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## Relationships between the elite athlete identification and sport commitment for Japanese collegiate athletes

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between an elite athlete identification and sport commitment in Japanese collegiate athletes. Participants were four hundred twelve Japanese collegiate athletes. Results indicated that collegiate athlete who strongly internalized the elite athlete's identity had formed more sport commitment than those who did not. This study suggests that elite athletes might affect sports participation behavior of collegiate athletes in Japan.

**Keywords:** elite athlete, sports commitment, identification

### 1. Introduction

Historically, collegiate athletes have assumed the role of developing Japanese sport culture, and they have supported to increase the international competitiveness in Japan<sup>[1]</sup>. On the other hand, previous researches mentioned that the number of collegiate athletes are declining slightly in recent years<sup>[2]</sup>. Collegiate athletes are important to maintain and develop the international competitiveness in Japan, moreover, they will accomplish important role in Tokyo 2020. Thus, it is necessary to conduct a research on competitive sport persistency for collegiate athletes in Japan.

In sport science field, previous studies indicated that sport commitment is a psychological factor related to sports participation and persistency<sup>[3, 4, 5]</sup>. Sport commitment is defined as "psychological state representing the desire and resolve to continue participation in a particular athletic program, specific sport or sport in general<sup>[6]</sup>". Jeon and Ridinger<sup>[7]</sup> demonstrated that athletes who showed a higher sport commitment score indicated high frequency of competitive sport participation. In addition, Hagiwara and Isogai<sup>[8]</sup> found that Japanese athletes who had a higher sport commitment score demonstrated high frequency of training, intensity of practice, and time spent on a workout. Thus, sport commitment is an important factor to determine competitive sport persistence.

In Japan, the Tokyo Olympic Games are scheduled to be held in 2020, and it is expected that people's attention to and interest in competitive sports and behavior of athletes will improve. Especially, it is indicated that the behavior of the successful athletes is likely to affect many people<sup>[9]</sup>, and the behavior and attitude of athletes sends an influential message across to young people<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relationships among behavior of successful athletes and sport participants. Previously, Hagiwara *et al.*<sup>[11]</sup> examined the relationship among behavior of Japanese elite athletes and intention for sports persistency in collegiate athletes. They found that a collegiate athlete who had developed elite athlete behaviors strongly formed sport commitment. Thus, elite athletes are likely to affect Japanese collegiate athletes. However, they mentioned that the study did not verify the extent to which elite athlete's behavior was internalized in collegiate athletes, which leads them to form the sport commitment. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the degree of elite athlete identification for clarifying the relationships between internalization of elite athletic behaviors and sports persistency behavior in Japanese collegiate athletes.

Social psychologists Tyler and Balder<sup>[12]</sup> mentioned that people form their social identity within groups, and social identity in turn influences attitudes, values, and behaviors.

In addition, they indicated that people form their social identity with respect to their belongings and social identity affects their commitment to action. In the sport science field, Mofokeng *et al.* [13] mentioned that there were significant relationships between athlete identification and sport commitment. They found that team identification has a direct significant positive effect on spectator's physiological commitment. From the above, the Japanese collegiate athletes belong to the community of sports, which is an especially competitive field; thus, elite athletes should be leaders of their society. Thus, an elite athlete identity might be a form of their standard social identity or identification.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between elite athlete identification and sport commitment for Japanese collegiate athletes.

## 2. Materials and Methods

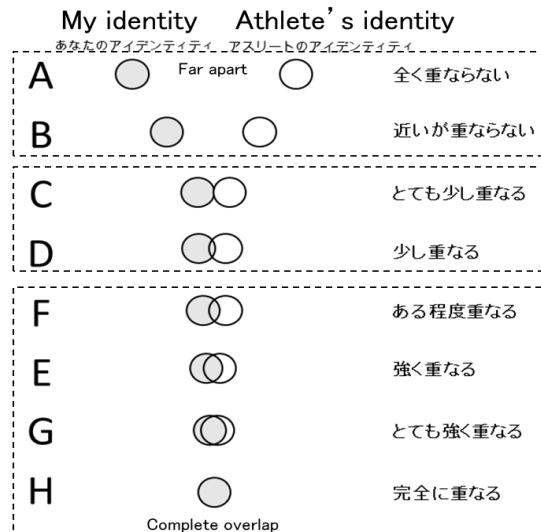
### 2.1 Participants

The participants were 412 Japanese collegiate athletes (Age M=19.08±.88). The average duration of sports participation was 17.59±7.34 hours per week. All participants were male athletes.

