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'It is the Journey not the Finish Line': Predictors of Grit in the Way of St. James Pilgrimage

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'It is the Journey not the Finish Line': Predictors of Grit in the Way of St. James Pilgrimage

Cover Page Footnote

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Few studies have explored how individuals can develop perseverance and passion towards long-term goals. This study addresses this research topic. Predictors of grit were tested while participants progressed on the Way of St. James, a long walk completed by foot or bicycle, taking several days or weeks, to Santiago de Compostela (Spain). 575 pilgrims of various nationalities self-reported measures of grit, harmonious passion, autonomous functioning, and lifelong learning attitudes. To study the association between these variables, path analysis modelling was conducted. The results show that autonomous pilgrims demonstrate more perseverance and passion towards their long-term goals than less autonomous pilgrims. Moreover, pilgrims who reported positive lifelong learning attitudes showed more grit behaviours than their counterparts with fewer lifelong learning attitudes. Finally, results indicate a strong association between autonomy and lifelong learning attitudes. The main conclusions suggest that perseverance with passion towards a long-term goal increases when individuals are congruent with their own interests and values, are not very susceptible to external or internal pressures, and are open to continuing to improve their knowledge and skills, regardless of age. Some implications for future research and practice are also addressed in this paper.

Key Words: grit, predictors, pilgrims, the Way of St. James

Introduction

The concept of grit has aroused great interest from psychology researchers and practitioners. Grit is defined as perseverance and passion towards a specific goal over time and is known as an influential factor in achieving successful outcomes (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). Grit is composed of two dimensions as follows: the effort directed to a goal, despite difficulties and failures – *perseverance of effort*; and the ability to maintain focus on one’s passionate goal over time – *consistency of*

interest (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). Importantly, passion is the dimension that differentiates grit from similar constructs related to goal-directed behaviour. For example, prior research found that individuals who are passionate about their domain of performance are more persistent in pursuing goals despite hardships than individuals involved in mandatory or exploratory activities (Jachimowicz *et al.*, 2018).

In a wide range of literature, grit emerges both as an important predictor (e.g., Clark, 2017; Wang *et al.*,

2017) and outcome of personal (e.g., Hill *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2017) professional, and / or educational development and success. More than innate talent itself, grit dimensions have shown to better predict either academic and non-academic individual performance (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). Following this approach, efforts have been addressed to intentionally promote different characteristics of grit, with key stakeholders (e.g., mentors, employers, parents) playing a key role while providing individuals with proper support and guidance (Credé *et al.*, 2017; Duckworth *et al.*, 2016).

Extant research has shown data in various domains that may be explained by grit (e.g., school and job performance; Jachimowicz *et al.*, 2018; Steinmayr *et al.*, 2018); still, there is little research addressing what sustains grit while individuals strive toward attaining long-term goals. Moreover, and as warned by Credé (2018), it is worth investigating whether being fixed and persistent regarding the same goal, despite consecutive hardships, is beneficial toward achieving successful outcomes. In line with new avenues opened in grit research, the current study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring what sustains individuals' perseverance and passion while they pursue a difficult goal under challenging conditions.

Grit in the Way of St. James Pilgrimage

To persist and experience passion, individuals need to value and enjoy the activity and allocate adequate time and energy to pursuing it (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007). A long pilgrimage, such as the Way of St. James, presents internal and contextual challenges, making it an optimal setting to investigate predictors of perseverance and passion over time towards a meaningful goal; simply put, grit.

The Way of St. James is a popular pilgrimage recognised worldwide and consists of travelling to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela on foot, horseback, or bicycle for several days, weeks, or months (Lois-González & Santos, 2015). In the Middle Ages, most people completed the Way of St. James as devotion to God and for religious practice (Lois-González, 2013). Nowadays, research indicates that individuals complete the Way of St. James for various reasons such as: to enjoy nature and new places, to meet people of different nationalities and cultures, to rethink their lifestyle and life priorities, to overcome a state of crisis, to deepen their faith, and to

have an experience that may foster self-knowledge and self-transformation (Nilsson, 2018; Seryczyńska, 2021; Walter, 2021).

