

Fear of failure and anxiety in sport

Marco Estêvão Correia* / António Rosado*

* Faculdade de Motricidade Humana da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

Sport represents an important achievement domain, where fear of failure and anxiety are permanently present. The present study aimed to examine the relationship between fear of failure and anxiety in sport contexts. A total of 405 athletes completed the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory and the Sport Anxiety Scale-2. In this study, a structural equation modelling was used to test this relationship. The results gathered, provided evidence that fear of failure construct has a direct and positive influence on sport anxiety. Furthermore, and consistent with previous studies, a relationship between fear of failure and anxiety was found, indicating that athletes with higher levels of fear of failure displayed a tendency of having greater anxiety levels. These findings highlights the importance of fear of failure in sport contexts, especially as a predictor of sport anxiety in athletes.

Key words: Performance appraisal failure inventory, Sport anxiety, Confirmatory factor analysis, Athletes.

Introduction

For numerous athletes, participation in competitive sport activities can be packed with anxiety and fear manifested in many ways, including: fear of failure, fear of social consequences, and worry about not living up to the expectations of adults (Gould, Horn, & Spreemann, 1983; Gould & Weinberg, 1985; Lewthwaite & Scanlan, 1989; Mesagno, Harvey, & Janelle, 2012; Rumbold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2012; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984; Scanlan & Passer, 1978).

Increasing pressure to achieve top sport performances will unequivocal create anxiety and fear of failure in young athletes. Smith, Smoll and Schutz (1990) suggested that the most salient sources of situational stress in competitive sport environment are related to performance failure. According with these authors, fear of failure is the central threat related to competitive sport anxiety and has been supported by several researches (e.g., Gould et al., 1983; James & Collins, 1997; Wilson & Eklund, 1998). Investigations have consistently found that high competitive anxiety athletes, from a variety of sports, tend to worry more frequently about factors relating to poor performance and negative social evaluation (Gould et al., 1983; Passer, 1983), providing strong empirical evidence of fear of failure and competitive anxiety relations (Dunn & Dunn, 2001).

Fear of failure is conceptualized as the motive to avoid failure in evaluative achievement situations, associated with anticipatory shame (Atkinson, 1957) and with the tendency to appraise threat in evaluative situations (Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1969; Conroy, Willow, & Metzler, 2002). It is suggested that failure is perceived as threatening, and feared, by athletes who associate

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Marco Estêvão Correia, Faculdade de Motricidade Humana da Universidade de Lisboa, Estrada da Costa MB, 1495-687 Cruz Quebrada, Lisboa, Portugal. E-mail: marc.correia@gmail.com

it with aversive consequences (Conroy et al., 2002; Correia, Rosado, Serpa, & Ferreira, 2017; Sagar & Jowett, 2012; Sagar, Lavallee, & Spray, 2007).

In sport domain, Conroy (2001; Conroy et al., 2002) developed a multidimensional, hierarchical model of fear of failure grounded in the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion (Lazarus, 1991).

This model offers five beliefs related to the consequences of failure that are associated with threat appraisal and feared. To measure these beliefs, Conroy et al. (2002) developed the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI) which differentiates five fears of failure, namely: (a) fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, (b) fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, (c) fear of having an uncertain future, (d) fear of important others losing interest, and (e) fear of upsetting important others.

On that account, several distinctive features of the PFAI should be noted. The PFAI is the first fear of failure measure unequivocally developed from a meta-theory of emotion. Rather than framing fear of failure as a trait or state, it can be examined as a function of the person-by-environment interaction. The idiosyncratic nature of perceptions of failure is explicitly acknowledged in the measure instead of assuming that failure is perceived the same way by all performers (Conroy et al., 2002).

According to Smoll and Smith (1996), anxiety is generally defined as an emotional response consisting of cognitive concerns and physiological arousal to perceived threat.

A great deal of research has been devoted in the past century to anxiety in sport psychology (Grossbard, Smith, Smoll, & Cummings, 2009). In the 90's, cognitive-affective models of anxiety and empirical findings concerning differential antecedents and consequences of cognitive and somatic anxiety prompted the development of a new sport-specific multidimensional trait anxiety measure, the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS; Smith et al., 1990), and consequently the Sport Anxiety Scale – 2, that could be used to extend multidimensional anxiety research downward to younger age groups, while measuring the same anxiety components in older populations (Smith, Smoll, Cumming, & Grossbard, 2006).

