

# Body Shaming Experiences of Elite Female Athletes

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## Abstract

Women face many problems in the sports environment; one of them is "body shaming" experiences. Especially elite female athletes may have some negative experiences due to the characteristics of their profession. The study which addresses this subject is a qualitative research that aims to reveal the experiences in which elite female athletes are humiliated over their bodies. For the study, interviews were conducted with 13 female athletes residing in Batman, Diyarbakir, and Istanbul who play sports in branches such as gymnastics, wrestling, athletics, kickboxing and boxing. According to the data obtained from the interviews, the participants are exposed to different forms of body shaming experiences, both in the sports environment and in the social fields outside the sports environment. The participants are faced with disturbing comments and practices in the process of capturing the body measurements specific to the sports branches in the sports environment. In addition, they encounter sexist expressions in social relationships about their bodies that they develop through training. Athletes are exposed to comments that include pressure, and psychological violence in the sports culture where gender-based power relations are intense.

**Keywords:** Body, Body Shaming, Sports, Violence.

## Öz

Kadınlar, spor ortamında pek çok sorun ile karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Bu sorunlarında biri de beden utandırma deneyimleridir. Özellikle elit kadın sporcular mesleklerinin özelliklerinden dolayı bazı olumsuz deneyimler yaşayabilmektedirler. Bu konuyu ele alan çalışma, elit kadın sporcuların bedenleri üzerinden utandırıldığı deneyimleri ortaya koymayı amaçlayan nitel bir araştırmadır. Çalışma için Batman, Diyarbakır ve İstanbul'da ikamet eden ve jimnastik, güreş, atletizm, kick boks, boks gibi branşlarda spor yapan 13 kadın sporcu ile görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerden elde edilen verilere göre katılımcılar, hem spor ortamında hem spor ortamının dışındaki toplumsal alanlarda, farklı şekillerde beden utandırma pratiklere maruz kalmaktadır. Katılımcılar, spor ortamında spora ve spor branşına özgü beden ölçülerini yakalama sürecinde rahatsız edici yorum ve pratiklerle karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Ayrıca toplumsal ilişkilerde, antrenmanlar yoluyla geliştirdikleri bedenlerine dair cinsiyetçi ifadelerle karşılaşmaktadır. Cinsiyet temelli güç ilişkilerinin yoğun yaşandığı spor kültürü içinde sporcuların maruz kaldıkları bu yorumlar; baskı ve psikolojik şiddet içermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Beden, Body Shaming, Spor, Şiddet.

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## Introduction

In the sports environment, most individuals, especially women and children, may be exposed to the experience of body shaming, which is a form of maltreatment and humiliation (Willson & Kerr, 2021; McMahan, McGannon & Palmer, 2022). The violence that a young female athlete, who has elite level achievements in the field of gymnastics, has been recently subjected to on social media has been striking in terms of revealing these experiences. The “muscle pile” analogy coming from her followers to her photo she shared on social media contains reflections of the traditional view that has developed around the female body. This situation, which includes a tendency towards humiliation of women, also indicates the existence of a widespread opinion in the society that sports are the field of manhood.

Body shaming may appear at school, in the environment of friends (Gam, Singh, Manar, Kar & Gupta, 2020), in the family (Martínez-González, Pérez-Pedraza, Alfaro-Álvarez, Reyes-Cervantes, González Malabet & Clemente-Suárez, 2021) and in digital environments through social media (Schluter, Kraag & Schmidt, 2021; Bilgin Ülken & Yüce, 2020). However, it can be said that body shaming experience finds larger area in the sports environment due to the fact that the body is at the center of sports activities. Again, it is possible to say that it is seen more on female athletes (McMahon et al., 2022; Willson & Kerr, 2021), especially due to practices of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2015).

