



## TOMBOY TRIUMPH: UNVEILING THE IMPACT OF GENDER IDENTITY ON ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE

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### Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between gender role identity and athletic performance among a diverse sample of 200 athletes representing various sports disciplines. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was employed to assess gender role identity, categorizing participants into masculine, feminine, and neutral groups based on their scores. Athletic performance was measured using the Wolanin Scale of Performance. The study found significant correlations between gender role identity and athletic performance. Specifically, masculinity exhibited a strong positive correlation with athletic performance, highlighting the influence of traditionally masculine traits on sports success. Contrary to common stereotypes, femininity did not demonstrate any substantial impact on athletic performance. Of particular interest was the positive influence of neutrality, suggesting that athletes who exhibit a balance of both masculine and feminine traits tend to perform better. These findings challenge traditional gender norms and underscore the need for more inclusive approaches in sports coaching and training. Future research should explore the underlying mechanisms behind these relationships to inform more effective strategies for athlete development and performance enhancement.

**Keywords:** Athletic Performance, Masculinity, Femininity, Neutrality, Bem Sex Role Inventory, Wolanin Scale of Performance

### Introduction

Early Japanese society was not in favor that each member of a society had to contribute for the solidarity of the society. Against this concept, present practices gave equal opportunities to females also in the sports, as girls and boys allows same amount of time for gymnastic, swimming, track and

field, and sports theory for the physical fitness in modern society (Powers, 2019). In this modern era, still girls and women facing a number of barriers to become involved in sports, especially in Asian countries. The reason is the traditional state of mind of their parents or pressure from their families. Gender inequalities persisted in the society which causes a continuity barrier for the participation of women in sports (Pope, 2017). Large proportion of females are still facing gender discrimination in sports. This factor pushed them to construct their gender identity in a traditionally masculine sport. This support theory of performativity (used to understand how female negotiate, resist or challenge the dominant gender discourse). Most of the female players adopt the gesture of tomboy just to trying to face the gender inequality and improve their sports performance (Fernandez-Lasa, et al., 2021). Female players, who adopted this way of style as they feel secure and also, they noticed their performance increased.

Tomboy is a complex identity in contemporary U.S. culture and parent called them their non-sense daughter or sometimes they symbolize it as they have tomboy kids. The concept of tomboy is very common in American society (Paechter & Clark, 2007). The girls and women adopted such gesture based on three different reasons; first, muscular dominant personality to protect themselves from perceptions about sexual reputation and sexual orientation. Secondly, they considered that tomboy identity works as a protection shield for lesbians who prefer not divulge their sexual orientation. Thirdly, this can gain females limited privilege to spaces for which masculinity is an unspoken requirement. The insecurities towards human protections shifted their minds to change their identity in U.S. culture (Craig, & LaCroix, 2011). Meanwhile a number of female players recorded that they adopted this identity because they feel protective. Female players also noticed that there is rapid progressive change in their performance after adopting tomboy identity. Sports are considered as it made to groom the male personality and females adopt tomboy gesture because society is not accepting girls be the part of sports activities. To reduce this rejection, females' players are also adopting this identity (Bailey et al., 2002; Plumb & Cowan, 1984; Saghir & Robins, 1973).

The cultural values also pushed some female players to adopt this tomboy look, which helps both herself and her family (Malterud, et al., 2021). Some females adopted this identity because there is no male member in their home, and this gesture is the protective shield not only for a girl or woman but also whole family feel secure themselves. This adopted identity can also adopted by some females just to protect their family (Meisel, 2022). A number of Disney movies, dramas and novels illustrated the tomboy look (they played the role of a most strong women in the gesture of tomboy), which grows the concept to adopt tomboy identity in rapid manners (Disney, 2012). Early tomboy was rejected scrap of dominant masculinity that enable male masculinity to appear to be the real thing (Higginbotham, 2018). Tomboy look mostly linked with potentially negative gender identification but more egalitarian perceptions of others. It associated with the male-typical play preferences (Ahlqvist, et al., 2013). This flexible personality role reflects in accepting other who violate gender norms (Bailey, Bechtold, & Berenbaum, 2002), other side putting them at risk for social rejection (Egan & Perry, 2001; Halim et al., 2011). Most studies in South Africa, UK and Australia have adopted that gender pattern in female players promoted a deep and meaningful engagement in sports performance (Kostas, 2022; Bartholomaeus, 2012; Renold, 2005). But not all girls adopting the boy dominant identity in the form of tomboy gesture (Kostas, 2022). To be the dominant participant in sports activities also influences the female players to adopt tomboy look, which played a positive role in the good performance in sports (Pope, 2017). Another reason that most of the female players adopt this identity because the nature of the sports is based on the male personality and female players also wants themselves be the part of the gender which sports demanded (Oxford, 2022). There is need to identify the heterosexual gender identity of the tomboy both in terms of its particularities and impact (Alvemark, 2021).

