

"I Can't Imagine Not Being an Athlete": A Retrospective Qualitative Analysis of the Factors that Influence Sport Passion Development in Collegiate Athletes

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Athletes' motivation, well-being, and outcomes in sport are heavily influenced by passion, which can be conceptualized as either harmonious (HP) or obsessive (OP) (Vallerand et al., 2003). Although the effects of HP and OP have been repeatedly observed, factors that cause these passion types to surface have scarcely been studied (Mageau et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to identify the major factors impacting HP and OP in collegiate athletes and note the differences in these pathways. Data collection occurred in two distinct phases: Phase I surveyed participants' sport passion levels, and Phase II selected athletes whose scores met certain criteria for follow-up interviews. During these interviews, the researcher explored each participant's sport journey from youth to college. Overarching categories identified from the athletes' rendition of their sport experiences were passion identifiers (enjoyment, time and energy investment, value), athletic identity ("I am an athlete" vs. "I am not only an athlete"), fulfillment/frustration of autonomy (autonomy support vs. autonomy thwarting), perception of feedback (support independent of performance outcomes vs. pressure to perform well), and motivation (extrinsic vs. intrinsic). The main differences between groups were seen in enjoyment, extrinsic motivation, exclusive athletic identity, pressure to perform well, and autonomy thwarting. Implications from the study include that parents and coaches can foster the development of HP by providing ample autonomy support, encouraging intrinsic motivation and a well-rounded identity, offering more support than pressure, and explicitly communicating that support is not attached to contingencies.

Keywords: passion, harmonious, obsessive, collegiate athletes

Passion is an innate component of life experiences. It can provide purpose, incite motivation, promote well-being, and stimulate an enthusiastic commitment to a task or activity (Curran et al., 2015). In sport, passion plays an impactful role in one's engagement in an activity, value placed on an activity, and emotional attachment to an activity (Mageau et al., 2009). Therefore, passion likely plays a critical role in the achievement of collegiate athletes as they are required to juggle practices, workouts, and games (that often include multi-day travel) amidst their academic workload. In fact, passion

itself has been deemed a motivational force in activity engagement (Vallerand, 2008). Athletes most likely value and have a great desire to play their sport to overcome the abundant challenges that playing at the collegiate level presents. Although we might assume that collegiate athletes have a relatively high degree of passion, existing literature has seldom explored the process by which sport passion develops. A better understanding of the specific factors that engender and influence passion is needed to gain insight into the motives behind athletes' sport participation, which in turn may allow parents and coaches to shape the experiences of youth athletes from a more holistic perspective. This understanding can be achieved through considering factors that might influence passion development.

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Defining Passion

Prior to the 21st century, passion had mostly been studied as a philosophical construct, not a psychological one (Vallerand et al., 2003). However, Vallerand and colleagues pioneered the psychological investigation of passion, defining passion as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (p. 757). Though individuals are motivated in every activity in which they are involved, passion only manifests in a few central activities over the course of one’s life. Specifically, the more an activity resonates with an individual’s sense of self, the more likely they are to be passionate about it (Mageau et al., 2009). Vallerand would say that individuals who are passionate about an activity are not those who write, read, or play sports but rather are writers, readers, and athletes. The central characteristic of the activity to an individual’s identity parallels the athletic identity concept in the sport realm: “The degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). In Brewer’s (1993) conceptualization, athletic identity is further described as containing three unique dimensions: “social identity” (the level to which they identify as an athlete), “exclusivity” (the extent they identify as only an athlete), and “negative affectivity” (negative emotional responses when not able to engage in sport).

In addition to general passion for an activity, Vallerand and colleagues (2003) generated a dualistic model that labels passion as being either harmonious or obsessive. Harmonious passion (HP) is facilitated by autonomous internalization of an activity in which the activity becomes part of an individual’s identity and cultivates a sense of personal enjoyment and freedom. Individuals who hold HP for an activity engage in it freely, without contingencies, and in harmony with other life domains. Conversely, obsessive passion (OP) stems from a controlled internalization of an activity in which participation in the activity becomes attached to contingencies (i.e., self-validation or social approval). Individuals with an OP for an activity oftentimes feel compelled to engage in the activity (regardless of dangerous consequences) and might feel that the activity is the only important thing in their life; consequently, they neglect other important life domains. Positive emotionality in sport can either be facilitated or hindered by passion; for instance, HP has exhibited significant predictive value for greater “enjoyment, vitality, life satisfaction, and happiness” (Stenseng et al., 2015, p. 1119). In contrast, OP has

been repeatedly correlated with unfavorable results in sport, and it is negatively related (or unrelated) to well-being, positive emotionality, and contentment with life (Stenseng et al., 2015). In general, studies examining passion and well-being suggest that HP is typically correlated to adaptive outcomes, whereas OP is related to more maladaptive outcomes (see Vallerand & Miquelon, 2007 for a summary). Even though much is known about the consequences of the differing types of passion, much less is known concerning the origin of passion.

Self-Determination Theory and Passion

The dualistic model of passion is rooted in self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), a large-scale theory of human motivation that outlines three fundamental psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and illustrates how motivation can be fostered (or hindered) depending on whether these basic needs are met. Further, SDT contains several sub-theories that explain human behavior. One sub-theory in particular, organismic integration theory (OIT), is especially relevant to the internalization of passion into one’s life as it posits that individuals are motivated to engage in an activity for reasons ranging from autonomous or intrinsic (e.g., the love of the sport) to controlled or extrinsic (e.g., monetary rewards). Whether passion manifests harmoniously or obsessively depends on whether the activity is internalized in an autonomous or controlled manner (Curran et al., 2015; Mageau et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003). If an individual feels self-actualized, capable, and supported in their environment, autonomous internalization likely occurs, in which the individual values the activity for the intrinsic satisfaction it brings and engages in the activity with a controllable desire (Mageau et al., 2009). However, if the environment is controlling, exceptionally taxing, and rejecting, the integration process can be impeded, and a controlled internalization of the activity may occur. In this case, OP would likely develop, in which the individual obligatorily participates—not for the activity itself but to fulfill a need, such as self-validation or seeking external social approval (Liu et al., 2011). In sum, SDT offers a clear explanation of how an individual may develop either harmonious or obsessive passion and points toward the influential role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in this process. However, motivation is not the only factor that is potentially instrumental in the development of passion.

