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 misconceived as legitimate in a football club. Dru’s (2002) dogmatism and competitive 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-Brunswik, 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-
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 that 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 measured 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, χ²(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”, χ²(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”) (α = .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”) (α = .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 (α = .88) and...
25-item femininity scale ($z = .91$). The other 18 traits were found to be neutral.

2.2.5. Male-typical vs. female-typical occupational preferences scale (MF-Occ)

Participants completed a 10-item measure of gender-related occupational preferences, which asked them to rate on 7-point scale ranging from “strongly dislike” to “strongly like” how much they were interested in the following jobs: car mechanic, costume designer, builder, dance teacher, carpenter, school teacher, electrical engineer, florist, inventor, and social worker (Lippa, 2005). Cronbach’s alphas were .88 for “masculine” occupations and .78 for the “feminine” occupations in this study.

2.2.6. Hobby preferences scale

Participants rated their degree of interest in 22 hobbies, 11 of which were preferred more by men and 11 of which were preferred more by women. The hobbies more preferred by men were computers, fishing, going to car shows, home electronics, playing basketball, playing poker, video games, watching sports on TV, watching thriller and action movies, weight lifting, and “working on cars”. The hobbies more preferred by women were aerobics, clothes shopping, collecting stuffed animals, cooking, dancing, interior decorating, keeping up with new fashions, reading romance novels, singing, taking and collecting photos of family and friends, and watching romance movies (Lippa, 2005). Participants rated their hobby preferences using a 5-point scale that ranged from “strongly dislike” to “strongly like”. Cronbach’s alphas were .87 for the “masculine” hobbies and .83 for the “feminine” hobbies.

2.3. Procedure

The second author, who is a professional football trainer, and several colleagues who helped him, distributed the questionnaires during trainings among football and basketball players. They told the participants that the study investigates attitudes of athletes and that they may refuse or stop filling in the questionnaire, should they fill any discomfort. Each player took a questionnaire for his partner who completed it separately. The research forms were put in sealed envelopes as to ensure discretion between partners, and boxes for filled-in questionnaires were installed in the sport centers as to ensure participants’ anonymity. After both groups completed the questionnaires we composed a demographically similar non-athlete control group. Control participants and their partners were recruited by the second author from two colleges and three workplaces, applying an identical data collection procedure.

### 3. Results

3.1. Intercorrelations between the dependent variables

In order to test the first hypothesis, we computed Pearson correlation coefficients among the RWA, AWS, BSRI Masculinity, interest in masculine occupations, interest in masculine hobbies, religiosity, education, and Political Attitude scales for the male participants. The results, presented in Table 1, indicate positive and significant associations, ranging from $r = .30$ to $r = .61$, $p < .01$, among the RWA, Masculinity, interest in masculine occupations, interest in masculine hobbies and religiosity. Negative relations, ranging from $r = -.15$ to $r = -.77$, significant at either $p < .05$ or $p < .01$, were found between the AWS and the rest of the dependent variables. These results fully support our first hypothesis. Also, RWA was strongly related to religiosity, rightist politics, and non-egalitarian attitudes toward women.

3.2. The dependent variables of the three groups of men

Six ANCOVAs with group (football, basketball, and control) as an independent variable, RWA, AWS, BSRI Masculinity, interest in masculine occupations, interest in masculine hobbies, and Political Attitudes as dependent variables, and relevant variables appearing below as covariates were carried out to test the hypothesized differences between the three groups of men.

RWA was the dependent variable in the first ANCOVA, group affiliation the independent variable, and age, $F(1, 130) = 7.42$, $p < .01$, education, $F(1, 130) = 0.72$, $p = non-significant$ (ns), religiosity, $F(1, 130) = 16.72$, $p < .01$, AWS, $F(1, 130) = 74.09$, $p < .001$, masculinity (BSRI), $F(1, 130) = 6.35$, $p < .05$ interest in masculine occupation, $F(1, 130) = 1.28$, $p = ns$, and interest in masculine hobbies, $F(1, 130) = 1.01$, $p = ns$, served as covariates. After deducting the covariate effects, the RWA of the three means significantly differ from one another, football players being the highest, followed by that of the control participants, and that of the basketball players (Table 2). The significantly highest RWA level of the football players supports our second hypothesis. The underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA has been met, $F(2, 137) = 0.02$, $p = ns$, as evidenced by Levene’s test of equality of error variances.

In the second ANCOVA AWS was the dependent variable. Group affiliation was the independent variable, and age, $F(1, 130) = 1.71$, $p = ns$, education, $F(1, 130) = 0.78$, $p = ns$, religiosity, $F(1, 130) = 16.72$, $p < .01$, RWA, $F(1, 130) = 97.61$, $p < .001$, BSRI Masculinity, $F(1, 130) = 0.11$, $p = ns$, interest in masculine occupation, $F(1, 130) = 4.05$, $p < .05$, and interest in masculine hobbies, $F(1, 130) = 0.63$, $p = ns$, served as covariates. After deducting the covariate effects, the three group AWS means significantly differed from

### Table 1

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Note. $N = 143$ (52 footballers, 50 basketballers, and 41 controls). RWA = Right-Wing Authoritarianism. AWS = attitudes toward women scale (the higher the score, the higher the adherence to traditional role gender).