Fear of failure has been strongly related to sport anxiety, since it is considered a subclass of performance anxiety constructs in sport (Conroy et al., 2002).

Even though, general fear of failure scores has shown themselves to be related, but empirically distinct, from more general trait anxiety constructs such as trait anxiety and sport competitive anxiety (Conroy, 2001; Conroy et al., 2002; Correia, Rosado, & Serpa, 2016).

Anxiety and fear of failure constructs share considerable conceptual space and both measures are recurrently used as proxy measures (e.g., Atkinson & Litwin, 1960). Byrne (2000) investigated the relationships between anxiety, fear, self-esteem and coping strategies, and the results indicated a correlation between anxiety and fear, supporting the hypothesis that they were closely related.

Athanas (2007) examined the roles that fear of failure, experience, and competitive level plays in predisposing fencers to experience precompetitive cognitive and somatic anxiety before a significant competition. The findings indicated that fencers' experience of precompetitive cognitive anxiety was partially dependent on individual differences in fear of failure. These results highlights the role of fear of failure as a trigger mechanism, in order to heighten cognitive anxiety before competition, confirming theoretical predictions that fear of failure contributes to cognitive anxiety (Conroy, 2001; Conroy et al., 2002). Another conclusion retrieved from this study was that fear of failure was not a significant predictor of somatic anxiety.

Considering the amount research made on fear of failure and anxiety, it's perfectly recognized that concerns about performance failure and negative social evaluation have been identified as central components of competitive trait anxiety. Several investigations had consistently found that high competitive trait anxiety athletes, from a multiplicity of sports, tend to worry more frequently about factors relating to poor performance and negative social evaluation than their low

competitive trait anxiety counterparts (e.g., Gould et al., 1983; Passer, 1983).

In summary, previous studies seem to provide evidence that fear of failure has a strong relationship with anxiety. Additionally, it seems to indicate that fear of failure positively influences athletes' general anxiety.

According to the existing literature, it was hypothesised that (a) general fear of failure positively influences sport anxiety; (b) general fear of failure will positively influence concentration disruption; (c) general fear of failure will positively influence worry; and (d) general fear of failure will positively influence somatic anxiety. This was tested via structural equation modelling. Two models were generated for testing the hypothesis formulated.

Therefore, the present study by examining the relationship among a multidimensional fear of failure construct and anxiety in sport, will extend the knowledge base concerning fear of failure as an antecedent of competitive anxiety, and will recognize empirically fear of failure as a predictor of sport anxiety.

Method

Participants

The convenience sample used in this study was composed of 405 Portuguese athletes. From them 99 (24.4%) were female and 306 (75.6%) were male. They competed in a variety of individual (40.7%) and team sports (59.3%). Participants' age ranged from 12 to 20 years ($M=15.26$ years; $SD=2.51$).

Procedures

Prior to data collection, the study was reviewed by the University Ethics Board of the Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Lisbon. Upon approval, participants were recruited. Clubs, sport associations and schools were contacted by e-mail or by telephone and were invited to participate.

Once clubs and schools authorizations were provided, letters and parental consent forms were sent home to parents for participants under the age of 18 informing them of the nature of the study and requesting their permission for their child's participation in the study. All participants, including minors, signed consent forms.

The questionnaires were administrated before training and it was assured to all athletes that information gathered would remain confidential and would only be used for the purposes of the investigation. Participants were asked to answer each item as honestly as possible and to complete their questionnaires individually.

Measures

The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI; Conroy et al., 2002), translated and adapted by Correia et al. (2016) is a multidimensional measure of threat appraisals associated with fear of failure. Participants were asked to rate how strongly they believed each of the 14 aversive consequences of failure were likely to occur to them after failing. The measure assessed the strength of their beliefs about possible consequences of failure in five domains: (a) experiencing shame and embarrassment, (b) devaluing one's self-estimate, (c) having an uncertain future, (d) important others losing interest, and (e) upsetting important others. Items were answered on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*do not believe at all*) to 5 (*truly believe*). The PFAI subscale scores

were derived by summing scores on the individual items for each subscale. A composite fear of failure score can be derived by summing all 14 items.

The Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS-2; Smith et al., 2006) translated and adapted by Cruz and Gomes (2007) contains 15 items distributed throughout three subscales: (a) somatic anxiety, (b) worry, and (c) concentration disruption. A composite performance-anxiety score based on summing the three subscale scores can also be obtained. The 15 items of the SAS-2 were designed to reflect possible responses that young athletes may have before or while they compete in sports. For each item, children indicated how they typically felt based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The SAS-2 subscale scores were derived by summing scores on the individual items for each subscale. A composite anxiety score can be derived by summing all 15 items.

Data analysis

Data were analysed and a two-step maximum likelihood structural equation modelling procedure was performed using AMOS 22.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago IL).

Firstly, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to confirm the measurement model of the two models suggested for testing the hypothesis formulated. Reliability of the constructs was estimated through Cronbach's α coefficients and values above the .7 criterion were considered reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The average variance extracted (AVE) was estimated to evaluate convergent validity and values greater than .5 were considered to demonstrate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2009). Discriminant validity was assumed when AVE of each construct was greater than the squared correlation between that construct and any other (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Subsequently, the structural model estimation was performed to test the research hypotheses. The appropriateness of the data to both the measurement and structural models was estimated through a variety of goodness-of-fit indices. Specifically, a good fit of the models was assumed when chi-square was not statistically significant ($p > .05$), the ratio of chi-square to its degrees of freedom was less than 3.0, comparative-of-fit-index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and goodness-of-fit index (GFI) were larger than .90 (Bentler, 1990; Hair et al., 2009; Tanaka & Huba, 1985), and parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PCFI) was higher than .60 (Blunch, 2008; Mulaik et al., 1989). A root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value less than .06 was indicative of good fit while an acceptable fit was assumed for values between .08 and .10 (Byrne, 2010). The significance of the structural weights was evaluated using the Z tests produced by AMOS and statistical significance was assumed at a .05 level.

Results

Measurement model (Model 1)

The skewness values for the items used in this study ranged from -0.11 to 1.62, while the kurtosis values ranged from -1.158 to 2.01. According to Kline (1998) these values do not represent non-normality problems that may limit further use in factor analysis.

The results of the CFA showed that the factor loadings from one item of somatic anxiety failed to exceed the cut-off point of .5 (Hair et al., 2009), and consequently, was eliminated. Subsequent scale refinement was conducted and two additional items, from Somatic subscale, were eliminated in order to obtain discriminant validity.

After the preceding procedures made, all items showed high factor loadings ranging from .57 to .82, while the Z-values ranged from 11.43 to 17.69. These results indicated that each item did load significantly on its construct. The Cronbach's α values supported the constructs reliability, ranging from .70 (fear of having an uncertain future) to .85 (worry). Convergent validity was accepted for all constructs, since the AVE values met accepted levels (see Appendix 1, for detailed information about factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted values). Furthermore, all constructs were considered to exhibit discriminant validity since all AVE values exceeded the appropriate squared factor correlations (Table 1).

Table 1

Discriminant validity results

	AVE	FSE	FDSE	FUF	FIOLI	FUIO	CD	W	SA
FSE	.51	1							
FDSE	.50	.41	1						
FUF	.54	.41	.44	1					
FIOLI	.50	.29	.26	.44	1				
FUIO	.53	.33	.15	.29	.43	1			
CD	.50	.09	.19	.11	.04	.03	1		
W	.54	.36	.29	.22	.10	.22	.12	1	
SA	.52	.09	.20	.15	.05	.04	.30	.11	1

Note. FSE=fear of experiencing shame & embarrassment; FDSE=fear of devaluing one's self-estimate; FUF=fear of having an uncertain future; FIOI=fear of important others losing interest; FUIO=fear of upsetting important others; CD=concentration disruption; W=worry; SA=somatic anxiety.

In addition, the results of the CFA indicated a good fit to the data [$\chi^2(80)=552.91$ ($p<.001$), $\chi^2/df=2.04$; CFI=.93, TLI=.92, GFI=.90, PCFI=.78, RMSEA=.051 (CI=.045, .047)]. CFI, TLI, GFI, PCFI and RMSEA values meet the recommended criteria for good fit; as well the ratio of χ^2 to its degrees of freedom, being less than 3.0. Overall, the final model showed a good fit to the data and was within the required criteria for good psychometric proprieties. Consequently, the proposed structural model (Model 1) was examined.