Body shaming can be defined as the act of asserting negative comments, making critical comments, using a sarcastic tongue, humiliating the person in individual relationships or on social media about the shape, size or appearance of the body (Schluter et al., 2021; Schooler, Ward, Merriweather & Caruthers, 2005; Webb, Fiery & Jafari, 2016). In the sports environment, body shaming emerges as repressing, insulting the body and its functions with verbal expressions or humiliating the person over weight and

appearance (Willson & Kerr, 2021). As a matter of fact, Kosteli, Raalte, Brewer & Cornelius (2014) remarks that sports do not always offer a protective environment for athletes. According to them, athletes who want to stay physically fit, especially in some branches, may face more pressure. In their study, they detected that athletes have such a thin body perception that they become vulnerable to eating disorders. A similar finding is seen in the study of Slater & Tiggemann (2011), in which they stated that women participating in physical activities have more shame and anxiety regarding their appearances.

Different forms of interpretation may develop towards the body due to gender-based relationships in social sense. While those who are strong and muscular emphasize masculine and superior, those who are slim, thin and lean represent woman. This point of view facilitates the establishment of a superiority relationship towards woman in parallel with the roles shaped by the social hierarchy and the reconstruction of this superiority relationship within the field of sports. This situation is founded with a culture in which physical attractiveness and beauty belong to females (Günindi Ersöz, 2010, p. 45). Again, its relationship established with social norms and cultural structure places the body to the center of organizations (Amsterdam, Claringbould & Knoppers, 2017). In this sense, the body is interpreted with its emotional, social and cognitive characteristics, despite the reference made to physical and motor characteristics. In other words, the individual's thoughts, attitudes and value judgments about her/his body gain importance with the way it was interpreted by other people. (Öngören, 2015, p.28).

It is no doubt that one of the people who try to explain the body around social and cultural discourse is Bourdieu. The concepts of “habitus”, “field” and “doxa” stand at the core of Bourdieu's ideas regarding the social construction processes of the body. According to Bourdieu (2005), habitus is the most basic disposition of ours, and it has been internalized

in the practices (of our body). Habitus, which is located in the body and represented by the body, finds the finest representation in the sports organization in this sense (Amsterdam et al., 2017). Bourdieu (2005) indicates that habitus needs doxa to become operative. According to him, doxa as the whole of opinions that dominate the society, prevails in many fields and makes individuals a part of the established rules in the relevant field. Doxa, which accelerates the processes of legitimization and normalization by giving a sense of belonging, makes the social fields in which the individual exists become operative (Koytak, 2012, pp. 91-92).

Bourdieu (2016, p. 137) emphasizes that there are general and absolute laws of fields, and that these laws develop under the monopoly of field-specific thought and authority. Willson & Kerr (2021), in their study addressing body shaming as a form of emotional abuse, determined that participants socialize in a sports environment where success in sports is valued above everything else and their bodies are judged over their aesthetics and appearance. In this aspect, body shaming can be defined as a common emotional experience resulting from the perceptions of reaching cultural standards specified by narrow patterns, and the discomfort created by this experience.

In this sense, the present study focuses on the negative experiences that elite female athletes in Turkey go through in the sports field and the socio-cultural field outside the sports field over body and appearance through Bourdieu's "doxa" and "field" concepts. Moreover, it also discusses how perceptions and comments regarding their bodies gain a place in the sports field and socio-cultural field outside the sports field.

## Method

In the study, qualitative research and phenomenology method, which is the design of qualitative research, were preferred. Phenomenology focuses on the form individuals approach a phenomenon, their perceptions and the way they make sense of the phenomenon

(Cresswell, 2021; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Accordingly, concentrating on body shaming experiences of female athletes and their way of making sense of these experiences in the study was an important reason for the preference of this research design.

## Data Collection Tool

In the study, individual interviews, which are used in examining complex and stratified structures such as individuals, groups, cultures, and social relations, and which are the data collection technique of qualitative research, were preferred. (Kümbetoğlu, 2005; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The fact that body shaming experiences that women are subjected to in the field of sports are not an individual and isolated actions and that when they are exposed to the actions in question, the presence of sexist expressions unfolding around their bodies and an attitude that humiliates women was effective in preferring the qualitative research method, which enables in-depth analysis of an event. A semi-structured interview form was prepared to be used in individual interviews. Qualitative (Tondo, 2022; Willson & Kerr, 2021) and quantitative (Arumugam, Manap, Mello, & Dharinee, 2022) studies, which were previously conducted on the subject, were utilized in the preparation of the questions. In the forms, next to giving place to a specific topic and list of question, without digressing from the subject of the interview, unplanned questions shaped by the response given by the participants were also included. As well as those about demographic information, the questions with regard to the social environment's comments on the body while performing sports and after quitting sports and how these comments differ in the sport and social fields were asked in the interview form. In the interview form, the individuals were asked about the changes in their bodies and their attitudes towards this change, their opinions about other people's bodies, and what kind of attitude and reaction they developed in disturbing situations towards their bodies before and after starting sports. How the changing bodies of female athletes with

