



## HYPERCOMPETITIVE ATTITUDE AMONG ATHLETES: A BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract:**

Maintaining competitive attitude provides confidence, focus and ability to achieve but over competitiveness can result in maladjusted behavior and lead to neurotic behavior. The present investigation was focused to explore the hypercompetitive attitude among track and field athletes across gender. The subjects were intercollegiate medalist and non-medalist athletes, age ranging from 18 to 25 years. The subjects objectively responded to a 26 items' Hypercompetitive Attitude Scale (Ryckman et al., 1990). Researchers tested the Null hypothesis by employing 't' test to find out the comparative differentials in hypercompetitive attitude between track and field athletes, medalist and non-medalist athletes and the gender groups. Findings of the study revealed that the athletic groups i.e. the track and field groups and medalist and non-medalist groups had not demonstrated any significant differences. However, significant differences were noticed among the gender groups. Results revealed that only medalist female athletes exhibited significantly higher level of hypercompetitive attitude as compared to the male athletes. Further in-depth investigation is needed to observe the intense attributes of hyper competitiveness in relation to sports performance.

**Keywords:** hyper-competitiveness; attitude; athletes; behavior

### **1. Introduction**

Competitive behavior is a natural tendency to pursue any task with an attitude to excel or do better than others. Competitiveness is a quest to win or take advantage against the others (Helmreich and Spence, 1978). The field of sports is full of competitiveness where

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every athlete's unremitting drive is to win the competition, which pre-occupies athlete's mind with different competitive orientations that vary from individual to individual and sport to sport. Collier et al. (2010) categorized three different competitive orientations such as personal development competitive individuals, competition avoidance individuals and hypercompetitive individuals. Similarly, Houston et al. (2012), after reviewing the findings of several other researchers, consolidated the competitive orientations as general competitiveness, healthy competitiveness and hyper competitiveness. There is no doubt that the competitive behavior or attitude supports personal development and provides more scope to win in sports and success in life. While a moderate or optimum feeling of competitiveness can be healthy for those who strive to achieve a higher level of performance, but overly competitive behavior or overly charged attitude can have negative effects (Hooda, 2015), which may lead the athletes to be misfit and maladjusted in sports and the society. Winning with healthy competitive behavior is appreciable, constructive and progressive for one's development as compared to the unhealthy competitive behavior, and such unhealthy competitive behavior is termed as hyper competitiveness. Hypercompetitive behavior is an attitude that exhibits negative behavior on the part of an athlete and is associated with low self-esteem and powerlessness (Horney, 1937; Ryckman et al. 1996; Williams et al., 2008); high aggression or hostility (Houston et al., 2003; Visek et al., 2010; Hooda, 2015); insecure or low self-worth and strong intensions to win at any cost (Horney, 1937). Such hyper competitive attitude manifests unhealthy psychological characteristics and cultivates an athlete with unhealthy behavior. Researchers have found that men and women who scored high on the trait of hyper competitiveness are more narcissistic and less psychologically healthy than those who scored low on this trait (David, 2013). Grijalva (2015) reported that men, on average, are more narcissistic than women. Walters (2018) says *"In fact, it's not hard to explain why men are more likely to be narcissistic than women. Just look at how we are socialized. So many boys grow up in families where both their assertiveness and desire for power are praised, meanwhile the same traits are discouraged for girls."* Such behavior, in any case, can be harmful to the moral and social values in a society. Therefore, finding or recognizing such behavior early among athletes is important in sports as it can not only be beneficial for building a comprehensive and balanced personality of athletes, boosting high performance, having optimistic and friendly behavior, positive acceptance for win and defeat, but will also be beneficial for inculcating moral and ethical behavior.

In athletics, the performance looms around the individual efforts, consequently sometimes due to the individual performances, the athlete remains focused on self-related motives and interests. This state may negatively influence the athlete as it may make them unhappy because they are competing in the activity not for healthy competition or enjoyment, but to attain the reward (Abuhamdeh et al., 2009). It may make an athlete self-centered and introvert, and even in some cases, such individualism may lead to hyper competitiveness.

Hypercompetitive behavior can be neutralized or molded to form healthy competitive behavioral personality of the athletes. It can boost an athlete's desire to seek

healthy competitive behavior and make him to stay longer in the competitive world with positivity and cooperation. Hence, the focus of this study was to understand the hypercompetitive behavior among intercollegiate athletes participating in track and field events, and to investigate their hypercompetitive attitude.

