Volume 2 (2) Page 54 - 69 https://doi.org/10.29329/ijcae.2023.644.2 Copyright © 2023. Open Access Article CC BY-NC-ND

Examining the Relationship Between Young Boxers' Attitudes Towards Gender Roles and Athlete Identities

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between young boxers' attitudes towards gender roles and their athlete identities. In order to achieve this objective, the study explores the levels of attitudes towards gender roles and athlete identities among young boxers, the impact of gender on gender roles and athlete identity, and the relationship between gender roles and athlete identity. The study utilizes a correlational survey model. The study group consists of 60 young athletes (25 males, 35 females) engaged in boxing in different cities of Turkey, with ages ranging from 14 to 28. Data for the research were collected through a personal information form, an attitude scale towards gender roles, and an athlete identity scale. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and Pearson correlation analysis were employed for data analysis using the SPSS 22 program. The research findings indicate that young boxers exhibit egalitarian attitude towards gender ((X)=41.96), and their levels of athlete identity are high (X=42.71). A significant difference in attitudes towards gender roles is observed between male and female athletes, favoring males (p<0.05). Moreover, the impact of gender on attitudes towards gender roles is found to be substantial (d=0.87). While there is no significant difference in athlete identity scores between male and female athletes, descriptive statistics reveal higher scores for female athletes compared to male athletes. When examining the relationship between athlete identity and attitudes towards gender roles, a positive, low-level, and significant correlation is identified (r=0.286, p<0.05). It is suggested that young individuals aspiring to pursue a career in the boxing field should be aware of these dynamics and critically evaluate their own attributes in comparison to the prevailing circumstances.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Athlete İdentity, Boxing, Career Awareness.

Received: 10.11.2023 – **Accepted:** 29.12.2023 – **Published:** 31.12.2023

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INTRODUCTION

Almost every child responds to the question posed by adults, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' by typically naming a limited number of professions such as 'teacher, doctor, police officer, pilot.' Children express these professions with all their innocence, often without contemplating whether they would enjoy pursuing that profession, possess the necessary skills, or consider the implications of engaging in that occupation. Influenced by family members, beloved elders, teachers, friends, and prominent figures in the media or film characters, individuals initiate the exploration of professions and assess their suitability (Agarwala, 2008; Brinthaupt et al., 2016; Fayadh et al., 2017; Hassan, 2022). As individuals age and mature, their preferences, life expectations, values, skills, and potential contributions to life become more evident, underscoring the significance of societal values attached to professions, educational opportunities offered to individuals, academic success, and societal employment policies in the process of career selection (Çetin Gündüz, Tarhan & Kılıç, 2015). It is believed that a fundamental factor influencing all these aspects is societal gender (Çetin Gündüz & Tarhan, 2017; Gönel et al., 2012).

The renowned philosopher and writer Simone de Beauvoir, in her book titled 'The Second Sex' (La Deuxieme Sexe) written in 1949, articulated the statement 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.' With this, she emphasized that the state of being a woman is more about the various behaviors and roles imposed on them by society than being solely biological, thereby addressing the distinction between biological sex and gender (social gender). Gender is a concept used to elucidate individuals' physical appearances and natural attributes (Başak, 2015). Additionally, within the context of an individual's biological sex, gender is a demographic data point that is primarily explored in sociological field studies. The biological sex of an individual, born biologically as female or male, undergoes a transformation during the socialization process as a result of social and cultural interactions. This transformation can be expressed as the societal transformation of gender influenced by culture (Dikici, 2022). Social gender is a topic sociologists emphatically focus on for the establishment of order in future generations and societies (Yüksel, 2014).

