



The effect of prosocial behaviour manageability on conscious awareness in university athletes: The mediating role of athlete identity

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Abstract

It has been suggested that there is a reciprocal and in-depth relationship between prosocial behaviors, mindfulness, and athlete identity. While athlete identity may contribute to the development of mindfulness by encouraging prosocial behaviors, mindfulness may also play an important role in understanding the internal structure of athlete identity and exhibiting prosocial behaviors. The interaction between these three components is thought to significantly affect athletes' social and psychological development. In this context, this study aimed to investigate the effect of university athletes' prosocial behavior manageability on mindfulness and the mediating role of athlete identity on this relationship. This study included 189 sports science faculty students who competed at least three times in university leagues. The Personal Information Form', 'Mindfulness Scale, and Prosocial Behavior Scale prepared by the researcher were used in the data collection part of the study. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data. Statistical calculations were performed using the Jamovi package program. The results of this study show that athlete identity plays an important mediating role in the effect of prosocial behaviors on mindfulness. This situation sheds light on the development of strategies that can contribute to both individual development of athletes and team dynamics. Although the direct effect was not statistically significant, the manageability of prosocial behaviors may have a significant effect on mindfulness through the mediating role of athlete identity. These findings suggest that strengthening athlete identity may be an effective strategy for transforming athletes' prosocial behaviors into mindfulness.

Keywords: Athlete identity, mindfulness, prosocial behaviour management

Üniversite sporcularında prososyal davranış yönetilebilirliğinin bilinçli farkındalık üzerindeki etkisi: Sporcu kimliğinin aracı rolü

Öz

Prososyal davranışlar, bilinçli farkındalık ve sporcu kimliği arasında karşılıklı ve derinlemesine bir ilişki olduğu öne sürülmüştür. Sporcu kimliği prososyal davranışları teşvik ederek bilinçli farkındalığın gelişimine katkıda bulunabilirken, bilinçli farkındalık da sporcu kimliğinin iç yapısını anlamada ve prososyal davranışlar sergilemede önemli bir rol oynayabilir. Bu üç bileşen arasındaki etkileşimin sporcuların sosyal ve psikolojik gelişimini önemli ölçüde etkileyeceği düşünülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite sporcularının prososyal davranış yönetilebilirliğinin bilinçli farkındalık üzerindeki etkisini ve sporcu kimliğinin bu ilişkideki aracılık rolünü araştırmaktır. Çalışmaya üniversite liglerinde en az üç kez yarışmış 189 spor bilimleri fakültesi öğrencisi dahil edilmiştir. Araştırmanın veri toplama kısmında araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan 'Kişisel Bilgi Formu', 'Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği' ve 'Prososyal Davranış Ölçeği' kullanılmıştır. Verileri analiz etmek için çoklu doğrusal regresyon analizinden yararlanılmıştır. İstatistiksel hesaplamalar ise Jamovi paket programı kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda, sporcu kimliğinin prososyal davranışların bilinçli farkındalık üzerindeki etkisinde önemli bir aracı rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Bu durum, sporcuların hem bireysel gelişimine hem de takım dinamiklerine katkıda bulunabilecek stratejilerin geliştirilmesine ışık tutmaktadır. Doğrudan etki istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olmasa da, prososyal davranışların yönetilebilirliğinin sporcu kimliğinin aracılık rolü yoluyla bilinçli farkındalık üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olabileceği görülmüştür. Bu bulgular, sporcu kimliğini güçlendirmenin, sporcuların prososyal davranışlarını bilinçli farkındalığa dönüştürmek için etkili bir strateji olabileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sporcu kimliği, farkındalık, prososyal davranış yönetimi

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INTRODUCTION

Sports psychologists aim to help athletes cope with challenges by teaching them psychological strategies (Gee, 2010). The use of psychological strategies enhances athletes' chances of performing at best under highly challenging, stressful, and even hostile conditions (Byshevets et al., 2023). Mindfulness, which is becoming increasingly popular among athletes, is defined as continuous attention to ongoing external and internal experiences with non-judgmental and non-reactive attitudes (Alvear et al., 2022). Recent mainstream theory research suggests that mindfulness can be significant in disrupting individuals' automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavior patterns (Brown, 2009; Chang et al., 2018). It is thought to potentially influence physiological and psychological states through various processes, such as error-free attention, experiential acceptance, non-attachment, or clarity about one's inner life (Coventry, 2015). Within this scope, two mindfulness-based group intervention programs have been developed: the mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) approach and the Mindfulness Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE) program (Wang et al., 2024). These programs consisted of several weeks of documented sessions aimed at learning different forms of mindfulness practices and their benefits on and off the field.

