

Original research article

EXTERNALITY AND THE TENDENCY FOR COMPARING WITH OTHERS AS DETERMINANTS OF SELF – ESTEEM IN MALE AND FEMALE ATHLETES

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Fahrudin Mavrić¹, Milena Belić², Anida Fazlagić², Adem Mavrić³

¹State University of Novi Pazar, Department of Biomedical Sciences,
Study program of Sport and Physical Education

²State University of Novi Pazar, Study program: Psychology

³Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract. *The goal of this paper is to explore externality and the tendency for comparing with others as the determinants of self-esteem in athletes. The research sample consisted of 125 athletes, with the average age of 24 (M= 23,84; SD=4,3). The participants included 99 male athletes (79,2%) and 26 female athletes (20,8%). The average time spent performing different sport activities is 12 years (M=11,62; SD=5,2). The instruments used in this research include: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Externality Questionnaire, The Scale of Tendency for Comparing with Others and a socio-demographic characteristics questionnaire. The results show that the athletes possess relatively high levels of self-esteem and externality, and a distinct tendency to compare themselves to other people. Significant differences between male and female athletes regarding the analyzed components were not found. The externality variable and the tendency to compare with others variable have a significant contribution to the prediction of the dependent self-esteem variable (Beta = .328, .289, $p < 0,05$). The model (Tendency to compare with others and externality) both explain the self-esteem variable with 42,7% ($R=0,427$, $p<0,05$).*

As in everyday life and in sports, self-esteem must be considered as a very important component of any successful activity. Sports activities, due to the complexity of the interaction of factors in sports situations, individuals need to perform frequent self-evaluations, either through self-evaluation or through comparison with others.

Key words: *self-esteem, externality, tendency to compare with others.*

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Corresponding author: Fahrudin Mavrić

State University of Novi Pazar, Department of Biomedical Sciences,
Study program of Sport and Physical Education, St. Vuka Karadžića bb, 36300 Novi Pazar, Serbia
Phone: +381 20 317754 • E-mail: mavface@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Sport has always been a particular positive motivational category of human action. Most of the young are intensely involved in some organized sport activity. We could assume that self-evaluation, with sport, starts in early childhood. Sport is an area where children could be actively involved, and whose activity has significant consequences for them, their friends, families, and society as a whole.

The consciousness about oneself, about one's personal qualities and achievements initiates a constant self-evaluation process, which entails the evaluation of one's own personality in accordance with the given information. The consciousness about oneself can be defined as "a sum of an individual's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, evaluations and predictions about himself/herself as an empirical object and a participant in the interaction with the physical and social surrounding" (Havelka, 1992). During the process of self-evaluation, people use different kinds of information and benchmarks. The information in relation to which people determine their own status, success or achievements can be one of several kinds – objective information, reflected estimations, temporal comparisons or social comparisons (Ćubela, 2001). In other words, this information can be related to the objective data (which are quantified most of the time), the data related to personal beliefs of what other people think about us, or – which is commonly the case according to research - information revealing what we were like and what we want to be in the future. However, social comparisons are also not rare. On the contrary, it is almost certain that there is not a single form of human interaction which does not include an ounce of perception of another person or at least the evaluation of that person's physical appearance and a simultaneous comparison of our own characteristics with those of another person (Tesser, 2000). It is argued that a comparison with another person often implies the existence of a smokescreen behind which a real personality is hidden, which the respondents deny either partially or fully. In other words, social comparisons, especially inadequate ones, so to say, (for instance, comparison with less successful people or with those who are in a worse situation than we are) can be a strategy for self-protection which prevents an individual from perceiving himself/herself realistically. The results of the self-evaluation process are different, regardless of the kind of information which is taken into consideration. The process itself can be followed by the emotions of satisfaction, pride, the feeling of being competent and fulfilled; however, on the other hand, it can also be followed by the feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, anger and sadness.

