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## STUDY OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY DIFFERENCES OF NATIONAL ATHLETES IN TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL ATHLETIC FIELD

\*Maryam Khajeh Salehani<sup>1</sup>, Hasan Karbalaee Hajiofrouz<sup>2</sup>, Samira sharifi Moghdam<sup>3</sup> and Farshid Taghi Pour<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Physical Education, Islamic Azad University, Astara

<sup>2</sup>Department of Futures, Shakhos Pazhoh Institute

<sup>3</sup>Department of Physical Education, Tehran University

<sup>4</sup>Department of Physical Education, Islamic Azad University, Mobarakeh Esfahan

\*Author for Correspondence

### ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is studying the effect of sport fields on athletic identity. Statistical samples of this research are accessible samples including 44 national athletes in volleyball (30 persons) and weightlifting (14 persons). Brewer Athletic Identity (1993) questionnaire, which includes four scales (self-identity, social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity), was used to gather data. Average and standard deviation in descriptive statistics section, and K-S Test, independent t, and Mann-Whitney Test in inferential statistics section were used to determine normality of data and significance of data in level  $p < 0.05$ . The results of this research showed that sport field affects athletic identity. Athletic identity is significant in weightlifting and volleyball fields and sport type affects athletic identity. Also, it was found that individual and team sports significantly affect self-identity, social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity on level  $p < 0.005$ .

**Keywords:** Athletic Identity, Self-identity, Social Identity, Exclusivity, Negative Affectivity, Team Sports, Individual Sports

### INTRODUCTION

Today each person has its own personality and place in the society. Place of each person is formed by recognition of that person from himself. In view of Smith, each person makes a figure of himself which is his main formation element. In other words, perception of each person from his personality and place can be a response to this question: “Who am I?” Ericson has called this question a “personal identity”. Mental and emotional dimensions of each human are classified and studied in different groups. What is important is necessity of study of all factors. So, identity is studied as an important aspect of human emotional behavior.

In today society, individuals and personalities have different places. Thus, we have different identities including personal, familial, national, religious, social, cultural, and athletic ones. One of the identities is athletic identity. Brewer *et al.*, (1993) indicate athletic identity as degrees for the roles of athletes and believe that high level engagements may create high commitments for athletes and cause persons know themselves as athletes. By view of Anderson, athletic identity relates with five factors: athletic appearance, sport importance, sport and exercise, competence, and encourages of others (Anderson, 2004). Regarding to different studies, athletes identities relate with health benefits, athletic participation, athletic performance, development of social relations, and self-confidence. Heerden and Kirstein (2010) found that athletic identity decreased by age, but sexuality had no effect on it, and there was not a significant difference between athletic identity and performance. They also found that there were significant differences between elite and non-elite athletes in ranking life roles (Hadiyan *et al.*, 2012; Heerden and Kiristien, 2010). Regarding versatility of sport fields, each field demands a special personality, which persons attain them during several years (Brewer, 1993). In this regard, the researcher is seeking “how do sport fields form athletic identities of athletes?” From the end of 1980, athletic identity has been related with different views and behaviors. For example, an athlete evaluates and modifies his identities similar to a sport manager manages his subordinate units. This self-organizing and

## **Research Article**

orientation relates with mutual interaction with environment and individuals. Identity modification is a meaning that we play in our society with our different roles (Stryker and Burke, 2000)

Participation means mental and emotional engagement of persons in group situations which motivate them to help each other to achieve their goals. At first, social participation was summarized in participation in polling, but then it included group sports, too (Zahedi, 2011). Luis Emrich has studied identity by its cultural dimension to study globalization by public media. Role identity is a situation in which a person identifies for himself as a special social position. Thus, role identity is (mental) imagination of a person from himself in a special position, which includes a contractual section regarding to social positions and a single section formed in imagine of persons (Dowran, 2002).

