

Moral Identity on Athletes' Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviour Perceived by Gender

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Abstract: Moral identity is a self-regulatory mechanism in which the conception of morality can vary from one individual to another. For example, one person may emphasize fairness as central to their morality, even as another accentuates kindness. It is prominent in the social cognitive view, which explains moral identity as increasing the accessibility of self-regulatory schemas that regulate moral behaviour. Moral identity is “a self-conception structured around a set of moral traits”. The centrality of morality to an individual’s identity builds chronically accessible self-schemas and moral behaviours such as prosocial and antisocial athletes’ behaviour. Thus, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the value of moral identity in athletes’ behaviour. This is observable in the environment of developing athlete’s dependent on gender. A questionnaire based on Moral Identity was completed by 240 university athletes from the northern region universities in Malaysia. The finding showed that there was no significant difference in the positive moral identity subscale among gender. Females are becoming socialised into sports by a process like males and learning values, norms, and character like males. Meanwhile, there was a significant difference in negative moral identity among gender. Female athletes adopt athletic moral and ethical behaviours much more in comparison with male athletes. Looking at the nature of male athletes themselves, their moral character is stricter and less spoiled than that of females. Works on promoting individuals’ moral identity should be encouraged to facilitate the effect of moral emotions on moral actions.

Keywords: Antisocial behaviour, athlete’s behaviour, moral identity, prosocial behaviour

Introduction

Moral standards are formed from a variety of sources, including education from others, observation, and punishment, and they are used to govern behaviour through emotional self-sanction. That is, when individuals act in accordance with their moral standards, they experience good feelings like pride and enjoyment, and when they break them, they experience unpleasant emotions such as regret and guilt. These self-sanctions are proposed to govern behaviour anticipatorily, with persons avoiding actions that may cause self-condemnation. Similar to social cognitive theory, Aquino and Reed (2002) described the psychological construct, moral identity, within a socio-cognitive approach that stresses the importance of situation-specific knowledge and experiences that guide behaviour and decision making. Moral identity is defined as the degree to which a person’s moral self is experienced as a central part of that person’s overall self-concept (Hurst et al., 2022).

Moral identity is a powerful source of moral motivation, or the drive to behave morally because of individuals’ need to preserve self-consistency. Moral identity has been linked to moral behaviour in a range of circumstances. Individuals whose moral identity was essential to their self-concept, for example, were more inclined to donate food to the poor and less likely to mislead during a pay negotiation. For instance, past research have found that team sport participants with a strong moral

identity exhibit less antisocial behaviour towards their opponents (Kavussanu, Strange, & Boardley, 2013). Furthermore, the correlation between the fiercely competitive aspect of engaging in sports and the intense drive to achieve victory has been associated with adverse consequences, resulting in the manifestation of unsociable and unprincipled conduct. (Mohammad Fazilah, Zainuddin, Mohd Abdoh, & Mohd Kassim, 2023). Moral identity is additionally related to heightened startle blinks while watching emotive pictures of athletes who have been wounded by an opponent or have been seriously injured during play, giving the first objective evidence for the relationship between moral identity and emotional processing in sports. However, predicted self-conscious moral feelings may operate as a mechanism through which moral identity prevents unethical behaviour (Kavussanu et al., 2015).

