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Those Fighting with Burden on Their Back: Elite Taekwondo Players' Perfectionism and Fear of Failure

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A) conception and design of the study
B) acquisition of data
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Abstract

This study aimed to examine levels of perfectionism and fear of failure of elite athletes in the Turkish national taekwondo team through qualitative research methods. A total of 11 national team athletes (6 females and 5 males) participated in the research. The data were collected using a semi-structured interview technique. In the study, opinions, emotions and thoughts of elite national team athletes about the concept of perfectionism and fear of failure were determined. In the theme of perfectionism, there were 7 categories and 35 codes; in the theme of fear of failure, 6 categories and 36 codes were revealed. It might be concluded that perfectionism and fear of failure have a more complex structure than it seems for elite and high-ranking athletes, and this might affect their motivation in many positive and negative ways. In addition, it was found that when the coach is a family member, two concerns of athletes (the coach is upset due to failure, and the family is upset due to failure) come together. Therefore, those who are both a coach and parent should be more careful with their children/athletes. It should also be kept in mind that while perfectionism is a great source of motivation and self-confidence, it has the potential to make athletes drop out of sports.

Keywords: Perfectionism, fear of failure, elite athlete, qualitative method

Introduction

Perfectionism is generally defined as "setting unreasonable high standards and striving to meet those standards" (Slade & Owens, 1998). Frost et al. (1990) state that perfectionism not only involves setting high standards for achievement but also includes a tendency for individuals to excessively criticize their own performance. Perfectionism is a commonly observed phenomenon in many fields (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009), especially in those that require competition and achievement, such as sports (Dunn et al., 2005). Moreover, elite athletes often mention perfectionism in interviews (Hill et al., 2015).

The effects of perfectionism on performance have always been an issue of discussion. While some researchers define the concept as a psychological trait that makes an "Olympic Medalist" (Gould et al., 2002), others opine that it is a maladaptive trait that hampers athletic performance rather than empowering it (Anshel & Mansouri, 2005; Flett & Hewitt, 2005).

In a study focusing on perfectionism in sports and training, Flett and Hewitt (2005) report that perfectionism in sports is a paradoxical issue, claiming that competitive athletes are often under pressure due to their aspirations to be successful. They feel that they need to be almost perfect at all times, and these attempts to reach unattainable levels

of achievement might result in pessimism, frustration and self-defeat. Dunn et al. (2002) believe that perfectionism consists of four dimensions: personal standards, perceived parental pressure perceived coach pressure, and concern over mistakes. Frost and Henderson (1991) found that athletes who are overly concerned about mistakes have higher levels of competitive trait anxiety. The findings also revealed that perfectionism, which is often characterized by having doubts about behaviors, has a negative correlation with confidence. Zinsser et al. (2001) investigated how perfectionism affects the way an athlete responds to failure and how the athlete enjoys involvement in sports in general. The researchers concluded that self-reproach, self-criticism attitudes, and dissatisfaction with performance quality might result in a decrease in enthusiasm in sports and even increase drop-out rates. Finally, they claimed that experiencing a permanent fear of failure due to concerns about past mistakes might hinder concentration and affect athletes' performance by distracting them.

In some studies, parents and trainers have been reported as important sources of the drive for perfectionism in athletes (Gotwals et al., 2003; McArdle & Duda, 2004; Ommundsen et al., 2005). Dunn et al. (2006) claimed that coach pressure might be more important than parental pressure, since coaches might have a more direct effect on athletic performance than parents. The role of parents and coaches as providers of performance-related feedback and expectations for athletes is particularly intriguing for researchers studying perfectionism in sports. This is because the idea that individuals' perfectionistic tendencies can be influenced both in sports (Appleton & Curran, 2016; Madigan et al., 2019) and non-sports settings (Flett et al., 2002; Perera & Chang, 2015) by socially-driven pressures from significant others is believed to play a crucial role. Furthermore, in a study investigating the perceptions of adolescent and adult athletes regarding the pressures to perform perfectly emanating from parents and coaches, researchers observed that the perceived performance pressures from parents tended to diminish as the athletes' age increased. Conversely, the perceived performance pressures from coaches tended to escalate as the athletes grew older (Dunn et al, 2022).

When perfectionists – especially those with high levels of perfectionistic concerns – mainly focus on evaluation, they might be vulnerable to negative consequences, especially shame and embarrassment. The meanings placed on mistakes and failures as well as athletes' perceptions and comments might result in shame and embarrassment in the case of failure (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009). Therefore, many researchers conducting studies on sports where assessments are quite important reported a correlation between perfectionism and fear of failure (Frost & Henderson, 1991; Stoeber & Becker, 2008, Kaye et al., 2008; Sagar & Stoeber, 2009).

