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**Beyond Health and Happiness: An Exploratory Study into the Relationship  
between Craftsmanship and Meaningfulness of Sport**

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**Abstract**

Meaning in movement is an enduring topic in sport social sciences, but few studies have explored how sport is meaningful and for whom. We examined the relationships between demographic variables, meaningfulness of sport and craftsmanship. Athletes (N=258, 61.6% male, age  $\geq 18$ ) from the UK completed a demographic questionnaire, the Work and Meaning Inventory (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012) modified for sport, and the Craftsmanship Scale (Thorlindsson, Halldorsson, & Sigfusdottir, 2018). Older age and individual sport significantly correlated with higher craftsmanship. Craftsmanship and religion were two independent predictors of meaningfulness but emphasised partly different meaning dimensions. Meaningfulness in sport seems to be related to how athletes approach their craft as well as their overall framework of life meaning.

*Keywords: meaningful work; athletes; life meaning; task-orientation, spirituality, skills*

## **Beyond Health and Happiness: An Exploratory Study into the Relationship between Craftsmanship and Meaningfulness of Sport**

In contemporary academic and popular discourses, the importance of movement is often justified with reference to the primary goals of health management (through exercise) and athletic achievement (through sport). For Twietmeyer (2018, p. 12), however, “to presume that either ‘health’ in kinesiology or ‘victory’ in sport is the meaning of our lives is a grand sort of foolishness”. This observation resonates with Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, and Garbinsky’s (2013) argument that two *ultimate* goals of life that animate and motivate human projects and activities are the desire to live a happy and a meaningful life. As they noted,

A breathtakingly broad variety of other common goals and strivings – as examples, the desires to be healthy, to be loved, to succeed at work, to raise children, and to serve one’s religion or country – can be subsumed under either or both of those broad wishes (Baumeister et al., 2013, p. 505).

While happiness can be broadly understood as the state of positive affect, having one’s needs and desires satisfied, and the absence of unpleasant states and experiences (Baumeister et al., 2013), meaning is a much more complex phenomenon. As Baumeister et al. (2013, p. 505) noted, “it requires interpretive construction of circumstances across time according to abstract values and other culturally mediated ideas”. People can live meaningful but unhappy lives (consider the cases of political activists and prisoners), suggesting that having a broader purpose is an essential component of meaningfulness (Martela & Pessi, 2018). As Viktor Frankl in his classic book *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1959) attested, experiencing meaning in life does not exclude suffering, anxiety and thwarted basic needs. However, both Frankl’s existential psychological account of the human condition (2010) and the classic sociological work of Durkheim (1951) and Marx (1977) highlighted that the societal conditions (of modernity and capitalism) could be detrimental to people’s ability to live meaningful lives.

Marx's alienation theory (1977) postulated various forms of alienation, arguing that economic and social alienation were the results of the capitalist mode of production that led workers to lose the ability to direct their lives through the loss of ownership over their own labour. Durkheim (1951), on the other hand, wrote about anomie as the social condition where shared meaning and values have become contested and lost their normative power, leaving individuals experiencing disorientation and a lack of life purpose. In the contemporary world of work, which is a central defining domain of individual lives in Western societies, scholars have observed that when people seek career counselling, they often do so because they are longing to experience more meaning in their work (Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009).

In sociocultural studies of sport, the questions about how sport can provide sport participants with meaningful experiences have been addressed through various theoretical lenses. Some scholars have written about the collective meanings, rituals and cultural significance of sport (inclusive of participating and spectating), conceptualising sport as a form of secular religion (Brody, 1979; Mandelbaum, 2004; Novak, 1994; Trothen, 2018). Sport philosophers including Kretchmar (2000) and Loland (2006) have argued for the centrality of meaning in analysing sports involvement and social justifications of sport. Some scholars have also drawn on existential philosophical ideas to discern dimensions of meaning and underpinning values in sport (Aggerholm, 2014; Aggerholm & Breivik, 2020; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018). Empirical studies have discerned various 'meanings' that people assign to their sport experience, including fun, health, fitness, aesthetics and community (Crossley, 2006; Seippel, 2006). However, in discussing the physical, cognitive and affective meanings of movement from a philosophical perspective, McCaughy and Rovegno (2001) argued that fun and enjoyment are only 'shallow' benefits of movement, calling for developing 'deeper' understandings of meaningful movement experiences. Besides the commonly cited

‘meanings’ of health and enjoyment, scholars have found that, for example, religious athletes might interpret their sporting talent as a gift from God and thus connect it to their existential framework of life meaning (Balague, 1999; Mosley, Frierson, Cheng, & Aoyagi, 2015). Furthermore, many scholars have suggested that sport can be a spiritual practice for participants, whether they are religious or not (Hutch, 2015; Ronkainen, Tikkanen, Littlewood, & Nesti 2015; Trothen, 2018). The religious and spiritual meanings of sport might exemplify “the individual’s active role in sanctifying various elements of life by viewing them through a sacred lens” (Pomerleau, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2016, p. 38).

