

## **SELF-CONCEPT OF ATHLETES**

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### **Apstract**

Many athletes and coaches state that a high percentage of success in the sport depends on psychological factors. Athletes are often under great pressure in the competition, which leads to that athletes psychological characteristics are often decisive factors in these circumstances and contribute to victory or defeat. Athletes self-concept is certainly one of the most important psychological factors and the focus of this paper.

The main purpose of the research was to show the importance of self-concept among athletes that is being manifested through a positive attitude about yourself and a belief in achieving the goal.

Expectations that there are differences in the aspects of self-concept between athletes and non-athletes are not confirmed and the connection between most aspects of athletes self-concept proved to be significant. The survey was conducted on 155 adolescents age from 16 to 19, which included 72 athletes and 83 non-athletes.

**Key words:** self-concept, athletes, non-athletes

### **Introduction**

The main aim of effective behavior in the behavioral theory is the one's own perception of his/her abilities; in the field of sport and physical activity this perception is seen as a signal of one's sports achievement. If an individual sees him/herself as physically able to perform certain activities, he/she decides to take part in these activities or otherwise. There are many researchers and theorists who have noted the significant disparity in personality traits between sport and non-sport persons. Many scholars have discussed this issue and the discussion has brought up a question: Whose personality traits, those of sports or non-sport persons are in favor? Cooper (1969) sees athletes as more self-content, more effective and more socialized

than non-athletes. The experience of a young athlete determines the growth of positive traits, such as level of self-concept and independence, in a person (Cox, 2005:29). In order to provide undisturbed development of an individual as well as his functioning, beside cognitive development as a natural factor, the social environment, family, school, sport club, etc., has huge influence. This environment may affect an individual in both, positive and negative ways and it essentially impacts the growth of self-esteem among the youth.

## **Literature review**

One of the main reasons we promote sport among youth is the way it affects body, health and social life. The body has been considered as the main source of one's self-concept. It has been noted that there is a strong relation between the body structure and physical abilities of an individual, and a body itself presents one of the main sources of one's self-esteem from the early childhood. The idea of self-concept, self-esteem, self-awareness has been defined as an overall of perception, thoughts, feelings the one has of him/herself in the interactions with the world around us. This may be defined as self-perceptions of an individual related to the individual's introspection as well as the way others see us, especially the important adults from our environment. These self-perceptions include one's self-esteem, self-acceptance, competence as well as one's abilities (Marsh, 2007; cited in Lazarevic at al., 2008:307). As self-concept is very important in the development and efficacy of an individual, whether athlete or not, the attention should be given to the positive development of self-concept, which is, according to many, best developed through physical activities. Shawelson and his associates point out that self-concept may be only understood through multi-dimensional concept. The non-academic self-concept includes social, emotional and physical self-concept and therefore this study is focused on the aspects of non-academic self-concept among athletes and non-athletes, such as: self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-satisfaction with own physical appearance, life satisfaction, fear of negative evaluation and loneliness.

It has been considered that the primary aim of effective behavior is influenced by of self-evaluation or awareness of one's own competences, as according to Hater (1992) perceived competence directly affects self-motivation as opposed to the real competence. Athletes with higher level of self-efficacy deem to work more, choose more challenging tasks to perform, experience more positivism, and are less anxious (Bosnar, Balent, 2009:43). According to Opacic (1995) success in activities one sees important for him, along with other social interactions in forms of being well

