

A Qualitative Assessment of Self-Presentational Concerns amongst Japanese Soccer Players

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Abstract

This qualitative study addressed a void in the extant literature and examined three facets of self-presentational concern for a sample of 60 intercollegiate soccer players in Japan. Participants completed the brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) scale (Leary, 1983) and listed their sport-specific self-presentational concerns plus the target people of those concerns. Scores on the FNE indicated that fear of negative evaluation was high when considered in the context of previous research with Western soccer players, while content analysis revealed that the most common concerns were the wish for one's team to show spirit, determination, and discipline; to be seen as a good player; and to show effort/that one is playing his best. The analysis also showed that general spectators and teammates emerged as the most important target people. Overall, the results suggest that the self-presentational thoughts of Japanese players are largely team-oriented and focused on in-groups, and that they extend from collectivistic attitudes about obligation and group responsibility. Follow-up studies should examine a broader range of Japanese athletes as well as the positive and/or negative effects of psychological skills training on evaluative concern and subsequent performance, as it is possible that self-presentational thinking serves an adaptive function for sports competitors in Japan. Such research is necessary before instructing coaches to apply intervention strategies that reduce self-presentational concerns.

Key words: self-presentation, evaluative concern, intercollegiate soccer, collectivism, content analysis

Self-presentation is the process by which people monitor and control how they are perceived and evaluated by others (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1999; Schlenker, 1980). It is also referred to as impression management (Schlenker, 1980), while concerns about the self-presentational effects of one's actions, words, or performance are usually equated with a fear of negative evaluation (Leary, 1992). Self-presentational behaviour involves selective presentation and omission of aspects of the self in order to cast desired impressions and/or avoid undesirable ones within a given situation or environment (Leary et al., 1999; Schlenker, 1980). However, it is not necessarily manipulative or deceptive in nature, and most self-presentations are thought to be reasonably

consistent with the individual's self-concept (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In fact, Leary (1995) suggests that all human behaviour is affected to some extent by self-presentational motives and that people typically act in ways that do not compromise their image in others' eyes. Thus, the contemporary understanding acknowledges that self-presentational behaviour is derived from both the immediate social context and one's internal sense of identity.

Sports competition contains an array of self-presentational risks, both real and imagined, of projecting negative images of oneself to a variety of evaluative others (Leary, 1992). Research conducted in physical activity contexts has provided both direct and indirect evidence that various aspects of sport and

exercise behaviour are affected by self-presentational thinking (see Carron, Burke, & Prapavessis, 2004; Hausenblas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2004; Leary, 1992; Prapavessis, Grove, & Eklund, 2004), and one of the most commonly addressed topics has been the relationship between social evaluation and anxiety. Schlenker and Leary (1982) state, for example, that when people are motivated to make positive impressions on others but are uncertain of their capacity to do so, they are likely to experience some degree of social anxiety. Leary (1992) adds that in the athletic domain, competitive anxiety is simply a sport-specific subclass of social anxiety, while Wilson and Eklund (1998) contend that concerns over the impressions left on others are the principal factors behind competitive anxiety experiences in sport. Accordingly, various theorists have proposed a social evaluation model of competitive anxiety that categorizes most anxiety sources under some facet of social evaluation, impression management, or self-presentational concern (Hudson & Williams, 2001; Leary, 1992; Wilson & Eklund, 1998), the consequence of which is that sport psychology studies on self-presentation have routinely measured anxiety as a correlate or dependent variable.