Irrespective of the nature of the pilgrims' motivations, the urge 'to follow and to pursue' a goal (Dupront, 1967:108) is ingrained in the identity of pilgrims. Each individual process is unique in providing pilgrims with varying experiences likely to enhance grit behaviours (e.g., need to overcome physical difficulties, persist in the task day after day despite hardships, adapt to the lifestyle schedule of pilgrims from different nationalities, or adjust the travel plan due to harsh weather conditions (Cazoux, 2011; Nilsson, 2018)). For example, pilgrims seeking self-reflection are likely to make efforts to be isolated from their counterparts, while those who try to overcome a crisis in the journey seek consolation and deep conversations with other pilgrims (Havard, 2018; Kurrat, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

The drivers of effort and passion can be understood under the lens of the Self-determination Theory (SDT). SDT distinguishes between two types of motivation, which serve as opposite ends of a spectrum: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Individuals involved in an activity of interest, enjoyment, and purpose are moved by autonomous motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Conversely, those involved in an activity due to external rewards, the avoidance of punishment, or internal pressures such as meeting the expectations of oneself or others are moved by controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivated individuals, when compared with controlled ones, are prone to perceive their behaviour as more consistent with their interests, values, feelings, and goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2006), and usually display the efforts needed to pursue their interests for long periods of time (Koestner *et al.*, 2008; Angulo-Brunet *et al.*, 2020; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Therefore, individuals moved by autonomous motivation are more likely to be effective at achieving positive outcomes like problem-solving, well-being, and high-performance than the latter (Chatzisarantis *et al.*, 2019). Autonomous motivation is supported by the fulfillment of psychological basic needs – autonomy, competency, and relatedness – underlying

the development of lifelong learning attitudes and skills (Stolk & Martello, 2015). Lifelong learning describes individuals' proactive engagement in formal and non-formal learning processes throughout their lifespan, recognising their needs, and taking responsibility in finding ways to improve knowledge and performance (Commission of the European Communities, 2000; Hojat *et al.*, 2006). Consistent with this, a recent study by Parisi and colleagues (2019) found that lifelong learning fosters individuals' autonomous functioning, allowing them to examine situations with high mental flexibility, select adequate strategies to overcome challenges, and transfer learning by applying the knowledge acquired in one context to a related one. However, to the best of our knowledge, little is known about whether positive attitudes regarding lifelong learning and autonomous functioning are related to grit, including the passion dimension.

Current Study Aims

The present study addresses several gaps in grit literature. First, grit includes a measure of the passion dimension. We believe this measure is more consistent with the grit construct and may help overcome some previous limitations regarding grit assessment. Second, we explored predictors of grit using a sample of pilgrims in their ongoing process to achieve a long-term goal. Finally, and following suggestions from previous studies (e.g., Cormier *et al.*, 2019), grit was analyzed as a domain-specific construct (i.e., focused on the Way of St. James).

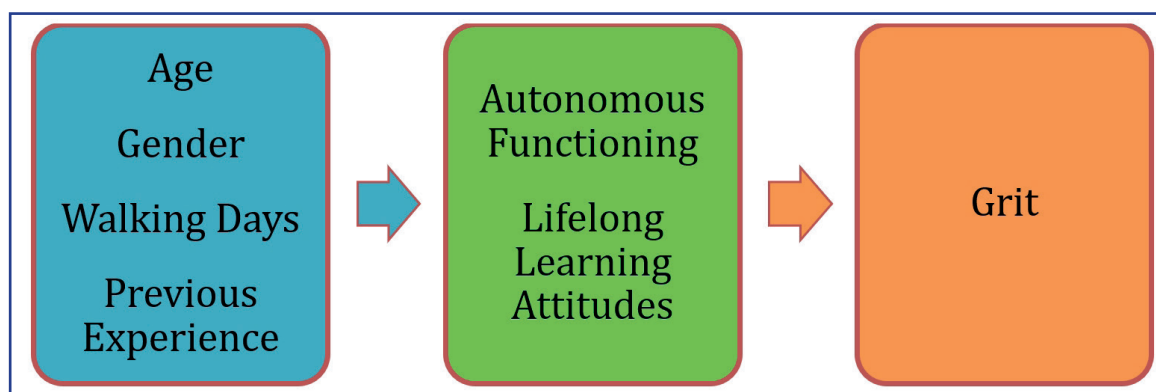
Considering the information above, a path model was developed to analyse whether the degree of autonomous

functioning and lifelong learning attitudes explain grit, and, in turn, whether those variables are explained by age, gender, number of walking days, or previous experience on the Way of St. James (see, Figure 1). Autonomous functioning is expected to be positively related to grit, as it is expected to increase individuals' willingness to stay engaged and pursue a challenging or long-term goal (Karlen *et al.*, 2019), even when there is no immediate reward or progress. Moreover, we expect to find a positive relationship between lifelong learning attitudes and grit because individuals with positive lifelong learning attitudes are expected to be willing to overcome challenging experiences and move forward towards the goals they are passionate about (Laal & Salamati, 2012).

