

DO YOU LIKE YOUR TEAMMATES? PERSONALITY AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY BETWEEN TEAMMATES IN COLLEGIATE ATHLETESLily Rainey¹, Eleni Petkari^{2*}Middlesex University Dubai¹, UAE, European University Cyprus², Cyprus

ABSTRACT: Extensive evidence has highlighted the association between personality traits and an individual's interpersonal and relational outcomes. However, there is a major gap on the link between personality and perceived quality of relationships in athletes, especially between teammates. This study aims to explore whether the Big Five personality traits are associated to the perceived quality of relationships between teammates. It is hypothesized that the Big Five are associated to the quality of relationships facets of social support, conflict and depth between teammates. 43 US collegiate athletes participated in the study and completed the International Personality Item Pool and the Quality of Relationships Inventory. Results of the stepwise regression indicated that agreeableness significantly predicted social support, whilst neuroticism predicted relationship depth between teammates. The findings suggest that agreeableness and neuroticism contribute independently to relationship quality between teammates, a relationship that has been long ignored albeit being a vital element of team functioning.

KEYWORDS: Relationship quality, Big Five personality traits, Collegiate athletes, Teammates

¿TE GUSTAN TUS COMPAÑEROS DE EQUIPO? PERSONALIDAD Y CALIDAD DE RELACIÓN ENTRE COMPAÑEROS DE EQUIPO UNIVERSITARIOS

RESUMEN: La relación entre personalidad y calidad de relaciones en atletas, especialmente entre compañeros de equipo no ha sido explorada en profundidad. El presente estudio pretende examinar si las características de personalidad medidas a través del modelo de los Cinco Grandes están asociadas a la calidad percibida de relaciones entre compañeros de equipo, medida a través de las facetas de apoyo social, conflicto y profundidad de relaciones. 43 atletas universitarios estadounidenses participaron en el estudio rellenando el Inventario de Personalidad y el Inventario de Calidad de Relaciones. Los análisis de regresiones revelaron que el factor de Amabilidad estaba asociado al apoyo social, mientras el Neuroticismo estaba asociado a la profundidad de la relación. Dichos hallazgos sugieren que estos dos factores tienen una contribución independiente a la calidad de la relación entre compañeros, una relación que ha sido sistemáticamente ignorada a pesar de ser un elemento vital del funcionamiento de un equipo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Calidad de relación, Cinco Grandes, Atletas universitarios, Compañeros de equipo

VOCÊ GOSTA DE SEUS COMPANHEIROS DE EQUIPE? PERSONALIDADE E QUALIDADE DO RELACIONAMENTO ENTRE COMPANHEIROS DE EQUIPE UNIVERSITÁRIOS

RESUMO: A relação entre personalidade e qualidade das relações em atletas, especialmente entre companheiros de equipe, não foi explorada em profundidade. O presente estudo tem como objetivo examinar se as características de personalidade medidas através do modelo do Cinco Grandes Fatores estão associadas à qualidade percebida das relações entre companheiros de equipe, medidos através das facetas do suporte social, conflito e profundidade de relacionamentos. 43 atletas universitários dos EUA participaram do estudo preenchendo o Inventário de Personalidade e o Inventário de Qualidade de Relacionamento. As análises de regressão revelaram que o fator de Amabilidade estava associado ao suporte social, enquanto o Neuroticismo estava associado à profundidade do relacionamento. Os resultados obtidos sugerem que esses dois fatores têm uma contribuição independente para a qualidade do relacionamento entre companheiros, uma relação que foi sistematicamente ignorada apesar de ser um elemento vital no funcionamento de uma equipe.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Qualidade do relacionamento, Cinco Grandes Fatores, Atletas universitários, Companheiros de equipe