their sports practices affected their own selves, the reactions they encountered socially and what attitude they had in the face of such reactions were also included among the questions.

## Participants

The participants were selected from Istanbul, Diyarbakir and Batman provinces. The interviews were conducted with 13 elite female athletes who play/played sports of wrestling, judo, gymnastic, boxing, kick boxing and athletics. In this sense, the participants consisted of individuals who participated at least at the national level tournaments, internalized the sport and shaped their lives with the sport. The code names given to the participants as well as the information regarding their age and sports branch were stated below.

*Table 1. Characteristics of the participants*

Code	Age	Branch	Education
Zeynep	22	Athletics	Undergraduate student
Aycan	24	Gymnastics	Bachelor degree
Belgin	19	Athletics	Undergraduate student
Candan	37	Wrestling	Bachelor degree
Yildiz	20	Kick box	Undergraduate student
Sevgi	23	Muay Thai, Kick box	Undergraduate student
Tuba	20	Gymnastics	Undergraduate student
Seray	30	Gymnastics	Bachelor degree
Mehtap	22	Wrestling	Undergraduate student
Suna	21	Boxing	Undergraduate student
Ayşe	19	Wrestling	High school graduate
Esra	28	Wrestling	Bachelor degree
Büşra	38	Athletics	Bachelor degree

## Data Collection and Analysis

Before commencing the study, an approval was received from Batman University Ethics Committee (Date: 12.05.2022; Decision Number: 2022/05). Afterwards, the interviews were made by the researcher, and the data were collected in about two months time. The participants were informed about the study topic before the interview. A special permission was received from each participant to audio record the interviews. After understanding that the participants who were given information about the study were comfortable and peaceful, it was ensured that the voluntary consent form was read and signed. During the interview, attention

was paid that no hierarchical relationship existed between the participant and the researcher and that the interview was conducted in a friendly environment. The individuals were reminded that they had the option of not answering the questions they do not want. In the face of the answers given, the actions that would disturb the individual, affect their answers or express any opinion were avoided. Again, the participants were asked at the end of the interview whether there is any inconvenience in using the data collected, and permission was requested for the last time to use the data. No participants stated that the information they shared in the interview could pose any inconvenience for them.

The data that were audio recorded were then transformed into written texts. The findings obtained were interpreted by the content analysis method. The opinion of a second researcher was consulted for the coding of the data in the analysis process. After the assessments made separately, the analyses of the two researchers were compared and the final themes were identified. The information collected from the participants was themed in the form of perceptions and reactions within the "sports field" and "social field". The data were analyzed in depth and the ones who were similar to each other were gathered in the axis of the same theme, and the evaluations were performed within the framework of specific concepts.

## Results and Discussion

The field concept that was utilized in the process of the analysis, thematization and interpretation of the findings in the study refers to the positions structured by laws and power relations in a certain institution along with individuals (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2021). From the field concept, the data obtained from the participants were interpreted according to the characteristics of the two distinct fields. The positive perspective of having a strong, muscular body, which is considered as the results of sportive

success and goals within the field of sports, turns into a contradiction in the social and cultural field. Both the experiences they are exposed to in the process of processing the body in sports and the fact that the body shaped by sports enforces women against the prevailing doxa in the social field are among the negative experiences lived by female athletes.

