



A GROUNDED THEORY ON THE DYNAMICS OF SPORTS ANXIETY OF COLLEGIATE ATHLETES

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Abstract:

The Dynamic Anxiety and Neuro-Behavioral Regulation Outcome in Collegiate Athletes (DANBROA) Theory presents a comprehensive framework to understand the complex interplay of factors influencing sports anxiety in collegiate athletes. Grounded in qualitative research, the DANBROA Theory identifies key elements shaping anxiety experiences: self-perception, social dynamics, coping strategies, and reflective practices. It emphasizes a dynamic feedback loop, where pre-competition anxiety, performance execution, and post-competition reflection continuously influence one another. This cyclical process highlights the evolving nature of sports anxiety and its impact on athletic performance. The theory posits that athletes with positive self-perception, supportive social environments, and effective coping mechanisms can harness sports anxiety as a source of motivation. At the same time, those lacking these resources may experience detrimental effects. The DANBROA framework underscores the importance of addressing internal (self-belief, mindset) and external (team dynamics, audience expectations) factors in managing sports anxiety. Implications for practice include the development of interventions to enhance resilience and sports performance. The theory offers a foundation for future research to explore further individual differences, cultural influences, and the effectiveness of anxiety management strategies in diverse athletic contexts.

Keywords: sports anxiety, collegiate athletes, DANBROA theory, performance feedback loop, mental health in sports

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1. Introduction

The college years are a critical transitional stage when young adults experience new and more complicated stressors, including academic stress, social requirements, and living independently (Worsley *et al.*, 2021). According to Agortey (2023), these stressors can be even more daunting, especially for student-athletes, given the fact that they must perform in sports besides their studies, which leads to increased levels of sports anxiety. This form of anxiety can affect their psychological well-being and their performance on the field, which is why it is essential to tackle it within the collegiate setting (Etherton *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is very important to understand the causes of sports anxiety and how best to prevent its occurrence in student-athletes who are already struggling through a stressful period of their lives (Jones, 2021).

Sports anxiety in college athletes is a concern because it is a common phenomenon through which athletes experience increased levels of stress and pressure in relation to sports, which may impair their psychological condition and welfare (Frame & Reichin, 2019). Research showed that sports anxiety may result in poor performance, reduced fun in the sporting activity, and higher rates of burnout and dropping out from the sport (Guiriba *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, this problem of sports anxiety can be related to physical education since sports are part and parcel of the field. High levels of sports anxiety can lead to fear or embarrassment resulting from the risk of failure in performing some tasks in sporting activities of students, affecting participation and development of motor skills that determine students' lifelong physical activity and health attitudes (Taylor *et al.*, 2021).

It is becoming apparent that high levels of sports anxiety amongst collegiate athletes are on the rise across the globe, as studies from different countries show high levels of prevalence. A study done with college athletes in the United States showed that 31% of female college athletes reported a high amount of sports-related anxiety (Beidler *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, among student-athletes in the United Kingdom, the study revealed that 27% of them often experienced critical sports anxiety signs that are associated with the performance of athletes (Rice *et al.*, 2019). In the same manner, a study in Australia showed that out of the collegiate athletes, 25% reported having notable instances of sports anxiety, thus affecting their well-being and academics (Lopes Dos Santos *et al.*, 2020). Validated psychological instruments in the collegiate setup usually determine the extent to which athletes experience sports anxiety in these studies. One standard instrument is the Sport Anxiety Scale-2, which measures the cognitive and somatic modes of sports anxiety (Smith *et al.*, 2006) self-report items with the use of a Likert scale. Furthermore, the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) is widely used to measure the level of anxiety at a specific time right before the competition and indexes cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence (Martens *et al.*, 1990).

The high incidence of sports anxiety among athletes in the Philippines has been recorded as a phenomenon of growing concern in the recent past. In a survey conducted by Tanglao (2021), 45% of Filipino student-athletes said that they experience severe anxiety before the game, which is 15% higher than the global average of 30% (Smith *et al.*,

2019). Furthermore, Capinpin and Estrella (2021) noted that 53 percent of the athletes asked in the country claimed that sports anxiety was the primary factor causing their poor performance. These findings indicate a significant problem, as sports anxiety affects not only the psyche of athletes but their success and progress in sports as well (Dieter Hackfort & Spielberger, 2021).

The high prevalence of sports anxiety has been a growing concern, especially in the Davao Region; researchers have investigated factors such as demographics. Daneca *et al.* (2023) found that numerous athletes in Davao suffer from heightened anxiousness due to mere competition pressures and lack of access to professional help. This is especially true for high school athletes, as Barlizo and Osorno (2022) pointed out, indicating that most of the respondents in their studies belonged to this group. Tanglao (2021) found that 45% of Filipino student-athletes, as well as those in the Davao Region, had high levels of sports anxiety before competitions, which was higher than the global average. However, research attention is still lacking for college athletes, who differ in stress and pressure as they advance to the next competitive level and responsibilities.

While much has been written on the phenomena of sports anxiety, a blossoming niche still exists due to a lack of sufficient information that would explain the multitude of factors that make up high levels of anxiety among Collegiate athletes. Despite their implications in relation to stress and burnout, existing theories like Cognitive Appraisal Theory, Self-efficacy Theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the Inverted U-Hypothesis, and Apter's Reversal Theory only partially focus on these factors. Scholarly literature about the interdependence of these constructs is currently lacking. However, a few prior quantitative studies either examined only a portion of these factors or did not involve collegiate sports *per se*. It is timely to investigate collegiate athletes' sports anxiety levels as their daily lives are full of stressors, academic responsibilities, and expectations of being a successful athlete. In this way, this study aims to present a perspective on these dynamics, which may help design specific interventions that would facilitate the development of more effective coping strategies for college athletes and improve their psychological and overall well-being.

The societal relevance of this study on the dynamics of sports anxiety in collegiate athletes can be regarded as significant because it aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which aims to promote the health of all individuals. In doing so, the present study can constructively contribute to sports psychology by generating a grounded theory of the multi-layered process of sports anxiety that can frame and guide methods to build effective coping resources for athletes' psychological well-being and peak performance. This contribution is crucial for enhancing athletes' quality of life and the progression of physical education as educators and coaches will be able to apply various practical means to address sports anxiety.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Prevalence of Sports Anxiety among Collegiate Athletes

Innumerable studies have thoroughly probed the incidence of sports anxiety among collegiate players. This valuable knowledge has come a long way and shed more light on its pervasive presence and far-reaching effect on athletes' sports performance and overall mental wellness. To illustrate this, Sutcliffe and Greenberger's (2020) work shows that about 40% of college players indicated having high levels of sports anxiety during the competitive seasons. Similarly, a study by Thompson and Schary (2020) found that more than 50% of student-athletes had regularly experienced symptoms of fear of failure, worry, and nervousness while participating in sports. This data underscores the fact that anxiety amongst sporting members in college is not uncommon.