After confirming the appropriateness of the first-order model, the model including the second-order constructs was examined. The goodness-of-fit indices produced for the second-order measurement model indicated a good fit to the data [$\chi^2(289)=632.961$ ($p<.001$), $\chi^2/df=2.19$; CFI=.91, GFI=.90, TLI=.90, PCFI=.81, RMSEA=.054 (CI=.049, .060)]. The paths between the second-order factors and their proposed sub-scales were all significant at $p<.001$. Inspection of the correlation between the second-order constructs indicated a large significant correlation (.82).

Structural model (Model 1)

The overall assessment of the structural model indicated an acceptable fit to the data indices [$\chi^2(290)=638.608$ ($p<.001$), $\chi^2/df=2.20$; CFI=.91, TLI=.90, GFI=.90, PCFI=.81, RMSEA=.055 (CI=.049, .060)]. The path coefficients for the model indicated that the main hypothesis was supported, since General Fear of Failure showed a significant positive effect on Sport Anxiety ($\beta=.83$, $p<.001$), as we can see in Figure 1.

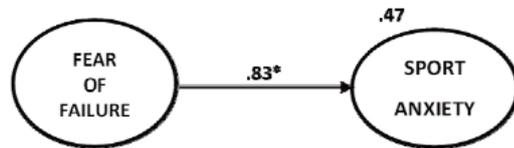


Figure 1. Estimate standardised effects for the structural model (Model 1)
 Note. * $p < .001$.

Measurement model (Model 2)

The skewness values for the items used in this study didn't present non-normality problems that may limit further use in factor analysis, since it ranged from -0.51 to 1.62, while the kurtosis values ranged from -1.29 to 2.64 (Kline, 1998).

Besides the satisfactory results of the CFA concerning the fit indices [$\chi^2(338)=719.166$ ($p < .001$), $\chi^2/df=2.13$; CFI=.91, TLI=.90, GFI=.89, PCFI=.81, RMSEA=.053 (CI=.047, .058)], there were some convergent validity issues. Subsequent scale refinement was conducted and three items were eliminated, one from concentration disruption construct and two others regarding somatic anxiety construct, in order to insure reliability and model parsimony (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Marôco, & Ross, 2012; Gladen & Funk, 2002).

After this procedure, the results indicated that each item did load significantly on its construct (Appendix 2), since all items showed loadings above the cut-off point of .50 (Hair et al., 2009). The Cronbach's α values supported the constructs reliability, ranging from .76 (somatic) to .87 (fear of failure). Convergent validity was accepted for all constructs, since the AVE values of each met accepted levels and ranged from .50 (concentration disruption) to .58 (fear of failure).

Moreover, discriminant validity of the measures was accepted given the squared correlations between each construct and any other were lower than the AVE values for each construct in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results could be better scrutinized in Table 2.

Table 2

Discriminant validity results

	AVE	FF	CD	W	SA
		.58	.50	.54	.52
FF	.58	1			
CD	.50	.18	1		
W	.54	.40	.11	1	
SA	.52	.15	.30	.12	1

Note. FF=fear of failure; CD=concentration disruption; W=worry; SA=somatic anxiety.

The results of this final measurement model indices [$\chi^2(288)=630.507$ ($p < .001$), $\chi^2/df=2.19$; CFI=.91, TLI=.90, GFI=.90, PCFI=.81, RMSEA=.054 (CI=.049, .060)] showed an acceptable fit to the data. The CFI and GFI were greater than the recommended threshold of .90 (Hair et al., 2009) providing evidence of good fit. Additionally, RMSEA was less than .06 suggesting also good fit (Byrne, 2000). Overall, the measurement model showed an acceptable fit to the data, and consequently, the structural model (Model 2) was examined.

Structural model (Model 2)

The examination of the structural model incorporated a test of the overall model fit as well as individual tests of the relationship among the latent constructs. The overall assessment of the

structural model indicated an acceptable fit to the data indices [$\chi^2(290)=649.307$ ($p<.001$), $\chi^2/df=2.24$; CFI=.91, TLI=.90, GFI=.90, PCFI=.81, RMSEA=.055 (CI=.050, .061)]. Path coefficients of fear of failure predicting concentration disruption, worry and somatic anxiety were all statistically significant ($p<.001$), supporting all hypothesis formulated. Approximately 22% of the variance of concentration disruption ($R^2=.22$), 47% of the variance of worry ($R^2=.47$), and 20% of the variance of somatic anxiety ($R^2=.20$) was explained by fear of failure (Figure 2).