On the other hand, a positive relationship is expected between the number of walking days in current or previous experiences on the Way of St. James and autonomous functioning and lifelong learning attitudes. Prior research has shown that pursuing the Way of St. James is an intrinsically interesting activity for pilgrims (e.g., providing various moments of personal and cultural learning) beyond the satisfaction related to reaching the final goal and getting the *Compostela* (i.e., the document certifying the completion of the pilgrimage, - Lois-González & Santos, 2015). In fact, the sense of satisfaction experienced while walking the Way of St. James makes many pilgrims repeat the journey (Lois-González & Santos, 2015).

In addition, it is expected that age will be positively related to grit given that the life experience that comes with age helps individuals develop their interests or passions and set congruent goals (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), and

Figure 1: Path Model of Grit Predictors



Source: Authors

encourages the need to develop new attitudes and abilities to better cope with changeable life circumstances (Laal & Salamati, 2012). Finally, knowing that some studies have reported that women tend to enjoy activities where they can feel or express gratitude and kindness (e.g., writing a journal about gratitude, displaying kindness behaviours) more than men do (e.g., Nilsson, 2018; Thompson *et al.*, 2015), women are expected to present more autonomous functioning (i.e., perceiving congruence between their preferences and pilgrimage features) than men and, consequently, are more likely to be gritters.

Method

Participants

575 pilgrims walking the Way of St. James participated in this study. All participants started their journey in Portugal. The pilgrims' mean age was 42.82 (14 – 81 years old; $SD = 16.24$), they were comprised of 41 nationalities, and 311 were female.

Instruments

Questionnaires were available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, and participants could choose their preferred language. All of the measures were translated from English to Portuguese and Spanish by native researchers knowledgeable in grit research. Finally, these items were back-translated by English-Portuguese or English-Spanish teachers blind to the original version of the instrument. The original and translated versions of the items were compared, and the discrepancies found in both versions (Portuguese and Spanish) were resolved through consensus within the research team.

Individual Variables. Participants indicated their gender, age, nationality, academic qualifications, the place where and date when they started the Way of St. James (i.e., walking days), and the number of times they had already completed the Way of St. James (i.e., previous experience in the Way).

Grit. The Grit-S scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) was used to measure grit. This scale is comprised of 8 items evaluating the two dimensions of grit: consistency of interest (e.g., 'I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one', reversed-coded) and perseverance of effort (e.g., 'Setbacks don't discourage me'). The items

were presented on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The factorial structure of the Grit-S scale was analysed through an exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation. The maximum likelihood Factor Analysis with a cut-off point of .50 and the Kaiser's Criterion of Eigenvalues greater than 1 yielded a two-factor solution as the best fit for the data, accounting for 53.80% of the variance. The first dimension (consistency of interest) accounted for 28.97%, and the second (perseverance of effort) for 24.84% of the variance. The Alpha of Cronbach was .71 and .70, respectively.

Passion. The harmonious passion subscale of Vallerand *et al.* (2007) was used to assess participants' passion toward performing a pilgrimage along the Way of St. James. This subscale consists of 7 items (e.g., 'The new things that I discover with this activity allow me to appreciate it even more'). The items were presented on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. An Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation was conducted to analyse the factorial structure of the harmonious passion subscale. The maximum likelihood factor analysis with a cut-off point of .50 and the Kaiser's Criterion of Eigenvalues greater than 1 yielded a one-factor solution as the best fit for the data, accounting for 45.24% of the variance. The Alpha of Cronbach was .75.

Index of Autonomous Functioning. Participants completed the Index of Autonomous Functioning scale (Weinstein *et al.*, 2012), used to measure the congruence of individuals' experiences with their thoughts, feelings, values, and interests. This scale includes three subscales (15 items): authorship / self-congruence (e.g., 'My decisions represent my most important values and feelings'), interest-taking (e.g., 'I often reflect on why I react the way I do'), and susceptibility to control (e.g., 'I do things in order to avoid feeling badly about myself'). The items were presented on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) not at all true to (5) completely true. The factorial structure of the Index of Autonomous Functioning Scale was analysed through an Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation. The maximum likelihood Factor Analysis with a cut-off point of .50 and the Kaiser's Criterion of Eigenvalues greater than 1 yielded a three-factor solution as the best fit for the

data, accounting for 50.80% of the variance. The first dimension (interest-taking) accounted for 19.62%, the second (authorship / self-congruence) for 16.42% and the third (susceptibility to control) for 14.81% of the variance. The Alphas of Cronbach were .80, .74, and .70, respectively.

