



The two roads from passion to sport performance and psychological well-being: The mediating role of need satisfaction, deliberate practice, and achievement goals



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Research on passion has demonstrated the existence of two roads toward sports performance through the effects of deliberate practice (Vallerand et al., 2007, 2008). The first emanates from harmonious passion (HP) and contributes to both performance and psychological well-being. The second stems from obsessive passion (OP), and performance comes at the cost of well-being. The present research proposes that need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000) mediates the relation of HP, but not OP, with both outcomes. In Study 2, achievement goals were added to the model. Mastery goals were expected to mediate the positive relation between HP and outcomes, whereas performance-avoidance goals would be associated with OP and, thus be detrimental to athletes.

Design: Two studies using correlational (Study 1) and longitudinal (Study 2) designs.

Method: Study 1 ($N = 172$) was conducted with soccer players. Study 2 was conducted with hockey players ($N = 598$). Athletes completed measures of passion, need satisfaction, life satisfaction, deliberate practice, and achievement goals (Study 2 only). Coaches assessed performance in Study 1. Study 2 used games played in competitive leagues over 15 years to measure performance.

Results: Analyses using SEM provided support for the mediating role of need satisfaction (Study 1 and 2) and achievement goals (Study 2) in the relation of HP with outcomes. In contrast, deliberate practice (Study 1 and 2) mediated the relation between OP and performance.

Conclusions: This research supported the mediating role of need satisfaction in the “two roads to performance” (Vallerand et al., 2007, 2008).

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Scientists in the field of expert performance have long identified deliberate practice as key in the attainment of high performance in sport (Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Starkes & Ericsson, 2003). Deliberate practice entails highly structured practice aimed specifically at the improvement of certain skills. Such practice is not always enjoyable, as it often involves practicing through setbacks, pain, and injuries. Passion leads athletes to actively pursue their quest to attain performance in sport, spending a great amount of time practicing in order to deliberately enhance their skills (Vallerand et al., 2007, 2008). Engaging in a sport in such an intense manner often leads to positive outcomes, such as high levels of

performance and psychological well-being. Nonetheless, the pursuit of performance can also lead to negative outcomes for athletes, especially regarding their psychological well-being. According to self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is key to better understand how athletes attain high levels of performance while also maintaining their psychological well-being. The present research proposes that the two types of passion take different roads to performance and psychological well-being, through the mediating effects of the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, deliberate practice (Studies 1 and 2) and also achievement goals (Study 2). Moreover, the current research uses two distinct measures of performance to assess the predictive power of the aforementioned variables both on short term (during a tournament – Study 1) and over the course of a career (nearly 15 years – Study 2).

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1. The dualistic model of passion

The dualistic model of passion (DMP; Vallerand, 2015; Vallerand et al., 2003) defines passion as a strong inclination toward an activity that is important, liked, and in which a significant amount of time and energy is invested. This model further proposes the existence of two dimensions of passion. Important theoretical and empirical support for the differentiation of harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion (OP) has been gathered over the past decade. These two types of passion can be distinguished in terms of how the passionate activity is regulated and integrated with other life domains. With HP, the process of internalization of the activity in the self occurs in an autonomous fashion. Thus, individuals with HP freely accept and engage in their passionate activity without any contingency attached to it (Mageau, Carpentier, & Vallerand, 2011; Vallerand et al., 2003). The activity thus occupies a significant, but not overpowering, space in one's identity and remains under the control of the individual. Consequently, this activity is in harmony with other important life aspects.

With OP, the process of internalization of the activity in the self occurs in a controlled way, as it originates from intra- and/or interpersonal pressures. Thus, the activity becomes a part of one's identity because it brings some extrinsic benefits, such as a boost of self-esteem or a reward (Lafrenière, Vallerand, & Sedikides, 2013; Mageau et al., 2011). With OP, individuals face an uncontrollable urge to partake in the activity they love and find enjoyable, as activity engagement is beyond their control. Since everything gravitates around the activity, OP is associated with rigid persistence, even when activity engagement is detrimental to other goals or activities in the person's life (Vallerand et al., 2003). Researchers have shown that HP is generally associated with more adaptive cognitive, affective, relational and behavioral outcomes compared to OP (see Curran, Hill, Appleton, Vallerand, & Standage, 2015; Vallerand, 2010, 2015 for reviews).