However, athletes' expectancies about others' evaluations offer a basis for understanding a wider range of issues in sport than just the experience of competitive anxiety. To that end, Bray, Martin, and Widmeyer (2000) note that it is equally important to identify, acknowledge, and address the specific concerns of athletes with respect to social evaluation. This may be especially interesting from a cultural identity standpoint and an Eastern perspective in particular, as variations in cultural norms can have significant effects on participants' values and attitudes toward sport (Nagaki, 1998). Indeed, empirical findings once thought to be universal are increasingly seen as culturally bound (Peters & Williams, 2006), and growing numbers of investigators have recognized the need to address cultural background in modern sport psychology research (e.g., Dewar & Horn, 1992; Duda & Allison, 1990; Duda & Hayashi, 1998; Hayashi & Weiss, 1994; Kim, Williams, & Gill, 2003; Morgan, Sproule, McNeill, Kingston, & Wang, 2006;

Page & Liu, 1997; Park, 2004; Peters & Williams, 2006). Among those studies that have examined cultural diversity within an East-West framework, significant differences have frequently been attributed to the construct of individualism-collectivism. In brief, collectivist cultures are defined as those that stress social interdependence, group connectedness, and mutual compromise or deference as predominant values. The opposite applies to individualist cultures, where emphasis is on independence or uniqueness, autonomy in choice and action, and social assertiveness (Bochner, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Considerable research suggests that people in Japan and other East Asian countries exhibit greater collectivism or interdependence and have a stronger sense of hierarchy and community, while independence, individuality, and horizontal relationships tend to be characteristics of North American and European nations (see Kerr, Kawaguchi, Oiwa, Terayama, & Zukawa, 2000; Kim & Gill, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

To some extent, East Asian athletes' self-presentational cognitions are likely to reflect the purported collectivistic nature of the cultures in which they live and compete. For instance, Pempel's (1998) discourse on Japanese sport and the characteristics of Japanese athletes refers to a sense of spirituality in one's activity and a devotion to the country's collective traditions as traits that are widely embraced and respected. Similar references are made by Kelly (1998) in his discussion of Japanese baseball, and for Japanese athletes, spirituality and a collective focus may mean that the process of competing is contained within an important set of team obligations and responsibilities. In turn, this may cause players to put particular emphasis on the impressions they leave with teammates, coaches, and supporters, since failure to meet these obligations can be expected to result in negative evaluations from the group.

Nevertheless, the possible links between collectivistic attitudes and evaluative concern in sport have remained largely unaddressed, as studies examining self-presentational concerns among athletes have focused almost exclusively on Western

participants. This means that implications for Japanese competitors must generally be inferred from the results of those studies, or from findings in other areas of research with only peripheral connections to self-presentational thinking. An illustration of this sort of inferred relationship is provided by Berkowitz (1972), whose research on aggression demonstrated that certain societies do not display aggressive behaviour or condone aggressive incidents in their customs of play. Although not stated outright, Berkowitz's observations can be taken to imply that aggressive acts within these cultures would produce negative social evaluations in accordance with established local norms. In Japan, people are said to be less outwardly aggressive than in most Western nations (Ferraro, 1999), and in keeping with the premise above, overt demonstrations of anger or hostility are generally seen as antithetical to cultural display rules (Izawa, Kodama, & Nomura, 2006). Thus, the self-presentational implications of conflict and aggression should be considerably more negative in Japan than in countries where most of the extant self-presentation research has been conducted.

Of course, aggression is only one type of behaviour with self-presentational underpinnings. In other research with a secondary connection to social evaluative concerns, Geisler and Kerr (2007) examined cross-national differences in futsal players' patterns of emotion and found that Japanese competitors reported higher pre-game levels of humiliation, shame, and guilt than Canadian players. Apter (1982) and Kerr (1997) describe humiliation, shame, and guilt as transactional emotions or those associated with human relationships, and as such, it is conceivable that the Japanese emotions reflected collectivistic concerns about issues of interpersonal conduct and meeting responsibilities to the team. This would likely invoke a concomitant fear of negative social evaluation, but once more, the absence of applied research into the evaluative concerns of Japanese athletes makes it unclear what the specific self-presentational thoughts might have been.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the level of evaluative fear among Japanese intercollegiate soccer players, their sport-specific self-

presentational concerns, and the targets of those concerns. Since the study was of a descriptive and exploratory nature, no formal hypotheses were proposed, but the findings should provide a preliminary framework for more extensive research into the self-presentational concerns of athletes from East Asian nations, their diversity and/or congruence with previous results for Western competitors, and the implications for adaptation and performance.