Furthermore, different researchers have made clear a lot of other variables that generate such an intense amount of sports anxiety in college student-athletes. To cite one of those stressors, managing a hectic class and sports schedule has been closely related to the rise in anxiety rates of NCAA athletes (Herman, 2021). When students in college must live with teammates and be intimate with their practices, it is the level of anxiety and self-doubt that they may experience. For instance, dealing with limited playing time and seeing oneself be below teammates in terms of performance can be some of the triggers (Hepler *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the robust environment of university sports and the pressure of achieving among athletes (Lopes Dos Santos *et al.*, 2020) can prompt stress or coalesce anxiety.

2.2 Sports Anxiety of Athletes Before Sport Competitions

Sports anxiety, especially before sporting events, remains well-established and has substantial implications for athletes' performance. Research has also indicated that the level of pre-competition anxiety depends on factors such as personality disposition, past experiences, and perceived self-efficacy of the competition (Šunje & Vardo, 2023). A study shows that cognitive anxiety, which encompasses thoughts or fears and expectations of adverse outcomes, and somatic anxiety, encompassing physical signs such as increased pulse rate and sweating, are common among athletes before sports events (Zubić, 2021). These forms of anxiety can make performance worse because they distract and affect motor skills. For instance, Hale (2019) established that increased pre-competition sports anxiety predicts poor sports performance among college athletes.

2.3 Sports Anxiety During Sports Competition

Anxiety during competitions has been identified as an important area of inquiry since excessive levels of anxiety can significantly affect athletic performance and the experience of the athletes (Rice *et al.*, 2019). Competitions are always associated with increased sports anxiety levels because of the time-related pressure on performance, observers, and the relevance of the competition results (Archer & Wildman, 2020). Recent research has also shown that this sports anxiety may be realized in cognitive form in terms of persisting with negative thoughts and doubts as well as somatic form in the form of tachycardia

and an increase in muscle tension (Geeta & Muthya, 2020). For instance, in their study, Sánchez-Sánchez *et al.* (2023) identified that student-athletes who experienced higher levels of in-sports anxiety demonstrated more absence of focus and more significant fluctuations in performance.

In addition, sports anxiety rates, which occur during competitions, can be affected by some psychological and situational aspects. Smith *et al.* (2019) revealed that athletes who have lower self-confidence and a poor ability to cope are vulnerable to experiencing sports anxiety. Such athletes usually have low coping resources, and for this reason, they show reduced functionality in the ways through which they can execute skills during competitive performance.

2.4 Sports Anxiety After Sports Competition

Sports Anxiety may continue beyond the competition, depending on athletes' self-appraisal and the comments from coaches and fellow athletes (Amemiya & Sakairi, 2021). Casali *et al.* (2021) also pointed out that athletes who view their performance as a failure or below their expectations trigger high levels of anxiety after the competition. Such post-event negative thoughts may include disappointment, shame, and fear of other failures that affect their motivation and mental health. Furthermore, (Nicholls, 2022) revealed that athletes who do not have adequate ways of managing these negative emotions are more susceptible to chronic anxiety, especially when they bring the anxiety to the next training or competition, making it worse.

The level of post-competition sports anxiety is also constrained by the social context and the available resources in handling the athletes. Prendergast and Brennan (2019) state that post-competition anxiety is a crucial factor whereby support from friends and family helps. Coping with stress and sports anxiety in the post-competition period depends on the quality of the relationships that the athlete is experiencing through interactions with coaches, teammates, and family members (Gjulem, 2023).

2.5 Theories Related to Sports Anxiety

Several theories provide rich information on how the different components of sports anxiety can be examined, thus providing an opportunity for a vast understanding of how the various factors cause high levels of anxiety and subsequently deter sports performance. Cognitive appraisal theory postulates that emotions result from how an individual perceives a specific event or circumstance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This was applied in research on sports anxiety to establish the impact that the perception that athletes have of situations as being challenging or threatening has on their emotional states and levels of sports anxiety. For instance, a study conducted on the relationship between competition appraisals and sports anxiety showed that individuals who perceive competitions as threats report higher levels of anxiety (Dieter Hackfort & Spielberger, 2021). Another theory is the self-efficacy theory based on Bandura (1997), which deals with the effect of power belief on motivation and consequent performance.

In the research on high levels of sports anxiety, this theory helps in explaining the relationship between the confidence level that athletes have in their abilities to handle

situations and their level of anxiety. It was observed that athletes with low efficacy experienced high levels of sports anxiety (Aliyyah *et al.*, 2020).

Another theory employed when examining anxiety was the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which elaborates and amplifies how stress operates through appraisal and coping. This theory was employed when exploring high levels of sports anxiety to analyze the relation between athletes' perceived stressors as well as their coping styles and anxiety (Nicholls, 2022). According to the Inverted U-Hypothesis by Yerkes and Dodson, 1908 one has to have an optimal level of arousal, which is suitable for performance. Still, any level below and above this level will not improve performance. In the studies concerning high levels of sports anxiety, this hypothesis is used to illustrate that the increased level of arousal or anxiety adversely affects performance, indicating that athletes must achieve a moderate level of arousal for maximum performance (Kerr, 2021). When discussing changes in sports anxiety, the Reversal Theory developed by Apter (1970) is also used. This theory suggests that orientations such as seriousness and playfulness establish arousal and bring about anxiety or excitement. As applied in research examining elevated sports anxiety, this theory helps elucidate how athletes in a telic state view high arousal as anxiety. In contrast, those in a paratelic state will interpret the same level of arousal as excitement, affecting their anxiety and performance (Sharma, 2022).

