

SENSATION SEEKING IN SLOVENIAN FEMALE AND MALE MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS

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Our paper focuses on differences in sensation seeking between male and female athletes who engage in high risk sports. There are several studies (Cox, 1994; Tušak & Tušak, 2001; Erjavec, 2002), which indicate that male and female athletes are more similar than males and females in the general population, female athletes thus show more "traditionally male" characteristics. These studies mainly focus on personality, anxiety and aggression; we wanted to address these issues in the area of sensation seeking. Sensation seeking has been well researched in the area of high risk sports – males seem to have higher sensation seeking needs, but gender differences in high risk sports have been quite poorly investigated. Of 33 mountain climbers who participated in our research, 15 of them were male and 18 female and differences in age were not significant. We used Zuckerman's Sensation seeking scale IV, which examines sensation seeking in terms of 5 factors – a general factor, factors of adventure and risk taking, an experience seeking factor, a disinhibition factor and a boredom susceptibility factor. There were no differences found between male and female mountain climbers, except for a tendency toward statistical significance in the factor of disinhibition, which is consistent with some previous research. We conclude that male and female mountain climbers in Slovenia are equal in sensation seeking needs and can be treated as a homogenous sample.

Keywords: Mountain climbing, sensation seeking, high risk sports, gender differences.

INTRODUCTION

Scientists have frequently studied the influence of gender on personality differences (Cox, 1994). Women are more neurotic, less serene and less capable of controlling themselves, respectively, less dominant (more considerate and moderate, tolerant and indulgent and understanding), more suppressed (have more anxieties and are insecure when a decision has to be made), less emotionally stable and show less masculinity and competitiveness (Cox, 1994).

Tušak and Tušak (2001) report that the majority of studies on women and sportswomen's personalities were founded on a bipolar model that represent typical male characteristics (dominance, aggression, self confidence and motivation for achievement) on one side and passivity on the other. On this basis, the conclusion that sportswomen have more male attributes emerges. However, this is a very stiff way of looking at male – female characteristics. It can not be said that men have no emotions, while on the other hand numerous successful sportswomen are very sensitive. This led to the establishment of a new flexible model in the 1960. According to this model, behaviour is considered from a situation – specific point of view. Men as well as women behave according to the situation. In sport, where activity and aggression is required, they are active and aggressive,

in love they can be emotional and don't tend to be as assertive. In some other situation they behave in correspondence with that specific situation. Women often become depressed, anxious and dissatisfied when their career is finished. The price of emotional in sport can be, especially where women are concerned, very high. For a woman, success can also be a sort of frustration and stress, respectively. It was found out that male athletes show less fear of success than female athletes.

Besides the result mentioned by Tušak and Tušak (2001), that female athletes display many traditionally male characteristics, such as dominance, aggression, competitiveness, emotional stability, lower neuroticism and lower repression, similar results are reported also by Erjavec (2002) – she found no differences between the personality traits and motivational characteristics of male and female track and field athletes. She explained that this is brought about by the high demands the sport imposes on a female athlete these days, and she agrees with Cox (1994), who states that this can be difficult for a woman, since it conflicts with the traditional image of a woman – quiet, submissive, somewhat repressed and non competitive. Pedersen-Darhl (1997) found different results – the male athletes examined in their research were more active, aggressive, competitive and dominant, whilst the female athletes were more goal oriented, better organized and followed the rules more

accurately. Differences between male and female athletes were established also by Swain and Jones (1991), who found female athletes to be higher in both trait and state anxiety.

Motivated human activity is regulated by the central nervous system, which is situated in the area of the hypothalamus and reticular formation. The first one is in charge of the survival of an organism, while the second one sustains an optimal level of excitement. Among the first formal theories concerning an optimal level of excitement appeared that of Zuckerman (1994). He stated ten postulates within which he determined the characteristics of the following factors: the current level of excitement at a given moment, the activation potential of sensations, an optimal level of stimulation, as well as the boundary between cortical and autonomous stimulation, and the factors that trigger one or the other. The results of his studies show that the performance of the cortex is disturbed when it is over or understimulated. That furthermore causes a loss of control over emotional reactions.