The Role of Social Agents in Passion Development

Another key construct that could influence passion (general, HP, or OP) is the involvement and influence of others. For better or worse, parents and other significant social agents (e.g., family, coach, peers) can play a key role in the athlete experience. In fact, a multi-study project by Mageau and colleagues (2009) found that parental valuation of an activity was an influential factor in the development of both HP and OP. Parents who expressed the value of an activity ultimately instilled this valuation in their child, which in turn prompted the child to increase their time and energy investment in the activity. This greater value and investment enhanced the child's passion for the activity. Further, Mageau and colleagues (2009) deemed the degree of autonomy support present in an individual's social environment to be a critical variable in differentiating passionate people from those who did not develop passion for an activity. Individuals who had been provided ample autonomy support from parents, coaches, and other adults displayed optimal engagement in their activity (e.g., freely exploring it, enjoying positive emotions, and exhibiting creativity), which in turn fostered higher levels of passion.

In addition to general passion, Mageau and colleagues (2009) distinguished the role of social agents in the development of harmonious and obsessive passion. They reported that high parental valuation can cause some individuals to perceive pressure to participate, which likely promotes OP. In addition, parents who are overly involved in their child's activity experience often have controlling parental styles and may place demands on children to think, feel, and behave in a desired manner. Conversely, parents who support their child in an autonomy-supportive manner likely provide their children the freedom to express their opinions and emotions, invite them to participate in decision-making, encourage self-initiation, and provide insight into the reasons for certain requirements and procedures (Curran et al., 2015; Mageau et al., 2009). Mageau et al. (2009) observed that the nature of an individual's social environment (controlled vs. autonomy-supportive) could effectively predict the type of passion they would exhibit. The development of HP was linked with greater autonomy support, whereas the development of OP was associated with greater control from both parents and other adult leaders.

The multi-study project by Mageau and colleagues (2009) provided a foundation for what we know about

the development of passion, but other researchers have investigated several topics that parallel these factors with a focus on significant social agents. For example, Amado et al. (2015) found that parental support was a predictor of need satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and sport enjoyment, whereas parental pressure acted as a hindrance to these processes. As these factors have been previously discussed as impacting the development of passion, it can be assumed that parental support and pressure can impact the development of general passion, as well as influence the type of passion that athletes develop for sport. Additionally, a recent study on retired elite athletes identified supportive coaching relationships as imperative to athletes' motivation and need satisfaction (Sauvé et al., 2022). Athletes who perceived unsupportive behaviors from their coaches reported experiencing a negative impact on their motivation and well-being (described as relating to basic need fulfillment). Again, an assumption can be made that a negative impact on these constructs may also mean a negative impact on the development of passion.

Context of Passion Development: Individual vs. Team Sports

In addition to how supportive others might influence passion, the sport context might itself influence this process. In support of this concept, Kovacsik et al. (2020) found that athletes in individual sports reported lower levels of HP than athletes in organized team sports. Further, they found that the correlation between OP and exercise addiction was twice as high in individual sports compared to team sports, indicating not only that passion levels may be different in these contexts, but the influence on other constructs might also differ. The researchers suggested that as team sports have factors that individual sports do not (e.g., shared success, unified ambition, and necessary collaboration as critical components of their social context), team sports might promote greater HP levels compared to individual sports (Kovacsik et al., 2020). Due to this initial study, we believe it would be worthwhile to investigate the influence of the development of passion specifically in athletes who participate in individual-level sports (e.g., track & field, tennis, gymnastics).

Addressing the Gap in Research

As mentioned previously, study of the development of passion is still in its early phases, and researchers have urged further exploration of this topic (Mageau

et al., 2009). This investigation, focused on high-level, individual sport athletes (Kovacsik et al., 2020), sought to explore collegiate athletes' past sport experiences with a specific emphasis on the factors that promoted their sport passion development in terms of general passion, HP, and OP. Increased research on the development of passion would benefit the field of psychology by providing a more thorough understanding of how to stimulate the development of HP (and prevent the occurrence of OP) in athletes, which could lead to more improved sport and holistic outcomes.

The current study had two purposes. First, we aimed to identify major factors that contributed to the origins of passion in collegiate athletes. Second, this study sought to determine key differences in this development that promoted one type of passion to develop over another (i.e., harmonious or obsessive). Therefore, the research study had two primary research questions: 1) What factors influence the development of passion in collegiate athletes who participate in individual sports; and 2) what are the differences in these factors for athletes who have been identified as either harmoniously or obsessively passionate?

Method

Positionality and Paradigmatic and Methodological Perspective

Our use of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) requires a brief overview of our positionality and paradigmatic and methodological perspective. Recently, Braun and Clark (2019; 2023) indicated that the researcher's role in knowledge production and clear perspective-taking is one way to increase the transparency of the project. We recognize that positioning the experiences and identities of the researchers is another important step in qualitative research, as each of these aspects can impact data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). The research team consisted of three individuals who were all familiar with the sports environment from their past sports experiences. Specifically, researchers participated in sport at several levels (e.g., Division I collegiate athlete, high-level elite club athlete, high school athlete), with two of the researchers also serving as coaches once they retired from sport (e.g., elite-level coach, community-based sport coach). Two researchers' areas of study focused on coursework that included both kinesiology and psychology, with the final researcher having a background that included advanced degrees in sport and exercise psychology. These diverse backgrounds, as

well as the diversity in ages of the researchers, helped to increase the level of discussion during all aspects of the research project (e.g., creation of the interview guide, analysis, write-up). It also provided multiple viewpoints, which more homogenous research teams often lack.

In terms of the research team's paradigmatic beliefs and assumptions regarding qualitative science and the philosophy of science, we do not fully align with any one particular paradigmatic view or perspective. However, the perspective we most closely align with is the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2013). In this framework, we recognize that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and that reality is subjective and context-dependent. Our understanding of the research topic was influenced by our own experiences, beliefs, and values, which shaped our perspectives and guided our inquiry. By employing a constructivist framework, we sought to explore the multiple perspectives and interpretations from the interviews. Principally, we acknowledged the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness in recognizing our own biases and assumptions. We also implemented both individual (e.g., reflexive diaries, interview field notes) and collective (e.g., research team meetings) tools for reflexivity over the course of the study and engaged in ongoing critical reflection throughout the conceptualization of the project, interview process, analysis, and write-up of results. It is important to note that while our research was situated within a constructivist framework, we recognize the existence of other valid theoretical perspectives and alternative ways of understanding the research topic. Our goal was not to assert an ultimate truth but rather to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and understanding of the subject matter within the constructivist paradigm.