### Body Shaming Experiences in the Sports Field

In the field of sports, doxa creates a mentality in which hard work comes to the fore so that the body transforms into a strong, muscular, athletic and flexible structure, and more importantly, reaches a strength that obtains the victory. This understanding, which is most often formed within the framework of the characteristics of the male body, is shaped by the prevailing social view. Studies (Hunter, 2004; Thorpe, 2009; Kavasoglu & Macit, 2018; Öztürk & Koca, 2014) demonstrate that the process in which the muscular female body transforms into a social body is under the influence of this prevailing discourse.

Under this theme, retaining a fit image in the sports field comes before individuals as an imperative task of the sport. Performance athletes, in particular, need to regulate their bodies by constantly working out. The female athletes stated that when they failed to meet the expectations in the sports field, they are subjected to body shaming, and this causes them discomfort.

The participant code-named Zeynep, who was interviewed for the aim of providing data for the study, stated that she was humiliated in the sports environment because she could not constantly maintain her ideal body with the following sentences:

*Since our financial situation was not very good, I was not able to do sports for twelve months of the year. I was working in the summer months. We were not able to go to training. When I returned, my hips, breasts and face were getting chubby. My hips were getting very large. I was not feeling comfortable when I wore trousers, which was bothering me very much. When I came, my other friends had entered the training season, the full season. They were so fit.*

*Their weights were quite good. So they were looking at me, and saying that that was puffy; this was puffy; you have become this; you have become that, you cannot recover; these kilos you have gained give you heaviness. I was being very embarrassed. (Zeynep, Athletics)*

Emotional and psychological factors related to the body constitute the parts of the individual's socialization processes, such as self-perception and identity. People give messages and influence others with bodily shapes and symbols in some fields (Bilgin, 2016, p. 220; Okumuş, 2009, p. 3). Ramadhany & Putri (2021) determined in their studies that body shaming experiences that individuals are exposed to on Instagram lower their self-confidence. Indeed, one of the points of action results from the comments others make of bodily characteristics. This is observed in the sports environment in the most obvious way.

Every branch in sports is closely related to the body and fictionalize its ideal body through the sportive success. While being overweight and shaping the weight with muscle is advantageous in some sports, being muscular but as thin and lean as possible can bring success in some sports. Sometimes, the weight class in which they will compete provide information about how athletes need to shape their bodies.

One of the participants, Yıldız, played sports in a branch in which being overweight creates a distress, and because of this situation, she had a sports history that was tested almost with hunger:

*While I was eating, one of my friends told me "What more are you eating, don't you see your condition, why are you still eating?" After that, as a child, I became obsessed about it and started sit-up exercises. Last time I was doing a thousand sit-ups. In the mean time, I think I've also grown taller. Then I could not recognize myself as I was getting thinner and thinner. There are also weight classes. You have to get into a weight class. Particularly a weight class the trainer specifies. You have to lose weight to reduce that weight class. You are on a diet. When you cannot lose weight, there is no insult you do not hear. I was becoming an enemy to my own body. (Yıldız, Kick box)*

Similarly, Gam et al. (2020) determined that individuals who do not have ideal bodies (obese, etc.) may be more exposed to body shaming. Seray, who experienced a similar situation, express that they face these problems more often especially at the beginning of adolescence, the periods in which individuals become more interested in their bodies and are more sensitive to comments.

*I was very young when we first started. I do not remember exactly. But as time passes and competition increases, talks about our movements and our weight are increasing. When we could not perform a movement, first we hear a scolding from the trainer for sure: 'if you do not lose those weights, of course, you cannot do it!' The same goes for friends as well. Of course, there were also some who rejoiced deep down inside. Then you become ambitious. You get on a diet for days. At the beginning of adolescence, these were too much (Seray, Gymnastics).*

This situation is in line with Foucault's (2015) views that the body will be a useful force as long as it is productive. According to him, the body is meaningful for the individual and is encircled by the power as long it is productive. In other words, in the moment when the individual thinks that she/he becomes a power with her/his body, in fact -in a contradictory way- her/his dependence also increases

Esra, another athlete, expressed that her being skinny and underweight was a concerning situation for her in the sports environment:

*Since I was already underweight, my father had me sign up for wrestling. As a told you before, there was also a trainer he had known before. We were with him. When I first started, I do not forget both their gaze and what they said to me. I used to wear loose clothes all the time. I never forget, at the first days; one of my friend said, 'Go do athletics with this body, at least it will work.' I was eating at home, but I was not able to put on weight. Sometimes I was eating as much as to choke. Naturally I grew up some more after adolescence. I also became a fine wrestler. But I still keep the words spoken in those days in my mind. (Esra, Wrestling)*

In their study that investigated the perpetrators of the body shaming experience,

McMahon et. al. (2022) determined that trainer, teammate (partner), parent and team managers emerge as four perpetrators in the formation of sportive success anxiety in the individual. In the study, athletes stated that they were punished with different training and exercises in negative situations regarding their bodies. In a study by Lucibello, Koulanova, Pila, Brunet, & Sabiston (2021) conducted with adolescent females, it was revealed that athletes hear negative comments towards their bodies from their teammates and from the opponent team's athletes and coaches in competitions. Willson & Kerr (2021), on the other hand, reported that in the case that the discipline about the body is not ensured and the body measurements specified by the trainer are not reached, the athletes are threatened with suspension from the sports environment. Again, it is seen that messages over the body are given to create hierarchy among athletes, to motivate athletes in competitions and trainings or to demoralize them.

Consequently, in the sports environment, when individuals do not have a body image appropriate for the characteristics of the sport they perform, they can be humiliated and subjected to body shaming by their social environment. In this stereotyped culture, the possession of body dimensions that are specified by sports and sports branch can become important for women, and they may experience more trouble if they do not have those dimensions.

### **Body Shaming Experiences in the Social and Cultural Field**

According to the data obtained from the participants, another field where body shaming is experienced is the social and cultural field. The situation, which is shaped by success and strong body image in the sports field, is conveyed to a different point in the social field. Especially when it is digressed from the gendered body in the social field, the common and acceptable body image, it can be contrary to the prevailing doxa and create a crisis in individuals. The

image of strong and muscular individual in the sports environment can compel the female figure reminded by doxa in the social field. This circumstance can cause individuals to experience unhappiness in certain cultural activities such as wedding, dating and marriage. All these are undoubtedly closely associated with the hegemonic masculinity expressed by Connell (2019), on the other side of this, the perception of femininity exists. Femininity and masculinity create the sets of assumptions, expectations and behaviors attributed to or associated with the genders in question in a society (Günindi Ersöz, 2016, p. 27).

It is a well-known fact that the socialization attributed to women in the common patriarchal environment in both traditional and modern societies puts a great emphasis on bodiliness and physical attractiveness. Because bodies are trained and processed within the social structure, and the process of the transformation of the torso into a body takes place with social elements (Bingöl, 2017, p. 88). Bilgin (2016, p. 219) says that these seemingly ordinary actions are based on an ideological foundation. According to him, this situation is a cultural, political and economic intervention against the body. Indeed, it is possible to say that there is a similar construction process for the sports field as well. It is observed that a part of the perspective that includes positive or negative aspects in the social field is based on physical attractiveness and ideal body.

Based on Foucault's bio-power approach, Fleming (2014) says that biocracy strengthens the power relations that control individuals and their bodies. The biocracy's process of normalizing some bodies with certain standards or abnormalizing bodies that are outside the set standards finds correspondence mostly in sports institutions (Amsterdam et al. 2017, p. 338). Just as, the standards in sports on emulating the body to something or shaping it in certain dimensions are shaped according to the doxa specific to the field of sports, so the development in the socio-cultural field continues in this way. Bourdieu (2015, p. 50) says that the ruled people look at the relations of domination with the categories that have been created according to

the rulers' point of view, which leads to the fact that these categories seem as if they are natural. This relation of domination affects the practice according to at which social field (sports, family, cultural areas, etc.) it is in. Perhaps, this domination is the reason why a female athlete, who feels so comfortable, and possesses a positive body perception in the sports field, experiences distress in other cultural and social fields.