Although meaning and meaningfulness are often used interchangeably, it could be argued that while all sport experiences have some *meaning(s)*, it does not imply that they are necessarily *meaningful*. Rather, meaningfulness refers to the amount of significance and positive valence something holds for an individual (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). From this perspective, a sports event that is experienced as fun and health-enhancing (meanings of sport) might be experienced as extremely meaningful by one individual and not very meaningful by another, depending on what matters to them. As such, from this lens, some ways of engaging in sport can also be meaningless for participants (even if they contain some types of meanings such as being coerced by the coach) and fail to capture participants’ interest and sustain engagement in the longer term. Despite the body of theoretical literature on meanings and meaningfulness in movement, Beni et al. (2017) recently argued that, in physical education, there is “little empirical evidence to support and guide the implementation of teaching strategies to facilitate meaningful experiences” (p. 306–307). Scholars are, therefore, increasingly addressing the question of what kind of pedagogical approaches and social organisations of sport participation have the greatest potential to facilitate meaningful movement experiences in physical education and youth

sport (Aggerholm, Standal, Barker, & Larsson, 2018; O'Connor, 2019; Walseth, Engebretsen, & Elvebakk, 2018).

One promising avenue for understanding meaningful engagement in sport and movement culture practices is the theory of craftsmanship, which Sennett (2008, p. 9) described as “an enduring, basic impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake”. Drawing on Sennett’s book *The Craftsman* (2008) where craftsmanship is conceptualized as the “the special human condition of being *engaged*” (p. 20), scholars have argued that craftsmanship can be a key factor in understanding meaningful movement practices (Højbjerg Larsen, 2016; Thorlindsson et al., 2018). In addition to discussing the theoretical construct of craftsmanship and its relationship with sport, Thorlindsson et al. (2018) also developed the first quantitative scale to assess craftsmanship and tested several hypotheses concerning the role of craftsmanship in schoolwork and youth sport in Icelandic adolescents. They found that craftsmanship was negatively correlated with general and school-related meaninglessness; however, they did not assess craftsmanship in relation to positive indices of meaningful engagement or focus on meaningfulness specifically in the sport context and were focused specifically on adolescent participants. Therefore, in our present study, we sought to contribute to this emerging line of research by investigating the role of craftsmanship in meaningful experiences in sport in a diverse sample of adult athletes across a spectrum of sports and performance levels. Specifically, the research can advance understandings of (a) demographic variables that are related to craftsmanship (i.e., who are the sports craftsmen?) and meaningful experience of sport (i.e., who are experiencing highest levels of meaningfulness in sport); and (b) the role of craftsmanship in these meaningful experiences. In the following sections, we first review the literature on sport, meaning(s) and meaningfulness and then introduce relevant literature on meaningful work that guided the design of our empirical study. We then explore sociological theories of craftsmanship and

their relevance for understanding meaningful engagement in sport. After presenting our empirical study and its key results, we discuss the findings in relation to theories of meaningful work and craftsmanship and their implications for future research in this area.

### **Sport as Meaningful Work?**

Given the relative dearth of literature of meaningfulness of sport and its relation to life meaning, it is useful to draw on scholarship in other disciplines for theoretical concepts and methodological tools. To date, it is the domain of work that has drawn the most attention in terms of meaningfulness in different domains research. Indeed, ‘meaningful work’ has been a topic of interest in the humanities for centuries (Bailey et al., 2019). Whether sport can be considered as similar enough to work so that this literature can be drawn on, of course, partly depends on what counts as “work”. Some of the cultural meanings of work – an activity done *not* for its own sake, the opposite of play, a means for survival, a burden, or even a curse (Super, 1976) – seem antithetical to sport which many scholars have traditionally associated with playfulness, joy and pleasure (Novak, 1994; Stolz, 2014). However, scholars have more recently emphasised the centrality and potential intrinsic value of work for people and also sought to expand the discourse of work to non-paid life roles, emphasising individual’s commitment and effort in this particular life project. Zorn (2017, p. 1), for instance, argued for adopting a broad concept of work in the meaningful work discourse, stating that

While organization studies (including organizational communication studies) tends to focus on work as paid employment, work can be seen more broadly as any endeavor requiring mental and/or physical effort, including doing household chores, volunteering in the community, developing a skill, learning to play a musical instrument, “working out” (i.e., exercise), working on personal development (e.g., to stop procrastinating), among many other possibilities.

In line with this broad discourse of ‘work’, scholars have explored a variety of occupations and activities as potential avenues to meaningful work (e.g., social entrepreneurship and volunteering in refugee shelters or music festivals; Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al., 2019), and the potential of ‘leisure careers’ to offer people who cannot attain fulfilment through paid work with an opportunity to pursue their callings in their free time (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010). The diversity of the meaningful work terrain has been traced by Taylor and Roth (2019), who observed how this ‘third’ voluntary sector is constituted by an array of organisations including charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community associations, activist groups, unions and social enterprises. The authors further outlined how these organisations can operate at global, national, or local levels to provide a range of functions and services that span health, social service, political activism, humanitarian aid, *and* recreation. Along similar lines, Stebbins (2001) observed that non-professional sport can offer the practitioners the foundation of their personal and communal identity and a ‘central life interest’ alongside or instead of paid work. In discussing committed amateurs in various serious leisure careers, Stebbins (2001, p. 54) also noted that there is a “sense that they are pursuing a career, not unlike the ones pursued in the more evolved, high-level occupations”.