informed, internal and external evaluation and social comparison are the main sources for the formation and change of one's self-concept. The most important factor which affects the way athletes see themselves is their own experience, with the reflection. One of the important aspects of self-concept is the self-assurance which includes both cognitive and affective components of an individual. It has been noted that self-respect is mostly reflected through the self-evaluation and the self-confidence in one's own abilities which rely on the affective components while self-efficacy relies on cognitive components. A positive attitude which indicates self-respect is very important in the sport because it is the first step in the development of all other psychological skills. There is a very broad use of the term self-confidence and it is often equalized with self-concept. However, self-concept is more general phenomenon than the self-confidence. Self-confidence greatly contributes to sports success. Research shows that it is the most important factor which distinguishing successful from less successful athletes. Athletes have the talent and all the necessary skills maximally developed, but if no one believes in them, they may not be able to take advantage of those skills. One of the reasons is just underdeveloped psychological skills, of which the most important is the self-assurance and the ability to use them in a critical moment. Sports psychologists define self-confidence as a belief that you can successfully perform the desired action (Bajraktarević, 2004: 131). It is also defined as self-assurance that the performance of certain tasks will be successful. These tasks may vary, depending on the sport activities. Those less self-confident always questions themselves, doubt in their abilities, and they are never sure if they have all the necessary skills to perform certain tasks. They do this during the training session, before and during the competition. The difference between those who are self-confident and those who are not is reflected thorough the way athletes perceive themselves, their actions as well as the conditions under which they take those actions, as they look through different lenses. The lack of self-confidence usually results in poor performance. The athlete is excellent during the training sessions, very good in unofficial games but performs poorly during the real competition, mostly because the athlete is unable to show what knows and what he can do. General self-evaluation, as the term indicates itself, is directed to self-evaluation of global characteristics and is relatively stable characteristics and mostly depends on the opinion of authorities. In case athlete is not satisfied with his/her body, the negative perception arises and athlete gives up of sport. More favorable self-evaluation of physical competence contributes to a higher level of enjoyment, as well as a lower level of anxiety during participation in physical activity and sport (Tubic, 2012: 210). The experience of young athletes should be positive in order to promote a positive self-concept. Sports programs should place emphasis on the development of self-respect, self-

confidence and independence and the victory should be placed on the second place. (Cox, 2005: 29).

## **Previous results**

Bearing in mind that there is not a large number of tests of self-concept among athletes in our region, this study aims to examine the differences in self-concept between athletes and those who do not practice sports. Although there are no consistent results when it comes to self-evaluation during the ages, some studies indicate a general decline in the self-evaluation in adolescence while others indicate an increase during the transition from elementary school to high school. Results given by Klomstena and associates (2004) show that participation in physical training and sport can contribute to the development of the self. Relation between sports activities and psychological functioning indicates that there is a reciprocal interactive process. Positive self-assessment of motor skills affects a higher degree of self-satisfaction, and it lowers the level of anxiety in the course of engagement in physical and sports activities, according to study (Scandan & Lewthwaite, 1986, according to Ivanovic Ivanovic, 2012: 6). Harter (1990) points out that the level of self-concept depends on social unit (family, school, sports club, etc.), which represents the positive conditions for the development of the self. It is stated that participation in physical activity improves mental health. Participation in sports activities involves many processes and can have a powerful influence on the formation and changes in self-concept of adolescents. Athletic performance, and self-efficacy support each other (Gašić-Pavišić et al, 2006: 387), Gifted athletes unsure of themselves work far below their capabilities and skills. Numerous authors have examined self-concept in the field of Physical Education and Sport (Gašić-Pavišić et al., 2006; Lazarevic et al., 2007; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Schneider et al., 2008). Research (Tubic, 2010) shows that athletes differ from non-athletes in emotional stability, self-confidence, perseverance, responsibility, the need for domination. Research (DuBois et al., 2000) indicates the theoretical aspects of self-concept, and the difference between the overall self-assessment and self-evaluation in characteristic areas (school, sports, social, etc.).

Studies of many authors (Chanal et al., 2005; Fox, 2002; Klomsten et al., 2004; Marsh, 2001; Marsh et al., 2006; Peart et al., 2005) indicate the role and importance of physical self-concept as well as practice of physical exercise and sports (Lazarevic, et al., 2008: 308). Tubic and associates (2012) emphasize that adolescents who participate in sports tend to more favorably estimate themselves in the most of tested aspects of self-concept in relation to their peers who are not involved in sports.

There are works that suggest (Biddle, 2000; Fox, 2000) to engage in moderate physical activity improves emotional functioning, improves self-esteem and physical self-concept and increases self-satisfaction. It is emphasized that the development of positive attitudes about physical exercise affects achievement in school and in sports domain while negative attitudes towards physical exercise as part of physical education, for example, may be associated with lower levels of their sports activities outside school (Tubic, 2012:209).

It is believed that if people perceive themselves as physically competent, will participate in physical activities, and vice versa (Ivanovic, Ivanovic, 2012: 7). Harter (1992) has established a relatively high correlation ( $r = .70$ ) between the valuation itself in those areas that we consider important and general self-evaluation, and a low correlation between the evaluations themselves in areas considered irrelevant and general self-evaluation. Alves-Martins et al (2002) show that self-evaluation of typical self-concept expresses one's own sense of ability in certain fields (social, school), and it is a subject of change under the influence of circumstances. Tubic and associates (2012) emphasize the role of body image perception in the general adolescent self-evaluation, regardless of whether they practice sports or not.

