



Contesting orientations: Measure construction and the prediction of sportspersonship[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This three-study investigation was undertaken to develop, validate, and test the Contesting Orientations Scale (COS), a new measure designed to assess individuals' tendencies to use contest-is-partnership and contest-is-war conceptual metaphors (i.e., contesting orientations) when competing (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009, 2011a).

Design: The research design was correlational. Following preliminary item creation and expert review, survey based studies were conducted to develop theoretically-based, psychometrically sound scales measuring contesting orientations.

Method: In Study 1, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on a preliminary 39-item COS administered to a sample of high school athletes (N = 233). Study 2 used EFA to evaluate a revised 23-item COS with a second sample of high school athletes (N = 92) resulting in a final reduction of the measure to twelve items. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then conducted on this 12-item COS, which proved an excellent fit to the data. A new sample of college athletes (N = 238) allowed Study 3 to (a) further examine the factorial validity of the COS, including gender invariance testing, (b) assess the concurrent validity of the COS via its correlations with goal orientations, empathy, moral identity, and moral disengagement; and, (c) assess the COS's incremental predictive utility for investigations of sportspersonship.

Results and conclusion: Results from the sequence of studies demonstrate that the 12-item, two-scale COS has good psychometric properties as assessed through EFA and CFA, good concurrent validity, and adds significantly to existing measures in the prediction of sportspersonship.

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Sport is a competitive process. Despite the centrality of competition to sport, however, relatively little theoretical or empirical attention has been paid to participants' understanding of competition. In the 1970s, Martens (1975) provided a helpful analysis of the competitive process that divided it into four inter-related stages. The first is the *objective competitive situation*, which refers to the structural features of the competitive setting, such as the rule and goal structure. More important for our purposes is the second dimension, or stage, which he called the *subjective competitive situation* (SCS). The SCS involves how the competitor

perceives the situation. The third and fourth stages involve the *response* (e.g., stress) and the *consequences* (e.g., lower performance) that emanate from the SCS.

There can be little doubt that individuals differ in their approach to achievement settings like sport (Shields & Bredemeier, 2007). Gill and colleagues (Gill & Deeter, 1988; Gill, Dziewaltowski, & Deeter, 1988), for example, identified three dimensions of achievement motivation that help to shed light on Marten's SCS: *competitiveness*, which they define as the desire to enter and strive for success in sport; a *win orientation*, consisting of a focus on winning and avoiding losing; and a *goal orientation*, which reflects a focus on personal standards.

Building on the achievement motivation theory of Nicholls (1984), Vealey (1986, 1988) also developed a measure of *competitiveness*. According to Vealey, competitiveness is a kind of achievement striving that can be defined in terms of two specific orientations: an orientation toward performing well and an

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orientation toward winning. Shortly thereafter, both Duda (1989) and Roberts, Treasure, and Balague (1998) developed instruments to assess the two types of achievement goal orientations (task and ego) featured in Nicholls' theory. Both instruments have become key measures in sport psychology research (Conroy & Hyde, 2012).

Since the 1980s, sport psychologists have made many advances in understanding the antecedents and consequences of competitiveness, understood as a part of achievement motivation (Roberts & Treasure, 2012). For example, researchers have demonstrated that there are important sociomoral implications for adopting task or ego goals in sport (for reviews, see Kavussanu, 2007; Kavussanu & Boardley, 2012; Shields & Bredemeier, 2007). Despite the insights gained through research on achievement goals, the essential nature of Martens' SCS may have been comparatively neglected. The focus on achievement motivation has been very fruitful, but may have missed important differences in how participants actually construe the fundamental nature of competition itself.

Recently, Shields and Bredemeier (2009, 2011a) proposed a new theoretical approach, which they call contesting theory, that focuses on athletes' cognitive framing of the meaning, purpose, and value of contesting. The contest structure is part of what Martens called the objective competitive situation. But the contest needs to be interpreted to have significance. Drawing upon cognitive linguistic theory (Lakoff, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Shields and Bredemeier (2009, 2011a) posit that there are two distinct ways of interpreting contests, each founded on different *conceptual metaphors* and implying qualitatively different kinds of interdependencies and sociomoral relationships among participants. Conceptual metaphors – unlike linguistic metaphors – represent modes of thought, not expression, and they provide the necessary cognitive scaffolding for understanding abstract and complex concepts and experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

One conceptual metaphor that Shields and Bredemeier (2009, 2011a) identify is the contest-is-partnership metaphor. When using a contest-is-partnership metaphor (hereafter referred to as *partnership*), athletes perceive the contest as an opportunity to “strive with” their opponents; this results in a process that is more consistent with the etymological meaning of the word ‘competition’ (i.e., “to strive with”). When the contest is interpreted as a form of partnership, the opponent is understood as an essential and valued co-participant in a mutual quest for excellence (cf. Hyland, 1978).