Unfortunately, similar to research on sport, meaning and meaningfulness, the literature base on meaningful work is fragmented, confusing and host to an array of diverse theoretical and methodological approaches (Rosso et al., 2010; Steger, 2019). Scholars have used, for example, existential (Frankl) and humanistic (Maslow) groundings to argue that we are ontologically constituted as meaning-seeking beings who are directed towards activities that allow us to experience and express those meanings (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Yeoman, 2014). However, a range of perspectives and conceptualisations of meaningful work also exist in fields as varied as critical cultural studies, moral philosophy, organisational management and economics (Yeoman et al., 2019). While there is a lack of consensus about

what the underpinnings of meaningful work are, a diverse body of empirical research has shown that, in addition to meaningful work being an end value in itself, there are a number of positive outputs associated with its attainment. Studies have reported, for example, the psychological (e.g., intrinsic motivation, work satisfaction, greater overall life meaning) and the organisational (e.g., motivating and mentoring others, working more, being ambassadors for the organisation) benefits of meaningful work (Steger & Dik, 2010). Despite these apparent benefits, critical scholars have warned that meaningful work discourse practices carry elitist undertones and might marginalise certain workers and lines of work (Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008), and potentially promote self-sacrifice, acceptance of underpaid or unpaid labour and loss of work-life balance due to overcommitment to work (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). In relation to the latter point, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that zookeepers who perceived their work as a calling were frequently willing to sacrifice personal time and pay and feel a strong commitment to maintaining their zoo at a high level. Finally, managerialist approaches to meaningful work have also been critiqued for their attempts to invade the existential domain of workers to ‘prescribe’ meaningful work and thus increase organisational control (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Such approaches reflect the broader and systematic efforts of managerialist and technocratic research and practice agendas to establish a particular world-view and way of thinking in employees, where the purpose is to monopolise ideas and definitions of appropriate values-sets and ideals (Alvesson, 2002). Sport is not impervious to attempts to manage the meanings and meaningfulness that participants derive from it. In sport sociology, for instance, it has been argued that cultural narratives constructing sport as the fulfilment of childhood dreams and a vocation may lead to athletes being susceptible to exploitation and sacrificing their broader personal and academic development, despite the low chances of eventual success (Roderick, 2014).

In the present study, we approach meaningfulness of sport through Steger and colleagues' (2012) framework that postulates that the experience of meaningful work arises from three primary facets: the work itself 'has a point' (positive meaning), it contributes to an overall sense of purpose in life (meaning-making through work), and has a positive impact on something beyond one's self (greater good motivations). Steger et al.'s (2012) Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) is a theory-driven instrument that measures meaningfulness in work along these three dimensions and has been extensively used with various populations (although to date, not with athletes). Firstly, positive meaning implies a subjective perception of what one is doing (in our case, sport) matters and has personal significance. Secondly, meaning-making through work (in our case, sport) indicates a sense that what one is doing contributes to an overall sense of life meaning, a link which has been identified by numerous scholars (Frankl, 1959; Rosso et al., 2010; Steger, 2019). Thirdly, greater good motivations refer to a sense that what one is doing has a positive impact on something beyond one's self, which has been identified as a salient aspect of experiencing work as meaningful (Allan, Duffy, & Collisson, 2018; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

Based on their review of literature, Steger et al. (2012) argued that the presence of all three dimensions is necessary for the experience of meaningfulness to arise. More recently, Pratt, Pradies, and Lepisto (2013) challenged this assumption and suggested three distinct (independent) pathways to meaningful work. They argued that work could be animated by a serving orientation (a desire to help others; 'doing good'), a kinship orientation (which values bonds between people created through work; 'doing with') or a craftsmanship orientation ('doing well' for its own sake). While the two first approaches have not been connected to sport, scholars have proposed a potential link between craftsmanship and meaningful experience in sport (Halldorsson, Thorlindsson, & Katovich 2014; Højbjerg Larsen, 2016;

Thorlindsson et al., 2018). Therefore, we explored craftsmanship as a specific pathway to meaningfulness in sport.

### **Craftsmanship as a Pathway to Meaningfulness in Work and Sport?**

The sociological writings on craftsmanship (e.g., Mills, 2002/1951; Sennett, 2008) have suggested that craftsmanship cultures are characterised by a desire to do quality work ‘for its own sake’, a holistic understanding, tacit knowledge that is difficult if not impossible to articulate, and the interplay of problem-finding and problem-solving. Craftsmanship has been discussed as a critical theory warning that the bureaucratic organisation of work and education produces alienation; however, more recent scholarship has also conceptualised craftsmanship as ‘an ethic of excellence’ (Berger, 2003) and explored its positive effects on learning and school performance. In his classic book *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, Mills (2002/1951, p. 220) described craftsmanship as involving six qualities:

There is no ulterior motive in work other than the product being made and the processes of its creation. The details of daily work are meaningful because they are not detached in the worker's mind from the product of the work. The worker is free to control his own working action. The craftsman is thus able to learn from his work; and to use and develop his capacities and skills in its prosecution. There is no split of work and play, or work and culture. The craftsman's way of livelihood determines and infuses his entire mode of living.