Our study aimed to take a generic qualitative design (Percy et al., 2015) in which we investigated collegiate athletes' subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and/or reflections on their sport experiences with a particular focus on their sport passion during their athletic careers. As Percy and colleagues (2015) have indicated, we believe this approach is ideal for two main reasons: 1) this approach is well suited for mixed methods studies, and 2) we, as researchers, have a body of pre-knowledge about the topic but aim to describe the process more richly from the participants' perspectives. Further, as the study was largely exploratory, we also quantitized (Sandelowski et al., 2009) codes to explore whether patterns existed in the experiences between groups. As Sandelowski et al. (2009) have indicated, qualitative data may be converted into quantitative

data to help identify idiosyncrasies or facilitate pattern recognition. We recognize that the process of counting data patterns can be subjective; therefore, we do not want these quantitative representations to be considered anything more than a note to inform future studies that explore the development of sport passion. Our ultimate goal was to highlight the athletes' perspectives of passion development across their sport experiences and note the commonalities and differences amongst the individual narratives of HP and OP athletes. Utilizing generic qualitative inquiry allowed us to better understand athletes' experiences because we were able to identify patterns and differences between their narratives more concretely. In addition, our use of quantitative surveys to select participants allowed us to investigate the groups of interest instead of assessing a larger sample who might not hold the characteristics of interest.

We used a few steps to maintain the rigor of the data analysis process:

1. Ensuring all three members of the research team had proper training in qualitative research and data analysis.
2. Following researcher reflectivity guidelines (Creswell & Miller, 2000), we discussed how our past experiences and current perceptions of the youth sport environment might influence our analysis and conclusions drawn from the interviews.
3. Using peer debriefing whereby researchers independently coded meaning units, then jointly discussed meaning units and formed themes and subthemes until consensus was reached. This phase helped the investigative team reflect on the data and their interpretations of it and ensure the data representation was an accurate account of what athletes spoke about in their interviews (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Procedure

Following IRB and athletic department approval, we conducted the study in two distinct phases to better investigate individuals with specific passion profiles and compare their past sport experiences. We decided to include only individual sport athletes in our sample per the findings of higher rates of OP among individual sport athletes (Kovacsik et al., 2020). Phase I of data collection took place during a team meeting where participants completed surveys to assess their levels of sport passion. During this data collection, the first

author informed the potential participants of the study's purpose, that their participation was optional, and measures that would be taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Willing participants provided written consent and completed the survey individually. At the conclusion of the survey, participants could opt to include contact information to be considered for follow-up interviews concerning the primary research questions if their scores fell into one of the groups of interest.

From those athletes who provided follow-up contact information, we began Phase II. We purposely invited participants who fit the criteria of high HP/low OP (group 1; labeled "HP athletes") and high OP (group 2; labeled "OP athletes") from the larger sample to be interviewed concerning the study's primary research questions. Specifically, from the total sample, two subsets of participants ("HP athletes" and "OP athletes") were derived by investigating individual means on the harmonious and obsessive passion subscales. Participants with high levels of HP (e.g., scores at the 85th percentile or above) and low levels of OP (e.g., scores at the 25th percentile or below) were classified as "HP athletes." As sample participants who scored high on OP also scored high on HP, we classified those individuals who scored highest on OP (e.g., scores at the 85th percentile or above) from the sample regardless of HP as "OP athletes." For these athletes, an interview guide was created using existing knowledge of potential factors that could influence passion development (see literature review for reference). All participants provided verbal consent prior to interviews and were informed of procedures to ensure the confidentiality of their responses (e.g., names would not be used in data analysis, and recordings would be stored on a password-protected computer file).

Participants

In Phase I of the research process, 65 participants completed surveys that included demographic information and the Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003). Participants were a mix of all grades (freshman $n = 12$; sophomore $n = 16$; junior $n = 14$; senior $n = 16$; other $n = 7$), had more female ($n = 44$) than male athletes ($n = 21$), were primarily Caucasian ($n = 41$), and were drawn from a variety of sports including track and field ($n = 17$), gymnastics ($n = 17$), tennis ($n = 16$), and golf ($n = 15$). For Phase II of the research process, five participants from each group (HP athletes, OP athletes) were interviewed ($n = 10$). Participants included nine female athletes and one male athlete from a variety of

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sports (track and field, $n = 5$; tennis, $n = 3$; gymnastics, $n = 2$). See Table 1 for the full demographics of each of these participants. The first author conducted all the interviews ($M = 64$ minutes; range 40 – 98 minutes), which took place in-person and were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Measures

Phase I

The Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003) was used to measure General Passion, HP, and OP. This scale contains three passion qualifiers (General Passion), six questions related to HP, and six questions pertaining to OP, with all questions scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “Do not agree at all”, 7 = “Completely Agree”). Sample items from the scale include: “*My sport is important to me*” (General Passion), “*My sport is well integrated in my life*” (HP), and “*I have the impression that my sport controls me*” (OP). Scores were averaged for each of the subscales to provide mean General Passion, HP, and OP values. Previous studies have demonstrated validity and reliability across all subscales (Marsh et al., 2013; Vallerand et al., 2003). For the current study, adequate Cronbach’s α were attained for all three subscales (general passion $\alpha = .85$; HP $\alpha = .83$; OP $\alpha = .85$).

Phase II

The semi-structured interview guide was designed to provide athletes with a setting where they could reflect on their past and current sport experiences, their change in motivation and passion over time, and the influence of various significant social agents in their sport participation. To design the survey, the research team used self-determination theory (Deci &

Ryan, 1985; 2000) and previous literature focused on the factors related to passion (Mageau et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003) as a guide to investigate aspects most likely to influence the development of passion. The guide focused on a range of topics, including general sport background (e.g., “Can you remember why you started playing sport?”), sport motivation (e.g., “What were your motivations for sport in middle/high school?”), identity (e.g., “For many athletes, sport is something that they do (play sport), and for others, it is a central part of their identity [I am a gymnast]. If you had to say you were one or the other, what would you say, and what made you choose that option?”), general passion (e.g., “Describe the value you place on sport”), types of passion (e.g., “After reading definition of HP and OP: Which aspects, if any, of these definitions do you identify with in your sport experiences?”), and impact of others on their sport experience (e.g., “When considering your youth sport experience, can you describe how your coaches [or parents/peers] interacted with you?”). Our aim was to explore athletes’ experiences, so the interviewer was encouraged to ask follow-up questions to fully understand the factors that influenced their youth sport background.

