

Exploring Gender Stereotypes in Sports: A Cross-Activity Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Gender stereotypes significantly shape sports participation, performance, and perceptions. Certain sports are often perceived as more suitable for one gender than another, influencing who chooses to participate and how they are viewed. This study explores a.) how gender stereotypes influence students' perceptions of and engagement in various sports, and b.) whether there are significant disparities in gender-based assumptions about participation in different physical activities. A descriptive comparative approach was employed to examine students' perceptions of gender roles in sports. A purposive sample of 60 fourth-year male and female students was selected. An online survey, semi-structured interviews, and FGD were used to gather data on students' opinions about gender stereotypes in sports. Mean values and standard deviation were utilized.

The survey indicates that Female students were more resilient under pressure, and male students are more involved in sports. Despite variations in participation and stress management, these gender stereotypes seem to be relatively consistent across both groups. Promoting gender equality in sports not only dismantles harmful stereotypes but also creates a more supportive and inclusive environment for all athletes. This can lead to increased self-esteem, improved physical and mental health, and greater opportunities for personal and professional growth.

KEYWORDS: *Gender Stereotypes, Physical Activities, and Sports Participation*

INTRODUCTION

Sports have traditionally been associated with specific genders in society and culture, leading to established stereotypes that influence how people are perceived. In educational settings, the concept of "gendered" sports is a popular activity worldwide. From a gender perspective, sports reflect societal and cultural processes where the construction of femininity and masculinity significantly impacts behaviors and attitudes. Sports are valued and enjoyed by people of all ages, genders, abilities, and races. Their popularity stems from the benefits they offer, both individually and societally. The 2013 European Union Conference on Gender Stereotypes in Sport proposed a plan of action to address these stereotypes. Recognizing the need for further progress, the conference encouraged the development and implementation of national and international policies for gender equality in sports by non-governmental organizations and sports governing bodies. As Crandall and Park (2003), define stereotypes as socially shared beliefs about the attributes, characteristics, and behaviors of members of a particular social group. According to their work, stereotypes are not only descriptive (describing perceived attributes of a group) but also prescriptive, as they dictate how

members of different groups should behave. These stereotypes help to reinforce and legitimize existing social structures, often by rationalizing discrimination and unequal treatment. Stereotypes are the characteristics and behaviors that individuals perceive as typical of a specific social group or those assumed to be its members (Stangor, 2016).

Gender stereotyping focuses on the traits and attributes typically associated with men and women in society (Eagly & Wood, 2012). There are stereotypes about the skills men and women should possess for different professions or fields. These skills can demonstrate how men and women can perform in similar roles within the same industry. A gender stereotype is an oversimplified belief about the roles men and women should play or the traits they should or should not control. Bullying of fellow students is one of the many issues linked to gender stereotypes. When a student is unable to perform certain sports or skills, they may feel pressured to take action. This can lead to students quitting or experiencing anxiety about the situation.

Many people in the Philippines have claimed that sports are a "no woman's land," but if you look around the country, you will notice that there is a stark lack of recognition for women in sports across all levels and disciplines, professional and amateur leagues, and local and international governing bodies. The main cause of the seeming lack of support for Filipino women in the sector was the opportunities that were not provided for them. Athletes have pointed out that it has always been the responsibility of the community to alter perceptions and advocate for increased female advancement and promotion. While Filipinos as a society may not fully recognize the true benefits of encouraging girls to participate in sports, such as the sense of accomplishment and personal identity it brings (NSA, 2003), sports participation improves students' physical fitness and overall health in most schools. Sports are valuable tools for leadership development, self-improvement, and socialization, but prejudice against women remains prevalent in sports. Stereotyping can occur when children engage in physical activity, as some may not know how to play a particular sport or lack the necessary skills. Students' attitudes and beliefs can either foster a strong sense of self-worth or contribute to their alienation from others. Furthermore, Gender equality refers to "the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys." It means that one's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on their gender. Gender equality is not just a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well. gender equality is not just about equal treatment but also about recognizing and addressing systemic inequalities, providing equal access to opportunities, and ensuring that all people, regardless of gender, can achieve their full potential.

Researchers have discovered that gender stereotypes in physical education classes significantly impact college students' course participation rates. However, there is currently no unified explanation for the underlying formation mechanisms and influencing factors of these stereotypes. Gender stereotypes in physical education classes have been a major focus of research in recent years (Deng, 2023). This study aims to investigate the influence of these stereotypes on the level of engagement BPeD students have in physical education activities. This study aimed to deepen our understanding of gender stereotypes, gender differences in sports choices, perceived gender appropriateness, socialization, and gender identities in sports. It also examined the performance levels of students participating in these activities. However, the influence of the sports environment and various sports organizations on the formation of gender stereotypes has not yet been explored. This study seeks to determine whether gender stereotypes significantly impact perceptions and involvement in different sports activities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was grounded in Eagly's Social Role Theory (1987), Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), and the Embodied Cognition Theory of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991).

