Athletic Identity and Life Satisfaction in Pakistani Athletes

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The present correlational study aimed to explore the psychosocial predictors (athletic identity, social identity, cognitive identity, and affective identity) of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes. The sample (N = 225) with the age range of M= 24.32, SD=5.5, comprised of currently active university athletes recruited through purposive sampling. The assessment measures included; the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale – plus (AIMS-plus) Cieslak (2004) and the Life Satisfaction sub-scale of Athlete Life Quality Scale (ALQS) (Gentner, 2004). Multiple hierarchical regression revealed that athletic identity explained 66.1% of the variance in the levels of life satisfaction in athletes reflecting that athletic identity is a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction in athletes. The sub-domain of social identity explained a maximum 51% variance while cognitive identity accounted for 14.5% variance in the levels of life satisfaction in athletes. This indicates the importance of the social and cognitive identities of the team that have a significant impact on their levels of life satisfaction. Interestingly, the levels of life satisfaction didn't differ in men and women, neither it differed across the nature of sports. The study elucidates the importance of social identity in the life satisfaction of young athletes. The findings will facilitate sports psychologists to customize

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wellness frameworks that may improve psychosocial aspects of quality of life in Pakistani athletes.

Keywords: athletic identity, social identity, cognitive identity, affective identity, life satisfaction, Pakistani athletes.

Involvement in any kind of sports comes with plenty of psychosocial health benefits which include improved satisfaction with life, increased resilience, better mental health, increased self-esteem, higher levels of self-efficacy, better coping skills, decreased levels of stress, and overall improved quality of life. All these benefits are generally reaped by athletes of almost all kinds of sports regardless of their age or other sociodemographic factors (Appleby & Diefenbach, 2016; see also Eime, et.al., 2013).

The extensive list of benefits associated with sports participation and that come with being athletes validate the point that as compared to the general population, athletes report better life satisfaction and quality of life (Houston, et.al, 2016). And among the benefits, the psychological benefits including health-related quality of life and well-being had more privilege than benefits associated with physical activity participation alone (Dionigi, 2002).

When an individual takes on the athlete role wholeheartedly and starts identifying with it, this starts having an impact on their engagement in sport, their self-definition as athletes, their pursuit of the sport, and eventually the meaning that identification gives to their life (Haslam, et.al, 2021). This is referred to as athletic identity. "Athletic identity is defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with an athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993)."

The more an athlete takes on the athletic identity, the stronger he depicts the commitment towards the sports, its goals, and the training associated with it. All this enhances the focus of the athlete in the game (Horton & Mack, 2000). Not only does the athletic identity benefits the sports person in achieving the sports-related goals but brings along strong positive psychological outcomes in his/her life. These psychological benefits result in the successful performance of athletes due to self-

confidence, whereas the benefits of intensive training help athletes in enhancing their body image and decreasing their anxiety (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

From Erickson's point of view, it can be stated that the key issue faced by students in late adolescence is identity formation (Miller & Kerr, 2003) and in the formation of these identities, social roles, social relations, and interactions play a significant role (Williams, 2007). High athletic identity is not only beneficial for the sports-related performance of the athletes this help in building their social identity and they start increasing their social network within and outside of their sport (Horton & Mack, 2000 as cited in Mitchell, et.al, 2014). Their social identities under their athletic self-identities help them improve their behaviors and make them more apt in social settings; it helps them improve their ways of expressing their attitudes and beliefs in other social arenas (Messner, & Musto, 2014).

Social identity has been defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 2010). The team identification or athletic identification with the team stems from social identity theory.

A positive social interaction is a key attribute of life satisfaction (Gibson, 1986 as cited in Kaplanidou, et.al., 2013), and those people who are satisfied with their lives, have reported a more optimistic attitude towards life with lower levels of stress (Chang, et.al., 2017). Life satisfaction can broadly be defined as a global cognitive judgment of one's life (Kern, et.al. 2014) which indicates one's satisfaction, happiness, or contentment with the quality of her or his life.

