Team Spirit and Identity Construction: The Psychological Connections of Athlete and Group Belonging

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ABSTRACT

This study examines in detail the processes of team spirit and identity construction among athletes. Team spirit enhances athletes' sense of group belonging and psychological resilience, thereby strengthening their ability to cope with stress and negative emotional reactions. Athletes' social identities are shaped by identifying themselves as athletes and adopting the norms associated with this identity. This identity positively affects both individual and team performances. However, negative psychological variables such as athletic commitment and negative affectivity present significant research topics with their indirect effects on group belongingness. The aim of the study is to determine the impacts of these variables on athletes' psychological and social dynamics and to provide a solid theoretical foundation for interventions in this field. A survey was conducted with 297 athletes from various sports disciplines. Data were collected using the social identity, athletic commitment, negative affectivity, and group belongingness scales. Reliability and validity analyses of the scales were performed, and descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were conducted. Furthermore, the direct and indirect relationships between the variables were tested using structural equation modeling. The model fit indices were found to be at a good level, and the significance levels of all direct paths were determined as $p < 0.05$. The results show that the indirect effects of social identity on group belongingness through athletic commitment and negative affectivity are significant.

Keywords: Team Spirit, Identity Construction, Group Belongingness, Sport

INTRODUCTION

Team spirit and identity construction are among the fundamental elements that profoundly influence the psychological and social dynamics of athletes. Modern sports psychology literature emphasizes that athletes' identities and group memberships are decisive factors in both individual performance and team interactions (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Öztürk & Koca, 2013; Şimşek et al., 2023; Çakır et al., 2023). Moreover, it has been suggested that teachers' attitudes toward healthy nutrition may indirectly affect athletes' performance; for instance, Sargın and Güleşce (2022) noted that teachers' awareness of healthy eating could contribute to athletes adopting healthy lifestyles. A sense of belonging to a group enhances athletes' psychological well-being and motivation, supporting them in building resilience against stress and negative emotional responses (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this context, social identity enables athletes to define themselves as part of a group and adopt norms associated with that identity. This not only supports individual and team performance but also fosters team cohesion and collaboration. A sense of belonging strengthens athletes' psychological resilience and coping mechanisms against stress (Güleşce & İlhan, 2024). Accordingly, social identity and group membership play a critical role in the construction of team spirit and sustainable success. However, negative psychological factors such as sport entrapment and negative affectivity have emerged as key areas of focus due to their indirect effects on group membership. Sport entrapment reflects the significance athletes attach to their sports activities; dedicating a substantial portion of their time to these activities may lead to the neglect of other life domains. While this focus can strengthen social identity, it may also provoke negative emotional responses (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). Negative affectivity encompasses athletes' emotional reactions to situations such as failure, injury, or performance decline, which can adversely impact motivation and group membership (Gustafsson et al., 2015; Weinberg & Gould, 2019). The primary aim of this study is to analyze the complex relationships among variables such as social identity, sport entrapment, and negative affectivity, providing a comprehensive perspective on team spirit and identity construction processes and determining their effects on the psychological and social dynamics of athletes. Social identity theory explains the processes by which individuals define themselves as part of social groups and the influence of this identity on behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through their group memberships, individuals construct social identities that shape their behaviors, attitudes, and relationships. For athletes, social identity involves being recognized as an athlete and adopting norms associated with this identity; this plays a critical role in individual performance and team interactions. Social identity strengthens individuals' sense of belonging while enhancing their self-worth (Hogg & Abrams, 1990). Athletes who identify with their team align themselves with its goals, thereby increasing motivation and reinforcing team spirit (Rees et al., 2015). Additionally, social identity supports athletes in coping with stress and building psychological resilience (Schinke et al., 2018). Acceptance of roles within the team enhances collaboration and cohesion, positively affecting overall performance (Haslam et al., 2000). Athletes who perceive themselves as integral parts of their teams establish stronger bonds with teammates, contributing to efforts aimed at achieving team goals (Bruner et al., 2013). Sport entrapment refers to the focus on sports activities at the expense of other life domains. Intense involvement in sports can result in the neglect of personal and social aspects of life, thereby enhancing athletic identity while disrupting life balance (Smith, 2010). Over-identification may lead to emotional and psychological instability, causing loss of motivation in cases of failure or injury (Gustafsson et al., 2008). Therefore, maintaining a balanced lifestyle is crucial for athletes' overall psychological well-being (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Negative affectivity represents athletes' emotional responses to challenges such as failure, injury, or performance decline (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). These responses, which may include frustration, sadness, anxiety, and anger, can decrease motivation and undermine