Moreover, studies investigating moral identity according to moral activity in the feeling of a game are lacking. Past research has shown that group activities players with clear upright personalities have detailed less successive antisocial behaviours towards their adversaries (Sage et al., 2006). Seeing full of feeling pictures depicting players who were injured by an adversary or genuinely harmed during play, moral character has likewise been identified with highlighted frightened flickers, introducing the primary quantitative proof for the association between upright personality and passionate preparation in competitors (Kavussanu, Willoughby, & Ring, 2012). Sports moral literature has tended to focus on the negative elements of morality, in addition to current publications indicating moral degradation in sports, as such football. This focus detracts from the sport's traditional functions as a vehicle for the development of characteristics such as justice, loyalty, and collaboration (Fauzee, 2012). Aiding an adversary off the court, saying thanks to a rival on an effective play, or returning the ball to the resistance are instances of prosocial behaviour in sports. Although prosocial practices can be directed for non-benevolent intentions, they are recognised by the way that they advantage others and are subsequently important all by themselves. Additionally, moral identity that presently cannot seem to be concentrated in association with sports ethical quality as game clinicians investigating moral challenges in sport have underscored the need of surveying moral character with moral working (Ebbeck & Gibbons, 2003). Based on the above, the relative importance of athlete's prosocial and antisocial behaviour toward coach's behaviour and moral identity among gender, team, and individual sports needs to be explored (Kavussanu & Al-Yaaribi, 2021). Moreover, there has not been any research done exclusively on youth or elite athletes among the students in Malaysia. Student athletes in Malaysia are expected to demonstrated high moral behaviour both on and off field (Tan & Naidu, 2018). Building on this work, a great deal of prosocial and antisocial behaviours may appear in athletes. Thus, the objective of this study was to conduct an in-depth investigation focusing on two fundamental research inquiries. The first inquiry aimed to determine whether there existed a notable disparity in the positive moral identity subscale when comparing genders. The second inquiry sought to ascertain whether a significant distinction could be observed in negative moral identity between genders among the demographic of young athletes.

Literature Review

Moral identity is a variable that has yet to be studied in connection to sports morality. Sport psychologists studying moral issues in sports have emphasized the need of comparing moral identification to moral functioning (Kavussanu & Stanger, 2017). Moral identity has been described as "a commitment to one's sense of self to paths of action that support or defend the well-being of others." It represents the importance of a set of moral attributes to the self. It has been depicted as the process that motivates moral conduct and is the second component of the self-structure associated with morality (Lapsley, 2015). In sum, moral identity, a powerful informant of moral motivation due to our longing for self-consistency, has been correlated with moral behaviour in a variety of contexts, comprising sport (Krettenauer, 2020).

Guilt is thought to discourage immoral activity and has been related to a low degree of violence. In addition, people whose moral identity was significant reported negative emotional reactions to others' violent behaviour (Aquino et al., 2007). However, it is uncertain if moral identity influences moral feeling in connection to one's own transgressive actions. Importantly, the mechanism

by which moral identity influences moral behaviour has yet to be identified. When the area of good brain research began to close the judgment-activity gap, the concept of 'moral personality' emerged as one of the most important scaffolds to moral behaviours (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral identity research is concerned with the importance of moral values, but it goes a step further. The moral identity of a person normally relates to 'a person's cognitive schema regarding his or her moral character' (Xu et al., 2023). While individuals may consider moral value to be important without incorporating those qualities into their ability to be self-aware, if virtues are prioritised over other qualities, they are likely to become essential components of character over time, keeping in mind that moral motivation is primarily, but not entirely, bind to moral personality (Ylä-Anttila, 2023).

As an individual's personality gradually absorbs moral concerns and themes, the need to maintain self-consistency enhances the chance that acts will embody the moral ideas and convictions valued by the individual (Blasi & Milton, 1991). A current meta-analysis assessment on moral identity and moral behavior commonly confirms these beliefs, discovering that 'moral identity fortifies people's eagerness' to take an interest in prosocial and moral conduct just as to cease from antisocial behaviour (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). While research on moral identity and sports activity is the smallest, the findings generally comprehend the meta-analysis trend (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). Thus, in a study by Sage et al. (2006), the analysts tracked down that moral identity disapproving antisocial behaviour selection and conduct. Similarly, Kavussanu, Stanger, and Ring (2015) found that moral personality was contrarily linked to antisocial behaviour, yet the association was interceded by anticipatory guilt in a follow-up study. They found in a third report in the study that preparing moral identity diminished antisocial behaviour and that ethical judgment and emotion mediated this impact. Shields, Funk, and Bredemeier (2015) found that moral identity was adversely linked to moral disconnection in sport, and Kavussanu, Hatzigeorgiadis, Elbe, and Ring (2016) correspondingly found that moral identity negatively expected moral disengagement.