Fear of failure is defined as an instinct to avoid failure when one is assessed and as an instinct based on possible embarrassment in the case of failure (Atkinson, 1957; McClelland et al., 1953). It might also be defined as the "tendency to prevent inadequacy due to expected embarrassment and despise in case of failure" (Kaye et al., 2008). Fear of failure has a multi-dimensional structure that involves various consequences related to failure (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007). More specifically, what causes fear is the consequences of failure rather than failure itself (Conroy, 2003). Fear of failure forms a structure related to achievements due to some negative consequences within or outside of a physical activity area. Development of this fear occurs through the following interpersonal patterns: (a) family structure, (b) parents' expectations for independence and competency, and (c) parent-child communication (Conroy, 2001). Fear of failure was analyzed in five dimensions by Conroy et al. (2002): fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, fear of uncertain future, fear of important others' losing interest, and fear of upsetting important others.

Fear of failure constitutes a substantial emotional burden for children and adults, and many aspects of their lives are vulnerable to fear of failure. Children learn (through verbal and non-verbal communication) that a successful performance brings additional love and approval, and failure may result in withdrawal, so avoiding a possible failure is a significant priority for children (Conroy, 2001). Fear of failure was also reported to be an excuse for dropping out of sports activities (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007). In addition, fear of failure was associated with performance anxiety in sports (Conroy & Elliot, 2004).

Perfectionism anxiety was found to have close correlations with fear of failure in athletes (Frost & Henderson, 1991; Stoeber & Becker, 2008). The findings showed a positive correlation between fear of failure and two dimensions of perfectionism (perfectionist strivings and perfectionist concerns), which is a signal for the correlation between perfectionism and fear of failure in sports (Kaye et al., 2008).

Considering all of the research mentioned above, the aim of the current study is to determine perfectionism and fear of failure levels in elite athletes and investigate their experiences with perfectionism and fear of failure through qualitative research methods. The study uses an interview design and tries to find answers to a few important research questions. However, the key question is: What are the experiences of elite taekwondo players in terms of perfectionism and fear of failure?

Methods

Study Design

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. The reason for preferring a qualitative methodology in this study is to

deal with the problems comprehensively and in a multi-dimensional way as the events and phenomena individuals experience may not be as simple and one-dimensional as they seem (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The objective of employing the phenomenological method in this study was to investigate perfectionism and fear of failure within the context of Turkish taekwondo sport and to explore how elite athletes comprehend and experience these phenomena.

Participants

In total 11 national athletes (6 females and 5 males) in the Turkish Taekwondo National Team voluntarily participated in the study. The ages of the participants range between 20 and 28 ($\bar{x}$ =22.9 SS=2.58). Four of the athletes have family members as their coaches. The number years of the participants' involvement in sports range between 9 and 20 years ($\bar{x}$ =13 SS=3.34). Demographic information about the participants interviewed is presented in Table 1 below. To ensure the anonymity of the participants and their personal information, the researcher used a different 'pseudonym' for each participant. The study followed ethical procedures and was approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board of Anadolu University (Protocol No: 70981).

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

	Age	Years of Sports Experience	Educational Status	Europe- World- Grand Prix Medals	Open Tournament
Leyla	21	10	University	1 Championship 1 Second place 6 Third place	3 Championship 4 Second place 5 Third place
Mina	24	15	University	6 Championship 4 Second place 10 Third place	11 Championship 8 Second place 5 Third place
Didem	23	15	University	12 Championship 1 Second place 2 Third place	13 Championship 2 Second place 1 Third place
Şule	22	9	University	0 Championship 0 Second place 3 Third place	4 Championship 1 Second place 7 Third place
Tezer	22	10	High School	0 Championship 0 Second place 0 Third place	2 Championship 1 Second place 4 Third place
Gülten	27	15	University	4 Championship 2 Second place 10 Third place	24 Championship 10 Second place 6 Third place
Oğuz	28	20	Post graduate	1 Championship 5 Second place 3 Third place	12 Championship 6 Second place 10 Third place
Arif	20	11	High School	1 Championship 1 Second place 3 Third place	4 Championship 3 Second place 2 Third place
Can	23	15	University	0 Championship 0 Second place 0 Third place	0 Championship 0 Second place 1 Third place
Ahmet	20	13	High School	2 Championship 0 Second place 1 Third place	6 Championship 5 Second place 3 Third place
Nazım	22	10	University	0 Championship 1 Second place 3 Third place	4 Championship 4 Second place 3 Third place

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview form, prepared by the researcher herself, benefited from the literature, expert opinions, and other studies in the field (Gotwals & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2014; Mallinson-Howard et.al, 2018). It consists of 21 questions. An in-depth interview technique was used in the interviews. The data were enriched by asking probing questions.

The participants were not informed about the concepts of the research prior to the interviews so as not to influence them. However, they were briefly informed about the study in a text read by the researcher directly from paper in order to eliminate any potential prejudice that might have occurred had the researcher given the information in spoken format. This preference might be considered an attempt to increase reliability.