Life satisfaction is the subjective assessment of the individuals about the lives they are living which they make in light of their system of measurement or the standards of living they have devised for themselves (Proctor, 2014; Corrigan, et.al. 2013). It is related to the evaluation of the individual's entire life and living patterns and is not limited to just one or few aspects or domains of their lives therefore, it is crucial to look at the bigger picture to understand the connectivity of different life domains and their collective effect on the levels of satisfaction of the individuals

regarding their life. For the athletes, the domains upon which their assumption of life satisfaction relies mainly revolve around sports, for instance, sports commitment, athletic identity, social support, or the time in sport (Boehm et al., 2015).

The literature and researches help in understanding the relationship between these different life domains of athletes with their overall life satisfaction. Morgulec-Adamowicz, et.al. (2011) found that increased participation in sports results in improved QoL. Tasiemski, et.al. (2004) studied the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction in athletes with spinal cord injury (SCI), and their findings suggest that no relationship exists between these two constructs. However, the findings can't be generalized to normal athletes as several other factors play a role in affecting the levels of life satisfaction in athletes with SCI along with athletic identity. The associations between the variables in normal athletes need to be explored more.

The literature highlights emotional problems that emerge due to strong and exclusive athletic identity (Fuller, 2014; see also Brewer, et.al, 2010; Gustafsson, et.al., 2008; Kissinger, et.al, 2011 Lemyre, et.al, 2008; Sturm, et.al, 2011; ;). This occurs when athletes associate their self-worth and self-esteem solely with their performance in the sports and in case their performance falls short of their expectations or the expectations of the athletes, this result in threatening their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, and poor performance may pose a risk of emotional disturbance in the athletes (Brewer, et.al, 2010). Athletic identity sometimes causes a negative impact on the self-identity of the athletes as they start thinking in one dimension.   (Fuller, 2014; Kissinger, et.al, 2011). This one-dimensional self-identity causes augmented levels of athlete burnout (Russell, 2021).

However, this is not true for all athletes. There are mixed findings when it comes to the impact of athletic identity on the well-being of athletes (Black & Smith, 2007; Isoard-Gautheur, et.al, 2016; Heird, & Steinfeldt, 2013; Settles et al. 2002) and strong and exclusive athletic identity leads towards the good consequences of performances. (Brewer et al., 2010; Gustafsson, et.al, 2007). In the study by Helms, (2010), the

findings failed to support the hypothesis that there would be a negative relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. Settles et al. (2002) found a high athletic identity to be correlated with positive psychological well-being. Similarly, Martin, et.al, (2014) found no negative relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction.

The strength with which an individual identifies with a group (social group) has significant positive developmental outcomes and in the case of athletes, the identification is with the sports team. This identification is positively associated with adaptive moral behaviors, adaptive cognitions, positive affect, and positive personality development (Benson & Bruner, 2018; Bruner et al., 2014; Bruner et al., 2017; Bruner, et.al. 2021).

Thus, it remains unclear whether an athletic identity leads to greater or diminished life satisfaction in athletes who are currently participating in their sport.

To get a comprehensive understanding of how athletic identity affects the life satisfaction of the students still competing in their sports, further research is needed as differences persist in the impact of athletic identity on life satisfaction of athletes based on ethnicities, gender, grouping type, and other subgroups (Martin et al., 2014; Williams, 2007).

Limited research data is available on the relationship of life satisfaction with the constructs of interest which is Athletic identity and its sub-domains, i-e social identity, cognitive identity, and affective identity in the athletes. Life satisfaction may have favorable or unfavorable associations with these constructs, directly or indirectly and this needs to be explored. The current study offered additional empirical information about the relationship between athletic identity, its sub-domains, and life satisfaction among athletes in universities of Pakistan.

Rationale

Optimizing sports performance does not rely only on the sports-related aspects of the training, instead, it's an integrated approach that takes into account all aspects of the athletes' life having an impact on their performance and they have been worked upon to augment their

performance (Gardner & Moore 2006). Sports psychology focuses on the psychological position of the athletes, their characteristics, and well-being while working on their skills to enhance the psychological well-being of the athletes at both the competitive level and in overall life (Hardy et al., 2010).

