



SITUATIONAL FACTORS RELATED TO ANXIETY AND MOOD

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between anxiety and performance from a cognitive-behavioral perspective. Athletes have to cope adequately with the consequences of their injury in order to return into sports as soon as possible. Besides the physical characteristics of the injury, illness perceptions and emotional responses impact the behavioural responses to the injury. Previous research in the field has suggested that the majority of consultations conducted by sport psychologists are related to anxiety. Included is a discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of anxiety and how it relates to performance. Research conducted on the relationship between anxiety and performance is also discussed. A review of the cognitive-behavioral treatments that have been used for anxiety reduction and performance enhancement within the field of athletics is included. To apply Leventhal's Common Sense Model as a theoretical framework in the field of sports medicine, pertaining to injured athletes. Suggestions for future research and practical considerations are listed in the conclusion. Injured athletes' most experienced symptoms were pain (82%) and loss of strength (50%), associated with a high controllability; they see their injury as not chronic, with minor consequences for daily life and minor emotional consequences. Athletes with an injury of longer duration have minor psychological attributions, 28% suffer from fatigue, which is strongly related to a negative mood state. Illness perceptions and mood states are related to injury characteristics. Clinicians ought to incorporate patients' views about their injuries into their treatment in order to increase the concordance between patient's and clinician's perceptions, thereby increasing chances of a quick and uneventful recovery.

Keywords: Athletes, mood, illness perception

Introduction:

The ability to cope with pressure and anxiety is an integral part of sports, particularly among elite athletes. Researchers have reported that over 50 of consultations among athletes at an Olympic festival were related to stress or anxiety related problems (Murphy, 1988). A great deal of research has been conducted examining the relationship between anxiety and performance within the field of athletics. This paper will review the relevant research from a cognitive-behavioral perspective. Included is a discussion of the research findings of the relationship between the two constructs. In addition, the research that has examined the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral treatments is also discussed. Although a great deal of information has been generated, the results are limited due problems in the terminology used by researchers. Therefore, it is important to first examine the conceptualization of anxiety.

Method:

Theoretical Constructs of Anxiety

Previous research conducted relating to anxiety and performance in athletics has been difficult to synthesize for a variety of reasons including methodological flaws such as a lack of clear operational definitions and a clear theoretical construct. This section will establish operational definitions for the terms that will be used throughout the rest of this paper. In addition, it will provide an overview of the theories that have been used by researchers who have attempted to clarify the relationship between anxiety and performance in athletics.

The main problem that research on the relationship between anxiety and performance has encountered is that researchers have not adequately operationally defined the construct of anxiety. Instead, terms such as stress, anxiety, arousal and activation have been used interchangeably. For the purposes of this paper the following operational definitions will be used for the terms anxiety

and stress. Stress is a state that results from the demands that are placed on the individual which require that person to engage in some coping behavior (Jones, 1990). Arousal can be considered to be a signal to the individual that he or she has entered a stressful state and is characterized by physiological signs (Hardy et al., 1996). Anxiety results when the individual doubts his or her ability to cope with the situation that causes him or her stress (Hardy et al., 1996). Another important point that needs to be clarified is the difference between state and trait anxiety (Spielberger, 1966). While state anxiety can be considered to be more situational in nature and is often associated with arousal of the autonomic nervous system, trait anxiety can be thought of as a world view that an individual uses when coping with situations in his or her environment (Spielberger, 1966). Trait anxiety influences performances in that individuals with high trait anxiety will attend more to information related to state anxiety (Hardy et al., 1996). Previous research outside of sport and exercise psychology has indicated that individuals with high trait anxiety who are state anxious attend to threat related information, while individuals with low trait anxiety who are state anxious will attend away from threat related information (MacLeod, 1990). Within the context of sports, those individuals who are low trait anxious and experience high state anxiety would find it facilitative to a peak performance; but, those individuals with who are high trait anxious and experience state anxiety will find it debilitating to athletic performance (Hardy et al., 1996).

The differences observed between successful and unsuccessful athletes may be the result of their cognitive interpretation of their anxiety states. According to reversal theory (Apter, 1982) arousal is interpreted differently depending on their present state. In telic states athletes are focused on a goal and thus interpret their arousal as anxiety. However, in paratelic states performers are focused on their behavior and therefore interpret their arousal as excitement. Individuals can flip from one state to

another quickly and therefore change their interpretation of the arousal that they experience which in turn affects their performance (Hardy et al., 1996). This theory attempts to incorporate both physiological and cognitive factors in its explanation of the relationship between performance and anxiety but fails to explain their relationship with performance adequately. Multidimensional anxiety theory expanded on reversal theory's inclusion of cognitive and physiological factors (Burton, 1988). In this model, cognitive anxiety (the central tenet of which is concerned with the consequences of failure) has been found to have a negative linear relationship with performance (Burton, 1988). Self-confidence (a separate cognitive component) has been found to have a positive linear relationship with performance (Burton, 1988). Finally, somatic anxiety (physiological symptoms) has been found to have an inverted-U shaped relationship with performance (Burton, 1988). Although this model incorporates many elements of anxiety, it still treats them as separate entities. The next model that arose looked at the interaction between two of these three factors.

Discussion :

Effects of Anxiety in Athletics

A great deal of research has been devoted to the effect of anxiety on sports performance. Researchers have found that competitive state anxiety is higher for amateur athletes in individual sports compared with athletes in team sports (Simon & Martens, 1977). In addition, participants in individual non-contact sports have been found to report lower levels of state anxiety than participants in individual contact sports (Lowe & McGrath, 1971). This section will review this research from the perspective of the theoretical models discussed above. Cognitive anxiety has been found to exert a powerful influence on performance. This statement holds true regardless of the individual's skill level. Participants in a collegiate softball tournament were put into one of two conditions: high situation criticality or low. While somatic anxiety did not differ in the two situations, those

athletes in the high criticality condition had significantly higher levels of cognitive-anxiety (Krane, Joyce, & Rafeld, 1994)

Although the research conducted focusing on cognitive anxiety and self-confidence provides some insight into their effect on athletic performance, the interaction of these variables in conjunction with somatic anxiety provides a better understanding of the true effects. Among a group of 91 athletes ranging in age from 14 - 36 years old who participated in soccer, swimming, and track and field, those individuals with higher scores on self-confidence and lower scores on cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety perceived their overall anxiety levels as more facilitative of athletic performance (Wiggins & Brustad, 1996). Research conducted comparing athletes competing in team sports (basketball) with those competing in individual sports (track and field) has found that subjects competing in individual sports report significantly lower self-confidence and higher somatic anxiety than team sport athletes (Kirby & Liu, 1999).

Cognitive-Behavioral Treatments in Athletics

The research cited so far in this paper clearly indicates that it is important for athletes to be able to control their anxiety if they are to produce peak performances at important times. A large discrepancy between performance in practice and in competition is indicative that the athlete is having a hard time achieving an appropriate level of arousal or may over aroused (Butler, 1996) Relaxation is one method that has been discussed in the literature for reducing both cognitive and somatic anxiety. It is important since it can reduce the individual; Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996). These two strategies have been used successfully in the treatment of clinical populations. While a discussion of the procedures used in these two treatments is beyond the scope of this paper, they are still an important component of any anxiety reduction intervention for the purposes of performance enhancement.

Imagery and mental rehearsal of tasks is also beneficial for the individual seeking

to improve athletic performance. It provides familiarity with the task at hand and also provides positive feedback of their imagined performance (Hardy et al., 1996). This intervention has been proven to be effective with collegiate athletes in all sports. Results of research indicate that individuals who were in the imagery intervention had significantly greater increases in sport performance and sport competition anxiety than did the delayed-training control group (Lohr & Scogin, 1998). The technique to be imagined should be brought into focus. An internal perspective (as if they are viewing it through their eyes not the eyes of a camera on them performing the skill) is necessary. In addition, an attempt to feel the movement is effective in enhancing the imagery exercise. Practice the skill in "real time," there is no need to speed up or slow the skill down. Inclusion of coaches in the development of an imagery routine is important since it incorporates their technical skill and helps to minimize the perception of psychologists as a threat by coaches.

Although relaxation, imagery, and cognitive interventions are each beneficial for the purposes of anxiety reduction in athletics, they are far more powerful when used in conjunction with one another. Butler (1996) suggests a mnemonic device called PRESSURE who have a hard time coping in competitions that incorporates all three phases of intervention. The word can be broken down as follows:

- Prepare - Athletes must psychologically prepare for what they will face during the competition.
- Relax - Diaphragmatic breathing exercises, may be necessary prior to competition in order to prevent over arousal which would result in a deterioration in performance.
- Externalize - This involves the belief that problems are not within yourself. This can be of assistance when athletes feel that there are too many demands that are being put upon them.
- Stay Positive - Acknowledgement of the importance that individuals should have confidence in their abilities.

- Single Minded - Stay focused on the task at hand. This can be used both in training and competition.
- Unite - Particularly useful within the framework of teams sports, this component encourages athletes to consider what roles others will fulfill and the importance of working together as a team throughout the competition.
- Re-evaluate - How important is this event in the real world?
- Extend yourself - Give your best performance every time no matter how important, or unimportant, the competition is.

Use of this mnemonic device is warranted with individuals that have problems with the three components of athletic anxiety: cognitive, somatic, and self-confidence. Even the amount of cognitive effort that is used by an individual to use these strategies as an effect on performance. Gould et al., (1993) reported that the differences between medal winners and non-medal winners at an Olympic wrestling competition was the degree to which the individuals used these interventions automatically such that winners were more likely to use the interventions automatically. Most elite level performers have already found ways of achieving the activation state that is necessary for the sport. One of the things that makes athletics so fascinating is the number of different demands that are placed on an individual throughout a competition. It is therefore unlikely that any one intervention will ever be able to be of benefit for everyone. Thorough assessment of the athlete's needs is therefore recommended.

Conclusion:

The above research indicates that anxiety has a considerable impact on performance. Early research was limited due to a lack of clear operational definitions for the construct of anxiety. The development of the catastrophe model provides future researchers with a theoretical framework for better understanding the relationship between cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety and their effect on performance.

Furthermore, we now have the tools for better understanding the components of anxiety in the athletic context. The development of the CSAI-2 and the SAS allows researchers to reliably measure the following constructs: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, self-confidence, and concentration disruption. Furthermore, the development and increased popularity of multiple baseline research designs provide a method for examining anxiety reduction interventions through cognitive-behavioral interventions with small sample sizes. Today's managed care environment has led to the development of manualized treatments for many anxiety disorders in clinical populations. Future researchers should focus on the development of manualized treatments within the athletic environment. However, this should be done with a consideration for the athlete's needs if our interventions as sport psychologists are to have their maximum impact.

According to the model, peak performances are achieved by individuals who poses psychological states with high levels of vigour and low levels of tension, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion. This is typically called the iceberg profile and is one method for differentiating between successful and unsuccessful performers. Although some research has indicated that this profile can not be used to differentiate between successful and non-successful athletes, evidence from Terry's meta analysis (1995) indicates that there is some validity to this profile if the sample is homogenous in ability and the sport they participate in. It is therefore necessary to consider all aspects of an individual's psychological functioning if sport psychology interventions are to have a maximum impact.

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