Data Analysis

After receiving the necessary permissions, the interviews conducted with participant athletes were audio recorded. In order to help the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed, the interviews were conducted in the camp centers and later transcribed into the Microsoft Word program. The transcribed interviews were read many times before the analysis and the codes were written down on the printed versions. Later, the categories were determined by finding similarities and differences among the codes, and themes were prepared accordingly. After the categories and themes were determined, the codes were compared again and revised. The interview data were studied using thematic analysis and constant comparison techniques. Analyzes were performed by the two researchers individually, after which they came together and examined the different analysis results they had obtained.

The common points of themes obtained through the constant comparison technique were reinterpreted so as to achieve a unity of meaning. By doing so, the researcher wanted to come up with abstract concepts through systematic and constant comparisons (Punch, 2011). These techniques were used to allow analyses and code-category forming procedures.

Methodological Rigor

For internal validity, qualitative studies use long-term interaction, in-depth interviews, data triangulation, expert opinion, and respondent views (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The data collected through in-depth interviews were analyzed to determine the opinions of participants about the research questions, relationships, and patterns, and also expert and respondent opinions were received to strengthen the persuasiveness of the study. Also, participants were asked to member check and all participants accepted that their transcripts were accurate representations.

External validity is about creating a framework suitable for similar environments and processes, as well as the findings. Two methods are suggested for increasing external validity in qualitative studies: detailed description and purposeful sampling (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). This study used direct quotations, coding and demographic information so as to increase external validity.

Internal reliability means that other researchers should reach similar results by using the same set of data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In order to ensure this type of reliability, the researcher used the following techniques: rereading; determining a separate theme for each participant and a main theme; finding a structure based on the themes and main themes obtained from the data; and conceptualizing. In addition, the structure obtained was presented to experts to increase reliability.

External reliability in qualitative studies requires researchers to constantly verify their findings and present a logical explanation accordingly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In the current study, the raw data and coding data were always open to inspection and experts were consulted throughout the analyses.

While the first author's background as a former national athlete could be perceived as an advantage, as it might make the participants feel more at ease during the interviews, it could also introduce potential subjective biases or thoughts that could be considered a disadvantage in the research. To address this concern, measures were taken to ensure rigor and credibility. Both participant validation and expert opinions were sought to validate the findings. Furthermore, after the creation of codes and themes, consultations were conducted with another researcher (advisor) until a consensus was reached, and adjustments were made when necessary to enhance the research's validity and reliability.

Results

The Opinions of National Athletes About Perfectionism

The opinions of Turkish taekwondo national team athletes about perfectionism are presented in Table 2.

According to Table 2, perfectionism consists of the following categories: setting challenging goals, parental expectation, others-oriented sadness and guilt, advantages and disadvantages of perfectionism, criteria for perfectionist athletes and the effect of perfectionism on other fields. Some of the sentences uttered by the participants in these categories are listed below:

Setting Challenging Goals: All the athletes who participated in the study reported that they set challenging goals for themselves. Some of the quotations related to this category are as follows:

Table 2. Thematic analysis of opinion on the perfectionism of national taekwondo team athletes

Being world champion	**Setting Challenging Goals**	**Perfectionism**
Going to the Olympics		
Being a champion in every tournament		
Targeting the summit		
Standing on your own feet	**Parental Expectation**	
To be happy / Being happy		
Olympic-World Championship		
Being a great athlete		
Fighting at the Olympics		
Sadness for expectant people	**Others-oriented Sadness and Guilt**	
Feeling guilty towards the coach and family		
Have self-confidence	**Advantages of Perfectionism**	
Trying to perform at your best		
Psychological comfort		
Orderly life / Discipline		
Success		
Questioning yourself	**Disadvantages of Perfectionism**	
Putting pressure on yourself		
To be obsessed		
Inability to digest defeat		
Aggression		
Excessive ambition		
Focusing too much on areas of weakness		
More disappointment		
Being psychologically strong	**The Criteria to be Perfectionist Athlete**	
Feeling performance falling even if not falling		
Stability-Diligence		
Being self-confident		
Being ambitious		
The desire to be good in all aspects		
Punctuality	**The Effect of Perfectionism on Other Fields**	
The effort to deliver perfect performance in all areas		
Fulfilling responsibilities		
The desire to be the best in every field		
Ego		

"Right now, we are professional athletes. Of course, I have high expectations of myself; to be a champion in every tournament." (Mina)

"To be the world champion. To participate in the Olympic Games. (...) My goal always gets more challenging. This is true in my sports life and also for my daily life. I never like being satisfied with what I have. I always want more and more." (Tezer)

Parental Expectation: Perceived parental expectations are in parallel with the athletes' goals. Some of these expectations are as follows:

"My family expects me to stand on my own feet. My happiness (...) to start a life, to build up my material and spiritual life." (Leyla)

"They expect me to be successful. That is why they stand by me. (...) They expect success, they do not want too much, indeed." (Arif)

