Racial and Gender Differences on Sources of Acute Stress and Coping Style Among Competitive Athletes

MARK H. ANSHEL
TOTO SUTARSO
COLBY JUBENVILLE
Middle Tennessee State University

ABSTRACT. The authors examined racial and gender differences on sport-related sources of acute stress that competitive athletes perceived as highly intense and experienced during the competitive event. Athletes \( N = 332 \), 176 men, 156 women; 59 African Americans: 27 men, 32 women; 232 Caucasians: 125 men, 107 women; and 41 Hispanics: 24 men, 17 women) who competed in sport on a high school or college team participated in this study. The sources of the acute stress and the coping style in sport scales, which M. H. Anshel and T. Sutarso (2007) developed, required the athletes to indicate their perceived stress intensity and their “typical” coping responses after experiencing the two stressors they perceived as most intense. A multivariate analysis of variance indicated that Caucasians experienced higher stress intensity more often than did African Americans on each of two sources of acute stress, and Caucasians tended to use an approach-behavior coping style. Women reported higher stress intensity for coach-related sources of acute stress and used approach-behavioral and avoidance-cognitive coping styles more often than did their male counterparts. Hispanic athletes did not differ from other groups on any measure. The authors conclude that race and gender influence the coping process in competitive sport.

Keywords: acute stress, coping style, gender differences, racial differences, sources of stress

COPING EFFECTIVELY WITH STRESSFUL EVENTS in competitive sport is essential to high performance quality and contest outcomes. Therefore, it may not be surprising that researchers have recently increased their attention toward examining the coping process in sport (for reviews, see Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, & Eom, 2008). The present study reflects the same data set computed in a previously published article in Psychology of Sport and Exercise (Anshel & Sutarso, 2007, pp. 1–24), which is listed in References. In the present study, we used different statistical analyses to address a different research topic: relationships between sources of acute stress and athletes’ coping style.

Address correspondence to Mark H. Anshel, Department of Health and Human Performance, Box 96, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 37132, USA; manshel@mtsu.edu (e-mail).
In the present study, our review of the extant literature has unequivocally indicated that personal factors (e.g., cognitive appraisal of the event as positive or negative, perceived intensity of the stressor, coping style) and situational factors (e.g., sources of acute stress, characteristics of the sport contest) are intrinsic to improving researchers’ understanding of the coping process.

Identifying and predicting athletes’ coping style (i.e., their disposition to use certain types of coping strategies during the competitive sport event) have received extensive study. This is probably because using the appropriate coping style in response to selected types of sport events results in improved coping outcomes (i.e., adaptive coping), including improved performance (Anshel & Kaisidis, 1997). Coping styles that are inappropriate for a given stressful event or situation (i.e., maladaptive coping) can lead to undesirable outcomes, such as heightened muscular tension (Anshel, Brown, & Brown, 1993; Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001), narrowed attentional focusing (Krohne & Hindel, 1988), and poor sport performance (Giacobbi, Foore, & Weinberg, 2004). Because the concepts of coping styles and coping strategies have been used in the past literature interchangeably and, therefore, inaccurately (Anshel, 2005; Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001), a brief discussion of their differences is warranted.

As previously indicated, coping style is a person’s preferred use of selected types of coping strategies (Anshel, 1996; Anshel & Anderson, 2002; Anshel & Wells, 2000; Hoar, Kowalski, Gaudreau, & Crocker, 2006). In contrast, a coping strategy is the situational use of a technique to reduce external demands or improve internal resources in dealing with an unpleasant event (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002). For example, Poczwardowski and Conroy examined the coping strategies among elite athletes and performing artists in response to perceived failure and success. Madden, Kirkby, and McDonald (1989); Anshel (1996); Anshel and Anderson (2002); and Rawstorne, Anshel, and Caputi (2000) examined evidence of coping styles of competitive athletes. Therefore, styles reflect the athlete’s more stable and consistent form of using similar types of coping strategies, either in response to different stressors or consistently across time following the same type of stressor, whereas strategies reflect situational responses to acute stressors. The results of these studies have indicated that the athlete’s selection of coping strategies reflect his or her coping style, specifically as a function of the type of stressor to which the athlete is responding. There has been a paucity of research concerning the extent to which race and gender moderate an athlete’s coping style as a function of the type of stressful event, which is the focus of the present study.