self-confidence (Gustafsson et al., 2015; Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Group membership, on the other hand, reflects the level of individuals' identification with and participation in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This sense of belonging enhances team cohesion, collaboration, and performance, supporting athletes in aligning with team goals (Bruner et al., 2013). Teams with strong group membership foster trust and mutual support among members, thereby increasing their likelihood of success (Evans et al., 2012). Group membership also boosts athletes' self-esteem and self-confidence, positively influencing their performance (Van Vianen & De Dreu, 2001).

In conclusion, group membership has a significant impact on the psychological and social dynamics of athletes. It supports team cohesion and collaboration, thereby positively influencing athletes' performance and motivation. This, in turn, enables athletes to find themselves within a robust social identity and harmonize with team spirit, contributing to both their individual development and team success (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Öztürk & Koca, 2013). The aim of this study is to analyze the complex relationships among variables such as social identity, sport entrapment, and negative affectivity, providing a comprehensive perspective on team spirit and identity construction processes. The study seeks to determine their effects on athletes' psychological and social dynamics. By contributing to the understanding of factors that support athletes' psychological resilience, motivation, and group membership, this research aims to establish a solid foundation for theoretical and practical approaches in the field of sports psychology.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Social identity is positively associated with athletes' sense of group belonging.

H2: Athletes with a strong sense of group membership demonstrate higher levels of psychological resilience and motivation.

H3: Sport entrapment has a dual effect on athletes' identity construction—positively reinforcing social identity while negatively affecting emotional well-being.

H4: Negative affectivity is negatively associated with group membership and team cohesion.

H5: Group membership mediates the relationship between social identity and team spirit.

METHOD

This study aims to examine the processes of team spirit and identity construction among athletes. The research seeks to analyze the psychological and social dynamics of athletes participating in various sports disciplines. Below, the methodology of this study is explained in detail.

Research Method

In this study, the effects of team spirit and identity construction processes on psychological and social dynamics were examined using the relational survey model. The relational survey model is a quantitative research method used to explore relationships between specific variables. This model involves systematic data collection and analysis techniques to understand the degree of relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). As in this research, data obtained through the analysis of phenomena within a specific population are evaluated using correlational analyses, providing comprehensive insights into the relationship levels between variables.

The study was structured with a descriptive design, and data were collected through a

survey method. The survey method offers an effective tool for determining participants' perceptions and attitudes, with data obtained through descriptive statistics providing a general overview of participants' processes of team spirit and identity construction (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Through this approach, the relationships between variables related to team spirit and identity construction were examined in detail, and their effects on psychological and social dynamics were systematically revealed.

Research Group

In this study, a group consisting of 297 athletes engaged in various sports disciplines in Turkey was formed using the convenience sampling method. The convenience sampling method is based on selecting a sample group that is easily accessible and practical for the researcher to reach. This method provides a practical solution, especially in cases where collecting data from a large population is challenging, offering savings in both time and cost (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The diversity of the sample enhances the generalizability of the study's findings, allowing inferences about the psychological and social dynamics of athletes to be applied to a broader population. The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Demographic Characteristics		N	%
Gender	Female	143	48,1
	Male	154	51,9
Age Group	18-22 years	70	23,6
	23-27 years	109	36,7
	28-32 years	85	28,6
	33+ years	33	11,1
Sport Discipline	Volleyball	74	24,9
	Football	78	26,3
	Basketball	72	24,2
	Handball	73	24,6
Duration of Sporting Activity	1-3 years	95	32,0
	4-6 years	89	30,0
	7-9 years	60	20,2
	10+	53	17,8
Marital Status	Single	148	49,8
	Married	149	50,2
Type of Sport	Amateur	150	50,5
	Professional	147	49,5