Others-oriented Sadness and Guilt: The majority of national team athletes voiced that they feel guilty and worried about their families and coaches when they are defeated. Some of the quotations related to this category are as follows:

"I somewhat feel guilty towards my coach – him, I think- since he trains me. I also feel that I upset my family because they are far away from me and they have expectations from me. I do not do many things for myself. I rather think of the people around me." (Gülten)

"Those who contribute to my development. I get worried more when they feel disappointed. They spend a lot of time for you. Other athletes could have been here instead of me. I start the match with these thoughts in my mind, especially the coaches, those who train me. So, I should think of them more, more than myself." (Arif)

Advantages of Perfectionism: The athletes pointed out some situations that might be an advantage of perfectionism. Some of their statements are as follows:

"The advantages of being a perfectionist is, first of all, that you affect your own psychology positively. Because you can say I have done everything, I have done my best. To me, this relaxes people psychologically." (Şule)

"It is important to feel perfect when you are in the ring. It is important how self-confident you are and how confidently you will adopt the technique. You cannot achieve any of these unless you feel that you are doing it perfectly. For me, this is the best part of perfectionism. It helps you develop self-confidence." (Ahmet)

Disadvantages of Perfectionism: The athletes pointed out some situations that might be a disadvantage of perfectionism. Some of their utterances are as follows:

"It is human, not a robot. You really see yourself as a robot. It is certain that you might be defeated in a match one day. You want to win every match. Or you might get badly injured or fight very poorly. You might not "be in practice". When a person is a perfectionist, he puts pressure on himself psychologically. You question yourself. Why can't you do it? Am I bad? Am I like this or that? You start to ask this. But you overcome it somehow." (Leyla)

"That it makes you over-ambitious. Looking at life with ambition. Placing sports in every part of your life. Competing to be the best in everything. Starting to sacrifice yourself. These are (the disadvantages), I think." (Gülten)

"You always have to be at the top, which is very difficult to sustain. For example, if people have expectations from you; I mean they expect something from you. And when you lose (...) For instance, you are the favorite, you get defeated. So what happens? The expectations get lower. That is it, I mean. You fight with a load on your back." (Can)

The Criteria to be Perfectionist Athlete: The participant athletes suggested that it is necessary to fulfil certain criteria and have certain characteristics to be a perfectionist athlete. Some of the quotations related to this category are as follows:

"An athlete who does his best. An athlete who aspires to be the best at everything." (Oğuz)

"I mean, indeed, perfectionism is a good thing for some but a bad thing for others. For instance, I want to be perfect but I might be defeated as well. There might be such ups and downs. I can keep myself at the top. However, a perfectionist athlete might feel a downfall although he does not experience a downfall. He might blame himself." (Ahmet)

The Effect of Perfectionism on Other Fields: The participant athletes reported their opinions about whether being a perfectionist athlete has any effects on other non-sports fields and pointed out that it affects other fields of life. Among some of these ideas are as follows:

"It affects you. Because sport affects our whole life. Even training affects our life. Training makes a person vigorous in his daily life. So, being a perfectionist helps you do your best in other works too. I mean, it makes you the best teacher, not an ordinary teacher." (Nazım)

"In fact, it affects you both positively and negatively. As for the negative effect, I know it all, I do it all, I need to be the best- You need to say this all the time. So you might have some problems with other people. The good side is that you learn to stand on your feet.

You feel that you are not alone and you are strong. These are the good sides." (Gülten)

The Opinions of National Athletes About Fear of Failure

The findings related to the opinions of Turkish Taekwondo National Team athletes about fear of failure are displayed in Table 3 below.

According to Table 3, "fear of failure" theme consists of the following categories: negative feelings following a failure; family reaction; effect of environment; consequences of failure, self-inadequacy and guilt; and fear and concerns. Some of the extracts related to "fear of failure" theme are presented below.

Negative Feelings Following a Failure: The participant athletes talked about the feelings they experience in the

Table 3. Thematic analysis of results of opinion on the fear of failure of national taekwondo team athletes

Unhappiness	**Negative Feelings following a failure**	**Fear of Failure**
Feeling the efforts wasted		
Feeling sorry for the family and the coach		
Searching for mistakes-weaknesses		
Blaming yourself		
Questioning yourself		
Extreme reactions		
Feeling sad and angry		
Criticism	**Family Reaction**	
Always same performance expectation		
Interfering with training		
Asking „Why were you defeated?"		
Crowd and cheering	**The Effect of Environment**	
People's expectations		
Get excited	**Consequences of Failure**	
Tackling the weaknesses		
Better self-review		
Gain experience		
Sacrificing your goal		
Not meeting people's expectations		
Efforts go to waste		
Feeling dispirited		
The road to success		
Give up		
Searching for mistakes	**Self-inadequacy and Guilt**	
Blaming yourself		
Uneasiness		
Thinking about weaknesses		
Disappointment		
Feeling inadequate		
Fear of injury	**Fears and Concerns**	
Fear of failing		
Fear of disappointing expectant people		
Fear of being defeated		
Fear of losing at the critical moment		
Fear of dropping out of the sport		

case of failure. Some of the extracts focusing on these feelings are as follows:

"When I lose, I feel devastated. It is true. I mean, I constantly blame myself. I try to identify my mistakes. It is generally like that. It is true for everybody." (Şule)

"I generally feel bad. Sometimes, I have extreme reactions. And sometimes I have normal reactions. But, in general, I try to take some lessons from it. For instance, I cried a lot. For days, even for months. Because there might be matches when you waste your time and energies. For example, you know, at the beginning of the season, we have the Turkish Championship, once a year. You should win. Either you have other matches or you cannot play in any matches. The Turkish Open, The President's Cup etc. If you fail in one month, all your works are wasted." (Ahmet)

Family Reaction: The participant athletes reported the reactions of their families in the case of failure. Some of their opinions are shown below:

"In general, for instance, what is one of the biggest problems? It is about my father, for instance, you win in one match and he expects me to give the same performance in the other match. All the same. Giving the same performance all the time and everywhere is sometimes difficult. My only concern is that people expect me to give the same performance all the time. or they say you are this, you are that. Although this is bad, sometimes it is good too because it keeps you motivated." (Ahmet)

"My mother, for example, likes controlling everything very much. So it interrupts my training procedures. Have you done your training in the morning? Do practice, work on this or that – she always gives such warnings. But she does not have any sports background. I really do not like this." (Şule)

The Effect of Environment: The participant athletes reported the effects of people around them on their failure. Some of the related opinions are as follows:

"I fight more comfortably when I am abroad. I act telling myself that I can overcome the pressure from the stands and shut them up by winning. It is a positive effect. When I fight abroad – where my opponents are the hosts- I feel better and more comfortable. As they cheer for my opponent, I become more careful, get motivated and more ambitious." (Mina)

"I care about the crowds. They affect me negatively. When it is crowded or the crowd cheers too much and loudly, it affects me negatively and puts pressure on me. As if I needed to win a victory this time. So I get tense and nervous during the match." (Gülten)

Consequences of Failure: The athletes who participated in the study mentioned the consequences of their failures. Some of these statements related to this issue are as follows:

"Giving up. Failure means giving up for me. It is not about being defeated in a match, for me, it is about throwing in the towel. It is the result of the failure." (Nazım)

"Failing to meet people's expectations. Training for success throughout the year and failing to meet my own expectations." (Oğuz)

Self-inadequacy and Guilt: Some of the extracts related to athletes' feeling of inadequacy and guilt following a failure are as follows:

"First, I blame myself for my failure. Why did I lose the match? I was nervous, this reason or that reason, but I say I was defeated at the end. I take this as a starting point. What happened, what did I do wrong? I constantly look for my mistakes and find them and try to correct them." (Ahmet)

"(When I fail) I think I am on the wrong track. I think there is something wrong. I think I did not work well enough, I failed to concentrate, I did not practice enough physically. And I think that I did not believe and concentrate mentally. I mean – not enough." (Can)

Fears and Concerns: The participant athletes listed their fears and concerns such as "fear of losing at a critical moment, fear of failing to reach targeted success, fear of getting injured, fear of being defeated and fear of giving up sports". The followings are some of the opinions stated by the participants:

"I got upset when I failed too. And I started to feel that I would always be unsuccessful like that and I started to feel afraid. I started to think that "What if I am defeated in the other matches? What if I cannot participate in the Olympic games?" (...) No matter which match it is, fear of being defeated. My biggest fear is fear of being defeated. And failing to reach the goal I set. My concern is what if I lose, what if I am defeated, what if someone else takes part in the match?" (Gülten).

"My concerns are failing to realize my dreams or giving up sports before reaching my goals. (...) I also

have the fear of getting seriously injured. I do not want to get injured when everything is going well." (Nazım)

"My fear and concern is getting injured and being defeated." (Didem)

"Fear and concern might be, I mean, losing the match at a critical moment in the tournament. Being defeated in the most important matches. My concern is to be defeated." (Oğuz)

Discussion and Conclusions

Setting Challenging Goals: When this category is examined in detail, it is seen that all the athletes set challenging goals, which is not surprising since they are elite, national athletes. However, their opinions about perfectionism and fear of failure have been an issue of curiosity. There are studies reporting that highly competitive levels of sport are related to high-level striving for perfectionism and perfectionist concerns in sports (Rasquinha et al., 2014). In this respect, setting challenging goals and participating in high-level tournaments might be considered the first step towards perfectionism.