In a movement culture context, Højbjerg Larsen (2016) analysed parkour practices through Sennett's (2008) theory of craftsmanship, contending that skilled movement is a major part of why parkour is meaningful to practitioners. She argued that craftsmanship can help understand how the participants sustain engagement in their activities and analysed the development of parkour expertise through the lens of craftsmanship culture around which the bodily practices are collectively organised.

Thorlindsson et al. (2018) recently extended the previously exclusively qualitative research on craftsmanship by developing and validating the Craftsmanship Scale and testing it in youth sport and education. They operationalised craftsmanship as comprising of the following elements: informal learning, tacit knowledge, intrinsic motivation, flow, holistic understanding, practice and honing of skills. Although flow and intrinsic motivation are extensively studied constructs in sport, craftsmanship is also distinct from them in that the former are typically shorter experiential states while the latter involves the long-term focus on mastering the craft (which typically takes years or decades; Berger, 2003; Sennett, 2008). Thorlindsson et al. (2018) proposed that the holistic approach of craftsmanship has the potential to make learning more meaningful, and showed that craftsmanship approach was negatively correlated both with general and school-work related meaninglessness in Icelandic adolescents. However, although they studied craftsmanship both in education and sport, their measures of meaning did not specifically focus on meaningfulness in sport, nor did they explore potential correlates of craftsmanship such as age, gender or type of sport.

### **Study Aims and Hypotheses**

The main aim of the present study was to explore craftsmanship in relation to meaningfulness of sport as measured by the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) modified for sport. As a secondary objective, we were interested in exploring whether any of the demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, religion, and type of sport) could shed light on who the sports craftsmen are and which groups of participants might experience higher levels of meaningfulness of sport. In addition to exploring the contribution of craftsmanship and demographics on the overall meaningfulness of sport, we also wanted to explore the individual contribution of these factors on the three sub-scales of the WAMI. As the study was exploratory in nature, we did not set specific hypotheses for our analyses.

## Methods

### Participants

We included participants 18 years and older, who reported the sport in which they were currently competing and had valid responses on the Craftsmanship Scale and WAMI. The included sample consisted of 258 competitive athletes (61.6 % male) with a mean age of 30.5 years (SD= 10.82, range 18-69 years), with 21.7% currently enrolled under a student-athlete scholarship scheme within an educational institution. Most of the participants were of white/Caucasian ethnic background (91.5 %) and UK citizens (87.6 %). In the demographic question on religion, 46.9% chose one of the major world religions and 48.5% chose 'no religion'. The participants were competing at the local (14.0 %), regional (19.4%), national (29.5%) and international/top tier professional level (33.1%). The most frequently reported male sports (or clusters of sports) were rugby (n=22), ultra-marathon/marathon/running (cluster) (n=17), ironman/triathlon/duathlon (cluster) (n=15), martial arts (cluster) (n=13), golf (n=11), football (soccer) (n=11), ice hockey (n=10), swimming (n=8), and rowing (n=8). The most frequently reported female sports were ironman/triathlon/duathlon (cluster) (n=11), rowing (n=10), ultra-marathon/marathon/running (cluster) (n=8), martial arts (cluster) (n=6), water polo (n=6), and swimming (n=5). In total, athletes represented 54 different types of sports, with 57.8% of athletes identified as individual sport athletes (table 1).

[Table 1 here]

### Procedure

We used a convenience sampling method, aimed at recruiting athletes from a broad range of sports and performance levels. We approached potential gatekeepers of sport clubs, student unions and other organisations (e.g., established members, coaches, performance directors and other employees) to assist in the recruitment of athletes. We also recruited athletes through social media (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn). The potential participants received a

link to the anonymous online survey which contained a participant information sheet with detailed information concerning the study and participants' rights.

### **Instruments**

The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012) is a 10-item scale to assess the degree to which work is a subjectively meaningful experience. Because our study was focused on meaningfulness of sport, we modified the items by changing the word 'work' to 'sport', and 'career' to 'athletic career'. The items are scored from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 5 (absolutely true). Items 1, 4, 5, and 8 assess positive meaning in work (example item in the modified questionnaire: 'I have a good sense of what makes my sport meaningful'); 2, 7, and 9 assess meaning-making through work (example item in the modified questionnaire: 'My sport helps me make sense of the world around me'); and 3, 6, and 10 assess the degree to which work is seen to serve a greater purpose (example item in the modified questionnaire: 'My sport really makes no difference in the world'). We instructed the athletes in the following way: 'please indicate how well the following statements apply to you and your sport and/or athletic career'. The internal consistency (reliability) of the WAMI scale in the current sample was  $\alpha = .74$ .