One of the participants, Sevgi, expressed the problems she experienced with respect to her body in the social field as follows:

*Again, I lived a process of muscling while doing sports. Because my abdominal muscles and arm muscles have started to form. Then my leg muscles, which are currently still very intense. Because we are exercising leg muscles very much. Then, my girlfriends around me started making fun of me. I also lived such a process. When I mentioned about my sportive successes, they were immediately hitting me from there. You know, 'You are muscular, in the future they will sag. It will be like this or that...' Needless to say, I believed whatever people said, since I did not have much information on individual sports. You are influenced. You sorrow involuntarily. Because you really think it will be just like that. (Sevgi, Muay Thai, Kick Boxing)*

Karagöz & Karagün (2015) indicated in their study that athletes who do judo come first among the athletes with a negative body perception. Again, it is possible to say that women having the most problems in the social field are those who do heavy combat sports such as wrestling, taekwondo and karate. In this regard, the comparisons made by Mandal (2014, p. 79-80) between active or less active sports groups revealed that women's satisfaction levels with their bodies are lower than men and that men's body perceptions are more positive.

Because of the prevailing relations in the society, one of the important aspects that legitimizes the ideal body perception is the body norms coded over its contrast (non-ideal) (Topaloğlu, 2010, p. 271). Indeed, the glorification of being thin, on the other hand, the defamation of being overweight (Hacısoftaoğlu & Bulgu, 2012, p. 183) constitute an important place in body perception. Again, another

prominent aspect here is the designation of female body measurements. The masculinization of the external appearance in women or the negative judgment about the muscular female body are characterized as "troublesome bodies". According to Öztürk & Koca (2014, p. 337), in a mentality where the femininity of bodies outside of femininity squeezed into an elegant, desirable, attractive body is questioned, muscular and athletic female athletes are seated on the target board and questioned.

This fear of being questioned and criticized was observed in some participants.

*It would not be a problem when you first start sports, and you are proud of your body as long as you achieve success. When people look at you, happiness occur inwardly. But, after you become a young lady, it changes. For example, when you want to have a relationship with someone of the opposite gender or in a social environment... It changes when you want to wear a beautiful dress while going to a party, a wedding. The statement, "she is like a man", bothers you. The gazes in the wedding hall bother you. What we experience in our daily life is starting to become hard on us. (Suna, Boxing)*

Büşra, who is also a teacher, said that despite quitting sports, she receives similar reactions from her family and students:

*I was not that overweight. But I was being criticized because of my gait and some of my behaviors. For example, as I said, my family still makes fun of me saying my body is masculine. 'You are like man.' Students at the school say 'my teacher, what kind of gait do you have? It's like you're going to beat a man.' Such things always happen. We got used to it as well. (Büşra, Athletics)*

Tondo (2022), in his study on female students, determined that the participants were very uncomfortable with the body shaming experiences they were exposed to, especially in the first period. According to Bourdieu, via doxa, individuals most often accept widespread opinions without knowing much about it. In this sense, views and beliefs that are seen as an obvious consensus but not criticized develop under the influence of doxa. This is regarded as

an unquestionable fact, some concrete cases of this arise as symbolic violence applied to women (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 2013). Bourdieu (2015) states that symbolic violence is shaped through the hidden inclinations and sensitivities of the individual and develops by taking support from dominant opinions and domination relationships.

The common discourse about having a strong body and a "man-like" muscle or body is also seen in the study of Kavasoğlu & Macit (2018). The study draws attention, in the themes of "Masculine domination over the body" and "Troublesome bodies", that having a muscular body is transformed into a troublesome body for females and that the female body is dominated with discourses within the gendered social structure. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) say that with the objectification theory, bodies are gendered and interpreted in this way. In relation to this, Li (2021) remarks that one of the sources of women's body shaming experience in Chinese society is the objectification of the body.

