

**An Investigation on the Relationship Between Social Appearance Concerns and Body Perceptions of Weightlifting Athletes at National Team Level<sup>1</sup>**

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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**Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between social appearance anxiety and body perception of national team weightlifting athletes (n=104; 58 males, 46 females) who had extensive weight training experience. The data were analyzed using SPSS 22, including descriptive and inferential statistics such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Independent T test, and Pearson correlation. The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale and Body Perception Scale were used to measure individuals' social appearance anxiety and body perception, respectively. The results indicated that there were no significant differences in body perception and social appearance anxiety scores based on gender, educational or marital status (p>0.05). However, a highly significant negative correlation was found between body perception and social appearance anxiety (p=0.0001). Additionally, there were no significant differences in body perception and social appearance anxiety scores according to age groups (p>0.05). Overall, the study revealed that weightlifters had a good body perception and low social appearance anxiety. Furthermore, as body perception levels increased, social appearance anxiety decreased.

**Keywords:** Weightlifting, Social Appearance, Body Image

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**Milli Takım Düzeyindeki Halter Sporcularının Sosyal Görünüş Kaygıları ile Beden Algıları Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi**

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**Öz**

Bu araştırmanın amacı, milli takım düzeyindeki halter sporcularının sosyal görünüş kaygıları ile beden algıları arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Araştırmaya, halter milli takımlarında yer alan 104 sporcu katılmıştır. Araştırma, sporcuların boy ve vücut ağırlığı, cinsiyet, eğitim durumu, medeni durum ve yaş gruplarına göre sosyal görünüş kaygısı ile beden algısı arasındaki ilişkileri karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sosyal görünüş kaygısını ölçmek için 16 maddelik Sosyal Görünüş Kaygı Ölçeği, beden algısını ölçmek için ise 40 maddelik Vücut Algısı ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Toplanan veriler, SPSS 22 programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, cinsiyet, eğitim durumu ve medeni duruma göre beden algısı ve sosyal görünüş kaygısı puanları arasında anlamlı fark bulunmamıştır. Yaş gruplarına göre de benzer bir sonuç elde edilmiştir. Sporcuların beden algısı ile sosyal görünüş kaygısı arasında ise negatif yönde yüksek düzeyde anlamlı ilişki görülmüştür. Yani, sporcuların beden algısı arttıkça, sosyal görünüş kaygısı azalmaktadır. Araştırma sonucunda, haltercilerin beden algısı iyi seviyelerdeyken sosyal görünüş kaygısının düşük düzeyde olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu sonuçlar, halter sporcularının beden algısı ve sosyal görünüş kaygısı arasındaki ilişkinin daha iyi anlaşılmasına yardımcı olabilir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Halter, Sosyal Görünüş, Vücut Algısı

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## Introduction

One of the issues that people attach importance to today is physical appearance. It has taken its most significant place among individual characteristics not only today but also in the past. The fact that people attach importance to their appearance, handsomeness or beauty has always kept their desire to be admirable at the forefront. It is even shown as a cultural value in magazines, advertisements and television programs (Tekeli, 2017).

People who attach importance to their own body and appearance have taken care of their own bodies naturally in the past, used natural plants and made ornaments for their appearance. When we look at recent times, it can be said that technology has advanced with the development and people are trying to make themselves look more beautiful by trying to pay more attention to the frequency of use of care materials for both body surgeries and skin thanks to these technological possibilities. In fact, as a result of a research conducted in this context, it was found that most of the individuals who went to the beauty center had a low level of self-liking (Yorulmaz and Kurutçu 2019).

An individual's image is not limited to his/her aesthetic appearance. It may vary according to the society, age, health, weight and gender of the individual. At the same time, self-esteem and body evaluation are very intertwined. Self-esteem is the individual's evaluation of his/her own characteristics and determining how he/she sees himself/herself as a person. Rosenberg is one of the first people who come to mind when it comes to self-esteem. He explained the concept of self-esteem as "positive or negative attitudes that an individual thinks about himself" (Haspolat and Kağan 2017).