Approach-behavioral coping consists of the conscious use of an overt action in response to stressful appraisal of a stimulus or event in which the person attends to or confronts the stressor (Anshel, 2001; Krohne, 1993). Examples include soliciting information, arguing, or any observable response in an attempt to reduce the stressor’s intensity. In contrast, approach-cognitive coping consists of a conscious thought or emotion in which the individual is “oriented toward the threat-related aspects of a situation” (Krohne, p. 3). Examples include plan-
ning, monitoring, becoming angry, strategizing, imaging, and having thoughts that promote cognitive arousal. Avoidance-behavioral coping is the conscious decision to physically remove oneself from a threatening environment. Examples are walking away from the stress source or avoiding a threatening or unpleasant situation, also called social engineering. Avoidance-cognitive coping reflects “turning away from threatening cues” (Krohne, p. 3)—for example, filtration of information, selective attention, and distraction.

The approach-avoidance coping style framework is not new. Approach coping—also called vigilant, attention, active, sensitization, engagement, or active coping—generally refers to the athlete’s behavioral and cognitive attempts to confront or deal directly with the stressor (Roth & Cohen, 1986; Suls & Fletcher, 1985). Avoidance coping—also called nonvigilant, passive, desensitization, repression, disengagement, or avoidant coping (Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001; Hoar et al., 2006; Krohne, 1996; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003)—reflects an athlete’s efforts to reduce or eliminate cues that he or she perceives as threatening or harmful (Krohne, 1993, 1996). These coping styles may also be subcategorized as behavioral or cognitive (Anshel, 2001; Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001; Krohne et al., 2000).

As indicated earlier, gender is one moderating variable that studies have shown differentiates the selection of coping strategies in the general psychology literature, yet it has received scant attention from researchers in relation to competitive athletes. Anshel and Kaissidis (1997) found that male and female highly skilled athletes used more approach-oriented coping strategies than did their lower skilled counterparts. However, among the less skilled male and female athletes, women applied avoidance coping more often than did men. Also, Anshel and Delany (2001) found gender differences for 11- and 12-year-old male and female field hockey players. For example, girls used considerably more confidence-building self-talk than did boys, whereas boys more often used resignation (e.g., “I reminded myself that things could be much worse”) than did girls. Anshel, Jamieson, and Raviv (2001) found gender differences in the use of coping strategies among Israeli athletes, whereas Lane, Jones, and Stevens (2002) found no gender differences in coping with failure and changes in self-efficacy among male and female tennis players as a function of self-esteem. In addition, maladaptive coping (e.g., self-blame, behavioral disengagement) was associated with low self-esteem for both genders. Although gender differences among athletes have been rarely studied, the association between categories of acute stress and subsequent use of the athlete’s coping style as a function of gender has apparently been previously unknown.

Hammermeister and Burton (2004) examined gender differences in coping among endurance athletes. They found that women perceived less control than did men over environmental threats, and they used the coping strategies of venting emotions, positive reinterpretation, dissociation, and emotional social support more often than did men. These examples of gender differences are important for acknowledging individual differences in providing effective stress management
programs to athletes. Another factor that has received even less attention in the literature on coping in sport is race.

Racial issues in sport have received extensive interest and research over the years (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1990). Particularly in the African American community, sport has been viewed as one important environment to demonstrate competence, achievement, and recognition. However, one factor that has received surprisingly little attention by researchers is the influence of race on determining athletes’ coping styles in response to acute stress experienced under competitive sport situations. In fact, sport has been widely institutionalized as the only path to success for many in the African American community, especially for men (Wenner, 1994). Although they receive traditional exposure to reading, language, and the arts from some parental influences, realities regarding African American male youths indicate that excellence in sports is what drives the culture (Messner, 1992). Other anecdotal claims have been highlighted in two studies by Spreitzer and Snyder (1990) and Snyder and Spreitzer (1973).