The other conceptual metaphor that may structure an athlete's interpretation of the contest is a contest-is-war metaphor (hereafter referred to as *war*). When using this metaphor, the contesting process is understood as one of “striving against,” and the opponent is rendered as an enemy who stands between the athlete and his or her goals. Shields and Bredemeier (2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b) propose that the term “competition” be limited to contesting that is scaffolded by the *partnership* metaphor and that the term “decompetition” be used to designate contesting that builds from and reflects the *war* metaphor.

It is important to note that Shields and Bredemeier (2011a) suggest that conceptual metaphors are not typically consciously employed. These organizing metaphors frequently ‘fly below the radar’ of our consciousness, even as they scaffold our perceptions and contour our conscious thoughts. In the cognitive sciences, research by Bargh and colleagues has documented the effects of non-conscious cognition on judgment and behavior, including social judgments (Bargh, 2006; Bargh & Shalev, 2012) and even conscious goal pursuit (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001). Such research fits into a more general trend in cognitive science that differentiates between two types of cognitive processing performed by the human mind. Kahneman (2011), in particular, has popularized the ‘dual-processing’ account of human

cognition, and its ‘fast’ and ‘slow’ systems of thought. Although the two systems do not have, as yet, clearly defined boundaries, “System 1” processes are typically unconscious, fast, low-effort (even automatic), and high-capacity; “System 2” processes are conscious, slow, high-effort, and low-capacity (Evans, 2008). Because our conscious, System 2, cognitive resources have a low capacity, inevitably much cognitive processing occurs at the System 1 level.

Research on moral functioning demonstrates how cognitive processes operating below awareness can have significant implications (Haidt, 2012). Narvaez and Lapsley (2005, p. 150) note, for example, that just as it has become clear that many of our non-moral decisions are rendered quickly and intuitively, “much of our moral behavior ... is governed by implicit, tacit processes.” Certainly in a context as dynamic as sport, moral evaluations often are “done nearly instantaneously based largely on habituated patterns of judgment and response” (Shields & Bredemeier, 2007, p. 668).

It is at the System 1 level where conceptual metaphors enable abstract concepts, like a contest, to be rendered meaningful. This is done through implicit, systematic cognitive mappings between the conceptual (or “source”) metaphor (in this case, partnership or war) and the target domain (in this case, the contest) (Shields & Bredemeier, 2011a). And if Martens' (1975) depiction of the competitive process is correct, conceptual metaphors that scaffold the rapid, unconscious interpretation of the contesting environment will influence subsequent responses and consequences. While Martens' focus was on responses like anxiety and consequences like disrupted performance, the partnership and war conceptual metaphors may have broad impact, influencing, for example, approaches to sportspersonship.

To date, hypotheses regarding the antecedents and consequences of adopting the competitive and decompetitive conceptual metaphors (partnership and war, respectively) have remained largely untestable because of the lack of a reliable and valid instrument assessing the degree to which contestants utilize them. The three interrelated studies that follow were designed to develop, refine, and validate a sport-specific measure of contesting orientation, and demonstrate its utility through an investigation of sportspersonship.

Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to develop and test an initial pool of items for the new scale. First, the authors created a list of possible items for each conceptual metaphor (*partnership*, *war*). These items were then reviewed by experts. Based upon the feedback received from the experts, the final pool of items was created and pilot tested. Finally, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to assess factor structure and item performance.

Methods

Preliminary scale development

The authors first created a list of seventy-four items reflecting both the *partnership* ($n = 34$) and *war* ($n = 40$) conceptual metaphors. Items were drafted as statements with which a respondent could agree or disagree. To establish the face and content validity of the items, they were given to five experts in sport and moral psychology. After being given descriptions of the two different conceptual metaphors (see Shields & Bredemeier, 2011a), the experts, who worked independently, were asked to identify which conceptual metaphor they thought the item reflected (or whether it was too ambiguous to tell), and whether the item was “clearly” or “somewhat” connected to the metaphor. Only items that all five reviewers indicated were unambiguous and clearly connected to

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