Zuckerman (1994) determined the sensation seeking need to be a "motivation for seeking different, new, complex and intense sensations and experiences, as well as the willingness to take physical, social, legal, or financial risk if necessary to achieve them". He also stated that a person, who had an urgent sensation need, underestimated risk or was willing to take it as the price for the reward of a new experience. Sensation seekers, however, only rarely take unnecessary risk, but rather try to minimise it. Zuckerman (1994) thus defined a person with high sensation need to be open to new experiences, active, impulsive, in need of excitement and stimulating experiences, and expressing positive feelings as well as anger.

Zuckerman (1994) also defined risk as an estimation of certain behaviour to turn out negatively. Sensation need grows according to the novelty of a situation and risk assessment up to a point of optimal excitement. At that point, tendencies for withdrawal and advancement are the strongest. It represents sensation seeking and anxiety at the same time. When the estimated risk is too high, anxiety and a withdrawal tendency prevail. Dahlbäck (1990) developed a theory of conflict with which he tried to explain human risk taking. According to his theory, impulsive risk should not trigger a conflict, while non impulsive decision making triggers a conflict between possibilities and their potential negative impact. A decision of an athlete is therefore the product of his/her anxieties, stick to it iveness, and an inclination to develop feelings of guilt. According to Dahlbäck (1990) athletes who are taking the highest risk are those who are capable of keeping their eye on the ball, are not anxious to lose control over a situation and don't develop feelings of guilt. Levenson (1990) studied sensa-

tion need in different types of persons. Persons in the first group were denominated "heroes", as they took risk in a pro social manner (e.g. policemen, firemen, etc). The second group consisted of drug addicts, who take risk in an anti social manner. In the third group there were mountain climbers, who take risk in an adventurous manner.

Distinctive and very poorly studied are female mountain climbers. They have been present in Slovenian mountain climbing since the beginning of modern mountain climbing. There have never been many of them. At the beginning there were only a few individual excellent climbers who had to constantly prove themselves against their male colleagues. The number of female mountain climbers has increased lately. However, the proportion that can be observed in other sports has never been reached. Burnik, Jug and Tušak (2002) found that Slovenian female mountain climbers were more enduring, indisposed, disturbed, had more difficulties with establishment of social contacts, a low tolerance for frustration, general psychosomatic disturbances, low self confidence, that they are more self critical and have stronger feelings of loneliness and inferiority in comparison with their male colleagues.

Studies of sensation seeking in male and female high risk sports athletes are few, Campbell, Tyrrell and Zingaro (1993) studied sensation seeking in white water kayakers and included both male and female athletes. They found that both male and female athletes scored higher than the average population in the risk subscale, but reported no differences between both genders. Some research shows that disinhibition is higher in male high risk sports athletes than in females in such sports according to Hartman and Rawson (1992, in Zuckerman, 1994) – this was confirmed also in the sample of non-athletes.

Cronin (1991) conducted research thanks to which he found that alpinists score higher in sensation seeking in total when compared to the general population and lower than the general population in the disinhibition subscale – the interesting part of his research was that he included both male and female alpinists and considered them to be a homogenous sample, meaning that there are no differences between them. Chirivella and Martinez (1994) did the same when attempting to distinguish between high risk sports and medium risk sports – the sample of high risk sports consisted of both male and female athletes. The same procedure was undertaken also by Wagner and Houlihan (1994) and Jack and Ronan (1998). All these authors considered male and female high risk sports athletes to be equal in risk – taking (which is understood by using them as a homogenous sample), although they offer no statistical data to support this claim.

Within the framework of our study, we attempted to offer more data and shed more light onto the question of the sensation seeking needs of our female and male mountain climbers – our aim was to determine and compare the sensation seeking needs of our female and male mountain climbers. No studies that would investigate this problem have been carried out in Slovenia before now. This is mostly due to the small number of women mountain climbers in Slovenia as well as in the world.