1.1. Passion and the “two roads to performance” in sports

In order to reach high levels of performance, an active learning process where the goal focuses on skill improvement is necessary (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Deliberate practice, defined as a highly structured activity motivated by the explicit aim of improvement, is thus key in order to reach high levels of performance. Interestingly, researchers have shown the existence of a positive linear relationships between accumulated team and individual deliberate practice and the skill level of international, national, and state/provincial athletes (e.g., Baker, Cote, & Abernethy, 2003; Helsen, Hodges, Van Winckel, & Starkes, 2000; Starkes & Ericsson, 2003). Passion represents a motivational force providing the necessary resources to engage in the deliberate practice activities that are essential to reach expert-level performance. Passion for sport, by being a highly important and valued activity in athletes' lives, is thus key in the process of energizing athletes, allowing them to engage in their deliberate practice activities that consequently lead to performance. Past research has supported these claims by showing the mediating role of deliberate practice in the relation between passion and performance in various domains, including sport (Bonneville-Roussy, Lavigne, & Vallerand, 2011; Vallerand et al., 2007, Studies 1 and 2, Vallerand et al., 2008, Study 2).

Moreover, these studies have demonstrated that passion can go beyond performance to facilitate other outcomes, such as psychological well-being. In what they called “the two roads to performance”, Vallerand et al. (2007, 2008) demonstrated that in addition to its positive relation with deliberate practice and subsequent performance, HP is also positively associated with indicators of psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction. Conversely, the

forementioned studies have shown that for OP, performance comes at the cost of lower levels of psychological well-being (see Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2007, Studies 1 and 2; Vallerand et al., 2008, Study 2). Researchers in several other achievement-oriented domains, such as work, music, and academia, have replicated these findings and repeatedly shown that HP was positively, but OP either negatively or non-significantly, associated with indicators of psychological well-being such as life satisfaction (see Vallerand, 2015 for a review). Life satisfaction in athletes is especially important as it represents a cognitive evaluation of athletes' global life judgement (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Consequently, life satisfaction is a key outcome of the present research, along with performance.

In addition to deliberate practice, the mediating role of achievement goals in the two roads to performance has been the focus of past research (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2007, 2008). Defined as mental representations of an object that a person is committed to approach or to avoid (Elliot & Church, 1997), achievement goals stem from either the motive to attain success (approach goals) or to avoid failure (avoidance goals). These goals can take various forms depending on whether people strive to master the requirements of a situation (mastery goals), outperform competitors (performance-approach goals), or avoid demonstrating incompetence by not performing poorly relative to others (performance-avoidance goals). Considering that passion is conducive to an important investment in sport, athletes should pursue achievement goals. Researchers have shown that achievement goals differ as a function of the type of passion. Specifically, it has been shown that HP triggers the adaptive goal of mastering achievement-related activities, while being unrelated to either type of performance goals (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2007, 2008). On the other hand, OP is a more controlled and pressuring form of engagement in sport that should be related to a more conflicted regulatory process. Consequently, OP was found to relate positively to all three goals, but mostly to performance-avoidance and performance-approach goals.

So far, researchers have mainly focused on deliberate practice and achievement goals to better understand the differential relation of HP and OP with performance and psychological well-being. The present research proposes that need satisfaction, as described by the SDT, also plays a pivotal role in understanding the relation between passion, psychological well-being, deliberate practice, and performance.

2. Passion and need satisfaction in sport

SDT proposes that the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy (a desire to feel a sense of personal initiative), competence (a desire to interact effectively with the environment), and relatedness (a desire to feel connected to significant others) is key in understanding the quality of one's adjustment, both in terms of performance and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Indeed, the satisfaction of the three basic needs has been associated with a range of positive outcomes, including psychological well-being (Tay & Diener, 2011) and performance (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). A few individual difference variables are associated with whether individuals succeed in satisfying these needs or not. The passion individuals have toward an activity, such as sport, has the potential to be one of them (see Vallerand, 2015).

For passionate athletes, engaging in sport provides feelings of autonomy as it reflects one's identity. Furthermore, passionate athletes who train and play frequently come to gain skills and develop feelings of competence along the way. Finally, sport provides opportunities for athletes to have significant relationships with others involved in their sport, such as teammates and coaches.

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