Lifelong Learning Attitudes. The Wielkiewicz and Meuwissen (2014) scale was used to assess perceived behaviours and attitudes positively related to curiosity, learning, and critical thinking. This scale includes 16 items, for example, ‘I like to analyse problems and issues in depth’. The items were presented on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) never to (5) always. An Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation was conducted to explore the factorial structure of the *Lifelong Learning Attitudes*. The maximum likelihood Factor Analysis with a cut-off point of .50 and the Kaiser’s Criterion of Eigenvalues greater than 1 yielded a one-factor solution as the best fit for the data, accounting for 33.71% of the variance. The Alpha of Cronbach was .86.

Procedure

Data collection was developed following the approval of the Scientific Ethics Committee of the University of Minho. Consistent with the aims of this research, we targeted pilgrims who already had the opportunity to experience difficulties along the way and continued on their course. According to the Pilgrim’s Welcome Office (2018), most Portuguese pilgrims start the Way in the city of Porto, Portugal (230 km from Santiago de Compostela). Acknowledging this data, researchers decided to collect data from albergues halfway between Porto (Portugal) and Santiago de Compostela (Spain).

Prior to data collection, researchers met with two albergue officials to request permission to apply the questionnaires in these places. During data collection (May to September), a team of researchers invited the pilgrims to enroll in the study in shared areas of the albergues (e.g., living room, kitchen, and garden). Pilgrims who agreed to participate filled in an informed consent form consistent with the declaration of Helsinki and answered the questionnaire in a room with adequate conditions.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted with SPSS 24 and Mplus 8.3. Firstly, the descriptive statistics and the correlations between the variables were run to decide the analytics best fit to approach our goals. We followed the Finney and DiStefano (2006) criteria of statistical normality, which establish ± 2 and ± 7 as the limits for skewness and kurtosis. Then, using Mplus 8.3. (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), we tested a Path Analysis to analyse the role of the variables in predicting grit. The model was evaluated by taking the most commonly used statistical measures and indexes as criteria; in addition to chi-square (χ^2) and its associated probability (p), we also used information provided by the TLI, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR to assess the fit of the path model. The model shows a good fit when TLI and CFI $\geq .95$, and RMSEA and SRMR $\leq .05$.

The AIC, BIC, and SSA-BIC indices were used to select the best model in the re-specification process (the best model is the one with the lowest AIC, BIC, and SSA-BIC). Cohen’s d was used to calculate the effect size of the relationships included in the model. The criteria used to judge the effect size was as follows: no ($d < 0.09$), small ($d = 0.10$ to 0.49), medium ($d = 0.50$ to 0.79), and large ($d \geq 0.80$) effect. No significant amount of missing data was found; so, the missing values were treated through the multiple imputation procedure.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlations (analysis was calculated with Spearman). Data from the Bartlett Sphericity Test show that the variables used in the model are interrelated ($\chi^2(21) = 456.64$; $p < .0001$), which is an important condition to run multivariate analysis. Data analyses show univariate (see skewness and kurtosis on Table 1) and multivariate normality (kurtosis = 1.161, $t = 1.239$, $p > .05$). Therefore, the robust maximum likelihood method was used to fit the model.

Data from the correlation matrix show that

- (i) individuals with greater age, more autonomous functioning, and lifelong learning attitudes are likely to score higher in grit;

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations (n = 575)

Descriptor	Age	Gender	Previous Experience	Walking Days	Autonomous f.	LLL Attitudes	Grit
Gender	.087*						
Previous Experience	.254**	.032					
Walking Days	.139**	-.066	.081				
Autonomous f.	.142**	-.111**	.115**	.083*			
LLL Attitudes	-.021	-.052	.014	.077	.500**		
Grit	.223**	-.058	.124**	.081	.493**	.379**	
M	42.53	.46	1.91	4.88	4.98	5.70	5.53
SD	16.24	.50	.76	1.72	.59	.79	.63
Skewness	.15	.17	.15	.07	.17	-1.01	-.24
Kurtosis	-1.23	-1.98	-1.24	-.21	.34	1.93	.13