Eagly's Social Role Theory (ESRT, 1987) is a social psychological theory that examines sex differences and similarities in social behavior. Its central principle is that these differences and similarities primarily stem from the societal distribution of men and women into specific social roles. On the other hand, Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping behavior. This theory suggests that people can acquire new behaviors and information by observing others, rather than solely through direct experience. Social Learning Theory posits that behavior, personal factors (such as cognitive skills or attitudes), and environmental influences interact reciprocally. This theory can help explain how gender roles are learned and reinforced through observing and imitating gender-specific behaviors. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's Embodied Cognition Theory (1991) suggests that our cognition (thinking, reasoning, and understanding) is deeply rooted in our body's interactions with the world. This theory posits that cognitive processes are not solely influenced by the brain but also by the entire body and its physical interactions with the environment. It challenges the traditional view of cognition as being brain-centered, emphasizing the crucial role of our bodies and physical interactions in shaping our thinking, reasoning, and understanding.

The theories of Eagly's Social Role Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's Embodied Cognition Theory provide a comprehensive framework for understanding gender stereotypes and their impact on sports participation. By integrating these theories, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence gender stereotypes and how they shape participation in sports. **The findings of this study highlight the significant gender gap in sports activities, particularly in participating in physical activities like playing sports.**

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a descriptive comparative research design to examine gender stereotypes in sports. The primary data collection tool was a survey questionnaire adapted from Bagongon's (2016) research on teachers' beliefs and perceptions of gender stereotypes in the classroom. The questionnaire was modified to align with the specific needs of this study, making it suitable for investigating gender stereotypes in sports activities.

This study was conducted at Bukidnon State University College of Education, a renowned institution for teacher education located in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. The participants were fourth-year Bachelor of Physical Education (BPE) students from the School of Physical Education (SPE-BPE) at Bukidnon State University (BukSU), comprising thirty (30) male and thirty (30) female students. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. A five-point Likert scale was used to score participants' responses on the questionnaire (Vagias, 2006). The following scale and qualifying statements were applied: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. **The research instrument will be uploaded online for data collection.** The collected

data will be summarized, tabulated, and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Mean and standard deviation will be used to analyze data related to research question 1, while a t-test will be employed to analyze data related to research question 2, which focuses on gender stereotypes in sports activities. Interview and focus group discussion data will be used to supplement the analysis and interpretation of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 reveals a strong male-centric stereotype in sports. The finding shows that male students overwhelmingly believe they are more active and skilled than female students, which supports the idea of a gender-based disparity in youth physical activity. This "favorable perception" is particularly evident in the belief that males are inherently more active than females. While a majority of respondents were undecided on whether females are naturally weak in sports, it is clear that traditional gender stereotypes still attribute greater physical advantages in strength, power, and speed to males. These results are consistent with existing literature (Eccles et al., 1992; EIGE, 2015; Jodl et al., 2001), which has long shown that sports are traditionally dominated by men, who are often perceived as more competent and are more valued in athletic contexts. Biological factors significantly contribute to the performance differences observed between genders in athletics. On average, men naturally possess greater muscle mass, which leads to a strength advantage, particularly in the upper body (Trifocus Fitness Academy). These distinctions, along with genetic and hormonal differences, affect key physiological factors such as height, weight, body fat, and aerobic capacity (NCBI, 2014).

Table 1. Mean Score of Male Stereotypes in Sports Activities

Items	Mea n	SD	QD
Males are more active than females.	4.27	0.70	Strongly Agree
Males are naturally better at most sports.	4.00	0.76	Agree
Males are less afraid of females during arguments.	3.80	1.21	Agree
Males can handle pressure situations better than females.	3.73	0.70	Agree
Males are better makers than females.	3.67	0.82	Agree
Males are more outspoken than females.	3.60	0.74	Agree
Males would learn more if they were separated from the females.	3.40	1.06	Undecided
Males are better at leadership skills than females	3.40	0.99	Undecided
Sports are mostly for Males rather than females.	3.33	1.18	Undecided
Males are strong and females are weak.	2.67	1.29	Undecided
Overall	3.59	0.54	Agree

Given this established biological context, the survey results are telling: students do not strongly endorse the stereotype of male dominance in sports. This suggests a disconnect between the

acknowledgment of biological differences and the belief in overt male superiority. However, the survey data does not fully explain how these perceptions influence actual participation rates.

Table 2's findings reveal a perceived strength among female BPE-SPE students in a critical area: decision-making under pressure. This is a crucial finding, as it suggests they are highly adept at managing the intense cognitive and emotional demands of sports activities. The ability to excel under such circumstances is linked to the "fight-or-flight" response—a well-known physiological reaction to stress. The results indicate that these students have a strong sense of self-efficacy in navigating these high-stakes moments, which is a valuable asset in officiating.