Data Analysis

For quantitative data analysis, means and standard deviations were calculated for each participant and the sample. From these results, athletes were classified and invited to participate in follow-up interviews for purposive sampling. For qualitative data analysis, we utilized reflexive thematic analysis as a general framework for data collection (Braun & Clark, 2006; 2019; 2023). The primary data used in the thematic analysis were verbatim transcripts of the digital recordings of the interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1984). After

Table 1. Interview Participant Demographics

	Pseudonym	Sex	Scholarship	Age	Class Standing	National Origins	Sport	Harmonious Passion	Obsessive Passion
1-OP	Mary	Female	Full	20	Junior	International	Tennis	7.00	6.50
2-OP	Claire	Female	None	18	Freshman	Domestic	Track and Field	6.50	6.83
3-OP	Philip	Male	None	21	Sophomore	Domestic	Track and Field	6.50	5.67
4-OP	Abby	Female	Partial	18	Freshman	Domestic	Track and Field	6.00	6.83
5-OP	Samantha	Female	Full	22	Senior	Domestic	Track and Field	6.83	5.50
6-HP	Peyton	Female	Full	18	Freshman	Domestic	Gymnastics	7.00	3.00
7-HP	Amanda	Female	Partial	22	Junior	International	Track and Field	7.00	1.50
8-HP	Beth	Female	Full	20	Junior	International	Tennis	7.00	1.17
9-HP	Amy	Female	Full	23	Sixth year	Domestic	Gymnastics	6.83	3.33
10-HP	Ellen	Female	Full	20	Sophomore	International	Tennis	7.00	3.17

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reading each transcript repeatedly to become familiar with the data, we identified meaning units that most adequately represented the athlete's experience (Dale, 1996) and organized them with a software program, Dedoose. Even though we created the interview guide with information derived from the SDT and passion frameworks, we employed an inductive coding approach. Through inductive coding, we were able to identify the meaning units directly from the data rather than from preconceived ideas. This approach allowed us to make meaning of the qualitative data and tell the story of participants (Braun & Clark, 2019; 2023). During the open coding of meaning units, we used a combination of in vivo codes using participants' own language and descriptive codes (i.e., summarizing the content) to best illustrate the perspectives of our participants.

After completing the open coding phase, we engaged in axial coding, which allowed us to organize and connect meaning units into broader categories and themes. Ideally, a comprehensive understanding of the topic is best illustrated by the relationships between the codes (Braun & Clark, 2019). Throughout this process, we tried to identify overarching categories that

captured the essence of the data while still preserving the complexity and uniqueness of individual codes. The first and second authors completed the data analysis together with guidance from the third author. Discussion between coders allowed for the categories to be created collaboratively and reflexively for a richer, more nuanced reading of the data (Braun & Clark, 2019; 2023). In this stage, we also searched for themes that demonstrated meaningful patterns in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Further, to highlight the experiences of the HP and OP athletes, we noted the frequency of meaning units in each theme and reported those in Table 2. It is important to note that Table 2 does not demonstrate significant differences between the groups; rather, it serves to provide a more complete picture of each group's experiences. The use of numbers in Table 2 is, as Maxwell (2010) stated, made to supplement the richness of the interview data and "complement the participants' perspectives in providing a clearer and more in-depth understanding of what's going on in a particular setting" (p. 479). Again, reporting frequency was not to show that these differences exist in every case but rather for the researchers to show "regularities or peculiarities

Table 2. Codes of All Topics

Overarching Category	Themes	Subthemes	HP Frequency	OP Frequency
Passion Identifiers	Enjoyment	Enjoyable Elements of Sport	22	18
		Sport Components that are not Enjoyable	4	9
	Time & Energy Investment Value		8	12
			11	8
Athletic Identity	"I am an athlete"	Individuals Identify Solely as an Athlete	4	9
		Sport is One Critical Piece of Individual's Identity	10	10
	"I am not only an athlete"	Identity is Comprised of More than Athletics	4	18
		Shift to More Well-Rounded Identity	4	3
Fulfillment/ Frustration of Autonomy	Autonomy Support	Explained Rationale/Open Communication	5	16
		Involved in Decision-Making Process	10	9
		Provided Adaptable Challenge	8	3
	Autonomy-Thwarting	Autocratic Decision-Making	5	12
	Controlling Behavior	2	2	
Perception of Feedback	Support Independent of Performance Outcome		36	38
	Pressure to Perform Well	Pressure Imposed on Self	3	12
		Pressure Received from Others	8	16
Motivation	Extrinsic	External Recognition/Comparison	17	34
		Validation from Others	11	24
	Intrinsic		20	22

in qualitative data they might not otherwise see or be able simply to communicate” (Sandelowski et al., 2009, p. 210).

In addition to the initial coding, a second phase of coding was conducted after the researchers received feedback from the first round of the peer review process. During the peer review process, reviewers suggested re-investigating the data to search for greater connections between the meaning units and themes. This suggestion led the research team to re-analyze the coded data to decrease the number of themes and increase the parsimony of the results. Following this second round of coding, several of the themes were recategorized into the final themes presented throughout the results and in Table 2.

Results

Phase I: Quantitative

Participants in the total sample scored very high on general passion ($M = 6.57$), high on HP ($M = 6.16$), and moderate on OP ($M = 3.57$). In terms of the two subsets of participants, the participants in the harmonious group had higher levels of general passion ($M = 7.00$) and HP ($M = 6.97$) and lower levels of OP ($M = 2.43$) than the total sample. The OP group also had higher levels of general passion ($M = 7.00$) and HP ($M = 6.56$) than the total sample but also had much higher levels of OP ($M = 6.26$).

Phase II: Qualitative

Through the analysis of the interview transcripts, we identified five overarching categories in the athletes' sport journeys that were related to their sport passion: passion identifiers, athletic identity, fulfillment/frustration of autonomy, perception of feedback, and motivation. In addition to the five overarching categories, we also noted several themes and subthemes represented in the overarching categories (see Table 2). A brief overview of each overarching category, theme, and relevant subthemes will be subsequently provided.