Research results of Lazarevic et al (2008) emphasize the existence of significant differences in the characteristics of physical self-concept in favor of a group of students who, in addition to physical education lessons, are extra engaged in physical exercise and sports. The differences are more manifested in the dimensions of physical self-concept in a sample of girls than boys, according to the degree of their involvement in physical exercise and sports.

The study conducted by Gašić-Pavišić et al (2006) found that the practice of sport influences general self-esteem and locus of control in adolescents through social feedback and social evaluation of sport achievement and physical fitness.

## **Methodological framework of research**

### *A sample of the population*

The population of the research consists of adolescents who are engaged in sports activities and adolescents who are not involved in sports activities. The subjects of 155 young men were divided in two sub-groups of athletes (72) and non-athletes (83). Ages range from 16 to 19 years.

### *Statistical methods*

In this study the following statistical methods were used: Descriptive statistical methods, Levene's test, T-test, Pearson correlation coefficient.

### *The problem, objectives and hypotheses*

The main problem of the research was to examine differences in the aspects of self-concept between athletes and non-athletes, and the link between aspects of self-concept. From these problems following objectives have arisen:

1. Examine the differences in the dimensions of the self- concept between athletes and non-athletes;
2. To determine whether there are significant statistical correlation between the dimensions of self-concept among athletes.

In accordance with the objectives, the following hypotheses were set:

1. Assumption that there is a statistically significant difference between athletes and non-athletes in the aspects of self-concept.
2. Expectation that there is a statistically significant correlation between most aspects of self-concept among athletes.

## **Results**

### *Self-concept of athletes and non-athletes*

As increasing number of research points to a better evaluation of athletes in aspects of self-concept, and that they have greater self-esteem, self-efficacy, life satisfaction, satisfaction with their physical appearance and a lower degree of fear of negative evaluation and loneliness. This study began with the examination of the subject (155 adolescents). The aim of this study was to examine whether there are differences in the aspects of self-concept between athletes and non-athletes in adolescence? Therefore, it was necessary to gain insight into aspects of descriptive statistical parameters of the self-concept which are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistical parameter of self-concept

	Athlete	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-respect	no	83	28.2169	6.03455	.66238
	yes	72	29.8056	7.10215	.83700
Fear of negative evaluation	no	83	23.1687	7.05176	.77403
	yes	72	24.8056	7.67039	.90396
Self-efficacy	no	83	38.6988	6.33753	.69563
	yes	72	39.3333	7.55077	.88987
Lonliness	no	83	37.6988	10.69846	1.17431
	yes	72	36.7361	9.63999	1.13608
Satisfaction with physical apper.	with no	83	34.9277	7.65695	.84046
	yes	72	37.8750	5.86212	.69086
Satisfaction with life	no	83	75.6627	11.90437	1.30667
	Yes	72	76.2639	11.56365	1.36279

The data in Table 1 show that adolescents who are engaged in sport activities generate greater results in average in almost all the aspects of self-concept than non-athletes, except in loneliness, as it was the expected, but the statistical significance of the results was not confirmed. Levene's test of equality of variable is not significant in aspects of self-concept ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that it did not affect assumption of equality of variables. Therefore, the results obtained are: self-esteem ( $t = .390$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), fear of negative evaluation ( $t = -1384$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), self-efficacy ( $t = -.569$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), loneliness ( $t = .585$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), body image satisfaction ( $t = -2659$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), satisfaction with life ( $t = -.318$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

The present data indicate that regardless of any differences that exist among the respondents who are involved / not involved in sports in aspects of self-

concept, it was not found that these differences were statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), in accordance with this, the first hypothesis was not confirmed .

### **Links among self-concept aspects among athletes**

To determine whether there is significant statistical correlation among the dimensions of self-concept among athletes was the second aim in this paper. The following table shows the inter-correlations of self-concept aspects (self-esteem, self-efficacy, fear of negative evaluation, loneliness, life satisfaction, body image satisfaction).

Table 2 shows significant positive correlation between self-esteem and certain aspects; athletes with higher levels of self-esteem are more self-effective ( $r = .372$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), more satisfied with their lives ( $r = .372$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and they are more satisfied with their body image ( $r = .372$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also athletes with higher levels of self-esteem have a lower degree of loneliness ( $r = -.429$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, there has not been found any significant correlation between the self-esteem and the fear of negative evaluation.