The perspectives of others are as important as all the feelings and attitudes of the individual about the body. Body perception covers the experiences of the individual and this perception can change over time. The environmental culture, friends, parents and role models in which the individual lives cause the individual's views about his/her body to change. The negative view of the individual may wear him/her down and cause a decrease in self-confidence. It is generally observed that physical appearance also affects the substructure of individuals' behaviors, thoughts and achievements. For example, an individual may feel weak in areas such as career, sexuality and social relations (Demir, 2013). In short, within the framework of purpose and meaning to life. When we look at it, we cannot think of sports and activities outside this framework (Ünlü et al., 2021).

Individuals who are physically at peace with themselves and evaluate themselves in a positive way achieve success in their bilateral relationships with other individuals and in their jobs, while individuals who do not like many aspects of themselves and think that they have flaws in themselves have anxious, restless and insecure feelings in certain periods of their lives (Alemdağ, 2013). The increase in the physical capacity of the individual will lead to an increase in the work capacity. This will contribute to the self-confidence of the individual (Turgut, 2021).

It has been concluded that athletes of weight lifting which have contribution to physical development at the top level, believe the nature of their sports branch contributes more to their physical development and their strength is acknowledged and appreciated by other people (Mumcu et al., 2017). Research on the level of anxiety and body satisfaction of individuals about their physical appearance in society is becoming increasingly important. The study with national team level weightlifting athletes aims to examine the relationship between social appearance anxiety and body perception, and to determine the factors affecting athletes' perceived body appearance, anxiety, and perception. The study is important because it will contribute to other research at other levels, taking into account variables such as age, height, weight, and gender, and the fact that athletes are in society due to competitions. The research aims to provide insights into social appearance anxiety and body perception and to inform future research in this area. In this context, the importance of researches addressing the level of anxiety and body satisfaction of individuals about their physical appearance in society is increasing. One of the reasons for conducting this study with our national team level athletes affiliated to the weightlifting federation is that it is thought that variables such as age, height, weight and gender and the fact that they are in the society due to the competitions will contribute to other researches at other levels. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between social appearance anxiety and body perception of national team level weightlifting athletes who have concentrated on weight training for a long time, to determine how there is a relationship between social appearance anxiety and body perception, to determine the factors affecting the social anxiety of athletes' perceived body appearance, anxiety and perception. Thus, it is aimed to develop information about social appearance anxiety and body perception and to shed light on future research.

## **Materials and Methods**

Survey management was used in the study. The study group consists of licensed and visa national weightlifting athletes affiliated to the Weightlifting Federation in the 2021-2022 sports season. In the study, "Social Appearance Anxiety" and "Body Perception" scales and "Personal Information Form" used by the researcher were used to obtain demographic information about the individuals.

### *Social Appearance Anxiety Scale*

It was developed by Hart et al. (2008) to measure individuals' social appearance anxiety. It was adapted into Turkish by Doğan (2010). The SSIQ, which has a unidimensional measurement structure, has a 5-point Likert-type response key as (1) Not at All Appropriate, (5) Completely Appropriate. It consists of a total of 16 items and item 1 of the scale is reverse coded. High scores

obtained from the SSIQ, which measures social appearance anxiety unidimensionally, mean that appearance anxiety is also high. It was stated that the item-total correlations of the scale ranged between .32 and .82 and that the scale was sufficiently reliable according to the data obtained. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for SSIQ was found to be 0.93, indicating high internal consistency (Doğan, 2010).

### *Body Perception Scale*

A Turkish version was developed by Hovardaoğlu (1993) to measure the body perception of individuals. A single score is obtained from the BDI and all items are scored between 1 and 5 (1: I don't like it at all, 5: I like it very much). A minimum of 40 and a maximum of 200 points are obtained from the scale and an increase in score is considered as an increase in positive evaluation. By subtracting the score of any item from the total score, the item average and the total score average can be compared (Hovardaoğlu, 1993).

The necessary permissions were obtained from Hitit University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee and Weightlifting Federation.

## **Results**

Considering the descriptive data of the participants, the age of the participants was  $15,04 \pm 1,69$  years, height  $169,37 \pm 13,33$  centimeters (cm), body weight  $58,62 \pm 12,23$  kg, athlete age  $3,78 \pm 1,85$  years.

Table 1

Demographic Variables of Participants

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>High School</b>	78	75,0
<b>Undergraduate - Associate Degree</b>	26	25,0
<b>Total</b>	104	100,0
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Single</b>	97	93,3
<b>Married</b>	7	6,7
<b>Total</b>	104	100,0

According to the table, 78 (75%) people at the high school level and 26 (25%) people at the undergraduate-graduate level participated in the study. 97 of the participants were single and 7 were married.