A number of researchers puts to the forefront voice for female players and their dignity in context to social justice agenda and in the context of physical activity (Balram, et al., 2022; Pang, 2021; Spaaij

et al., 2020). Another concept was also focused on female players who had South Asian background and were born and reside there. These female players were marginalized in terms of race and ethnicity in sports opportunities due to racial stereotypes of them with physicality and sporting powers (Balram, et al., 2022; Balram, et al., 2022). Economic and family background of such females was also examined in this research work, which influenced to adopt tomboy gesture in female players (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2020).

This is the most common phenomenon that men are more potent than women. This is the reason that for decade sports is linked with males who played them well as they have strong muscular power. In current era, a number of female athletes adopting muscular appearance to improve their confidence and sports performance. Female players feel the same muscular power when they adopt the appearance of tomboy. This concept influenced to make objective that tomboy look helps to improve the performance of female players.

### **Literature Review**

The lives of female players and their physical activities have been widely explored in past few decades (Riley, K., & Proctor, 2022; O'Flynn & Lee, 2010; Azzarito, 2009; Hills, 2007; Macdonald, e al., 2005). These studies have focused on players in relation to body image in physical education, sports sciences, and social networks as inclusive practices of females' physical education experiences (Balram, et al., 2022). Moreover, gender, race, and social class discrimination also plays an effective impact on the performance of female players (Pang, 2018). For example, studies related to young Chinese-Australian students involved in sports (Pang, 2018), the behavior of sports discrimination in South-Asia (Pulia, et al., 2022), non-indigenous women in South Pacific Island (Kanemasu, 2018), behavior with Muslim girls in UK (Stride, 2014). A number of studies highlights that South Asian woman are facing physicality but Young South Asian women are playing active role in physical activity prospects (Kanemasu, 2018; Stride, 2014).

Playground are critical arena wherein player's gender performances unfold. Kostas (2021) analyzed qualitative study that "how children negotiate and perform gender, exploring material-discursive effects of human and non-human agents in their intra actions with the body. Findings showed that playgrounds were dichotomized into rigid gender zones. Players reaffirmed their gender allegiances by forming gender homogenous playgroups and engaging in diametrical activities. The effects of martial-discursive forces in gender identity development. Specifically, successful masculinity, girly femininity, and tomboy emerged through material discursive intra-actions of playgrounds, bodies, football, and heteronormative discourses (Kostas, 2021). The tomboy code of conduct is in fact a "racial zed construct" (Well, 2022; Abate, 2008). Tomboy offer an opportunity for a reconsideration of history (Scherman, 2023; Ahlqvist, et al., 2013). On the other side, tomboy gesture helps to tackle a queered theme by focusing on women's collective empowerment and sisterhood against patriarchy (Li, 2022). A number of women in sports has considerable grown in Pakistan. Based on this emerging concept, female players face a number of hurdles regarding their gender and sexual orientation. Martos-Garcia, et al. (2023) suggested that females who participate a traditionally masculine sport faces gender discrimination. Female players consider that adoption of tomboy gesture is a protective shield to tackle the hurdle of gender discrimination.

The studied literature suggested to conclude that divert ethnic groups make evident that with the female players faced a number of hurdles to show their active participation in the field of sports. They faced a number of hurdles in the form of parents' traditional mind of thinking, pressure from relatives, behavior of the society, emergence of gender discrimination, and race. These factors influence female players to change their personality and face these hurdles by adopting the tomboy look. They feel more comfortable secure in tomboy gesture.

This is an emerging concept in Pakistan that tomboy look is more secure and protective way for females to save themselves from different challenges (gender discrimination, family pressure, parents' traditional mind, race and ect.) they faced to grow their career. The purpose of this study is to examine the rapidly increasing trend of tomboy look among female players in Pakistan.

### Materials and Methods

**Sample:** The study focused on a sample of 200 female athletes participating in various sports through convenience sampling. This research employed a cross-sectional design, assessing masculinity/femininity and sports performance at a single point in time.

