Perfectionism, Fear of Failure, and the Relationship to Emotional Affect

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How do levels of perfectionism and fear of failure impact emotional affect in athletes?
Background

Concern Over Mistakes

Perceived Coach Pressure

Increases

Shame and Embarrassment

Negative Affect after Failure

(Sagar & Stoeber, 2009)
Background

- High Scores on ‘Personal Standards’
- Lower Rates of Burnout
- Higher Sense of Accomplishment

(Hill, 2013)
Positive correlation between fear of failure and antisocial behavior among student athletes (Sagar et al., 2011)

This suggests fear of failure has a negative impact on an individual's behavior (Sagar et al., 2011)
We predicted that the higher a participant scores when measuring fear of failure and perfectionism, the higher their negative emotional affect.

We predicted that the more years of experience an athlete has, the higher levels of perfectionism and fear of failure will be expressed.
Methods - Participants

- 40 Participants
  - Above the age of 18
  - Currently enrolled in Psychology course
    at Carroll College
Methods - Measurements

Measurements

❖ Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI)

❖ Sport Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Sport – MPS)

❖ Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)
Methods - Procedure

- Participants self-reported years of experience, and were then divided into groups based on their participation
  - Beginner: 0-10 years (18 participants)
  - Intermediate: 11-19 years (27 participants)
  - Advanced: 20+ years (21 participants)

- Completed the PFAI and Sport-MPS
- Participants were then exposed to two imagined sports scenarios,
  - Success in sports competition,
  - Failure in sports competition
- Participants completed the PANAS after hearing the first scenario, and again after hearing the second scenario.
Results

❖ Shame and Embarrassment
  ○ Beginner > Advanced \( t(24) = 2.296, p=0.04 \)
  ○ Intermediate > Advanced \( t(23) = 2.86, p=0.0012 \)

❖ Fear of Upsetting Important Others (FUIO)
  ○ Beginner > Advanced \( t(24) = 2.307, p=0.021 \)
  ○ Intermediate > Advanced \( t(23) = 3.529, p=0.002 \)

❖ Fear of Failure
  ○ Beginner > Advanced \( t(24) = 2.314, p=0.022 \)
  ○ Intermediate > Advanced \( t(23) = 3.725, p=0.001 \)

❖ Concern Over Mistakes
  ○ Beginner > Advanced \( t(24) = 3.052, p=0.005 \)
  ○ Intermediate > Advanced \( t(23) = 2.482, p=0.016 \)

❖ Doubts About Action
  ○ Intermediate > Advanced \( t(23) = 2.674, p=0.016 \)
Mean Scores on Sport-MPS Sub-scales for Differing Levels of Participation in Sports

Sport-MPS Sub-scales

- Personal Standards
- Concern Over Mistakes
- Perceived Parental Pressure
- Perceived Coach Pressure
- Doubts About Actions
- Organization

Legend:
- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced

* Denotes statistically significant differences.
Mean Scores on PFAI Sub-scales for Differing Levels of Participation in Sports

FSE = Fear of Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment
FDSE = Fear of Devaluing One’s Self-Estimate
FUF = Fear of an Uncertain Future
FIOLI = Fear of Important Others Losing Interest
FUIO = Fear of Upsetting Important Others
GFF = General Fear of Failure

**Beginner**

**Intermediate**

**Experienced**

* Indicates statistical significance.
Methods - Participants

- 66 participants
  - Above the age of 18
  - Currently enrolled in Psychology course at Carroll College
Results

❖ Concern Over Mistakes
  ❖ Beginner > Advanced (t(37) = 2.914, p=0.006)
❖ Doubts About Action
  ❖ Beginner > Advanced (t(37) = 2.292, p=0.028)
  ❖ Intermediate > Advanced (t(46) = 1.727, p=0.09)
❖ Organization
  ❖ Advanced > Intermediate (t(46) = -3.217, p=0.024)
Mean Scores on Sport - MPS Sub-scales for Differing Levels of Participation in Sports

- **Personal Standards**
  - Beginner: ~24
  - Intermediate: ~26
  - Advanced: ~30

- **Concern Over Mistakes**
  - Beginner: ~29
  - Intermediate: ~34
  - Advanced: ~32

- **Perceived Parental Pressure**
  - Beginner: ~20
  - Intermediate: ~18
  - Advanced: ~22

- **Perceived Coach Pressure**
  - Beginner: ~16
  - Intermediate: ~15
  - Advanced: ~17

- **Doubts About Actions**
  - Beginner: ~14
  - Intermediate: ~13
  - Advanced: ~15

- **Organization**
  - Beginner: ~22
  - Intermediate: ~23
  - Advanced: ~25

*Significant differences indicated by asterisks.*
Mean Scores on PFAI Sub-scales for Differing Levels of Participation in Sports

- **FSE** = Fear of Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment
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Positive and Negative Affect from Failure Scenario vs Concern Over Mistakes Sub-scale
Success Scenario - Positive Affect vs Fear of Upsetting Important Others (FUIO) Sub-scale
Conclusions

❖ Advanced athletes scored lowest on subscales regarding anxiety due to the possibility of humiliation and fear of upsetting people perceived as important to the individual.

❖ Advanced athletes scored lowest on the subscale regarding fear of failing, while intermediate experience athletes scored highest.

❖ Advanced athletes scored the lowest in the subscales analyzing worry regarding potential consequences resulting from mistakes made and questioning decisions made regarding a task, whereas the beginner athletes scored the highest.

❖ This supports the idea that advanced athletes have more confidence and are less likely to be influenced by anxiety (Hanton, Mellalieu & Hall, 2004).
Discussion

- Previous research has shown the importance of separating perfection in sport from overall self confidence in advanced athletes (Sagar & Stoebber, 2009). Our results suggest this to be an important concept in beginner and intermediate athletes as well.

- Educating coaches and other leaders on this phenomenon, as well as how to correctly deal with, manage, and prevent low self-worth could have an important impact on overall mental health, especially for those who have competed in a variety of sports.
References


Thank You for Listening!

If you have any questions about our research, please do not hesitate to contact koliver-connelly@carroll.edu