In one study, Spreitzer and Snyder (1990) assessed the extent of informal and vicarious involvement in sport among African American and Caucasian athletes, the meaning of competing in sport in the lives of the athletes, their attitudes toward the function of sport in their lives, and their overall orientation toward sport. Findings of the study indicated that African American athletes are usually psychologically more involved with sport than are their Caucasian counterparts. Other demographic variables (e.g., age, income, education, population of hometown) did not show racial differences. These results supported an earlier study (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973), which indicated that African Americans were more involved in their active sport participation—specifically, in basketball, football, and baseball or softball—than were their Caucasian counterparts.

Probable explanations for this tendency are, according to Edwards (1973), that black athletes tend to spend considerable time honing their athletic abilities, believing they will become professional athletes, and African American families and communities tend to overreward achievement in athletics in comparison with other areas. To African American men, perhaps more than to men of other racial groups, sport participation is an important resource for achieving respect (Messner, 1992). It is not surprising, then, that African American athletes, men in particular, consider sport to be a relevant part of their self-identity and that they will perceive threats to success in sport as stressful.

Investigating evidence of racial differences in the sport psychology literature is virtually nonexistent. In one rare (qualitative) study, Anshel (1990) examined the perceptions of African American intercollegiate football players about aspects of team participation. Using a structured interview approach, he found that the players perceived a lack of communication, honesty, fairness, psychological support, and trust toward their (Caucasian) head coach. In another (quantitative) study, Anshel and Sailes (1990) examined racial differences between African American and Caucasian male intercollegiate athletes on their respective psychological needs. In gen-
eral, African American athletes, in comparison with their Caucasian counterparts, were less receptive to criticism, believed more strongly that coaches should earn the respect of their players, tended to focus more on scouting reports and less on game films, and more often perceived the head coach as too authoritative. However, the topic of coping with stress was not addressed in either study.

Although numerous studies on coping with stress among African Americans have been published in the general psychology literature (for a review, see McCrea, Cunningham, Ingram, & Fife, 2006), it is surprising that sport psychology researchers have ignored the coping process among African American athletes, particularly in comparison with Caucasians. Belgrave and Allison (2006) asserted that “as a group, African Americans experience higher levels than do European Americans . . . and that both race and socio-economic status contribute to stress experiences” (p. 281). Researchers do not know whether similar racial differences exist among competitive athletes. In their review of literature on stress and coping as a function of culture and race, McCreary et al. (2006) concluded,

Researchers, teachers, and clinicians must modify their models of stress and coping to reflect the unique cultural and social circumstances of different ethnic groups. We believe that it is critical and relevant to integrate culture into our stress and coping models. (p. 490)

Last, examinations of the relation between acute stress and coping styles as a function of both race and gender are apparently nonexistent. Therefore, improving our understanding of the coping process in sport requires examining these two moderating variables: race and gender.

In summary, it is apparent that the coping-in-sport research has gained popularity in recent years, depicting the athlete’s preferred use of selected coping strategies and styles, usually as a function of various personal and situational factors. The conceptual framework of approach-avoidance coping is among the more common conceptual frameworks that illuminate this area. However, too few researchers have investigated gender differences in the coping process, and apparently no previous study has focused on the moderating role of race in determining athletes’ coping tendencies following stressful events in sport.