Parental Expectation: The athletes reported that parental expectations are related to happiness and success. Most families expect a "championship" performance. Then, when athletes become champions, this expectation may be a source of motivation, since it also brings happiness to families. However, in the case of failure, it may be a demotivating factor, as the possibility of family unhappiness could fuel athletes' fear of failure. Indeed, one of the categories in the main theme "fear of failure" is "family reaction". Thus, these two categories might be interrelated.

Others-oriented Sadness and Guilt: The athletes stated that in the case of failure they feel guilty towards people who have expectations from them and those who try hard to train them, such as coaches and family members. One study found that athletes with healthy perfectionism see others (coaches, teammates) as a positive source of support and motivation. On the other hand, athletes with unhealthily perfectionism see others as both a positive and negative source of pressure (Dunn et al., 2006).

Advantages of Perfectionism: National team athletes listed some advantages of being a perfectionist athlete. They stated that perfectionist athletes are self-confident, psychologically relaxed and try hard to give their best performances. Also, there were athletes who associate the advantages of perfectionism with success and discipline. Broadly speaking, self-confidence triggered by the passion to be the most successful and the best athlete and feeling that one is the best was largely emphasized.

Disadvantages of Perfectionism: The athletes said that perfectionism forced them to question themselves through the question "Am I bad?" when they are not "in practice", fight poorly – i.e. in case of defeat – and they feel sad and disappointed. Failing to tolerate a defeat, overambition, being obsessed and aggressiveness were also listed as the disadvantages of being a perfectionist.

Generally speaking, it might be concluded that the advantageous nature of perfectionism might be reversed as we move from "winner" to "loser". Indeed, while perfectionism promotes self-confidence when athletes win and are the best, it makes them question their talents when they fail. Can (a male participant) strikingly explains this situation as follows: "(Imagine) You are the favorite in a match, but you are defeated. So what happens? Expectations are lowered. I mean, you fight with a load on your back.

Criteria to be a Perfectionist Athlete: The participant athletes defined perfectionists as "ambitious" athletes who want to be the best "in everything" and all the time". According to the participants, ambition is a requirement for perfectionism, while overambition is considered a disadvantage. Thus, it is an important code. In addition, one of the participant athletes stated that being a perfectionist athlete is a negative criterion, since perfectionist athletes will feel "a downfall" despite the lack of a real downfall.

While perfectionist concerns are associated with obsessive ambition, perfectionist strivings are associated with sporting passion, which is perceived partly as obsessive and partly compatible with an athlete's daily life. This conclusion implies that even athletes who show attempts at perfectionism and do not care too much about others' evaluation of their performances have mixed feelings about their passion for sports. This finding is consistent with previous findings related to perfectionism and motivation – perfectionist strivings of athletes – although they are mostly positive but are sometimes associated with "extreme consequences" and mixed positive-negative patterns (e.g task and ego orientation) (Hall et al., 2007).

The Effect of Perfectionism on Other Fields: All the participant athletes except two claimed that perfectionism has effects on other aspects of their lives. While some athletes listed positive effects such as attempts to be "the best" in every field and "responsibility", others talked about its disadvantages, such as negative effects of "ego" on social life and friendship.

This category shows that perfectionism has an effect on the social dimension of sports experience. The studies also supported the claim that maladaptive perfectionism correlates with negative and interpersonal social behaviors that might cause problems in interactions and relationships (Habke & Flynn, 2002). In a study conducted with undergraduate students, Flett et al. (1997) found that perfectionists display negative social behaviors in their social environments. In addition, the findings showed

that maladaptive perfectionism correlates with negative social behaviors, such as self-criticism, betrayal and lack of recognition. These findings imply that a maladaptive nature of perfectionism might stimulate negative reactions coming from the social environment and trigger negative a relationship cycle with peers.

It might be claimed that a passion to be perfect has many benefits. However, some recent studies have investigated its negative sides. For instance, in addition to disadvantages obtained from the categories, one study found that perfectionism might be related to doping. The results showed that perfectionist strivings negatively correlate with attitudes towards doping, and perfectionist concerns positively predict attitudes towards doping (Wang, 2020).

Recent studies in the literature show that it is relatively more difficult to define perfectionism with a single dimension – good or bad. Stoeber (2014) suggested one of the best similes for perfectionism by defining it as "a double-edged sword". In addition, he emphasized that distinguishing between perfectionist strivings and perfectionist concerns is crucial (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

The study by Dunn et al. (2014) is the first study examining perfectionism in athletes and how they overcome performance downfalls. It adopted an individual-centered approach and used a tripartite conceptualization of the perfectionism model as an analytical framework. The study used quantitative methods, and athletes that are not perfectionist were included in the study. Based on the expectations, it was found that athletes with healthy perfectionism have more active coping strategies than athletes with unhealthy perfectionism. The athletes with unhealthy perfectionism reported "not caring about" strategy as an inappropriate reaction to performance downfalls more than athletes with healthy perfectionism.