Many researchers studied athletic identity and its relation with sport participation. Brewer et al. reported that athletic identity scale may be a multi-dimensional scale including three factors (social identity, exclusivity, negative affectivity). Personal identity says how a person sees himself, which is inaccessible for others, and includes views, beliefs, and emotions of a person about his athletic activities. Personal athletic identity says that how much does an athlete think and sense? Since athletes do not disclose their beliefs, and they may not aware of their beliefs too, this kind of identity can solve problems of coaches and psychologists to access personal identities of athletes (Duda, 1999). Mailers & Christian (2007) suggested that elite athletes have higher athletic identity than amateur ones. Athletic identity has been related with engagement in sports and good experiences of positive exercise results such as corporal image, increased self-confidence, and decreased anxiety (Horton and Mack, 2000). Today, sport is very important. Modern Olympic Games and constitution of different sport federations around the world have increased public participation. This popularity creates obligation and versatility for sport organizations. Since athletes play important roles in industry, understanding their roles and identities is very important. Many studies show that a strong athletic identity is necessary for success. Researches show that strong athletic identity creates obligation and exercise, positive effects on performances, progress of social communications, and concentration on related goals. Herdon and Christian suggested that elite athletes have higher athletic identity than amateur ones (Heerden and Kiristien, 2010). When athletes encounter conditions that treat their athletic performances, they comprise their values and scores as athletes in lower levels (Stryker and Serpe, 1994). Athletic identity has been related with engagement in sports and good experiences of positive exercise results such as corporal image, increased self-confidence, and decreased anxiety (Horton and Mack, 2000). Regarding the researches about athletic identity and its relation with factors such as self-esteem and self-regard, anxiety and self-confidence, obligation and exercise and their effects on athletic performance, there is not any research about if any field has differently affect athletic identity, or if there is different effects for athletic identity on team or individual fields. This research intends to answer these questions and to study athletic identity between elite athletes.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Methodology**

This research intends to study the effect of sport field on athletic identities of elite athletes. This is a descriptive research. Brewer's Athletic Identity questionnaire was used to gather data (Brewer *et al.*, 1993). To do this, players of national volleyball and weightlifting teams that were present in camps in 2003, with at least 8 years sport record and two campaign experiences were selected. Questionnaires were filled during the last period of national team camp. The statistical society includes elite adult national team athletes in volleyball and weightlifting team and individual fields (44 athletes). On access sampling method was used for sampling. The questionnaire included 10 questions and 4 subscales of self-identity, social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity (Anderson, 2006)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

In this section, we analyze data by descriptive and inferential statistics. To do this, we extracted frequency and percentage of data in descriptive statistics. Then we used independent T test and Mann-Whitney U Test to analyze the assumptions in inferential statistics.

**Research Article**

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of participant**

| Variable             |            | Numbers | Average | SD    |
|----------------------|------------|---------|---------|-------|
| Athletic identity    | Individual | 14      | 29.07   | 17.34 |
|                      | Team       | 30      | 57.30   | 8.59  |
| Self-identity        | Individual | 14      | 6.36    | 5.26  |
|                      | Team       | 30      | 12.87   | 2.42  |
| Social identity      | Individual | 14      | 5.57    | 3.76  |
|                      | Team       | 30      | 11.43   | 2.42  |
| Negative affectivity | Individual | 14      | 5.21    | 2.58  |
|                      | Team       | 30      | 11.67   | 4.27  |
| Exclusivity          | Individual | 14      | 9.21    | 4.73  |
|                      | Team       | 30      | 16.33   | 2.99  |

The above table shows identity features of athletes by their sport fields. As you see, the average of athletic identity for all team fields is more than individual fields.

**Inferential Statistics**

Normality of data is examined. To do this, SPSS software and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test were used.

**Table 2: Data frequency and distribution**

| Variable                | Frequency | Sig.  |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Self-identity           | 44        | 0.001 |
| Social identity         | 44        | 0.117 |
| Exclusivity             | 44        | 0.062 |
| Negative affectivity    | 44        | 0.702 |
| Total athletic identity | 44        | 0.069 |

Regarding to sig. in the K-S table, which all are more than 5% except self-identity, normality claim for distribution of data for athletic identity and four subscales is true. Thus, parametric test is used to analyze data. For self-identity, significance level is less than 5%, so normality claim for distribution of data for self-identity is not true. Thus, non-parametric test is used to analyze data.