The present study extends the psychometric findings of Anshel and Sutarso (2007), who generated two inventories categorizing sources of acute stress and coping styles among highly skilled competitive athletes. Anshel and Sutarso examined the relations between sources of acute stress and athletes’ coping style in competitive sport. Using confirmatory factor analyses, they categorized acute stressors as performance-related (e.g., “received an unfair call from the umpire/referee,” “was injured and played in pain,” “negative comment from others”) and coach-related (e.g., “arguing with my coach,” “coach was upset with me,” and “treated unfairly by my coach”). In addition, the researchers categorized coping styles as approach behavioral, approach cognitive, and avoidance behavioral. Anshel and Sutarso generated the psychometrics of the
two scales that measured sources of acute stress and coping styles respectively among competitive athletes.

The present study primarily compared racial and gender differences on sources of acute stress experienced during the competitive event, which the athletes perceived as highly intense, and the athletes’ respective coping styles. The implications of linking the sources of acute stress with athletes’ coping styles would result in more effective stress management interventions that target individual differences in the coping process.

In the present study, we hypothesized that athletes would differ significantly on their respective sources of stress, which we labeled performance related (PR) and coach related (CR), and on their respective coping styles, depicted as approach and avoidance, as functions of both race and gender. Specifically, on the basis of existing coping research in general psychology and, to a lesser extent, in sport psychology literature, racial groups would differ in their sources of stress, and Caucasian men would more frequently use an approach coping style than would all other racial and gender groups. With respect to gender differences, we hypothesized that men would more frequently use an approach coping style than would their female counterparts.

Method

Participants

Participants were 332 students (176 men, 156 women; age range = 18–33 years; \(M = 21.6\) years, \(SD = 4.86\) years). Ethnicities represented in this study included 59 African Americans (27 men, 32 women), 232 Caucasians (125 men, 107 women), and 41 Hispanic athletes (24 men, 17 women). All participants were majors in a physical education program and currently enrolled at a university in the southeast United States. Each had competed on his or her high school sport team. Although starting players were not differentiated from nonstarters, team status (i.e., starter vs. nonstarter) has been established in previous related studies to operationally define moderate to high skill level in sport (see Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001, for a review). We assumed that competing on a school team in the United States represents a relatively moderate to high skill level and that each participant would have experienced similar types of game-related acute stress. Therefore, the results of the present study could be generalized to competitors at the high (secondary) school level. Sample size for the statistical procedures in this study exceeded that of previous convenient-samples studies (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Srivastava, Locke, & Bartol, 2001).

Instrumentation

The approach-avoidance coping styles framework used in the present investigation was a function of several factors. First, a psychometrically validated
inventory using this coping style framework following acute stress does not seem to exist in the extant sport psychology literature. Therefore, we conducted an extensive literature review of the sport psychology coping research literature in which we asked respondents about their coping responses to acute stress during sport contests. Consequently, for this study, we obtained the coping style items from several previous investigations using this framework (e.g., Anshel & Anderson, 2002; Anshel, Williams, & Hodge, 1997; Krohne, 1993; Rawstorne et al., 2000). Second, although researchers have developed independent lists of traits to measure athletes’ sources of acute stress and their companion coping styles (e.g., Anshel, 1996; Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001; Fisher & Zwart, 1982; Kaissidis-Rodafinos, Anshel, & Porter, 1997; Krohne, 1996; Madden, Summers, & Brown, 1990), they have not widely used any measure of athletes’ sources of acute stress and their respective coping styles. Last, researchers prefer shorter, less time-intensive scales that are both reliable and valid (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004).

Anshel and Sutarso (2007) developed an inventory that measured the degree to which the athletes used similar coping styles in response to two different categories of acute stressors. They based the stressors, and the respective categories to which those stressors were assigned, on a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) that they named the Sources of Acute Stress Scale (SASS). The sources of stress that athletes perceived as highly intense were designated as PR (e.g., “received unfair call from the umpire/referee,” “injured and played in pain,” “received a negative comment”) and CR (e.g., “arguing with my coach,” “coach was upset with me,” and “treated unfairly by my coach”). Anshel and Sutarso used three criteria for including a stressor in this list. First, the stressor was frequently experienced in sport settings; second, the stressor was acute, reflecting a stressful event, as opposed to chronic (long-term) sources of stress; and third, the stressor was perceived as highly intense on the basis of a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very low intensity) to 5 (very high intensity). These criteria were used in previous sport-related coping studies (e.g., Anshel & Anderson, 2002; Kaissidis-Rodafinos et al., 1997). Coping style is more apparent when the sources of stress to which individuals respond are perceived as highly intense (McCrae, 1992). To promote recall of stressful events experienced perhaps years earlier, researchers asked participants to reflect on the most intense situations and the feelings that followed those situations.