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The majority of sStudies conducted in the field of sport psychology focus majorly on the relationships between the athlete and their coach, their athletic trainer, or the athlete's parent (Allen Greenlees, Jones, 2011; Jackson, Dimmock, Gucciardi, Grove 2011; Vella, Oades, Crowe, 2013). While it is important to understand such relationships due to their effects on enhanced performance capabilities and the athlete's character development (Chan, Lonsdale, Fung, 2012), it is also critical to recognize the relationship between teammates (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, Payne, 2013). In this vein, the personal and social relationships within the athlete-athlete dyad can be explained through the Interdependence Theory (IT) (Casper, Gray, Stellino, 2007), consisting of a framework for understanding the way relational dyads influence each other based on a mutual rewards system. According to this theory, within every relationship each individual tries to maximize the rewards (happiness, social status, pleasure) and minimize the costs (anxiety, negative emotions, and conflict) (Thibaut, Kelley, 2007). Hence, in the athlete-athlete relationship, the individuals expect their relationship to benefit them through social support (Shapiro & Martin, 2010), increased technical skills, and individual and team success (Casper, et al., 2007) although due to the competitive nature of the relationship in some occasion such interaction may be negative (Eime, et al., 2013). In any case the athlete-athlete relationship consists of certain principles of interdependence (Jowet, Nezelek, 2011). Importantly, such relationships are the ones that can help the individual to manage stress, cultivate skill development, improve social relationships, prolong participation and help the athletes to reach their full mental and athletic potential to enhance performance success (Allen, et al., 2011; Allen, Laborde, 2014; Hoffman, 2013; Jowett, Nezelek, 2011). When exploring further the quality of the athlete's peer relationships, the role of social perception is essential.

Such perception is derived from three distinct facets of the social relationships: social support, depth and conflict (Uchino, 2006) which have a major influence on an individual's health and well-being (Jetten, Haslam, Alexander, 2012). Social support is the perception of an interactive, interpersonal connectedness (Sarason, Sarason, 2013) and when received from peer athletes it is connected to increased self-motivation and less burnout (DeFreese, Smith, 2013).

Relationship depth is the extent to which an individual perceives a relationship as important, positive and secure, enhancing the sense of cohesion in the athletes' peer relationships (Bosselut, McLaren, Eys, Heuzé, 2012). The third facet of relationships, conflict, refers to a struggle between two individuals with opposing values, needs, beliefs or goals (Vazou, Ntoumanis, Duda, 2005) and although very prominent in athlete intra-group relationships it has been largely unexplored (Paradis, Carron, Martin, 2014). Adding upon this, over the past few decades, there has been extensive evidence demonstrating the effect that personality traits have on an individual's interpersonal and relational outcomes (Jackson, Dimmock, Gucciardi, Grove, 2010; Yang, Jowett, & Chan, 2015). The personality model most widely used in this field is the Big Five traits (Costa and McCrae, 1992), consisting of five facets: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism and each of these five factors influences on the athletes thought processes, behaviours and social relationships (Allen, Laborde, 2014).

Also, such traits have an influence on enhanced performance capabilities, athletes' character development and prolonged participation in sports (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008). Regarding the athlete-athlete partnership, those individuals with high levels of openness to experience display a greater

amount of flexibility and adaptability in their relationship interactions (Allen, et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2011).

Furthermore, athletes with high conscientiousness tend to demonstrate characteristics such as competence and achievement which make them successful in their relationships (Leary, Hoyle, 2009; Nia, Besharat, 2010). What is more, extroverts tend to thrive in group settings as they profit by the conditions of closeness, positivity and cooperation created in a team (Berry, Hansen, 2000; Berry et al., 2000). Thus, within a sports team, they tend to act positively displaying an active, social personality (Ghaderi, Ghasemi, 2012). On the other hand, individuals characterized by agreeableness tend to be modest, straightforward, trustworthy, cooperative and considerate (Graziano, Tobin, 2009) resulting in satisfactory relationships with their peer athletes (Aşçı, Keleşek, Altıntaş, 2015), showing greater relationship stability, cooperation and empathy in their dyadic relationships (Jackson, et al., 2011). Finally, neurotic individuals are anxious, hostile, self-conscious, vulnerable, insecure (Macht, Nembhard, 2015) and are often less committed in their relationships with their team partners (Jackson, et al., 2011).

Importantly, Based on the above-mentioned perspective, it seems essential to understand which of the personality characteristics are related to the quality of relationships as perceived by the relational dyad in peer athletes. Despite the great amount of evidence in mainstream settings (Swickert, Hittner, Foster 2010; Zielinski, Veilleux, 2014), there is a major gap in literature on the link between personality and perceived quality of relationships in athletes. Thus, the present study aims to explore whether personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) are associated to the perceived quality of relationships between teammates in collegiate athletes. In the current study it is hypothesized that: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism will be associated with the quality of relationships between athlete teammates with regards to (a) social support, (b) conflict and (c) relationship depth.

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 43 student-athletes coming from two liberal arts colleges (College 1; n=31) and (College 2; n=12) located in southern California, US.