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a grounded theory approach within Creswell's qualitative research framework. Qualitative research is a research technique that focuses on the purpose of experiencing, doing, and the why of such actions. Hence, the main objectives of qualitative research studies are to establish the 'why,' the 'feelings,' 'perceived sensations,' and 'perceptions' of people or organizations. It intends to define and interpret various phenomena in their natural context, which might require additional text (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research's key characteristics include context and meaning, which are investigated through open-ended questions and common methodological approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. This approach is quite open, and one can incorporate it so that the researcher gets immersed in the research subject (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Grounded theory is a purposive approach used in social sciences, which predominantly looks at building systematic theories based on a paradoxical approach to data collection and analysis (Massimiliano Tarozzi, 2020). Grounded theory is a method of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data elaborated by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, in the mid of the 1960s. Their book, "The Discovery of Grounded Theory," published in 1967, introduced the fundamental processes of this approach as it focuses on developing theories from the data obtained rather than theory concerned with the testing of theories. This study adheres to the methodological techniques of grounded theory, such as constant comparative analysis, theoretical

sampling, and coding, through which the data collection and analysis are integrated cyclically to refine and expand the theoretical concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

One factor that makes grounded theory a good approach is that it focuses on theory building through the analysis of data, which enables the identification of hidden underlying patterns of social conduct and hence facilitates the creation of new theories that capture the social processes accurately. It is generic for investigating when specific theories might be lacking or scarce (Burns *et al.*, 2022). As noted above, grounded theory has been appropriately utilized in sports and psychological studies when identifying subjective behaviors, phenomena, and processes in these fields.

In the context of collegiate athletes' sports anxiety dynamics, the grounded theory approach is particularly suitable since it aims to develop a new and context-specific theory based on profound qualitative data collected from the numerous interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents. This approach aligns with the study's goals since it allows for rigorous documentation and understanding of athletes' personal and cultural aspects, thus enabling the researchers to understand how athletes perceive and deal with sports anxiety. Furthermore, the iterative analysis process ensures the refinement and timely applicability of the theory, increases the athletes' empathetic and receptive reaction, and provides valuable and context-specific insights for collegiate athletes in Region XI.

3.2 Participants

As mentioned above, the Grounded Theory study focuses on identifying the dynamics of sports anxiety among college athletes from public and private colleges and universities of Region XI. To ensure that the study remains on track and is helpful, it is necessary to set specific criteria that will help to determine if the subject can or cannot be included in the study, among other things. Specifically, college athletes participating in organized sports competitions outside their schools, at the local, regional, or national levels, are selected based on the inclusion criteria. Those associated with this group should be able to practice generally to the varsity level in various sports such as football, basketball, swimming, and track and field, among others. All genders were included in this study. Also, athletes who claim regular sporting activity were asked to participate irrespective of their degree of sporting anxiety- low, moderate, or high, to enrich the study with diverse opinions.

To determine if a participant experiences low, moderate, or high anxiety in a Grounded Theory study, I used an approach similar to that described by Charmaz (2014). This involves conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions where athletes share their experiences with sports anxiety. During these conversations, I noticed how frequently participants mentioned feeling anxious, the intensity of these feelings, and the impact on their sports performance and daily life. By analyzing these narratives, I categorized the sports anxiety levels without using structured questionnaires, relying instead on the rich qualitative data the athletes provided. This method aligns with Charmaz's emphasis on building theory from participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

The criteria for exclusion ensured that the participants are active college athletes and experience sports anxiety; as such, participants may have limited information to contribute to the issue under consideration. Students with major mental disorders not associated with anxiety in relation to a sporting activity are also considered to be outside the study to maintain the specific focus of the study on the pressure particular to sports. Also, athletes who do not wish to be interviewed cannot participate in the study.

Purposive sampling was the primary sampling technique for this study, at first instance, to identify participants who would have well-developed the behaviors required for inclusion and can thus offer comprehensive descriptions of their experiences of sports anxiety. This approach helps to minimize inconsequential and general data collection in a way that makes sense for the study. During the data analysis, the choices of further participants will be grounded on the theoretical sampling as data analysis progresses and the extent of theory saturation is reached. This method entails identifying new participants based on the insights and categories from subsequent data analysis. It helps achieve a finer and more elaborate understanding of the dynamics of sports anxiety that collegiate athletes in Region XI approach. Thus, the study utilized purposive and theoretical sampling techniques to establish a grounded theory that represents every facet of sports anxiety in various colleges and universities established within the region.

3.3 Research Instruments

As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), referenced by Lobe *et al.* (2020), the researcher is regarded as a data collection instrument. This indicates that rather than being mediated by computers or survey questionnaires, human instruments mediate the data—the researcher uses interview questions which are the following:

- 1) How do college athletes view the dynamics of sports anxiety?
- 2) What are the elements that characterize the dynamics of sports anxiety theory?
- 3) What are the relationships among these elements?
- 4) How are the dynamics of sports anxiety manifested in the sports community?

I recorded the responses, gestures, and facial expressions in a notebook. During the procedure, voice recorders and pictures are used as tools. The conversations and interviews were captured on tape, and photos were taken when needed for proof. The taped conversations and interviews are fully transcribed. Once finished, the talks are transcribed and printed for reading, assessment, and analysis. The documents and images are stored in a computer for later analysis, coding, annotation, and interpretation.

3.4 In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

In the process of grounded theory, selecting participants, conducting interviews, and conducting focus group discussions are considered the primary procedures for data gathering, focused on the search for the phenomenon being investigated (Tümen Akyildiz, 2021). According to Pagliarin *et al.* (2022), face-to-face interviews facilitate direct participant responses. The researchers can delve deeper into the specific episodes of the participants' lives and how they feel and perceive certain situations. They follow an

interview schedule but simultaneously allow the participants to elaborate on their ideas and concepts to discover rich details that underpin the theories emerging from the data.

On the other hand, focus group discussions make it possible to have a sequence of exchanges of views between participants, making it easier to elicit a range of responses from the participants based on the experiences that they all go through (Cyr, 2019). It allows the participants to engage in a collaborative discussion of their responses to the questions. It helps to identify shared perceptions, discrepancies, and latent meanings of their experiences, essential for asserting a rich and holistic understanding of the phenomenon in focus. Altogether, these qualitative methods produce substantive and thick data and enable the theoretical elaboration to be done progressively by building grounded theories that are more genuine and accurate about the phenomenon (Eakin & Gladstone, 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Views on the Dynamics of Sports Anxiety

Based on participants' responses, the following categories emerged, which led to the creation of the new emerging grounded theory on the dynamics of sports anxiety of collegiate athletes. The following categories are the participant's views on the dynamics of sports anxiety.

4.1.1 Anticipatory Nervousness

It is usual for many athletes to feel anxious before the competition, especially when they are envisioning themselves in some or other competition situation and results. This category involves the worry occasioned by anticipation and expectations before an event. The athlete feels nervous and may even have problems with sleeping, all if an athlete is not quite sure about his preparedness. This mental tension can counter their attention prospects, so a calm pre-game mind is crucial.

