



Identity Formation of Left-Handed Athletes: Focusing on the Process and Change

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Abstract

This study analyzed the social process of identity formation in left-handed athletes. It used convenience and snowball sampling methods for in-depth interviews and recruited participants through a network of left-handed athletes who nurtured an interest in academic research and expressed willingness to participate. The results of this study are as follows. First, left-handed athletes experienced social discrimination and disadvantage due to prejudice against left-handed people before starting sports. Through the social discrimination and disadvantage, they unknowingly developed a negative view of left-handers and experienced a socially isolated phenomenon. Second, left-handed players discovered a new self as they start exercising. They experienced the advantage of being a left-handed player in a sporting event and were recognized as useful players on the team. Third, left-handed athletes who demonstrate excellent skills in athletics received a lot of attention from peers and parents even after they enter society, served as role models, and were recognized for their abilities. Through this process, left-handed athletes can lead a dignified life as members of society with confidence as left-handed athletes. This study is significant in that it analyzes the socialization process of identity formation experienced by left-handed athletes as they start exercising.

Key words: sports, left-handed athletes, left-handed culture, formation of identity

Introduction

All human beings tend to use one hand much more than the other, making them predominantly right-handed or left-handed (Kang, 1994). The ratio of left-handed people varies across countries, primarily owing to cultural differences (Oh, 2005). For example, in Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United States,

Canada, and the United Kingdom, which have a relatively free sociocultural atmosphere, approximately 12-15% of people are left-handed, but this proportion is very low in countries where the cultural perception about left-handed people is negative (Peters & Murphy, 1992). For instance, the number of left-handed people is remarkably low in Arab and Confucian cultures, where being left-handed is considered taboo (Park et al., 2010).

Potentially linked to cultural perceptions of left-handedness are the lifelong inconveniences left-handed people face as they have to live in a society

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where right-handed people predominate (Oh, 2005). For example, most devices, such as subway passes and scissors, are generally manufactured with right-handed people in mind. Although using the left hand is no longer considered heathen or second-rate, there is still a culture unique to left-handed people worldwide (Kim, 2018). This group continues to experience sociocultural prejudice and exclusion that goes beyond daily the inconveniences of a society designed for right-handed people (Jung & Jung, 2004). Society remains indifferent to this reality, reducing left-handed people to a minority forced to adapt to the discomforts of discrimination and indifference (Kim, 2018).

In many countries, negative perceptions about left-handed people are rampant. For example, France portrays the left hand as the 'devil's hand', and the Italian word 'mancino' meaning left-handed, also translates to thief (Kim, 2018). The English word 'left' also implies being abandoned, while 'right' also implies correct. Additionally, China officially considers being left-handed a taboo, and there was a time when even well-educated people did not cut the fingernails on their left hand to avoid using it (Kim, 2018). Plato mentioned that left-handedness was caused by the ignorance of the mother or the nanny taking care of the child. There has been a strong negative prejudice against left-handed people across different times and regions (Jung & Jung, 2004; Oh, 2007).

Since it follows the Confucian culture, Korea is generally conservative about the use of hands and, when compared to Western culture, appears strongly biased toward right-handedness (Kang, 1994; Kang & Harris, 1993). In other words, life is difficult as a left-handed person in Korean society. The strong prejudice and negative perception toward left-handedness were established long ago (Jeon, 2017; Lee et al., 2010). Although perceptions about being right-handed or left-handed have changed over time in Korea, schools still have a strong tendency to coerce left-handed children to become right-handed (Kang, 1997).

Despite this social prejudice, left-handed people are

considered to have many advantages in sports. This is because they are acknowledged as being the 'rare kind' in sports and, in many cases, perform better than right-handed people (Oh, 2007). In addition to this rarity, there are games where left-handed people feel psychologically comfortable competing with right-handed people while enjoying certain advantages even when their competitors have similar skills (Oh, 2007). In sports, left-handed people are generally acknowledged as necessary. Thus, they gain the unique identity of being a left-handed athlete (Coakley, 2009).