The role of athletic identity, social identity, cognitive and affective identity in the overall wellness of the athletes and their relationship with the life satisfaction levels of the athletes is largely been ignored by the researchers. This study tried to explore the relationship between athletic identity, its sub-components, and life satisfaction. Moreover, the relationship between these variables was examined based on gender and across the type of sports, i-e, individual or group sports. The findings will provide insight to sports psychologists and counselors on the role of athletic identity in the overall life satisfaction levels and wellness of athletes.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the current study were:

1. To identify the extent to which psychosocial predictors including athletic Identity, Social identity, cognitive identity, and affective identity tend to influence the life satisfaction of Pakistani athletes.

2. To identify the differences in life satisfaction of athletes playing individual and group sports.

Research Questions

- How do athletic identity and its sub-domains tend to influence the levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes?

- How do levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes tend to differ across the type of sports they engaged in (individual / group)?

Method

Research Design and Sample

The present correlational research study was carried out to explore the psychosocial predictors (athletic identity, social identity, cognitive identity, affective identity) of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes.

The sample for the present study comprised 225 athletes as calculated by the G-Power (Erdfelder, *Faul*, & *Buchner*, 1996) sample calculator with their age range suggested by HEC policy for athletes i.e. 18-27. A purposive sampling technique was used for the data collection. The sample was collected from the sports department of different universities in Lahore Pakistan.

Inclusion criteria.

- Athletes with a minimum of one time HEC Representation in HEC All Pakistan Intervarsity sports competition or National level sports.

- Registered athletes who are associated with sports departments of their respective universities.

- Athletes from both indoor and outdoor physical games were taken

- Both group and individual game athletes were part of this study.

Exclusion criteria.

- Athletes with less than one year of professional experience at the National level or HEC level.

- Athletes with any physical injury or disability.

- Athletes currently on medications and rehabilitation.

- Athletes facing disciplinary charges against them.

Assessment measures.

Demographic information sheet. Demographic items included the following information: type of sport, playing level, playing duration, no of siblings, birth order, marital status, education, residence, and monthly income.

AIMS-plus (Athletic Identity Measurement Scale – plus). The AIMS-plus was created by Cieslak (2004*)*. The athletic Identity Measurement Scale AIMS is a standardized, psychometrically sound measure that can facilitate the testing of athletic identity (AI). A 10-item version of the AIMS was used. The 10 items encompass social (2 items), cognitive (4 items), and affective (4 items) elements of athletic identity. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Agree Somewhat, 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 5 = Disagree Somewhat, 6 = Disagree, 7 = Disagree Strongly). The items evaluated the thoughts and feelings from athletes' daily experiences. Alpha reliability was found to be between .79-.85 for this study.

**Athlete Life Quality Scale *(ALQS).* The ALQS (Gentner, 2004) is a measure of how satisfied an athlete is with various aspects of his or her life. It is 15 items scale. Higher scores indicate a greater quality of life. It is scored on 7 points Likert scale of 1=very dissatisfied to 7=very satisfied. It has 5 subscales i.e. general life satisfaction, physical satisfaction, team/sports satisfaction, primary social satisfaction, and recovery satisfaction. Cronbach alpha reliability of the tool was found to be .90. The general life-satisfaction sub-scale was used in the current study to assess the levels of life satisfaction of the athletes.

Procedure

After obtaining permission from the authorities of the sports department from different Pakistani universities, athletes were approached and the nature of the study was explained to them. Upon their agreement, written consent was taken through an informed consent form. Participants were assured complete confidentiality of the information that they provided. After that they were guided about the questionnaires and participants were requested to give honest answers. Questionnaires were translated into Urdu for this study and administered in Urdu.

Ethical considerations

For the current study, all the institutional requirements were fulfilled and it was carried out following approval from the Departmental Doctoral Program Committee (DDPC) of the University of the Punjab,

Lahore, and the university competent authority. Permission of scales for usage and translation was sought from the concerned authors who developed the scales and for data collection, permission was taken from the concerned authorities and departments. Upon consent of the participants, they were included in the study and were told that they have the right to leave the research anytime they want, without any penalty. They were ensured complete confidentiality of their personal information and were told that the data that they provided will only be used for the current study. Participants were told that the findings of the study will be shared with them if they desired to.