Research based on the prosocial and antisocial behaviour of athletes has established connections with the moral identity of the athletes themselves. Sport psychologists who investigate moral challenges in sports have emphasized the importance of evaluating moral identity along with moral functioning (Ebbeck & Gibbonsm, 2003). Moral identity refers to the significance of a set of moral characteristics to an individual. It has been described as the process that motivates moral behaviour and constitutes the second dimension of the self-structure related to morality. Two assumptions have been made regarding moral identity. The first assumption is that although distinct moral identities may consist of non-overlapping moral features, a collection of shared moral traits is likely to be crucial for most individuals' definition of their moral selves. In recent research conducted by Aquino and Reed (2002) on university students in the United States, nine moral traits (such as caring, compassionate, fair, etc.) were identified. The second premise is that the value placed on being a moral person differs among individuals. Indeed, Aquino and Reed (2002) found evidence to support Blasi's (2010) assumption that morality holds greater importance for some individuals than it does for others.

In addition to the assumptions made by Blasi (2010), there exist two levels of moral identity, namely internalisation (private) and symbolisation (public). The measurement of internalisation focuses on the extent to which moral attributes are considered essential to one's self-concept, while symbolisation measures the degree to which these same traits are expressed in the real world. Research has shown that both aspects of moral identity have an impact on self-reported volunteering among college students. However, it is only the factor of internalisation that can predict actual donating behaviour (Winterich et al., 2013). Moreover, a strong sense of internalised moral identity has been positively linked to an extended circle of moral respect for out-group members, a more favourable judgment of relief efforts, and monetary gifts (Ii, Aquino, Fitzsimmons, Kim, Reed & Van, 2003). Due to the symbolisation dimension's weak predictive qualities and its ambiguous relevance to the football environment, only the aspect of internalisation was considered. For example, participants were asked about their engagement in activities such as reading books, wearing clothes, or purchasing products that signify their moral identity. Additionally, the symbolisation dimension's poor predictive qualities were taken into account as well (Sage et al., 2006).

Overall, sport has commonly been perceived as a significant platform for the acquisition of essential skills and the fostering of favourable youth development (Gould & Carson, 2008). Nevertheless, due to the increased media focus on violence and various forms of dishonesty in sports,

doubts have emerged regarding the suitability of (elite) sport athletes as role models for young individuals (Traclet, Moret, Ohl & Clémence, 2015). Coaches play a crucial role as socialising agents in the lives of athletes (Davies, Babkes Stellino, Nichols & Coleman, 2016). There exist two categories of coaching styles: autonomy-supportive and controlling. The autonomy-supportive coaching approach involves the coach empowering athletes to participate in tactical and technique decision-making while also respecting their thoughts and emotions (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Conversely, the dominating approach involves the coach employing authoritarian and forceful communication, disregarding the players' ideas and emotions, and utilising persuasive tactics such as guilt induction, manipulation, or threats (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010). The autonomy-supportive coaching style has been associated with prosocial behaviour, whereas the controlling coaching style has been connected to antisocial behaviour (Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015).

Methodology

Participants

This particular research design employs a cross-sectional survey methodology, utilising a questionnaire as the primary tool for evaluating the moral identity of young athletes engaged in the realm of sports. The target population of the present study encompasses individuals ranging from 18 to 25 years of age, who actively participate in both individual and team sports. The recruitment of participants was carried out within the student body of various public universities located in the northern region of Malaysia. Notable examples of these institutions include Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM Perlis), University Malaysia Perlis (UNIMAP), and University Utara Malaysia (UUM). The total sample size consisted of 240 athletes, with subgroups categorized as team sport athletes ($n = 148$), individual sport athletes ($n = 92$), male athletes ($n = 125$), and female athletes ($n = 115$). The sports represented within the sample encompass a diverse range, such as netball, basketball, handball, volleyball, hockey, futsal, football, rugby sepak takraw, badminton, ping pong, tennis, mountain bike, silat, taekwondo, pétanque, basketball, softball, and karate. The study incorporates two distinct sets of criteria, namely inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria for the participants' selections were:

1. Athletes who participated in team or individual sport.
2. Athletes must actively be involved in their sport within 6 months and above of experience.
3. Athletes must have participated at least for university, state and national level.
4. Age of athletes must range between 18 to 25.