**Two-Independent Groups T Test**

Two-Independent Groups T Test is used to test the assumption. To do this, at first we examine variance equality of these two groups. Then the results of averages of two groups for both equality and inequality cases are provided.

**Table 3: Results of Independent T Test for athletic identity in team and individual fields**

| T Test for equal averages |        |        | Lion Test for equal variances |        |           |         |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|
| Sig.                      | df     | t      | Sig.                          | F      |           |         |
| 0.001                     | 42     | -7.268 | 0.000                         | 19.896 | Assuming  | equal   |
|                           |        |        |                               |        | variances |         |
| 0.001                     | 16.051 | -5.770 |                               |        | Assuming  | unequal |
|                           |        |        |                               |        | variances |         |

As you see in the above table, sig. in Lion Test for athletic identity is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say variances of two groups are not equal. Sig. in Independent T Test for athletic identity is 0.000, which is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say that there is a significant difference between averages of athletic identities of team and individual groups. Therefore, sport type affects athletic identity.

**Mann-Whitney U Test**

This test is used to determine the difference of averages in two groups, but the distribution is not normal.

**Research Article**

**Table 4: Results of Mann-Whitney Test for athletic identity in team and individual fields**

| Individual identity | Sig. |
|---------------------|------|
| -3.740              | Z    |
| 0.001               | Sig. |

As you see in the above table, sig. is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by confidence of 95%, we can say that there is a significant difference between averages of self-identity in two team and individual groups. therefore, sport type affects self-identity.

**Two-Independent Groups T Test**

Two-Independent Groups T Test is used to test the assumption. To do this, at first we examine variance equality of these two groups. Then the results of averages of two groups for both equality and inequality cases are provided.

**Table 5: Results of Independent T Test for social identity in team and individual fields**

| T Test for equal averages |        |        | Lion Test for equal variances |       |           |         |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|
| Sig.                      | df     | t      | Sig.                          | F     |           |         |
| 0.001                     | 42     | -6.249 | 0.005                         | 8.699 | Assuming  | equal   |
|                           |        |        |                               |       | variances |         |
| 0.001                     | 18.203 | -5.346 |                               |       | Assuming  | unequal |
|                           |        |        |                               |       | variances |         |

As you see in the above table, sig. in Lion Test for social identity is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say variances of two groups are not equal. Sig. in Independent T Test for social identity is 0.000, which is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say that there is a significant difference between averages of social identities of team and individual groups. Therefore, sport type affects social identity.

**Two-Independent Groups T Test**

Two-Independent Groups T Test is used to test the assumption. To do this, at first we examine variance equality of these two groups. Then the results of averages of two groups for both equality and inequality cases are provided.

**Table 6: Results of Independent T Test for negative affectivity in team and individual fields**

| T Test for equal averages |        |        | Lion Test for equal variances |       |           |         |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|
| Sig.                      | df     | t      | Sig.                          | F     |           |         |
| 0.001                     | 42     | -5.210 | 0.206                         | 1.649 | Assuming  | equal   |
|                           |        |        |                               |       | variances |         |
| 0.001                     | 38.968 | -6.203 |                               |       | Assuming  | unequal |
|                           |        |        |                               |       | variances |         |

As you see in the above table, sig. in Lion Test for negative affectivity is greater than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say variances of two groups are equal. Sig. in Independent T Test for negative affectivity is 0.000, which is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say that there is a significant difference between averages of negative affectivity of team and individual groups. Therefore, sport type affects negative affectivity.

**Two-Independent Groups T Test**

Two-Independent Groups T Test is used to test the assumption. To do this, at first we examine variance equality of these two groups. Then the results of averages of two groups for both equality and inequality cases are provided.

**Research Article**

**Table 7: Results of Independent T Test for exclusivity in team and individual fields**

| T Test for equal averages |        |        | Lion Test for equal variances |       |           |         |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|
| Sig.                      | df     | t      | Sig.                          | F     |           |         |
| 0.001                     | 42     | -6.083 | 0.016                         | 6.316 | Assuming  | equal   |
|                           |        |        |                               |       | variances |         |
| 0.001                     | 18.016 | -5.175 |                               |       | Assuming  | unequal |
|                           |        |        |                               |       | variances |         |

As you see in the above table, sig. in Lion Test for exclusivity is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say variances of two groups are not equal. Sig. in Independent T Test for exclusivity is 0.000, which is less than 5% ( $\alpha=5\%$ ); thus, by 95% confidence, we can say that there is a significant difference between averages of exclusivity of team and individual groups. Therefore, sport type affects exclusivity.

