



## Beauty and the Beast: Authoritarianism and gender roles of Israeli footballers, basketballers, non-athletes, and their wives

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### ABSTRACT

This study quantitatively compared authoritarianism and gender roles of 51 Israeli football players, 50 basketball players, 41 non-athletes and their wives (mean age = 27 years). As hypothesized, we found significant positive intercorrelations among RWA, anti-feminist attitudes, masculine traits, and interest in male-typical occupational and hobby preferences among men. Football players were more authoritarian, anti-feminist, religious, supportive of the political right, masculine, and interested in male-typical occupations and hobbies. The greatest authoritarianism, feminism, political right attitudes, and religiosity differences were found between the football players and their wives, and the football players' wives were significantly more authoritarian, anti-feminist, and politically rightist, than both the wives of the basketball players and those of the non-athletes. Football is discussed as a politically right wing subculture that perpetuates traditional gender roles.

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### 1. Introduction

The relationship between football (“soccer”) players and their wives draws both media and research attention. The British television drama *Footballers’ Wives* surrounded a fictional Premier League association football club, its players, and their wives, and has become popular worldwide. Clayton and Harris (2004) examined the media image of some of the women associated with professional football players in England by conducting a textual analysis of multiple media sources. The results connect media portrayals of, and narratives about, the image of football players’ partners with the social reproduction of masculine hegemony, exploring the role of the beautiful, erotic and yet devoted and supportive, woman. Jones (2008) interviewed 38 female fans at English men’s football matches and analyzed their responses to abusive or insulting behavior by male fans. Women expressed disgust at abuse, sometimes redefining fandom to exclude abusers, downplayed sexism, and embraced gender stereotypes. Clayton and Humberstone (2006) analyzed the conversations of male university football players in the UK and identified three predominant topics: academic studies, alcohol consumption, and women. Cushion and Jones (2006) showed how an authoritarian discourse is established and maintained, and how accompanying behaviors are misrecognized as legitimate in a football club. Dru’s (2002) dogmatism and com-

petitive relationships study between soccer teams described out-group authoritarian intolerance.

Football is played in open spaces and does not require special equipment and therefore has become popular worldwide in neighborhoods of low-medium socioeconomic status (SES) and created an upward mobility channel. In Israel, it opened opportunities for low SES individuals, Sephardic Jews in the past and Arabs in the present. This combination is of particular special interest in the context of a study on the effects of authoritarianism, as low SES Sephardic Jews hold extreme anti-Arab attitudes in Israel.

The present study applies a quantitative comparison of Israeli football to basketball players and to a control group of non-athletes. Furthermore, we compare authoritarianism and gender roles of the participants to those of their wives and between the three groups of women.

#### 1.1. Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism constitutes extreme obedience, and dependence on a powerful leader, accompanied by adherence to traditional gender roles and prejudicial, racist, homophobic, rigid, and tyrannical behavior against those who are inferior in rank, vulnerable, or weak (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Altemeyer (1981) developed a Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA), measuring authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. He conceptualized his results in terms of Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory rather than in the framework of Freudian psychodynamics. The RWA has under-

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gone extensive empirical testing in Canada, South Africa, West Germany, the United States and Australia. Hebrew and Arabic versions have also proven to be valid and reliable in Israel among both Jewish and Palestinian participants (Rubinstein, 1996).

### 1.2. Gender roles

The traditional approach to gender roles is based on a bipolar view of instrumentality, identified with masculinity, vs. femininity, identified with expressivity (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Bem (1974) rejected this traditional approach, claiming that socialization of the genders to stereotypic gender roles limits the ability of both genders to react appropriately to different situations. She developed an alternative classification schema, based on masculinity and femininity measures, and proposed four personality types: sex typed, cross-sex typed, androgynous, and undifferentiated. Androgynous types, who have both instrumental and expressive traits, are more flexible and can comfortably perform both male and female tasks (Bem, 1977).