$^a$ The higher the score, the higher the participants’ self-rating on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from “Political Left” (1) to “Political Right” (6).

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

** $p < .01$, two-tailed.
one another, the football players holding the least egalitarian attitudes, followed by the basketball players and non-athletes. This fully support our second hypothesis, as far as AWS is concerned. The underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA has also been met, $F(2, 137) = 1.47, p = \text{n.s.}$, as evidenced by Levene’s test of equality of error variances.

In the third ANCOVA BSRI Masculinity was the dependent variable, group was the independent variable, and age, $F(1, 130) = 0.17, p = \text{n.s.}$, education, $F(1, 130) = 8.35, p < .01$, religiosity, $F(1, 130) = 5.17, p < .05$, RWA, $F(1, 130) = 6.35, p < .05$, AWS $F(1, 130) = 0.06, p = \text{n.s.}$, interest in masculine occupation, $F(1, 130) = 0.07, p = \text{n.s.}$, and interest in masculine hobbies, $F(1, 130) = 2.30, p = \text{n.s.}$, served as covariates. After deducting the covariate effects, the three masculinity means significantly differed from one another with football players’ masculinity being the highest, followed by that of the basketball players and that of the non-athletes. Here too both means order and the significant differences between them fully support our second hypothesis with respect to masculine attitudes, followed by the basketball players and non-athletes. This may has to do with the fact that both ballplayer groups are professional athletes who practice “masculine” sport careers, hence express little interest in other “masculine” occupations. The underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA has been met, $F(2, 137) = 2.47, p = \text{n.s.}$, as evidenced by Levene’s test of equality of error variances.

In the fourth ANCOVA interest in masculine occupations was the dependent variable, group was the independent variable, and age, $F(1, 130) = 2.86, p = \text{n.s.}$, education, $F(1, 130) = 0.83, p = \text{n.s.}$, religiosity, $F(1, 130) = 1.74, p = \text{n.s.}$, RWA, $F(1, 130) = 1.28, p = \text{n.s.}$, AWS $F(1, 130) = 4.09, p < .05$, and interest in masculine hobbies, $F(1, 130) = 20.75, p < .001$, served as covariates. After deducting covariate effects, the three means significantly differed from one another. However, the order of the means is opposite to our hypothesis, with the non-athletes showing the greatest interest in “masculine”, followed by the basketball players and the football players, who showed the smallest interest. This may has to do with the fact that both ballplayer groups are professional athletes who practice “masculine” sport careers, hence express little interest in other “masculine” occupations. The underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA has been met, $F(2, 137) = 1.30, p = \text{n.s.}$, as evidenced by Levene’s test of equality of error variances and as was the case in the previous ANCOVAS.

In the fifth ANCOVA interest in masculine hobbies is the dependent variable; group affiliation is the independent variable, and age, $F(1, 130) = 0.53, p = \text{n.s.}$, education, $F(1, 130) = 3.04, p < .10$, religiosity, $F(1, 130) = 0.57, p = \text{n.s.}$, RWA, $F(1, 130) = 1.01, p = \text{n.s.}$, AWS $F(1, 130) = 0.60, p = \text{n.s.}$, and interest in masculine occupations, $F(1, 130) = 20.75, p < .001$, serve as covariates. Having deducted the effect of the covariates, football players’ masculinity trait level, according to level of interest in masculine occupations among basketball players is the highest, followed by that of the football players, and that of the control participants, which is the lowest, with the three means significantly different from one another (see Table 2). Despite the statistical significance of the mean differences, the highest level of interest in masculine hobbies is that of the basketball players rather than that of the football players, as hypothesized. The underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA has been met, $F(2, 137) = 2.73, p = \text{n.s.}$, according to Levene’s test of equality of error variances, as was the case in the previous ANCOVAS.

In the sixth ANCOVA the self-rating of the participants on the political Left(1)–Right(6) scale is the dependent variable; group affiliation is the independent variable, and age, $F(1, 130) = 1.87, p = \text{n.s.}$, education, $F(1, 130) = 0.48, p = \text{n.s.}$, religiosity, $F(1, 130) = 0.72, p = \text{n.s.}$, RWA, $F(1, 130) = 30.74, p < .001$, AWS $F(1, 130) = 2.60, p = \text{n.s.}$, interest in masculine occupations, $F(1, 130) = 0.75, p = \text{n.s.}$, and interest in masculine hobbies, $F(1, 130) = 0.26, p = \text{n.s.}$, serve as covariates. After deducting the effect of the covariates, the football players see themselves as the most rightist group, followed by that of the basketball players, and that of the control participants, who rate themselves closest to the political leftist point of the scale. The three means significantly different from one another (see Table 2) and their order is in accord with that hypothesized. Here also the underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA has been met, $F(2, 137) = 2.28, p = \text{n.s.}$, according to Levene’s test of equality of error variances.

