Sex-Role Perceptions Among Black Female Athletes and Nonathletes

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This study compared sex-role perceptions of Black female college athletes and nonathletes, and examined the relationship between sex-role perceptions and socioeconomic, demographic, familial, and psychological variables. The study replicated, in part, similar research by Snyder and Kivlin, who found differences in sex-role perceptions between athletes and nonathletes. Statistical treatment of data included chi-square technique, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Interpretation of data indicated no significant differences in sex-role perceptions between Black female athletes and nonathletes. Independent variables influencing sex-role perceptions to a significant degree included age and body weight for both subgroups, with lesser influence derived from parental education level and psychological variables. Athletes' perception of their ability and the age they began their training influenced sex-role perceptions significantly. Athletic experiences for Black females appears distinct from that of White females, as perceived by the athlete and community, and this distinction influences sex-role perceptions of female athletes.

The traditional feminine sex role has undergone a period of dynamic change and influence within the last decade. In various sectors of society new roles for girls and women have opened up. As a consequence, the traditional view of femininity has felt the forces of strain in coping with the new reality. The cumulative influence of the feminist movement and the specific effects of Title IX guidelines (or the 1972 Education Amendments) have opened up
areas of access in education and athletics to women which were traditionally closed. Such developments have been powerful social forces in awakening the consciousness of both sexes with respect to changing roles of women.

Women's participation in interscholastic and intercollegiate sports has became a national phenomenon. This development has attracted the attention of social scientists, who are particularly interested in assessing its impact on traditional sex-role attitudes. One expectation is that increased participation in athletics might affect the sex-role attitudes of female athletes.

Sports traditionally have been thought of as "building men," and an "athletic personality" has been viewed as tantamount to "male personality." In this view, an athlete was supposed to be competitive, rugged, aggressive, tough, independent, dominant, assertive, achievement oriented, and self-controlled. Such characteristics have seldom been connected with the female personality. A "real woman" was supposed to possess characteristics the opposite of those listed, carrying with them both psychological and physical implications for femininity.

The belief that female participation in athletics promotes the development of masculine characteristics is still extant in the minds of many girls and women. The conception that serious athletic participation will masculinize the female body continues to prevent some women from active involvement. Even successful women athletes tend to express "feminine hang-ups." Harris (1973) captures the plight of women athletes when she states that "When a female chooses to participate in vigorous competitive activity, she may be risking a great deal. She is laying on the line everything she may represent as a female."

Many observers still believe that serious athletic participation is stressful for women, since the new role collides with traditional sex roles. The female athlete may be viewed as deviating from traditional sex-role prescriptions and proscriptions. Since sports still are predominantly a male domain, women athletes tend to develop defense mechanisms to counter the stigma attached to their new role. Fearing that her participation in male-dominated sports may lead people to view her as masculine, the female athlete tends to become apologetic (Rohrbaugh, 1979).

Notwithstanding these speculations and beliefs, more and more research is being conducted to examine the consequences of sport participation on psychological and personality traits of women. Not all researchers agree on the traits associated with active involvement in sports but the research does show a noticeable trend. Ogilvie (1970), Ogilvie and Tutko (1971), and Cooper (1969) studied the personality traits of highly skilled male and female competitors over a period of time. This research