

The olympic experience as a career change-event: athletes` and coaches` perceptions of the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic games

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to research athletes' and coaches' personal characteristics, perceptions of, coping with, and perceived outcome of the London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games (OGs) by using the Scheme of Change for Sport Psychology Practice (SCSPP; Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011a). There were four subgroups within this cross-sectional and retrospective design: Israeli Olympic athletes, Paralympic athletes, Olympic coaches, and Paralympic coaches (N 1/4 61). They each completed measures of change-event experiences (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011b) and athletic/coaching identity (AI/CI; Brewer & Cornelius, 2001) two years after the London 2012 OGs and after the Rio de Janeiro 2016 OGs.

Keywords: athletes, coaches, Paralympic coaches, Israeli Olympic athletes

Topicality:

This paper seeks to address the Olympic experience as a career change-event for athletes and coaches through their perceptions of the London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic games. The research focuses on Israeli athletes and coaches.

The purpose of this study is twofold. To begin, the Olympic games is of major importance as one of the most inclusive and respectful sporting competitions that has ever existed, and which is extremely relevant today, due to the impressive achievements of Israel in the Olympic games in Tokyo. Furthermore, the Olympic Games has had an enormous impact on the world, in terms of economic and financial influence and in terms of social integration and connectivity between different countries as the Olympic games as the first global sports collaboration.

Materials and methods of research:

The material and methods instruments include a semi-structured interview and an open-ended questionnaire during the qualitative phase, and a closed-ended questionnaire during the quantitative phase.

The set of questions developed for the semi-structured qualitative interview in this study correspond to variables underlying the qualitative analysis of the variables and include questions concerning participants' experiences, feeling, and outcomes during and following the negotiation. The semi-structured qualitative interviews took place in the interviewee's offices. It was conducted after the interviewees were addressed and gave their consent to the interview. The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and were recorded and later transcribed and qualitatively analyzed by the researcher using shkedi (2011) methodology.

The sample of the following questions are taken from the recorded actual interview:

- *What was your initial reaction when you have achieved the criteria for the London Olympic games?*
- *How extensive were the available professional resources in your immediate surrounding (for example, coacher assistant, professional sport crew, union people, doctors, psychologists)?*
- *What will be the exact description of the way you responded to the London Olympic experience?*

Research results:

The responses of the participants to the statements assessing the study variables, which included the gaming experience, the Olympic participation experience, coping efficiency, satisfaction with the results and motivation, showed that the participants indicated above average agreement, but that for the gaming experience and the Olympic participation experience there was a larger extent of agreement to the statements. Thus, the Olympic participation experience and the gaming experience could be considered of greater importance when relating to the Olympic and Paralympic games' experiences.

An examination of the impact of the study variables on the Olympic participation experience using multiple regression analysis for predicting the Olympic participation experience showed that motivation had the greatest impact. The impact of the gaming experience on Olympic participation experience was lower than that of motivation. Nevertheless, both these variables, motivation and gaming experience were able to predict the Olympic participation experience providing an indication that these aspects may most strongly influence the Olympic participation experience. Participating athletes' perceptions of the OGs experiences are shown in Figure 1 with descriptive statistics, including the perception of the OGs as a highly significant change-event in their careers; a positive event characterized by positive emotional reactions, low cognitive concerns, as well as under a high perceived control. Significant others also perceived it as a generally positive experience. The participants also reported that their OGs opening ceremony experience the OGs experience, perceived control over the OGs experience, and emotional reaction to the OGs qualification (descriptive statistics are shown in Figure 2). A non-significant group effect was shown in the MANOVA, Wilks' Λ .99, $F(3, 54) = 1.4$, $p = .89$, illustrating that veteran and first time Olympians were similar in their OGs experience perceptions.

Figure 1:

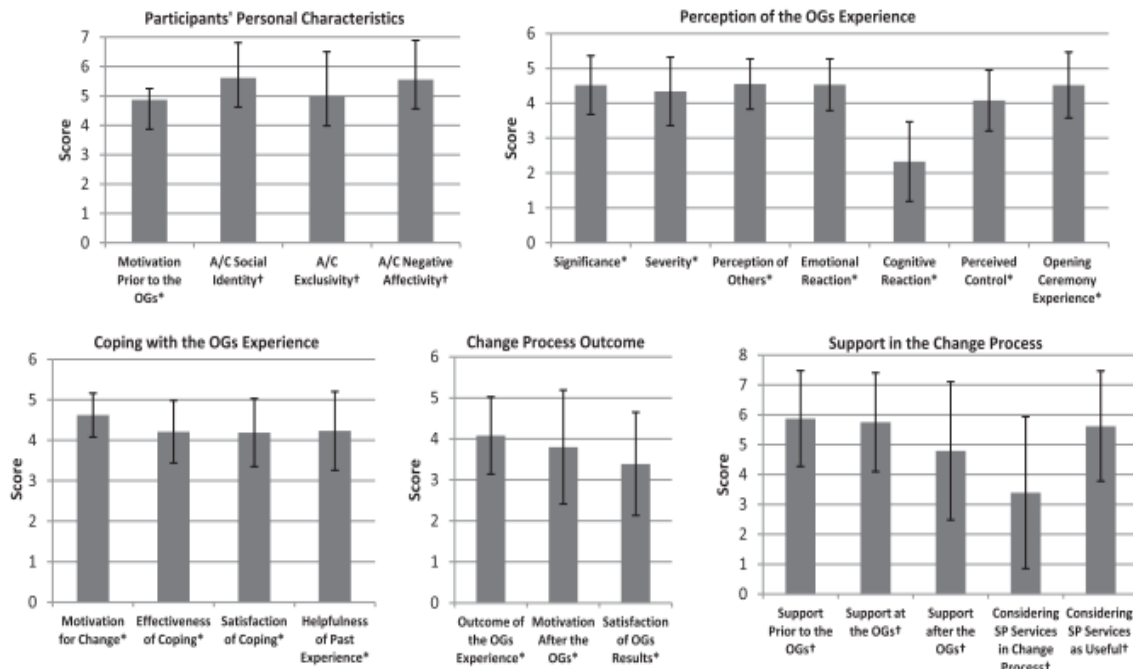


Fig. 1. Means and SDs for the participants' personal characteristics, the perception of the OGs experience, coping with the OGs experience, change process outcome, and support in the change process. OGs = Olympic Games; A/C = Athletic/Coaching Identity; SP = Sport Psychology. * Scale is 1–5; † Scale is 1–7.

Figure 2:

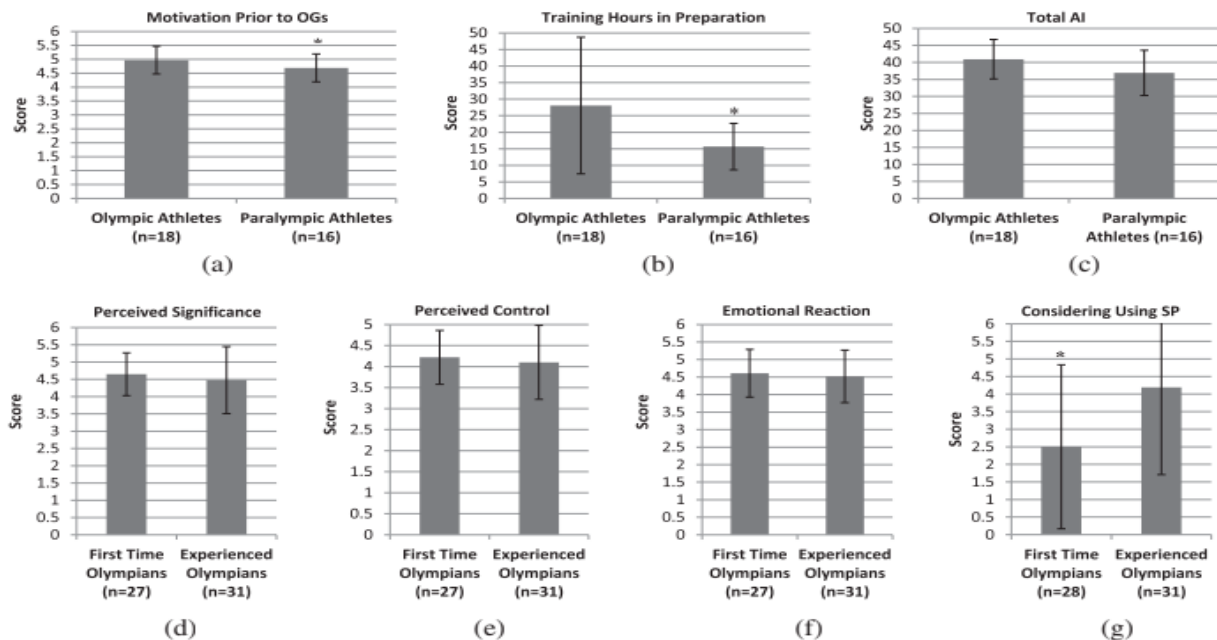


Fig. 2. Means and SDs of Olympic and Paralympic athletes in (a) motivation for the sport prior to the OGs, (b) weekly training hours in the preparation to the OGs, and (c) total AI, and of experienced and first time Olympians (i.e., athletes and coaches) in (d) perceived significance of the OGs experience, (e) perceived control over the OGs experience, (f) emotional reaction to the OGs qualification, and (g) considering using sport psychology services throughout the OGs experience. * $p < .05$.

Discussion:

The semi-structured qualitative interviews took place in the interviewees' offices. It was conducted after the interviewees were addressed and gave their consent to the interview. The interviews lasted 30–60 minutes and were recorded and later transcribed and qualitatively analyzed by the researcher using shkedi (2011) methodology. The fact that the interviewees an integral part of the negotiation process have a direct connection to the subject at hand has enabled in-depth discussion of the unstructured findings. Collecting the material is done out of an emphasis on interaction between the interviewees and the researcher. The discussion allowed to clarify ambiguous issues, and therefore semi-structured qualitative interviews can be regarded as a complementing research tool to advance and broaden the present study perspective.

Conclusion:

The retrospective study focused on the perspective of the participation experience of the Israeli coaches and athletes at the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the effect of the Olympic Games as a life changing event for coaches and athletes. Even though the study did not explore the whole career lifespan of the athletes, and it is to be expected that the positioning of the Olympic games within the participants' career could affect the participants' perception of the event, all the participants perceived the Olympic Games to be a significant and positive change-event. Thus, the results of the study show that encouragement of the athletes and the coaches to take part in the Olympic Games should be viewed not only from a competitive angle, but also as an opportunity to drive a significant change-event in the coaches' and athletes' careers.

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