From an individual perspective, prosocial behavior helps enhance self-esteem (Hu, 2023), provides a sense of meaning, copes with negative emotions such as anxiety and loneliness, increases individual happiness and life satisfaction (Sun & Shek, 2010) and achieves a higher level of mental health. From a social perspective, prosocial behavior is a crucial foundation for building and sustaining a cohesive society and promoting social civilization (Taylor & Christie, 2015; Yuan, 2024). One of the methods suggested for managing prosocial behavior is to develop awareness. (Schindler & Friese, 2022). Mindfulness involves intentionally focusing on the present moment without judgment, while maintaining a non-reactive and compassionate attitude (Small & Lew, 2021). The potential role of mindfulness in educational settings has garnered the interest of scientists, educators, and policymakers, encouraged by increasing evidence (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Systematic reviews indicate that mindfulness-based interventions positively affect prosocial outcomes and promote helping behaviors, with medium effect sizes (Berry et al., 2020).

Social learning theory argues that individuals can develop prosocial behavior management by witnessing the behavior and consequences of others during physical activity, learning, and reinforcing behavioral outcomes (Majed et al., 2022). The group dynamics theory emphasizes that personal behavior results from the interaction between an individual's internal

demands and the external forces of the environment (Eys et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). Based on this concept, experimental studies have shown that physical activity facilitates the development of prosocial behavior in adolescents and adults (Di Bartolomeo & Papa, 2019). For instance, when Moeijes et al. (2018) examined the longitudinal relationships between sports participation and prosocial behaviors in children aged 10 and 12, they found that being a member of a sports club and participating in sports at moderate or frequent levels were longitudinally associated with improved prosocial behavior (Moeijes et al., 2018).

In enhancing prosocial behavior, sports are primarily said to affect individual mental health by increasing empathy, promoting collective participation, and increasing the opportunities and frequency of interpersonal interaction (Bahmani et al., 2020). Kavussanu (2008) defined the prosocial dimension of sports' social nature as any voluntary action aimed at benefiting or helping another person (e.g., assisting an injured player). Stephens and Bredemeier (1996) examined fair play attitudes in football players and noted that the fair play values of a team triggered prosocial behaviors to the extent of athletes' sports identities. Duquin and Schroeder-Braun (1996) mention that coaches can play an important role in the development and management of prosocial behaviors as they structure the moral climate of the sports environment, model empathic relationships, and influence athlete identities in terms of the discipline they instill in young people and the values they transmit. In this context, many studies have revealed that increased mindfulness encourages prosocial behaviors by increasing the empathy levels of individuals and that athletes tend to provide more support to group members (Keng et al., 2011), which has been argued to mediate the relationship between mindfulness and prosocial behaviors (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008). Reeve (2024) stated that as the mindfulness of athletes increases, their athlete identity strengthens and, as a result, prosocial behaviors increase. It has been stated that the development of mindfulness in athletes is due to their strong athlete identities, which positively affect not only their own performance but also the social dynamics within the team (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Based on social learning and group dynamics theory, this study aimed to determine the mediating role of athlete identity on the effect of prosocial behaviour manageability on mindfulness.

METHOD

Research group (population-sample)

The study was conducted on a volunteer basis, involving 189 students enrolled in sports science faculties who had participated in university league competitions in various sports at least thrice. Participants were first directed to answer the question, "How many inter-university

competitions have you participated in?” Those who answered 3 or more proceeded to the next section and were asked to complete the survey. Participants who answered 2 were excluded from the study, resulting in 189 of 233 volunteers being included.

Data collection tools

Mindful Awareness Scale (MAS)

The Mindful Awareness Scale (MAS), developed by Brown and Ryan (2003), was adapted into Turkish by Özyeşil et al. (2011) in a study titled “Adaptation of the Mindful Awareness Scale (MAS) into Turkish.” This scale, validated and reliable through validity and reliability studies, measures individuals’ mindful awareness. The scale’s Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficient was 0.80, and the test-retest correlation was 0.86, indicating high reliability (Özyeşil et al., 2011).

Prosocial Behavior Scale (PBS)

The Prosocial Behavior Scale (PBS), developed by Ayten and Korkmaz (2019), consists of 22 items (e.g., “I help my neighbors when needed,” “I frequently provide financial aid to those in need,” “I am the first to call when I have a dispute with my friends” I frequently provide financial aid to those in need). It uses a 7-point Likert scale (1=Not suitable for me at all, 7=Very suitable for me) to measure helping, altruism, sacrifice, forgiveness, and pardoning as five sub-dimensions. In this study, the total score of the scale was analyzed, with higher scores indicating higher prosocial behaviors.