The roles assigned to gender have influenced the perception of certain professions as either 'women's work' or 'men's work,' impacting the types of occupations men and women may pursue (Altuntaş, Atlı, & Kış, 2016). The primary reason for this lies in the socialization of individuals from birth, where men are socialized with independent, assertive, and masculine individual values, while women are socialized with feminine, caring, and service-oriented values (Uyguç, 2003). Although cultural dynamics and expectations of men and women vary across societies, these differences, shaped by societal norms, significantly influence individuals' career choices (Özkaplan, 2013; Özyürek, 2013). For example, men are expected to choose professions such as athletes, politicians, soldiers, or

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drivers, reflecting qualities like being more active, rational, assertive, and combative compared to women. On the other hand, women are expected to opt for professions like teachers, nurses, or fashion designers, embodying qualities of being nurturing, emotional, compassionate, and fond of children (Güdücü, 2018).

Slattery (2012, p. 341) raises questions within the context of gender studies: 'Are the behaviors of men and women in society influenced by their biology or culture? Are men and women inherently different, or is it due to the society they live in? Are men inherently in an active/doing position, while women are caregivers? Is a man's place outside, and a woman's place at home? Are men inherently aggressive, emotionless, and rational, while women are emotional, intuitive, and passive beings?' These questions continue to be extensively studied in current gender studies, and the common ground reached is that societal gender roles have arisen through a cultural transformation based on biological gender (Eisend, 2019; Pekel, 2019; Tire, 2020). Constructing societal expectations regarding which behavioral patterns and roles are suitable for men and women based on societal gender roles has given rise to certain inequalities and discriminations for both genders (Ecevit, 2003). Discriminatory attitudes particularly limit job opportunities for women and prompt both men and women to lean towards professions aligned with traditional gender roles during career choices (Correll, 2001).

Discrimination constructed upon societal gender roles and its effects are also observed in sports disciplines. Modern sports reflect the culture and knowledge of the society in which they exist (Bozca & Akgül, 2022). Zafer (2018) investigated the relationship between sports and gender through wrestlers. The study revealed that 88% of participants believed in a connection between sports and gender, and those actively engaged in wrestling perceived it as a sport exclusive to men. Kavasoğlu and Yaşar (2016) examined the experiences of male athletes in sports predominantly pursued by women and female athletes in sports predominantly pursued by men, based on a social gender perspective. The research found that societal gender roles led to restrictive and challenging practices for both male and female athletes. Karabörklüargut (2021) observed a tendency for the view that men have a more determining influence on the characteristics associated with gender in sports. The structured societal gender roles contribute to the preference of certain sports by women and men, where women tend to prefer swimming, walking, pilates, volleyball, step-aerobics, figure skating, and men tend to desire sports like martial arts, football, wrestling, skiing, mountaineering, and basketball (Yüksel, 2014). The findings of the study by Emir, Karacam, and Koca (2015) titled 'Female Boxers: Wearing Gloves Constantly Inside and Outside the Boxing Ring' reveal that the boxing arena is socially gendered. Additionally, female boxers are required to develop and implement various strategies to exist in this field. Families tend to support the participation of male children in sports to

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enhance their development, while female children are often steered away from physically demanding sports to preserve their feminine attributes (Koca, 2006).

Social gender roles emerge as a phenomenon that not only influences the choice of sports type and profession but also significantly impacts careers in general (Avcı et al., 2019). There is a positive and meaningful relationship between individuals' career adaptability, which refers to their capacity to cope with obstacles encountered in the career process, and societal gender roles (Siyez & Belkis, 2016). A meaningful relationship exists between athlete identity, which can be considered as career adaptability for athletes, and the conflict of societal gender roles (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010). Athlete identity can be defined as the mental organization of the athlete and the social role assigned to the athlete (Tekkurşun Demir & Güvendi, 2022). Athlete identity is expressed as a three-dimensional concept comprising social identity, sport-related limitations, and negative affectivity (Brewer et al., 1993; cited in Öztürk & Koca, 2013). Social identity is defined as the athlete perceiving themselves as an athlete in the eyes of others, creating a unique image as an athlete, and encompassing other selfconcepts to the extent of sport-related limitations (Hagiwaraa et al., 2022). Negative affectivity is expressed as the concern athletes feel when they fail to fulfill their athlete roles and the anxiety related to poor performance (Öztürk & Koca, 2013). Athletes' love for their sports, the support they receive from those around them, and the achievements they have gained are influential in the development of athlete identity (Kaya et al., 2018).