The exclusion criteria for the participants' selections were:

1. Athletes who participated in mixed categories sport.
2. Athletes who were actively involved in sport had less than 6 months of experience.
3. Athletes below the age of 18 years and, above 25 years old.

Measures

The sets of measure are divided into two distinct parts, namely Part A: Demographic Information (Part A) consists of seven questions that inquire about age, gender, duration of participation in sports, level of involvement, type of sports, sports categories, and the duration of the relationship between athletes and coaches. (Part B) focused to Moral Identity - Moral Identity (MI) and was developed by Aquino and Reed (2002). This conceptualisation characterizes character as a cognitive schema that is organised around nine moral traits, including compassion, kindness, hard work, fairness, helpfulness, care, friendliness, honesty, and generosity. Athletes were instructed to read these nine traits and subsequently provide their responses to five items using a 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The construct validity and internal consistency (α

coefficients of .83 and .85) of this scale have been supported by evidence presented in various studies (Aquino et al., 2007).

Procedures

This study obtained approval from the institutional ethical committee (REC/03/2022 (PG/MR/31)), following which coaches were engaged for the relevant sports. The targeted population sample was contacted through their respective coach, and the researcher visited coaches after their athletes participated in the study. The informed consent was acquired through various channels such as email, WhatsApp, calls, and messages. Prior to respondents answering the questionnaire or completing the Google Form, the researchers provided a comprehensive explanation of the instructions, the study's objectives, and clarification of several terms used in the questionnaires. Specifically, the terms moral identity positive and negative were explicated to ensure athletes' comprehension of the questions. Subsequently, the participants were presented with an informed consent document prior to data collection, underscoring the importance of confidentiality, the option to withdraw at any time, and the assurance that the gathered information would be kept confidential. Furthermore, respondents were given the opportunity to raise any queries they may have had.

Upon submission of the consent form, respondents were provided with an informed personal questionnaire titled "Moral Identity Development through online medium." The respondents were instructed to complete the questionnaire individually using an electronic copy in the form of a Google Form. The researcher furnished concise and lucid instructions within the Google Form on how to address all the questions. Participants were guided to furnish the necessary particulars in the survey. On average, respondents took approximately 20 minutes to complete all the questionnaires.

Findings

Table 1. An independent sample t-Test to assess the differences of moral identity perceived by gender (male and female) in youth athletes. (N=240)

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MI Positive	Male	125	6.29	.841	.075
	Female	115	6.32	.927	.088
MI Negative	Male	125	2.10	1.71	.153
	Female	115	1.60	1.25	.117

Note – N: Sample Test, SD: Standard Deviation, Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum.

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Diff.	
								Lower	Upper
MI Positive	1.75	.187	-.253	238	.801	-.028	.114	-.253	.196
MI Negative	17.00	.000	2.532	238	.012	.495	.195	.109	.880
			2.564	226.94	.011	.495	.193	.11	.875

Note: P-value \leq 0.05 is significant (two-tailed).

Table 1 showed the mean and standard deviation for computed variables of moral identity (MI). The mean score of positive moral identity for male was 6.29 while for female was 6.32. Next, the mean score of negative moral identity subscale for male was 2.10 while for female was 1.60.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to assess the differences in moral identity perceived by gender (male and female) in youth athletes. The p-value for positive moral identity (.187) obtained from Levene's Test is smaller than 0.05, therefore, it showed that the variance is equally assumed. There was no significant difference in positive moral identity ($t(238) = -.253, p = .801$ (two-tailed) in the scores with the mean score for male, $M = 6.29, SD = .841$ was lower than female, $M = 6.32, SD = .927$. Since the p-value is more > 0.05 . Therefore, there is no significant difference in positive moral identity for male and female in youth athletes. Another p-value for negative moral identity (.000) obtained from Levene's Test is smaller than 0.05, therefore, it showed that the variance is equal, not assumed. There was a significant difference in negative moral identity ($t(226.942) = 2.564, p = .011$ (two-tailed) in the scores with the mean score for male, $M = 2.10, SD = 1.71$ was higher than female, $M = 1.60, SD = 1.25$. Since the p-value is less than ≤ 0.05 . Therefore, there is a significant difference in negative moral identity for male and female in youth athletes.