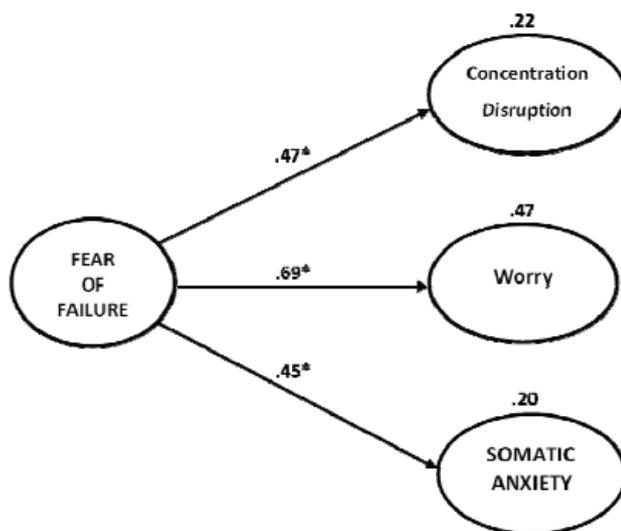


Figure 2. Standardized estimates of the structural model (Model 2)

Note. * $p<.001$.

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between fear of failure and anxiety in sports context and the direct influence that fear of failure had on sport anxiety among athletes in a structural equation modelling framework.

Although it has been established that trait anxiety and experience are predictors of state cognitive anxiety (Cooley, 1987; Donzeli & Dugoni, 1990; Gill & Martens, 1977; Gould, Horn, & Spreeman, 1984; Hanton, Mellalieu, & Hall, 2001; Krane & Williams, 1987; McGregor & Abrahamson, 2000; Ryska, 1998; Scanlan & Passer, 1979), fear of failure has not been reconnoitred empirically as a possible predictor. Accordingly, with the results of this research it is possible to recognise that fear of failure may undoubtedly trigger sport anxiety levels.

The results are congruent with the assumption made, considering that fear of failure is strongly correlated with sport anxiety. This postulation is concomitant with Conroy et al. (2002), since these authors postulated that general fear of failure can affect athletes by creating high levels of cognitive disruption, somatic anxiety, worry and overall sport anxiety. Thus, this strong relation verified between fear of failure and sport anxiety was not surprising, since fear of failure is considered to be a subclass of performance anxiety in sport (Conroy et al., 2002).

The structural equation analysis (Model 2) indicated that fear of failure was a significant predictor of all sport anxiety subscales. Fear of failure was the stronger predictor of worry subscale of sport anxiety. This result is not unexpected, given that the worry subscale of sport anxiety and

the fear of failure construct are measures of cognitive anxiety (Dunn & Dunn, 2001). However, fear of failure had also a significant effect on concentration disruption and somatic anxiety subscales, contrary to previous investigations.

Although the sport anxiety scale provides precious information regarding anxiety levels, limited information about their causes is acquired. For this particular reason, researchers, sports psychologists and coaches should use the PFAI, since it is a valuable instrument that gives a specific attention to the existence of different situational threats that might reside within the competitive environment being studied (Correia et al., 2016; Fisher & Zwart, 1982).

It is important to note that, as with any other study, there are limitations that should be acknowledged and considered in future research. First, this study was based on a sample of Portuguese young athletes, and thus, the findings may lack generalizability to overall sport settings. Furthermore, it is important to replicate the present factorial structure in future studies using samples of sport athletes from different cultural contexts.

It also should be acknowledged, that the strength of the correlations between fear of failure and sport anxiety may have been, somehow, wide-ranging by the diverse nature of sports, competitive level, and time of practice of the sample engaged in this study. Therefore, future studies should consider these variables.

In conclusion, the present study is unique in reckoning the relationship between fear of failure and sport anxiety in a sample of young male and female athletes from team and individual sports. These results should remain tentative until researchers replicate the current study. We hope that the current findings stimulate debate regarding a clear understanding of the important role that fear of failure has in sport settings.