There are various studies examining the relationships between athlete identity and different variables. Relationships have been identified between athlete identity and engaging in prosocial behaviors towards teammates (Görgülü et al., 2018), general self-efficacy levels (Caba & Pekel, 2017), homophobia (Saraç & Toprak, 2016), perception of violence (Esenkaya, Ulukan, & Ulukan, 2021), sportsmanship orientations (Turan, 2021), social role conflict (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010), effective communication levels (Karakuş, 2022), courage and self-confidence feelings (Kaçay & Can, 2017). However, there is no research encountered in the literature specifically examining the relationship between athlete identity and societal gender roles. In this study, young individuals engaged in boxing for at least two years were investigated. Boxing is integrated with the patriarchal understanding, perceived as a sport exclusive to men due to the athletic structure associated with men (Emir, Karaçam, & Koca, 2015). Considering gender as one of the strong stereotypes (Dökmen, 2010), understanding the attitudes of young individuals engaged in boxing towards societal gender roles is important, especially when gender, which holds significant weight in career choices, does not limit career options (Özyürek, 2013). Recognizing and overcoming obstacles is crucial.

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Understanding the athlete identities of young individuals engaged in boxing will reveal their career adaptability actively participating in this sport. Understanding the relationship between their attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities will also uncover the societal gender influence on the development of athlete identity in young individuals practicing boxing, providing guidance for those who aspire to choose this profession. Making career choices based on the qualities one possesses is undoubtedly crucial for future success and job satisfaction. Recognizing whether culturally shaped gender roles have an impact on the development of athlete identity for successful boxing athletes is also important for guiding young individuals choosing this profession and overcoming societal barriers in this process. In this regard, the study is expected to contribute to 'Conscious Awareness and Career Consciousness' studies.

This research aims to examine the relationship between the attitudes of young individuals engaged in boxing towards societal gender roles and their athlete identities. To achieve this goal, the following questions were addressed:

- What is the level of attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities among young individuals engaged in boxing?
- Do the attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities differ based on the gender of young individuals engaged in boxing?
- Is there a relationship between the attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities among young individuals engaged in boxing?

METHODOLOGY

In this section, information is provided about the research design, participants, data collection tools, data collection process, and data analyses.

Research Design

A relational survey model was employed to investigate the relationship between the athlete identities of young individuals engaged in boxing and their attitudes towards societal gender roles. This model aims to determine the direction and extent of relationships between two or more variables (Karasar, 2014).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 60 athletes engaged in boxing from different cities in Turkey, with ages ranging from 14 to 28. Purposive sampling, a non-random sampling method, was employed to select participants who could provide rich information in the context of the study's objectives. The

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criteria for forming the study group were based on the qualification of engaging in boxing. The young boxers in this study were determined through convenience sampling. Among the participants, 41.7% (n=25) were male, and 58.3% (n=35) were female, with an average age of 20.8. They had been involved in boxing for a period ranging from two to ten years. Additionally, 33.3% (n=20) of the participants had represented the national boxing team, and 56.6% (n=34) had achieved success in the competitions they participated in, ranging from local championships to world championships. 10.1% of them (n=6) are in preparation for local and national competitions.

Furthermore, 23.3% (n=14) of the participants were involved in sports coaching, physical education teaching, or coaching, and one participant was an academician. 76.6% (n=46) of the young boxers are students. Approximately 7% of the participants stated that they started boxing due to encouragement from someone close to them, while 25% initiated the sport based on their own interest and enthusiasm. 68% started their boxing career through interest.

Data Collection Tools

The research utilized a data collection form, the Attitude Scale towards Societal Gender Roles, and the Athlete Identity Scale. The participants voluntarily completed these tools online.

Data Collection Form

The data collection form included information about the participants' gender, age, occupation, duration of engagement in boxing, national representation status, achievements in competitions, reasons for starting boxing, and other relevant details.

