1987

The effect of parental pressure on athletic performance

Jessica A. Bumsted

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses

Recommended Citation
Parental Pressure

The Effect of Parental Pressure on Athletic Performance
Jessica A. Bumsted
University of Richmond

Running head: PARENTAL PRESSURE
The Effect of Parental Pressure on Athletic Performance

Participation in youth sports and the factors that determine whether a participant will gain satisfaction and succeed at a given task, or whether disappointment and failure will result, are issues currently being explored in sport psychology. Current estimates reveal that over 20 million American youths are involved in some form of organized sport activity (McGuire & Cook, 1983). Yet, how much is really known about the child's motivation to become and stay involved? Research in this area has found that children participate in youth sport primarily to have fun (McGuire & Cook, 1983). It was also found that additional factors may play a vital role. Sapp and Haubenstricker (1978) identified other reasons for children choosing to participate in organized sport. Among these were: having fun (90%), skill improvement (80%), physical fitness (56%), making new friends (38%), and parental pressure (32%). The questions start to arise, however, when each factor is singled out and examined more closely.
The current study will focus on the role of the parent in the child's youth sport involvement, concentrating primarily on the socialization process into sport, the effects of parental pressure and expectations (perceived by both parent and child), conceptions of ability, and a child's attributions to success and/or failure in terms of locus of control and self-efficacy.

Socialization is the process whereby individuals learn the skills, values, and behaviors that enable them to function in a group (Weinberg, 1980). Sport is considered an excellent medium through which the socialization process of young children is enhanced. Yet, who is responsible for this process? Existing literature suggests that the family members, the parents in particular, are instrumental in determining a child's sport involvement (Lewko & Ewing, 1980; Orlick & Botterill, 1975; Snyder & Sprectzer, 1976). Additional significant others play a role here also (Seefeldt, 1980; Smoll & Lefebvre, 1979). However, as gender differences appear in traditional literature, further investigation is needed to study current sex-role socialization patterns.

In addition to the importance of parental socialization
into sport, special attention should be paid to the fine lines drawn between encouragement, influence, and ultimately coercion. Often, in regard to the decision to participate in youth sport, this distinction is drawn only in the mind and perceptions of the individual child (McGuire & Cook, 1983). Yet these pressures and expectations are felt and/or implied, and the parents are influenced, not only by differential adult expectancy/child performance discrepancies due to socioeconomic status (Smith, Zingale & Coleman, 1978), but also by the personality variables of internal-external locus of control (Cunningham, Gerard, & Miller, 1978).

Research centering on parental behavior and locus of control supports that the parent who is warm, supportive, flexible, approving, consistant in discipline and who expects early independence in the child is more likely to encourage the child's beliefs in internal control than is the parent who is rejecting, punative, dominating, and critical (Chance, 1965; Davis & Phares, 1969; Katkovsky et al, 1967). However, little attention has been devoted to personal expectancies for control, where personality and situational factors dominate. According to Ducette
Parental Pressure

and Wolk (1973), these factors are strong predictors of all performance variables.

Early research by Rotter (1954, 1966) which concentrates on locus of control is receiving more and more attention as developmental psychologists study the factors closely related to pressure expectations in sport performance. The theory itself focuses primarily on the subjects' perceptions of performance. An internal subject has an expectancy that the environment is open to manipulation and that a relationship exists between his actions and his reinforcements. An external person, on the other hand, expects to be under the control of others, and expects that effort does not necessarily result in reward (Ducette & Wolk, 1973). James and Rotter (1958) reported that those who differed in their expectancies for control would perform differently in learning situations. For example, an internal subject, having come to expect that his/her actions and outcomes are correlated, responds adaptively to reinforcement: an external subject does not. It was later hypothesized that internal subjects may possess a perceptual sensitivity (Getter, 1966; Phares, 1968; Ude & Vogler, 1969) or the ability to
extract more information from ambiguous situations (Phares, 1968). They are also found to employ their attention to relevant cues, thereby performing more effectively, and are able to make more eye contact thus deriving more information per contact than external subjects.

In reference to a child's reinforcement process, performance is also regulated by both internal and external expectancies to either succeed or fail. Baumeister, Hamilton, and Tice (1985) propose that a performer's private expectancy of success will improve performance due to self-attributions of competence and efficacy leading to increased effort, while at the same time, an audience's expectancy of success can harm performance by putting added pressure on the performer. Bandura (1977) supports this hypothesis stating that success expectancies lead to self-attributions of competence and increased motivation to succeed. However, a distinction must be made between private expectancies and the performer's knowledge of the audience's expectancy (Baumeister, Hamilton, & Tice, 1985). Barling and Abel (1983) focused on self-efficacy beliefs and tennis performance in support of Bandura's (1977) model. They were able to
conclude, by extending the meaning of self-efficacy theory to a nonpathological behavior, i.e., tennis performance, that perceived success experiences are indeed the principle motivators of behavior. Their research found that the individual tennis players who were rated by two external judges as more skillful were found to have higher efficacy expectancies (Barling & Abel, 1983).

