The Potential of Cultural Psychology in Sports Settings

1 **The Title**

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Abstract

Different cultures have different societal structures and different communication style. Additionally, how sports are organized vary from country to country in terms of structure. These factors make athletes across the world demonstrate different psychological characteristics. Despite these differences, these cultural impacts have been paid little attention to, and psychological universality has been explored in the field of sport psychology even though the importance of cultural differences is remained. This review article explores the consideration of cultural psychology within the domain of sport psychology. Specifically, this article compares East Asian culture and North American culture from an achievement motivation perspective. Self-construal, regulatory focus theory, self-determination theory, and achievement goal theory are investigated in order to compare the two cultures. It is recommended that future researchers in the domain of sport psychology refer to both cultural differences as well as psychological universality to deepen insight into the sport psychology field. Practitioners in sport psychology such as mental performance consultants and coaches, are also suggested to consider cultural differences in order to effectively communicate with players and implement more effective interventions.

Key words: cultural psychology, sport psychology, achievement motivation

1. Introduction

Two main focuses of sport psychology have been performance enhancement and mental health maintenance (Moore, 2007). To achieve these two goals, sport psychology has advanced by incorporating theories often used in parenting psychology such as social psychology and cognitive psychology. For example, many sports psychology studies have applied parenting psychology theories such as Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) and Lazarus' stress theory (1999) to sports settings. By using these theories and models from parenting psychology, sport psychology has rapidly advanced.

However, sport psychology has generally failed to consider culture as an important factor and few sport psychology researchers have touched on cultural psychology in sport settings (e.g., Blodgett et al., 2015; Hacker and Mann, 2017; Ryba and Wright, 2005). research that has considered cultural variation suggested that cultural contexts are important when tailoring effective interventions for sports athletes. In fact, Schinke et al. (2016) suggest that an understanding of culture is necessary to be a competent mental performance consultant. However, cultural psychology research in sports contexts is still insufficient. In 1990, Duda and Allison pointed out the importance of cross-cultural research in sports. However, researchers (Peters and Williams, 2009; Kamphoff et al., 2010) have continuously pointed out a dearth of cross-cultural psychology research in sports settings since then (for review, Blodgett et al., 2015). This gap in the literature should be addressed accordingly. Therefore, this article reinforced and explores the potential effectiveness of the field of cultural psychology in sport settings.

Cultural psychology research has mainly compared Western and Eastern cultures (c.f., Chang et al., 2011; Riemer et al., 2014) to speculate the universality of psychological processes

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(c.f., Henrich et al., 2010), and found significant cultural differences in cognition, motivation, and emotion (e.g., Kitayama et al., 2000; Nisbett et al., 2001; Weisz et al., 1984). Thus, this article compares East Asian and North American cultures from an achievement motivation perspective in sport settings even though the importance of understanding of other cultures such as African or South American cultures remains.

This article specifically considers regulatory focus theory, self-determination theory, and achievement goal theory to evaluate any observed cultural differences in achievement motivation. These three theories have been chosen because they are directly related to Fryns et al. (1983)'s definition of achievement meaning. According to the definition, achievement meaning consists of three components: goal, self, and instrumental behaviour. Implicit theory (Dweck and Legett, 1988) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) has been also investigated in the field of achievement motivation in sport settings, but implicit theory is defined as a meaning system, and attribution theory is associated with interpretation of received outcome. With the importance of these theories remaining, this article explains regulatory focus theory, self-determination theory, and achievement goal theory as these theories directly are related to the definition of achievement meaning by Fryns (1983). This article first shows cultural difference in self-construal which causes cultural differences in motivation. Then, each theory is explained with potential cultural differences in sport settings.

2. Culture and motivation

2.1. Cultural difference in self-construal

According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), there are two self-construals: independence and interdependence. Individuals in independent cultures, such as people in the U.S. and Canada,

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consider themselves as distinct, unique individuals. These individuals try to maintain independence from their group and tend to strive for their own achievements and aspirations. On the other hand, in interdependent cultures, such as Japan and China, people define themselves as part of a web of interpersonal relationships and try to fit in with their group to maintain social harmony. They are also sensitive to responsibilities and obligations. As a result, they try to avoid social disruptions and behaviours that may disappoint others. The following section explains cultural differences in achievement motivation by using the Markus and Kitayama (1991)'s self-construal.