Procedure

After receiving ethical approval by the Corresponding University's Ethics Committee offshore campus, universities were contacted and a "No Objection Certificate" from the universities willing to participate was obtained. Potential participants were contacted through the collegiate coaches of their respective sport. Data collection took place from March through May, 2016. One of the researchers met with the participants in a classroom setting where she introduced the study, briefed the participants, assured them of their right to withdraw from the study and of confidentiality, and gained a signed consent form. Students were eligible to participate when the interactions with one another were primarily athletic in nature, excluding any participants that had any romantic or familial relationships between them. Upon the receipt of a consent form participants were administered a booklet with the questionnaires.

Once the questionnaires had been filled out and collected, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study. The total process took approximately 30-45 minutes.

Measures

Socio-demographic variables. A socio-demographic questionnaire was administered to collect information on the participant's age in years, gender, ethnicity, college, current educational year, and number of years playing soccer.

International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). The revised International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, et al., 2006) is a one hundred-item questionnaire that measures the Big Five Personality traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. There are twenty items for each of the five personality characteristics. The IPIP includes self-descriptive statements that participants respond by a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate). The instrument has shown good psychometric properties (iPIP.ori.org; Goldberg, et al., 2006). Total scores for each domain are calculated separately by summing the positive and the negative items (reverse worded). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for openness to experience was .80, for conscientiousness was 0.82, for extraversion was 0.75, for agreeableness was 0.75, and for neuroticism was 0.78.

Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI). The Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, 1991; Verhofstadt, et al., 2006), was used to measure the participant's current relationships quality using twenty-five items to assess relationship perceptions in three different subscales, according to the analysis of Verhofstadt, Buysse, Rosseel, Peene (2006): social support (7 items), conflict (12 items) and depth (6 items). Responses are scored on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). Scores for each subscale are calculated by averaging the scores of the corresponding items. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for social support was .75, for conflict was .74, and for

depth was .79. Participants were instructed to complete the QRI based on their relationship with their teammate/teammates.

Statistical Analyses. The data was analysed using SPSS, Version 24. Descriptive analyses were performed in order to examine the socio-demographic data of our sample as well as the levels of the five personality factors and the three aspects of quality of relationships. Cronbach alpha analyses were performed in order to examine the reliability of the instruments' subscales. Three stepwise regression analyses were performed to determine which of the big five personality factors were associated with each of the quality of relationships aspect (social support, conflict, and depth).

RESULTS

Characteristics of the sample

Details on the sample's characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics, Big Five and Relationships Quality.

Variable		N (Percentage)	Mean	SD
Sociodemographic Characteristics				
43				
Sex	Male	13 (69.8%)		
	Female	30 (30.2%)		
Age			19.84	1.07
Ethnicity	Caucasian	33 (76.7%)		
	Hispanic	3 (7%)		
	European	2 (4.7%)		
	Pacific Islander	2 (4.7%)		
Educational year	Southeast Asian	2 (4.7%)		
	Freshman	12 (27.9%)		
	Sophomore	16 (37.2%)	2.07	.799
	Junior	15 (34.9%)		
Experience playing soccer (years)			14.26	2.65
Big Five Personality Traits				
Extraversion			3.43	.79
Agreeableness			3.98	.40
Conscientiousness			3.83	.51
Neuroticism			3.51	.56
Openness			3.68	.39
Relationships Quality				
Social support			3.34	.46
Conflict			1.78	.36
Depth			3.18	.51

Results of the stepwise regressions can be seen at Table 2. Specifically, such analyses revealed that out of the Five Personality factors, agreeableness accounted for 11 % of the variation in social support [$R^2 = .108$, $F(1,40) = 5.96$, $p < .05$] whilst neuroticism accounted for 7.6% of the variation in depth [$R^2 = .076$, $F(1,40) = 4.37$, $p < .05$]. Finally, there were no significant predictors of conflict [$R^2 = .027$, $F(5,36)$, $p > .05$ NS].

Table 2. Associations of Personality Traits with Relationship Quality.

Factors	Coefficients	95% CI				
		Outcome	β	t	p	Lower Bound
Agreeableness	Social Support	.360	2.441	.019	.071	.756
	Relationship Depth	-.314	-2.091	.043	-.571	-.010

