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Re-examining the competitive anxiety trait-state relationship

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the multidimensional competitive anxiety trait-state relationship and explore the effects of trait anxiety upon directional interpretations of state responses. Competitive soccer players ($N=102$) completed the SAS [Smith, Smoll, & Schutz (1990) *Anxiety Research* 2, 263] and modified CSAI-2 [Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump, & Smith (1990) In: Martens, Vealey, & Burton, *Competitive anxiety in sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics] including intensity and direction subscales [Jones & Swain (1992) *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 74, 46]. High trait anxiety performers responded with significantly greater state anxiety levels than low trait performers. Investigation of directional interpretations of state anxiety symptoms revealed low trait concentration disruption performers perceived state responses as more facilitating than their high trait counterparts. The findings highlight the role of directional interpretations in the experience of competitive state anxiety symptoms in sports that require high levels of perceptual attention. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Since the conception of an interactional model of anxiety distinguishing trait and state symptoms (Spielberger, 1966), considerable understanding of the debilitating effects of anxiety upon sporting performance has been made. A large contribution has come from the development of sport-specific competitive anxiety theory (Martens, 1977), which states that, in advance of sporting competition, an individuals' competitive trait anxiety directly affects their perception of threat, subsequently mediating the level of state anxiety experienced (Smith, Smoll, & Wiechman, 1998). Further advancement has established competitive state anxiety to be a multidimensional concept, possessing at least cognitive and somatic components (Davidson & Schwartz, 1976;

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Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump, & Smith 1990). The adoption of a multidimensional approach, together with the development of the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2; Martens, Burton, et al., 1990), have resulted in a plethora of literature investigating competitive state anxiety symptoms of sport performers (Woodman & Hardy, 2001).

Despite the proliferation of competitive state anxiety investigations, research examining the personality variable of multidimensional competitive trait anxiety has received little attention. This is somewhat surprising given the considerable amount of existing literature that has adopted unidimensional trait anxiety measures, such as the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970) and Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT, Martens, 1977). Findings have observed global trait anxiety to be consistently related to high cognitive and somatic state anxiety responses (Crocker, Alderman, & Smith, 1988; Gould, Petlichkoff, & Weinberg, 1984; Maynard & Howe, 1987). In addition, studies have adopted a trait version of the multidimensional CSAI-2, the Competitive Trait Anxiety Inventory-2 (CTAI-2), with relative success (cf. Hanton & Jones, 1999a, 1999b; Jones & Swain, 1995). However, despite the majority of investigations reporting moderate to strong internal reliability coefficients, the psychometric properties of the scale, such as construct validity, have yet to be fully explored and tested.

In an attempt to address the imbalance in competitive trait anxiety investigations the multidimensional Sports Anxiety Scale (SAS; Smith, Smoll, & Schutz, 1990) has been developed. The scale adopts a more conceptually sound and theoretically grounded approach to measure competitive trait anxiety (Smith et al., 1998). The model is constructed upon conceptions of emotionality and anxiety from research in anxiety and emotion, including those of Spielberger (1966), Lazarus, and Folkman (1984), and Smith (1989). Included in the conceptualisation is the trait-state distinction, the differentiation between situational, cognitive, physiological, and behavioural components of the process of anxiety, and the directional component of competitive anxiety (Jones & Swain, 1995). Test construction of the SAS has reported strong reliability and validity measures (Krane & Finch, 1991; Smith et al., 1990). Despite the initial impressive psychometric properties of the scale, due to the attention accorded to competitive state anxiety research, few studies have actually adopted the SAS as a measure of multidimensional competitive trait anxiety since its inception. The limited investigations have examined competitive trait anxiety in several modalities including, situation criticality (Krane, Joyce, & Rafeld, 1994), injury prediction (Smith, Ptacek, Everett, & May, 1995) and in intervening to reduce levels of coach experienced stress (Smith, Smoll, & Barnett, 1995).

According to Spielberger's (1966) original conceptualisation of the relationship between trait and state anxiety, high trait anxious performers should respond to stressful situations by demonstrating high levels of state anxiety intensity. Studies adopting both unidimensional and multidimensional measures of competitive state anxiety have supported this relationship (e.g. Cooley, 1987; Martens & Simon, 1976; Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990), however, few studies have employed multidimensional trait measures of anxiety. Krane and Finch (1991) have reported predictive validity for the SAS in samples of collegiate tennis and golf athletes, while Lefingwell and Williams (1995) found similar support in collegiate tennis players and cross-country athletes. Although this initial research provides partial support for the multidimensional trait-state relationship, collectively, the findings represent a relatively small weight of evidence to support the theory and utility of the SAS as a measure of competitive anxiety. As Smith et al. (1998) acknowledged:

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