Methods and Procedures

Participants

Sixty male soccer players from four different university teams in Japan were recruited as participants in the study. Their ages ranged from 18-22 years ($M = 19.6$, $SD = 1.13$), and all participants were required to be full time students as well as members of the top soccer team at one of the selected institutions. In addition, only those players who were deemed "fit" (i.e., uninjured) and eligible to play were asked to participate.

Measures

The brief version of the Fear of Negative Evaluation scale (FNE; Leary, 1983) was administered to each participant. The brief FNE is a 12-item self-report inventory designed to assess the amount of apprehension people have about the possibility of being evaluated unfavourably in social situations. On a 5-point Likert-type scale, respondents must indicate the extent to which questionnaire items describe them, ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). A total score between 12 and 60 is then obtained, with higher scores indicating a greater fear of negative evaluation (or self-presentational concern). Leary (1983) reported that the brief version of the FNE had a correlation coefficient of .96 with the original long version. He also demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$) and adequate 4-week test-retest reliability ($r = .75$).

The back of the FNE form was used for participants to list any additional factors that could contribute to their self-presentational or evaluative concerns specific to competing in soccer, both on an individual level and on a collective or team level. The assessment read

as follows: "Please list any other concerns you have about the impressions you and your team make on other people when you play your next soccer game. Who are these people?" The aim of these follow-up questions was to reveal the players' specific self-presentational considerations behind their overall FNE scores. This is consistent with other researchers' use of specially-written, open-ended questions to measure self-presentational thoughts about particular performance situations. Examples of such items in sport studies include references to the importance that significant others place on one's performance (Brustad, 1988; Brustad & Weiss, 1987), how much people worry that their performance might let others down (Lewthwaite & Scanlan, 1989), and how important it is to perform well when parents, friends, other competitors, and strangers are watching (Bray et al., 2000).

The process of translating the FNE into Japanese followed the common procedure of translating and then back-translating the form via two independent and bilingual individuals who were familiar with the applicable constructs and terminology (Brislin, 1986). Differences were then discussed before a final version of the translated questionnaire was agreed upon.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the FNE were intended to give a general indication of the players' overall level of evaluative concern. Thus, the mean score was simply computed for a descriptive comparison with previous findings and there was no corresponding analysis. The follow-up questions, on the other hand, were more exploratory in nature, and since these data were obtained through open-ended questions that did not address any formally-stated hypotheses, they were well-suited to content analysis and conceptual analysis in particular. Conceptual analysis is an inductive process in that perusal of questionnaire responses leads to the formation of conceptual clusters. In this study, the follow-up questions served as the unit of analysis and the responses were read and translated by the two bilingual assistants who translated the FNE. Those responses comprised the raw data, and consensus was reached on the organization of raw data themes into

higher-order themes, or conceptual clusters. Therefore, the clusters represented selected ideas, and instances of specific words or statements in the players' responses were counted as scoring units of the conceptual clusters that emerged. This provided a means of numerical expression for each cluster (e.g., 3 instances of applicable statements equaled 3 scoring units), which was converted into percentages and presented as descriptive information. See Sanders and Pinhey (1983, p. 184-202) for a more detailed explanation of content analysis.

The selected method of analysis was similar to Geisler and Leith's (2007) approach in previous cross-cultural research on stress. It also resembled the method employed by Dale (2000), whose examination of the distractions experienced by decathletes reduced 32 raw data points into eight higher-order themes or clusters. An important consideration, however, is that content analysis should be viewed as a coding procedure, not as a type of statistical test (Sanders & Pinhey, 1983). It is a useful method for categorizing people's statements into specific concepts or frameworks (Patton, 1990), but it is simply concerned with transforming and studying data, and the information obtained frequently remains at a descriptive level for qualitative research purposes (e.g., Dale, 2000; Park, 2000, 2004).