As stated earlier, due to self-attributions of efficacy, both effort and performance are greatly enhanced. Bandura (1977) has expanded on the concept of self-efficacy stating that self-precepts of efficacy are concerned with beliefs of individuals that they can successfully execute the behavior required to produce a certain outcome. Behavioral change is thus mediated by a common cognitive mechanism (Bandura, 1977). These expectations determine, not only the choice of activity to participate in, i.e., a tennis match, but also the amount of effort and persistence exerted by the performer. Bandura (1977) supports the state theorist's viewpoint that self-efficacy is situation-specific.

When a performer is faced with outside pressure
Parental Pressure

expectancies to succeed however, that performer is faced with expectations that can ultimately harm behavior. It is here then that one's self-precept of efficacy plays a vital role. The interaction with others, and in the case of our study, one's parents, can either facilitate or harm performance. Yet depending on the response to the pressure expectancies, or the social aspect of an audience's expectancy of success (Baumeister et al, 1985), one's performance is conditional to the level of self-consciousness and self-attention that has been attained (Baumeister et al, 1985). Audience expectancies of successes constitute performance pressure, which can harm performance, except when substantial private confidence is created (Baumeister et al, 1985).

It is apparent that adolescents differ in their perceptions of parental control, yet it is also important to point out the source of these perceptions. Attribution theory would argue that adolescent inferences about parental power are based largely on parental attempts to control behavior (Jones & Davis, 1965). Thus, as adolescents grow and mature, parental control must adapt to these changes in order to maximize their persuasive ability.
Parental Pressure

(DeTurck & Miller, 1982). Consequently, if this perception of parental power is an internalized attribution, then the source of the message (mother or father) would affect adolescent perceptions of their power as well as the type of message given (DeTurck & Miller, 1982). A study by Lepper (1973), replicating a study by Aronson & Carlsmith (1963) of the effect of fear appeals on a child's internalization of compliance with adult requests found that, by using the "forbidden toy" paradigm, children comply with strong fear appeals not because the source is persuasive, but to avoid punishment. Consistently strong fear appeal inhibits internalization.

By contrast, adolescents exposed to mild fear appeals do more than comply (Lepper, 1973). These fear appeals cause the child to perceive the source as more influential due to the compliance with salient external inducements (DeTurck & Miller, 1982). It is also important to point out that, as children mature, they perceive the same-sexed parent as more instrumental in attempting to persuade them (DeTurck & Miller, 1982). DeTurck also supports the notion that parents who rely on threat as a persuasive technique are perceived to wield less power.
These perceptual factors are important to athletics, in that, parents are a significant influence on sport involvement.

The influences parents have on a child not only effect a child’s willingness to conform, they can also have an alarming effect on the self-esteem, or general self-worth of the participant due to parental pressures as well as other environmental factors. These pressures can develop as a result of social conflicts between a parent and child. Subsequently, this can lead to differences in evaluating ability (McElroy & Kirkendall, 1981). McElroy also hypothesized that in a situation where a child’s value of their sport performance differs from that of their parents’, their level of self-esteem would be lower than when a parent/child sport values are similar.

Method

Subjects

Sixty-one white male junior tennis players from the Mid-Atlantic Tennis Association served as subjects for the present study. All participants were between the ages of eleven and thirteen, and were selected at random
from a list of players who had qualified for ranking in the twelve to fourteen and under divisions. The child's rank value was taken from the computer records of the Mid-Atlantic Tennis Association files. The process of ranking involves each player's win/loss record as well as strength of opponents. Parents of the players, also serving as subjects, were contacted by letter asking to participate along with their child. They were asked to complete two consent forms.