The Craftsmanship Scale (Thorlindsson et al., 2018) is an 8-item scale where responses are rated from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The questions 1-2 measure tacit knowledge and informal learning (example item: 'I try to understand how things work'), 3 and 8 practice and honing of skills (example item: 'I try to solve my tasks to the best of my ability'), 4-5 intrinsic motivation and flow (example item: 'I often focus so hard on tasks that I lose track of time'), and 6-7 holistic understanding of the task at hand (example item: 'I see in my mind how I can finish my task'). The internal consistency (reliability) of the scale was  $\alpha = .79$  in the current sample.

## **Data Analysis**

All data were analyzed in SPSS version 26. First, we explored correlations between the demographic variables, craftsmanship scale and the total WAMI scale. Then we included the variables that were significantly correlated with WAMI in a multiple regression model to test the contribution of each predictor variable on the overall meaningfulness of sport. We then conducted a multivariate multiple regression analysis with the three sub-scales of the WAMI as dependent variables to further explore the potential contribution of our predictor variables on the different dimension of the WAMI scale. A multivariate analysis is preferred when testing for several dependent variables that are expected to be closely related, as it reduces the family-wise error and increases the potential power to detect effects (Field, 2013). These multivariate analyses were conducted through the General Linear Models (GLM) multivariate function in SPSS. Hence the analyses were initially run as a MANCOVA model including continuous independent variables as covariates and categorical independent variables as fixed factors. Parameters estimates were then examined to interpret the multivariate regression models.

## **Results**

### **Correlations**

Table 2 shows the correlations between demographic variables, craftsmanship, and the total WAMI scale. Older age and competing in individual sports (as opposed to team sports) were significantly correlated with higher craftsmanship scores ( $r = .18, p < .001$ , and  $r = .13, p < .001$ , respectively). Identification with some religion, as opposed to no religion, was related to higher WAMI scores ( $r = -.18, p < .001$ ). Also, older age ( $r = .17, p < .001$ ) and higher craftsmanship ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ) were significantly related to higher WAMI scores.

[Table 2 here]

## **Multiple Regression Analyses between Independent Variables and WAMI Total Score**

Assumptions of multiple regression analysis were assessed and suggested that multicollinearity was not an issue across the three predictor variables (VIF = 1.004- 1.039). The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.81 hence the assumption of independence of error terms was met. Based on visual examination of the histogram, P- P plot and scatterplot, the assumption of normality of residuals as well as homoscedasticity was also met. As can be seen in Table 3, the total regression model [ $F(3, 233) = 10.61, p < .001$ ], explained 11% of the variance in WAMI scores. Religion and craftsmanship were both significant predictors of WAMI scores. Although age was initially correlated with both craftsmanship and meaningfulness, it did not, however, remain as a significant predictor in the regression model.

[Table 3 here]

## **Multivariate Regression Analyses between Independent Variables and WAMI Sub-Scales**

We followed our multiple regression analyses with a multivariate multiple regression analysis (i.e. testing the relationship between independent variables and several dependent variables) to explore the contribution of religion and craftsmanship to the three underlying dimensions of the WAMI (i.e. Positive Meaning, Meaning Making Through (sport) Work, and Greater Good Motivations). We first tested the assumption of equality of covariance matrices and found that this test statistic was non-significant ( $p = .26$ ) and hence the assumption was met. The Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was also non-significant across the dependent variables, suggesting that the error variance was equal in the categorical predictor variable 'religion vs. no religion'. Results from the multivariate regression models are shown in table 3. In model one, we tested the total and independent contribution of craftsmanship and religion in explaining the variance in the Positive Meaning subscale scores. The independent variables explained 8.7% of the total variance, with both

predictors significantly contributing to the model. Hence, possessing higher craftsmanship and identifying with a religion predicted increased positive meaning in sport. In the second model, the predictors explained 6.7% of the total variance in the Meaning Making Through (sport) Work subscale. However, only craftsmanship significantly contributed to the model suggesting that possessing higher craftsmanship predicted higher meaning making through sport, while religion did not. Finally, in model three, the predictors explained 5.2% of the total variance in the Greater Good Motivations subscale. Here religion, but not craftsmanship, significantly predicted higher greater good motivations.

[Table 4 here]

## **Discussion**

### **Main Findings**

The present study sought to extend the emerging body of literature on meaningfulness of sport by exploring its relationship to craftsmanship and various demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, religion, athletic level and type of sport). Our study shows that sport is not inherently meaningful or meaningless activity, but the level of meaningfulness that participants experience depends on factors both intrinsic (i.e., how sport is practised and organised as a social activity, for example as a craftsmanship culture) and extrinsic to sport (i.e., participants' broader framework of meaning and values such as that derived from religion). To summarise the main findings, firstly, we found that competing in individual sports and older age were correlated with higher levels of craftsmanship. Furthermore, we found that craftsmanship and religion were independent predictors of meaningfulness of sport, but that they also appear to be partly related to different dimensions of meaningfulness. That is, while both craftsmanship and religion were significant predictors of the Positive Meaning subscale (athletic career is experienced as meaningful and sport contributes to life

meaning), only craftsmanship was a significant predictor of the Meaning Making Through Work subscale (focus on personal growth, self-understanding, understanding of the world). In contrast, only religion predicted the Greater Good Motivations (serving a greater purpose and making a positive difference in the world through sport). This finding indicates that participants bring various intentions and values to their sporting activities, reminding that meaningful involvement in sport is always shaped by broader ideologies and belief systems that individuals hold within particular socio-historic contexts.