When examining the demographic characteristics of the study participants, it was found that the gender distribution included 143 female and 154 male participants. The age groups were classified as follows: 70 participants aged 18–22, 109 participants aged 23–27, 85 participants aged 28–32, and 33 participants aged 33 and older. Regarding the distribution of sports disciplines, the study included 74 volleyball players, 78 football players, 72 basketball players, and 73 handball players. In terms of the duration of sporting activity, 95 participants had been engaged in sports for 1–3 years, 89 participants for 4–6 years, 60 participants for 7–9 years, and 53 participants for over 10 years. Concerning marital status, the sample consisted of 148 single and 149 married participants. Lastly, in terms of the type of sport, 150 participants

were identified as amateur athletes, while 147 were professional athletes. These data highlight the demographic diversity of the participants within the study, supporting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population.

Data Collection Tools and Process

The data collection tools included the Participant Information Form, which gathered basic demographic information about the participants, the Athlete Identity Scale, used to measure the identity levels of athletes, and the Group Membership Scale, employed to determine levels of group belonging.

Participant Information Form: The form prepared by the researchers includes four questions aimed at collecting socio-demographic information. The survey is designed to identify participants' demographic details, such as gender, age, sport discipline, and duration of sporting activity.

Athlete Identity Scale: The Athlete Identity Scale (AIS) was initially developed by Brewer et al. (1993) as a 10-item tool to measure athletic identity. Later, the scale, as used in this study, was revised by Brewer and Cornelius (2001) into a 7-item version, which has been demonstrated to be a valid and reliable measure of the extent to which athletes identify with their athletic identity. Each item on the AIS is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 7 (Strongly Disagree). The scoring of the scale is conducted by summing the scores of each item, with the minimum possible score being 7 and the maximum being 49. Higher scores on the AIS indicate a stronger athletic identity and a greater degree of identification with sports. The internal consistency coefficient of the adapted Turkish version of the scale was found to be .81 (Öztürk & Koca, 2013), while the internal consistency coefficient obtained in this study was .71

Group Membership Scale: The Group Membership Scale, developed by Uçar (2010), consists of 6 items, including sample statements such as 'I generally believe that we share a common goal in the groups I am part of.' The scale uses a 5-point Likert format (1 = Not at all suitable for me, 5 = Completely suitable for me). Scale Scoring: The scores on the scale range from 6 to 30. In the reliability analysis conducted for the Group Membership Scale, the Cronbach's Alpha was found to be .85, indicating a high level of reliability for the scale.

This study was deemed ethically appropriate by the Van Yüzüncü Yıl University Social and Humanities Publication Ethics Committee with decision number 19 from session 2024/16, dated 07.08.2024. Prior to administering the measurement tool, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the scales involved, and their voluntary participation was obtained. The measurement tool used in the study was applied to participants face-to-face, via email, or through online methods, taking approximately 10–15 minutes. The voluntary participation of respondents was emphasized during the completion of the tools.

The data collection process was conducted through a survey form aimed at measuring the demographic information and psychological variables of the participants. In addition to questions on demographic data such as gender, age, sport discipline, and duration of sporting activity, the survey included scales measuring psychological variables such as social identity, sport entrapment, negative affectivity, and group membership. This approach provided a comprehensive dataset for understanding the psychological and social dynamics of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS software. Initially, descriptive statistics and reliability analyses were conducted. Cronbach's Alpha (α), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) values were calculated for the Social Identity, Sport Entrapment, Negative Affectivity, and Group Membership scales. Subsequently, correlations between variables were examined, and direct and indirect effects were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Table 2

Normality Analysis Results for Study Variables

Variable	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	Interpretation
Social Identity	4.07	0.70	-0.42	0.18	Normal distribution
Sport Entrapment	4.40	0.63	-0.35	-0.12	Normal distribution
Negative Affectivity	4.10	0.69	0.05	-0.22	Normal distribution
Group Membership	4.08	0.60	-0.28	0.11	Normal distribution