Note. Age (14 = min., 81 = max.); Gender (0 = women, 1 = men); Previous experience (1 = no experience, 2 = one or two experiences, 3 = three or more experiences); Walking days (1 = one-day walking, 2 = two days walking, 7 = seven days walking, 8 = eight or more days walking); Autonomous f. autonomous functioning, LLL Lifelong learning attitudes, and Grit (1 = min., 7 = max.). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

- (ii) women show more autonomous functioning, but no gender differences were found related to grit;
- (iii) autonomous functioning, the variable more related to grit, is closely associated with lifelong learning attitudes and previous experience.
- (iv) the variable of lifelong learning attitudes is not related to the variables used (i.e., age, gender, previous experience, and walking days), except to autonomy and grit.

Predictors of Grit

The initial model (see Figure 1) did not fit data well: $\chi^2(5) = 194.25$; $p < .0001$; TLI = .466 ; CFI = .511; RMSEA = .257 (.227 - .288); SRMR = .111. The inspection of residuals and modification indexes suggest the need to include direct effects as follows: the effect of autonomous functioning on lifelong learning attitudes and the effect of age on grit. Both effects were included in the model one by one. The model with these modifications fitted the data well: $\chi^2(3) = 1.35$; $p < .716$; TLI = 1.000 ; CFI = 1.000; RMSEA = .001 (.000 - .005); SRMR = .007. Accordingly, the information from the AIC, BIC, and SSA-BIC indices clearly indicates that the final model has a better fit than the initial model (final model: AIC = ; BIC = ; SSA-BIC = ; initial model: AIC = ; BIC = ; SSA-

BIC =). Table 2 presents information on the relationships between the variables of the path model: their size, direction, and statistical significance.

Data (see Figure 2) indicate that

- i) grit is direct and significantly explained by autonomous functioning and lifelong learning attitudes;
- ii) autonomous functioning and lifelong learning are closely interrelated;
- iii) age, gender, and previous experience are associated with autonomous functioning; and
- iv) only age is associated with lifelong learning attitudes.

All considered, the explained variance of grit was 29.6% ($R^2 = .296$), from which autonomous functioning and lifelong learning attitudes directly explain 23.6%. Age, gender, and previous experience cover 6% of grit's explained variance. In general, data indicate that grit is strongly associated with pilgrims' autonomous functioning ($d = 0.806$) and moderately with lifelong learning attitudes; furthermore, age, gender, and previous experience are indirectly related with grit, mediated by autonomous functioning.

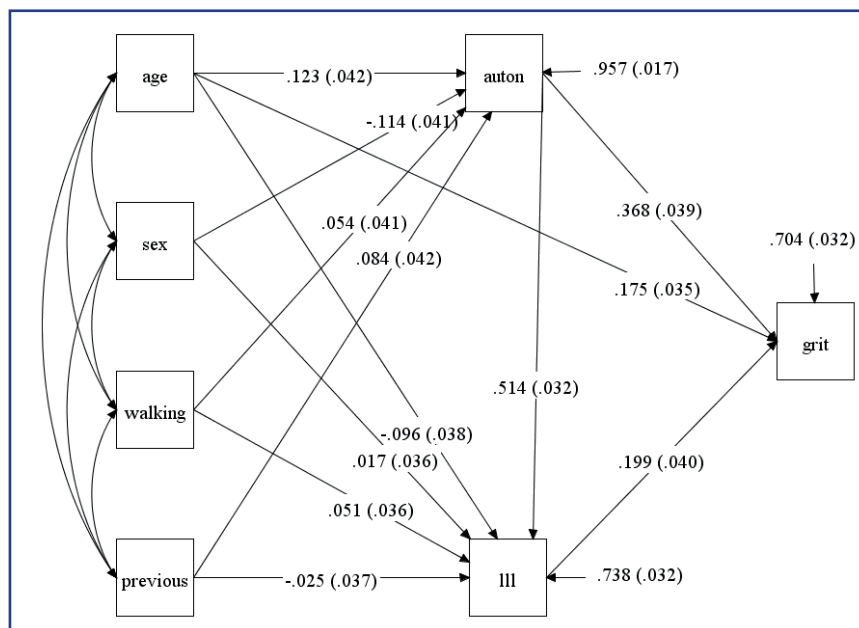
Table 2: Results of the Path Model Fit (direct and indirect effects)