**Design and Procedure**

The players were individually administered the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control scale (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973). The scale consists of 40 items requiring a yes or no response. A high score indicates external orientation, or the attribution of success or failure to external causes. The original sample tested of 1,017 third to fifth grade students reported an internal consistency of .68. The Physical Self-Efficacy scale (Ryckman et al, 1982) was used to measure the degree of perceived physical competence. The testing scale ranges from one (strongly agree) to six (strongly disagree). An internal consistency finding of .82 was obtained on a
sample of 83 undergraduates at the University of Maine. In addition, both parent and child were interviewed and asked a series of questions from which a rating of 1-10 for pressure was ascertained. When possible, both parents were interviewed together. In this study twenty couples were represented. Questions asked in the interviews dealt primarily with the amount of time and effort spent with a child, their behavior toward that child, and a discussion of expectations and reactions to a child’s successes and failures. Two interviewers were used and their results produced a inter-rater reliability coefficient of .92. The same interview questions were asked to the children emphasizing individual behavior, while also asking how they perceived their parents’ expectations. Again, the inter-rater reliability indicated a high degree of consistency (.86). Each interview was completed in five to ten minutes, in person, at tournament sights throughout summer competition.
Results

The means and standard deviations for each variable are presented in Table 1.

__________________________
Insert Table 1 about here

__________________________
Pearson Product-moment correlation was used to evaluate the relationship between Locus of Control (LOC), Self-Efficacy (SE), Parental Pressure (PRES), Rank (RANK), and Child's Perceived Pressure (PPRES) as seen in Table 2.

__________________________
Insert Table 2 about here

__________________________
Partial correlations were also calculated by removing SE and LOC respectively. See Table 3 for a complete listing of correlations.

__________________________
Insert Table 3 about here
Discussion

Results of this study support the relationship between locus of control and a child’s perceived parental pressure expectancies. The more externally oriented, the more a child perceives pressure expectancies. However, a negative correlation between pressure and locus of control indicates that the higher parental pressure expectancies, the more internal one is. One possible explanation is that an internal, one who believes that events are contingent on their actions and abilities, is more ‘perceptive’ (Gette et al., 1966) of parental expectations where pressure is viewed as either positive or negative reinforcement. Conversely, an external subject sees the pressure expectancies as ‘pressure’ without this perceptual ability.

A relationship was also found between self-efficacy and the child’s perceived pressure expectancies. In support of our hypothesis that one’s level of self-attention is vital in response to outside pressures to perform (Baumeister et al., 1985), it was found that a higher level of self-efficacy results in lower perceived pressure expectancies. This is further substantiated by
Parental Pressure


With the finding that self-attributions of competence and efficacy lead to increased effort and motivation to succeed (Bandura, 1977a), it is apparent that a relationship should exist between a player's rank and self-efficacy. Results of the present study reveal a trend in this direction, although a non-significant result was reported.

McElroy & Kirkendall (1980) found that self-esteem is adversely affected when significant individuals are viewed as holding perceptions that differ from a child's own perceptions. Baumeister et al (1985) found that a performer's private expectancies of success, as a result of changes in motivation and self-attributions (increased efficacy) produces a true self-fulfilling prophecy. This occurs because the target accepts as accurate the assessment implied by the perceiver's action and continues to act in terms of that assessment (Darley & Fazio, 1980). Thus, when pressure expectancies to succeed correspond with privately held competency expectancies, performance is improved. Conversely, the less value
Parental Pressure

placed on performance, the lower one's level of self-esteem. Here, parental pressure can harm performance. Baumeister et al (1984) contend that pressure is enhanced when private expectations are negative, yet an audience expects success. Thus performance pressure is unmitigated by internal confidence. It was also reported that 'choking under pressure' is most common among people who are ordinarily low in self-consciousness, for a suddenly high level of self-attention will be most unfamiliar and thus most disruptive to them.

The effects of parental and individual expectancies on performance and the level of self-efficacy and locus of control are all important variables to consider when evaluating contributing factors in achievement-related behavior (athletic competition). Further research attributing feelings of efficacy to perceived performance pressure in order to access a causal analysis is needed. Also, the present study did not take into account gender differences in relation to the variables studied. Future trends in the sport arena are beginning to take these factors into account as researchers begin to focus on the impact sport participation, and the pressures to
perform, have on children.

References


Chance, J.E. (1965, March). Internal control of
Parental Pressure

reinforcement and the school learning process.

Paper read at Society for Research in Child Development meeting, Minneapolis.


Parental Pressure

19


Parental Pressure

20


Parental Pressure

Psychology, 42.


### Table 1  **Means and Standard Deviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>LOC</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>PRES</th>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>PPRES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  **Intercorrelations Between Variables** using Pearson Product-moment Correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>LOC</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>PRES</th>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>PPRES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. LOC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PRES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RANK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. PPRES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 Partial Correlation Coefficients: Self-efficacy and Locus of Control Controlled For

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>PRES</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>LOC</th>
<th>PPRES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. RANK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[-.32]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[-.08]</td>
<td>[.05]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>{.40}</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PRES</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[-.47]</td>
<td>[-.35]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>{-21}</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(-.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. LOC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[ .71]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. PPRES</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SE controlled for - [ ]
LOC controlled for - ( )