There may be something peculiar about the identity of left-handed athletes compared to that of general athletes. Before becoming athletes, left-handers might have been forced to become right-handed (Lee, 2013). However, as they entered the world of sports, they may have faced a dramatic turning point in life, where they are finally acknowledged for their rarity. Thus breaking free from the environmental inequality focused on right-handedness (Park et al., 2020), they could finally experience an environment where left-handedness is recognized for its own benefits. Moreover, in sports, the choice of left-handed people is likely to be affected by the sport in question and the athlete's demographic characteristics, such as gender and age (Kim, 2012), and their sociocultural characteristics.

The advantages left-handed athletes have in sports has received much attention, but there has been no proper analysis of their identity formation process and the factors affecting it. The choices of left-handed athletes are highly likely to be affected by their sport type, demographic characteristics, such as gender and age, or the sociocultural environment. Going beyond research that measures the physical characteristics of left-handed people and examining the factors affecting identity formation and changes in left-handed athletes from multiple perspectives would contribute to expanding sports literature and academic knowledge. Therefore, this study examines from multiple perspectives the factors affecting how left-hand athletes' identity is formed and changes over time.

Literature Review

The Left Hand in South Korean Society: Evil Hand, Unfortunate Hand

Korea is a society centered on right-handedness, and there is a strong taboo on the use of the left hand. In the past, children who used their left hand were not allowed to eat and were even beaten (Oh, 2007). Using the right hand in social life is generally more advantageous, a custom that has established a strong prejudice against left-handedness and created a negative perception of left-handed people (Jeon, 2017; Lee et al., 2010). Although perceptions about being right-handed or left-handed have evolved in Korea, schools still tend to convert left-handed children (Kang, 1997).

Many left-handed adults in Korea likely experienced a ‘forced socialization’ process to become right-handed in childhood through discipline (Jeon, 2017). Through this process, many would have naturally begun using the right hand instead of the left, growing up to be ambidextrous (Kim, 2018). According to a poll, only about 5% of Korean adults were left-handed, which is half the world average, and only 1% wrote with their left hand (Kim, 2018). These figures may result from many left-handed people becoming right-handed through forced socialization.

Due to cultural intolerance of left-handedness, little social attention has been paid to the inconveniences left-handed people face in their daily lives (Jeon, 2017). Compounding this is the negative perception and social prejudice against left-handedness, which is more problematic than daily inconveniences (Kim, 2018). Korea still lacks consideration for left-handed people and has negative perceptions and prejudices against left-handedness (Kim et al., 2008). Consequently, the rights of the left-handed minority are restricted, and they cannot fully develop their abilities as left-handed people (Jeon, 2017).

Rediscovering Left-handers: Their Scarcity in Sports

Left-handedness in sports indicates ‘unfamiliarity’, which can be an effective tool for winning because there are many more right-handed athletes than left-handed ones. However, since left-handed athletes interact with right-handed athletes more frequently, left-handers feel relatively more comfortable playing against right-handed opponents (McManus, 1985). In general, left-handed people have an advantage in games when they have skills similar to opponents (Oh, 2007). In sports such as baseball, tennis, and boxing, where left-handed people are generally known to have an advantage, a high proportion (30%) of athletes are left-handed (Oh, 2007). According to the British newspaper *The Economist*, at least 15% of top-ranking tennis, boxing, and fencing athletes are left-handed (Kim, 2018). In fencing, in the last 14 years, 50% of the top 4 finishers in the semifinals of world competitions were left-handed, indicating the potential for left-handed sportsmanship (Sung & Moon, 2002). Nonetheless, while it is better to begin training in a sport using the preferred hand or foot, many are still forced to use the right side for the instructor’s convenience (Kim & Yeom, 1998).

Human history and culture have centered on right-handedness; since it represents a minority, left-handedness has been sidelined (Joo, 2002). However, in sports, left-handedness is recognized as valuable due to its scarcity; in many cases, left-handed individuals achieve better results than right-handed individuals.