	Estimate	SE	T	p	Cohen' d
Direct Effects					
Outcome: Autonomy					
Age	.123	.042	2.902	.004	.242
Gender	-.114	.041	-2.785	.005	.232
Walking days	.054	.041	1.297	.195	----
Previous experience	.084	.042	1.984	.047	.166
Outcome: Lifelong Learning Attitudes					
Age	-.096	.038	-2.546	.011	.213
Gender	.017	.036	.466	.641	----
Walking days	.051	.036	1.391	.164	----
Previous experience	-.025	.037	-0.680	.496	----
Autonomous functioning	.514	.032	16.181	<.0001	1.829
Outcome: Grit					
Age	.175	.035	4.977	<.0001	.420
Autonomous functioning	.368	.039	9.402	<.0001	.806
LLL Attitudes	.199	.040	4.942	<.0001	.416
Indirect Effects¹					
Age → Autonomous f. → Grit	.045	.016	2.781	.005	.234
Age → LLL → Grit	-.019	.008	-2.253	.024	.189
Age → Autonomous f. → LLL → Grit	.013	.005	2.474	.013	.208
Gender → Autonomous f. → Grit	-.042	.016	-2.657	.008	.223
Gender → Autonomous f. → LLL → Grit	-.012	.005	-2.386	.017	.200
Prev. exp. → Autonomous f. → Grit	.031	.016	1.936	.053*	.162
Prev. exp. → Autonomous f. → LLL → Grit	.009	.005	1.823	.068*	.153

Note. Estimate (standardised coefficients);

¹ Only statistically significant indirect effects are shown. (*) Only marginally significant.

Figure 2: Results of the Path Model Fitting (direct effects)



Note: Walking (walking days); previous (previous experience); auton (autonomous functioning); ill (lifelong learning attitudes)

Discussion

A Path Analysis was run to examine whether grit is directly explained by the autonomous functioning and lifelong learning attitudes, and indirectly by variables such as age, gender, number of walking days, or previous experience on the Way of St. James. The model fits the data well, and findings are likely to help deepen researchers' and practitioners' understanding of grit. This study adds to the previous literature on grit both theoretically and methodologically.

The current data extends the prior research on pilgrims' sustained efforts and harmonious passion while pursuing their long-term goals. The statistical results of the two direct predictors of grit in a pilgrimage setting (i.e., autonomous functioning and lifelong learning attitudes) show that autonomous functioning predicts pilgrims' perseverance and harmonious passion for long-term goals (grit). This finding is consistent with the study by Jin and Kim (2017), reporting that autonomous functioning is positively related to perseverance in attaining self-set goals. In fact, autonomous pilgrims, who act at their own pace and pursue their motivations, are more likely to persevere and work harder to achieve goals than less autonomous pilgrims (i.e., those perceiving behaviour in response to external control or introjected pressures; see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Koestner *et al.*, 2008). These findings are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of SDT stating that the fulfilment of individuals' basic psychological needs facilitates and sustains their autonomous functioning; moreover, the latter is crucial to explain individuals' tendencies towards effort, perseverance, and positive outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

Following Weinstein *et al.* (2012), we believe that pilgrims reporting high autonomous functioning are likely to be grittier because they are more aware of their needs and predisposed to accept their weaknesses and strengths than individuals reporting low autonomous functioning. Moreover, as SDT literature posits, autonomy-oriented individuals are more predisposed to seek for and nurture interpersonal relationships important to thrive and growth (Legault *et al.*, 2017). Despite the limited body of knowledge on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, available data show that collaboration

between pilgrims sharing the same destination can be an opportunity for them to learn and grow as people (Slavin, 2003). Pilgrims' journals illustrate efforts to take the best advantage of each other's strengths while attempting to reach Santiago de Compostela (Cazaux, 2011). For example, pilgrims frequently encourage each other with songs or by slowing down their walking pace to accompany another pilgrim.

Furthermore, the current data show that pilgrims displaying a positive attitude toward lifelong learning show more perseverance and passion in achieving long-term goals. This is consistent with previous findings stating that attitudes toward lifelong learning and the use of effective strategies suited to their own learning needs may shape the degree of sustained effort by pilgrims and perseverance necessary to thrive and remain focused on achieving long-term goals (Weisskirch, 2018).