Self-esteem has a central role in the formation of one's self-concept, which can be described as a cognitive schema of information about oneself and which is a necessary starting point in numerous socially conditioned situations, including comparison with another person. It can be argued that the results of a self-evaluation process of a certain individual depend on the level of self-esteem of that individual. Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as a negative or positive attitude towards oneself. A person with a high level of self-esteem respects and values himself/herself, considers himself/herself to be respect-worthy and has a positive opinion about himself/herself, whereas a person with a low level of self-esteem does not accept himself/herself, underestimates and has a negative opinion of himself/herself. Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as a self-evaluation process by which an individual expresses an attitude of acceptance or rejection towards him/her and as the extent to which an individual believes in his/her own abilities,

importance, success, and value. McAuluey, Mihalko & Bane report that around 60% of studies done on athletes proved that physical activity, training, practice and involvement in sport are positively related to high levels of self-esteem (1997). According to the author, practicing and training give feedback to the individual immediately after the completion of an activity, and more precisely, self-esteem is maintained through positive feedback about the completed task.

The participants with a high level of self-esteem are not affected by their social environment, which is not in accordance with their own perceptions, they express higher levels of flexibility, they are more imaginative and, therefore, solve their problems in more original ways than individuals with lower levels of self-esteem do. We were particularly interested in whether self-esteem could be explained through a model consisting of externality and a tendency to compare to the others. Namely, according to research, self-esteem will contribute to self-improvement mostly among those athletes who are estimated to have a little talent (Pelham & Swan, 1989). Also self-esteem will improve significantly among those athletes who experience more competitive situations. Therefore, externality and a tendency to compare to others as socio-psychological dimensions are interesting variables that predict self-esteem. Different social situations demand different levels of comparison with another person – in some situations we try to avoid the comparison, sometimes we latently approve of it and sometimes we openly encourage it. In almost all sport activities, especially competitive ones, external benchmarks for competences and skills are imposed, and comparison with other athletes is highly pronounced and even considered desirable. In sport activities, objective information is the most important kind of information; however, there are also other kinds of information used in the process of self-evaluation, social comparison being one of them (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Furthermore, the complexity of the situation in sport activities is burdened with the presence of a real or imaginary opponent which needs to be defeated. The locus of control, as an important element of one's self-concept, refers to the individual's belief that he/she cannot control external events or that they occur under the influence of some greater power (external locus of control), or the belief that the events in one's life depend on his/her actions and will (internal locus of control) (Gašić-Pavišić, Joksimović & Janjetović, 2006). The locus of control has a great influence on the way an individual is likely to behave because of the feeling of self-responsibility and the possibility, or the lack of it, to control the situations which directly affect one's life. The basic assumption of one of the theories which explore the locus of control (Lord & Manges, 1987 as cited in Judge & Bono, 2001) points out that, when faced with the undesirable outcome or a failure, a person will invest an additional amount of effort in order to accomplish his/her goal, lower his/her standards and expectations or simply withdraw. This theoretical assumption has been confirmed in numerous studies which show that individuals with an internal locus of control, when faced with the disbalance between their expectations and real outcomes, tend to increase the amount of effort invested in order to accomplish their goals. Studies have also shown that the locus of control is more significantly related to psychological wellbeing (Burger, 1989; Skinner, 1996 as cited in Creed & Bartrum, 2008). The internal locus of control is connected with higher levels of psychological wellbeing, whereas the external locus of control can be related to lower levels of psychological wellbeing.

Success in sport activities and feedback from coaches and other relevant people in sport can contribute to the development of an inner locus of control which is constantly highly correlated with self-efficiency and self-esteem (Weinberg & Jackson, 1990).

Research indicates that physical activity in women is often a consequence of the selection of sports that affects the improvement of the physical image of one's body, especially in the cultures where the beauty of the body has been primarily emphasized, and the maintenance of a more stable inner locus of control (Parsons & Bets, 2001).

This goal of this study is to prove whether and to what extent psychological constructs such as externality and a tendency to compare with others help young male and female athletes to build and maintain positive self-image. The fact that in most psychological studies gender appears to be an important dichotomous variable made us reconsider any potential differences. Different styles of education of boys and girls as well as different messages introduced in early childhood and adolescence create very clear gender differences in the functioning in any field including sport. On the other hand, social expectations make gender differences conditional. Active female athletes find self-esteem support in social adequacy through low competitive and high social orientation (Gibbons & Lynn, 1997; Knoppers & Schuiteman, 1986). The general image of a young man's self-esteem is reflected in different ways: through direct sexual expression, independence and autonomy, competitiveness in various areas such as sports, intellectual activities, leadership and responsibility towards tasks (Janjetović, 1996).