Identity as Left-handed Athletes

When forming their value systems, attitudes, and behaviors, sports participants are greatly affected by various stakeholders, such as parents, instructors, and fellow athletes (Kwon & Jo, 2015). Through this process, the form and level of their participation and

their disposition in sports are determined, and through socialization, they begin to form their identity as athletes (Coakley, 2009). Identity in the sports environment is formed through social interactions with others and by sharing roles in the sports environment (Kwon & Cho, 2015). Participation in sports activities induces a change in individuals through which they cultivate various attitudes and perceptions (Coakley, 2009).

As noted earlier, the identity formation of left-handed athletes may exhibit some distinctive qualities. Before becoming athletes, left-handed people may have been forced to become right-handed to adapt to a world dominated by right-handed individuals (Lee, 2013). In other words, they might have experienced a process of forced socialization. However, their entry into the world of sports could have been a dramatic turning point in life. Left-handed people, always considered unfortunate in life, are recognized as necessary in sports, thereby facilitating their unique identity as left-handed athletes (Coakley, 2009). They are recognized for their rarity. Breaking free from the environmental inequality focused on right-handedness (Park et al., 2010), they finally experience an environment where left-handedness is recognized for its benefits.

Approximately 90% of the general population is right-handed, a percentage that remains unchanged across all ages and countries (Lee et al., 2010) and is therefore applicable to the world of sports. As a result, left-handed people are inherently unique in sports and enjoy a distinguished status. Despite facing a serious mental burden in a culture that forces left-handed people to become right-handed (Hong, 2016), left-handed people soon become aware that it is more efficient to use their left hand in a sports environment. In everyday life, left-handed people experience the social pressure of forced correction due to the prejudice that they lack competency or are somehow different. However, in sports, they are given a chance to display their capabilities to the fullest rather than being corrected (Ryu et al., 2018).

There are various internal identities experienced by

left-handed athletes who have discovered their use beyond the unfortunate hand, but studies on sports have thus far only focused on the external aspect, such as comparing athletic performance or fitness between left- and right-handed individuals. Almost no research explores in depth the experience and internal identity formation of left-handed athletes in a structural environment. Previous studies paid little attention to the unique and complex internal experiences of left-handed athletes and regarded them merely as the opposite of right-handedness or outliers.

Material and Methods

Selection of Participants

To investigate the identity formation process of left-handed athletes, this study selected a population of left-handed athletes who have had athletic experience since school and continue to participate in sports. As the population in question was potentially alienated from mainstream sporting culture, this study recruited participants for in-depth interviews using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The initial participants were recruited through a network of left-handed athletes who nurture an interest in academic research and expressed their willingness to participate.

Table 1. General participant characteristics

Category	Gender	Age (years)	Years of athletic experience
Golfer	Female	25	13
Basketball player	Male	34	18
Volleyball player	Female	26	12
Badminton player	Male	33	21
Boxer	Male	29	15
Baseball player	Male	36	23
Soccer player	Female	32	20
Tennis player	Male	48	32

Participants were selected to include diverse social backgrounds, such as place of residence or birth, gender, participating sport, age, and years of athletic experience. Eight participants who met the inclusion criteria mentioned above were finally selected. Table 1 shows their general characteristics.

Survey Tools

A literature review was first conducted to identify potentially important themes in the identity formation process of left-handed athletes. Informed by the literature review, a systematic analysis of the data collected from in-depth interviews was performed to specifically and accurately reflect the perceptions and experiences of left-handed athletes. Since qualitative research involves both data collection and analysis, in-depth interviews involve constant data collection and analysis (Kim et al., 2001).

In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews focused on awareness of the problem and the topic of left-handedness in general using open-ended questions and a semi-structured questionnaire. The researcher explained, in detail, the intent of this study to the participants before the interview and recorded the interviews using a recorder, with their prior consent. After each interview, the recording was transcribed, and its contents were analyzed. Based on this analysis, the interview questions were revised and supplemented to combine the participants' perspectives with the researcher's intentions. Using coding, categorization, and conceptualization, the interview content was classified into three core categories and eight topics.