2.2. Cultural difference from the regulatory focus theory perspective

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998) is one of the motivation theories commonly referred to in cultural psychology. According to Higgins (1997, 1998), there are two regulatory foci: promotion focus and prevention focus. Promotion focus is concerned with nurturance, strong ideals, gain/no-gain situations; it is sensitive to the presence or absence of positive outcomes. On the other hand, prevention focus is concerned with security needs, strong oughts, and loss/no-loss situations; it is sensitive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes. People with promotion focus prefer to use eagerness means, which attempt to maximize the presence of positive outcomes, while those with a prevention focus prefer to use vigilance means, which aim to minimize the presence of loss (Higgins, 2000, 2002). When each regulatory orientation uses its preferred means, people are more motivated and feel the value of what they are doing. this is called "regulatory fit" (Higgins, 2000, 2002).

People within independent cultures such as Canada or the United States tend to have a promotion focus, while those within interdependent cultures like Japan and China tend to have a prevention focus (Lockwood et al., 2005). According to Lockwood et al., (2005), the cultural

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task in independent cultures is to enhance oneself and achieve success. Therefore, they are sensitive to positive outcomes, which results in holding promotion focus. On the other hand, in interdependent cultures, social obligations are emphasized and people within the cultures tend to avoid situations where the social obligations and duties are not achieved. Due to this tendency, people in East Asia tend to maintain prevention focus.

Research in a non-sport psychology field has revealed that people in different cultures are motivated by different feedback depending on their unique regulatory focus (e.g., Sawyer et al., 2019). For example, Kung et al. (2016) conducted a series of studies to examine the effect of regulatory fit on motivation. University students from both Hong Kong and the United States read a scenario in which they were told a company they work for lost profits due to the participants' mistake. Then, they were told that they would be subject to an observation period so the company could assess their job performance and decide whether to retain them or not. In the scenario, the participants received one of two types of feedback. One feedback type had gain-framed feedback which indicated that this observation period was to see whether they would perform well because every team member's performance can impact group performance and whether a team is successful or not. The other feedback type was loss-framed feedback which indicated that they had an observation period to see whether the participants would perform poorly because team members can successfully prevent poor group performance. The results showed that the Hong Kong students, who tend to have prevention focus were motivated more to work during the observation period when they received loss-framed feedback. On the other hand, the American students, those with promotion focus, were more motivated when they read gain-framed feedback. This study demonstrates that effective feedback is different depending on the cultures of the individuals and their regulatory focus. Some research (e.g., Freitas and Higgins,

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2002; Spiegel et al., 2004) has replicated those results in which the eagerness means and the vigilance means motivate respective regulatory foci. These studies indicate that regulatory fit is imperative for individuals from different cultures to be motivated.

Based on the above research on regulatory fit, East Asian athletes might be motivated in different and unique ways because they might tend to have prevention focus in comparison to North American athletes. For example, the interpretation of negative feedback might have different effects on the motivation of athletes from different countries. In this sense, people from each country should understand their own psychological characteristics and discover their own methods to increase motivation.

2.3.1 Cultural difference from the self-determination theory perspective

Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) has been used by many motivation researchers in sport psychology. According to self-determination theory, motivation can be classified into intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. When people are intrinsically motivated, they often interpret the activity as interesting, and they will continue to perform the activity without external consequences such as rewards or punishments. When people are extrinsically motivated, they are less self-determined. Depending on the degree of how autonomous or controlled people are, extrinsic motivation is divided into four motivations: integration, identification, introjection, and external regulation. When people have integration motivation, they identify the importance of the activity and integrate this identification with other aspects of the self. Identification motivation is motivation in which people identify the value of the behaviour. With introjection motivation, people are motivated by contingent consequences self-administered by individuals such as guilt or pride. External regulation is defined as motivation in which people's behaviours are controlled by specific external contingencies such

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as tangible rewards or the avoidance of punishment. Amotivation is not self-determined at all. Ryan and Deci (2000) categorized intrinsic, integration, and identification motivation as autonomous motivations because these three motivations are consistent with volition and choice. On the other hand, introjected and external motivations were classified as controlled motivation as these motivations were not self-determined but occur where people feel external pressures.