Leyla and Candan are among the participants most widely exposed to this discourse:

*Yes, 'You are like a man; you do not look like a woman.' Everybody was saying. Even when I was passing by the street, they would say, 'Girl is like a man, look!'. Since the clothing is also in that style... Perhaps, as there are too many men around me, I might be acting like them. But most of them are like that. Girls doing this sport are masculine. (Leyla, Kick Boxing)*

*Well, 'Your physique does not befit to woman at all', 'It's getting worse every day', 'You look like a man...' Even my sisters, although they are physical education teachers, used to say 'Candan, you should quit it, when we look behind you while you walk, it is like a man is walking.' Yes, it was generally negative. (Candan, Wrestling)*

For the postmodern consumption culture, we live in, Köse (2016) says: "In this new era, where technology has been effective, the social purchasing power provided by the advantages provided by physical images to the individual has increased so much that it is much more appreciated than the highest level of individual

effort and talent can achieve." Indeed, one last aspect that draws attention in this regard is the anxiety to maintain the aesthetic body acquired through sports after quitting sports. Some participants verbalized that they experienced such an anxiety after quitting sports:

*You experience the distinction after quitting sports. While you eat like you used to, you cannot do sports as much as you used to. When you cannot fit in the clothes, when you sag, people's comments start to come. Some was saying, 'We said not to do this sport. Look at your physique'. Some was saying, 'As times go, you'll be like a bear.' Let alone my household, my friends outside, there was a talk about my body every day. I did not have any successes that I could tell and be proud of anymore. It has always been making me happy until now. Maybe, I am more obsessed with my weight now; I do not know that either, but the comments of the people around myself were really offensive, they still are. (Esra, Wrestling)*

As a result, it was seen that the elite female athletes interviewed in the present study were exposed to comments developed under the influence of the prevailing doxa, as in the sports environment. As a matter of fact, this situation creates a pressure for athletes in terms of the wish to do sports, its frequency, the branch of sports and when they need to end the sport. A significant part of the participants express that they experience tension in the social field due to stereotypes about the body. Although this situation, which Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2021) expresses as the divided habitus, causes a challenge and a renewal in some participants, it was observed that the participants usually have a tendency to create a harmony between the field and the habitus.

## Conclusion

The data obtained in the present study revealed that female athletes are exposed to body shaming experience in different ways both in the sports environment and in the social field. Especially the characteristic of sports developing around the body and discourses and practices advanced within the social structure and hierarchy in which women are tested with their bodies constitute a form of psychological

maltreatment. The view rooted in the society facilitates the discourse and practices of humiliation over the body.

Comments made under the influence of the prevailing doxa both in the sports field and in the social field outside the sports field develops around the measurements that are cut out for to the body of athletes and particularly female ones. Due to consisting of negativities towards female athletes, these comments create a heavy burden on them. The comments that the female participants experienced from individuals in their sports environment demonstrate that sport is done for ambition and competition rather than for education, recreation and health. As a matter of fact, the reason why the emotional abuse experienced by elite athletes is based on a more severe experience results from the fact that sports are performed within a strong competition tradition.

The present study revealed that body shaming experience for athletes develops based on the characteristics of the sports environment and that the field it affects the social relations of the individual is the social and cultural field. The prevailing hegemony that the nature of sports is men-specific nature and the body form it creates is masculine, makes the main focus of comments regarding the body of female athletes. The expressions socially growing around the "male body" discourse cause a reactivity to be born against body characteristics, which are seen as the key to happiness and success in the sports environment and obtained as a result of long exercises. The prevailing social doxa requires sensitivity because of its unchallengeable or irresistible nature. Because of this, athletes who cannot resist the comments coming from the social environment can take more radical decisions such as quitting sports.

Although the stigmatization and humiliation related to the body made in the field of sports is a heavy experience that athletes are exposed to, all authorities in the field of sports socialize with this culture. For an appropriate sport and team environment, confronting this culture and producing solutions appear as indispensable necessities for all actors of sports. Both reducing the tendency to threaten athlete's prosperity

through body, weight and eating habits in the sports environment and raising awareness of the athletes for the discourses that they can face in the social field would contribute more to the prosperity and well-being, which is one of the purposes of doing sports.

Finally, studies about this subject conducted in Turkey are seen to be limited. Today, with the development of social media, both men and women can be subjected to body shaming due to their different bodily features. In this sense, it is possible to carry out qualitative and quantitative studies on different construction processes of body shaming in the sports environment, which is also the subject of the present study, and other social institutions.

*Limitation of the study:* The study data were limited to the experiences of female athletes competing in individual sports. Again, only female athletes were included in the study, and it focused on body shaming experiences they were subjected to.

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