

Assignment One

Personality Traits and Performance Psychology

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Personality traits have been studied at length within the field of sport and performance psychology with over 1000 studies estimated to have been conducted between the 1960s and 1970s. However more recently the focus of study has moved away from this toward more specific and, possibly, more concrete subjects. The effects of personality traits on athletic performance is intriguing, as they are the basis for their behaviours, including trait anxiety and mental toughness. Further, within the Big Five model, assessments of personality can lead to general identification of beneficial and non-beneficial behaviour. Other personality traits, defined and studied, provide an array of perspectives to analyse athletes and non-athletes performance, however the variety of these make it difficult for cross referencing to accurately assess all of the work conducted to accurately conclude the effects of personality traits in exercise and sport psychology.

For example, low levels of agreeableness, extraversion and high levels of neuroticism lead to a tendency toward aggressive behaviour and low levels of openness and high levels of neuroticism lead to avoidance coping strategies. Further, personality traits have been closely studied and associated with academic and career success, therefore, it is reasonably expected that these associations transfer to the sports performance disciplines. (Allen, et al. 2013)

The interpersonal domain of personality traits is significant in an individual's integration within social groups and can lead to successful or unsuccessful interpersonal interactions. As sport is an inherently interpersonal relationship, with coaches and trainers, support through family and peers, cooperation with teammates or training partners, and a competition with opponents or opposing teams, it is natural to assume that an athlete's traits

affecting interpersonal relationships will influence their athletic progression and performance. (Allen, et al. 2013)

Whilst it is natural to expect differing trait profiles amongst players in different positions of the same sport, there is no evidence to support this. On a small scale, that is to review individual positions within a single sport, in this case Ice Hockey, personality trait stereotypes have been formed. It has been identified that players within the same team tended to assess other players' personalities based on their position rather than the individual. The study method was to self-report and report on the personality traits of others through standardised questionnaires. The latter assessment was analysed by group reporting and reported on. The results identified, firstly that, there was no significant difference in personality trait between positions and that when assessing teammates within their own and other positions, an in-group bias was identified.

The in-group biases that were identified showed the "line in the sand" regarding teammates of differing positions rather than any personality traits. For example, defensive players and goalies are more similar than to offensive players, as they can be grouped in a broader category of defenders. Whilst the offensive players role is to score and therefore always against the defensive player group. This shows an underlying bias toward personality trait presumption within this specific context and may allude to why trait-based testing is more seldom conducted in sport psychology. However, importantly it showed that the basis for team or position selection cannot be implemented based on personality trait testing. (Cameron, et al. 2012)

Of British gymnasts, those that high levels of conscientiousness positively correlated to the quality of preparation prior to a competition and low levels of neuroticism was positively correlated to effective coping strategies during competition. (Woodman, et al. 2010) The assessment of high conscientiousness can be used to further develop athletes to more demanding or autonomous training plans. They also were found to use less goal setting techniques, therefore could refocus to improve goal setting skills to improve areas that may be lacking in the individual athlete's repertoire. Alternatively, athletes with low conscientiousness may need closer monitoring or the fostering of a dyadic relationship to capitalise on other athlete's performances and personality traits. (Jackson, et al. 2010)

The level and controllability of perceived stress an individual encounters within a sport will significantly influence how they perform. The link between stress and performance, in any area, is well known. If the level of stress is too low, the subject lacks arousal and interest, therefore is less likely to perform well. If the level of stress is too high, the subject can become overwhelmed and unable to perform at their peak. This stress can be described in two areas, perceived controllability and perceived intensity. Perception is the key influence on each of these on an individual, as it is their own perception that inevitably influences their reaction to the stimulus. (Laborde, et al. 2014)

Emotional Intelligence is the method in which a person observes, analyses and approaches their and another's emotions. (Mayer, et al. 1999) This assessment of behaviour is likely to affect an individual's performance in any number of areas within their life; however, this could be most evident in athletic performance. One key factor in the performance of athletes during sports is their ability to cope with stress. The individual's ability to control the stimuli, or stress event, is directly related to their orientation to use problem-focused or task-

focused coping methods. Therefore, the more perceived control an athlete has over a stimulus, the more likely they are to cope effectively with the stressor.

Individuals with low Emotional Intelligence assess more events as a threat whilst those with high Emotional Intelligence assess less. The presence of a stressful stimulus will affect an individual's performance satisfaction through athletic pursuit. When the individual athlete perceives stressors at a higher frequency than others, they are more likely to become overwhelmed by these stressors or perceive less controllability of those stressors and revert to less effective coping mechanisms, resulting in poorer performance.