Passion Identifiers

Interview participants discussed several ways in which they perceived their sport passion to surface. We identified three main themes (with one theme having two subthemes) during data analysis to encapsulate these passion identifiers: (a) Enjoyable areas of sport (or sport components that are not enjoyable); (b) Time and energy investment; and (c) Value. In terms of enjoyable areas of sport, every athlete spoke about positive

emotions evoked by their sport or about a general love for their sport, even when it was challenging. Abby (OP) stated, “When you are [doing your sport], it is like nothing else matters. Yeah, you could have a bad [rep], but at least you got to do it, right?” Conversely, several athletes discussed sport components that they did not enjoy. Although this subtheme was observed in athlete interviews from both groups, it was seen twice as frequently in those from the OP group (see Table 2). One example of non-enjoyable sport components was cited by Ellen (HP): “I don’t want to do this anymore. I’m not enjoying it.” Participants frequently spoke about the time and energy they invested in their sport. Peyton (HP) said, “A lot of my time goes into [sport]. I think of myself sometimes as an athlete-student because . . . I just think of [sport] as the main part of my day, and everything else is just extra stuff,” indicating the extra time and effort sport requires. Finally, athletes explicitly communicated that they possessed a high value for their sport with the focus on not taking the time for granted. For example, Claire (OP) said, “. . . you don’t know what you have until it’s gone. And I learned that the hard way . . . so here I put a lot of value into it because I know what I have.”

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity appeared as an overarching category in the interviews conducted. Athletes discussed concepts related to athletic identity that aligned with the two dimensions of Brewer et al.’s (1993) conceptualization of athletic identity: social identity and exclusivity. Within the idea of athletic identity, we identified two themes the “I am an athlete” perspective (e.g., athletics was the most/only thing important to me) that partially aligned with the exclusivity aspect of athletic identity and the “I am not only an athlete” (e.g., sport is one piece of my identity) perspective that aligns with the social identity aspect of athletic identity.

“**I Am an Athlete.**” Within the “I am an athlete” theme, two unique subthemes were identified: individual identifies solely as an athlete, and sport is one critical piece of identity. Several participants felt their identity was solely defined by athletics; for instance, Abby (OP) stated, “. . . my identity is (sport) 100% of the time, and so, if I’m not doing that, it’s like, I don’t know . . . I don’t feel like myself.” These athletes discussed needing their sport to feel complete and that their personality and daily activities revolved around sport. Ellen (HP) expressed, “I feel like when I was younger, say 14, 15, 16, I was [sport, sport, sport, sport] and nothing else. It was tunnel vision. . . . I loved it, but everything was about that.” Some degree of identity exclusivity was

present in both groups, but the OP group had a greater prevalence (see Table 2). In terms of the sport is one critical piece of identity subtheme, Abby (OP) explained that being an athlete gave her a uniqueness and a place in her family, and said, "I fell into that athlete kind of mold because that's just how our little sibling trio was set up." Overall, the OP group identified solely as an athlete more than the HP group, and their sport was more intertwined with their identity overall.

"I Am Not Only an Athlete." We identified two subthemes within the "I am not only an athlete" theme: identity is comprised of more than athletics and shift to more well-rounded identity. In terms of identity being comprised of more than athletics, family seemed to be an important part of helping athletes view themselves as having other identities associated with their lives. For example, Abby (OP) said, "My mom is actually really good at reminding me that I have other things going on for me other than (sport)." In discussing the shift to a more well-rounded identity, Ellen (HP) said,

. . . now, with a big effort in school and I want to be a good friend, and I want to be a good daughter. And I don't know, I've become more than that (an athlete) now. I think my view of my life is, okay, I'm not just a (sport) player, I have other attributes.

Similarly, Amy (HP) talked about a moment her identity evolved, saying,

When I went to write my résumé, I saw all of the other things that I had done, and I really came to see how much other parts of my identity I had going for me besides (sport). Even though that's certainly a really big part of my life, I saw that it's only a slice of the pie.

Both groups showed a shift in identity to a more well-rounded view of themselves at some point in their sport history.

Fulfillment/Frustration of Autonomy

During interviews, participants addressed times when they perceived their basic need of autonomy to be supported or thwarted during their sporting experiences. In terms of significant social agents, collegiate athletes discussed the influence of coaches more frequently than parents, as coaches had more direct involvement in sport experiences. Across both groups, participants mentioned autonomy-supportive behaviors more frequently than autonomy-thwarting behaviors; however, discussions of autonomy-thwarting were nearly three times higher in the OP group than for the HP group. Regarding autonomy support, three subthemes were identified during data analysis: explained rationale/open communication, involved athletes in the decision-making process, and

provided adaptable challenge. Concerning the autonomy thwarting behaviors, two subthemes were identified: autocratic decision-making and controlling behavior.

Autonomy Support. Collegiate athletes spoke fondly and admirably of coaches with whom they felt they could communicate safely and openly, express opinions and emotions, and collaborate on training protocol and decisions. Claire (OP) declared that she "probably wouldn't be here" without having coaches that "you could talk to about things that you're struggling with, and they will listen to you when you're explaining how you're feeling mentally, physically . . . and give you good advice." Another participant, Abby (OP), expressed gratitude that her current collegiate coach regularly asks for her feedback (i.e., "How did that feel?" or "Why did that happen?") instead of yelling at her for a mistake she cannot take back. Abby stated, "We definitely have more communication because he never just wants to be like, 'That was wrong. Do it right.' It's like, 'Let's figure out why you did that.'" Furthermore, several athletes expressed the value of coaches allowing decision-making involvement in learning how to stand up for beliefs later in their careers. When considering her college experience thus far, Beth (HP) remarked,

We all come from different places; we've all had different training. And so, I've definitely been more comfortable with pushing back and not so much with just people-pleasing. And that's been a growing experience . . . not just saying 'okay,' but 'why?' . . . Because ultimately, it's for the best of the team, not just to make somebody happy.

Participants also discussed the benefits of coaches providing adaptable challenges, in which coaches pushed athletes to an appropriate degree (i.e., not causing undue stress) while adjusting their coaching practices according to each athlete's current situation. For instance, Peyton (HP) spoke of past coaches who would give them tough assignments but recognize when the athletes needed a break. She said, "It never got to a point where we were suffering or the coaches kept pushing us because we were afraid to speak up." The description of this adaptable challenge aligned with athletes' discussions of an overall autonomy-supportive sport environment.