Results

In the current study, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (Table 1). Reliability analyses were run to see the psychometric properties of the scales used in the present study (Table 2). Pearson Product Moment Correlation was carried out to assess the relationship between variables. Whereas, an Independent sample t-test was run to assess the gender differences across the levels of life satisfaction and to identify the differences across the types of sports played by the athletes and their life satisfaction levels. Furthermore, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was run to assess the predictive role of athletic identity in the levels of life satisfaction and the individual contribution of sub-components of athletic identity, i-e, social identity, cognitive identity, and affective identity in this after controlling for the socio-demographic factors.

Table 1

Description of the Demographic Characteristics (Gender, Age, Marital Status, and Nature of Sports) of the Participants (N=225)

Characteristics	*F*	*%*	*M(SD)*
Gender			
Male	132	58.7	

Females	93	41.3	
Age (years)			24.32(5.5)
Marital Status			
Single	164	72.9	
Married	38	16.9	
Engaged	23	10.2	
Nature of Sports			
Individual Sports	87	38.7	
Group Sports	138	61.3	

Table 2

Descriptive and Psychometric Properties of Scale of Present Study (N=225)

Variables				Ranges			
	M	*SD*	α	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Identity	7.99	3.57	.78	2	14	-.18	-1.1

Cognitive Identity	16.20	6.99	.74	4	28	-.16	-1.19
Affective Identity	16.04	7.20	.79	4	28	-.19	-1.30
General Satisfaction	15.40	7.77	.89	4	28	-.03	-1.44

Table 2 reflects the descriptive statistics of scales used in the current study and the reliability analysis revealed that all the tools and their sub-scales are statistically sound and reliable instruments to be used and assess the constructs of the study.

Table 3

Inter-correlations among Study Variables (N=225)

Variables	2	3	4
1. Social Identity	.83***	.84***	.72***
2. Cognitive Identity	-	.91***	.82***
3. Affective Identity	-	-	.80***
4. General Life Satisfaction	-	-	-

*Note: *p<.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001*

Table 3 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between the sub-domains of the athletic identity and the general life satisfaction among Pakistani athletes. Findings show that there is a strong positive relationship between social identity and life satisfaction, r=.72, p<0.001,

cognitive identity and life satisfaction, r=.82, p<0.001, and effective identity and life satisfaction r=.80, p<0.001

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Life Satisfaction in Athletes (N=225)

Predictors	Life Satisfaction	
	ΔR^2	*B*
Step 1	.047	
Control Variables		
Step 2	.510**	
Social Identity		1.57***
Step 3	.145**	
Cognitive Identity		0.786**
Step 4	.006*	
Affective Identity		0.261*
Total R^2	.708**	

*Note *p< 0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001*

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the Athletic Sports Identity (Social Identity, Cognitive Identity & Affective Identity) significantly predicted general life satisfaction in athletes.

The regression Model 2 indicates the effect of social identity on the levels of life satisfaction while controlling for the sociodemographic factors in the first step and the findings revealed that social identity explained 51.% variance F(9, 215)=30.0, p <.001) in the levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes.

The regression Model 3 indicates that effect of cognitive identity on the levels of life satisfaction while controlling for the sociodemographic factors and social identity in the previous steps and the findings revealed that cognitive identity explained 14.5% variance $F(10, 214)=50.30$, p <.001) in the levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes.

The regression Model 4 indicates the effect of affective identity on the levels of life satisfaction while controlling for the sociodemographic factors, social identity, and cognitive in the previous steps, and the findings revealed that affective identity explained 0.6% variance $F(11, 213)=46.90$, p <.001) in the levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes.

The results of the regression analysis indicated that social identity, cognitive identity, and affective identity collectively explained 66.1% of the variance in the levels of life satisfaction in athletes.

Table 5

Results of t-tests to assess differences in levels of life satisfaction across gender (N=225)

Outcome	Group Males (n=132)		Females (n=93)		95% CI	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD			
Life Satisfaction	15.18	7.89	15.70	7.62	-2.60 – 1.59	-.501	223

The results of the independent sample t-test, as shown in Table 5, indicate that there are no gender differences across the levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes.