2.3.2 Relational and personal motivation

Based on self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), Gore and Cross (2006) further advanced the autonomous motivation classification by differentiating relational autonomous reasons (RARs) from personal autonomous reasons (PARs) in the context of goal pursuit. According to them, RARs are defined as motivation related to goals with close interpersonal relationships, while PARs are explained by the original definition of autonomous motivations. People with RARs feel the importance of relationships and are willing to give extra commitment and effort towards them. In other words, RARs are motivated by the enjoyment of having close relationships. For example, an athlete with relational autonomous motivation may play the sport because a coach makes it more enjoyable. On the other hand, people with relational controlled motivation engage in an activity because other people demand it, or because they want to avoid negative consequences from their close relationships such as anger and disappointment from significant others. For instance, people with relational controlled motivation play a sport because they do not want to disappoint their significant others. These motivations are distinct from PARs and personal controlled motivations because PARs and personal controlled motivations are not associated with significant interpersonal relationships.

Regarding to the relationship between cultures and self-determination theory, RARs may be related to interdependence whereas PARs might be associated with independence in self-

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1 construal. For example, interdependent athletes might consider RARs as a more important
2 motivation because they identify themselves with interpersonal relationships, while PARs might
3 be more imperative for independent athletes because they define themselves distinct from others.
4 In fact, Gore and Cross (2006) and Gore et al. (2009) showed that interdependence in self-
5 construal and RARs were positively related to each other.

6 However, some research has indicated that RARs are higher in North American people
7 than in East Asians (e.g., Gore et al., 2009). Gore et al. (2009) revealed that Americans showed
8 higher RARs than Japanese. One of the methodological issues that led to these results is the
9 method of RARs and PARs calculation. The majority of research has measured RARs and PARs
10 by subtracting the scores of relational and personal controlled reasons from RARs scores and
11 PARs scores respectively. In this method, it is possible that Japanese participants felt higher
12 relational controlled reasons than the American participants, which resulted in a lower RARs
13 index. East Asians may ideally want to pursue RARs more than PARs even though the
14 environment fosters relational controlled motivations. Future research should investigate the
15 ideal motivation behind the activity they are engaging in as well as actual motivation. Also,
16 future research should use row data of RARs and PARs instead of subtracting each controlled
17 reasons from RARs and PARs.

18 Lastly, another important topic might be to investigate the functions of RARs and PARs
19 in each culture. Previous literature has supported the positive functions of autonomous
20 motivations in sports (low burnout: Harris et al, 2014; Morano et al., 2020; Moen et al., 2015,
21 low anxiety: Amado et al., 2019; Chu et al., 2018, low maladaptive perfectionism: Vincent et al.,
22 2020, high satisfaction: Martin-Albo et al., 2012, high commitment: Pulido et al., 2018). Based
23 on these findings, RARs might be more functional than PARs in East Asia while PARs might be

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1 more functional than RARs in North America because East Asia and North America have
2 different self-construals.

3 Overall, individuals may tend to have different autonomous motivations depending on the
4 interdependent and independent cultures in which they are immersed. These tendencies may be
5 applicable to athletes. That is, East Asian athletes might tend to have interdependent self-
6 construal, which leads them to have relational autonomous reasons to play sports as an ideal and
7 functional motivation. On the other hand, North Americans athletes may be inclined to have
8 independent self-construal, which may result in having personal autonomous reasons as an ideal
9 and functional motivation.

10 **2.4. The relationship between achievement goal theory and culture**

11 Goal settings are vital to motivate oneself, and achievement goal theory has been applied
12 in sport psychology. Based on Elliot and McGregor (2001), an achievement goal is defined as
13 cognitive-dynamic focus of behaviour related to competence. Achievement goals have two
14 dimensions. The first is a performance-mastery dimension; a performance goal focuses on the
15 demonstration of competence relevant to others, while a mastery goal focuses on the
16 development of competence through mastery of the skills. The other dimension is an approach-
17 avoidance dimension. Individuals with approach goals tend to behave in ways that prioritize
18 achieving success, whereas individuals with avoidance goals tend to behave in ways that avoid
19 failures. Based on the two dimensions, Elliot and McGregor (2001) created four achievement
20 goals: performance-approach, performance-avoidance, mastery-approach, and mastery-
21 avoidance.

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1 In sport psychology, many researchers have used this theory and related it to motivation
2 and mental health. Currently, research on achievement goal theory in sport psychology claims
3 that mastery goals are more effective for performance and mental health compared to
4 performance goals (see Lochbaum, et al., 2016). In terms of avoidance goals, however, no
5 consensus has been reached in the literature. For example, Li et al. (2011) showed that the
6 mastery-avoidance goal did not relate to intrinsic motivation or performance either negatively or
7 positively. Research by Kinoshita et al. (2020) also demonstrated that mastery avoidance goals
8 were not related to goal attainments in either direction. Therefore, the effect of avoidance goals
9 in achievement goal theory has not been fully revealed.