Bem's exclusive reliance on personality traits as discriminative indicators between men and women raises the inadequacy of personality to predict behavior. Investigating personality gender differences with the Big Five Model and vocational interests and hobbies as behavioral gender differences, Lippa's (1998, 2005) approach seems to represent a personality-behavior optimum. Factor analytic and multidimensional scaling studies suggest that two 'super-factors' underlie individual differences in interests: (a) the people-things dimension that taps the degree to which individuals are interested in people-oriented activities and occupations versus thing-oriented activities and occupations, and (b) the ideas-data dimension data taps the degree to which individuals are interested in activities and occupations that require creative thought and intelligence versus activities and occupations that entail more routine tasks that are less cognitively demanding. Overwhelming evidence shows that men and women differ substantially on the people-things dimension of interests but little on the ideas-data dimension (Lippa, 2010).

### 1.3. Hypotheses

This study compared RWA and gender roles of football players, basketball players, non-athletes, and their wives. Based on the above review, our hypotheses were:

- (1). RWA, anti-feminist attitudes, BSRI Masculinity, interest in both "masculine" occupations and hobbies, support of the political right and religiosity would be related to one another.
- (2). Football players would be significantly more authoritarian, anti-feminist, masculine (as measure by the BSRI), interested in "masculine" occupations and hobbies, politically rightist and religious compared to both basketball players and non-athletes.
- (3). The largest authoritarianism, feminism, political right attitudes, and religiosity differences would be found between football players and their wives, compared to basketball players and non-athletes and their wives.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 51 Jewish native Israeli football players, 50 basketball players, and 41 non-athletes and their wives. Half of the men were married and the other half were in long term relationships. The mean age of the men ( $M = 27.61$ ) was significantly

higher,  $F(1, 282) = 5.70$ ,  $p < .05$ , than that of the women ( $M = 26.33$ ), without significant age difference between the three groups. Of all participants, 10.2% had not completed secondary school, 41.9% were secondary-school graduates but had not started undergraduate studies, 18.0% were undergraduate students, 17.6% had completed their undergraduate studies, and 4.3% were graduate students. No significant education differences were found between the football players, basketball players, and the non-athletes. Of all participants, 45.4% were of Sephardic origin, 28.2% were of Ashkenazi origin, and 19.6% were of mixed origin. While 78.0% of the football players were of Sephardic origin, 52.0% of the basketball players were of Ashkenazi origin,  $\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 31.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . Of all participants, 53.2% defined themselves as "secular", 35.2% defined themselves as "traditional", and 3.2% defined themselves as "orthodox". While 64.0% of the football players defined themselves as "traditional", 64.0% of the basketball players defined themselves as "secular",  $\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 26.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . Given the above linkage between religiosity, ethnicity, and type of sport, these variables were used as covariates in all the statistical comparisons.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Demographic questionnaire

The first page of the research form included items on gender, age, country of origin, education level, occupation, sport, religiosity, family status, and politics (voting and a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from Left to Right).

#### 2.2.2. Rwa

A valid and reliable Hebrew version (Rubinstein, 1996, 2006) of Hunsberger and Altemeyer's (2006) RWA was used. The scale includes 20 statements to which subjects are asked to agree or disagree on a 9-point Likert type scale. One half of the items are worded in the authoritarian direction (e.g., "The established authorities generally turn out to be right about things, while the radicals and protestors are usually just 'loud mouths' showing off their ignorance"), while the other half is framed in the opposite direction (e.g., "Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anybody else") ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

#### 2.2.3. Attitudes toward women scale (AWS)

A valid and reliable Hebrew version of Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp's (1973) AWS short version was used. The scale includes 25 statements to which participants are asked to agree or disagree on a 4-point Likert type scale. One half of the items are formulated in a non-egalitarian direction (e.g., "Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than of a man") and the other half are framed in an egalitarian direction (e.g., "Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving the intellectual and social problems of the day") ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

#### 2.2.4. Bem's sex roles inventory (BSRI)

The BSRI (Bem, 1974, 1977) includes 20 feminine, 20 masculine, and 20 neutral traits, viewed by students at Stanford University as positive for both genders. A trait was defined as masculine or feminine if it was consistently described as being more desirable in American society for one gender. Participants are asked to rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale the degree each trait describe them. A Hebrew version of the BSRI was found valid and reliable in Israel (Rubinstein, 1995, 2003; Safir, Perez, & Lichtenstein, 1982), although item analysis yielded slightly different clustering of the three kinds of traits, suggesting that item analyzing is needed for every new sample. Factor analysis, followed by VARIMAX rotation, in this study produced 17-item masculinity scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and

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