Athlete Identity Scale (AIS)

The Athlete Identity Scale (AIS), created by Brewer and Cornelius (2001) to determine individuals’ levels of athleticism, consists of 7 items and 3 sub-dimensions. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Öztürk and Koca (2013). Internal consistency coefficients for the scale’s sub-dimensions range from 0.66 to 0.88, encompassing Social Identity, Sport-Specific Limitation, and Negative Affectivity. Higher scores on this scale indicate a predominance of athletic roles. The scale uses a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree), and the items were interpreted accordingly.

Data collection/processing method

Google Forms was used to prepare and administer the surveys and collect data. The participants received a survey consisting of three sections. The first section asked, “How many inter-university competitions have you participated in?” Participants with responses of three or more were directed to proceed to the subsequent sections for data collection. The participants received no financial compensation. Before completing the questionnaires, all participants were

asked to sign an informed consent form indicating their voluntary participation and right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data. Before data analysis, the validity of the assumptions, including normality, linearity, and multiple regression assumptions, was accepted. Following the fulfillment of these assumptions, basic analyses (indirect, direct, and total effects) were conducted. JAMOVI software (Karakaya Özyer & Yıldız, 2022) was used for statistical analysis, allowing all analyses to be conducted without the need for coding skills or menus. The construct validity of each scale used in the study (the Prosocial Behavior Scale, Mindful Awareness Scale, and Athlete Identity Scale) was tested using Cronbach's α . For the Prosocial Behavior Scale, Cronbach's $\alpha= 0.83$; for the Mindful Awareness Scale, Cronbach's $\alpha= 0.89$; and for the Athlete Identity Scale, Cronbach's $\alpha= 0.79$, indicating the validity of the scales for the sample group.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Percentage and frequency values related to the demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables	Sub-Variables	N	%
Gender	Female	70	37,0
	Male	119	63,0
Section	Physical education and sports teaching	76	40,2
	Coaching education	33	17,5
	Sports management	80	42,3
Active sports participation status	Yes	138	73,0
	No	51	27,0
Category	Individual	133	70,4
	Team	56	29,6
Total		189	100,0

Table 1 shows of the participants, 70 (37%) were female and 119 (63%) were male. Regarding educational background, 76 (40.2%) were from physical education and sports teaching, 33 (17.5%) from coaching education, and 80 (42.3%) from sports management. One hundred thirty-eight (73.0%) participants were actively engaged in sports, while 51 (27.0%) were not. Additionally, 133 (70.4%) participated in individual sports, and 56 (29.6%) participated in team sports. The study excluded individuals with disabilities and special athletes.

Table 2. Mediation Models Table

Mediation effect	M 1	AI~ PB
Full Model	M 2	M ~ AI+ PB
Indirect effects	IE 1	PB \Rightarrow AI \Rightarrow M
Sample size	N	189

AI: Athlete Identity, PB: Prosocial Behaviors, M: Mindfulness

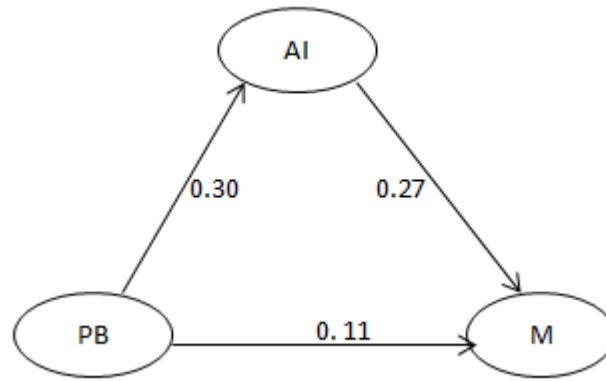


Figure 1. Statistical path diagram

Table 3. Indirect, direct and total effects of the mediating role of athlete identity in the effect of prosocial behaviors on mindfulness

Type of effects	Effects	Estimate	SE	95% C.I (a)		β	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	PB \Rightarrow AI \Rightarrow M	0.0611	0.0227	0.0240	0.116	0.0797	2.68	0.007
Components	PB \Rightarrow AI	0.2791	0.0692	0.1468	0.419	0.2985	4.03	<0.001**
	AI \Rightarrow M	0.2188	0.0611	0.0969	0.337	0.2669	3.58	<0.001**
Direct	PB \Rightarrow M	0.0860	0.0650	-0.0517	0.204	0.1123	1.32	0.186
Total	PB \Rightarrow M	0.1471	0.0627	0.0162	0.266	0.1920	2.35	0.019