In a study conducted with 222 young athletes (11–18 age range), Mallison and Hill (2019) examined negative effects of perfectionism on young athletes. The study revealed that individual approval of perfectionist standards leads to the highest level of commitment in sports, whilst experiencing externally forced perfectionist standards leads to the lowest levels of commitment.

Stoeber and Becker (2008) carried out a study with 74 female footballers and showed that athletes with high levels of perfectionism generally hope to be successful, but that they link this tendency to external factors when they achieve their goals. The study examined perfectionism, achievement motivation and how success and failure is attributed and found a positive correlation between the search for perfection and hope for success, and a negative correlation between the search for perfection and fear of failure. On the contrary, negative reactions to what is lacking show a positive correlation with fear of failure.

In conclusion, perfectionism in sport can be adopted by athletes who try hard for perfection but can control negative reactions when their performance is lower than perfect so that perfectionism might be useful.

According to Flett and Hewitt (2020), perfectionism is a paradox. They suggest that a "perfectionism paradox" exists in many contexts that require perfect performance; especially for elite and ambitious athletes. They also claim that if individuals intentionally focus on being perfect or are directed towards perfection, it might result in sensitivity that might hinder future success and result in lower performance. In this respect, the data obtained from the interviews conducted with the athletes support the idea that perfectionism is a paradox.

Negative Feelings Following a Failure: The participant athletes stated that they have negative feelings such as "unhappiness", "sadness and aggressiveness" and some even had "serious" reactions, such as crying for days. Similarly, the athletes pointed out that they look for "mistakes and weaknesses" and "question and blame themselves".

In addition, the emergence of a code (feeling sorry for family and coach) that is similar to "feeling guilty towards coach and family", which is found under perfectionism categories, implies that these two concepts – perfectionism and fear of failure – are interrelated when parents and coach are concerned.

Parental Reaction: Most of the athletes reported that their families support them and that they are happy with this support; however, in the case of failure they feel uncomfortable when people around them ask them "Why were you defeated?", and when their family think they have inadequate practice and interfere with training procedures. They labeled their families' criticisms and their reactions such as "expecting the same performance at all times" as negative. However, these reactions might have a paradoxical effect, just like with perfectionism.

The Effects of Environment: Most of the participant athletes said that they pay attention to the crowd around the ring. Similarly, they stated that they are affected by the people who have expectations from them. Interestingly, some athletes find it difficult when the two codes combine.

Thus, it might be concluded that environment affects fear of failure. Indeed, athletes confess that they put pressure on themselves when they want to meet people's expectations, when they become champion or are the favorite for the championship. Some athletes even claimed that they fail because they focus on meeting such expectations and stop being themselves.

Consequences of Failure: In this category, some of the athletes listed consequences of failure by stating positive phrases, such as "path leading to success", "gaining experience", improving oneself" or "having a better self-evaluation"; others talked about negative sides using the following phrases: "wasted attempts", "dropping out", "failing to meet people's expectations" and "demoralization". "Expectations of people", which was a code in the

previous category, was an effective code. It might be said that "people who have expectations" in their evaluations of athletes play quite an important role.

Feeling of Self-inadequacy and Guilt: The athletes stated that in the case of failure they "blame themselves for their mistakes", "feel inadequate and frustrated" and "question themselves".

The codes in this category largely match with those in "disadvantages of perfectionism", which is under the main theme of "perfectionism". This finding clearly shows that the relation between these two concepts should be analyzed in detail. Indeed, the athletes reported that being a perfectionist has certain disadvantages, such as "self-questioning" and "diagnosing the mistakes".

Fears and Concerns: Athletes have certain fears and concerns depending on the characteristics of the sport they do. National athletes reported several fears, such as "injury and failure", "dropping out", "losing the match at a critical moment", and "fear of being defeated". "Those who have expectations" have been foregrounded in this category in a patterned way. Indeed, one of the fears mentioned by athletes is "fear of disappointing others who have certain expectations from you".

Fear of failure triggers the assessment of negative consequences on potential emotions of athletes when they fail to fulfill a task in front of their peers, coaches and teachers (such as mocking, embarrassment or stage fright) (Sagar et al., 2007; Conroy et al., 2002; Conroy, 2001). Thus, the reasons behind others-related concerns of national athletes are easy to understand.

The athletes who participated in the study are among the best athletes in their fields in the country and they are in almost all the top places in the Olympic ranking. However, despite their widely recognized achievements, they experience fear of failure.

A recent study by Gustafsson et al. (2017) showed that fear of embarrassment, which might have a strong effect on fear of failure, is strongly related to psychological stress. Young people with high levels of competitive anxiety display more concerns than their peers who have lower levels of anxiety related to making mistakes, not playing well or being defeated. Some elite athletes might be reluctant to express their fear of failure, which they associate with having a weak personality, and lack of achievement and confidence (Sagar, Lavallee and Spray, 2007). Therefore, it might be concluded that the interviews with the participant athletes revealed findings that support the literature.

