

# Stereotypes in Orthopaedic Surgery: Fact or Fiction?

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## INTRODUCTION:

Stereotypes regarding orthopaedic surgeons include “non-intellectual” and “jock” themes that may be disconnected with the reality of individuals in the field. Anecdotally, the hobbies and interests of orthopaedic surgeons outside of work encompass a wide spectrum that has not been explored previously.

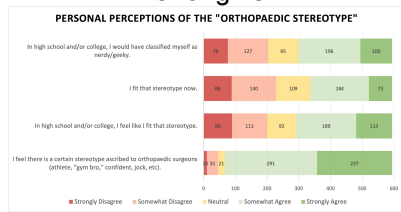
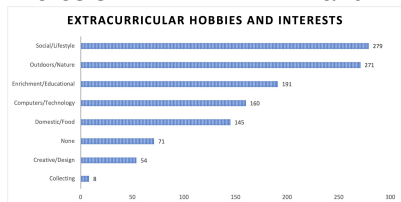
## METHODS:

An anonymous survey of current and previous extracurricular activities and interests was sent to each residency program coordinator for distribution throughout orthopaedic departments and circulated through a widely followed orthopaedic social media outlet. The survey remained open for 6 months to maximize responses, and included multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions.

## RESULTS:

Five-hundred-ninety-four orthopaedic surgery residents, fellows, and attendings responded to the survey. Ninety-five percent of respondents reported playing a sport prior to medical school, with 87.5% continuing to participate in physical activity during medical school. Nearly half reported spending significant time on social and outdoor/nature-related pursuits. Half of the study cohort regularly participated in non-athletic hobbies such as music, cooking, and writing (Figure 1). Eighty-nine percent of participants reported agreement with the existence of the typical orthopaedic stereotype; however, only 43.3% reported feelings of self-concordance with that stereotype (Table 1, Figure 2).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:** This study affirms that while orthopaedic surgeons commonly pursue athletic hobbies, there also exists a wide range of interests and activities outside of the preconceived stereotype. The majority of the cohort feel that they fall outside of the stereotype, and half participate in non-stereotypical hobbies. The existence of this diversity should be highlighted, both to combat the stereotype and to attract a greater array of applicants with different interests and strengths to the field.



**Table 1. Examples of Open-Ended Comments from Survey Respondents**

**Responses to "If you have any other comments, please let us know below."**

While I think the stereotype carries some accuracy, I think the overall composition of our specialty is more nuanced. While many orthopaedic surgeons are athletes, many of us were more studious and nerdy in many other ways.

Everything is relative; while I have always seen myself as a nerd, I somehow get reclassified when judged among a new subset of population in medical school.

These stereotype hurts us in the long run. We miss out on stellar applicants because a majority of those in positions of authority value these stereotypes and devalue those who don't fit that stereotype. We also miss out when applicants forego applying to ortho altogether because they feel they won't fit in.

My background fits the classical stereotype, but I'm only a chief resident and if you asked my corecidents about me I'd be defined much more by my role as a parent than I am by what I did a decade ago. I think defining people retrospectively is a big part of this problem.

I definitely think there is a stereotype to Orthopaedics as it is a more physically demanding job than other specialties. However, half of my residency class were female and 100% tougher than me. It also believe a lot of the nonortho people don't help either, as a stereotypically Ortho looking person I got "you're doing Ortho right?" from medicine attendings more than anyone. Was written off by them as not wanting to learn because "he's going to Ortho even if he doesn't know it yet."

I think the gym bro stereotype is mostly perpetuated by non orthopods these days. But the majority of people going into medicine commit to some aspect of fitness whether it is sport, gym, or outdoors activity, I don't think ortho gets sole propriety of that stereotype anymore. I mean I went to the gym, ran, and played a bunch of sports recreationally but was also student council member and volunteered at a hospice and meal kitchen.

Despite the stereotype of athlete that I find myself fitting, there is still a big difference between being an athletic woman in ortho vs any male in ortho. Size alone is something people feel they can comment on throughout my training and med school.

I think all orthopaedic surgeons were probably nerds whether they showed it or not.