*p<0.05, **p<0.001, AI: Athlete Identity, PB: Prosocial Behaviors, M: Mindfulness

Table 3 shows the results regarding the mediating role of athlete identity in the effect of prosocial behaviours on mindfulness. The table shows that the indirect effect size is 8% ($\beta=0,0797$) and significant ($p=0.007$) and the direct effect is 11% ($\beta=0.1123$) but statistically insignificant ($p=0,186$). It is understood that prosocial behaviors have an effect of 30% ($\beta=0.2985$) on athlete identity, and it is statistically significant ($p=0.001$) and athlete identity has an effect of 27% ($\beta=0.2669$) on mindfulness, and it was statistically significant ($p=0.001$). When the total effect of the mediating role of athlete identity on the effect of prosocial behaviors on mindfulness was examined, it was observed that it had an effect of 19% ($\beta=0.1920$) and was statistically significant ($p=0.019$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Referring to the multifactorial nature of these three traits, this study aimed to examine the mediating role of athlete identity on the influence of the manageability of prosocial behaviors on mindfulness in a normative adult population. To examine the impact of the manageability of prosocial behaviors on mindfulness, the mediating role of athlete identity was tested. As previously mentioned, our primary measure for assessing prosocial behavior was the PRO questionnaire, while the BF mindfulness scale served as a supporting measure to capture insights. The influential role of athletic identity in this process was identified. Consequently,

our discussion primarily focuses on the outcomes of prosocial behavior and refers to findings related to athlete identity's mediating role in mindful awareness.

First, the results revealed that in terms of the impact of prosocial behavior on mindful awareness, the indirect effect size was 8% ($\beta=0.0797$), which was statistically significant ($p=0.007<0.05$), whereas the direct effect was 11% ($\beta=0.1123$), but statistically non-significant ($p=0.186>0.05$). This suggests that prosocial behaviors may influence mindful awareness levels both directly and indirectly. These effects could stem from factors such as the participants' lack of self-confidence in social environments, exclusion from group relationships, and feelings of failure. Evidence compiled by Serwacki and Cook-Cottone (2012) indicated positive effects of yoga interventions in school-based settings on various factors, including emotional balance, attention control, cognitive efficiency, anxiety, negative thought patterns, emotional and physical arousal, responsiveness, and prosocial behavior (Thomas, 2008; Drmandjian, 2015). Moreover, existing research suggests a direct relationship between mindful awareness and prosocial behavior (Baer et al., 2006; Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007; Howell & Buro, 2011; Berry et al., 2018). Mindful awareness of one's own actions may potentially govern the pathway from values to prosocial behavior, and this link needs to be examined further to uncover causality (Kil et al., 2021).

Second, the findings indicate that prosocial behaviors have a 30% ($\beta=0.2985$) impact on athlete identity, which is statistically significant ($p=0.001<0.05$). This effect can be stated as the level and management of the positive behaviors (helping, sharing, cooperation) that the athletes have acquired until the current period is an important criterion in revealing where they position themselves in the sports branch in which they are interested or to what extent they feel like an athlete. Kavussanu et al. (2006) found that congratulating an opponent for a good game in football is very rare, but congratulating an opponent in tennis is part of the game and culture (Hanle, 2021). This may mean that the correct management of prosocial behavior emphasizes the effect of prosocial behavior on athletes according to the sports branches. Rutten et al. (2011) stated that athletes who can manage prosocial behaviors permanently reinforce them in the sports environment over time (Dishion & Dodge, 2005). On the contrary, it is stated that athletes who exhibit antisocial behaviors cause these behaviors to become permanent while being selected for sports clubs, and even lead to a step back due to the risk of increasing the rate (Dodge et al., 2006). Positive socio-moral atmosphere experienced in sports clubs/communities and a positive relationship with the coach is stated to be associated with fewer antisocial behaviors from their side (Carlo et al., 1999; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Scholte et al., 2001; Rutten

et al., 2007). In recent years, an increasing number of prosocial studies have suggested that physiological factors, temperament characteristics, socialization factors, social cognition, and other factors collectively interact to influence prosocial behavior. In addition, the desire of the athlete to improve his/her personal ability and the idea of striving to improve the performance of other teammates in the same position (Tjosvold et al., 2006) are associated with the management of prosocial behaviour (Tjosvold et al., 2006; Harenberg et al., 2019; Worley, et al., 2022).