In a qualitative study examining perfectionism and fear of failure, Gotwals and Spencer-Cavaliere (2010, 2011) used the tripartite perfectionism model, which examines how athletes with healthy perfectionism (high level of perfectionist strivings, low level of perfectionist concerns) and athletes with unhealthy perfectionism (high level of perfectionist strivings, high level of perfectionist concerns) respond to success and failure. Potential participants from a pool of 117 university student-athletes competing in competitions organized among universities were determined through the Multi-dimensional Perfectionism Scale in Sports – 2 (Gotwals & Dunn, 2009) according to unhealthy perfectionism scores. 11 athletes (6 female and 5 male) from various sport branches participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic content analysis of the interviews revealed three themes: personal expectations, coping with difficulties, and others' roles. As for personal expectation, the athletes set "winning" as the primary goal and emphasized the importance of "attempt" as well as their concerns and fears that accompany with their mistakes. Later, the researchers also selected student-athletes from the same pool by looking at their healthy perfectionism scores. 7 athletes (3 female and 4 male) participated in the interviews. The analysis revealed 3 themes: namely, personal expectations, coping with difficulties and others' roles. As for personal expectation, the athletes emphasized the importance of having targets, showing attempts, and mental concentration. They also reported that adopting a positive attitude and problem-solving skills help coping with sport performance challenges. Finally, the critical role of others (e.g. parents, teammates and coaches) in sports experiences was discussed in the study.

Athletes with healthy perfectionism highlighted sustaining a positive point of view in the case of failure and stated that they overcome their failure relatively faster (by considering the negative and positive sides of the experience). By contrast, athletes with unhealthy perfectionism reacted through self-criticism, focused on negative consequences, and felt depressed and frustrated (Stoeber et al. 2007).

In conclusion, perfectionism and fear of failure are believed to be interrelated in terms of people who, they feel, have expectations, especially parental expectations and reactions.

Being a personality trait with both positive and negative sides, perfectionism makes it difficult to make conclusive judgements of its effects in sports contexts. In addition, it is quite easy to understand the attempts of national taekwondo competitors to be perfect in achieving their goal of participating in the Olympic Games, the most important sports event in the world. However, this situation should be taken into consideration since it seems to affect their fear of failure. Indeed, extreme levels of perfectionism anxiety may result in dropping out of the sport altogether.

It might be concluded that perfectionism and fear of failure have a more complex structure than it appears for elite and high-ranking athletes and this might affect their motivation in many positive and negative ways. In addition, it is possible to say that the two concepts

intersect and affect each other (especially in family and environment codes).

Finally, the coach of four of the elite athletes included in the study is also a family member. A remarkable finding from the research is that when the coach is a family member, the two concerns of the athletes (the coach being upset due to failure and family being upset due to failure) come together. In Turkey, it is common for parents to be coaches. The sports system in Turkey has recently made it mandatory to operate sports facilities with coaching certificates. In the past, it was possible to work as a taekwondo coach at a club without having a coaching certificate. As a result, individuals who were once involved in taekwondo was able to also work as coaches in their own sports hall alongside top professionals. Consequently, some of them began to train their own children in the sports hall alongside other athletes. However, being the coach of one's own child at an elite level can be considered a special case. This is because the athletes included in the study are high-level athletes and not every parent-coach child can achieve success.

Therefore, although they seem to be in the minority, people who are both coaches and parents need to be more careful with their children/athletes, since, in a possible negative situation, problems can arise in both their sports career and family.

Suggestions

Although perfectionism is a great source of motivation and self-confidence, its potential to bring the athlete to the brink of dropping out of the sport should not be underestimated. For this reason, more and varied studies should be conducted, especially for elite athletes who compete at a high level and participate in competitions. At this point, examining both the adaptive, healthy and maladaptive and unhealthy dimensions of perfectionism can provide clues for athletes to psychologically direct their perfectionism in a positive direction and maintain it in that direction.

Parents and coaches should be more aware of the importance of any words or interventions at critical moments. In future studies, in-depth interviews with parents and coaches can be conducted to provide a more comprehensive framework by revealing how raising elite level athletes is seen from their perspective.

The elite athletes who participated in the study consider it very important to fulfill their personal standards. This can be an important input for psychologists and coaches, helping them to minimize the dangers of athletes' reduced efficiency.

Training programs can be prepared for families and coaches so that fear of failure will not affect athletes' performance negatively.

In the field of sports, which is closely related to competition and the concept of success by definition, it is important to determine the levels of perfectionism and fear of failure of those who perform sports at the highest level. Since this research provides an opportunity to understand the feelings and thoughts of the athletes, it can contribute to regulating the behaviors of the elite athletes to the people who can influence them (such as the athlete's family, coach or club-federation manager) when they insist on perfectionism or when they experience failure. The research can be deepened by applying it to athletes who are in the national team or compete at the elite level both in other national team branches in Turkey and in different countries.

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