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O desporto representa um importante domínio de realização, onde o medo de falhar e a ansiedade estão permanentemente presentes. O presente estudo procurou examinar a relação entre o medo de falhar e a ansiedade. Um total de 405 atletas completaram o Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory e o Sport Anxiety Scale-2. Foi realizada uma análise de equações estruturais para testar estas relações. Os resultados obtidos, providenciaram evidências de que o constructo do medo de falhar tem uma

influência direta e positiva na ansiedade desportiva. Adicionalmente, foi encontrada uma relação entre o medo de falhar e ansiedade, dando indicação que atletas com níveis elevados de medo de falhar apresentam uma maior tendência para possuir níveis superiores de ansiedade. Estes dados destacam a importância do medo de falhar no contexto desportivo, principalmente enquanto preditor da ansiedade desportiva em atletas.

Palavras-chave: Performance appraisal failure inventory, Ansiedade desportiva, Análise factorial confirmatória, Atletas.

Appendix 1

Factor loadings, Z-values and reliabilities (α)

Constructs/Items	Loadings	Z value	CR	AVE
Fear of Experiencing Shame & Embarrassment			.75	.51
When I am failing, it is embarrassing if others are there to see it	.729	15.33		
When I am failing, I worry that others may think I am not trying	.789	16.76		
When I am failing, I worry about what others think about me	.603	12.04		
Fear of Devaluing One's Self-Estimate			.74	.50
When I am not succeeding, I get down on myself easily	.608	11.43		
When I am failing, I blame my lack of talent	.797	16.10		
When I am failing, I am afraid that I might not have enough talent	.685	13.88		
Fear of Having an Uncertain Future			.70	.54
When I am failing, my future seems uncertain	.748	14.77		
When I am failing, it upsets my "plan" for the future	.718	14.20		
Fear of Important Others Losing Interest			.75	.50
When I am not succeeding, people are less interested in me	.715	14.65		
When I am not succeeding, some people are not interested in me anymore	.715	14.66		
When I am not succeeding, my value decreases for some people	.701	14.27		
Fear of Upsetting Important Others			.77	.53
When I am failing, it upsets important others	.819	17.69		
When I am failing, important others are not happy	.766	16.44		
When I am failing, important others are disappointed	.570	11.28		
Concentration Disruption			.80	.50
It is hard to concentrate on the game	.676	14.03		
It is hard for me to focus on what I am supposed to do	.783	16.86		
I lose focus on the game	.752	16.01		
I cannot think clearly during the game	.593	11.82		
I have a hard time focusing on what my coach tells me to do ^a				
Worry			.85	.54
I worry that I will not play well	.776	17.51		
I worry that I will let others down.	.615	12.80		
I worry that I will not play my best	.780	17.56		
I worry that I will play badly	.779	17.54		
I worry that I will mess up during the game	.703	15.24		
Somatic			.76	.52
My body feels tense ^b				
I feel tense in my stomach	.747	15.29		
My muscles feel shaky	.600	11.78		
My stomach feels upset	.799	16.45		
My muscles feel tight because I am nervous ^b				

Note. ^aItem eliminated due to lack of individual reliability; ^bItem eliminated after scale refinement.

Appendix 2

Factor loadings, Z-values, reliabilities (α), and average variance extracted (AVE)

Constructs/Items	Loadings	Z value	CR	AVE
Fear of Failure			.87	.58
Fear of Experiencing Shame & Embarrassment	.839	12.13		
Fear of Devaluing One's Self-Estimate	.796	12.78		
Fear of Having an Uncertain Future	.712	12.31		
Fear of Important Others Losing Interest	.574	10.32		
Fear of Upsetting Important Others	.665	11.44		
Concentration Disruption			.80	.50
It is hard to concentrate on the game	.676	14.03		
It is hard for me to focus on what I am supposed to do	.783	16.86		
I lose focus on the game	.752	16.01		
I cannot think clearly during the game	.593	11.82		
I have a hard time focusing on what my coach tells me to do ^a				
Worry			.85	.54
I worry that I will not play well	.776	17.51		
I worry that I will let others down.	.615	12.80		
I worry that I will not play my best	.780	17.56		
I worry that I will play badly	.779	17.54		
I worry that I will mess up during the game	.703	15.24		
Somatic			.76	.52
My body feels tense ^b				
I feel tense in my stomach	.747	15.29		
My muscles feel shaky	.600	11.78		
My stomach feels upset	.799	16.45		
My muscles feel tight because I am nervous ^b				

Note. ^aItem eliminated due to lack of individual reliability; ^bItem eliminated after scale refinement.

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