four main areas of physical fitness, including physical fitness,

## Investigating the role of gender ..... (75)

muscle flexibility, muscle condition and physical composition, was also used to collect required data.

### Findings

Table1 shows the frequency, percent, and mean age of participants based on sex.

**Table 1: Frequency, percentage and mean age of subjects by sex**

Sex	Frequency	Percent	Age Average	Standard deviation
Men	134	57	25.21	4.62
woman	100	43	22.19	3.32
Total	234	100	23.70	3.94

Tables 2 and 3 indicate the results of studying the main and the secondary hypotheses of the research separately for men and women using Pearson correlation coefficient.

**Table 2: Summary of research hypothesis testing for men group**

Hypotheses	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Significant Coefficient	Correlation Coefficient	Test result
The main hypothesis	Narcissism	Physical Perception	0.001	0.827	Reject $H_0$
The first hypothesis	Authority	Physical Perception	0.001	0.363	Reject $H_0$
Second hypothesis	Brightness	Physical Perception	0.001	0.734	Reject $H_0$
The third hypothesis	Superiority	Physical Perception	0.001	0.634	Reject $H_0$
Fourth hypothesis	Exploitation	Physical Perception	0.001	0.683	Reject $H_0$
The fifth hypothesis	Being a researcher	Physical Perception	0.001	0.644	Reject $H_0$
Sixth hypothesis	Self esteem	Physical Perception	0.001	0.699	Reject $H_0$
Seventh hypothesis	Selfishness	Physical Perception	0.001	0.672	Reject $H_0$

**Table 4: Summary of the research hypothesis test for the women's group**

Hypotheses	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Significant Coefficient	Correlation Coefficient	Test result
The main hypothesis	Narcissism	Physical Perception	0.001	0.696	Reject $H_0$
The first hypothesis	Authority	Physical Perception	0.001	0.604	Reject $H_0$
Second hypothesis	Brightness	Physical Perception	0.001	0.587	Reject $H_0$
The third hypothesis	Superiority	Physical Perception	0.001	0.671	Reject $H_0$
Fourth hypothesis	Exploitation	Physical Perception	0.001	0.586	Reject $H_0$
The fifth hypothesis	Being a researcher	Physical Perception	0.001	0.613	Reject $H_0$
Sixth hypothesis	Self esteem	Physical Perception	0.001	0.683	Reject $H_0$
Seventh hypothesis	Selfishness	Physical Perception	0.001	0.648	Reject $H_0$

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, there is a significant relationship between athlete's narcissism and authority, arrogance, exploitation, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, and self-centeredness, with their physical perception at the acceptable error level of 5% and probability of 95%; there turns out to be a significant relationship between the components of narcissistic personality and physical perception in male and female athletes; the high correlation coefficient between these two variables indicates the strength of the relationships between them.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

## **Investigating the role of gender ..... (77)**

The present study investigates the relationship between narcissism and physical perception of athletes based on gender differences. The results of the analysis of the research data show that components of narcissistic personality are significantly correlated with physical perception. The results of this study are consistent with the following research, including (Jackson et al., 1992; Wazy. et al., 2008; Waller et al., 2008; Smith & Stewart, 2013). It showed that with increase in personal perception of physical fitness the level of narcissism, also, rises. The results of this study showed that the average components of narcissism are more common among men in comparison with women. The results of Emse et al research (2006) indicated that the narcissistic scores of men were significantly higher in comparison with women in the narcissistic personality questionnaire. However, most of the researches that use the narcissistic personality questionnaire (NPI) to analyze gender differences have reported that the mean scores of men are significantly higher than women (Carroll 1987; Joubert, 1989; Foster et al., 2003; Hirst & Thatcher, 2010).

Since the majority of the participants of the present study population include individuals who spend most of their time in gyms and clubs working on physical readiness and fitness, it is clear that success in achieving the goal of ideal body involves spending time, energy, strong will, breaking away from other recreations and opportunities for establishing social relationships that sometimes create conflicts in some cultures (Alizadeh et al., 2015). In this way, the public and private spaces of bodybuilding and fitness are places that show the close relationship between habits, lifestyles, and the sex of the subjects. The use of this space also serves to strengthen the proper norms and behaviors that are themselves subject to power and gender relations at the macro level of society as well. Therefore, it seems that the provision of preventive programs such as life and communication skills training workshops, in which special emphasis is placed on knowledge of the positive and negative aspects of the athlete's personality, has a significant effect on preventing problematic behavioral patterns among athletes (Peivastegar et al., 2011).

الملخص

أحدى علامات صحة الروح هي أن نتعرف على أنفسنا كما هي و بما أن شكل الجسم بشكل عام يرتبط كثيـرا بمكونات تكويـن الجسم و قد تكون نرجسية الرياضيين أكثر من الأخرى بسبب اهتمام كبير بهم من قبل المجتمع. و بناء على هذا الاحتمال في هذا البحث الوصفي والميداني عولجت علاقة النرجسية و الإدراك البدني للرياضيين استنادا إلى اختلاف جنسيتهم. جمعية البحث الإحصائية تشمل جميع الرياضيين الناشطين في النوادي الرياضية (اللياقة البدنية و التمارين الرياضية) في مدينة سنج و تم اختيـار ٢٩٤ نسمة متطوعين كعينة البحث. و أظهرت نتائج الدراسة تواجد علاقة ذات مغزى بين النرجسية و الإدراك البدني لدى الذكور والإناث و لجانب الاكتفاء الذاتي مع معامل الارتباط  $0.683$  بالنسبة إلى الإناث و لجانب إظهار الثقة بالنفس مع معامل ارتباط  $0.734$  بالنسبة إلى الذكور أكثر علاقة بإدراكهم البدني. في المجموع يمكن الاستنتاج بأن الاستياء الشديـد من المظهر قد تخفي حالات مرض نفساني و إهماله قد يسبب عواقب طبية خطيرة.

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