## 2. Method and Procedure

Descriptive method has been adopted to explore the hypercompetitive behavior/attitude among the athletes participating in track and field events in the inter college competitions. Subjects (N=162) were male and female medalist and non-medalist in equal proportion (81 medalists and 81 non-medalist) with age ranging from 18 to 25 years. The subjects were asked to fill out the Hypercompetitive Attitude Scale (a 5-point Likert Scale) developed by Ryckman et al., (1990) to assess their level of hypercompetitive attitude. Null hypotheses were tested by employing 't'-test to find out the comparative differentials between different groups i.e. track and field event athletes, medalist and non-medalist athletes and the gender groups.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 Differences between intercollegiate medalist and non-medalist athletes on hypercompetitive attitude

**Table 1:** Mean, SD and t-value with regard to the Intercollegiate medalist and Non-medalist athletes on Hypercompetitive Attitude

Groups	Mean	SD	Mean diff	t-value
Intercollegiate Medalists	82.543	9.206	1.851	1.763
Intercollegiate Non-medalists	80.691	9.689		

The results in Table 1 have demonstrated that Intercollegiate Medalist group was having mean score of 82.54 and SD= 9.20 as compared to the Non-medalist group which had obtained the mean score of 80.69 and SD value 9.68. The mean difference was 1.851 and 't' value being 1.763, the same was not found to be significant. This indicated that there were no significant differences between medalist and non-medalist athletes on their hypercompetitive attitude. The findings of the study are in line with that of Kohlstedt (2011) who also found no significant differences between university and recreational student athletes on this variable. This shows that the athletes who are involved in competitive pursuit, regardless of their medalist and non-medalist status, possess similar psychological attributes related with their hypercompetitive attitude.

### 3.2 Differences between intercollegiate track events and field events medalists on their hypercompetitive attitude

**Table 2:** Mean, SD and t-value with regard to the Intercollegiate Track events and Field events Medalists on Hypercompetitive Attitude

Groups	Mean	SD	Mean diff	t-value
Intercollegiate Track Event Medalists	83.412	9.006	2.933	1.866
Intercollegiate Field Event Medalists	80.479	9.441		

The results in Table 2 have revealed that intercollegiate track events medalists had the mean score of 83.412 and SD=9.006. On the other hand, field events medalists had obtained the mean score of 80.479 and SD=9.441. The mean difference was found 2.933 and 't' value was 1.866, which was not found to be significant. These results revealed that both the track and field athletes possessed similar level of hyper competitiveness. These findings suggest that hypercompetitive attitude has been a strong psychological attribute and propensity to compete and win for both the track and field events medalists. On similar lines, Ryska (2002) found hypercompetitive as a strong predictor of self-purpose of the sports i.e. acquiring social recognition, achieving new heights in career, along with becoming a competitive skill learner.

### 3.3 Differences between intercollegiate track and field non-medalists on hypercompetitive attitude

**Table 3:** Mean, SD and t-value with regard to the Intercollegiate Track and Field Non-Medalists on Hypercompetitive Attitude

Groups	Mean	SD	Mean diff	t-value
Intercollegiate Track Events Non-Medalists	81.508	9.304	2.758	1.664
Intercollegiate Field Events Non-Medalists	78.750	10.393		

The results in Table 3 have descriptively traced the mean and SD values of 81.508 and 9.304 respectively for the track events non-medalists and M=78.750 and SD= 10.393 for field events non-medalist groups. The mean difference between both the groups was 2.758 and the obtained 't' value was 1.664, which was not found to be significant. Although these results indicate that non-medalist track athletes scored higher than non-medalist field athletes, and thus to be more hypercompetitive, but not significantly. These results also disclosed that the non-medalist track and field athletes group were having low level of hypercompetitive attitude as compare to medalist of track and field groups (Table 2) because as per the manual of Hypercompetitive Attitude Scale, higher the score, higher the level of hyper-competitiveness.