Attitude Scale towards Societal Gender Roles

The Attitude Scale towards Societal Gender Roles, adapted by Bakioğlu and Türküm (2019) from the original scale developed by García-Cueto et al. (2015), consists of 15 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale, where 13 items are reverse-scored, reflects attitudes towards societal gender roles, with a possible score range of 15 to 75. The internal consistency of the scale for this study was found to be .876, indicating its reliability.

Athlete Identity Scale

The Athlete Identity Scale, originally named Athletic Identity Measurement Scale and developed by Brewer and Cornelius (2001), was adapted into Turkish by Öztürk and Koca (2013). The scale consists of seven items measuring three sub-dimensions: social identity, sport-related

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limitation, and negative affectivity. The scale, scored on a 7-point Likert scale, demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .974 for this study.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected during the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The three-part form, consisting of the data collection form, Attitude Scale towards Societal Gender Roles, and Athlete Identity Scale, was administered online by the researchers. Participants were informed about the purpose, significance, and structure of the measurement tools. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, and their data would be used solely for scientific purposes, ensuring confidentiality and security. This information was also included in the Google Form where the data were collected. The completion of the form took approximately 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 22 software. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, mode, median, skewness, and kurtosis, were initially calculated. The Attitude Scale towards Societal Gender Roles showed a skewness coefficient of .445 and a kurtosis coefficient of .065, and the Athlete Identity Scale had a skewness coefficient of -.103 and a kurtosis coefficient of .908, indicating a normal distribution. Independent samples t-test was conducted to assess whether the athlete identities and attitudes towards societal gender roles of young individuals engaged in boxing differed based on their gender. The effect size, calculated using the Cohen's d, was determined using the tool available at https://www.psychometrica.de/effect_size.html. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between the two variables.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ministry of National Education of the province where the research was conducted (Approval Number: E-99191664-605.01-65647396). Permission to use the measurement tools was also obtained from the academics who developed them. Informed consent forms were sent to the Ministry of National Education along with parental consent forms for participants under the age of 18.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings derived from the analysis of the data are presented under headings related to the research questions.

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Athlete Identities and Gender Attitudes among Young Boxers

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Athlete Identities and Attitudes toward Societal Gender Roles of Young Individuals Engaged in Boxing

Variable	N	Minimum	Maksimum	\bar{X}	SS
Attitudes Towards Societal Gender Roles	60	18.00	75.00	41.96	13.05
Athlete Identities	60	7.00	49.00	42.71	10.25

When examining Table 1, it is observed that the attitude scores of young individuals engaged in boxing toward societal gender roles range from 18 to 75, with a mean score of 41.96. The scores obtained from the athlete identity scale range from 7 to 49, with a mean score of 42.71. This finding suggests that the level of athlete identity among young boxers is relatively high as the highest score is 49.

Young Individuals in Boxing: Differences in Athlete Identities and Attitudes towards Societal Gender Roles Based on Gender

Table 2. Young Boxers' Gendered Attitudes and Athlete Identity: t-Test Results

Variables	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Ss	Sd	t	p
Attitudes Towards Societal	Male	25	48.08	14.75	58	3.31	.002
Gender Roles	Female	35	37.60	9.74		3.31	.002
Athlete Identities	Male	25	40.68	11.44	5 0	-1.308	106
	Female	35	44.17	9.21	58	-1.308	.196

When examining the results presented in Table 2, there is no significant difference in terms of athlete identity between male and female athletes (p > .05). However, there is a significant difference in attitudes toward societal gender roles between male and female athletes (p < .05, t = 3.31). The attitude scores of male athletes toward societal gender roles (X = 48.08) are higher than those of female athletes (X = 37.60). When the effect size (Cohen's d) for this analysis is calculated, the effect size is found to be .87. An effect size greater than .80 is considered strong (Özsoy & Özsoy, 2013). In other words, the influence of gender on attitudes toward societal gender roles is substantial. Additionally, while there is no significant difference in athlete identity scores between male and female athletes, the athlete identity scores of female athletes (X = 44.17) are higher than those of male athletes (X = 40.68).