Discussion

The finding is to differentiate moral identity among gender in youth athletes. The positive moral identity showed that there was no significant difference in moral identity among male and female. According to Olu and Ph (2016), female athletes are socialised into sports in the same manner that male athletes are, and they learn the same values, standards, and character qualities. It means that female athletes desire to be regarded as equal to male athletes in sports and show valued masculine social character traits. It is supported by Ding, Shao, Sun, Xie, Li, Wang and Xiaozhen (2018), where the idea that females frequently provide help because they are moved by moral feelings, whereas males frequently assist people because of their moral judgement. Given that men are constantly connected with impersonal thinking and act in line with their judgement or value. Moreover, it is reasonable to posit that female athletes possess the ambition to be perceived as on par with their male counterparts in the realm of sports and demonstrate esteemed masculine societal character attributes. Nevertheless, within the framework of ethical perspectives, it can be postulated that males predominantly conceptualise morality in relation to principles of fairness, whereas females may construe morality in relation to obligations and compassion. These findings supported Graham and Burns (2020) who demonstrated that athletic identity could act as a predicting variable for moral value preferences and that social identity formation could interact with an individual's moral development.

Then, the negative moral identity showed that there was a significant difference in moral identity among male and female. This is in line with Gentile, Boca, Giammusso and Isabella (2018), as male-female distinctions are frequently thought to be more 'real' than they actually are. These differences can be explained by the fact that sport is typically a male domain, and stereotypical masculinity norms are thought to impact male sport behaviour. In alternative terms, female athletes manifest considerably greater levels of athletic moral and ethical conduct compared to male players. In regard to male athletes, their moral demeanour is more stringent and less indulged than that of female athletes. Furthermore, masculinity is associated with the perceived value of hardness. For instance, according to Muhammad (2019), male appear to be more prone than women to exhibit negative behaviour. Furthermore, male desire is at the foundation of most conflict in the world, from football violence to world conflicts. Female athletes, on the other hand, demonstrate features that imply a more cooperative and disciplined approach to sport. These findings support the widely held belief that sport is a masculine activity in which males are more likely to be competitive while females are more likely to be cooperative (Monasterio, Erik, Hackney, Cloninger & Robert, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, moral identity emerges as a pivotal component in the process of decision-making pertaining to our actions. There exists an indirect correlation between moral identity and attitudes. Moreover, initiatives aimed at fostering moral identities among individuals should be encouraged to augment the impact of moral identity on moral conduct. Nevertheless, approaches to enhancing prosocial behaviour vary based on gender. It may be beneficial to allocate greater attention towards cultivating moral identities and moral virtues in both men and women, respectively, to enhance their prosocial behaviours. Gender serves as a determinant factor in shaping the development of moral identity.

Suggestion for Future Research

This study population only recruited youth athletes in specific population samples and focused on gender, and this limits the potential to generalise the results to the other age groups and levels of athletes. Future research is encouraged to replicate the current findings with athletes from the other age groups and athletes with more experiences which may influence the prosocial and antisocial behaviour in sports.

Co-Author Contribution

Ahmad Fikri Mohd Kassim conceived and planned this study, verified the data and discussion of the results, and took the lead in writing the manuscripts. Fariha Mohammad Fazilah conducted the literature finding, data preparation and data collection. Nandinie Mohd Nizam Edros conducted the data analysis and verified the content writing and contributed to the interpretation of the results. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis, and manuscript.

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