The research by Laborde, et al, (2014) shows evidence of a trait-based assessment, on Emotional Intelligence, to athletic coping efficacy which resulted in performance satisfaction. It also showed a correlation between Emotional Intelligence and the perceived controllability of stressors. Both these factors can have a significant influence on an athlete's performance.

Coaches are often overlooked as critical components of the athlete's success and competence, due to the focus on the athlete's performance during the event or sport, rather than the weeks, months or years spent training the varying aspects of their discipline with a coach or coaches. The behavioural traits of a coach can have a significant impact on the coach-athlete relationship and therefore the athlete's performance, either when paired well or poorly. In this way a coach's Emotional Intelligence will affect their ability to motivate and manage athlete's emotions and behaviours. Whilst this behavioural trait goes beyond strategy, drills and physical training, they are inseparable to the holistic training of an athlete.

The coach's ability to assess themselves also can have a significant impact on an athlete. When an athlete makes an error during a critical point resulting in a poorer outcome than was expected, the coach, who has invested their own time and effort, will invariably be disappointed. This could even turn to anger. In cases where the coach has a high Emotional Intelligence, they are more likely to identify their own emotions and exercise intervention methods to self-manage those emotions, can adequately and apathetically assess and intervene with the athlete's emotions, rather than direct their anger and disappointment toward the athlete, who is likely already self-criticising. This is one instance where the Emotional Intelligence of a coach is critical to the future development and longevity of an athlete. (Chan and Mallett. 2011)

An athlete's ability to perform under pressure is a necessity at elite levels, however the perceived pressure can be higher depending on the situation, such as finals, even for lower grades, et cetera. The effects of public and private self-consciousness, and narcissism on player performance in low- and high-pressure situations shows how an individual's traits have an effect on their performance in varying but familiar situations. Narcissism, an inflated sense of one's own importance, and public self-consciousness, the assessment of one's self from the vantage point of others, had high correlations with better performance when performing a familiar task under a high-pressure environment. The results concluded that those with high levels of public self-consciousness performed better than lowering scoring competitors, because they were more familiar with the feeling of being assessed by others. Also, those with a higher assessed level of narcissism, performed well due to the desire of publicised success. Both these traits had no effect on performance in low pressure situations.

The trait of private self-consciousness, the ability to assess one's self and/or performance, was assessed to have no effect on predicting performance in either the high- or low-pressure situation. It was concluded that the situation did not provoke the activation of this trait to sufficiently effect the results from the test. Although athletes with this trait performed consistently between each of the situations, leading to a hypothesis that individuals with high private self-consciousness are unaffected by the difference between high- and low-pressure situations. (Geukes, et al. 2012; Allen, et al. 2011)

The research conducted within the area of correlating Traits to athletic performance, is contradictory and often inconclusive. Whilst seemingly conclusive hypotheses are drawn, such as neuroticism will correlate positively with exercise capacity and extraversion is higher in team sport athletes than individual sport athletes, the results of experiments and data analysis are often either inconclusive or contradictory to the studies they are attempting to replicate. (Malinauskas, et al. 2014)

Malinauskas, et al, (2014) did conclude that athletes scored significantly higher in conscientiousness than the non-athletes. This was also true with regard to performance in anaerobically demanding tasks, such as maximum number of pull-ups, however the correlation was statically insignificant. The acceptance that conscientiousness leads to consistent and even compulsive behaviour, leads to the further consideration that conscientiousness can determine athletic success or aptitude. It was also identified that extraversion was higher in team sport athletes than endurance athletes. However, the significance of this was less than was found in previous studies.

Coping strategies are important tools athletes are required to call upon during many aspects of sports, including training and competition. An athlete's ability to cope with changing circumstances within their discipline and against events outside their control or contrary to their actions, can determine the outcome of a competition or match. The high emotional stability and extraversion of an athlete influences the coping mechanisms and efficacy employed. It was found that this specific combination with a high openness trait would present more proactive coping strategies that are beneficial to sports performance. This was contrary to findings with non-athletic populations, leading to the belief that athletes remodelled their coping strategies, unlike non-athletes with similar traits of conscientiousness. Further, athletes with low openness, were more likely to use problem avoidance coping strategies than non-athletic counterparts, where openness had limited or no correlation to avoidance coping strategies. (Allen, et al. 2011)

Personality traits have clear effects on athletes in their performance in sporting events. The Big Five model provides a well-rounded assessment of individuals' personality traits, which can be used to understand the potential behaviours in a variety of situations. Other more specific assessments of singular traits, such as emotional intelligence, can also be used to analyse, in a more targeted fashion, traits more relative to the sport or behaviour. Athletes are not the only people affected by performance psychology models, coaches, trainers and performance psychologists' traits will also have a significant impact on the athlete's performance, whether positive or negative. These traits can provide insight to how and why people perform well or poorly in sports.

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