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The Correlation Between Athlete Identities and Gender Attitudes among Young Boxers

Table 3. The Correlation Between Athlete Identities and Gender Attitudes among Young Boxers

		Attitudes Towards Societal Gender Roles	
A 41-1-4-	r	.286	
Athlete	p	.02	
Identities N	N	60	

p<. 05, r=Pearson Correlation.

When examining the relationship between athlete identity and attitudes toward societal gender roles, a low-level, positively significant correlation was found between the two variables (p < .05, r = .286). The interpretation of correlation coefficients for low, medium, and high levels is essential in understanding the strength of relationships between variables. According to (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014), an absolute value of the correlation coefficient between 0.70-1.00 indicates a high-level relationship, 0.30-0.50 indicates a medium-level relationship, and 0.00-0.29 indicates a low-level relationship. According to this finding, as athletes' levels of athletic identity increase, their attitudes toward societal gender roles also increase. In other words, as the level of athletic identity rises, athletes tend to adopt a more egalitarian gender role attitude.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this research examining the relationship between the attitudes of young boxers towards societal gender roles and their athlete identities, the levels of attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities of young individuals were initially determined. It was observed that young individuals engaging in boxing possess egalitarian attitude towards societal gender roles, and their athlete identity levels are high (42.71 out of 49). The attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities were also compared based on gender. A significant difference was found between male and female athletes in terms of attitudes towards societal gender roles, favoring males. Simultaneously, the impact of gender on attitudes towards societal gender roles was identified as substantial or strong. While there was no significant difference in athlete identity scores between male and female athletes, descriptive analysis revealed that female athletes have higher athlete identity scores than male athletes.

Another key finding is young boxers possess egalitarian attitude towards societal gender roles. A study conducted with students from a sports science faculty concluded that students tend to adopt a traditional perspective (Yıldız & Keçeci, 2016). Previous research on athletes often focused on gender roles (feminine, masculine, social acceptability) (Baştuğ & Kuru, 2009; Koca et al., 2004). Research on young individuals in different fields investigating attitudes towards societal gender roles

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indicates that students mostly have attitudes towards gender equality (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017; Ergin et al., 2019; Karasu et al., 2017; Palas Karaca & Çubukçu Aksu, 2020; Sis et al., 2013). The current study's findings align with similar outcomes in the literature. The discovery that young individuals engaged in boxing tend to adopt egalitarian attitudes towards gender equality is noteworthy. This result suggests that athletes in the male-dominated sport of boxing embrace equality. Additionally, it contributes to breaking down biases for those interested in pursuing boxing, providing guidance in this regard. The high levels of athlete identities among young boxers are notable. Similarly, Caba and Pekel (2017) found high levels of athlete identities among active young athletes. Tekkurşun Demir and Güvendi (2022) found that national athletes with physical disabilities have high athlete identity scores. Furthermore, Costa et al. (2020) expected to observe stronger athletic identity in athletes competing at higher levels. Other studies in the literature also indicate high levels of athlete identity among athletes (Esenkaya et al., 2021; Görgülü et al., 2018; Saraç & Toprak, 2016; Karakuş, 2022; Turan, 2021). The passion young boxers have for their sport, their integration of themselves with their sport, and their identification with the role of a boxer may contribute to their high levels of athlete identity.

Significantly, a difference was found between male and female athletes in terms of attitudes towards societal gender roles, favoring males. In the current study, male boxers exhibited more egalitarian attitudes towards societal gender roles compared to female boxers. However, the majority of research on young individuals in Turkey indicates that males tend to adopt more non-egalitarian roles (Çetinkaya Kodan, 2013; Ergin et al., 2019; Palas Karaca & Çubukçu Aksu, 2020; Uçar et al., 2017). This is supported by various studies that have consistently shown that young women tend to exhibit more egalitarian attitudes than young men (Askari et al., 2010; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017; Freund et al., 2013; Marcos & Bahr, 2001; Pavlou et al., 2008). For instance, Dotti Sani and Quaranta (2017) found that even in adolescence, young women show more egalitarian attitudes than young men and avoid conforming to traditional gender roles. Studies conducted with adults also yield similar results (Secgin & Tarı Selçuk, 2022; Ulusu, 2022). The finding that male boxers in the current study exhibit more egalitarian attitudes towards societal gender roles than their female counterparts is surprising. This result may be due to the limited sample size of 60 boxers in the research. Different results could be obtained with larger samples. The more egalitarian attitude of male participants in this research may be related to certain demographic characteristics. Some of the participants have represented the national team, achieved rankings in competitions, and are also involved in coaching or training. Male participants with these characteristics may have a mission to promote boxing, regardless of gender. By working with female boxers to improve their skills, prepare for competitions, and build careers, these male participants may have developed a more egalitarian attitude.