Procedure

Individual meetings were arranged with the coaches of the four participating teams to explain the research purpose and procedures. The coaches were able to ask any questions at that time. In keeping with their wishes, though, the research protocol was later explained to the players by the coaches themselves and the data were collected at a second team meeting after an explanatory letter from the researcher was read by each player. The letter explained the basic purpose of the study and that there were no correct or incorrect answers to the questions. It also explained that all responses would be kept confidential, and that the players' responses to the FNE questions were to reflect their self-presentational thoughts in a soccer context. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of a coding system on the questionnaire forms.

Results

The players' mean score on the FNE was 35.8, with a standard deviation of 6.44. This is in the upper half of total possible scores and, as will be addressed later, implies that the sampled Japanese intercollegiate competitors had a relatively high fear of negative evaluation. The follow-up questions provide further details. First, conceptual analysis of the players' soccer-specific self-presentational concerns yielded 44 scoring units. The mean number of concerns for each participant was 0.73, with a range of 0 to 4, and this produced 13 conceptual clusters in total. Three clusters pertained to individual concerns and 10 were team-oriented, while 12 were expressed in positive terms (e.g., players *wanted* spectators to enjoy watching) and one was negative in nature (e.g., players *didn't want* their weaknesses exposed/to look like a bad player). The strongest consideration was the wish for one's team to show spirit, determination, and discipline (12 scoring units, or 27.3%). This was followed by participants wanting to be thought of as good players (15.9%) and wanting to show effort/that one is playing his best (13.6%). The remaining categories were endorsed to varying degrees, with three of the reported concerns associated with only one scoring unit. These

findings are best viewed in tabular form, and Table 1 shows all of the relevant clusters for soccer-specific self-presentational concerns and the corresponding number of scoring units and percentages.

The second follow-up question sought to identify the specific people upon whom players most wanted to leave good impressions. For the purposes of this research, they are referred to as "target people" or "targets." The analysis of all 60 players' responses produced 27 scoring units, leaving a mean of 0.45 target people per player and a range once again of 0 to 4. Eleven categories of target people emerged. The most frequently endorsed category was general spectators, which accounted for 11 scoring units (40.7%), while the other main targets were comprised of teammates in general (14.8%) and players' parents/families (11.1%). Table 2 presents all of the categories of target people and their corresponding scoring units and percentages.

Discussion

This investigation addressed the self-presentational concerns of intercollegiate soccer players in Japan as well as the specific nature and target people of those concerns. The major objective was to open up lines

Table 1 *Soccer-Specific Self-Presentational Concerns as Reported by the Players*

Cluster (Reported Concern)	No. of Scoring Units	Percentage (%)
Want my team to show spirit, determination, and discipline	12	27.3
Want people to think I'm a good player	7	15.9
Want to show effort/that I'm playing my best	6	13.6
Want spectators to enjoy watching	3	6.8
Want people to think my team/university is the best	3	6.8
Want to win/be successful	2	4.5
Want to show a good team atmosphere	2	4.5
Want to show good team technique and tactics	2	4.5
Don't want my weaknesses exposed/to look like a bad player	2	4.5
Want to show character/conduct ourselves properly (off field)	2	4.5
Want my team to score many/enough goals	1	2.3
Want my team to show development/improvement	1	2.3
Want my team to appear fair and sportsmanlike	1	2.3
Total	44	99.8

Table 2 *Target People of Soccer-Specific Self-Presentational Concerns as Reported by the Players*

Reported Target People	No. of Scoring Units	Percentage (%)
General spectators	11	40.7
Teammates in general	4	14.8
Parents/family	3	11.1
Self	2	7.4
Veteran teammates	1	3.7
Teammates playing the same position	1	3.7
Friends	1	3.7
Students from own university	1	3.7
Students from other universities	1	3.7
Opposing players/teams	1	3.7
Referees	1	3.7
Total	27	99.9