Obtaining Validity and Research Ethics

This study assessed validity based on Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four criteria for qualitative research: dependability, transferability, credibility, and

confirmability. More specifically, archives, approaches, research diversification, peer collaboration, and detailed descriptions were used. Through these approaches researcher's errors and subjectivity were excluded, and bias was also avoided.

Moreover, to prevent ethical problems from arising during the research, this study closely reviewed, in advance, the impact this research might have on the participants. To ensure ethicality, the interviews were conducted after clarifying, in detail, to the participants the purpose of this study, how the results obtained would be used, and by obtaining their consent. Moreover, participants were made aware that the collected data would not be used for purposes other than research, and they were given a detailed explanation of their privacy rights, data storage, and processing.

Results and Discussion

As a result of analyzing the data collected from the interviews, eight topics on the identity formation of left-handed athletes were derived. These were grouped into three core categories. Table 2 shows the details.

Table 2. Topics in each category

Core category	Topic
	Forced correction at home
Outcasts of the world	Everything reversed
	The left hand is evil
From ugly ducklings to swans	From a neglected minority to someone useful
	Strategically using scarcity
	Becoming the envy of others
Knowing one is competent and being proud of oneself	Becoming recognized for competency
	Finally becoming a "leftie" to be proud of

Outcasts of the World

Forced Correction at Home

The word ‘right-handed; in Korea originates from the word ‘right’, which means correct (Oh, 2007). If the right hand is the correct hand, then the left naturally becomes wrong. Korea is strictly a right-handed society where left-handedness is taboo. Thus, parents do not want their left-handed children to be stigmatized as being wrong or odd in society. They try to fix left-handed children by teaching them that it is wrong to use the left hand, scolding and even beating them to try and make them change:

Eating was particularly difficult in childhood. I am more comfortable using my left hand, but my grandfather used to scold me if I did not eat with my right hand. He would yell at me and ask me not to use my left hand when eating. He even said he did not want a left-handed grandson, which really broke my heart. Having been scolded during every meal, I have come to naturally use the right hand. So, now I play badminton with my left hand but still eat with my right hand. (Badminton player)

In Korea, left-handed people are often forced to become right-handed by their families, who try to fix them through daily activities like eating (Oh, 2007). Some were advised by adults not to use their left hand or were scolded and told that using the left-hand takes away good luck. Other conservative countries also have social pressure to use only the right hand for general activities, such as eating, writing, or shaking hands (Kang, 1994). As part of the Confucian culture, Korea is also one of the countries with extreme social prejudice against left-handedness. Evidence of left-handed prejudice in writing is explored in the following interview quotations:

In elementary school, my parents would always watch me do my homework. If I held the pen with my left hand, they would tell me immediately to

use my right hand. It was inconvenient and difficult to do my homework with my right hand, but I had to always hold the pen in my right hand as my parents told me to. I fixed my left-handedness at the time without knowing why I had to write with my right hand. (Basketball player)

I do everything with my left hand except writing. When I was young, my parents corrected me to write with my right hand. They said my writing with my left hand looked unusual and somewhat uncomfortable, so they tried hard to change that. However, I do not remember having my writing fixed. I think they began to correct me when I first began to use a pen. (Soccer player)

At first, the participants could have been more comfortable writing or performing other tasks with their left hand. However, they received education or training that entailed forcing them to use their right hand. Their parents or other family members also pressured them to change because they were different or seemed uncomfortable. Most participants successfully became right-handed through the forced correction of their parents, but they could not easily accept why they were forced to do so.