In the third part, athlete identity has a 27% ($\beta=0.2669$) impact on mindful awareness, which is statistically significant ($p=0.001<0.05$). This suggests that it is important for individuals to be aware of the attitudes they exhibit regarding the sporting roles they assume in the sport in which they are interested. They have stated that as they spend more time in sports clubs and communities, they have clearer roles as sportspeople and an awareness of their roles as role models who motivate, support, inspire, and invite new people to their sports (Guest & Cox, 2009; Lyle, 2013). Brown et al. (2000) made various inferences about athletes developing mindful awareness as they embrace their identities, becoming more realistic about the possibility of a professional sports career (Brown & Hartley, 1998; Miller & Kerr, 2003). As a result of long-term training and sports activities, general benefits and effects on athletes have been identified, contributing to increased sensitivity to body movement, changes in brain function and structure, higher emotional intelligence, and mental resilience, including levels of body awareness (Mehling et al., 2011; Farb et al., 2015; Gibson, 2019; Erden & Emirzeoglu, 2020; Tokola, 2021).

Finally, when looking at the total effect of the mediating role of athlete identity in the impact of prosocial behavior on mindful awareness, it was found to have a 19% ($\beta=0.1920$) effect, which is statistically significant ($p=0.019<0.05$). This effect can be said to indicate that athlete identity has an undeniable role because experiences such as the understanding of empathy brought by the feeling of sadness and happiness after defeat and victory in the process of sports competition, the sense of unity and cooperation in achieving success contain the concept of prosocial behavior in a sense, and concepts such as responsibility, self-efficacy, and motivation, which constitute the conscious awareness understanding of managing these behaviors, are important tools for achieving success in sports. Considering this perspective, the limited scope of this research enhances the unique value of our study. In addition, many studies have revealed that increased mindfulness encourages prosocial behaviors by increasing the empathy levels of individuals and that athletes tend to provide more support to group members

(Keng et al., 2011), which has been argued to mediate the relationship between mindfulness and prosocial behaviors (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008). Reeve (2024) stated that as the mindfulness of athletes increases, their athlete identity strengthens and, as a result, prosocial behaviors increase. It has been stated that the development of mindfulness in athletes is due to their strong athlete identities, which positively affect not only their own performance but also the social dynamics within the team (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

The findings of this study suggest that athlete identity plays an important mediating role in the effect of manageability of prosocial behaviours on mindfulness. Prosocial behaviors emerge as individuals shape their experiences and emotional responses in social environments, with athletic identity emerging as a determining factor in this process. The research highlights the importance of mindfulness and prosocial behaviours and their manageability in the social and emotional development of athletes by revealing the effect of athlete identity on mindfulness. Experiences gained in sports environments and the adoption of an athlete's identity help individuals to better understand themselves and their environment, contributing to the strengthening and management of prosocial behaviors through mindfulness. These findings underscore the need to support prosocial behavior and mindful awareness studies in athletes' psychological and social development.

Recommendations

The current study has several limitations. First, the study design was non-experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal, which limits the causal interpretation of the findings. Since only self-reports of young athletes were used and data from coaches were not obtained, it was not possible to determine the extent to which athletes' personal perceptions colored their reports of antisocial and prosocial behaviors. However, self-report instruments that assess antisocial (Junger-Tas & Haen Marshall, 1999; Thornberry & Krohn, 2000) and prosocial behaviors (Carlo & Randall, 2002) have been shown to produce valid and reliable data.

Primarily, programs and activities should be organized to enhance the identities of collegiate athletes. These programs should include activities that encourage and manage athletes' prosocial behaviors, such as teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration. Additionally, mindfulness training and meditation practices can help athletes to better understand themselves and their actions. Coaches and sports administrators should provide mentoring and counseling services to support athletes' social and emotional development. Systems that reward athletes' achievements and positive behaviors should be developed to reinforce such behaviors. Lastly,

involvement in social responsibility projects and community service activities can provide athletes with opportunities to engage in prosocial behaviors in real-life situations. These recommendations will not only strengthen collegiate athletes' athlete identities, but also enhance their levels of mindful awareness, contributing to their overall personal development.

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KATKI ORANI CONTRIBUTION RATE	AÇIKLAMA EXPLANATION	KATKIDA BULUNANLAR CONTRIBUTORS
Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü <i>Idea or Notion</i>	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak <i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>	Ünal SAKİ
Tasarım <i>Design</i>	Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak <i>To design the method and research design.</i>	Mehmet ÖZTAŞ
Literatür Tarama <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Ünal SAKİ
Veri Toplama ve İşleme <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlaştırmak <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Ünal SAKİ Mehmet ÖZTAŞ
Tartışma ve Yorum <i>Discussion and Commentary</i>	Elde edilen bulguların değerlendirilmesi <i>Evaluation of the obtained finding</i>	Ünal SAKİ Mehmet ÖZTAŞ
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