Autonomy Thwarting. A majority of the athletes also voiced experiences with coaches who engaged in autonomy-thwarting behaviors. Participants indicated several coaches made them feel unvalued, controlled, or unsafe to communicate candidly and made decisions unilaterally without any athlete input. For example, Claire (OP) recalled a coach she felt unable to have a productive conversation with and said these types of coaches ". . . don't value your side [of the story]." Another

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participant, Amanda (HP), spoke distastefully of a past coach who had attempted to control her life outside of sport, stating,

One time I remember I finished practice and I left like immediately, and he called me, and he was like, 'If you ever leave practice again to rush and to go see your boyfriend, I will kick you out of the team.'

Moreover, Peyton (HP) and Claire (OP) both depicted autocratic decision-making from past coaches, respectively saying: "[Coach] never gave me a clear explanation as to why [a decision was made], and she never even made an attempt to," and

[Coach] would give us workouts or have a practice that just didn't make any sense. And there were a couple times where I've been like, 'Why are we doing this?' . . . and he wouldn't explain to you why. If they can't explain what they're doing and why they're doing it, they're not doing it right.

Overall, the OP group mentioned autonomy thwarting twice as frequently as the HP group (see Table 2), indicating that a lack of autonomy support could be an influential factor in whether an individual develops HP or OP.

Perception of Feedback

Athletes in the study spoke about the feedback they received from others and how that impacted their own expectations of sport performance and continuation in sport. Specifically, we identified support independent of performance outcomes and pressure to perform well as major themes from the participant interviews. Athletes perceived the feedback they received from parents and coaches as either supportive in nature (regardless of performance quality) or as pressure on them to perform well in their sport. Moreover, some athletes mentioned that they perceived support from others in a way that created self-imposed pressure to perform. Within the theme of pressure to perform well, the research team identified two subthemes: pressure received from others and pressure imposed on self. Whether it was support independent of performance outcomes or pressure to perform well, both groups demonstrated that most of the influence came from parents and family members. There was evidence that coaches provided some of the support and pressure, but athletes cited parents much more frequently in both aspects.

Support Independent of Performance Outcomes. Athletes discussed perceived support broadly, and thus it was developed as a single theme with no subthemes. Some mentions of perceived support included tangible support (e.g., driving them to practice and games),

financial support (e.g., money to participate), and emotional support (e.g., "If I wanted to be a swimmer, she would be happy that I was a swimmer. If I wanted to be a freaking golf player, she (mom) would have been happy" -Beth). Beth (HP) cited a combination of support (emotional and tangible) and said,

She's (mom) motivated me to try everything and play every tournament I can. Yeah, I suppose knowing that all the work she's done when I was younger, it motivates me to kind of like pay it back almost by trying my hardest, I suppose.

The frequency of mentions of support did not differ prominently between the HP and OP groups; however, participants' consistently indicated that perception of support was a key influencer to athletes' overall passion levels.

Pressure to Perform Well. Both groups reported that perceiving pressure from parents and coaches was a consistent piece of their sport experience. Although the subtheme of pressure received from others was seen in both groups, only the OP group described explicit and implicit manifestations of external pressures (e.g., parents telling them they need to play better vs. perceiving pressure because of the cost of involvement). Claire (OP) spoke about an explicit pressure she perceived from her father: "He's kind of living through me in a way, so there have been times where I think he may have overstepped a little bit." Conversely, Abby (OP) experienced implicit pressure from her parents, explaining, "They never said openly that they wanted me to do good, but they always would make comments like, 'Oh, you're not working out today? Are you sure?'" Overall, athletes in the OP group perceived more pressure from others than the HP group (see Table 2).

Importantly, several athletes indicated that the support they received from others, even though meant in a reassuring, positive manner, sometimes created an internal pressure to perform well or risk disappointing these individuals. In other words, at times, athletes interpreted support in a way that created self-imposed pressure. Ellen (HP) provided an excellent example of the subtheme 'pressure imposed on self' by saying,

I think when I was younger, [parental support] actually didn't help [my motivation] really because they were doing so much for me, and when I would travel to tournaments abroad, I would see that was a lot of money . . . [sport] is very expensive. I was like, 'Oh my God, I have to win because my mom and dad . . . have put all this into it.' And they never said anything about money, about time, nothing. But I was just like, 'God, if I lose so badly, we're going to have to turn around the plane and go back home, and they've done so much.'

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This subtheme of pressure imposed on self was seen much more frequently in the OP group.

Motivation Types

Collegiate athletes frequently spoke about factors that have motivated them throughout their sport careers and identified both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Overall, extrinsic motivators were mentioned more frequently by athletes than intrinsic motivators, especially by those in the OP group. In the analysis, we identified two subthemes for extrinsic motivation: external recognition/comparison and external validation. No subthemes were identified for intrinsic motivation. A short overview of each theme will be subsequently provided.

Extrinsic Motivation. Collegiate athletes commonly mentioned a strong desire for external recognition as a motivational factor in their sport. Many participants spoke of external recognition in the form of awards and honors, whereas some discussed comparison to their peers and wanting to be seen as the better athlete than rivals. Particularly noteworthy were responses in which participants expressed the influence of social agents (i.e., coaches, parents, peers) on their desire for external recognition. For example, Peyton (HP) talked about wanting recognition from her coach to show she was advancing in sport when she said, "If you do better, then the coach sees you differently, and they give you more respect. And you're put in a higher-level group . . . I just wanted to do the best that I could and stay on top more often." Meanwhile, Abby (OP) described a strong desire for recognition of her accomplishments. In terms of collegiate scholarship offers when she said, "It kept me going, being like, 'I'm going D1. I'm going to school to do (sport). I'm going to be better than all the other athletes in my grade.'"

Another extrinsic motivator repeatedly discussed by athletes was external validation, which differs from recognition in that participants implied a desire that their athletic efforts be meaningful to those around them. For example, several athletes expressed wanting to be validated by parents and coaches from which they had received ample help and support. Beth (HP) stated, "I mean, my mom worked so hard for my brother and I that I wanted to impress her . . . She sacrificed a lot for my brother and I, so that was a big motivator." Additionally, numerous athletes felt a need to prove themselves to others, whether that be through winning, achieving goals others said they could not, or showing they were an asset to their college team. For instance, Abby (OP) stated, "Because I'm on scholarship—I want to be like, 'I'm worth the money

that you're spending on me.'" Likewise, Peyton (HP) recalled her sport participation in high school was "for approval . . . and to prove that I am capable of doing well. And for my coaches, too, I needed their approval . . . And so, I felt like . . . I was forcing myself to do it, and I wasn't enjoying it." In general, the OP group had twice as many mentions of extrinsic motivation than the HP group (see Table 2) with athletes in the OP group much more likely to strive for recognition and validation from others than athletes in the HP group.