$p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Guided by previous empirical research, the present study sought to examine whether openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were significant predictors of relationship quality (social support, conflict and depth) between teammates in collegiate athletes. Overall, our results supported the existence of associations between agreeableness and social support on one hand and neuroticism and depth on the other, in line with previous research suggesting that both agreeableness and neuroticism are associated with relationship quality Nofle, Shaver, 2006; Ozer, Benet-Martinez, 2006). Conversely, there were no significant predictors of the conflict facet of relationship quality in the present study. Indeed, agreeableness and neuroticism appear to have a significant influence on an individual's interpersonal and relational outcomes. Having high or low amounts of such traits can have a distinct contribution to an individual's thought-processes, behaviours and social relationships (Cuperman, Ikes, 2009). The association

of agreeableness with social support can be explained when considering that agreeable people are viewed as kind, congenial and pleasant. Such are traits are ideal for prompting the perception and materialization of an active social network (Cuperman, Ickes, 2009) and also for striving for cooperation and value in a collective community (Nofle, Shaver, 2006). Specifically, in the athlete-athlete relationship, the association between agreeableness and social support indicates their tendency towards cooperation as well as elevated levels of commitment to the team and their teammates (Hall, 2007). Our findings also indicate an inverse association between neuroticism and depth in relationship quality (Ben-Ari, Laveé, 2005), in line with previous research viewing neuroticism as the trait with the strongest association to the relationship satisfaction and depth (Heller, Watson, Iles, 2004). One possible way to explain our results is that individuals displaying high levels of neuroticism tend to remove themselves from any relationship that may cause them further distress. Additionally, such individuals can be often seen as irritated, tense and anxious which make them less attractive for the establishment of a meaningful social network (Swickert, et al., 2010) Thus, in a group or team context, individuals high in neuroticism often experience negative interpersonal encounters and apprehension towards and from other group members (Macht, Nembhard, 2015). The opposite has been observed for individuals with low neuroticism, who generally report higher relationship satisfaction and higher positive emotional states (Ben-Ari, Laveé, 2005; Nofle, Shaver, 2006).

Additionally, in the athlete-athlete relationship, individuals high in neuroticism often experience difficulties in conflict resolution, negative interpersonal encounters and apprehension towards other group members (Macht, Nembhard, 2015). Thus, it would be desirable for the team or athletic group to comprise of individuals displaying low levels of neuroticism and high levels of agreeableness. A perhaps striking result in our study is the absence of associations between personality traits and conflict, contrary to previous studies (Bradley, et al., Klotz, Postlethwaite, 2013; DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus Doty, 2013). In the athletic community, conflict between teammates often includes disputes regarding playing roles, lack of communication, and accusations of selfishness (Holt, Knight, Zukowski, 2012) and is an irrefutable obstacle, although it can also be identified as an important role component in sport relationships (Bradley, Anderson, Baur, Klotz, 2015; Partridge, Knapp, 2016). The absence of a direct association between personality and conflict might actually be due to the contribution of other, less stable factors that may have a stronger influence on the relational conflict, such as motivation-related variables (Smith, 2003). Additionally, considering the framework of the Interdependence Theory (IT) (Casper, et al., 2007), the athlete-athlete dyadic relationship provides pro-social results through the education of social skills, communication and cooperation. In this context, the teammate-teammate relationship can help an individual become more aware of what they are independently capable of achieving (Clifford, Feezell, 2010) and thus any potential relational conflict could be resolved through such acquired elements reducing any latent effects of personality traits.

Although the present study adds significant value on a scarcely researched topic concerning the possible associations between personality characteristics and relationship quality, some limitations need to be taken into account. Firstly, we focused on a relatively small sample size with a female majority, result of the composition of the student population targeted. Secondly, the student athletes came from two predominately white, middle-class, liberal arts colleges located in southern California, which limits the extent to which the present study can generalize its findings to the general population. Thirdly, other factors, such as the relationships with the coach, the frequency of contact or relationship length that might have influenced the associations observed were not considered in the present research. Finally, it would be interesting to replicate the current study on a different population, such as young children, in order to examine how different ages affect personality and the individual's perceived quality of relationships. In the same vein, the cross sectional nature of the study did not allow us to reach any conclusions that imply causality. Thus, a longitudinal design will allow us to observe how relationships develop from an early age and examine the extent to which early peer interactions characterized by sensitivity and autonomy can reflect future positive relationships.

While the majority of the limited studies conducted in this field focus on the dyadic relationships between the coach and the player, or an individual's familial and romantic dyads, very few studies focus on the platonic relationships between friends, or on a more equally based and still less studied dyadic relationships, that of co-athletes. The present research took an initial step towards understanding the importance of the teammate-teammate relationship and the influence each teammate's personality can have on the team's social networks and dynamics. The results not only confirmed previous theory on relationship quality and personality, but also added insight into the practical implications for athletes.

In this vein, we suggest that it is critical to put on the spotlight the long-ignored relationship between athletes, friends or teammates. Conclusively, this study has paved the way for future research to focus on both the short and long-term impact of personality on the individual and team interactions, a crucial element for successful team functioning and happy athletes.

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