Table 2

Average Age, Height and Body Weight of Participants by Gender

		<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Body Weight (kg)</b>
<b>Male</b>	$\bar{x} \pm$	20,33 $\pm$ 3,47	169,66 $\pm$ 6,20	75,31 $\pm$ 18,34
	<b>N</b>	58	58	58

<b>Female</b>	$\bar{x} \pm$	20,61±4,62	162,26±7,16	69,83±16,65
	<b>N</b>	46	46	46
<b>Total</b>	$\bar{x} \pm$	20,45±4,00	166,38±7,57	72,88±17,74
	<b>N</b>	104	104	104

According to gender, the mean age of the participants was 20.33±3.47 years for males and 20.61±4.62 years for females, mean height was 169.66±6.20 cm for males and 162.26±7.16 cm for females, mean body weight was 75.31±18.34 kg for males and 69.83±16.65 for females.

Table 3

Body Perception and Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score Comparison by Gender

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{x} \pm$	<b>F</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Body Perception Total Score</b>	<b>Male</b>	58	154,24±21,42	3,604	-0,209	102	0,835
	<b>Female</b>	46	155,23±27,17				
<b>Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score</b>	<b>Male</b>	58	33,65±10,94	6,648	-0,715	102	0,476
	<b>Female</b>	46	35,45±14,73				

When the total body perception and social appearance anxiety scores were compared according to gender, there was no significant difference between men and women ( $p > 0.05$ ). Considering the averages, it was found that body perception and social appearance anxiety scores were higher in women.

Table 4

Body Perception and Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score Comparison by Marital Status

	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{x} \pm$	<b>F</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Body Perception Total Score</b>	<b>Single</b>	97	155,34±24,23	1,268	1,040	102	0,301
	<b>Married</b>	7	145,57±20,11				
<b>Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score</b>	<b>Single</b>	97	34,62±12,84	0,343	0,526	102	0,600
	<b>Married</b>	7	32,00±11,51				

According to the table, there was no significant difference between singles and married people, according to marital status, body image and social gaze anxiety total score ( $p > 0,05$ ). When the averages are examined, it has been determined that the body image and social appearance anxiety scores are higher in singles.

Table 5

Body Perception and Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score Comparison by Education Status

	Education	N	$\bar{x} \pm s$	F	t	df	P
Body Perception Total Score	High School	78	154,50±25,08	0,819	-0,134	102	0,894
	Undergraduate - Associate Degree	26	155,23±20,91				
Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score	High School	78	35,10±13,52	5,478	1,052	58,458	0,297
	Undergraduate - Associate Degree	26	32,50±9,90				

When the total score of body perception and social appearance anxiety was compared according to the educational level of the participants in the table, no significant difference was found between high school education level and undergraduate-pre-graduate education level ( $p > 0.05$ ). When the averages were examined, it was found that the score of the bachelor's and associate degree education level was higher than the high school education level in the body perception score, and the social appearance anxiety score was higher in those with high school education level.

Table 6

The Relationship Between Body Perception and Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score According to Age, Height and Body Weight

		Body Perception Total Score	Social Appearance Anxiety Total Score
Age	r	-0,068	-0,152
	p	0,494	0,124
	N	104	104
Boy	r	-0,085	-0,036
	p	0,393	0,713
	N	104	104
Body weight (kg)	r	-0,110	0,094
	p	0,267	0,343
	N	104	104
Body Perception Total Score	r		<b>-0,536**</b>
	p		0,0001
	N		104

\*\* Significant relationship at the 0.01 level.

The table shows the relationship between body perception and social appearance anxiety total score according to age, height and body weight of the participants. No significant relationship was found between body perception and social appearance anxiety and age, height and body weight of the participants ( $p > 0.05$ ). A highly significant negative correlation was found between body perception and social appearance anxiety ( $p = 0.0001$ ). There was a moderate correlation between body perception and social appearance anxiety ( $r = 0.4-0.6$ ).