### 2.2 Instrument

Athlete identification was measured using an item from the Athlete Identification Scale [9]. This scale measures cognitive identification as a unidimensional measure of the construct (fig.1). If a participant chooses option "A," it means that there is minimal athlete identification. On the other hand, if the participants choose "H," it means that their identity completely overlaps with athlete identity. In addition, this study classified the three groups according to the degree of internalization of elite athlete identification. For example, group 1 was "not overlapping group," in which participants chose "A" or "B." It meant that participants did not internalize elite athlete's identity.

This study conducted a questionnaire survey with Japanese samples; thus, we translated the scale into Japanese and then conducted back translation into English to preserve its correspondence with the original scale, rather than allowing for linguistic and cultural differences. Four experts with backgrounds in sport psychology and sport management conducted the translation process. They were native Japanese speakers with sufficient English skills and had adequate research experience in the US.



1. no overlap group, 2. little overlap group,  
3. overlap group

**Fig 1:** Japanese version of athlete identification scale

Sport commitment was measured using the Japanese version of the Sport Commitment Scale [14] originally developed by Scanlan *et al.* [6]. This scale was also a self-report inventory measuring the psychological desire to continue sports participation. Six questions such as "How dedicated are you to playing sports?" "What would you be willing to do keep playing sports?" and "How determined are you to keep playing sports?" A five-point Likert scale was used, which varied depending on the question. Values were summed to provide total sport commitment score with the psychological desire for sports participation.

## 3. Results

The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of the sport commitment scores for are shown in Table. 1. A one-way ANOVA analyses was used to compare among sport commitment scores and current elite's identification status. Results of the one-way ANOVA analyses that there were significant differences in sport commitment score between each group status ( $F=11.69$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In addition, the results of Tukey post hoc analyses, there were significant differences between group 1 and group 2, 3 (Table. 1).

**Table 1:** Results of descriptive statistics and one way ANOVA for sport commitment

Variable	Group1 (no overlap)		Group2 (little overlap)		Group3 (overlap)		Post hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Sport Commitment	23.95	4.74	25.81	3.79	26.60	4.15	1<2 *** 1<3 **

\*\*\*  $p<.001$   
\*\*  $p<.01$

## 4. Discussion

This study examined the relationships between elite athlete identification and sport commitment for Japanese collegiate athletes. The results indicated that participants who had higher elite athlete identification had higher sport commitment scores. Namely, Japanese collegiate student athletes who internalized the elite athlete identity indicated higher commitment for sports persistency. Thus, results of

this study indicated that elite athlete identification affected the formation of sport commitment in Japanese collegiate athletes. Additionally, the results followed the theory of a previous research [12, 13]. They indicated that people form their social identity with respect to their belongings and social identity affects their commitment to action. The present study inferred that identification with athletes of one's own country formed their commitment for sport persistency, because

student athletes belong to the society of competitive sports field and elite athletes might be a significant influence on this society.

The results of this study are essential to understanding the relationships between elite athlete identification and sport commitment for collegiate athletes; however, there are some limitations. The first is that this study was conducted in a small area of Japan. In order to better understand Japanese collegiate athletes, future studies should be conducted in broader areas of Japan. In addition, larger samples are needed in order to explain issues regarding collegiate athletes' sport commitment. Finally, this study did not address actual sports adherence behaviors. Further research is needed to develop a better understanding of elite athlete's influences on sports adherence behavior among Japanese collegiate athletes.

## 5. Conclusions

This study clarified the relationship between the elite athlete identification and sport commitment in collegiate athletes. Japanese collegiate athletes who had higher elite athlete identification had higher sport commitment scores. These results enhance our understanding of the influences of elite athletes on Japanese student athletes. For maintaining the population of collegiate athletes in Japan, elite athlete's influences might be important for sports adherence.

## 6. Acknowledgments

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