of enquiry that have thus far excluded East Asian athletes. With respect to the overall level of evaluative concern, the mean score of 35.8 on the FNE can be contrasted with two different sets of data for Western soccer participants. Specifically, Geisler and Leith (2005) obtained FNE scores of 32.0 and 32.1 for Canadian and German players, respectively, which might be interpreted to suggest that the Japanese competitors in the current study reported a comparatively high fear of negative evaluation. This helps to corroborate the notion that maintaining "face" is an important part of Japanese life (Whiting, 1977) and that "face" extends to Japanese sport, presumably through a cultural sense of obligation and a corresponding pressure to perform. That is, the unpleasant ramifications of shame that Hayashi and Weiss (1994) associate with athletic failure in Japan (and letting teammates and supporters down) may include concerns about unfavourable evaluations from other people and the resulting negative self-presentation. Looking further, it is also possible that shame and the loss of "face" in Japanese sport are linked with unpleasant feelings of embarrassment. To illustrate, Singelis and Sharkey's (1995) research into the influence of culture and self-construal (or self-perception) found that the more interdependent or collective self-construal characteristic of Asian-

Americans was positively related to embarrassability, while the independent self-construal of European-Americans showed a negative correlation. The authors thus proposed that embarrassability be viewed in a broader cultural context that considers its function as an adaptive mechanism, and when combined with the findings obtained here, the implication is that fear of negative evaluation may be a product of a strong susceptibility to embarrassment in the collectivistic Japanese sports environment.

It must be stated, of course, that the FNE addressed a general fear of negative evaluation as it applied to sport. The soccer-specific considerations in the follow-up questions, on the other hand, were directed at the players' upcoming game and give a more detailed account of their competition-related self-presentational thinking. To start, it is noteworthy that the most highly endorsed cluster showed a wish for the players' teams to show spirit, determination, and discipline. This calls to mind the budo notion of "seishin" or spirit that Pempel (1998) and Kelly (1998) ascribe to Japanese sport, just as the reported need to demonstrate proper conduct off the field underlines the importance in Japan of "shikata," or the concept of the "correct way" (Berglund, 2004). A more contemporary description of this type of thinking might be the notion of "TPO" (time, place, and occasion), a reference to widely

understood social rules that dictate appropriate behaviours for particular situations and settings, including the competitive sports environment. The emphasis on spirit and determination can also be applied to the fact that only one of the 13 clusters was expressed in negative terms (“*Don’t* want my weaknesses exposed/to look like a bad player”); the others showed a positive or proactive spirit and indicated what players *wanted* to achieve. Lastly, there was evidence of collectivistic thinking in that 10 clusters were centered on team-oriented considerations, while the hope that spectators would enjoy watching could be attributed to a collectivistic sense of obligation to perform well for one’s supporters. Overall, then, the pattern of results lends support to the premise that the players’ self-presentational concerns had a characteristically Japanese tone.

Nevertheless, there were signs of personal/individual considerations as well. The desire to be seen as a good player was reported by 15.9% of the participants while 13.6% wanted to show effort/that they were playing their best, which is similar to other findings for Western sports competitors (e.g., Bray et al., 2000; Geisler & Leith, 2005; Wilson & Eklund, 1998). In this way, the results also give partial support to the “athletic imperatives” view of Chelladurai, Imamura, Yamaguchi, Oinuma, & Miyauchi (1988), or the idea that universally endorsed performance requirements in sport lead to a degree of cultural congruence in various thoughts about competition. This congruence would appear to encompass certain feelings about self-presentation, but at the same time, it does not preclude the fact (as mentioned above) that many of the reported evaluative concerns could be seen as culturally unique.

The second part of the follow-up question, which addressed the target people of players’ concerns, revealed that general spectators made up the most highly endorsed cluster, followed by teammates in general and parents/family. The underlying message is that the players showed a similar concern about evaluations from both knowledgeable and less knowledgeable spectators, as was the case with Bray et al.’s (2000) youth skiers. Among the current

participants, though, the importance attached to general spectators can be associated once again with the budo-oriented motive to show spirit and discipline when playing (the most frequently listed self-presentational concern) and with the feeling that spectators should enjoy watching (the fourth most frequent concern). In practical terms, these attitudes are manifested in the characteristic act of bowing when players leave the playing field after substitutions and at the conclusion of games. As De Mente (1993) and Feiler (1991) point out, bowing in Japan connotes feelings of obligation, respect, and humility, and it is often meant to earn a reciprocal respect from people upon whom a good impression is to be made. It can also be construed as a sign of gratitude in sports settings for coming to watch one perform, and from that perspective, it is consistent with the study’s finding that the players attached a great deal of importance to social evaluations from spectators.