Some studies have proved that girls involved in sports have higher self-esteem in comparison to those who do not do sports. Generally, an increasing number of studies prove that involvement in sport significantly contributes to the development of self-esteem and the usage of different moderating variables measuring self-esteem globally or individually can find gender differences in this dimension. In one of those studies it has been found that lower self-esteem among women is expected during a competition, but higher in noncompetitive situations (Bowker, Gadbois & Cornock, 2003). The protective role that sport plays in mental health maintenance and the creation of healthy self-concept should be emphasized. According to the latest studies, active participation in sport decreases risk for depression and suicidal ideas by keeping up an optimal level of self-esteem and increases the social support that athletes receive (Babiss & Gangwisch, 2009).

METHOD

Participants

The research sample consisted of 125 athletes, with the average age of 24 ($M=23,84$; $SD=4,3$). The participants included 99 male athletes (79,2%) and 26 female athletes (20,8%). The average time spent doing different sport activities is 12 years ($M=11,62$; $SD=5,2$). Table 1 shows the type of sport activity the participants are involved in and the participation of athletes in international and world competitions.

Instruments

The instruments used in this research are the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Externality Questionnaire, The Scale of Tendency for Comparing with Others and socio-demographic characteristics questionnaire.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: This scale, designed by the author Rosenberg (1969), determines the general orientation towards oneself. It consists of ten items which

are evaluated using five-level Likert scales. High results point to a higher level of self-esteem, and the result span is 10-50. In our study, the reliability was measured using the α coefficient and its value is $\alpha = .786$.

Table 1 The percentage of the type of sport activity and the participation in the international and world competitions of male and female athletes

	Male athletes	Female athletes
Karate	7,1%	11,5%
Athletics	4%	7,7%
American football	6,1%	/
Volleyball	17,2%	38,5%
Handball	8,5%	19,2%
Football	47,5%	
Kick-boxing	1%	11,5%
judo	3,8%	1%
Basketball	6,1%	3,8%
Cross country skiing	2%	3,8%
The competition of international level	74,7%	26,3%
Competition World level	65,4%	30,8%

Externality questionnaire: Bezinović's scale of externality was used (Bezinovic, 1990). The externality scale is a one-dimensional scale. It consists of 10 statements which represent a fatalistic orientation – what happens to an individual and all the outcomes of his/her behavior are attributed solely to fate and the corresponding circumstances. The participants' task was to determine how much they agree or disagree with each given statement using the 1-5-level scale. The final result is obtained by making a sum of the estimations for every statement, and the high result is a sign of external orientation. In this research, reliability is measured with an α coefficient and its value is $\alpha = .744$

The Scale of Tendency for Comparing with Others: The scale was adapted by Vera Čubela Andoric and Zvezdan Penezic. The scale consists of nine statements which describe the tendency for making a comparison with other people when there is a need to evaluate one's thoughts, efficiency and accomplishments. Every statement is evaluated using a five-level Likert scale and the points are calculated in the same direction. The final result is obtained by calculating the sum of evaluations made by the participant regarding particular items. Therefore, the result span is 9-45, where the high result points to the existence of a greater tendency towards social comparison. In this research, reliability is measured with the α coefficient and its value is $\alpha = .801$.

The socio-demographic characteristics questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed for this research. It consists of 15 questions. The participants were asked to provide their general information (age and gender), which sport activity they have participated in and for how long and how many times they have competed. They were also asked to explain the reason for becoming athletes, and they could choose from the following: better physical condition, socialization, prizes, acknowledgements and the love for sports and an honest desire to become an athlete. Using the five-level scale, the participants were asked to evaluate how their self-confidence is influenced by: successes, confident actions, confident thinking and physical preparation. Also using the five-level

scale, the participants were asked to evaluate how the loss of their self-confidence is influenced by constant mistakes, being defeated by a lower-ranked competitor, missing a clear shot or bad start.

