

Abstract:

Reference-dependent behavior refers to how individuals assess outcomes relative to a reference point rather than in absolute terms, influencing decision-making. Various types of reference points — such as the status quo, goals, or expectations — can shape behavior, yet little is known about how men and women respond differently to these reference points. Professional sports, particularly tennis and marathon running, offer an ideal context to explore this issue. In tennis, players' rankings provide clear reference points based on previous year's performance, while marathon running sees round numbers as performance targets. An analysis of tennis data (2009-2023) shows no significant gender differences in reference-dependent behavior, as both male and female players adjust their efforts similarly. However, in marathon running (1970-2013), male runners exhibit more reference-dependent behavior around round numbers than female runners, indicating potential gender differences based on the type of reference point.