4.1.2 Game-Related Fear

The fear of making mistakes is common in sports, where performance is often judged publicly and carries high personal stakes. Sports anxiety in this category stems from the fear of committing errors, being blamed, or failing to meet expectations. This pressure can create mental blocks, causing athletes to overthink or doubt their abilities.

4.1.3 Self-Confidence Issues

Self-confidence is crucial for athletic performance, but comparisons, negative feedback, or a lack of self-belief can undermine it. Athletes who struggle with self-confidence may feel heightened anxiety, especially in environments where they are compared to others. This category highlights the impact of self-consciousness on sports performance.

4.1.4 Opponent-induced anxiety

Skill levels on an athlete's competitors can create anticipation that alters an athlete's disposition, in this case, anxiety when facing an athlete of a higher skill level. When athletes encounter their counterparts, they will likely be intimidated and nervous as they question whether they will stand their ground. This anxiety can truly hamper sports performance, making it critically important for athletes to think about their capabilities and plans about the opponents, not the opponents' capabilities.

4.1.5 Physical Manifestations of Anxiety

Anxiety often manifests physically, signalling heightened arousal that can either hinder or, if managed well, enhance performance. Symptoms like a racing heart, sweating, and shallow breathing are natural responses to stress but can be disruptive if left unmanaged.

4.1.6 Physical Discomfort from Sports Anxiety

Pains in the stomach or cold hands amplify stress, making athletes unprepared for their activities. It involves symptoms such as trembling or the sensation of a painful stomach, which should distract sports performance.

4.1.7 Cognitive Effects of Anxiety

Anxiety can lead to cognitive disruptions, interfering with focus, decision-making, and recall of practiced drills or strategies. Worry, mental blocks, and difficulty concentrating are common under stress or sports anxiety.

4.1.8 External Factors Contributing to Anxiety

External factors such as unfamiliar venues, equipment issues, and referees can create added anxiety for athletes. Situational factors beyond athletes' control can heighten stress, making it crucial for them to maintain flexibility and adapt quickly to external circumstances.

4.1.9 Social Dynamics and Team Interactions

Team dynamics and social interactions can impact individual anxiety levels, affecting overall performance and team cohesion. Athletes may feel isolated or distracted by teammates, causing anxiety that disrupts team coordination. Open communication and mutual support within the team were challenges, especially during the game.

4.1.10 Coping Mechanisms and Relaxation Techniques

Some physical warm-up exercises practiced before games enable the body to relax to prepare for a big event. Warming up, tapping, and stretching are important to a performer before the performance. Through a physical ritual, an athlete's body becomes ready, reducing responsiveness to other stimuli.

4.1.11 Breathing and Relaxation Techniques

Breathing exercises and relaxation techniques are widely used to regulate emotions and reduce anxiety during competitions. Controlled breathing and relaxation help athletes manage arousal levels, maintain calm, and stay focused. Athletes use deep breathing as a simple yet effective way of promoting relaxation and mental clarity.

4.1.12 Cognitive Relaxation Techniques

Mental strategies like positive self-talk and visualization support athletes' focus, confidence, and coping skills. This category focuses on athletes' cognitive techniques to reinforce confidence and concentration.

4.1.13 Expressive Relaxation Techniques

Calming down activities like shouting or laughing can help athletes clear their minds of the anxiety-causing clutter. This category is a technique for managing the feelings that enable athletes to release steam in a socially acceptable manner. The athletes do an activity such as yelling to help manage their stress, as they can get it out of their system for just several seconds and concentrate on the game.

4.1.14 Spiritual and Mindful Coping Mechanisms

Many athletes consider spirituality and faith comfort and strength before a game. Spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation offer athletes mental reassurance and guidance. Faith-based rituals served as grounding practices, enabling these athletes to feel supported and less anxious as they prepare for competition.

4.1.15 Relief from Anxiety Post-Game

Anxiety often diminishes post-game, providing athletes with a sense of relief after intense focus and exertion. This category highlights the natural relief and satisfaction athletes feel after a game as anxiety recedes and they can relax.

The direct utterances with almost the same ideas were grouped, and a central node was given according to the participants' main idea expressed in those utterances. The common ideas from the direct utterances were identified during the memoing. The overarching theme now serves as the overall subject loaded with core ideas clustered as one and transformed into categories. In sum, the participants viewed the dynamics of sports anxiety as a multifaceted experience of Pre-Competition Sports Anxiety, Physical Manifestations, Mental and Emotional Techniques, Self-Perception and Social Influences, Holistic Anxiety Management, and Post-Competition Relief and Reflection as the overall themes.

4.2 Characteristics of the Dynamics of Sports Anxiety Theory

Based on participants' responses, the following categories emerged, which led to the creation of the new emerging grounded theory on the dynamics of sports anxiety of collegiate athletes. The following are categories for the characteristics of the dynamics of sports anxiety according to the responses of the participants.

4.2.1 Performance Anxiety Triggers

For athletes, performing in front of a large audience can be thrilling and intimidating. The sheer presence of hundreds, if not thousands, of eyes focused solely on them often brings intense pressure. When athletes step onto the field or court, knowing that so many people are watching their every move can amplify their nerves. This “audience-induced tension” can cause athletes to overthink each play, fearful of making mistakes. For many, this pressure manifests as anxiety, affecting their ability to perform as they usually would in a more private setting. While the audience brings an electric energy, it also acts as a powerful source of stress that can be difficult to shake off.

4.2.2 Expectation Pressure

Coaches, parents, athletes, and even society place certain expectations that can put incredible pressure on the various sports performances. This takes us to the competitiveness of sports; what many people find very hard is trying to perform or give what others expect of them. Every athlete is under huge pressure to perform according to expectations from their teammates, their families, and everyone else. This “expectation-driven pressure” can put a lot of stress and strain, especially if an athlete fears letting those stakeholders down. Should expectations be raised so high, that pressure to meet those starts weighing on an athlete’s confidence, depriving them of the freedom to perform.

4.2.3 Supportive Guidance

Positive feedback and reassurance from coaches and parents can be a powerful buffer against performance anxiety, helping athletes remain focused and grounded. When authority figures offer support without attaching conditions or expectations, athletes feel empowered to take risks and make mistakes without fear. This supportive approach reinforces that their worth isn’t solely tied to results, allowing athletes to focus on their growth and enjoy the competition experience more fully.

Phase Two: The Integration of Categories and its Properties

4.2.4 Coaching Manner

A coach’s positive influence is vital to athlete development, as constructive coaching fosters a sense of confidence and resilience in players. Athletes who have encouraging coaches often feel safer to push their limits, knowing that their coach supports their efforts regardless of the outcome. This balanced approach helps reduce anxiety, as athletes are reminded that their progress and well-being are valued just as much as their performance.