METHOD

Participants

A group of 33 Slovenian male and female mountain climbers aged between 22 and 30 years were studied ($M = 24.93$ years; $SD = 2.11$ years). There were 15 male and 18 female mountain climbers. All of them were members of Slovenian climbing clubs, the difference in age between both groups was not significant.

Instruments

Sensation seeking scale (SSS - IV) – Zuckerman (1994): The questionnaire consists of 72 pairs of statements. Each time, the subject has to choose the one that best represents him or her, the factors being as follows (Lamovec, 1988):

The general factor marks the desire for an exciting life, full of adventure, a tendency to want to experience everything possible, and it is also demonstrated as an interest in unusual and exciting sports, for unplanned travelling and experiencing extraordinary sensations with the use of drugs, hypnosis, etc. It also includes the desire to associate with unpredictable, dynamic and emotionally expressive people.

The factor of adventure and risk taking encompasses the desire for participating in unusual physical activities, such as sky gliding, sky diving, diving, alpinism, car racing and the like.

The experience seeking factor refers to seeking out unusual sensual or mental experiences and to the unconventionality of one's lifestyle. It is marked by the need to wear extraordinary clothes, to shock others, by having an interest in extraordinary places and people, using drugs, and so on.

The disinhibition factor includes seeking pleasure, mainly sexual pleasure. It is marked by the desire to engage in wild parties, attended by happy and attractive people that give in to uninhibited sensuality, often under the influence of alcohol.

The factor of boredom susceptibility includes the rejection of repetitive events, routine, rejection of always the same people and places, of predictable and boring people. It is connected with the tendency to change work

places every once in a while, to buy and try new products, to test new and unknown dishes and so forth.

The Slovene translation was published in the work of Lamovec (1988). There is no data for Slovene samples, but the authors of the test report α reliability coefficients between 0.68 and 0.84 for risk taking, experience and disinhibition factors and 0.62 and 0.66 for males on boredom susceptibility and 0.38 and 0.56 for females. The test-retest method rendered a high coefficient 0.89 after three weeks and 0.75 after 6 to 8 months (Zuckerman, 1994).

Procedure

The application of the questionnaires was carried out on a number of separate groups from January 2006 till March 2007. The results for all groups were collected anonymously, that is, the ethical code of the Slovene Association of psychologists was respected. The T-test was used to establish differences between both groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1

Differences between male and female alpinists in sensation seeking

Factor	Group	M	SD	t	p (t)
GENERAL	Males	9.33	2.77	-0.06	0.96
	Females	9.39	2.77		
TAS	Males	6.27	1.75	0.31	0.76
	Females	6.06	2.15		
ES	Males	7.40	2.87	0.68	0.50
	Females	6.83	1.86		
Dis	Males	6.40	2.44	-1.73	0.09
	Females	7.94	2.64		
BS	Males	9.13	2.03	-0.50	0.62
	Females	9.56	2.71		

Legend:

GENERAL – general factor of sensation seeking,

TAS – thrill and adventure seeking factor,

ES – experience seeking factor,

Dis – disinhibition factor,

BS – boredom susceptibility factor,

MIN – minimum,

MAX – maximum,

M – mean,

SD – standard deviation,

t – t value,

p (t) – significance of t-test.

Our results, as displayed in TABLE 1, show, that there are no differences between male and female mountain climbers, there is only one tendency toward

statistical significance, which is shown in the factor of disinhibition. This finding, although it might be surprising, since studies indicate that risk taking and sensation seeking is higher in males than in females (Zuckerman, 1994; Dahlbäck, 1990; Levenson, 1990), can be well understood when we take into consideration studies comparing male and female athletes in non risk sports. These show that there are fewer differences between male and female athletes than there are between male and female non athletes (Tušak & Tušak, 2001; Erjavec, 2002).

It could be said that females in sport show a greater amount of male attributes or traits, such as aggression, lower neuroticism, dominance, emotional stability and the like, the fact of which often leads them into conflicts with the traditional society, where females are expected to be good looking, submissive, and to take care of the house and children (Cox, 1994). Studies in comparing male and female athletes have been done in the area of personality traits. Burnik, Jug and Tušak (2002) even compared the personality of male and female alpinists, some comparing anxiety (Swain & Jones, 1991), while the area of sensation seeking in sports has been somewhat left out. Worth mentioning is the research done by Hartman and Rawson (1992, in Zuckerman, 1994), who found disinhibition to be higher in male high risk sports athletes, a result which has been partially confirmed also in our study with a tendency toward statistical significance.