### 3.4 Gender differences among intercollege medalist athletes on hypercompetitive attitude

**Table 4:** Mean, SD and t-value with regard to the Intercollegiate Male and Female medalists on Hypercompetitive Attitude

Groups	Mean	SD	Mean diff	t-value
Intercollegiate Male Medalists	80.851	8.592	3.382	2.372*
Intercollegiate Female Medalists	84.235	9.537		

\*p<0.05

The results in Table 4 have projected that the female medalists were having a higher mean score of 84.235 as compared to the male medalists who had the mean score of 80.851. The SD values for both the groups were 9.537 and 8.592 respectively. The mean difference between both male and female medalist groups was 3.382 and 't' value was 2.372, the same was found to be significant (p<0.05). Williams et al. (2008) had also found that gender had a significant effect on hyper-competitiveness but in their study, the male subjects were found to have higher level of hyper-competitiveness than the female subjects. With the increasing number of female athletes entering competitive sports, which were once male dominated, the female athletes are demonstrating similar trait as that of male athletes.

**Table 5:** Mean, SD and t-value with regard to the Intercollegiate Male and Female Non-Medalists on Hypercompetitive Attitude

Groups	Mean	SD	Mean diff	t-value
Intercollegiate Male Non-Medalists	80.271	8.941	0.839	0.550
Intercollegiate Female Non-Medalists	81.111	10.423		

Concerning the attitude hyper-competitiveness, the results in Table-5 have shown that the intercollegiate female non-medalists had a slightly higher mean score of 81.111 than their counterpart male non-medalists who had obtained a mean score of 80.271. The SD values for both the groups were 10.423 and 8.941 respectively. The mean difference between both these groups was 0.839 and 't' value being 0.550, the same was not found to be significant. The result indicated that although the female non-medalists had scored a bit higher on hyper-competitiveness than their male counterpart, which are in line with the female medalist group (Table 4), but these differences fell below the level of significance. This shows that non-medalist females were also conscious of their performance and had zeal to compete with high competitiveness than male.

## 4. Findings and Conclusions

Findings of the study suggest that the performance groups i.e. medalist and non-medalist groups, track and field medalist groups, track events and field events non-

medalist groups and the gender non-medalist groups did not differ from each other significantly on their hyper-competitiveness attitude. Although the medalist groups had obtained higher scores on hypercompetitive attitude as compare to non-medalist groups, but these scores fell short to achieve the level of significance. Only the gender differences among medalist athletes were found to be significant, where female athletes exhibited higher level of hypercompetitive attitude than male athletes. Female medalists had obtained a mean score of 84.23 which was significantly greater than that of the mean score of males i.e. 80.85, meaning thereby that the former group had higher level of hypercompetitive attitude (as per the test manual, higher the score, higher the hypercompetitive attitude).

These results were contrary to those of Kohlsted (2011) and Williams (2012) who found that male sportsperson had greater hypercompetitive attitude than the females. This reversal of the trend is perhaps due to the changing current social scenario, the emerging competitive atmosphere, and the demands that might have put pressure over females and encouraged them to prove their self-worth and maintain self-esteem in the society.

The earlier results might have been influenced due to the lower social status of females, dominating male behavior in the society and also in the athletic abilities. But in the present-day scenario, the females have become more conscious and feel empowered to enhance or retain their social identity, self-worth and desire to overcome the male domination which might have made them to compete hyper-competitively and outclassed their male counterpart on their hypercompetitive attitude. Such hypercompetitive attitude may push the females more towards the neurotic behavior and make them maladjusted in society. Researchers have found that men and women who scored high on the trait of hyper competitiveness are more narcissistic and less psychologically healthy than those who scored low on this trait (Hooda, 2015).

The authors recommend further investigations involving athletes at national and international levels to provide an in-depth analysis of their hypercompetitive attitude to understand their competitive orientations, psychological health and pros and cons of hypercompetitive behavior or attitude in athletics so that healthy competitive behavior can be defined to set the healthy attitude among them.

## **5. Implications of the Study**

- The findings of the study can lead the coaches to identify the competitive behavior among athletes and direct or counsel them for healthy competitive behavior.
- Understanding and identifying such behavior will enable the sports psychologist and coaches to work over the mental skills and strategies of the athletes in order to help them overcome the hostility and neurotic behavior, and to prepare them for better performance and long-term retention in the athletic world.

### Authors' Note

Authors certify that they have no commercial associations (e.g., consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangements, etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

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