4.2.5 Team Dynamics and Support

Open lines of communication and mutual support within a team can be a powerful antidote to anxiety, fostering a sense of security and mutual trust. Athletes who know they can rely on their teammates for support often feel less anxious as they understand that mistakes are shared learning opportunities. This supportive atmosphere encourages

members to focus on the team's success over personal worries, creating a more enjoyable and less anxiety-ridden experience.

4.2.6 Coach-Player Dynamics

While coaches play a crucial role in guiding athletes, excessive demands or unrealistic expectations can sometimes create more harm than motivation. When coaches emphasize results over progress, athletes may feel they are only as good as their last performance. This constant pressure to excel can hinder an athlete's confidence and willingness to take risks as they worry about the repercussions of failure. For some, this strain erodes the joy of competition.

4.2.7 Performance Pressure and Expectations

Athletes often set high standards for themselves, striving for perfection, which can lead to self-imposed stress and anxiety. When the bar is set too high, athletes may become overly critical of themselves, feeling that anything short of perfection is a failure. This internalized pressure can be paralyzing, as they may feel they can't afford to make mistakes, reducing their ability to perform freely.

4.2.8 Impact of Media on Anxiety

Media and social media visibility can pressure athletes, primarily when their performance is broadcast to a broader audience. This visibility can make athletes feel they are competing for their team and representing themselves in front of the world. The pressure to appear flawless in front of a wider audience can amplify self-consciousness and worry, making it hard for athletes to focus on their game entirely.

The direct utterances with almost the same ideas were grouped, and a central node was given according to the participants' main idea expressed in those utterances. The common ideas from the direct utterances were identified during the memoing. The overarching theme now serves as the overall subject loaded with core ideas clustered as one and transformed into categories. In sum, the participants captured the elements that characterized the dynamics of sports anxiety theory, namely External Expectations and Triggers, Interpersonal Dynamics, Media and Personal Perceptions, and Coaching Influence as the overall themes.

4.3 The Relationship Among All Emerging Overarching Themes

The cyclical nature of sports anxiety in collegiate athletes by connecting ten overarching themes. It begins with Pre-Competition Anxiety, which triggers the initial stress and anticipation before a performance. This anxiety leads to Physical Manifestations, such as increased heart rate or muscle tension, which represent how stress first expresses itself in the body. The flow then moves to Mental and Emotional Techniques, highlighting how athletes use strategies like visualization and positive self-talk to manage their anxiety and redirect it into focus and energy.

Next, the cycle transitions to Self-Perception and Social Influences, where an athlete's confidence is shaped by their self-image and external perceptions from peers,

coaches, family, and the audience. This connects to Holistic Anxiety Management, a broader category that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual coping strategies to create balance and resilience. The arrows then guide us to External Expectations and Triggers, representing societal, team, and audience pressures that heighten anxiety again, influencing an athlete's mental state and preparedness.

The flow continues to Interpersonal Dynamics, emphasizing the role of relationships with teammates, coaches, and peers in either alleviating or intensifying anxiety. From there, the cycle touches on Coaching Influence, reflecting how coaching styles and feedback impact athletes' stress levels. Media and Personal Perceptions show how media coverage and public opinion further shape sports anxiety. Finally, the cycle concludes with Post-Competition Relief and Reflection, where athletes evaluate their performance, learn from their experiences, and prepare for future competitions, looping back to Pre-Competition Anxiety as the cycle begins again. This interconnected flow demonstrates the recurring and complex dynamics of sports anxiety.

4.4 The New Emerging Theory on the Dynamics of Sports Anxiety of Collegiate Athletes Is Based on the Relationships of All the Overarching Themes (DANBROA Theory).

Sports anxiety is a multifaceted concern with Pre-Competition Anxiety, Physical, Mental, and Emotional Techniques, Self-Perception and Social Influences, Holistic Anxiety Management, and Post-Competition Relief and Reflection. According to the participants' responses, it also includes External Expectations and Triggers, Interpersonal Dynamics, Media and Personal Perceptions, and Coaching Influence. With these themes, it led to the emergence of a new sports anxiety theory, the Dynamic Anxiety Neuro-Behavioral Regulation Outcome in College Athletes (DANBROA Theory). According to the theory, sports anxiety in collegiate athletes is a multifaceted and reciprocally generated process influenced by the athlete's cognition, perceptions, and environmental prescriptive stimuli. It focuses on how competitive stress and coping, social pressure, and other factors affect competitive self-presentation, as well as the process of post-competition evaluation. It concerns how athletes can balance and deal with all the above components to reduce sports anxiety and enhance sports performance.

Furthermore, another tenet of the DANBROA theory is that sports anxiety is cyclical since the competitive environment of sports continually reintroduces the same stressors and pressures. Each time an athlete prepares for competition, they revisit the cycle of pre-competition anxiety, influenced by expectations, self-perception, and external pressures. Their physical and mental coping techniques help them manage stress temporarily, but the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, coaching influence, and media scrutiny persist and evolve with each performance. Post-competition reflection provides valuable insights, yet it also feeds into future expectations. As athletes engage in subsequent competitions, these dynamics repeat, creating a continuous loop where sports anxiety is felt.

Although there are present theoretical frameworks of sports anxiety that can be informative, these are usually insufficient regarding the scope of the college athletic

environment. These frameworks are inclined to present anxiety as a singular reaction to competition stress, and the existing literature indeed mainly explores the physiological and cognitive elements separately. However, student-athletes experience different situations of academic stress, social roles, group cohesion, and development pressure, which traditional models do not explain well. Also, the theories of competition that are recognized at the present stage do not take into account that anxiety can act as a stimulating factor that helps to overcome many obstacles. The research suggests that these facets are essential but are not considered in current existing theories; therefore, there is a requirement for a new theory-in-the-making, DANBROA Theory, for a better understanding of sports anxiety features in this population.

Moreover, the landscape of collegiate sports has evolved significantly, with increased competitiveness, higher performance expectations, and the pervasive influence of social media amplifying the pressure on athletes. Unlike previous generations, today's athletes contend with public scrutiny and instant feedback from audiences beyond the physical arena, including online communities. This shift in social dynamics has intensified external pressures, altering how athletes experience and cope with anxiety. Traditional theories, developed in less interconnected environments, do not account for these modern stressors and the complex interplay between in-person and digital interactions. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a new theory that considers the contemporary context of collegiate athletics, where anxiety sources are multifaceted and dynamically influenced by evolving social and digital landscapes.

