

Short communication

PERFECTIONISM IN ATHLETES- POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Ali Aziz Dawood Al Sudani¹, Kamila Budzyńska²,

¹Academy of Physical Education and Sport in Gdansk, Poland

¹University of Misan, Iraq

²Institute of Psychology, University of Szczecin, Poland

Address: ul. Mazurska 12/2, 70-424, Szczecin, Poland

Phone: + 506 938 502

E-mail: kamilabudzynska@wp.pl

Abstract

This article presents a review of recent studies about perfectionism in sport, its function and its positive and negative aspects. Perfectionism is a multidimensional characteristic of personality. Some studies suggests that perfectionism has two main dimensions- perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber, 2011) or positive and negative perfectionism (Łuszczynska, 2012). Perfectionistic strivings correlate positively with approach goal orientations, self-confidence, hope of success and performance in training and competitions, where perfectionistic concerns show positive connections with avoidance goal orientation, fear of failure or competitive anxiety (Stoeber, 2011). Positive perfectionism may be associated with better performance in sport, refering to high personal standards and the pursuit of excellence. Negative perfectionism relates to concerns about your own performance, focusing on the mistakes, evaluation and implementation of a discrepancy between expectations and negative reactions for ones own mistakes (Łuszczynska, 2012). Assuming that perfectionism is a part of personality which can change during the lifespan and is a multidimensional characteristic, we should ask the question whether in a given player the dimensions of perfectionism may change depending on the conditions in which he/she is located and his/her personal experience?

Keywords: *perfectionism in sport, perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns*

Introduction

As with general perfectionism, perfectionism in sport has for a long time been recognised as a one-dimensional, unhealthy, dysfunctional and

maladaptive characteristic. Perfectionism has influence on all spheres of athletes functioning- cognitive, emotional and behavioral. It can bring positive outcomes but it may also induce harsh self-evaluation or concern about mistakes and higher self-criticism. According to some authors perfectionism is an ambivalent characteristic which has positive and negative aspects. Perfectionistic strivings and concerns manifest mainly in an athletes thoughts (Hall, Jowett & Hill, 2014).

Positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism

Some studies showed that there are two dimensions of perfectionism: perfectionistic strivings (positive perfectionism) and perfectionistic concerns (negative perfectionism).

Table 1 shows the comparison of Hall's and Stoeber's conceptions of perfectionism. Generally positive perfectionism is connected with more adaptive coping with stress, high personal standards, better performance in sport and having fun. Negative perfectionism- perfectionistic strivings correlates with fear of making mistakes, negative reactions for ones own mistakes, focusing on mistakes and frequent meditation on the negative consequences of a situation (Łuszczynska, 2012).

Table 1

Factors connected with positive and neagive dimensions of perfectionism

Hall, 2006	
involved perfectionionism	non-adaptive perfectionism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - beneficial to the individual - more adaptive coping with stress - high personal standards - a desire to have fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fear of making mistakes, - frequent meditation on the negative consequences of a situation - need for approval -pressure from important people during coping with stressful situatons
Stoeber et al. 2006	
positive perfectionism	negative perfectionism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - associated with better performance in sport - high personal standards - striving for perfection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fear for their own performance - focusing on mistakes - evaluating the discrepancy between performance and expectations - negative reactions for own mistakes

Stoeber and Otto (2006) checked 15 studies about general perfectionism literature which reported bivariate correlations between healthy, adaptive and facilitative or unhealthy, maladaptive and debilitating

characteristics, processes and outcomes. Perfectionistic concerns were only negatively correlated with adaptive characteristic and positively correlated with non-adaptive characteristic such as neuroticism. In 10 of the 15 studies perfectionistic strivings showed positive correlations with adaptive characteristics and negative with maladaptive characteristics. Other studies about perfectionistic strivings didn't show any significant correlations or showed together positive and negative correlations between adaptive or maladaptive characteristics (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

It is not clear if positive perfectionism can be change to negative perfectionism and negative perfectionism to positive perfectionism. However according to Hall (2006) athletes who have a higher level of adaptive, perfectionistic strivings also tend to have a higher level of primarily, maladaptive perfectionistic concerns. In this situation positive or negative aspects of perfectionism in an athlete can depend on outside circumstances, his/her experiences and other factors which are not directly under our control. Moreover most perfectionistic athletes reported a fear of failure, unremitting pressure to meet their own high standards, maladaptive forms of motivation anxiety over performance, fluctuating self-worth, anger and so on.

Some researchers suggest that perfectionism should have more precise meaning to help and enable sport psychologists to understand achievement behaviours in sport. It could be possible that when the term of perfectionism includes only compulsive strivings for perfection, which indicate harsh evaluative concerns and supports the thinking that self-worth is a result of productivity and sporting accomplishment (Hall, Jowett & Hill, 2014).

Conclusion

Taking all things into account it is difficult to conclude that perfectionism has only positive or negative aspects. Perfectionism seems to be a kind of paradox where some of its aspects are useful to build success of performance and at the same time some of its aspects make this success impossible. Perfectionistic strivings seems to be adaptive when not accompanied by perfectionistic concerns which clearly can lead to low self-esteem and be a risk factor for development of mental health disorders. But people having a positive perfectionism are still more likely to experience a negative perfectionism (Hall, Jowett & Hill, 2014). The future challenge for sport psychologists is to strengthen perfectionistic strivings and reduce perfectionistic concerns in athletes so that they have reached their maximum capabilities.

References

1. Hall, H.K. (2006). Perfectionism: A hallmark quality of world class performers, or a psychological impediment to athletic development. In: D. Hackfort, G. Tenenbaum (Eds.), *Perspectives in sport and exercise psychology*, volume 1: Essential processes for attaining peak performance (pp.178-211). Oxford, UK: Meyer & Meyer.
2. Hall, H.K., Jowett, G.E., Hill, A.P. (2014). Perfectionism. In: A.G. Papaioannou, & D. Hackfort (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Sport and Exercise Psychology* (pp.152-168). New York, USA: Routledge.
3. Łuszczyńska, A. (2012). Psychologiczne źródła zmiany w poziomie wykonania sportowego. In: A. Łuszczyńska (Ed.), *Psychologia Sportu i Aktywności Fizycznej* (pp.60-73). Warszawa, Polska: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA.
4. Stoeber, J., & Otto, K. (2006). Positive conception on perfectionism: Approaches, evidence, challenges. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, 295-315. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_2
6. Stoeber, J. (2011). The dual nature of perfectionism in sports: Relationships with emotion, motivation, and performance. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 4(2), 128-145. doi: 10.1080/1750984x.2011.604789

Submitted: May 8, 2014

Accepted: May 15, 2014