### **Who are the Sports Craftsmen?**

The study provides initial evidence that we might be more likely to find sports craftsmen among individual and older sport participants. The finding related to individual vs. team sports suggests that certain ways of organising sport practices might be more conducive to craftsmanship than others. Drawing on Sennett (2008), Højbjerg Larsen (2016) argued that, to foster craftsmanship, “the practice must be organised so that it enables subjective explorations and self-corrective reflections to foster motivation” (p. 305). It is conceivable that some individual sports may offer more possibilities of creatively finding and solving new problems at practitioners’ own pace – a quality also emphasised by Thorlindsson et al. (2018) – than team sports where ways of practising are more strictly organised as team sessions and structured around shared team objectives. Mills (2002/1951) also emphasised that craftsmen have a sense of control over their work and are able to modify their practice as they go. It is conceivable that, although team sports also offer possibilities reflection and refinement, these qualities are more available in individual sports where athletes are more in charge of (but also responsible for) their own craft.

This focus on individual agency and responsibility in craftsmanship theories does not necessarily imply lack of structure and hierarchy; indeed, some individual sports that were included in our study (specifically martial arts) typically have a master-apprentice

organisation of the training, which is described by Sennett (2008) as the traditional way of developing craftspeople in the workshop. Importantly, Sennett (2008) argued that craftsmanship cultures are not about fully autonomous and self-creating individuals but have a hierarchical structure based on bodily competence: “the successful workshop will establish legitimate authority in the flesh, not in rights or duties set down on paper” (p. 54). As with other crafts ‘workshops’, the karate sensei’s authority rests in the quality of skill and bodily performance and not demographic vote or other social arrangements; and how that skill is learned by the novices is much about imitation and attempts to ‘get to’ that tacit knowledge through trial and error. It is conceivable that, in individual sports, athletes often get more one-to-one time with their coach and thus opportunities to work in this master-apprentice dyad, which is one potential way of seeking to make sense of our findings. However, these ideas should be contrasted with Højbjerg Larsen’s (2016) analysis of parkour craft culture which she describes as self-organised and spontaneous practice, often involving no (official) coaches or masters. Given the type of data gathered in the study, only tentative explanations can be given as to why individual sport athletes report higher craftsmanship; however, it opens a promising avenue to exploring specific sites of movement culture to understand the processes and specific features related to developing craftsmanship.

Our finding that older age was positively correlated with higher levels of craftsmanship emphasises the point made by Højbjerg Larsen (2016) that craftsmanship is not an elitist concept and thus available only for the talented few at the top level of physical performance; as she noted, “the most important factor in developing craftsmanship is not nature, but nurture” (p. 305). Becoming a craftsman is not about realising innate talent, but about an extended period of committed training and discipline; as Sennett (2008) makes clear, one does not become a craftsman overnight. Although older athletes might be past their peak of physical strength and objective performance (the physical talent), they can still be developing

and refining their bodily skill and the holistic understanding of their craft – thus having a future horizon of ‘becoming’ craftsmen. Concerning the role of temporality in craftsmanship, Smith (2007) clarified that “in fact craftsmanship requires not only a certain amount of time, but time that has a certain shape and direction: there is something it is like to begin, to develop and to mature” (p. 196). The journey of developing craftsmanship can be lifelong, and therefore the craftsmanship approach can provide a sense of meaningful engagement in sport for older athletes that is denied of them in modernist cultural narratives that effectively codify sport as a project of youth (see Ronkainen, Ryba, Tonge, & Tikkanen, 2019). From a practical perspective, seeking to organise sporting activities from a craftsmanship perspective holds potential to create more inclusive movement culture spaces that provide opportunities for meaningful experiences to not only the most talented and successful. Focusing on the processes of learning and refining the sporting skill as an end value in itself, rather than simply outperforming the opponent, would also imply challenging the performance narratives of sport (Douglas & Carless, 2009) and introducing new narratives that might better serve our need for meaning in life and sport.

### **The Role of Craftsmanship in Meaningful Sport Engagement**

Our findings help to substantiate theoretical literature that has postulated craftsmanship as a meaningful approach to work/sport and showed that craftsmanship was specifically linked to the themes of personal growth, increased sense of life meaning, and understanding of the self and the world through sport. These themes were already discussed by Mills (2002/1951) in his seminal work, who argued that developing the craft skill is also a way of developing the person; however, he emphasised that personal growth and meaningfulness should not be understood as ‘outputs’ but rather the side-product of devotion and continued practising over a considerable period of time. Scholars working within serious leisure perspective have also found both qualitative (e.g., Brown, McGuire, & Voelkl, 2008)

and quantitative (e.g. Kim, Heo, Le, & Kim, 2015; Kono, Ito & Gui, 2020) evidence to suggest that engagement in various forms of serious leisure is associated with personal growth and meaning in life. Meaningfulness might, therefore, arise first and foremost from the quality, rather than the content of engagement. Writing about the relationship between practising and spiritual development, Atchley (2007) makes a similar point that the quality matters; “practices such as meditation must be done patiently and for their own sake, not for ulterior motives such as a desire for transcendence, because motives bring attachment, and contemplative transcendence requires letting go of attachment” (p. 128). Our finding that craftsmanship is related to an increased sense of life meaning also corroborates Thorlindsson et al.’s (2018) finding that craftsmanship decreased the sense of general meaninglessness in Icelandic adolescents. As existentialist writers have emphasised, meaningful lives are created partly by choosing and committing to life projects (Frankl, 1959) and ‘becoming’ through these projects.

