Nostalgia, Passion, and College Athletic Performance

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Introduction

Previous research has demonstrated that nostalgia (a sentimental longing for the past) enhances psychological and social well-being (Sedikides et al, 2016; Wildschut et al., 2006). Additionally, nostalgic reverie leads not only to increased optimism and positive attitudes towards health behaviors, but also actual increased health behaviors (Kersten, Cox, & Van Enkevort, 2016). Within the context of high-performing athletes, other psychological constructs of well-being are predictive of heightened performance, including optimism (Ortin-Montero et al., 2018), need fulfillment (Verner-Filion et al., 2017), and passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). This study explored how collegiate athletes' performance is correlated with nostalgic tendencies, in addition to various measures of well-being. It was expected that higher performing athletes would demonstrate more engagement in nostalgia in addition to higher levels of well-being. This study is foundational for exploring the benefits for athletes of nostalgic thought, the advantages of which are supported in other contexts, such as health, relationship satisfaction (Abeyta, Routledge, & Juhl, 2015), and employee motivation (Leunissen et al., 2016).

Materials

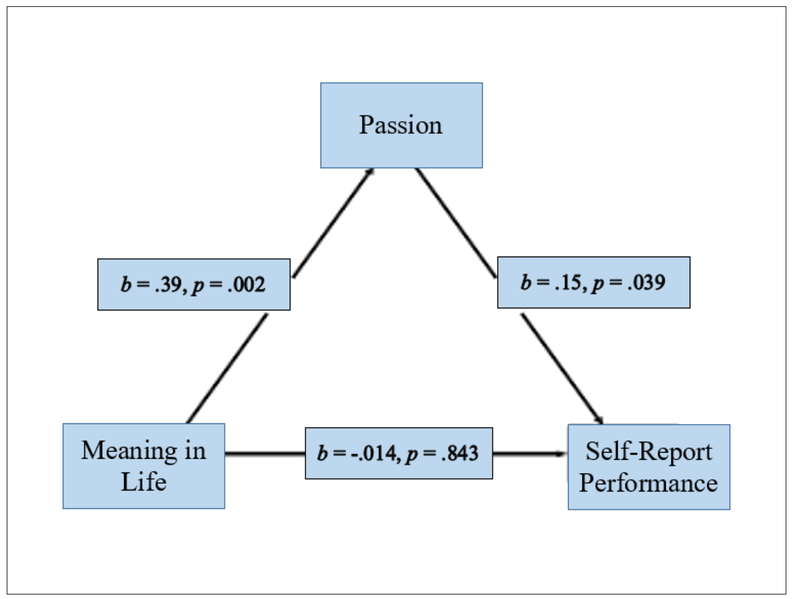
- Trait Nostalgia (Barrett et al., 2010)
  - "How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?" (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*)
- Presence of Meaning in Life (Steger et al., 2006)
  - "I understand my life's meaning." (1 = *absolutely untrue*; 7 = *absolutely true*)
- Basic Needs Satisfaction in Sport (Ng, Lonsdale, & Hodge, 2011)
  - "I choose to play football according to my own free will." (1 = *not at all true*; 7 = *very true*)
- Harmonious Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003)
  - "Football reflects the qualities I like about myself." (1 = don't agree at all; 7 = *completely agree*)
- Performance Self-Rating
  - "Please rate your current athletic performance for: aggressiveness" (1 = *very poor*; 5 = *very good*)

Results

- Passion was positively correlated with MIL, BNSS, optimism, and performance self-ratings, *p*s ≤ .028
- MIL was also positively correlated with BNSS, $p \leq .001$
- Performance self-ratings were positively correlated with recruiting rankings, $p \leq .028$
- Passion mediated the relationship between MIL and performance self-ratings
- However, contrary to expectations, trait nostalgia was negatively correlated with BNSS and passion, *p*s ≤ .022

Method

- 100 male college football players age 18-25 years old (M = 19.78, SD = 1.45) awarded a $10 gift card for their participation
- Participants reported their time playing football between 2 and 18 years (M = 10.25, SD = 3.77)
- Athletes responded to a number of survey items measuring nostalgia proneness, meaning in life (MIL), basic needs satisfaction in sport (BNSS), and passion for their sport
- Across positions, athletic performance was operationalized using the individuals' college recruiting rankings (0-5 stars)
- Performance was also measured using a self-report of competence in 13 different areas (i.e., strength, motivation, agility), in addition to their coach's ratings for each athlete on the same scale



Discussion

- While exploratory, these results suggest that nostalgia may be a psychological detriment for college athletes
- Nostalgia, an emotion sometimes characterized by sadness (Barrett et al., 2010), may be avoided by college athletes who wish to focus on present performance rather than past
- This study also illustrates that higher levels of passion, MIL, and BNSS predict higher levels of performance
- Limited by self-reported measures of performance and difficulty in standardizing these measures across the variety of positions in the sport
- Future directions include tailoring measures of nostalgia proneness to specifically sport-related nostalgic memories, comparing these relationships in team vs. individual sports, and examining potential explanations for the negative association between nostalgia proneness and performance