Everything Reversed

From building entrances to computer mice and fitness facilities, there are disadvantages for the left-handed everywhere, although this may not go so far as to be considered discrimination (Park et al., 2020). The proportion of left-handed individuals varies across countries due to cultural characteristics (Oh, 2005). Unsurprisingly, an extremely low number of people report being left handed in countries with a strong negative perception of left-handedness (Peters & Murphy, 1992). This is especially so in Confucian countries with a strong taboo on using the left hand (Park et al., 2010). It was found that, despite the inconvenience, participants accepted the social rules

based on right-handed experience and adapted through learning. These demographic differences in reported left-handedness may reveal that left-handed people face considerable inconveniences throughout life in societies centered on right-handedness. The following quotes from interviews explore this topic:

During computer class in elementary school, I raised my hand and asked my teacher if I could use the mouse with my left hand because I am left-handed. The teacher told me to keep the mouse on my right because it would take too long to switch sides in class. It was really uncomfortable having to use the mouse on my right, but I had to go through the whole class like that. (Tennis player)

I started playing golf for the first time in my life when I was in the fifth grade. I visited a driving range with my parents to learn golf. At the time, all the bays or stalls at the driving range were facing right, and not a single one of them was facing left. I remember the instructor telling me to hit the balls from the right because hitting from the left would disrupt other players on the right when swinging. (Golfer)

People generally gain more benefits from performing tasks with their predominant hand (Kang, 1994). However, society often forces all to use the right hand, and left-handed people must live as a minority while struggling to adapt to the inconveniences amidst discrimination and indifference (Kim 2018). Participants pointed out that it was mainly their parents, families, or teachers forcing them to use their right hand. The ones closest to them, who should have embraced their distinctiveness and understood their social alienation as left-handed people, were actually those who most strongly forced them to use the right hand. Some of the participants felt hurt and lost due to their family or teachers being synchronized with the social perception against left-handers:

I remember when I was young, my teacher told

some of the kids who were confused with directions that the right hand is the hand used when eating. I remember thinking, '*But I eat with my left hand...*' When I came home and told my parents, they said I should listen to the teacher for my own good. I was a little hurt by the fact that even my parents forced me to use my right hand. (Baseball player)

In the fourth grade, I could run faster than my classmates, so I joined the school's athletic club. There were only two left-handed students in the club. The two of us had to learn in the back or the corner of the space, not at the center or in front of the teacher. The teacher was right-handed, so he taught mostly how to play with the right hand while not paying much attention to us left-handed students. (Badminton player)

The Left Hand Is Evil

Left-handed people suffer from deep-rooted cultural and social prejudices which are not unique to specific cultures (Kim, 2018). They have been the subject of negative perceptions and prejudices across time and regions (Oh, 2007). Due to intolerant cultures, little social attention has been paid to the inconveniences left-handed individuals face in life (Jeon, 2017). Therefore, they always felt the need to be considerate of right-handed people. However, this is because left-handed people are criticized or alienated by many right-handed people.

I remember being teased mercilessly by my seniors and friends when I began to play sports. They said my stances were weird, thinking that left-handed people were opposite or reversed from right-handed ones or something. If I made a mistake during practice, some would say they did not want to practice or play with me because left-handed people have such a weird stance, and they would leave me out. (Badminton player)

When I would eat with friends during childhood, I remember sitting in the end or switching seats with others, saying, "Sorry, but I am a leftie." My right-handed friends would feel uncomfortable because our hands would touch when eating, so I was always sorry about that. I still have that habit from childhood, so I always scarf down my food when I sit with a right-handed person on my left. (Baseball player)

Annett (1985) argues that genetics determines left-handedness, and thus, the attempt to force them into becoming right-handed is not desirable. However, according to a survey on left-handed children conducted in Korea, most Korean mothers and teachers think that left-handed children must be fixed into becoming right-handed (Kang, 1995). By custom in Korea, using the right hand in social life is generally more advantageous than the left hand, establishing a substantial prejudice against left-handedness and creating unfavorable perceptions (Jeon, 2017; Lee et al., 2010). Some participants stated that their sports instructors did not want them to use their left hand at first, highlighting the negative perception of using the left hand:

When I started learning, the coach just made me hold the racket in my right hand and started teaching me how to swing without asking me anything. Being such a timid kid, I kept practicing without saying anything, but at one point, I cautiously said that I was left-handed. When I told the coach, he instantly knitted his brows. (Tennis player)