The only dimension of our meaningful work scale that did not have a significant association with craftsmanship was greater good motivations. Indeed, craftsmanship has been described as an approach focused on doing something ‘for its own sake’ and not for ulterior motives (Mills 2002/1951). As such, craftsmanship might not contain any necessary or obvious benefit for fellow humans and the world at large. Sennett (2008) was aware of potential ethical problems of craftsmanship, for example, when discussing the craftwork involved in the creation of the atomic bomb. He also discussed the need for craftsmen to learn to manage their ‘obsessional energy’ when developing their skill which can have a detrimental effect on their craft, and assumedly, also on their life at large. Meaningful work literature has also highlighted that sometimes work can bear ‘too much’ meaning in a worker’s life and lead to the neglect of close relationships and other domains of life (Bailey et al. 2019).

Although craftsmanship can perhaps be a self-oriented (or maybe even selfish?) practice, Sennett's (2008) description of crafts workshops touch on an important other-oriented element discussed in meaningful work literature, which is having a purpose that transcends the here-and-now (Bailey & Madden, 2017). The dedication of the masters of the workshop to transmitting their knowledge to the future generations of craftsmen points towards a type of greater good motivations in craftsmanship. However, this dimension of knowledge transfer is not measured in the Craftsmanship Scale which focuses on how individuals approach their tasks, nor specifically explored in Højbjerg Larsen's (2016) work on parkour craftsmen. Future research, especially that using qualitative methods, will hopefully shed more light on the ethics, values and relationships in craftsmanship cultures in sport and other movement contexts.

### **Religion and Meaningful Engagement in Sport**

When exploring the role of demographic variables, one perhaps surprising finding of our study was the significant relationship between identifying with religion (as opposed to no religion) and elevated levels of meaningfulness in sport. Many sociologists of religion have considered the UK as a highly secularised country where people are 'neither believing nor belonging' (Voas & Crockett, 2005). Despite the low attendance in religious practices, however, UK statistics in 2018 indicated that 38% of the population had a Christian identity (Clark, 2019), and in our sample, the number was slightly higher (44.2%). Saroglou (2011) argued that religion should be theorised as a multidimensional construct involving beliefs, practices, communities, and values. Our findings on the link between religious identity and greater good motivations in sport might indicate that the role of religion in athletes' sporting lives might come through the value system that shapes their orientation to sport practices. This also resonates with Watson and colleagues' (2005) work on Muscular Christianity where they argued that the notion of sport as contributing to developing Christian morality has had

an enduring effect on societal justification and ideas circulating sport in the UK since Victorian times up to today.

The finding on the intersections of meaningfulness in sport and religion is furthermore aligned with previous literature that has shown that many people integrate their faith with their work (Grant, O'Neil, & Stephens, 2004; Sullivan, 2006) and adds to sports-specific literature on the role of religion in athletes' lives. While several qualitative studies have described how religious meanings intersect with athletic career meanings (Grindstaff et al., 2010; Hagan, Schack, & Schinke, 2019; Mosley et al., 2015; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Tod, 2020), our study is the first to provide quantitative evidence that athletes who identify with religion report more meaningfulness in sport compared to those with no religion. While sport is not one of the traditional 'helping others' and 'making the world a better place' life domains (compared to nursing, teaching, ministry, volunteering, etc.), religious athletes may derive meaning in sport partly through other-oriented values and a self-transcendent purpose.

### **Limitations**

The findings should be interpreted with several limitations in mind. While both religion and craftsmanship were both independently and significantly correlated with meaningfulness in sport, they only explained 11 % of the WAMI score. Therefore, it is important to remember that numerous other, unobserved factors are likely to influence the degree of meaningfulness of sport. Secondly, the classifying of athletes in 'religion' and 'no-religion' groups was based on one item, and we do not know the nature of the participants' religious affiliation, or whether they were simply official members of a religious denomination but inactive in religious life.

Since our study was based on a cross-sectional design, it does not tell us about how craftsmanship and meaningfulness of sport develop over time, nor does it describe any

causality. Furthermore, although our findings could be read as indicating that individual sports have higher potential for meaningfulness because they are correlated with higher levels of craftsmanship, it should be remembered that team sports could have other ways of being meaningful in people's lives. As Pratt et al. (2013) suggested, 'doing well', 'doing good' and 'doing with' might be three independent pathways to meaningful work, and our questionnaires were not able to capture whether the 'doing with' orientation was present in our participants' engagement in sport. Aggerholm and Breivik (2020) emphasised that belonging could be one important value underpinning people's involvement in sport, and future research might explore whether that is one important 'meaningfulness factor' specific to team sports.