### 3.3. Pair comparison of the dependent variables

Results of the repeated measures MANOVA indicated that the football players are significantly more authoritarian, anti-feminist, religious and politically rightist than their female partners, Pillai’s Trace $= 1.35, F(1, 137) = 9.07, p < .001$, whereas no significant differences between partners with respect to the dependent variables was found among the basketball players and the control participants (see Table 3). This result supports our third hypothesis, as far as the football players and their wives are concerned.

### 3.4. The dependent variables of the three groups of women

Table 3 presents the opportunity to look at the means of the three groups of women. Although the football players are significantly more authoritarian than their wives (as indicated by the
above MANOVA), their wives are significantly more authoritarian, $F(2, 137) = 15.59$, $p < .001$, anti-feminist, $F(2, 137) = 7.10$, $p < .01$, and politically rightist, $F(2, 137) = 7.96$, $p < .01$ than both the wives of the basketball players and those of the non-athletic participants. With respect to religiosity level, however, the order is slightly different: The most religious, followed by the wives of the non-athletic participants, and the religiosity level of the football players’ wives is the lowest, the football players’ wives being significantly more religious than both the basketball players’ and the control wives, $F(2, 137) = 13.97$, $p < .001$. Independent comparisons of the dependent variables among men were presented earlier.

4. Discussion

4.1. Right-Wing Authoritarianism and gender roles

The significant positive associations between RWA, anti-feminist attitudes, masculine traits, and interest in male-typical occupational and hobby preferences found among men provides additional support for the construct validity of the concept of Authoritarianism both according to the classical Frankfurt School (Adorno et al., 1950) and according to Altemeyer’s (1981) Right-Wing Authoritarianism, according to which adherence to traditional gender roles, religiosity, and support of the political right consist a distinct personality construct. These correlations are also in accord with previous Israeli authoritarianism studies (Rubinstein, 1995, 1996, 2003, 2006).

4.2. Football players as masculine warriors

As hypothesized, the football players, who participated in this study, were found to be more authoritarian, anti-feminist, religious, and supportive of the political right, masculine, and show greater interest in male-typical occupations and hobbies, compared to the two other groups of men. Indeed, football is considered an important contributor to masculinity construction but is also related to bullying (Steinfeldt, Vaughan, LaFollette, & Steinfeldt, 2012). Attitudes toward women and viewing contact sports were also found to be significant predictors of sexual aggression against women (Brown, Sumber, & Nocera, 2002). Researchers have also explored how membership in various types of sports teams may predispose men toward sexual aggressiveness (e.g., Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). Kilianski (2003) developed a complementary model in which masculine identity, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation explained heterosexual men’s hostility toward women and gay men.

4.3. Right-Wing Authoritarianism and football hooliganism

The highest RWA level of the football players, who participated in this study, is in accord with previous studies (e.g., Dru, 2002; Jones, 2008) and may also be related to Football hooliganism, which includes actions such as brawling, vandalism and intimidation. The behavior is often based upon rivalry between different teams and conflict may take place before or after football matches. In Israel in the 2000s, tensions surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict spilled over into sporadic riots between Jewish and Arab Israeli football fans. In December 2000, it was reported that every club in Israel was on a final warning following escalating violence and intimidation at matches. “Beitar”, an Israeli football club from Jerusalem, associated with right-wing Israeli politics for over 70 years were attracting attention because of their fans’ behavior.

4.4. Football players’ wives

In accord with previous Israeli authoritarianism studies, which consistently found that men are more authoritarian than women (Rubinstein, 1995, 1996), the greatest authoritarianism, feminism, political right attitudes, and religiosity differences in this study were found between football players and their wives, who were still significantly more authoritarian, anti-feminist, and politically rightist, than both the wives of the basketball players and those of the non-athletes. This last result is in accord with the results of the studies reviewed in the introduction, describing the perpetuating role of traditional masculinity and femininity, played by both football players’ wives and female football fans (Clayton & Harris, 2004; Clayton & Humberstone, 2006; Jones, 2008). From a self-psychology perspective, this might be considered “mirroring” (Kohut, 1971). Playing the role of a traditional masculine man, a football player may need a traditional feminine woman to tell him “You are perfect and you need me in order to confirm it”.

4.5. Limitations and recommendations for future studies

This study applied structured personality and gender role measures to compare football players to other athletes and non-athletes to their female life partners. It is, however, still limited to Israel, hence replication in other countries is recommended as to enable cross-cultural comparison. Our review of the literature suggests strong ethnographic emphasis in this field of research. Comparing football players to other athletes by more personality and attitude measures is also recommended.

References


