

The Association Between Sports Self-Image and Sports Performance in Collegiate Athletes: A Mixed Methods Study



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INTRODUCTION

This paper conceptualizes self-image as a novel measure in the sports performance realm as it pertains to an athlete's perception of themselves with an emphasis placed on their body and appearance on and off the court.

The purpose of this research is to assess the relationship between sports self-image and sports performance in collegiate athletes.

METHODS

31 Division 1 collegiate athletes from a variety of sports (basketball, tennis, beach volleyball, track and field, and water polo) were given two opened-ended qualitative questions:

- 1) "Are you conscious of your body image or appearance while you are playing your sport?"
- 2) "Does how you feel about your body image or appearance affect your performance on the court or field?"

Self-image was assessed using the Body Self-Image Questionnaire (BSIQ) and sports performance was assessed using the Athlete Sports Performance Survey (ASPS). The longitudinal assessment of the relationship between sports self-image and sports performance was taken across two time points, three months apart.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Qualitative analyses found that most of the elite athletes are highly conscious of their body self-image. However, once it was gametime many were able to reach a flow state and block out the excess noise.

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| Women's Water Polo Athlete | "While I am actively participating in practice or a game, it does not cross my mind, however when I get out of the pool, I always become very self-conscious about my body, especially during a game if there are people watching." |
| Men's Basketball Athlete | "Body self-image does not affect my performance as soon as the game starts. However, I do like to look good so I can feel good and that helps me play good." |
| Women's Tennis Athlete | "I pay attention to how my body looks in uniforms. I'm extra-conscious of my body if I feel bloated or am having a negative self-image day. I feel like I also compare myself to my other teammates or opponents in how they look." |
| Women's Beach Volleyball Athlete | "There will be times where I did not eat at all during a full day of competition. Growing up, we would play in bikinis, and you constantly compare yourself to the girls around you." |
| Co-ed Track and Field Athlete | "If I am running shirtless, then yes at times. I have a lot of back stretch marks that are very obvious that I don't like. But, it doesn't affect my performance, preparation is the main thing that affects my performance." |

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Table 1 and Table 2 illustrate the correlations between each self-image item (Time 1 and Time 2 respectively) and sports performance using **all the participants**.

Table 3. Correlations between Self-Image (Time 1) and Performance (Time 1 and Time 2) amongst female athletes (n = 20).

| | SIT1-1 | SIT1-2 | SIT1-3 | SIT1-4 | SIT1-5 | SIT1-6 | SIT1-7 | SIT1-8 | SIT1-9 |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| T1 | .52* | .29 | -.01 | -.27 | .02 | .29 | -.22 | -.30 | -.33 |
| T2 | .20 | .03 | .02 | -.34 | -.19 | .42 | -.30 | -.03 | -.29 |

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 4. Correlations between Self-Image (Time 2) and Performance (Time 1 and Time 2) amongst female athletes (n = 20).

| | SIT2-1 | SIT2-2 | SIT2-3 | SIT2-4 | SIT2-5 | SIT2-6 | SIT2-7 | SIT2-8 | SIT2-9 |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| T1 | .43 | .38 | -.18 | -.36 | -.13 | .25 | -.23 | -.28 | -.34 |
| T2 | .44 | .40 | .18 | -.49* | .10 | .41 | -.27 | .16 | -.05 |

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 5 and Table 6 illustrate the correlations between each self-image item (Time 1 and Time 2 respectively) and sports performance amongst the **male participants**.

Table 1. Correlations between Self-Image (Time 1) and Performance (Time 1 and Time 2) for all participants (n = 31).

| | SIT1-1 | SIT1-2 | SIT1-3 | SIT1-4 | SIT1-5 | SIT1-6 | SIT1-7 | SIT1-8 | SIT1-9 |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| T1 | .14 | .02 | .02 | .01 | .17 | .11 | -.02 | .13 | .08 |
| T2 | .20 | .06 | -.12 | -.05 | .15 | .36* | -.12 | .10 | -.05 |

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 2. Correlations between Self-Image (Time 2) and Performance (Time 1 and Time 2) for all participants (n = 31).

| | SIT2-1 | SIT2-2 | SIT2-3 | SIT2-4 | SIT2-5 | SIT2-6 | SIT2-7 | SIT2-8 | SIT2-9 |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| T1 | .31 | .24 | -.15 | -.08 | .09 | .23 | .01 | .13 | .30 |
| T2 | .46** | .52** | .21 | -.18 | .19 | .36 | -.20 | .21 | .20 |

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 3 and Table 4 illustrate the correlations between each self-image item (Time 1 and Time 2 respectively) and sports performance amongst the **female participants**.

Table 5. Correlations between Self-Image (Time 1) and Performance (Time 1 and Time 2) amongst male athletes (n = 11).

| | SIT1-1 | SIT1-2 | SIT1-3 | SIT1-4 | SIT1-5 | SIT1-6 | SIT1-7 | SIT1-8 | SIT1-9 |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| T1 | .34 | .17 | -.07 | -.07 | .28 | -.25 | .34 | .14 | -.13 |
| T2 | .53 | .47 | .13 | .22 | .55 | .25 | .23 | -.13 | -.21 |

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 6. Correlations between Self-Image (Time 2) and Performance (Time 1 and Time 2) amongst male athletes (n = 11).

| | SIT2-1 | SIT2-2 | SIT2-3 | SIT2-4 | SIT2-5 | SIT2-6 | SIT2-7 | SIT2-8 | SIT2-9 |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| T1 | .63* | .37 | -.19 | .14 | .11 | .28 | .27 | .10 | .48 |
| T2 | .75** | .85** | .26 | .23 | .18 | .32 | -.20 | -.08 | .17 |

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

The data provides preliminary support for a positive relationship between sports self-image and sports performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, we suggest that enhancing an athlete's self-image may lead to a better performance and a better sports performance may, in turn, lead to higher sports self-image.

With physical injuries and mental struggles, most athletes are taught to push through their obstacles and keep training; the performance will show for itself. This current developmental style perpetuates negative self-image in these players, ultimately impacting their level of self-confidence and performance according to the REM. The purpose of this research is to show that strengthening one's self-image will make a player stronger and more effective in their performance—and will carry on with them throughout their life and not just exclusively in their respective sport.

Research that explicitly details the importance of enhancing self-image illuminates the critical role that coaches play in shaping these young athletes as well.