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While there was no significant difference in athlete identity scores between male and female athletes, descriptively, female athletes had higher athlete identity scores than male athletes. Saraç and Toprak's (2016) studies also found no difference in findings related to athlete identity between male and female athletes. Karakuş (2022) concluded that the athlete identities of e-sports players do not differ based on gender. Studies on team sports indicate no gender differences in athlete identity (Çetinkaya, 2010). In contrast, Görgülü et al. (2018) and Turan's (2021) studies show significant differences in athlete identity based on gender, favoring males. Rajan and Varma (2022) found that male athletes manifested higher athlete identity scores compared to female athletes, displaying a stronger athletic identity. Esenkaya et al. (2021) also demonstrates gender-based differences in athlete identity, but in this case, the difference favors females. The lack of a difference in athlete identity among male and female boxers in this study may be explained by females striving to excel in the male-dominated sport of boxing, resulting in a strong athlete identity (Koca, 2006).

When examining the relationship between athlete identity and attitudes towards societal gender roles, a low-level, positively significant correlation was found between the two variables. This relationship has not been explored in previous research. However, Siyez and Belkis' (2016) studies indicate a positive and significant relationship between career adaptability and societal gender roles. A meaningful relationship also exists between athlete identity, which can be considered career adaptability for athletes, and societal gender role conflict (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010). The passion young boxers have for their sport, the support they receive from people around them, and the successes they achieve may have been effective in the development of their athlete identities (Kaya et al., 2018). The finding that, as athlete identity levels increase, athletes tend to adopt more egalitarian gender role attitudes provides a new perspective on patriarchal and sexist perceptions in the sport of boxing. Athletes with a strong athlete identity may be more willing to engage in this sport and perceive themselves more positively. Athletes who are both highly identified and successful are egalitarian individuals in terms of attitudes towards societal gender roles. It is not difficult to assume that these same athletes would have a positive attitude towards women engaging in boxing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result that the attitudes of young boxers towards societal gender roles, in other words, their attitudes towards gender equality, are moderate, it is recommended to plan and implement studies to increase the egalitarian attitudes towards societal gender roles of young boxers.

Since the levels of athlete identities among young boxers are high, it is recommended that young individuals interested in pursuing a career in boxing, and especially female athletes, should be aware that they consciously evaluate their values, skills, life expectations, and what they can contribute to life in this context. Athlete identity is, in a sense, the backbone of an athlete's life. Young

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individuals planning a career in boxing should evaluate their values, skills, life expectations, and what they can contribute to life in this context.

Male boxers exhibit more egalitarian attitudes towards societal gender roles compared to female boxers. It is recommended that young individuals interested in pursuing boxing and planning a career in this field, especially female athletes, should not have biased views on this matter. Programs aimed at raising awareness and sensitivity can be implemented in sports academies and K-12 education levels.

Given the result that athlete identity is independent of gender, both male and female athletes, as well as young individuals considering a career in boxing, are recommended to be aware of this situation and other variables that may affect the development of their athlete identities. There is a positive and significant relationship between attitudes towards societal gender roles and athlete identities among young boxers. Boxers are individuals who are both highly identified and egalitarian in terms of attitudes towards societal gender roles. Young individuals interested in engaging in boxing and planning a career in this sport should be aware of this situation and evaluate their own characteristics comparatively.

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