**Instruments:** the following instruments were used

**Bem Sex Role Inventory:** The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), developed by psychologist Sandra Bem in 1974, is a widely used psychometric instrument designed to assess an individual's gender role identity. The BSRI consists of 60 items, each describing a specific personality trait, behavior, or characteristic. Respondents are asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 7 based on how well each item describes them. The items are carefully selected to represent traits that are stereotypically associated with either masculinity or femininity in the culture where the assessment is being conducted.

**Self-Rating Scale for Athletic Performance:** Sports performance was measured by Self-Rating Scale of Athletic Performance developed by Wolanin in 2004. The rating scale is a direct measure of athletic performance and includes variables of performance such as strength, motivation, concentration, competitiveness, endurance, quickness, fitness, mechanics, agility, aggressiveness, and team cohesion.

**Procedure:** Athletes were invited to participate voluntarily. They completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the Wolanin Scale of Performance in a controlled environment. To minimize order effects, the order of administering the scales was counterbalanced, with half of the participants starting with the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the other half with the Wolanin Scale of Performance. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects were strictly followed.

### Data Analysis and Results

Data were checked for missing values and outliers and cleaned accordingly. SPSS version 23 was use data analysis. Statistical analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics Statistical analysis included correlation analysis to examine the relationship between masculinity/femininity scores and sports performance. Regression analysis was used to explore the predictive power of gender roles on performance

**Table 1** *Reliability of the scales (n=200)*

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Masculinity	20	0.89
Femininity	20	0.82
Neutral	20	0.71
Sports Performance	11	0.82
Overall	71	0.86

*Note:* Table 1 shows the Cronbach alpha of the scales used in the study. the overall reliability of the scale is good where masculinity scale showed the highest reliability.

**Table 2** Demographic characteristics of the sample (n=200)

Variables	Frequency	%
Games		
Athletics	41	20.5
Badminton	38	39.5
Baseball	15	47.0
Basketball	19	56.5
Cricket	27	70.0
Football	30	85.0
Table Tennis	2	86.0
Tennis	7	89.5
Volleyball	21	20.5
Playing level		
Professional	145	72.5
Amateur	55	27.5
Locality		
Urban	141	70.5
Rural	59	29.5

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample.

**Table 3** Means, Standard Deviations Between Subscales of Bem Sex Role Inventory and Athletic Performance (n=200)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Masculinity	15.44	2.51	-	.14	.41	.83**
2 Femininity	22.43	2.92		-	.05	-.02
3 Neutral	14.21	2.14			-	.59**
4 Athletic Performance	11.94	2.13				-

p<.001\*\*

Results in Table 3 show correlations of *Bem Sex Role Inventory and Athletic performance*. Results suggest strong and significant positive correlation among masculinity subscale and Athletic Performance while weak negative correlation between femininity and Athletic Performance.

**Table 4** Regression coefficients of masculinity on Athletic Performance (n=200)

Variable	B	$\beta$	SE
Constant	.93		.14
Masculinity	.42	.83	.03
R <sup>2</sup>	0.69		

We examined the impact of masculinity on Athletic Performance.

**Table 5** Regression coefficients of Femininity on Athletic Performance (n=200)

Variable	B	$\beta$	SE
Constant	14.68		3.34
Femininity	-.14	-.02	1.00
R <sup>2</sup>	.00		

We examined the impact of femininity on Athletic Performance.

**Table 6** Regression coefficients of Neutral on Athletic Performance (n=200)

Variable	B	$\beta$	SE
Constant	1.48		.16
Neutral	.67	.59	3.39
R <sup>2</sup>	.35		

We examined the impact of neutrality on Athletic Performance.

## Discussions

This study aimed to explore the impact of masculinity, femininity, and neutrality on athletic performance among a sample of 200 athletes across various sports. The research employed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to assess gender role identity and the Wolanin Scale of Performance to measure sports performance. The reliability of these scales was assessed and found to be acceptable (Table 1). The study aimed to shed light on whether athletes with "tomboy" characteristics, often associated with a blend of traditionally masculine and feminine traits, exhibited any distinct advantages or disadvantages in their sporting endeavors.

