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Insight Grant 2018

Athletes' self-regulation and interpersonal emotion regulation in performance settings

Sport is a context where athletes experience a variety of positive and negative emotions. Thus, athletes' engagement in affect-improving and affect-worsening emotion regulation (e.g., thinking about positive vs. negative aspects of the self) can influence their performance (Robazza et al., 2008). Most research in this area has adopted an intrapersonal perspective on emotion regulation, focusing on what individual athletes do to regulate their own emotions. However, emerging evidence suggests that athletes also influence one another's emotions and emotion regulation, which has implications for their motivation, commitment, and performance (e.g., Tamminen et al., 2019; Tamminen, McEwen, et al., 2016).

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine whether athletes' performance satisfaction is associated with their engagement in affect-improving and affect-worsening ESR (emotional self-regulation), as well as with receiving affect-improving and affect-worsening IER from teammates (interpersonal emotion regulation).

Method: 517 team sport athletes ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.0 \pm 3.1$) in Canada and the United Kingdom completed a questionnaire package asking about their demographics, emotions felt during sport, engagement in ESR and received IER from teammates, and performance satisfaction.

Results: Multiple regression results indicated that performance satisfaction was positively predicted by engagement in affect-improving ESR ($p < .001$) and receiving affect-improving IER from teammates ($p = .006$). Performance satisfaction was negatively predicted by engagement in affect-worsening ESR ($p < .001$). Receiving affect-worsening IER from teammates did not relate to performance satisfaction ($p = .528$).

Conclusion: For better performance outcomes, athletes should engage in affect-improving ESR (e.g., positive self-talk) and avoid engaging in affect-worsening ESR (e.g., focusing on one's shortcomings). Athletes should also be encouraged to engage in affect-improving IER towards teammates (e.g., telling them about their positive characteristics) and seek support from teammates for positive emotion regulation. Overall, both ESR and IER may be important for more optimal performance outcomes.

Project Status: SSHRC and Sport Canada funding for this research was awarded in 2018. For Study 1, data collection (517 athletes from Canada and the UK) has concluded and analysis is underway. Study 2 examines conversation patterns between athlete teammate dyads to understand how athletes help one another deal with stressful situations in sport, and how this influences their perceptions regarding their teammate. Data collection has concluded and analysis is underway (45 dyads).