Table 6

Results of t-tests to assess differences in levels of life satisfaction across the nature of the sports (N=225)

Outcome	Group				95% CI for Mean Difference		
	Individual Sports (87)		Group Sports (138)				
	M	SD	M	SD		T	df
Life Satisfaction	15.94	7.37	15.05	8.01	-1.21– 2.98	.831	223

Table 6 depicts that the levels of life satisfaction among athletes don't differ by the nature of sports that they play.

Discussion

The present research was carried out to study the predictive role of Athletic identity and its sub-domains, i-e, social identity, athletic identity, and affective identity in determining the life satisfaction of Pakistani athletes. It was hypothesized that Athletic Identity and its sub-domains will likely predict life satisfaction in athletes. Research findings support the hypothesis, however, previous researches has documented mixed results when it comes to the relationship between these two variables. Elasky (2006), in his research, found that no relationship exists between athletic identity and life satisfaction. When it comes to the level of competition, the researcher found that life satisfaction differs across different levels of competition, which is contrary to the findings of the current research as no difference in the levels of life satisfaction were found across the nature of sports in the current study.

It was also hypothesized that there would likely be gender differences across the levels of life satisfaction among athletes, however,

the findings of the study failed to support the hypothesis. The findings are is in line with the research results of the study by Elasky (2006). Similarly, Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, and Blaikley, (2004) in their study failed to find any significant relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. However, their study involved people with spinal cord injury (SCI), therefore there is a limitation when it comes to the generalization of these findings.

Among the different sub-domains of Athletic identity, social identity was found to be the most significant predictor of life satisfaction among athletes. This association has also been supported by the literature as the association and identification with the social environment have been found to be positively and significantly related to higher levels of life satisfaction (Rojas Marcos, 2005). Life satisfaction, social relations, physical activity, and high self-esteem, all are found to be significantly related to each other, especially in women (Maher et al., 2015).

Athletes' life continuously revolved around physical activity and this life pattern has been linked to greater life satisfaction (Moraes et al., 2009) mainly because this develops the feeling of competence in the athletes and improve their motivation levels in them Escartí et al. 2004).

In line with these arguments, it is safe to state that previous researches provide some evidence of the contribution of athletic identity in improving the levels of life satisfaction of athletes and in turn help in improving their mental health and well-being Morgulec-Adamowicz, et.al. (2011).

Conclusion

The present research investigated the predictive role of Athletic Identity in the life satisfaction levels of Pakistani athletes. The findings of the study highlight that all the sub-domains of athletic identity are significant predictors of life satisfaction. The findings indicate the importance of the social, cognitive, and affective identities of an athlete as they directly affect the satisfaction levels of athletes. Among all sub-domains, social identity accounted for the maximum variance in the levels of life satisfaction in Pakistani athletes. This is indicative of the importance of the social life of athletes and their identification with it. The findings

failed to establish any gender differences when it comes to the levels of life satisfaction, similarly, the satisfaction with life didn't differ across the nature of sports played by the athletes.

Implications

Athletes face different challenges, and these become distinctive when the athletes have to take up roles both as students and athletes. This has a huge impact on their social, occupational, and academic life while influencing the wellness levels across the physical, emotional, and psychological selves of the athletes. Insight into the role of social, cognitive, and affective identities of the athletes and their role in affecting the levels of life satisfaction will help counselors and sports psychologists a lot as they get a better understanding of the complexities of the lives of athletes.

Findings will help sports psychologists to devise a wellness framework incorporating all the essential domains and fields of athletic identity that an athlete identifies with. This study is focused and will eventually help the athletes in maximizing their overall functioning and performance during competition and games. Being an underrated and not-so-focused field in Pakistani culture, the findings hold great value for sports personnel and psychologists, strategies to enhance their overall quality of life and functioning, which will eventually reflect in the improved performance of the athletes at both national and international levels.

Future Recommendations

It is recommended to carry out a follow-up qualitative study to get a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of the athletes which will be having an impact on the quality of life of the athletes. A longitudinal study can get us closer to the generalization of the findings across athletes of all age groups. Moreover, research involving retired athletes will give an overview of impact of athletic identity on quality of life in later stages of life.

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