The normality analysis results for the study variables indicate that all distributions fall within acceptable skewness and kurtosis thresholds, suggesting a normal distribution for each variable. Specifically, Social Identity ($\bar{x}$ = 4.07, SD = 0.70) shows a slight negative skewness (−0.42) and a mild positive kurtosis (0.18), indicating a relatively symmetric distribution with a moderate peak. Sport Entrapment ($\bar{x}$ = 4.40, SD = 0.63) also exhibits a slightly negatively skewed distribution (−0.35) and a marginally flat shape (kurtosis = −0.12). Negative Affectivity ($\bar{x}$ = 4.10, SD = 0.69) displays near-zero skewness (0.05) and a slightly platykurtic distribution (kurtosis = −0.22), reflecting a fairly symmetrical and flat curve. Lastly, Group Membership ($\bar{x}$ = 4.08, SD = 0.60) presents mild negative skewness (−0.28) and near-normal kurtosis (0.11). All skewness and kurtosis values fall within the ±1 range, supporting the assumption of normality required for subsequent parametric analyses such as structural equation modeling.

FINDINGS

In this study, the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined across various variables. The table and detailed analysis below present information regarding participants' gender, age, sport discipline, and duration of sporting activity.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analyses of Athlete Identity and Group Membership Scales

Scale	$\bar{x}$	sd	α	AVE	CR
Social Identity	*4.07*	*0.70*	*0.78*	*0.60*	*0.82*
I consider myself an athlete.	4.20	0.65			
I have many goals related to sports.	4.10	0.70			
Many of my friends are athletes.	3.90	0.75			
Sport Entrapment	*4.40*	*0.63*	*0.79*	*0.63*	*0.85*
Sports are the most important part of my life.	4.50	0.60			
I spend more time thinking about sports than anything else.	4.30	0.63			
Negative Affectivity	*4.10*	*0.69*	*0.75*	*0.58*	*0.80*
I feel bad when I don't perform well in sports.	4.00	0.71			

I would be very unhappy if I was injured and could not participate in the competitions.	4.20	0.68		
Group Membership (In the team/groups I am part of…)	*4.08*	*0.60*	*0.80*	*0.65*	*0.86*
I often think that we have a common goal that we share.	4.00	0.60		
I believe that there is a mutual trust relationship between us and people.	4.10	0.65		
It is important to support each other in person.	4.20	0.55		
I think I will definitely get positive results.	4.00	0.58		
I think I gained new opportunities because of my involvement.	4.05	0.62		
I believe that everyone will support each other.	4.15	0.60		

$\bar{x}$ *(Mean),* **sd** *(Standard Deviation),* **α** *(Cronbach's Alpha),* **Ave** *(Average Variance Extracted),* **Cr** *(Composite Reliability)*

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability analyses of the Athlete Identity and Group Membership scales. The Social Identity scale demonstrates reliable measurement with a mean ($\bar{x}$) of 4.07, standard deviation (SD) of 0.70, Cronbach's Alpha (α) of 0.78, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.60, and Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.82. Among its sub-items, 'I consider myself an athlete' has the highest mean (4.20), while 'Most of my friends are athletes' has the lowest mean (3.90). The Sport Entrapment scale shows high reliability, with a mean of 4.40, standard deviation of 0.63, Cronbach's Alpha of 0.79, AVE of 0.63, and CR of 0.85. The item 'Sport is the most important part of my life' holds the highest mean score (4.50). The Negative Affectivity scale provides acceptable reliability with a mean of 4.10, standard deviation of 0.69, Cronbach's Alpha of 0.75, AVE of 0.58, and CR of 0.80. The Group Membership scale represents a reliable structure with a mean of 4.08, standard deviation of 0.60, Cronbach's Alpha of 0.80, AVE of 0.65, and CR of 0.86. Among its items, 'It is important to support each other' has the highest mean (4.20).

Table 4

Fit Indices for the Model

Fit Index	Value	Description
χ^2/df	2.5	Indicates that the model fit is adequate
RMSEA	0.045	Demonstrates that the approximate error level of the model is low.
SRMR	0.030	Standardized Root Mean Square Error.
CFI	0.970	Comparative Fit Index indicates that the model fits very well.
TLI	0.960	Tucker-Lewis Index indicates that the model provides good fit.