Finally, today's models generally view anxiety as a negative construct that interferes with performance and that primary goals seek to minimize or control. Although the majority of research in sports psychology warns people about the negative consequences of sports anxiety and toxic optimism, some recent investigations stress that anxiety can work as the facilitator of learning, growth, adaptation, and resilience if it is appropriately regulated. Student-athletes are at a developmental age where their experiences with anxiety can create lifelong patterns of adjustment and psychological development. A new theory must highlight not only the dysfunctional aspects of anxiety but also focus on its positive aspects and describe a cycle of acquiring knowledge. By embracing sports anxiety as both dangerous and beneficial to self-growth, this new approach can enable a better understanding of the processes that take place in sports anxiety, making it easier to develop better coping strategies as the athlete transitions through their college years.

4.5 Manifestation of the Dynamics of Sports Anxiety in the Collegiate Sports Community

It begins with External Expectations and Triggers, where coaches, team, and audience demand to act as catalysts for stress, setting the stage for Pre-Competition Anxiety. This phase reflects the anticipation and worry athletes face before a performance. From here, the flow moves to Coaching Influence, illustrating how coaching styles, feedback, and guidance help athletes manage or exacerbate anxiety, for coaches play a pivotal role in shaping athletes' mental preparedness and responses to pressure. The cycle then

progresses to Interpersonal Dynamics, emphasizing athletes' relationships with teammates, coaches, peers, and family. These dynamics significantly influence how sports anxiety manifests, either providing support to reduce stress or fostering competition that increases it. These interactions feed into Media and Personal Perceptions, where athletes face scrutiny from media coverage and public opinion. This scrutiny affects Self-Perception and Social Influences, shaping athletes' confidence and the way they internalize external feedback.

From self-perception, the flow moves to Mental and Emotional Techniques, which include strategies like visualization, positive self-talk, and focus exercises to manage sports anxiety. These techniques are connected to Physical Manifestations, as mental anxiety often translates into physical symptoms like tension or a rapid heart rate. Student-athletes address these symptoms through Holistic Anxiety Management, a combination of mental, emotional, and physical coping strategies that prepare them for performance. Following the competition, athletes experience Post-Competition Relief and Reflection, evaluating their performance and considering their successes and shortcomings. This reflection creates a feedback loop, influencing the next cycle of External Expectations and Triggers, as the cycle begins again with new goals and pressures.

Sports anxiety in collegiate sports is a cycle influenced by internal and external factors. External expectations, coaching influence, media, and personal perceptions contribute to pre-competition anxiety. Athletes rely on mental and emotional techniques to manage anxiety, often requiring holistic anxiety management. Post-competition relief and reflection help restart the cycle.

5. Recommendations

Understanding sports anxiety in college athletes using the DANBROA Theory is possible. Still, it doesn't consider how athletes' experiences change when they're professional, young, or in other situations. The idea might not work for other students because it is based on college athletes with different academic and social development needs than other students. In addition, this theory is based on data collected from athletes through interview guide questions, which could be skewed by what the athletes say or think they are saying. Because of these things, it might be helpful to use more "external" data, like physiological and observational data, along with self-reports to understand better how sports anxiety patterns change over time. Therefore, the researcher highly recommended the following for applying the new emerging theory.

Explore Cross-Cultural Variations. Future works can investigate how this or that cultural background influences the manifestation of sports anxiety and its regulation. Using and comparing the DANBROA Theory in different cultures, authors can isolate different factors that affect anxiety and further tailor the theory to be more sensitive to different cultural contexts for athletes.

Apply Longitudinal Research Methods. Researchers could conduct longitudinal studies to track athletes' anxiety levels, coping strategies, and performance over multiple

seasons or competitions. This would provide insights into how anxiety evolves and how athletes' coping mechanisms develop over time, validating the cyclical feedback loop proposed in the DANBROA Theory.

Conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of the DANBROA Model. Researchers can perform a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to statistically test the validity of the constructs proposed in the DANBROA Theory. This analysis would help confirm whether the identified factors are distinct yet interrelated elements influencing sports anxiety.

Development and Validation of a DANBROA-Based Assessment Tool. Creating a standardized assessment tool based on the DANBROA Theory could allow researchers and practitioners to measure anxiety levels, coping strategies, and social influences. Validation studies could then be conducted to test this tool's reliability and accuracy in assessing athletes' sports anxiety.

Comparative Studies with Existing Anxiety Theories. Conducting comparative research between the DANBROA Theory and other established models of sports anxiety (e.g., the Multidimensional Anxiety Theory or the Catastrophe Model) could help validate its unique contributions. This could also highlight areas where the DANBROA Theory provides additional insights or needs refinement.

6. Conclusion

The Dynamic Anxiety and Neuro-Behavioral Regulation Outcomes in Collegiate Athletes Theory is a novel framework addressing the multifaceted aspects influencing an athlete's psychological condition. The DANBROA hypothesis elucidates the cyclical relationship between sports anxiety, performance, and reflection, offering a thorough comprehension of how collegiate athletes manage anxiety. The theory offers a systematic framework for comprehending and managing the intricate dynamics of sports anxiety, providing valuable insights for coaches, athletes, and sports psychologists to formulate customized tactics that enhance athlete mental health and performance.

Moreover, the DANBROA theory, as mentioned, highlights the cyclical nature of sports anxiety, which is evident in the recurring pattern of external pressures, internal responses, and reflective feedback that athletes experience before, during, and after competition. As athletes face expectations from coaches, teammates, and spectators, they often experience pre-competition anxiety, which manifests physically and mentally. These anxieties influence performance and are reflected upon after the competition, shaping how athletes prepare for future events. This ongoing process, in which each cycle influences the next, demonstrates that sports anxiety is not a one-time event but an evolving challenge that athletes must continuously navigate. With each competition, the cycle restarts, reinforcing anxiety through heightened expectations and the need for adaptive coping strategies, proving its cyclical nature and persistent impact on the athlete's experience.

This study indicates that future researchers may explore cross-cultural variations, employ longitudinal research methods, perform confirmatory factor analysis, create, and

validate an assessment tool, or pursue additional studies on the complexities of the dynamics of sports anxiety among athletes.