Intrinsic Motivation. Collegiate athletes often spoke about intrinsic motivators that have been present throughout their sport journeys. Most of the participants discussed participating in their sport solely due to love and enjoyment, not for any external rewards. For a lot of the athletes, these times took place in youth sport; for example, Ellen (HP) recalled her memories growing up in her sport: "I definitely felt really free, and I felt this was my place." Other intrinsic motivators commonly mentioned by athletes were improving competency and striving for personal bests. For instance, Mary (OP) stated,

It honestly feels great when you're able to achieve those goals. You set up some goals for the season, for the year . . . and you're able to see yourself get better at something you've been putting effort in. It's just so rewarding.

Markedly, many participants noticed that as they progressed from youth sport to a serious athletic commitment, extrinsic motivators began to overshadow the intrinsic ones. However, these athletes expressed that the transition into collegiate athletics rekindled the flame of their intrinsic motivation. For instance, Claire (OP) voiced, "I'm still super motivated, and I go to practice every day with the right intentions, to get better. But I think there's just a big difference in the kind of motivation (present vs. past)." She explained that in high school her motivation was that she "wanted to go D1," whereas now that she is in college, her motivation is "to stay healthy and PR each week." Another participant, Ellen (HP), also recognized a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation in her sport journey, saying,

I think when I was younger with maybe certain coaches . . . I would've wanted their approval . . . I was always searching for good opinions from other people, but now since I've gotten older . . . it's like . . . it doesn't matter. I'll do this for me and that's it.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the passion levels of current Division I collegiate athletes in individual sports, investigate what aspects influenced

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their development of passion, and explore differences in this development in terms of groups identified as harmoniously or obsessively passionate. We compared the sport experiences of athletes with contrasting passion profiles and identified aspects of their experiences as influential in the engenderment of their distinct passion type (HP or OP). Autonomy thwarting behaviors, perceived pressure, and extrinsic motivation were identified as the primary differences in experiences between OP and HP athletes. The group differences suggest that these three aspects of sport experience are influential factors in the development of distinct passion profiles. Additionally, we observed that parents and coaches play a role in these factors, and subsequently, in group differences. This observation points toward the influence of social agents as a factor in the development of passion as a whole and the differentiation of HP and OP in athletes.

Overall, the collegiate athletes in our sample were overwhelmingly passionate for their sport, and they held high levels of HP and moderate levels of OP for sport. Comparing the individual sport collegiate athletes in our own study to those individual sport athletes represented in the Kovacsik et al. (2020) study, our total sample had slightly higher levels of HP ($M = 6.16$ compared to $M = 5.37$) and slightly lower levels of OP ($M = 3.57$ compared to $M = 3.79$). Both of our sub-groups were notably higher in terms of their HP and split on their levels of OP (HP group lower; OP group higher) in relation to the individual level athletes in the Kovacsik sample. Although we cannot make a comparison to team sport athletes paired with the current sample, it seems that the current group of athletes is similar to those utilized in the Kovacsik et al. (2020) sample.

As expected, athletes in both groups reported high instances of all three precursors of passion (i.e., enjoyment, time and energy investment, and value). This finding reflects existing literature (including Vallerand et al., 2003) that demonstrates passion manifests in individuals when they enjoy their sport, spend considerable time engaging in it, and place high levels of value on it. The differences observed between the HP and OP groups in this aspect were minimal, reflecting the high levels of general passion both groups reported and illustrating that HP and OP are distinct concepts from the general passion construct. The most notable difference between the two groups occurred in the subtheme of sport components that are not enjoyable as the OP group had twice as many mentions of lack of enjoyment as the HP group. This result aligns with previous research suggesting that an autonomous internalization of an activity (associated with HP) facilitates personal

enjoyment, whereas a controlled internalization (associated with OP) does the opposite (Liu et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2003).

Both the OP and HP groups also discussed aspects of athletic identity that mirror Brewer and colleagues' (1993) conceptualization of the subcomponents of athletic identity, namely the dimensions of social identity and exclusivity. The central role of identity in these athletes reflects the reality of the collegiate athlete experience. For example, collegiate athletes are required to engage in practices, workouts, and games connected to their sport and are often identified as athletes instead of someone playing a sport (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Further, Vallerand and colleagues (2003) would argue that passionate athletes hold their sport at the center of their identity and are athletes instead of just playing a sport. In the coding of the interviews, both groups identified two of the major three aspects of the initial conceptualization of athletic identity (Brewer, 1993; social identity and exclusivity). However, it is important to consider how those aspects manifested. Several past studies have shown that high social identity is not necessarily problematic, but rather problems arise when exclusivity increases (Martin & Horn, 2013). In our sample, more athletes in the OP group discussed the perception that their identity was focused solely on the sport role while more athletes in the HP group described identities consisting of activities outside of athletics. This finding suggests that exclusivity may contribute to the development of OP which can be related to negative outcomes both inside and outside of sport (Martin & Horn, 2013). Additionally, negative affectivity (third dimension of athletic identity as conceptualized by Brewer, 1993) was missing from the interviews. It is possible that this construct was not mentioned by athletes as they were never forced to entirely stop participation and, thus, did not experience negative affectivity from cessation of participation.

Finally, and somewhat unexpectedly, several of the HP athletes mentioned that they shifted to a more well-rounded identity as they entered college. Many of these aspects indicated that the pursuit of the college scholarship was paramount to creating an exclusivity in their life; but once that goal was achieved, they could enjoy their sport and shift to a more holistic pursuit of excellence. This finding suggests that the HP athletes in our sample may have had more OP prior to college and future studies should investigate this phenomenon to examine whether the collegiate athletic environment can influence passion levels in athletes or if this was just something mentioned by our sample. Future research could also explore if an increase in publicity and time

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spent in their sport (which is typically seen in the college environment) could indicate an increase in athletic identity that was not seen in these athletes.