From Ugly Ducklings to Swans

From a Neglected Minority to Someone Useful

As left-handed people are far fewer than right-handed people, they often operate in a strange environment and are even dismissed as subjects to be corrected (Jeon, 2017). Of course, there have been movements to

understand the difference and prohibit discrimination, but still, left-handedness is far from the mainstream of society. This phenomenon is observed more in the specific context of Eastern culture (Peters & Murphy, 1992). However, in sports, left-handed people often undergo a completely different experience. They are no longer subjects of discrimination or correction in sports but can simply be themselves. Their role as a social minority is recognized as a strength that gives them advantages in sports due to their unfamiliarity and scarcity.

I first started playing baseball because I am left-handed, which is kind of funny. Of course, I enjoyed playing baseball, but my coach encouraged me to start training because there are not many left-handed baseball players, so left-handed pitchers have a competitive advantage. The term 'left-handed pitcher' does not sound awkward, and I could stand out, which made me confident. I think left-handed pitchers can throw balls that are hard to hit. (Baseball player)

They say orthodox boxers (right-handed) struggle when they meet southpaw boxers (left-handed) in a fight. This is true in my experience. However, I do not think I have that much trouble fighting with either a left-handed or a right-handed boxer. Of course, there is clearly a difference depending on the opponent, but there is not much of a challenge. I think this is all about experience, and there are so few left-handed athletes. (Boxer)

In sports, where victory comes through competition, the value of left-handedness is re-evaluated as a scarce resource aiding competitiveness. In a situation where competition with right-handed people is more common, competition with left-handed people becomes a new challenge that reveals the left-handed person's strengths. The unfamiliarity of others with left-handedness can be explained as another factor determining victory or defeat. Korea has fewer left-handed people than other

countries, and it strictly limits the use of the left hand due to its Confucian culture (Part et al., 2010), and many left-handed people became right-handed through the forced socialization process (Kim 2018). Thus, left-handed athletes have even greater advantages in Korea.

Making Strategic Use of Scarcity

As with the general population, there are more right-handed than left-handed people in sports, so the rarity of left-handed people is recognized. Compared with their societal disadvantages, the left-handed have greater advantages in sports involving competition. Since left-handed athletes interact more frequently with right-handed athletes daily, they feel relatively more comfortable (Oh, 2007). They are known to have more advantages than right-handed people in all sports, excluding track and field and swimming. There are substantial benefits in using the left hand for not only non-contact sports, such as table tennis, tennis, and badminton, but also contact sports, such as martial arts, wrestling, judo, and boxing (Sung & Moon, 2002). The participants understood that they have many relative benefits in using their left hand or left foot due to their opponent's unfamiliarity with skills associated with left-handedness:

There are many cases in which left-handed people have advantages in sports. This is especially the case in racket sports or games on the court, facing the opponent. Tennis players generally have weaker backhand than forehand, so left-handed players have more advantages. Assuming that players have similar skills, a right-handed player must prepare for more complex and diverse cases when playing against a left-handed opponent. (Tennis player)

Left-handed people are also recognized in sports because they often outperform right-handed people (Shin, 2009). Left-handed athletes' advantages in sports

are recognized for their rarity, going beyond the disadvantages they face in society (Lee, 2016). Sport is competitive, where strategy and tactics are required to win. An individual athlete's physical characteristics and skill level are some of the key factors to consider when planning strategies and tactics. While the existence of left-handed people in sports is interpreted in terms of competitiveness and rarity, the role of left-handed people at a deeper level can be understood in terms of strategy and tactics:

Each player in position shows remarkable advantages depending on the hand used in general. When spiking, the left-handed player attacking the right has a greater range of vision and attack than right-handed players. This is why left-handed athletes are necessary. This is the strategy to win in volleyball. Finding competent left-handed athletes may determine victory or defeat. (Volleyball player)

Knowing One is Competent and Being Proud of Oneself

Becoming the Envy of Others (Being a Role Model)

Before becoming athletes, many left-handed athletes may have been forced to become right-handed and adapt to a world comfortable with right-handed individuals (Lee, 2013); specifically, they may have experienced the process of forced socialization. However, their entry into the world of sports was perhaps a dramatic turning point in life. Left-handed athletes get along well among themselves and also with right-handed people, often even becoming the envy of right-handed players. When they play sports with non-athletes after retirement, they can become the object of respect. As the advantages of left-handed athletes have become socially or scientifically proven, their strengths have begun to stand out.