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Appendix

Diagram 1: Integrating Categories, Properties
Including Diagram Views on the Dynamics of Sports Anxiety

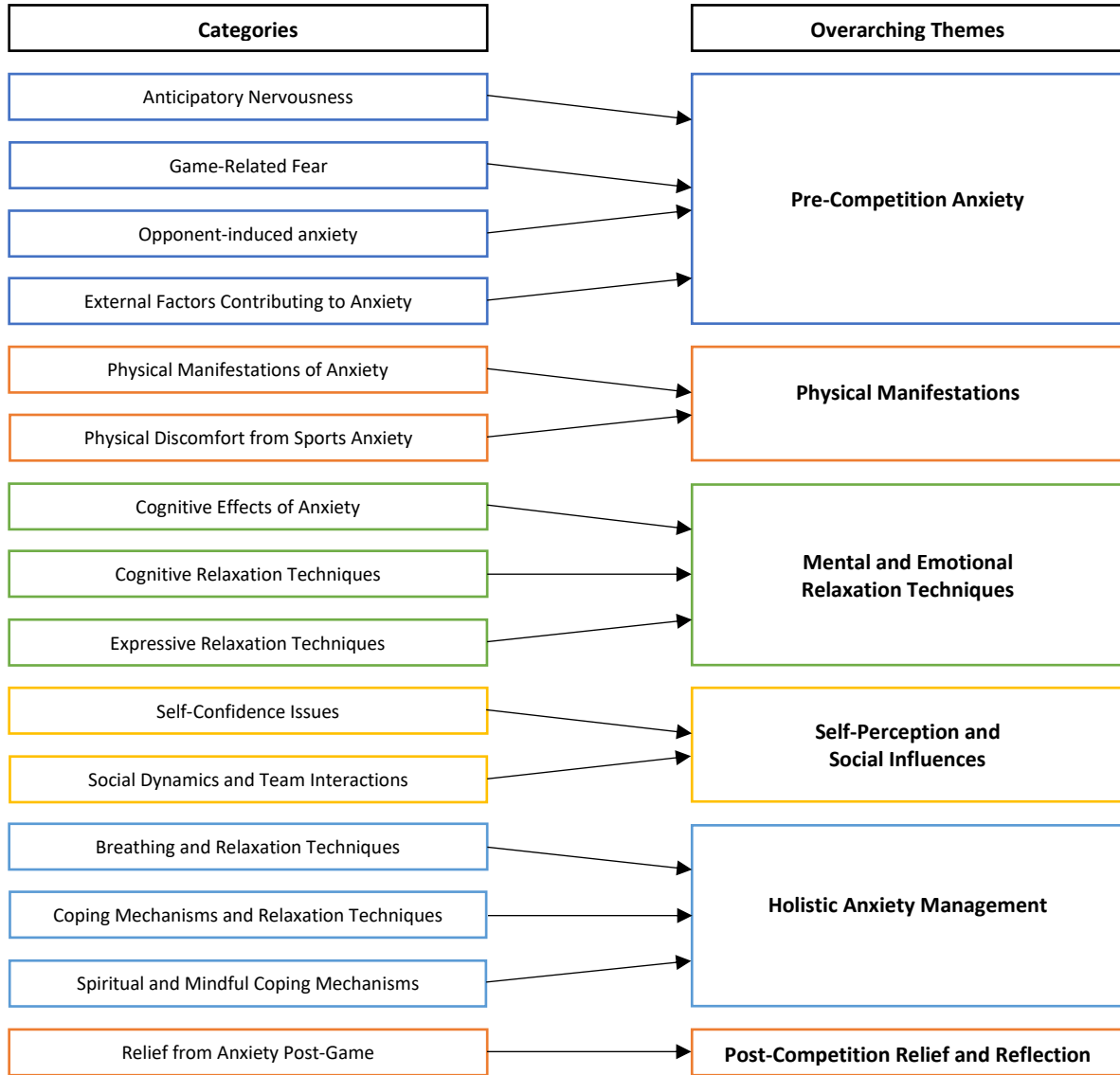


Diagram 2: Integrating Categories, Properties Including
Diagram Characteristics of the Dynamics Sports of Anxiety Theory