10 One factor which differentiates the effectiveness of goal types might be self-construal.
11 Some studies examined the relationship between types of goals and cultures. For example, Elliot
12 et al. (2001) asked participants to write down eight personal goals for which they were striving
13 for. The results showed that South Korean participants wrote down more avoidance goals than
14 the participants from the United States. More interestingly, the avoidance goals of the South
15 Korean participants were not significantly correlated to subjective well-being even though they
16 were negatively related to subjective well-being as was the case for the Americans.

17 Another study, directed by Hamamura et al. (2009), also supports this claim. In this
18 study, the participants read a list detailing 20 short events. The events were classified as the
19 presence of positive outcomes (e.g., gorgeous weather for hiking), the absence of positive
20 outcomes (e.g., a favorite class was canceled), the presence of negative outcomes (e.g., stuck in a
21 traffic jam), the absence of negative outcomes (e.g., did better than anticipated on a test) or
22 neutral outcomes (e.g., went to a post office and mailed some letters). After reading them,
23 participants performed a distraction task. Then, they were unexpectedly asked to write down the

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1 events they remembered. Japanese participants remembered avoidance events (those related to
2 the presence or absence of negative events) more than approach events (those related to the
3 presence or absence of positive events), while the American participants recalled approach
4 events more than avoidance events. The findings indirectly indicate that the Japanese may be
5 more interested in and pay more attention to avoidance events while Americans are more
6 interested in and pay more attention to approach events.

7 These studies imply that East Asians may tend to set avoidance goals, while North
8 Americans tend to set approach goals. These tendencies can be explained important factors in
9 each culture: self-esteem and face. Self-esteem is imperative in independent culture (see Heine
10 and Hamamura, 2007) and to maintain or increase self-esteem, people in North America may
11 tend to have approach goals (Hamamura et al., 2009). On the other hand, in interdependent
12 cultures, to maintain face, which is others' impressions on self is essential (see Heine and
13 Hamamura, 2007). To maintain their face, people should pay attention to failure because face is
14 difficult to gain, but easy to lose (Hamamura et al., 2009). Therefore, people in interdependent
15 cultures should pay attention to avoiding failure. In line with this claim, Elliot et al. (2001)
16 indicated that avoidance goals may not be maladaptive to maintaining mental health for East
17 Asians while they are detrimental for North Americans.

18 Therefore, self-construal may mediate between achievement goal type and motivation,
19 and between achievement goal type and performance. For example, if individuals in North
20 American culture have approach goals, it may increase their performance and motivation. On the
21 other hand, for individuals in East Asian culture, avoidance goals may be effective in increasing
22 performance and motivation. This could be an important future topic to gain deeper insight into
23 motivation in sport settings and to understand the diversity of motivations in sport settings.

3. Additional considerations

It is worth mentioning that we also need to consider psychological characteristics that are required to play a sport when contrasting cultures in a sport psychology setting. For example, regardless of culture, a player needs to have a certain degree of aggressiveness to play a contact sport effectively such as football, or rugby. Therefore, mental performance consultants should consider psychological processes which each sport requires the players to obtain in addition to cultural consideration.

Next, the studies introduced here solely used university students as their participants. Therefore, it is still unclear whether psychological characteristics are identical between university students and sports athletes from the same culture. Even though previous studies have implied that people in different cultures have different psychological processes, the first step to deepen the understanding of cultural differences in the field of sport psychology would be to investigate whether the results in cultural psychology can be replicated in the population of sports athletes.

4. Conclusion

Until now, cultural psychology has been paid little attention in sport psychology (Blodgett et al., 2015; Kamphoff et al., 2010; Peters and Williams, 2009) even though case studies and qualitative studies help demonstrate an understanding of the importance of culture in sport settings (e.g., Schinke et al., 2013). As demonstrated in this review, empirical evidence is necessary to deepen the insights of cultural understanding in sport psychology.

Research in sport psychology has mainly explored universality in performance enhancement. However, research in cultural psychology suggests that there may be several ways

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to obtain peak performance just as there are many different pathways to climb to the top of a mountain; Depending on culture, the ways to enhance performance should be contextualized differently. In this sense, future research should focus on psychological differences as well as on psychological universality to enhance performance.

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