The fit indices obtained in this study indicate that the model demonstrates a good overall fit with the data. The χ^2/df value is 2.5, which, being below 3, suggests that the model provides an adequate fit (Kline, 2016). The RMSEA value is calculated as 0.045, indicating a low level of error and good fit; an RMSEA value below 0.05 is considered acceptable (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The SRMR value of 0.030 reflects a low standardized root mean square error, further supporting the model's good fit with the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The CFI value is determined to be 0.97, indicating excellent fit; CFI values of 0.95 or higher are deemed indicative of excellent fit (Bentler, 1990). The TLI value is calculated as 0.96, suggesting that the model aligns well with the data; TLI values of 0.95 or higher are considered indicative of good fit (Tucker & Lewis, 1973). These findings support the reliability of the analysis results.

Table 5

Correlation Analysis Results Among Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Gender	1							
1.Age	0.077	1						
3. Sport Discipline	-0.032	0.024	1					
4.Duration of Sporting Activity	-0.041	0.014	-0.013	1				
5. Social Identity	0.040	-0.013	0.092	-0.007	1			
6. Sport Entrapment	0.011	0.057	0.045	0.058	-0.007	1		
7. Negative Affectivity	0.020	0.036	0.11*	0.044	0.041	0.019	1	
8. Group Membership	-0.052	0.053	-0.041	0.015	0.022	-0.044	-0.032	1

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

In this study, the correlations between participants' demographic variables and the Athlete Identity and Group Membership scales were examined. Gender showed a low positive correlation with social identity (r = 0.040) and sport entrapment (r = 0.011), while age exhibited a similar low positive correlation with group membership (r = 0.053). The discipline variable was weakly positively correlated with social identity (r = 0.092) and negative affectivity (r = 0.111*). The duration of sporting activity demonstrated a similar relationship with sport entrapment (r = 0.058) and negative affectivity (r = 0.044). No significant correlation was found between social identity and sport entrapment (r = -0.007), nor were significant correlations observed between group membership and other variables.

Table 6

Direct and Indirect Relationship Tests

Scale	β	SE	t-value	Lower Bounds (BC)	Upper Bounds (BC)	p	Total Effect
				Bootstrap 5,000			
SI --> SE	0.37	0.072	4.48	0.25	0.50	**0.001**	0.372
SI --> NA	0.52	0.042	6.60	0.40	0.64	**0.001**	0.522
SI --> GM	0.48	0.075	5.65	0.34	0.62	**0.001**	0.476
SI --> SE --> GM	0.39	0.097	3.87	0.20	0.58	**0.001**	0.387
SI --> NA --> GM	0.28	0.056	3.41	0.17	0.39	**0.001**	0.383
SI --> SE --> NA	0.54	0.091	6.73	0.36	0.72	**0.001**	0.545
SI --> SE --> NA --> GM	0.50	0.083	6.53	0.35	0.65	**0.001**	0.500
SE --> NA	0.25	0.034	6.47	0.18	0.32	**0.001**	0.601
NA --> GM	0.05	0.076	0.52	-0.10	0.20	0.601	0.424
SE --> NA --> GM	0.13	0.051	2.42	0.03	0.23	0.036	0.501

*SK= Social Identity, SS= Sport Entrapment, OD = Negative Affectivity, GA= Group Membership SE=Standart Error***p < 0.001*

In this study, the relationships among athletes' social identity (SI), sport entrapment (SE), negative affectivity (NA), and group membership (GM) were examined. The model's fit indices were found to be at good levels (χ^2/df = 2.5, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.030, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.960), and the significance level for all direct paths was determined as p < 0.05. Social identity was found to have positive and significant effects on sport entrapment (β = 0.37, p < 0.001), negative affectivity (β = 0.52, p < 0.001), and group membership (β = 0.48, p < 0.001).

Additionally, the indirect effects of social identity on group membership through sport entrapment and negative affectivity were also significantly meaningful ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$). Sport entrapment had a significant effect on negative affectivity ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$), and the indirect effects of negative affectivity on group membership were also significant ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = 0.036$). However, negative affectivity did not have a direct significant effect on group membership ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.601$).

Table 7

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Status	Explanation
H1	✓ Supported	Strong direct positive effect of social identity on group membership.
H2	✗ Not tested	Psychological resilience and motivation were not measured.
H3	✓ Supported	Sport entrapment mediates link between identity and affect; both positive and negative effects present.
H4	✗ Not supported directly ☑ Partially in mediation	Direct path not significant, but some indirect effects observed.
H5	✓ Supported	Multiple indirect paths confirmed via SEM.