**Conclusion**

Our identities such as familial, friendship, athletic, and scientific identities, which are products of self-esteem and social supports, change by our emotions. In sports, relationship between athletes and their environments promotes emotions of them (Duda, 1999),

The results of this research showed that sport type variable affects athletic identity and subscales of self-identity, social identity, negative affectivity, and exclusivity.

According to the findings, we conclude that most volleyball and weightlifting players have strong athletic identity. Since these players are elite, these findings are justified and logical. This means that elite volleyball and weightlifting players base their values on their athletic performances and desire to promote their self-esteem by their athletic identities. These findings are compatible with those of Mailers and Christian (Mailers & Cristian, 2007)

Here the point is that athletic identities of players of adolescent national team are higher than those of young and adult players. The reason is that more received positive energy from others and less social expectations in their athletic relationships, which the start of identity formation process is.

The results of this research were only compatible with those of Herdon & Christian. Brewer et al. found that persons with higher athletic identity are more desire to participate in athletic activities, and engagement in higher sport levels can create higher obligations in athletes. According to Brewer et al. and regarding to the findings of this research, it seems that athletes in individual fields have higher obligations and desire to participate in sports, and this may be their success reason in the recent years (Brewer, 1993). Considering the outcomes of team and individual sport fields in the recent years in our country, it is obvious that mostly individual athletes have been presented in Olympics. Regarding to the results of this research, which compatible with those of Anderson & Churchill (2004), the reason of better performances of athletes is differences of athletic identities, which is an important part of self-regard and increases self-esteem, obligation, exercise, social communication, and concentration of goals, and creates motives for more exercises and success. On the other hand, Oler et al., (1994) and Stryker & Serpe (2000) suggested that increment of an identity increased related obligation and behaviors to that identity. Brewer et al., suggested that obligation needs exercise and competition requires limitation of other activities by athletes. Therefore, a higher athletic identity helps the athlete to attain his desired athletic performance. The results of this research showed that athletes of individual fields have higher athletic identities than athletes of team fields. This higher athletic identities increase their obligation and exercise, and this may be the reason that a large caravan of our athletes in Olympics 2012 is from individual fields.

It seems that we can extend the results of Brewer et al. and Good et al., (1993), which why elite athletes have higher athletic identities than college athletes, to the results of this research, which why individual athletes have higher athletic identities than team athletes. As Stambulova (1994) suggested, when athletes reach Olympics levels, they must concentrate on this goal. Even if some of them have part-time businesses, their identities are combined with their sports. Consequently, an athlete cannot be another thing, and they know themselves as athletes (Webb et al., 1998).

### **Research Article**

Anderson (2006) found that swimmers had most athletic identities during their championship season than before that period. Therefore, season was an indirect variable that must be controlled. Thus, we recommend sport officials to consider this while dispatching athletes to Olympics, world matches, or Asian matches. As the athletes must be physically ready when dispatching matches, they must be mentally ready too. In addition, Brewer et al. showed that importance, power, and exclusivity decrease by weak performance (Brewer *et al.*, 1993; Hadiyan *et al.*, 2012). Thus, it is recommended that the levels of athletes are considered while dispatching them to provisional and championship games. Horton & Mack (2000) showed that runners with higher athletic identities prioritize their other life identities such as families, life partners, occupations, educations, friendships, and sports similarly. Thus, it is recommended to sport officials to provide situations to meet other identity priorities for athletes in national team camps, so athletes are directed from a one-dimensional self-regard to the other dimensions, and this protects them while defeat in those dimensions. In fact, high athletic identity is problematic if it prevents other identities. The method of encountering an event for an athlete is determined by athletic identity. A person with a strong athletic identity can encounter sport damages better than a person with a weak athletic identity. Thus, it is recommended to coaches and officials to select athletes with higher athletic identity for national team camps, because these athletes can encounter sport damages well.

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**Research Article**

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