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Metamotivational and contextual effects on performance, self-efficacy, and shifts in affective states

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Abstract

Objectives: To examine reversal theory's (RT) postulations that telic–paratelic dominance is associated with respective arousal interpretations and shifts under different environmental conditions.

Design and procedure: Two studies were carried out with the same 40 students. They were categorized into telic, paratelic, and non-dominance metamotivational orientation. In study 1, participants performed dart-throwing from two distances: short (1.37 m) and long (3.37 m). In study 2, performance feedback (win, lose, win/lose) was manipulated using a competitive task. Two players, of whom one was a confederate, competed while standing side by side separated by a white curtain, which prevented visual contact with the opponent. Feedback was provided by the researcher. Arousal, pleasantness, and self-efficacy measures were administered during four trial blocks during task engagement.

Results: Throwing darts from the short throwing distance was associated with more pleasant feelings for telic than paratelic players, even though paratelic players were more self-efficacious and exhibited better performance. High-paratelic dominance and non-dominance players reported greater self-efficacy perceptions throughout the trials of the long throwing distance condition, suggesting that metamotivational dominance might affect efficacy beliefs during motor activities. Under variable (win/lose) and negative (lose) feedback paratelic-dominant players demonstrated better dart accuracy performance, reported more pleasant feelings, and higher efficacy perceptions than telic-dominant players. Overall, the study only partially confirmed the RT postulations.

Conclusions: State of the mind and affect shift during task engagement are evident in performers, and must be studied within different environmental contexts and conditions. Further studies are needed to explore the 'shifts' thresholds' (i.e., under what conditions people shift their state of mind) associated with contextual–metamotivational dominance interactions.

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Keywords: Metamotivational dominance; Reversal theory; Contextual interference; Self-efficacy; Affect

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Traditional trait-state psychology has used a correlational approach in investigating the link between affective state and performance of various tasks. Though eliciting sound results, it has failed to determine how affect is interpreted during sustained or changing contextual demands posed on the performer. Two studies were carried out to examine shifts in affective states while performing accuracy motor task under controlled laboratory conditions. Apter's (1982) reversal theory (RT) was used to conceptualize the theoretical framework underlying the studies' methodology and design.

One of the ways individuals differ from each other at the metamotivational level is in their predispositions or tendencies to be more in one mental state than the other (Apter, 1984). Such tendency is referred to in RT as dominance. A telic-dominant individual is more likely to pursue goals that are perceived to be important rather than engaging in playful activity. On the other hand, a paratelic-dominant individual is more likely to pursue goals that are perceived to be fun. RT proposes that paratelic-dominant people more often prefer and enjoy high arousal, whereas telic-dominant people more often prefer and enjoy low arousal (Kerr, 1997). It is further proposed that the factors that tend to induce the telic state have to be stronger in order to bring about such a shift for paratelic-dominant people than for telic-dominant people, and vice versa for those factors that tend to induce the paratelic state (Apter, 1984). Moreover, it is thought that a person 'will contingently reverse easily into his or her dominant state, and will satiate more slowly and become frustrated less easily in that state' (Frey, 1999, p.13). Reversal theory (Apter & Heskin, 2001) holds that reversal between telic and paratelic states may be triggered in one of three ways: (a) contingent events, (b) frustration, and (c) satiation.

"A direct linear link exists between stressors and mood disturbance for the telic-dominant persons; however, a curvilinear relation was indicated for paratelic-dominant persons, i.e., higher mood disturbance were evident at both low and high levels of stress, and lower mood disturbance at moderate levels of stress (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dobbin, 1987). Similarly, paratelic-dominant players scored higher on a video game when experiencing conditionrate stress whereas telic-dominant players scored higher in the non-stressful condition than in the conditionately stressful condition (Martin et al., 1987). Furthermore, telic-dominant players felt more unpleasant and more dissatisfied with their performance, and perceived the experimenter as being more hostile and disapproving in the stressful condition than in the no-stress condition.

The reversal process between telic and paratelic states was of interest in several studies. Apter and Batler (1997), for example, reported that parachutists experienced their highest anxiety just before the parachute opened, and experienced their highest excitement immediately after that. Thus, a contingent telic-to-paratelic reversal occurs as danger turns to safety. Kerr, Hayashi, Matsumoto, and Miyamoto (2002) and Kerr and Tacon (1999) also noted the influences of environmental events, locations, and activities (e.g., medical library, sport center, sport meets, lecture on statistics) on telic/paratelic reversals state.

To our knowledge reversal theory research, incorporating telic and paratelic dominance and related affective states, has not considered self-efficacy as a mediating variable between the states of mind a person experience and his/her ongoing activity. In extensive reviews of the motor behavior literature, Feltz (1992) and Feltz and Lirgg (2001) found correlations between self-efficacy and performing motor tasks to be in excess of 0.50. Moritz, Feltz, Fahrback, and Mack (2000) meta-analytic review showed that the average correlation between self-efficacy and sport performance was 0.38. Thus, self-efficacy may mediate between the feelings an individual experiences while engaging in a task and his/her performance level.

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effect of telic–paratelic dominance on pleasantness, arousal, task-specific self-efficacy, and dart accuracy performance while performing under

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