Anshel and Sutarso (2007) used a coping style framework consisting of three dimensions: approach behavior (ApB), approach cognitive (ApC), and avoidance cognitive (AvC). The ApB factor comprised four items: “I discussed the problem with others,” “I asked other people to give me their opinion,” “I complained to a friend or another objective party,” and “I discussed the problem with another person.” Three items reflected the ApC factor: “I tried to obtain more information,” “I tried to use logic or reason to overcome the problem,” and “I thought about what to do next.” The third factor, AvC, comprised the last three items: “I prayed to help me deal with the problem or situation,” “I believed the situation was in God’s hands,” and “I thought to myself that things could be worse.” The
dimensions of the three coping styles and their respective items are linked to each
dimension as determined by a conceptual framework. The coping inventory was
entitled the Coping Style in Sport Scale (CSSS).

Anshel and Sutarso (2007) reported complete psychometric data for the two
scales. In particular, intrareliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha$) for the SASS and CSSS items
were .81 and .82, respectively, indicating that both measures were highly reliable.
The correlation between the two scales was $r = .48, p < .0001$, indicating that gen-
eral coping style was significantly related to general sources of acute stress. Using
CFA, the researchers reported that the SASS and CSSS reflected face, content,
predictive, and construct validity. Moreover, multigroup CFA was conducted to test
the generalizability of both SASS and CSSS. Both inventories met the invariance
criteria using nonsignificant change in chi-square (Byrne, 1993) and nonsignificant
change in fit indexes, including comparative fit index and the Tucker-Lewis index
(Tang, Luna-Arocas, & Sutarso, 2005; Vandenbegan & Lance, 2000).

Procedures

As previously indicated, all data were obtained voluntarily from current
university undergraduate students who had competed on their high school sport
team. We administered the inventory to the athletes (a) before a university class
of physical education majors who had competed in sport, with permission of the
course instructor, or (b) prior to team practice, with permission of the coach. We
asked respondents to the SASS and CSSS to indicate their perceived level of
intensity for each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all)
to 5 (extremely high), after experiencing each of several stressful events.

On the basis of the CFA from an earlier study (Anshel & Sutarso, 2007), the
seven SASS items were classified into two categories: PR and CR. An average
of the composite score for each category was calculated by summing all values
of the items and then dividing by the number of items. All items are listed in
Appendix A. The same procedures were completed for each of the three coping

Data Analysis

We used a $2 \times 3$ multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test differ-
ences on two factors of the SASS (i.e., categories of stressors) and three factors
(i.e., coping styles) of the CSSS as a function of race and gender. On the linear
model approach, the MANOVA, using the general linear model (GLM), could be

If we found significant multivariate interactions, we examined multivariate
simple effects, followed by more specific tests of other simple effects; otherwise,
we tested multivariate main effects. If we found significant multivariate main
effects, we examined univariate main effects. If we found significant univariate
main effects, we compared multiple comparison means (post hoc tests) from different groups using Tukey’s honestly significant difference (HSD). Because the groups had an unbalanced sample, we used least square means (LSMs) to compare group means.

Results

The MANOVA indicated that the interaction effect for race and gender on PR, CR, ApB, ApC, and AvC was not significant, Wilks’s $\lambda = .98$, $F(10, 644) = .76$, $p = .66$, $\eta^2 < .01$. Consequently, the main effects for race and gender on the five dependent variables were calculated.