Distinct psychological and biological responses to stress have been observed between genders (Frankland, 2023). A physiological readiness for competition and dominance characterizes the traditional male "fight-or-flight" response. In contrast, women often exhibit a "tend-and-befriend" response, which is associated with the release of oxytocin and promotes collaboration and social support. These differing strategies may equip women to navigate high-stress situations through communication and cooperation rather than confrontation. The male stress response, however, may be a contributing factor to increased vulnerability to stress-related disorders, including violence, substance abuse, and cardiovascular issues.

Table 2. Mean Score of Female Stereotypes in Sports Activities

Items	Mean	SD	QD
Females can handle pressure situations better than males	4.07	1.03	Agree
Females are better decision makers than males	3.73	0.88	Agree
Females are more outspoken than males.	3.53	1.36	Agree
Females are more active than males	3.47	1.13	Agree
Females are less afraid of males during arguments.	3.47	0.83	Agree
Females are naturally better at most sports	3.33	0.62	Undecided
Females are better at leadership skills than males.	3.20	1.15	Undecided
Sports are mostly for females than males	2.67	0.90	Undecided
Females would learn more if they were separated from the males	2.53	1.13	Disagree
Females are strong and males are weak	2.53	0.99	Disagree
Overall	3.35	0.67	Undecided

While the survey data shows that respondents don't strongly believe that females were inherently weak, it is clear that they are not perceived as being equally as strong as males. This perception, however, is likely influenced more by social factors than by physical limitations (Finnel et al.,

2011). Research suggests that female participation in sports is positively influenced by the presence of other active female role models (Jobe et al., 2006) and negatively impacted by personal factors like shyness and low self-esteem (Murrie, 2006). Moreover, gender-based discrimination and negative perceptions can lead to feelings of inadequacy (NSW, 1997), and females in one study even cited boys as a significant barrier to physical activity (Vu et al., 2006). These social and psychological factors contribute to persistent gender differences in sport preferences. Klomsten et al. (2005) found that females are more likely to participate in sports like dance and figure skating, while males prefer ball games and martial arts (Sports Council of Wales, 2009). These findings underscore that while females may show less interest in traditional male-dominated sports, they still face significant gender equity challenges, as sports continue to be viewed as a predominantly masculine domain (Senne, n.d.).

As shown in Table 3, the statistical analysis reveals no significant difference in gender stereotypes regarding sports activities among the students ($p=0.306$). This finding is a strong indicator that male and female students in this study do not hold widely divergent views on gender and sports, which supports the idea that the gender gap in athletic perception may be narrowing. This conclusion is consistent with research by Toporek (2012) and Beneke and Hutler (2005), who suggest that traditional gender-based differences in sports participation are diminishing.

Table 3. The significant difference between males and females in Sports Activities

t-value	Df	p-value
1.042	28	0.306

$P > 0.05$: no significant difference

While male students in this study showed a stronger agreement with traditional gender stereotypes in sports, female students were more undecided, suggesting a potential shift in perceptions and a growing acceptance of both genders' involvement in athletic activities. Despite some differences, such as male students perceiving themselves as more active and female students reporting greater resilience under pressure, the overall finding was a lack of a significant disparity in gender stereotypes. This indicates that traditional perceptions may be losing their hold. Based on these findings, it is crucial to promote inclusive and equitable environments in sports to foster equal participation and opportunities for all. This requires intentional effort to address existing stereotypes and to provide targeted support for female athletes, thereby encouraging greater involvement and creating a more inclusive sporting culture.

CONCLUSION:

The study's most significant finding is that there is no significant overall disparity in gender stereotypes about sports activities between male and female students. While male students may still show a stronger agreement with traditional views, the widespread indecisiveness among female students suggests a potential generational shift in perceptions.

Despite the lack of an overall statistical difference, the study highlights a crucial distinction: perceived gender differences are more influenced by social and psychological factors than by

physical limitations. Male students see themselves as more active, while female students report greater resilience under pressure. These findings underscore that simply addressing biological differences is insufficient.

RECOMMENDATION:

To build on this research, future studies should adopt a broader scope and more rigorous methodologies. Additionally, Physical Education teachers can play a pivotal role in this effort by encouraging interaction and collaboration among students of all genders. The Physical Education Department should also prioritize raising awareness about gender issues through comprehensive initiatives, including seminars, workshops, and lectures for teachers, students, parents, and the wider community.

Physical Education departments and teachers must play a proactive role in raising awareness about gender issues and implementing practices that encourage equal participation. This includes creating opportunities for collaboration among students of all genders and addressing the social and psychological barriers that continue to impact female participation.

Interventions should focus on fostering inclusive environments, providing positive female role models, and combating issues like low self-esteem and shyness that hinder female participation.

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