A noticeable shift toward encouraging left-handedness in sports has occurred. For example, former badminton players know that left-handed players have an advantage.

Therefore, they encourage their children to play with their left hand, according to Kim Joong-soo, Vice Chairman of the Badminton Korea Association (quoted in Sports Donga, July 18, 2019). Moreover, left-handed athletes also draw the attention of fellow sports club members and parents who envy their skills. There was even a parent of a young athlete who asked one of the left-handed athletes to be a role model, wanting to change his right-handed son to a left-handed one (Jeong, 2019). Participants stated that they could build new confidence that had been otherwise denied. Many participants expressed confidence as a left-handed athlete without caring about the social prejudices against left-handed people:

Since I retired, I sometimes play tennis with club members. My fellow club members show great interest in me, claiming that most left-handed people they have seen were masters in tennis. Some even say they want to be left-handed, too. (Tennis player)

A while ago, I met a parent whose son plays baseball. He asked me many questions, claiming that many baseball players become left-handed by choice to play baseball. He even asked me to meet with his son to advise him on becoming a left-handed player. (Baseball player)

There was this person who seemed so delighted to meet me, saying that his son was a left-handed person too. He said he wanted to introduce his son to me sometime. His son is not really a badminton player, but he thought I would be a great role model as a left-handed person. This made me feel great. (Badminton player)

Becoming Recognized for Competency

In general, people are prejudiced against the left-handed, believing that they cannot easily assimilate into society or consider them different (Oh, 2005).

However, participants stated that left-handed people could make full use of their excellent qualities even in such a society. They said they also suffered from these prejudices, but their athletic experience helped them be sufficiently evaluated based on their skills. As a result, they were evaluated by their talent or competency, not by the hand they used:

In the past, people avoided getting lessons from left-handed players. However, now people do not seem to care much about that. They just want someone who can give them great lessons. This might sound like bragging, but I have the largest number of members that receive lessons from me. (Tennis player)

These days people do not consider left-handedness to be so odd. However, we were treated a little differently when I first started playing golf. People who played with me on the course for the first time even gave me strange looks. Some would say I have a weird swing, being left-handed and all. But nowadays, I am just recognized for my skills. (Golfer)

These statements can be used as evidence that Korean society, which had been especially harsh on left-handed people, is slowly changing. The emotions felt by the participants were more than just pride because they were recognized for their abilities as general athletes rather than for the characteristics of left-handed athletes. The participants emphasized that the sports environment respects each and every role. One of the participants (a badminton player) said that very few people used to learn from left-handed athletes in the past, but more and more people now seek him as a teacher:

Society is still centered on right-handedness, but the sports environment seems to respect each and every role. People say it is difficult to play with a left-handed player because they are so exceptionally smart. This makes me feel so great. After playing, many people ask me all kinds of

questions, claiming that there are so many things to learn from a left-handed person. (Badminton player)

Finally Becoming a 'Leftie' to Be Proud of

One of the stereotypes about left-handed people in Korean society is that they cannot blend well with group life. In other words, the view of them as being different determined their individual characteristics (Jeon, 2017). They often experience sociocultural prejudice and exclusion beyond the inconveniences of a life that seems designed for the right-handed (Jung & Jung, 2004). Constant discrimination, such as alienation, taboo, and abnormality, symbolizes left-handedness in Korean society. There is a common misunderstanding that left-handed people are wrapped up in their own world, failing to assimilate into reality. Due to this, even though their skills are now being recognized in the sports environment, they still face social prejudice.