Racial Differences on Sources of Acute Stress and Coping Style

The results indicated a significant main effect for race on the five dependent variables (PR, CR, ApB, ApC, and AvC), Wilks’s $\lambda = .92$, $F(10, 644) = 2.82$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 < .05$, $(1 - \beta) = .97$. Racial differences were significant on the two sources of acute stress (PR and CR) and on the three coping style factors (ApB, ApC, and AvC). Univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) on each factor with HSD mean comparison was conducted to determine which factors differed as a function of race.

The data indicated that racial differences on both acute stress factors, PR and CR, were significant. For PR, $F(2, 329) = 10.25$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 < .05$, $(1 - \beta) = .98$. For CR, $F(2, 329) = 8.11$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 < .05$, $(1 - \beta) = .96$. To ascertain the location of these significant differences, multiple comparisons using HSD were conducted. The results showed a significant difference between African Americans and Caucasians on the PR stressor ($p < .01$). However, significant difference was not seen either between African Americans and Hispanics ($0.05 < p < .10$) or between Caucasians and Hispanics ($p = .37$). The means on the PR stressors were 2.73 ($SD = 0.87$) for African Americans, 3.27 ($SD = 0.83$) for Caucasians, and 3.08 ($SD = 0.79$) for Hispanics (see Table 1).

Multiple comparisons for the CR factor, similar to the PR comparison, indicated a significant difference between African Americans and Caucasians ($p < .01$). However, there was no significant difference between African Americans and Hispanics ($p = .21$), or between Caucasians and Hispanics ($p = .34$). The means on the CR factor were 2.53 ($SD = 1.06$) for African Americans, 3.12 ($SD = 0.83$) for Caucasians, and 2.88 ($SD = 1.03$) for Hispanics.

For the three-factor CSSS, significant racial differences were found on one of the three factors. Specifically, racial differences were significant for the ApB factor, $F(2, 329) = 3.11$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 < .02$, $(1 - \beta) = .60$. Multiple comparisons using HSD showed a significant difference between African Americans and Caucasians on the ApB coping style ($p < .05$). However, there was no significant difference between African Americans and Hispanics ($p = .53$) or between Caucasians and Hispanics ($p = .68$). The means on the ApB coping style were
The analysis revealed a significant gender main effect on the five dependent variables (PR, CR, ApB, ApC, and AvC), Wilks’s $\lambda = .93$, $F(10, 644) = 4.70$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 < .07$; $(1 - \beta) = .97$. Specifically, gender differences were apparent for all the dependent variables simultaneously.
Univariate ANOVA, conducted on each factor to determine the location of these differences, indicated significant gender differences on sources of acute stress on the CR stressor factor, $F(1, 330) = 7.13, p < .01, \eta^2 < .03, (1 – \beta) = .76$. Comparisons for the PR factor, however, were not significant, $F(1, 330) = .48, p = .47, \eta^2 < .01, (1 – \beta) < .11$. The means on the CR factor were 2.84 ($SD = 1.00$) for men and 3.14 ($SD = 1.06$) for women (see Table 2).

For the three-factor CSSS, the results indicated significant gender differences for ApB, $F(1, 330) = 11.04, p < .01, \eta^2 < .04, (1 – \beta) = .91$. The results also indicated significant gender differences for AvC, $F(1, 330) = 6.51, p < .02, \eta^2 < .02, (1 – \beta) = .72$. Comparisons on the ApC factor, however, were not significant, $F(1, 330) = .03, p = .95, \eta^2 < .01, (1 – \beta) < .06$. Means on the ApB factor were 2.72 ($SD = 0.87$) for men and 3.05 ($SD = 0.96$) for women; on the AvC coping style, 2.82 ($SD = 1.07$) for men and 3.13 ($SD = 1.10$) for women.

**Discussion**

In the present study, we tried to determine the extent to which athletes differed in their coping styles, which we have depicted as approach and avoidance among competitive athletes as a function of race—primarily by comparisons between African Americans and Caucasians—and gender. We hypothesized significant racial and gender differences in sources of acute stress and coping styles.