Teammates in general and parents/family received the second and third highest ranks, respectively, while opposing players/teams were poorly endorsed as self-presentation targets. This suggests that outside of the sense of obligation that was probably felt toward spectators, the players were mainly concerned about impressions left with peers and members of their closest circles, which would explain why the categories of teammates in general, veteran teammates, teammates playing the same position, and parents/family could be combined to account for 33.3% of the scoring units. To better understand these results, it is necessary to consider the Japanese concept of in-group (“*miuchi*”) versus out-group (“*soto*”), a theme of membership and exclusivity in Japanese life that is illustrated in Hasegawa’s (2005) research on cultural self-construal and self-presentation. After extracting 19 desirable self-images from a pilot study, Hasegawa showed that Japanese undergraduates with an interdependent/collective self-construal had a greater tendency than individualists to manage their self-images among in-group members, and less desire to do so with out-groups. In competitive sport, opposing players and teams constitute out-groups. Therefore, the Japanese societal emphasis on this in- and out-group dichotomy is the most probable reason that

opponents were low on the list of important self-presentation target people and why the combined teammate categories plus parents/family were ranked more highly.

Surprisingly, none of the participants listed coaches as self-presentation targets. One explanation might be found in Polster's (2004) comparative essay on sports management and coaching in Germany and Japan, which claims that Japanese coaches do not get as much social respect as their German counterparts (largely because of differences in the two countries' sports management systems) and that traditional Japanese group dynamics prevent strong interpersonal coach-athlete cooperation. Similar reasoning is offered by Yoshida et al. (1998), whose cross-cultural research with university athletes from Japan, Canada, China, Germany, Russia, South Africa, and U.S.A. suggested that Japanese coaches do not closely monitor their relationships with all of the athletes on their teams. Nevertheless, one could reasonably expect a proclivity on the part of the Japanese players, as with all players in team sports, to leave favourable impressions on coaches since it is the coaches who determine one's playing time and status within the team. Furthermore, Geisler and Leith (2007) showed that relationships with coaches and issues associated with coaching decisions were notable sources of stress for student-athletes in Japan. Consequently, the absence of coaches on the Japanese list of target people might best be treated as a spurious result that is peculiar to the sample, the question, or the free-form method of data collection. It could be, for instance, that the players regarded coaches as a "given" or automatic concern that did not need to be listed. Thus, to examine the importance of coaches as a self-presentation target among Japanese athletes, future research might wish to use surveys that address coaches directly, as in Bray et al.'s (2000) series of questions on how important it is to ski well when (parents, friends, other competitors, strangers) are watching.

In summary, the results reveal that the Japanese intercollegiate soccer players in this study felt a reasonably high level of self-presentational concern that included general as well as performance-specific thoughts. A number of concerns could be recounted

as the common desire to look competent and competitive, which is not unlike previous research findings and which lends an element of support to the notion of universal "athletic imperatives" (Chelladurai et al., 1988) regarding evaluative concern in sport. By the same token, the results contained patterns that seemed characteristically Japanese. For example, players' thoughts were primarily team-oriented and directed toward people associated with in-groups, while less concern was given to those outside of the players' inner circles. In addition, there was an emphasis on showing spirit and discipline as well as proper conduct off the field, all of which reinforce common perceptions about obligation, maintaining "face," and collectivistic thinking in Japanese sport.

