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Research Papers 2018-2019

Sr. No	Title of Paper	Name of Author	Department	Journal	Year	Impact Factor
1	A comprehensive review in sport system	Gajanan S. Paikat	Physical Education	Research journey- International multidisciplinary E-research journal	2019	6.261

A Comprehensive Review in Sport System

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Abstract

“Sports can bring people together or they about sport so much that they’re actually become part of the language, particularly when it comes to idioms.”

There is now good evidence that athletic success and participation in physical activity can be predicted by personality traits. In this article, we review new studies that have contributed to our understanding of these relationships and outline potential avenues of inquiry to support the development of personality-trait research in exercise and sport. Our review identified a number of novel findings from contemporary studies. In the context of sport performance, new studies have demonstrated that personality traits relate to long-term athletic success, interpersonal relationships, and athletes’ psychological states before, during, and after competitions. In the context of health-related exercise, new studies have demonstrated that personality traits relate to leisure-time sitting time, strength and mobility in old age, and unhealthy (addictive) exercise behaviors.

Keywords: Introduction paper topic, five factor model, developmental changes, behavior genetics, social interaction, peak performance

Introduction

The predictive power of personality is no more apparent than in reviews of studies documenting associations between personality and important life outcomes. They show that personality traits can predict outcomes for individuals (e.g. happiness, health), dyads (e.g. relationship commitment), groups (e.g. team cohesion), and society (e.g. criminal behavior). With such a strong foundation of research evidence it is surprising that personality traits and their contribution to athletic success has often been viewed in rather cynical and pessimistic manner. Despite the historical impetus behind personality research in sport, Veale (2002) observed that “many researchers ... believe that sport personality research has yielded no useful findings” (p. 71) while Gill and Williams (2008) comment that “most scholars see little value in global personality measures”. In this article we challenge these conventional opinions and following a critical review of the extant literature arrive at rather different conclusions to most narrative reviews on this topic. Moreover, we show that personality has much predictive utility in organized sport and can contribute to the development of applied interventions in various athletic contexts. Perhaps more importantly, we offer a number of possibilities for the progression and expansion of personality research in this field.

Overview of personality in sport

Since its integration into Coleman Griffith’s teachings on the psychology of sport and performance (Griffith, 1926, 1930) personality has remained a core element on most taught sport and exercise psychology programmes and psychologists have continued their Endeavour to understand the personality of the successful athlete. When the first sport and exercise 4



psychology laboratories were developed during the early part of the 20th century, habit was identified as a key factor influencing development and success in sport (Griffith, 1930).

The 1930s to 1960s have been described as a rather stagnated period for sport and exercise psychology research (Weinberg & Gould, 2011) but one area that continued to prosper and dominated the field throughout this period was personality research.

Personality theory and assessment

Personality can be defined as “psychological qualities that contribute to an individual’s enduring and distinctive patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving”. Personality theory has an extensive history and comprehensive accounts of personality structure can be found in the works of Hippocrates (460-370 BC), Galen (AD 129-199) and many other natural philosophers. The modern era of personality (scientific) research continues to adopt the concept of personality “dimensions” and the hierarchical approach to personality structure, initially proposed by Allport (1927, 1937), has 6 been incorporated into most modern theories of personality (see Barenboim & Winter, 2008, for a historical overview of personality theory.

Personality and performance in sport

There are good reasons to expect personality to predict athletic success based on the theoretical predictions that govern associations between personality and academic or organizational success. Performance in both work and academia is determined by factors related to capacity and willingness to perform and these are governed by personality. In sport settings, success is also determined, at least in part, by an athlete’s capacity (e.g., ability to cope with pressure) and willingness to perform and it is tempting to assume that associations between personality and sport performance should mirror those observed in academic and organizational settings.

However, a number of critical differences between these domains (e.g. competitive sport is an optional Endeavour whereas academia and employment are compulsory) may prevent findings transferring directly across contexts. Thus, the similarities between these domains might suggest similar associations with personality, but these similarities are not sufficient to assume this is the case.

Population based differences

For a long time researchers have contemplated whether there is such a thing as an athletic personality (Carter & Shannon, 1940; Thune, 1949). This remains an important question as it can provide valuable information on whether important relationships (or successful interventions) observed in other (non-athletic) domains remain valid in athletic samples. There is good evidence to suggest that personality is associated with participation in regular exercise and personality differences can also be found between people that participate in organized sport and people that do not participate in organized sport. Specifically, athletes consistently demonstrate higher levels of extraversion than non-athletes and some studies have observed that (in addition to being more extraverted) athletes have greater levels of emotional stability and are more open to new experiences It is tempting to assume that the dimensions of personality that predict participation in organized sport should mirror those that predict participation in regular exercise. However findings may not transfer directly across contexts. This is because the motives that



drive people towards exercise (e.g. health) can differ from those that drive people towards organized sport.

Practical application of personality research

There is considerable practical as well as theoretical value in being able to statistically predict athletic behavior. In addition to being able to select (or deselect) appropriate persons to fit the needs of a team (or a particular competition) understanding personality can help coaches and practitioners identify athletes requiring greater support during important personal or career transitions. Because personality is consistent and enduring it would not be practical to design interventions that target the suppression or expression of various personality characteristics.

The relevance of personality also extends beyond the content of interventions to the manner in which those interventions are delivered. That is, sport psychology consultants need to be aware of their own personality and how it can affect their relationships with clients including the engagement in and acceptance of recommended intervention strategies. Indeed, many practitioners would agree that the first consultation with a new client is as much about developing a rapport (contingent on understanding the clients' personality) as it is about developing an understanding of their personal and sporting background. It is likely that sport psychologists intuitively adjust their consultancy style to satisfy the needs of their clients and this is contingent on developing an understanding of the client's personality. In fact, it is difficult to envision a consultation that is not in some way tailored towards the individual needs of the client. Unfortunately, personality effects on client-practitioner relationships have not featured in sport-based research.

This information would be particularly valuable to those working in both amateur and professional sport settings and is an important avenue for future sport personality research. These are just a few of the practical advantages that can be gained by undertaking a programmed of research into personality in sport and we expect that readers can fathom many others to supplement these. How research moves forward from here depends largely on the 27 interests and aspirations of researchers, and the topics we have run through represent our own outlook on the areas we feel would best suit the progression of this field. We conclude this review by summarizing what we know (and what we do not know) and briefly describing an assortment of research questions we feel offer the best prospects for moving sport-based personality research forward.

Conclusion

As part of our work, we wanted to examine different peer experiences in sports participation. To do so, we looked at the group composition of the activity, youths' perceptions of their social integration in the activity peer group, and youths' friendship network in and out the activity, with a special attention given to sports type. Altogether, our findings highlighted the importance of peer experiences in sports participation. We first found that the average size of groups in individual and team sports was identical, suggesting that youths participating in these two types of sports were exposed to a similar number of group members. However, the activity peer group was more homogenous with respect to age and gender in team sports. In addition, youths felt more socially integrated in team sports and their perceptions of social integration were linked to their well-being only in team



sports. Our results also suggested some overlap between youths' larger friendship networks and activity groups, especially in team sports.

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