Regarding perceptions of support and pressure, most athletes spoke of experiences with parents (coaches and other family members had minimal mentions). Athletes in both groups cited numerous instances of support, whereas mentions of perceived pressure were notably more frequent in the OP group. These increased perceptions of pressure in the OP group, especially from parents, mirror results from Mageau et al. (2009), who found that pressure from parents was linked to the development of OP whereas parental support was associated with the development of HP. Further, athletes in the OP group talked about self-imposed pressure in addition to implicit and explicit pressure from others, revealing both a greater occurrence of pressure and more nuanced description of the perceived pressure. These differences speak to the importance of all significant social agents (but especially parents) in terms of how the various levels of perceived support and pressure can influence the development of HP or OP in athletes. Additionally, as the concepts of pressure from oneself (self-prescribed) and pressure from others (socially prescribed perfectionism) parallel subscales of the Hewitt and Flett (1991) conceptualization of perfectionism, the relationship between these constructs and the types of passion an individual holds in sport could be an interesting future area to explore.

In terms of motivation, both the HP and OP groups described a variety of motivators throughout their sport journeys. Levels of intrinsic motivation showed to be similar across groups, indicating that every athlete had some level of autonomous internalization of their sport (Mageau et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2008). In contrast, levels of extrinsic motivation were substantially different between groups. In the HP group, mentions of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were almost identical in frequency, whereas the OP group reported over twice as many mentions of extrinsic than intrinsic motivation. This finding suggests that high extrinsic motivation may influence the development of OP, which is consistent with previous research (Mageau et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2008). It is also possible that the intrinsic motivation was relatively equal among the two groups because both groups had similar levels of HP and differed primarily in their OP levels. Future studies may benefit from using sample groups that are more distinctly different (e.g., high HP, low OP; low HP, high OP). Importantly, Schellenberg and colleagues (2018) have begun investigating these

different profiles using a novel quadripartite model of passion where individuals can be classified as pure HP (high HP, low OP), pure OP (low HP, high OP), mixed passion (high HP, high OP), and non-passion (low HP, low OP). However, finding these individuals might prove difficult to find as athletes who exclusively possess OP could have experienced many negative outcomes and withdrawn from sport participation fully.

Furthermore, it is imperative to consider that motivation can either be fostered or hindered depending on whether basic psychological needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), especially in relation to autonomy. In this study, autonomy support/thwarting was a clear theme identified by the researchers, which pointed towards its influence in the development of distinct passion types; however, the other two basic needs were encapsulated, at least partially, in other codes. For example, athletes might see parents and other social agents providing support as a parallel to relatedness, whereas several athletes attributed their sport competence to external comparison to peers and opponents. Athletes in our sample did not explicitly indicate how relatedness and competence were influential in their passion development, but some implicit links could be made. Meanwhile, autonomy emerging as the most important SDT element to athletes parallels the findings by Mageau et al. (2009) who emphasized autonomy support as a critical factor in passion development.

Few differences were observed between the HP and OP groups in terms of how autonomy support influenced passion development, indicating that participants experienced comparable levels of need fulfillment throughout their sport journeys. Both groups had high levels of HP, and athletes who display HP are expected to have more favorable past sport experiences (Stenseng et al., 2015). The primary difference between groups was seen in reports of negative experiences (lacking need fulfillment) as the frequency of athletes discussing autonomy thwarting was much more pronounced in the OP group compared to the HP group. It is possible that these autonomy thwarting experiences contributed to the development of higher levels of OP in these athletes, and this connection deserves further study in the form of longitudinal research focused on the impact of autocratic coach behavior on athletes' levels of passion. Further, this result adds to Mageau et al. (2009)'s findings that OP individuals do not interact with as many autonomy-supportive individuals (specifically parents and other significant adults) as HP individuals. Further, because both groups had moderate to high levels of HP (and therefore some degree of need fulfillment), the group

with higher levels of OP (and likely a higher degree of need frustration) may have been more distinguished by negative aspects of the sports environment rather than positive aspects. This result aligns with Stenseng et al. (2015), who reported that HP predicts enjoyment and positive emotionality, while OP is negatively correlated with well-being and positive emotionality. In total, these findings imply that youth sport coaches may promote more favorable sport experiences among their athletes by building a need-fulfilling environment in which athletes feel valued for more than their performance, safe to openly communicate, and receive constructive (as opposed to overly critical) feedback, with additional focus toward ensuring athletes feel autonomous in their environments.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the present study has produced findings valuable to understanding how passion manifests in athletes, it is not without limitations. First, both sample groups were high in HP. Ideally, one group would have been high HP/low OP and the other group low HP/high OP, like the groups found by Schellenberg et al. (2018). None of the athletes surveyed in Phase I of the data collection met these criteria; therefore, future research would benefit from investigating the existence and experiences of such athletes, especially those with low HP and high OP. Second, the present study only considered individual sport athletes from a single Division I university. Future research may want to include athletes from team sports and a variety of universities, including Division I and other divisions (i.e., Division II, III, NAIA, NJCAA) to obtain more comprehensive results from a wide range of athletes. Additionally, there was a substantial sex imbalance in the sample as only one male athlete was interviewed during Phase II of the project. A larger sample size may benefit future studies by increasing the likelihood that a more balanced mix of males and females will meet inclusion criteria used in the qualitative portion of the project. Thirdly, our methodology was designed to compare two groups and their experiences, but we understand that this may be at odds with the typical goals of qualitative research methods. Comparisons of the constructs' frequencies were made to bring contrast to these groups, but it would be helpful to recruit a larger number of participants and assess group differences to truly understand the magnitude of these comparisons. Finally, the study relied on retrospection to collect data with athletes recalling their own sport experience. Although retrospective data methods have shown to have some reliability (Friedenreich et al., 1998), a longitudinal design would be ideal for future studies.

Conclusion

Our study aimed to identify critical elements in the establishment and evolution of passion in collegiate athletes. Overall, athletes exhibited high sport passion. Regarding our first research question, athletes discussed the importance of significant social agents (i.e., parents and coaches) on the development of their passion in both direct (e.g., feedback) and indirect manners (e.g., creating an environment of autonomy support/thwarting). In terms of our second research question, athletes in the two groups discussed many of the same factors in the development of passion; yet athletes in the OP group were more likely to discuss coaches who utilized autocratic decision making, perceive pressure to perform from others, and internalize feedback from others as pressure on themselves. These group distinctions provide an initial conceptualization of what might prompt athletes to develop HP or OP for their sport. Based on our findings, we encourage parents to ensure their children feel unconditionally supported in sport endeavors and are not solely defining their identity as a participant in their sport. Further, we urge coaches and parents to foster environments conducive for psychological need fulfillment as this could increase the probability of HP manifesting in young athletes.

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