These limitations notwithstanding, our ambition has been to stimulate interest in, and show the promise of, craftsmanship and meaningfulness research on extending our understandings of the value of sport engagement, skills development, and practising for individuals and communities. In the future, qualitative and longitudinal studies would be valuable for identifying the underlying mechanisms of the identified relationships and revealing the different ways that sport is meaningful for athletes.

### **Conclusions**

In our exploratory study, we found that craftsmanship and religion had independent contributions to meaningfulness in sport and each related partially to different types of meaning. As Baumeister et al. (2013) noted, meaningful life is one of the two end-goals of human life; and if sport has the potential to contribute to life meaning, then it seems to be important despite "being ultimately about nothing" (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018, p. 149). Furthermore, the positive relationship between craftsmanship and meaningfulness in sport is significant for the social organisation of sport culture practices and points towards the benefits of working to create craftsmanship cultures in sport. Finally, our study suggests that

religion can be an important aspect that shapes meaningfulness in sport and should not be dismissed as a thing of the past even in increasingly secularised cultural contexts and countries like the UK.

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**Table 1. Sample characteristics**

Factor	n	%
Age		
18-21	48	18.6
22-25	56	21.7
26-29	36	14.0
30-33	39	15.1
34-37	14	5.4
38-41	13	5.0
42-45	12	4.7
46-49	10	3.9
50-53	4	1.6
54-57	7	2.7
58-61	4	1.6
62-65	2	.8
65+	1	.4
Missing	12	4.7
Gender		
Male	159	62.1
Female	97	37.6
Missing	2	.8
Religion		
Christian	114	44.2
Muslim	5	1.9
Buddhist	1	.4
Jewish	1	.4
No religion	127	49.2
Prefer not to say	8	3.1
Other	2	.8
Missing	0	0
Type of sport		
Team	109	42.2
Individual	149	57.8
Missing	0	0
Current competitive level		
Local	36	14.0
Regional	50	19.4
National	76	29.5
international level or top tier	80	31.0
Missing	16	6.2

**Table 2. Pearson's Correlations across Demographic and Sport-Related Factors, and Craftsmanship Scale and the Modified Work and Meaning Inventory**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	-							
2. Gender	-.21	-						
3. Religion	-.02	-.05	-					
4. Student athlete	.46**	-.25**	.05	-				
5. Competition level	-.30**	.19**	-.03	-.27**	-			
6. Type of sport	.35**	.05	-.04	.12	.01	-		
7. Craftsmanship	.19**	.04	.06	.07	.06	.14*	-	
8. WAMI	.16**	-.04	-.19**	.06	-.01	.09	.23**	-

*Note.* Age = total years within the calendar year. Categorical variables scored as follows: Gender (male= 1, female=2), Religion (some religion=1, no religion=2) Student athlete (yes=1, no=2), Competition level (local=1, regional=2, national=3, top tier international/professional=4), Type of sport (team sport=1, individual sport=2). WAMI = Work and Meaning Inventory total score.

**Table 3. Linear Multiple Regression Model of Predictors of Meaningfulness of Sport Assessed by the Total Score on the Modified Work and Meaning Inventory**

	B (95% CI)	SE B	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	32.42 (26.17, 38.66)	3.167		10.24	.000
Age	.06 (-.01, .12)	.03	.11	1.81	.072
Religion	-2.46 (-3.75, -1.18)	.65	-.23	-3.77	.000
Craftsmanship	.27 (.12, .41)	.08	.22	3.52	.001

*Note.*  $R^2 = .12$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .11$

**Table 4. Multivariate Regression Models of Religion and Craftsmanship as Predictors of Positive Meaning, Meaning Making Through (Sport) Work, and Greater Good Motivations Sub-Scales of the Modified Work and Meaning Inventory**

Model	B (95% CI)	SE B	t	Sig.
1. Positive Meaning Scale <sup>a</sup>				
(Constant)	10.87 (8.26, 13.48)	1.32	8.21	.000
Craftsmanship	.14 ( <b>.08, .20</b> )	.03	4.35	.000
Religion	.66 (.11, 1.21)	.28	2.32	.021
2. Meaning Making Through Work <sup>b</sup>				
(Constant)	8.60 (6.50, 10.70)	1.06	8.08	.000
Craftsmanship	.10 (.05, .15)	.03	3.88	.000
Religion	.41 ( <b>-.04, .86</b> )	.23	1.80	.073
3. Greater Good Motivations <sup>c</sup>				
(Constant)	8.56 (5.62, 11.51)	1.50	5.73	.000
Craftsmanship	.05 ( <b>-.02, .13</b> )	.04	1.49	.138
Religion	1.19 (.56, 1.82)	.32	3.74	.000

Note. a.  $R^2 = .087$  (Adjusted  $R^2 = .079$ ); b.  $R^2 = .067$  (Adjusted  $R^2 = .059$ ); c.  $R^2 = .060$  (Adjusted  $R^2 = .052$ ).