**Discussion**

When the total scale scores of the participants in the study were analyzed, it was found that the total score of body perception was  $154.68 \pm 24.01$ , while the total score of social appearance

anxiety was  $34.45 \pm 12.72$ . A single score is obtained from the body perception scale. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 40 and the highest score is 200, and an increase in score means an increase in positive evaluation. Accordingly, the fact that the total score of the weightlifters participating in the study from the body perception scale is close to the highest score of 200 points can be interpreted as a good level of body perception. When the literature is examined, Yorulmaz and Kurutçu (2019) found the body perception score as  $98.68 \pm 27.76$  points in men and  $98.51 \pm 25.14$  points in women in their study with an average age of  $30.86 \pm 8.76$ . Social appearance anxiety was found to be  $45.61 \pm 14.22$  points in men and  $42.74 \pm 12.75$  points in women. Social appearance anxiety and body perception scores of the participants in the study were found to be low. Sarıkadıoğlu (2016) found that the mean of the body perception scale of individuals was  $142.30 \pm 40.22$  in his study on adults.

Social appearance anxiety of national team level weightlifting athletes was found to be at a low level. It can be thought that the fact that the athletes are at the elite level and take part in national teams eliminates social appearance anxiety. When the literature was examined, Özkan et al. (2021) found that the average social appearance anxiety of university students was  $1.92 \pm 0.70$  for female participants and  $1.93 \pm 0.70$  for male participants. As a result of the study, it was found that male participants had a higher average of social appearance anxiety. In his study, Erdoğan (2021) found that the social appearance anxiety score of individuals who exercised was  $2.15 \pm 0.68$ . According to the results of Erdoğan (2021), he stated that the social appearance anxiety of individuals who exercise is at a low level.

When the total body perception score was compared according to gender, there was no significant difference between men and women ( $p > 0.05$ ). When the averages were analyzed, it was found that the body perception score was higher in women (Table 3). When the literature on body perception was examined, Güçlü and Yentür (2008) examined the body perception levels of elite female athletes at the national team level and found that the highest level of body perception was found in female soccer players and the second highest level was found in female basketball players. The branches that follow these respectively are as follows: handball, karate and judo. The lowest body perception was found in female athletes engaged in weightlifting and wrestling. They stated that the fact that female athletes engaged in wrestling and weightlifting have a mesomorphic structure physically compared to athletes in other sports branches may have affected their body perception. Karagöz and Karagün (2015) compared the mean body image scores in terms of gender in a study involving weightlifters. They concluded that the mean body image scores of female athletes were significantly lower than the mean scores of male athletes. Delfabro et al. (2011) found that negative body images of girls were significantly higher than boys in their study. There are also studies in the literature stating that gender does not affect body image (Mülazımoğlu Ballı and Aşçı, 2004; Altıntaş

and Aşçı, 2005; Özcan, 2017). As a result of the research, it can be said that although weightlifting is known to be specific to men like wrestling and boxing, the body perception score was high in male and female athletes participating in this study. Although male athletes have high levels of body perception scores in the studies in the literature, the fact that the scores of female athletes in this study are higher than men may be due to the fact that weightlifting sport is specific to men.

When the total score of social appearance anxiety was compared according to gender, there was no significant difference between men and women ( $p>0.05$ ) (Table 3). When the literature on social appearance anxiety is examined, Özcan (2017) concluded in his study that women's social appearance anxiety levels ( $\bar{x}=33.41\pm9.63$ ) were different from men's social appearance anxiety levels ( $\bar{x}=32.63\pm7.57$ ), but this difference was not statistically significant. Soylu et al. (2017) found that there was a significant difference between the groups in terms of social appearance anxiety levels according to gender variable. They concluded that boys have higher social appearance anxiety than girls. However, there are studies in the literature showing that girls have a more negative appearance image or appearance anxiety than boys (Makinen et al. 2012; Wilkosz et al. 2011; Delfabro et al. 2011; Chen et al. 2010; Aygör, 2010; Kalafat and Kıncal, 2008).