Some say left-handed people are stubborn because otherwise, they would have been corrected already. However, this sort of stubbornness does not confer much of an advantage. The left-handed face constant inconveniences in a society focused on right-handed people, even in terms of trivial aspects, such as camera shutters, car transmissions, and computer mice. Nonetheless, the stubbornness of the left-handed can bring results and led Korea's United Future Party, facing the April 15, 2022, parliamentary elections, to pledge to create a convenient world where left-handed people can flourish (Moon, 2020).

Left-handed people are generally referred to as stubborn because they insist on using their left hand against their parents' will. According to the statistics, about 4% (2 million) of people in Korea are left-handed, 8% are ambidextrous, and 88% are right-handed. About 17% of newborn children are born left-handed but are forced to become right-handed as they grow up (Kim, 2018). However, Sports People Times (April 9, 2021) pointed out that 4% still insist on using their left hand,

so it is somewhat understandable that they are considered stubborn.

Left-handed participants stated that they rarely encounter the prejudice that they are stubborn in daily life anymore. They had been subject to these prejudices in the past, but as they naturally got along with others in social life, a mutual understanding developed, eliminating the negative perception. It was revealed that there was nothing odd or different about using the left hand while interacting with others, and there was no problem getting along with others in social life. Some even claimed they did not care about the social prejudice since right-handed people created it and were now taking pride in being left-handed. Although social prejudice exists, the participants claimed they were satisfied with themselves as left-handed people and could live a confident and dignified life:

One of the senior athletes used to say that I am stubborn and ill-tempered because I am left-handed. Now, we are best friends, and he apologized to me for his misunderstanding. Before he became good friends with me, he thought left-handed people were not easy to get along with. I used to hate how others looked at me before, but these days, people do not seem to find anything different in a left-handed person. (Baseball player)

A while ago, I created a club called 'Lefties' with my left-handed friends. We used to be disregarded before, but we did not care how we were labeled. These days, my right-handed friends envy us, wanting to join our club. So, we tell them to become left-handed if they want to join (chuckles). (Badminton player)

Conclusions

The significance of this study is that it analyzes the socialization process of identity formation experienced by left-handed athletes when they began their athletic

career, extending beyond prior research that had only focused on the physical characteristics of left-handed people. The conclusions of this study are as follows.

First, left-handed athletes experienced the pressure of forced correction at home or school due to social prejudice against left-handedness before they started playing. Through this experience, they grew up with low confidence and became social outcasts.

Second, left-handed athletes experienced the advantages of using the left hand in sports as they began playing, thereby being recognized as useful players. These advantages and the scarcity of left-handed athletes in sports began to be used strategically.

Third, left-handed athletes who demonstrated excellent skills in games received considerable attention from sports club members and parents in social life. This enabled them to lead a more dignified and confident life as a member of society.

In conclusion, left-handed athletes suffered from all kinds of social prejudices before becoming athletes, but it has been found that they experienced a dramatic turning point in life as they entered the sports environment. The choices left-handed people make in sports are highly likely to be affected by their type of sport, demographic characteristics, such as gender and age, and the sociocultural environment. Therefore, going beyond research that measures the physical characteristics of such people, examining factors affecting identity formation and change in left-handed athletes from multiple perspectives contributes to expanding the horizon of behavioral studies in sports.

The practical advantages left-handed athletes have in sports has received considerable attention, but until now, there has been no adequate analysis of the identity formation process of left-handed athletes and the factors affecting their identity. Although negative perceptions and prejudices toward left-handed people are decreasing significantly in Korean society, they are still likely to experience social pressure and are often forced by their instructors or parents against their will in a right-handed society. Therefore, exploring the identity formation

process of left-handed athletes is significant in understanding the experience or process by which people who started as social outcasts became elite athletes.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, W.G.J.; data analysis, W.G.J.; writing-original draft preparation, W.G.J.; writing-review and editing, M.L.L. All authors have read and agree to the published version of the manuscript.

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