The procedure

The results of this research were analyzed using the statistics program SPSS.17.0. In this research we used descriptive statistics, correlations, a regression analysis and the T-test.

RESULTS

The results have shown that our participants display a tendency for comparing with others during the self-evaluation process, and have an optimal level of self-esteem which is expressed externality.

Table 2 Descriptive values for the research variables

	Self-esteem	Tendency for comparing with others	Externality
M	31,13	30,13	30,62
Minimum value	14	13	12
Maximum value	40	46	43
SD	4,00	6,63	7,36

The results show a positive, but low correlation of self-esteem and the tendency of comparing with others, while the correlation between externality and preferences for comparing oneself with others is negative.

Table 3 The relation between the tendency for comparing with other people and self-esteem and externality

	Tendency for comparing with others
Self-esteem	.315**
Externality	-.047

Table 4 shows the values of the examined variables for men and women. Using the T-test results, we reached the conclusion that there is no great statistical difference between male and female athletes regarding self-esteem and externality ($p > 0,05$).

Table 4 The difference between males and females in relation to the levels of self-esteem and externality

Gender	Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig
Males	Externality	99	29,88	7,034	.310	.757
	Self-esteem	99	31,37	4,26	1.297	.197
Females	Externality	26	29,52	7,89		
	Self-esteem	26	30,53	2,21		

The tendency for comparing with other people variable and externality variable give a significant contribution in predicting the value of the dependent self-esteem variable (Beta = .328, .289, $p < 0,05$). The model (The tendency for comparing with other people and externality) both explain the self-esteem variable with 42,7% ($R = 0,427$, $p < 0,05$).

Table 5 Regression coefficients

Model	Predictor	B	Beta	t	p
Tendency for comparing with others	Tendency for comparing with others	.197	.328	4,009	.000
Externality	Externality	.164	.289	3,353	.001

Dependent variable – Self-esteem

DISCUSSION

The results show that the athletes who participated in this research have a high level of self-esteem. This is not a surprising result having in mind that earlier research has shown that individuals who participate in sport activities have higher levels of self-esteem (Treasure & Roberts, 2001). It is assumed that participation in an activity which gives a certain amount of pleasure and in which an individual is successful contributes to the general level of self-esteem. On the other hand, being an athlete has a number of implications which influence the image of one's own body and social life. (Opačić, 1995) However, the relation between sport activities and the levels of self-esteem is not a one-way street: higher levels of self-esteem have a positive effect on performance in sport activities. In relation to the tendency for comparing with other people, it is interesting to note that our participants' answers indicate that athletes often tend to compare themselves with people in their surroundings. This result is somewhat expected, having in mind the fact that athletes are focused on giving the best possible performance and getting the most prestigious results, which always includes an opponent, at least at the level of comparison not only of strength, but also of speed or skill. According to the theory of social comparisons, individuals are encouraged to improve their performance and simultaneously minimize or prevent discrepancies between their personal and the performance of others (Festinger, 1954, as cited in Garcia, Tor & Schiff, 2013). Comparing oneself with others directly generates a competitive attitude that is often aimed at preserving a superior position, which is, among other things, very characteristic for sport and sport activities (Garcia et al., 2013).

Uncertainty and vagueness of a specific situation are the key characteristics which determine the probability of social comparison (Čubela, 2001), and sport activities often include these components to a certain level. Besides, studies dealing with social comparison have proved an interesting fact that the general concern for personal position and tendency to be better, that are common products of this social behavior, frequently decrease with the increased number of competitors. More precisely, comparing oneself to others is intensified with fewer competitors (Garcia & Tor, 2009). According to these results, we could analyze the above-mentioned result that athletes are prone to comparing themselves with others, since regardless of the massive scale of a sport, athletes mostly have a limited number of competitors.

The result that is, perhaps, the most surprising is that the answers of the participants in this research indicate high levels of externality among athletes, i.e. the tendency to prescribe certain life events, failures or successes to a greater power or to different life

circumstances. Having in mind that professional athletes spend most of their careers in extremely tense and demanding training activities, strict diets and harsh daily activities in order to use all of their potential and to better control the determination of their body and mind, i.e. they solely focus on their personal mental and physical strength, this result is slightly surprising. Moreover, earlier research concerning the athletes' locus of control has shown the opposite results. This result can be explained by the fact that the participants were mainly involved in team sport activities. This can directly affect the locus of control – in team activities there is always the possibility of rely on team members and of dispersing responsibility, which contributes to the possibility of shifting the locus of control to external factors, beyond the power of personal influence.