When the body perception and social appearance anxiety total score was compared according to the marital status of the participants, there was no significant difference between singles and married people ( $p>0.05$ ). Looking at the averages, it was found that body perception and social appearance anxiety scores were higher in singles (Table 4). The higher social appearance anxiety of singles may be due to the fact that they pay more attention to themselves in terms of appearance. When the literature was examined, Yorulmaz and Kurutçu (2019) found that the body perception score was  $98.92\pm24.11$  points in married people and  $98.06\pm27.33$  points in single people. In the study, the body perception averages of married athletes were higher. In addition, there was no significant difference between the mean body perception scores. Yorulmaz and Kurutçu (2019) found that social appearance anxiety was  $44.01\pm11.09$  points in married people and  $42.34\pm14.48$  points in single people. There was no significant difference in the study according to marital status variables. There are studies in the literature with similar results (Çetintürk, 2021; Durmaz and Özcan 2021; Gökçe and Keçeci, 2020; Musa, 2020; Yağan, 2019; Yorulmaz and Kurutçu, 2019; Pehlivan et al., 2017; Karagöz and Karagün, 2015). There are also different results related to this research in the literature. Korkmaz and Uslu (2020) found that between social appearance anxiety and marital status, the social appearance anxiety levels of single individuals were higher than married individuals.

When the total score of body perception and social appearance anxiety was compared according to the educational status of the participants, no significant difference was found between high school education level and undergraduate-graduate level (Table 5). When the averages were examined, it was found that the body perception score of the bachelor's and associate's degree level



was higher than the high school education level, and the social appearance anxiety score was higher in those with high school education level. When the literature is examined, Macar (2022) found significant changes in social appearance anxiety according to education level in his study on fitness center members. It was found that the mean value of the participants at primary-secondary education level was significantly higher than those at high school, university and graduate education level. A significant difference was found between the social appearance anxiety levels of the participants at the high school education level and those at the graduate education level. While the highest mean value belongs to the participants at primary-secondary education level, the lowest mean value belongs to the participants at graduate education level. He stated that as the level of education increases, the level of social appearance anxiety decreases.

The relationship between body perception and social appearance anxiety total score according to age, height and body weight of the participants was examined. No significant relationship was found between body perception and social appearance anxiety and age, height and body weight of the participants ( $p>0.05$ ). A highly significant negative relationship was found between body perception and social appearance anxiety ( $p=0.0001$ ) (Table 6). It was concluded that as the body perception level of the participants increased, social appearance anxiety decreased. This result is expected. It is normal for social appearance anxiety to decrease when body perception is high. The fact that the study group was athletes may have played a role in these results. The fact that age, height and body weight parameters were not related to body perception and social appearance anxiety may be due to the fact that the average age, height and body weight parameters of the athlete group were close to each other. When the literature is examined, there are studies examining the relationship between body perception and social appearance anxiety. Yılmaz (2015) found a significant negative correlation between social appearance anxiety and body perception. A high score on the social appearance anxiety scale indicates that appearance anxiety is high, and a high body perception scale score indicates that body perception is good. He stated that individuals with high social appearance anxiety have poor body perception. Işıkol (2013) found a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and social appearance anxiety in his study. The results of Işıkol's study and our study were found to be similar. When we look at the studies conducted on social appearance anxiety and other subjects: Cash et al. (2004) found that high levels of social-evaluative anxiety were associated with body image dissatisfaction, overemphasizing appearance, and situational body image dissatisfaction. In a different study, Özkan et al. (2021) concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between social appearance anxiety and healthy living behaviors of university students. Özkan et al. (2021) stated that university students with social appearance anxiety had low health responsibilities, low interpersonal relationships, poor stress management skills, and poor healthy lifestyle habits. As a result of the literature review, the scarcity of studies on the relationship between

social appearance anxiety and body perception draws attention. In general, it was observed that there are studies on self-esteem and body image in the literature.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of the study, it was found that the body perception of the weightlifters participating in the study was at good levels. The social appearance anxiety of the participants is at a low level. When the total score of body perception and social appearance anxiety of weightlifters according to gender is compared, there is no difference between men and women. There is no difference between men and women according to gender. When body perception and social appearance anxiety of weightlifters are compared according to marital status, there is no difference between single and married. There is no relationship between body perception and social appearance anxiety and age, height and body weight of the participants. A highly significant negative correlation was found between the participants' body perception and social appearance anxiety. It was concluded that as the body perception level of the participants increased, social appearance anxiety decreased. The current study was conducted with national team weightlifting athletes. For this reason, it is thought that it is beneficial to conduct comparative studies with different athlete groups and to contribute to research at other levels. In addition, according to the study, it is thought that in order for individuals not to have low social appearance anxiety, it is beneficial for them to be at peace with themselves and increase their body perception levels by making positive use of educational family, environment and other resources.

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## **Authors' Contributions**

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## **Conflicts of interest**

The authors certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial organization regarding the material discussed in the manuscript.

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