**Abstract: Sport and Gender Conference, Bodø**

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**Title:** Body image and disordered eating among men and female athletes: A case study of Norwegian sport climbing

**Objectives:** This paper examines how social constructions of gender in sport culture affect the athletes’ body image in sport climbing. Specifically, the aim of the paper is to analyze: 1) How does the sport culture in climbing affects male and female athletes’ body image, and how can this contribute to disordered eating? And 2) How does gender influence athletes’ perceptions of body, performance and nutrition? The paper is based om my master thesis in sociology.

**Methods:** The study was based on qualitative interviews with sixteen athletes and coaches in Norwegian sport climbing. The data is analyzed thematically, using theoretical perspectives on environmental sociology and social comparison theory, as well as previous research on gender and eating disorders, and body image in elite sport.

**Findings:** Both male and female athletes internalized a lean and muscular ideal body for performance in climbing. Further, the comparison of the ideal with one’s own body affected the athlete’s self-esteem. Comparisons of personal body image against the athletic ideal affected both male and female athlete’s self-esteem, but had different effects relative to gender.

**Discussion:** The findings from this study align with previous research, showing that both male and female athletes in climbing considers a lean and muscular body ideal for performance (Joubert et al., 2020; Reeves et al., 2017; Grønhaug, 2018). This can create pressure to reduce weight and can contribute to a culture where disordered eating is legitimized.

The analysis shows how social norms of “the ideal body” for performance in climbing aligns with societal norms of the male athletic body, which led to better self-esteem and an improved body image for male athletes. For female athletes the sports culture and ideal body in climbing led to ambiguous expectations about body appearance due to different gendered cultural norms of the ideal body in the sports culture and the wider society.

**Conclusion**: The discrepancy between the female ideal body in the athletic culture and the societal culture may contribute to a higher vulnerability to disordered eating and development of a negative body image in female athletes in climbing, compared to their male counterparts.

**References:**

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