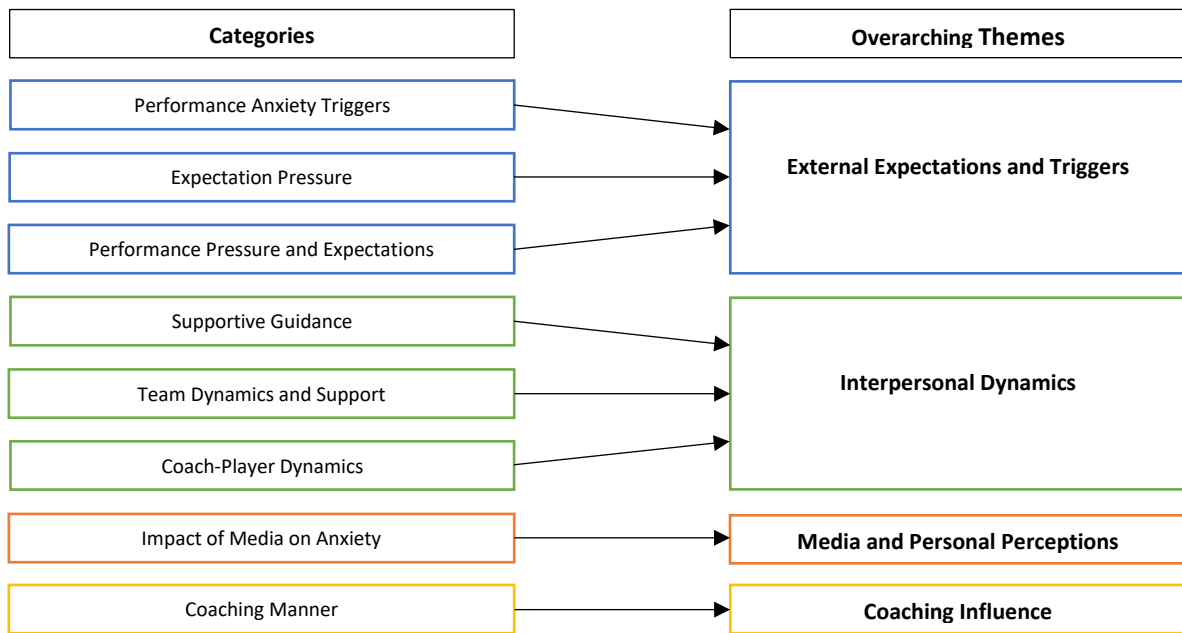


Diagram 3: The Relationship among Elements



Diagram 4: The Relationship among Elements

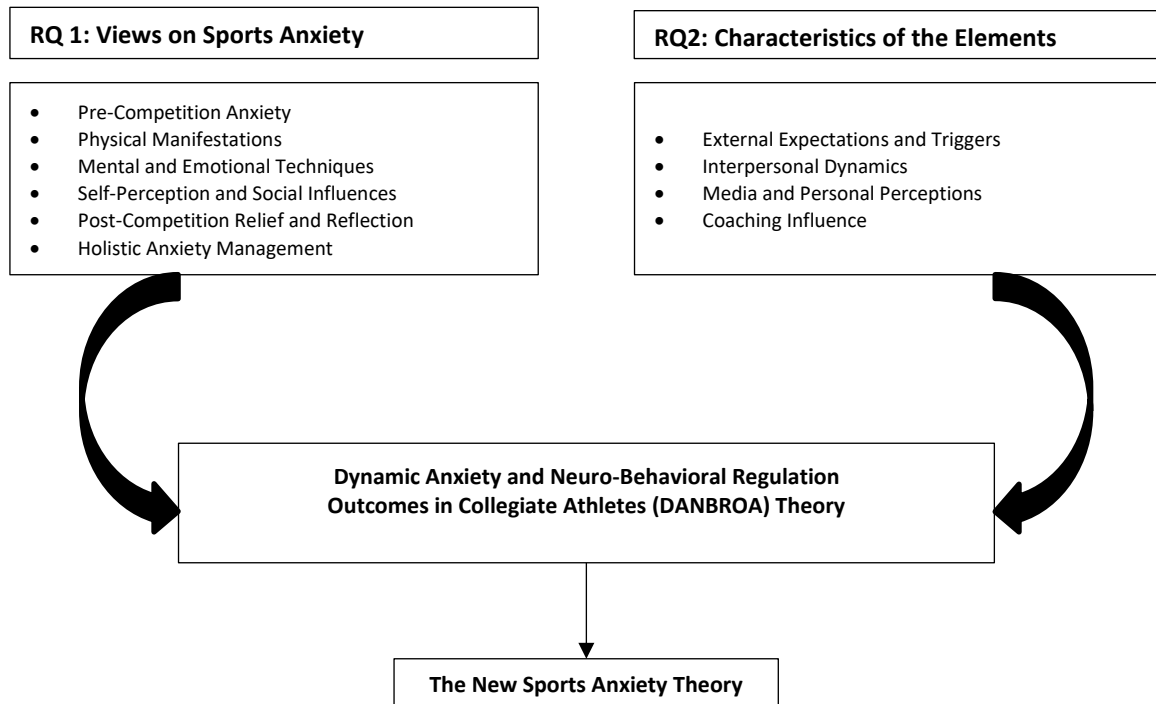
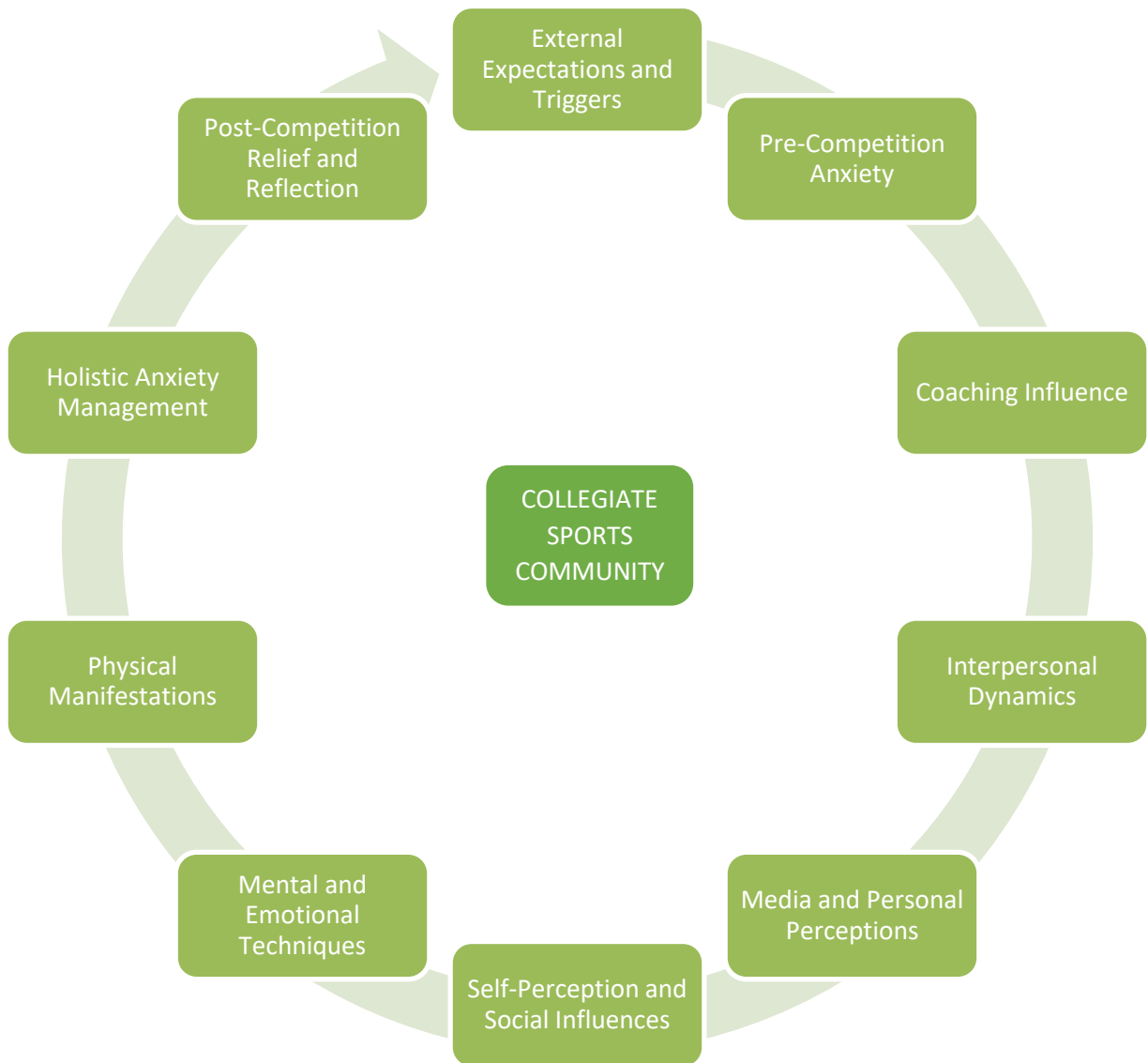


Diagram 5: How is the dynamics of sports anxiety manifested in the collegiate sports community?



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