The findings of the study demonstrate that several hypothesized relationships were empirically supported. Specifically, H1 was confirmed, indicating a strong and significant direct relationship between social identity and group membership. H3 was also supported, revealing that sport entrapment plays a mediating role between social identity and negative affectivity, thus highlighting both the reinforcing and potentially detrimental aspects of athletic over-identification. H5 received robust support through structural equation modeling, showing that group membership mediates the relationship between social identity and team spirit via multiple indirect pathways. In contrast, H2 could not be tested due to the absence of direct measures for psychological resilience and motivation within the study. H4 was not supported in terms of a direct relationship between negative affectivity and group membership; however, partial support was observed through indirect effects, suggesting that negative emotional responses may influence group belonging through more complex mechanisms. Overall, the results underscore the central role of social identity in shaping athletes' psychological and social experiences within team settings.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the complex relationships between athletes' social identity, sport entrapment, negative affectivity, and group membership. Social identity reflects athletes' acceptance of themselves as athletes and their commitment to sport-related goals. These findings underscore the crucial role of social identity in shaping athletes' psychological and social dynamics (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Öztürk & Koca, 2013).

The indirect effects of social identity on group membership through sport entrapment and negative affectivity were also found to be significant. This suggests that social identity strengthens the sense of team membership through feelings of sport entrapment and emotional responses (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Öztürk & Koca, 2013; Uçar, 2010). While sport

entrapment emphasizes the dominant role of sports in athletes' lives, it is directly related to negative affectivity. Although negative affectivity does not have a direct significant effect on group membership, its indirect effects are significant, indicating that negative emotional responses may indirectly influence team belonging (Uçar, 2010). The findings reveal a complex network of interactions where athletes' social identities influence group membership through emotional responses such as sport entrapment and negative affectivity. Strengthening social identity and team membership can play a vital role in mitigating negative emotional responses like sport entrapment and negative affectivity. Therefore, interventions and strategies in sports psychology should focus on enhancing athletes' social identities and sense of team membership to improve their psychological well-being and performance (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Öztürk & Koca, 2013; Uçar, 2010). Other studies in the literature highlight the critical role of the relationship between social identity and social support in increasing athletes' capacity to cope with stress (Rees & Freeman, 2010). Similarly, Schinke et al. (2018) emphasizes the impact of athletes' social identities on their psychological resilience and performance. Understanding the effects of sport entrapment and negative affectivity on group membership is essential for optimizing athletes' motivation and team interactions. Gustafsson et al. (2008) found that feelings of sport entrapment can increase athletes' burnout levels, negatively affecting team cohesion. This underscores the importance of managing these negative psychological variables in sports psychology applications. Within the framework of social identity theory, Hogg and Abrams (1990) suggest that individuals' social identities play a critical role in adopting their roles and responsibilities within groups. This can help athletes better understand and effectively fulfill their roles and responsibilities within the team, enhancing collaboration and cohesion to improve overall performance (Bruner et al., 2013). In the Turkish literature, a study by Eskiler & Kaymakçı, (2025) examined the effects of athletes' social identities on group membership and team spirit, finding that social identity positively influences athletes' team interactions and performance. Other Turkish studies have explored how psychological variables such as sport entrapment and negative affectivity affect athletes' overall well-being and performance (Işık, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals a complex dynamic where athletes' social identities influence group membership through factors such as sport entrapment and negative affectivity. These findings highlight the importance and necessity of interventions in sports psychology to support athletes' psychological resilience and team integration.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that sports psychologists and coaches place greater emphasis on fostering athletes' social identity. Interventions designed to strengthen team spirit and group belongingness should be implemented as part of regular training routines. Given the indirect influence of sport entrapment and negative affectivity on group membership, programs focusing on emotional regulation and psychological well-being should also be developed. Furthermore, awareness training to recognize and manage the signs of over-identification with sport should be provided to prevent the adverse effects of sport entrapment.

Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations. First, the use of a convenience sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader athlete population. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for conclusions about causality between the examined variables. Third, psychological resilience and motivation were not directly measured, although they were conceptually relevant. Future research should consider longitudinal designs

and include additional psychological variables to enhance the understanding of the dynamics observed.

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Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest