



## Self-efficacy as a metaperception within coach–athlete and athlete–athlete relationships

Ben Jackson <sup>a,\*</sup>, Mark R. Beauchamp <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Sport Science, Exercise and Health, University of Western Australia, M408, Crawley, WA 6009, Australia

<sup>b</sup> School of Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia, Room 156B, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z2, Canada

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### ABSTRACT

**Background and Purpose:** Metaperceptions constitute estimations that one person holds about another person's perceptions. This study draws from and extends [Lent and Lopez's \(2002\)](#) tripartite model of relational efficacy, to present conceptual and empirical evidence for the role of self-efficacy as a metaperception (*Estimations of the Other person's Self-Efficacy; EOSE*) within coach–athlete and athlete–athlete contexts.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 members of international-level coach–athlete and athlete–athlete dyads. The data were subjected to content analysis.

**Results and Conclusions:** Results revealed insight into the means through which dyad members form EOSE appraisals (i.e., antecedents), namely via perceptions regarding 'the other' (e.g., his/her verbal communication) and the dyad as a whole (i.e., mastery achievements as a dyad). EOSE was also reported to be aligned with important indices of individual and relationship functioning in the form of intra-personal (e.g., personal motivation) and interpersonal (e.g., relationship persistence intentions) outcomes. Overall, findings suggest that EOSE perceptions may represent an important relational efficacy construct within sporting contexts, and implications for theory advancement as well as applied considerations for supporting close relationships in athletic settings are discussed.

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Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; [Bandura, 1986](#)) emphasizes that human functioning is underpinned by the notion of triadic reciprocal determinism, whereby individuals both influence and are influenced by various personal, environmental, and behavioral factors. A fundamental *personal* component of SCT that has received substantial empirical attention is the concept of self-efficacy, which relates to an individual's beliefs in his or her "capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" ([Bandura, 1997](#), p.3). Consistent with the concept of reciprocal determinism, [Bandura \(1997\)](#) proposed that in individual performance settings self-efficacy is not only a key determinant of various behaviors (e.g., effort, performance, persistence), but also the activities (or environments) in which individuals choose to engage. As an extension of SCT and with respect to dyadic contexts, [Lent and Lopez \(2002\)](#) proposed that in close relationships individuals develop a 'tripartite' network of complementary efficacy beliefs that correspond to themselves and their partners, and that

these social cognitions may be central to engendering mutually beneficial interactions. Specifically, drawing from self-efficacy theory, [Lent and Lopez](#) theorized that when people form close relationships, they not only develop conceptions about their own personal capabilities (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs), but they also develop a set of *other-efficacy* beliefs that represent their confidence in the capabilities of the other person in the relationship. Beyond self-efficacy and other-efficacy, [Lent and Lopez](#) also articulated the role of *relation-inferred self-efficacy* (RISE) as the final component within their tripartite model. RISE is conceptualized as a person's beliefs about his or her partner's other-efficacy and was defined as "person B's appraisal of how his or her capabilities are viewed by person A" ([Lent & Lopez, p.268](#)).

As well as defining these 'relational efficacy' beliefs, [Lent and Lopez \(2002\)](#) also outlined a comprehensive network of antecedents and consequences relating to each of these efficacy constructs. Importantly, in doing so, they theorized that self-efficacy, other-efficacy, and RISE are each independently associated with adaptive personal and dyad-related consequences for those within close relationships, in the form of key affective (e.g., relationship satisfaction), cognitive (e.g., choice of partner, relationship persistence intentions), and behavioral outcomes (e.g., performance, effort).

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 (0) 8 6488 4625; fax: +61 (0) 8 6488 1039.

E-mail addresses: [bjackson@cyllene.uwa.edu.au](mailto:bjackson@cyllene.uwa.edu.au) (B. Jackson), [mark.beauchamp@ubc.ca](mailto:mark.beauchamp@ubc.ca) (M.R. Beauchamp).

Recent research involving athletic dyads (e.g., coach–athlete, athlete–athlete) has provided preliminary evidence for the utility of these tripartite constructs in predicting a range of desirable relational outcomes. In particular, self-efficacy and other-efficacy have both been found to predict relationship commitment, as well as indices of enhanced performance and perceptions of effort expended (Beauchamp & Whinton, 2005; Jackson & Beauchamp, *in press*; Jackson, Beauchamp, & Knapp, 2007). The findings for RISE are somewhat limited. However, in one study Jackson and Beauchamp (*in press*) observed that coaches who believed that their athletes were highly confident in their (i.e., coaches') abilities reported more positive relationship commitment and satisfaction perceptions themselves. In sum, the tripartite model has provided some insight into the role of interpersonal efficacy beliefs in contributing to relationship functioning within sport settings. In spite of this evidence however, it is noteworthy that Lent and Lopez referred to their tripartite framework as a "preliminary model" (p. 257) that could potentially be extended and refined.

In the social cognition literature, a number of prominent researchers have emphasized the need to differentiate between *direct perceptions* (also referred to as first-order expectations) and *metaperceptions* (also referred to as second-order expectations) (Snyder & Stukas, 1999; Troyer & Younts, 1997; Webster & Whitmeyer, 1999). Direct perceptions (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001) relate to the 'direct' beliefs that individuals hold for themselves or others. With respect to Lent and Lopez's (2002) conceptual model, self-efficacy represents a direct perception, namely one's own confidence in one's own ability. Similarly, other-efficacy is also a direct perception; however, the frame of reference in this case shifts from one's confidence in one's own ability to one's confidence in another person's ability. For example, an athlete's confidence in his own ability would reflect a self-efficacy belief, whereas the same athlete's confidence in his coach's ability would represent his other-efficacy belief. Alongside direct perceptions, people are also theorized to develop *metaperceptions* (see Kenny & Acitelli, 2001 for an excellent discussion of this topic). Unlike direct perceptions, metaperceptions represent the *estimations* that people form regarding the thoughts of significant others. Drawing from the work of Laing and his colleagues (Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966), the role of metaperceptions has long been the subject of research within social psychology (see Kenny, 1994; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). However, only recently has this type of cognition been examined by relationship researchers in sport. In particular, Jowett and colleagues (e.g., Jowett, 2009; Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006) highlighted the importance of metaperceptions in shaping the quality of coach–athlete interactions in sport, noting for instance that in addition to developing feelings of closeness and commitment towards one another (termed 'direct closeness' and 'direct commitment'), coaches and athletes also monitor and appraise the closeness or commitment perceptions held by each other (i.e., 'meta-closeness' and 'meta-commitment'). Similarly, with respect to the tripartite model, RISE constitutes a metaperception regarding the expectations that a significant other holds for oneself (i.e., 'how confident do I think my partner is in my capabilities?').

Importantly, in their review of interpersonal perceptions, Troyer and Younts (1997) commented that a complete understanding of relational processes should account for "one's own expectations regarding self and other and one's beliefs about the expectations other holds for self and other" (p. 696). Direct efficacy perceptions regarding oneself (i.e., self-efficacy) and other (i.e., other-efficacy) within dyadic settings are clearly accounted for in Lent and Lopez's (2002) model, as are one's beliefs about the expectations that one's partner holds for oneself (i.e., RISE). However, what is evident from Troyer and Younts' writing is that the tripartite model does not presently incorporate a person's

beliefs about the expectations that his or her partner holds for him or herself; that is, the degree to which a person believes that his or her partner is confident in the partner's *own* abilities. In essence, this construct simply reflects self-efficacy as a metaperception within dyadic settings. In this paper we refer to these appraisals as *Estimations of the Other person's Self-Efficacy* (EOSE) beliefs, and by extending the tripartite model in this way, it is proposed that the network of efficacy beliefs that exist in close relationships comprises four constructs, namely self-efficacy ('my confidence in my ability'), other-efficacy ('my confidence in my partner's ability'), RISE ('how confident I think my partner is in my ability'), and finally, EOSE ('how confident I think my partner is in him/herself'). It is worth noting that in their review of the self-efficacy literature in sport, Feltz, Short, and Sullivan (2008) briefly discuss the presence of this type of metaperception. In doing so they referred to this construct as 'confidence-focused other-efficacy', however we believe that this term is potentially confusing, and does not sufficiently distinguish this metaperception from the way in which other-efficacy has been conceptualized and operationalized in the social psychology (e.g., Lopez & Lent, 1991) and sport psychology (e.g., Jackson et al., 2007; Jackson & Beauchamp, *in press*) literature. In short we have proposed the use of the term, *Estimations of the Other person's Self-Efficacy* (EOSE), because we believe that it more closely represents the psychological concept of interest (cf. Maddux, 1999).

In sport, a substantial body of literature has revealed a variety of factors that are either predictive of, or predicted by self-efficacy perceptions. For instance, research has shown that individuals' confidence in their own ability stems from prior mastery achievements (Wise & Trunnell, 2001), pre-competition preparation (Hays, Maynard, Thomas, & Bawden, 2007), verbal persuasion (Chase, 1998), observational learning (Law & Hall, 2009), imagery/mental rehearsal (Ross-Stewart & Short, 2009), and physiological/emotional factors (Chase, Feltz, & Lirgg, 2003). In addition, self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to be associated with a range of desirable consequences, including improved athletic performance (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrback, & Mack, 2000), greater effort (Hutchinson, Sherman, Martinovic, & Tenenbaum, 2008), enhanced well-being (Rudolph & Butki, 1998), and positive affective responses (Martin, 2002). Nonetheless, whilst much is known about the origins and consequences of self-efficacy, little attention in either sport settings or beyond has been directed towards exploring and/or describing self-efficacy as a metaperception (i.e., EOSE). In one investigation, Short and Short (2004) collected data regarding collegiate football coaches' self-efficacy beliefs, alongside athletes' perceptions of their coaches' self-efficacy beliefs, in order to explore the congruence between coaches' actual scores and athletes' estimations. In this respect, Short and Short measured (what we would term) EOSE beliefs, that is, an individual's estimation of another person's self-efficacy. However, it is important to note that in this investigation, the authors referred to this construct as 'other-efficacy'. Although subtly different, appraising another person's *self-efficacy* (i.e., a metaperception) is not the same thing as appraising another person's *capabilities* (i.e., a direct perception). Indeed, while Short and Short considered the former cognition to be other-efficacy, the latter definition of other-efficacy is adopted in most empirical reports published in this area (e.g., Beauchamp & Whinton, 2005; Jackson et al., 2007; Lopez & Lent, 1991). Nevertheless, Short and Short found that team members' estimations of their coaches' self-efficacy beliefs were largely similar to their coaches' actual perceptions. That said, given the exploratory nature of their study, it is important to note that Short and Short did not investigate either the sources or potential implications associated with these metaperceptual beliefs, and so the role of EOSE in sport is currently unclear.

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