Significant differences between males and females regarding self-esteem, externality and tendency for comparing with other people were not found. The results of some earlier studies conducted on our population confirm the direct reflection of gender differences stereotypes (Janjetović, 1996; Opačić, 1995; Gašić-Pavišić et al., 2006). Specifically, there is a tendency in our society to appreciate and be more interested in men's success in sport. The closer relationship between self-esteem and involvement in sport in men than in women is confirmed by these studies. Another result proves the higher externality of women in sport, while the internal locus of control is more emphasized among men. This fact, according to the authors of these studies, can be interpreted in the frame of gender stereotypes. However, when we analyze the gender differences obtained in our research we must take into consideration the asymmetry of the sample, which is highly noticeable in this research.

The results of the regression analysis have shown that the tendency for comparing with others and externality can be very important predictors of self-esteem in male and female athletes. If we accept the fact that self-esteem as a concept is highly appreciated in the Western culture, and on the other hand, has real implications on several personal performances, this finding should help the proper guidance and promotion of young people involved in sport. It imposes the importance of, among other issues, setting benchmarks for comparison, respect, individual and contextual factors in that social process, as well as the empowerment of faith in personal strength which could directly lead to a higher level of self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

Self-esteem is, in most social and life circumstances, a very important component for a successful activity. Sport activities, due to the specific characteristics which make them very complex and uncertain, impose the necessity for positive self-evaluation and positive evaluation of one's own abilities and potentials; therefore, the importance of self-esteem is additionally emphasized.

The results of this research have shown that, regardless of the type of sport activity they participate in and their competition category, athletes tend to compare themselves with others, have emphasized external locus of control and high levels of self-esteem; the results, however, have not shown great gender differences regarding these components. The tendency for comparing with other people variable and the externality variable give a significant contribution in predicting the value of the dependent self-esteem variable.

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EKSTERALNOST I SKLONOST UPOREĐIVNJU SA DRUGIMA KAO ODREDNICE SAMOPOŠTOVANJA KOD SPORTISTA I SPORTISKINJA

Cilj ovog rada predstavlja ispitivanje eksteralnosti i sklonosti upoređivanja sa drugima kao odrednica samopoštovanja kod sportista. Uzorak istraživanja činilo je 125 sportista, prosečne starosne dobi 24 godine ($M=23,84; SD=4,3$). Sportista je bilo 99 (79,2%) i 26 sportiskinja (20,8%). Prosečan broj godina koje su proveli u sportu iznosi 12 godina ($M=11,62; SD=5,2$). Instrumenti korišćeni u ovom istraživanju bili su Rozenbergova skala samopoštovanja, Upitnik eksteralnosti, Skala sklonosti upoređivanja sa drugima i upitnik o sociodemografskim obeležjima. Rezultati pokazuju relativno visoko samopoštovanje kod sportista, visoku eksteralnost i izraženu sklonost upoređivanja sa drugima. Nisu pronađene statistički značajne razlike između sportista i sportiskinja u pogledu ispitivanih komponenti. Varijable sklonost upoređivanja sa drugima i eksteralnost daju značajan doprinos pridikciji zavisne varijable samopoštovanje ($Beta = .328, .289, p < 0,05$). Model (Sklonost upoređivanja sa drugima i eksteralnost) zajednički objašnjavaju varijablu samopoštovanje sa 42,7% ($R=0,427, p < 0,05$). Kako u svakodnevnom životu tako i u sportu samopoštovanje moramo posmatrati kao vrlo značajnu komponentu za uspešno delovanje. Sportske aktivnosti, usled složenosti interakcije faktora u sportskim situacijama, nameću pojedincima potrebu da vrše česte samoevaluacije, bilo kroz samoevaluaciju ili kroz upoređivanje sa drugima.

Ključne reči: samopoštovanje, eksteralnost, sklonost upoređivanja sa drugima