The study uncovered several intriguing findings that have implications for the concept of "tomboy" traits and their impact on athletic performance. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations between subscales of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Masculinity, Femininity, and Neutral) and Athletic Performance. The results suggest several noteworthy findings. First, there is a strong and significant positive correlation between the Masculinity subscale and Athletic Performance ( $r = 0.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding indicates that athletes who score higher on the masculinity scale tend to have better athletic performance. This is consistent with traditional gender role stereotypes that associate masculinity with qualities such as competitiveness, assertiveness, and physical prowess, aligns with the societal notion of "tomboy" characteristics being associated with sporting success, as many of these traits fall within the traditional realm of masculinity. (Kachel et al., 2016). Second, there is a weak negative correlation between the Femininity subscale and Athletic Performance ( $r = -0.02$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This implies that there is no significant relationship between femininity and athletic performance among the studied athletes. This finding challenges the stereotype that femininity is inherently detrimental to athletic performance, suggesting that feminine traits may not have a substantial impact in this context (Bojkowski, 2022).

Lastly, the Neutral subscale shows a moderate positive correlation with Athletic Performance ( $r = 0.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that individuals who score higher on the neutral scale, indicating a blend of both masculine and feminine traits, tend to have better athletic performance. This result is intriguing as it highlights the potential benefits of androgynous gender role identities in the context of sports performance. This aspect is particularly interesting within the context of the "tomboy" concept, as it highlights the advantages of embracing a diverse set of traits that include empathy and sensitivity alongside assertiveness and competitiveness. (Gentile et al., 2018; Hively & El-Alayli, 2014).

To further explore the impact of gender role identity on athletic performance, regression analyses were conducted. These analyses provide a more detailed understanding of how each dimension of gender identity (masculinity, femininity, and neutrality) influences athletic performance.

Table 3 presents the regression coefficients of masculinity on Athletic Performance. The results indicate that masculinity significantly predicts athletic performance ( $B = 0.42$ ,  $\beta = 0.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The positive beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.83$ ) indicates that for each one-unit increase in masculinity score, there is an associated 0.83-unit increase in athletic performance. This finding underscores the substantial impact of masculine traits on athletic success and suggests that athletes who exhibit more masculine qualities tend to perform better in sports (Manno, 2023).

Table 4, on the other hand, reveals that femininity does not significantly predict athletic performance ( $B = -0.14$ ,  $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The beta coefficient ( $\beta = -0.02$ ) is close to zero, indicating that there is essentially no relationship between femininity and athletic performance. This result contradicts the idea that feminine traits inherently hinder athletic success, suggesting that such traits may not have a substantial impact in this context.

Table 5 shows the regression coefficients of neutrality on Athletic Performance. The results indicate that neutrality significantly predicts athletic performance ( $B = 0.67$ ,  $\beta = 0.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The positive beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.59$ ) implies that for each one-unit increase in neutrality score, there is an associated 0.59-unit increase in athletic performance. This finding highlights the positive influence of androgynous traits, encompassing both masculinity and femininity, on athletic success. Athletes who exhibit a balance of gender role characteristics tend to perform better (Jeanes et al., 2020).

The results of this study shed light on the complex relationship between gender role identity and athletic performance. While masculinity was found to be a significant predictor of athletic success,

femininity did not show any substantial influence. This challenges traditional gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with athletic prowess and femininity with inferior performance (Menzie, 2020). The strong positive correlation between masculinity and athletic performance suggests that athletes who embody masculine traits, such as competitiveness and assertiveness, are more likely to excel in sports. This aligns with the cultural narrative that often glorifies traditional masculine qualities in the athletic realm. Coaches and sports organizations may consider these findings when evaluating and training athletes (Gentile et al., 2018).

However, the intriguing finding in this study is the positive influence of neutrality (androgynous traits) on athletic performance. Athletes who display a balance of both masculine and feminine characteristics tend to perform better. This suggests that a diverse set of traits, including empathy and sensitivity (often associated with femininity), can be advantageous in sports. Coaches and organizations may need to reevaluate their traditional gender-based coaching and training strategies to accommodate a broader range of gender identities and traits (Bojkowski, 2022).

It is important to note that the present study provides insights into correlations and predictions but cannot establish causation. Additional research is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms that link gender role identity with athletic performance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that masculinity significantly predicts athletic performance, whereas femininity does not show any substantial impact. Furthermore, neutrality, encompassing a balance of both masculine and feminine traits, positively influences athletic success. These findings challenge conventional stereotypes and highlight the importance of recognizing and accommodating diverse gender identities and traits in the world of sports. Future research should delve deeper into the mechanisms behind these relationships to inform more inclusive and effective coaching and training practices.

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