Interestingly, present data contribute to the literature by supporting the relationship between autonomous functioning and lifelong learning. Previous studies (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2002; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2004) targeting students found that autonomy and self-reflection were positively related to intrinsic motivational beliefs and the capacity for lifelong learning. Also, the current data show that pilgrims scoring higher in autonomous functioning are likely to display more positive attitudes toward lifelong learning than counterparts scoring lower. In fact, individuals who are driven by intrinsic motivational resources and self-set goals are prone to successfully engage in lifelong learning (Lüftenegger *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2015). Together, these findings might be illustrated by an old saying of Way of St. James: for pilgrims, it is not just the finishing line; it is the journey that matters.

Regarding the analysis of indirect effects, we found that participants' age, gender, and previous experience on the Way of St. James explain grit indirectly through autonomous functioning and lifelong learning. Literature found mixed results regarding the motivational profiles based on person-centred variables; current data are consistent with those of prior studies reporting age and gender as predictors of individuals' engagement in lifelong learning (Gorard *et al.*, 2001) and autonomous motivation (Bonnevill-Russy *et al.*, 2017), and therefore, related to grit toward long-term goals. For example,

women are likely to report higher levels of autonomous motivation (Bonneville-Russy *et al.*, 2017) and to score higher in mindset growth (Sigmundsson *et al.*, 2020) and grit (Kannagara *et al.*, 2018) than men. Moreover, data show that many participants were completing the Way of St. James at least for the second time, and a few had completed this pilgrimage more than five times. Despite the small effect found, previous experience is positively related to autonomous functioning, indicating that pilgrims with higher previous experience are likely to enhance self-awareness capabilities and therefore their autonomous functioning (Parisi *et al.*, 2019; Weinstein *et al.*, 2013).

Lastly, a methodological contribution is provided by assessing grit with a novel measure, comprised of perseverance (Grit-S scale, Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and harmonious passion (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007), which we believe better represents the definition of grit introduced by Duckworth *et al.* (2007:1087): ‘perseverance and passion for long-term goals’. In fact, recent studies have found that the Grit-S scale does not properly capture the passion component of the construct (Jachimowicz *et al.*, 2018; Jordan *et al.*, 2019). Literature shows that passion or a strong interest experienced in a task or activity is like a ‘catalyst’ (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007:387), impelling individuals to display the necessary effort to complete complex tasks or activities and overcome obstacles to achieve a goal (Mueller *et al.*, 2017). Anchored on literature showing that harmonious passion is associated with flexible persistence and well-being indicators (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003) current findings, despite being preliminary, are very promising and stress the relevance of including a passion measure while measuring grit.

Implications

Findings suggest consideration of two groups of stakeholders in the Way of St. James: pilgrims and people or organisations providing professional services to pilgrims. Findings stress two psychological processes likely to help individuals progress to Santiago de Compostela, even when facing setbacks: autonomous functioning and positive attitude towards learning. Those working in the service of pilgrims (e.g., tour organisers, guides of the Way of St. James, albergue owners) may consider acknowledging the differences in pilgrims’

autonomous functioning, and organise activities tailored to their needs (e.g., provide support to people with lower abilities to make choices on their own). Moreover, organisers could consider promoting pilgrims’ positive attitudes towards learning; for example, by encouraging pilgrims to look at challenges as opportunities to learn and reflect on their achievements (e.g., get to the albergue after several hours of walking in the rain; pack their backpack to travel light).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some methodological and theoretical limitations. First, a high percentage of grit’s variability was not explained. Future studies could consider including variables such as pilgrims’ reasons to go on a pilgrimage, their self-efficacy beliefs, and their usage of self-regulatory strategies. Findings in this regard, would help further understand autonomous functioning, lifelong learning attitudes, and pilgrims’ grit. Second, the results of our study should not be generalised to all routes of the Way of St. James or similar pilgrimages, because each pilgrimage route and path is unique. Future research may consider investigating the grit behaviour of pilgrims completing other routes of the Way of St. James (e.g., the French Way) to understand the grit experience further. Third, although our questionnaires were available in three languages (English, Portuguese, and Spanish), we did not have German or Italian versions available. Pilgrims from those countries used Google Translate to answer the questionnaires, which is a limitation that needs to be acknowledged. Finally, a measure of grit closer to the construct’s definition is an important achievement and adds to grit literature. Future research could consider analyzing grit’s relationship with successful outcomes through a similar measure.

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