We could thus say that there are some indications that female high risk sports athletes engage less often in pleasure seeking, especially sexual pleasure. They seem to engage in wild parties less frequently, surrender to uninhibited sensuality less frequently and give into alcohol and drugs less often than male high risk sports athletes.

Other studies on sensation seeking in high risk sports, which included male and female athletes, made no distinction between both genders (Campbell, Tyrrell, & Zingaro, 1993; Cronin, 1991; Chirivella & Martinez, 1994; Wagner & Houlihan, 1994; Jack & Ronan, 1998). All these authors considered male and female high risk sports athletes to be equal in risk taking by treating them as a homogenous sample, but offer no statistical data to support this claim. Our study supports their findings – there actually seem to be no differences between male and female athletes in high risk sports when it comes to sensation seeking. This could be well explained by the type of activity they engage in. Both male and female alpinists (if we focus especially on the sport our participants engage in) face the same task. They both go up the same mountain, they both have to look out for avalanches, scrutinize conditions hard

and well and both genders face the same consequences, when things go wrong. We could say that the task before them could be successfully accomplished only when sensation seeking needs are high enough for the athletes to accept the situation of possible danger, which even stimulates them further. The same could be said for all other high risk sports. It seems that males and females in these sports really have equally high sensation seeking needs. The filter assumed by Breivik (1999) works in the gender sense as well. Only people with sufficiently high sensation seeking needs will engage in high risk sports, however, the filter has to be higher and more powerful in females, since the general level of sensation seeking in this gender is lower than in males.

We can conclude by stating that there are no differences in male and female high risk sports athletes and that they actually can be considered as homogenous samples when studying this group of sports.

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VYHLEDÁVÁNÍ PROŽITKU U SLOVINSKÝCH HOROLEZKYŇ A HOROLEZCŮ

Naše pojednání se zaměřuje na odlišnosti ve vyhledávání prožitku („sensation seeking“) u sportovkyň a sportovců, kteří se věnují vysoce rizikovým sportům. Existuje několik studií (Cox, 1994; Tušak & Tušak, 2001; Erjavec, 2002), jež udávají, že sportovkyně a sportovci si jsou podobnější než ženy a muži v obecné populaci, tj. sportovkyně vykazují více „tradičně mužských“ charakteristik. Tyto studie se zaměřují zejména na osobnost, úzkost a agresi; těmito otázkami jsme se chtěli zabývat v oblasti vyhledávání prožitku. Vyhledávání prožitku bylo v oblasti vysoce rizikových sportů dobře prozkoumáno – u mužů byly zaznamenány vyšší potřeby vyhledávání prožitku, ale rozdíly mezi pohlavími v oblasti vysoce rizikových sportů doposud nebyly dobře probádány. Našeho výzkumu se zúčastnilo 33 horolezců, z toho 15 mužů a 18 žen a nepřehlíželo se k věkovým rozdílům. Použili jsme Zuckermanův dotazník Sensation

seeking scale IV, jenž zkoumá vyhledávání prožitku za pomoci 5 faktorů, jimiž jsou všeobecný faktor; faktory podstoupení rizika; faktor hledání zkušenosti; faktor odtlumení (disinhibice) a faktor vnímavosti nudy. Mezi horolezkyněmi a horolezci nebyly nalezeny rozdíly s výjimkou tendence ke statistické významnosti u faktoru odtlumení, jenž je v souladu s některými předchozími výzkumy. Náš závěr je ten, že horolezkyně a horolezci ve Slovinsku jsou si rovni v potřebách vyhledávání prožitku a lze je považovat za homogenní vzorek.

Klíčová slova: horolezectví, vyhledávání prožitku, vysoce rizikové sporty, rozdíly mezi pohlavími.

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