Significant correlation between fear of negative evaluation and life satisfaction is not found, nor with the satisfaction with body appearance. The results show a statistically significant association between fear of negative evaluation and self-efficacy ( $r = 0.260$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

When it comes to self-efficacy scale, most of the aspects positively correlate with it. This shows that athletes with a higher degree of self-efficacy tend to have higher self-esteem ( $r = .372$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and they are satisfied with life ( $r = .301$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), while we have not found any significant correlation between self-efficacy and loneliness nor with satisfaction with body appearance.

Negative correlation of the scale with the facets of loneliness indicates that athletes with a higher degree of loneliness are generally less satisfied with life ( $r = -.308$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and less satisfied with body image ( $r = -.421$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There is no significant correlation between loneliness and fear of negative evaluation and loneliness and self-efficacy.

**Table 2.** Inter-correlations of self-concept aspects

		samopostovanje	strah_neg E	samoefikasnost	usamljenost	zadovoljstvo_zivotom	zadovoljstvo_iz_gledom
Self-respect	Pearson Correlation	1	-.257	.372**	-.429**	.372**	.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.051	.004	.001	.004	.005
	N	72	72	72	72	72	72
Fear of negative evaluation	Pearson Correlation	-.257	1	.260*	.142	-.201	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.051		.049	.286	.130	.557
	N	72	72	72	72	72	72
Self-respect	Pearson Correlation	.372**	.260*	1	-.194	.301*	.235
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.049		.144	.022	.076
	N	72	72	72	72	72	72
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	-.429**	.142	-.194	1	-.308*	-.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.286	.144		.019	.001
	N	72	72	72	72	72	72
Life satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.372**	-.201	.301*	-.308*	1	.468**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.130	.022	.019		.000
	N	72	72	72	27	72	72
Satisfaction with physical appearance	Pearson Correlation	.365**	-.079	.235	-.421**	.468**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.557	.076	.001	.000	
	N	72	72	72	72	72	72

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Life satisfaction is positively correlated with aspects of body image satisfaction, indicating that athletes with higher life satisfaction are generally satisfied with their body image ( $r = .468$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), have higher self-efficacy ( $r = .301$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and self-esteem ( $r = .372$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Satisfaction with physical appearance is positively correlated with other aspects, except with loneliness and fear of negative evaluation. The association between physical appearance satisfaction and loneliness turned out to be statistically significant ( $r = -.421$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that athletes who are more satisfied with their body image are less lonely and vice versa.

There is no statistically significant correlation with the fear of negative evaluation. The data from the second table confirm the second hypothesis.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

In this study, we investigated the differences in some aspects of self-concept among adolescents (athletes and non-athletes), as well as the link among aspects of self-concept. According to the results, both groups of the participants in this study, on aspects of self-esteem, self-efficacy, life satisfaction, satisfaction with body appearance, loneliness and fear of negative evaluation may be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between athletes and non-athletes, although athletes achieve higher value in the average on the aspects of self-concept. When it comes to the link among the aspects of self-concept the results indicate that the largest statistically significant positive correlation is found among self-esteem, self-efficacy, life satisfaction and physical appearance satisfaction. While the negative correlation is found between the aspects of self-concept and loneliness, the lowest correlation is found with the fear of negative evaluation.

The results obtained in this study in terms of the link between certain aspects of self-concept were expected and it could be said that they are in the line with other studies. While the results indicating the differences in self-concept between athletes and non-athletes are not in line with other studies because there is a significant difference in favor of the athlete. In this study, although the athletes achieve better results in the aspects of self-concept, the difference is not statistically significant.

Possible causes of the results and the finding which shows no differences in self-concepts between athletes and non-athletes may be explained by the growing differentiation of self-concept in many studies which indicate that there is a mutual conflict in adolescence, therefore descriptions are unstable. These conflicts make the most important source of identity crisis, because of the need to find a balanced view of themselves and the requirements of social environment and that is considered to make the self-concept lower.

The cause of the results may be found in the level and variability of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The researchers state that the self-esteem changes from day to day or even hour by hour (Larsen-Buss, 2008). The variability of self-esteem varies with the individual; refers to the size of short-term fluctuations in the existing level of self-esteem. The assumption for the level and variability is based on a variety of mental mechanisms, and it is also believed that the variability of self-esteem are associated with the degree of change which coexist in one's own self-evaluation. Particularly important is

the perception of competence in adolescence. Since the evaluation of self-efficacy refers to the assessment of what someone can do, regardless of the actual skills possessed according to Ivanov (2007), it is possible that the ambitions of the adolescents indicate the degree of efficiency which has been shown in this study.

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