To continue the line of enquiry initiated here, three main recommendations are offered for future research. First, it would be useful to address the level and nature of evaluative concerns for both elite and lower-level soccer players outside of the academic environment. This would shed more light on self-presentational thoughts among a broad spectrum of Japanese players and would help determine if the current findings are a specific function of the intercollegiate environment. Furthermore, whether or not these patterns of evaluative concern can be attributed to Japanese athletes in a wider array of sports is a question for follow-up work with competitors from an assortment of team and individual activities with both Japanese and foreign origins.

The second recommendation has to do with self-presentational concern and competitive anxiety. Given the well-researched links between these constructs in Western athletes, it is necessary to assess their relationship among sports competitors in Japan. Further still, investigators have shown a positive relationship between psychological skills usage and reductions in competitive anxiety (e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2001; Hale & Whitehouse, 1998; Hanton & Jones, 1999; Mamassis & Doganis, 2004), but Peters and Williams (2006) point out that there is a need to determine whether psychological skills training can facilitate the mental readiness and performance of athletes from collectivistic cultural backgrounds as they have been shown to do for those from

individualistic societies. This should include cognitive interventions that are aimed at reducing evaluative concern, since the effects of such programs may not necessarily be facilitative for Japanese players.

To elaborate, numerous studies have indicated that self-criticism and negative self-talk, for instance, are more prevalent in Japanese and other East Asian cultures than in Western nations, but there is also evidence that attempting to terminate these processes can actually increase anxiety and hinder the performance of athletes from collectivistic backgrounds (Heine, 2001; Heine & Lehman, 1999; Marsella, Walker, & Johnson, 1973; Peters & Williams, 2006; Yanagida & Marsella, 1978). Similarly, Yamauchi (1986) has suggested that, due to fears about losing affiliation with one's group through individual success, most Japanese people avoid expressing pride for successful outcomes while readily acknowledging their own responsibility for poor performance. All of the aforementioned phenomena have self-presentational roots, and as a result, it is possible that fear of negative evaluation may also provide an adaptive function for Japanese athletes in a manner that resembles what Singelis and Sharkey (1995) have suggested for embarrassability. That is, the specific nature of evaluative concern among Japanese competitors may help them to stay focused on tactical plans and performance objectives while reducing the individualistic and ego-driven pressure to stand out personally. Therefore, the third recommendation notes the importance of conducting research into the actual performance effects of self-presentational concerns in Japanese athletes, and the positive or negative role that psychological skills training can play, before instructing coaches to apply strategies that moderate self-presentational thinking. In the meantime, coaches can minimize the worry of athletes with concerns about others' expectations by simply letting them know what those expectations are (Lorimer, 2006). In other words, allowing Japanese athletes to respond to self-presentational concerns in ways that are most natural may be wiser than encouraging interventions that might reduce their importance and hinder their role in adaptation.

The discussion closes with limitations of the

research protocol. As in all field studies, the sampling procedure was based in part on accessibility considerations and the willingness of players and coaches to participate. Moreover, the number of participants was relatively small, and some of the clusters that emerged from the content analysis received only one scoring unit. Therefore, the results cannot effectively be generalized beyond the current sample. Second, interpretation of responses to the follow-up questions was limited by the truthfulness of respondents and by the possibility of subjective bias in the formation of conceptual clusters. These are limitations of any type of content analysis, however, and of qualitative research in general (Anshel, 2001). The final point addresses the selected method of analysis. The study was restricted to descriptive information, which means that instead of drawing objective conclusions, the findings simply offer preliminary insights that can serve as a backdrop for new empirical questions and hypotheses as well as more in-depth cross-cultural study. Nevertheless, extended research could further advance the understanding of evaluative concerns in Japanese sports participants by employing more rigorous methods of data analysis.

This investigation considered the evaluative or self-presentational concerns of competitive athletes in Japan, a seemingly unaddressed question with little research precedent to date. Both original and follow-up studies, like those suggested above, should open new doors for researchers while contributing to the existing body of literature from a non-Western perspective. They should also offer practical insights that are meaningful to coaches and counselors in Japan as well as to Japanese sports competitors themselves.

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