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<th>TABLE 2. Gender Mean Comparisons for Each Factor (Two-Factor Analysis of SASS and Three-Factor Analysis of CSSS)</th>
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<td>Factor, by gender</td>
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*Note. N = 332. SASS = Sources of Acute Stress Scale; CSSS = Coping Style in Sport Scale. $^{**}p < .01. \, ^{†}p < .02.$*
The results partially supported these predictions. In addition, the present findings supported use of the approach-avoidance coping style framework, expanded by behavioral and cognitive subdimensions (e.g., ApB, ApC, AvC).

The results indicated racial and gender differences on both sources (factors) of acute stress (PR and CR) and on the three coping style factors (ApB, ApC, and AvC). Specifically, racial differences between African Americans and Caucasians on both factors of source of acute stress were significant. Caucasian athletes experienced higher, more intense levels of acute stress from both sources, in comparison with their African American counterparts. However, differences in athletes between African Americans and Hispanics and between Caucasians and Hispanics were not significant. The Race × Gender interaction was not significant.

For coping style, the results indicated significant racial differences on the ApB factor, specifically between African American and Caucasian athletes. A comparison of mean scores indicated that Caucasian athletes used an ApB coping style significantly more often than did African American athletes. However, there were no significant racial differences for ApC or AvC coping styles.

Although the findings between genders on sources of acute stress were not significant on the PR factor, differences for the CR factor were significant. Female athletes experienced more intense stress from their coaches than did male athletes. Gender differences for coping style were also significant on ApB and AvC but were not significant for ApC. Apparently, female competitive athletes use more ApB and AvC coping styles than do their male counterparts. As indicated earlier, absence of a Race × Gender interaction indicated that both genders within each racial group experience and respond to sport-related stress in a similar manner.

**Racial Differences**

The results of the present study indicate racial differences on sources of stress and coping styles. Caucasians reported more intense perceived stress than did African Americans in both stress categories (i.e., PR stress and CR stress). On the surface, this finding is surprising because of the importance with which African Americans perceive sport as a primary vehicle for demonstrating competence and recognition and as the only path to success, especially for men (Wenner, 1994). As previously indicated, the results of studies by Snyder and Spreitzer (1973) and Spreitzer and Snyder (1990) showed African American athletes to be more involved with sport (e.g., basketball, football, baseball, or softball), both psychologically and in their participation rates, than their Caucasian counterparts.

One possible explanation for racial differences on stress intensity is the concomitant findings on racial differences in coping style. Specifically, Caucasian athletes \( (M = 2.95, SD = 0.92) \) were more likely than African American athletes \( (M = 2.62, SD = 0.93) \) to use an ApB coping style. Sample coping strategies were “I complained to a friend or another objective party,” “I discussed the problem
Anshel, Sutarso, & Jubenville

with others,” and “I asked other people to give me their opinion.” Conversely, African American athletes were more likely to apply an AvC coping style \( (M = 3.11, SD = 1.15) \) than were their Caucasian counterparts \( (M = 2.94, SD = 1.10) \).

Examples of AvC coping include “I prayed to help me deal with the problem or situation,” “I believed the situation was in God’s hands,” and “I thought to myself that things could be worse.” These coping strategies, also called discounting or psychological distancing \( \text{Anshel, 2005} \), in which the athlete copes by reducing the stressor’s importance (e.g., “I’ll get better next time”) can (a) explain or rationalize it (e.g., “I know I can play better than that” or “That was a difficult task”) or (b) enable the athlete to perceive the stressor objectively (e.g., “The coach must do what he/she has to do”). It appears, then, that stress intensity is associated with the athletes’ approach or avoidance coping style.

The use of avoidance coping as a function of race is understandable, according to an extensive review of nonsport literature by Belgrave and Allison \( \text{2006} \). For example, those authors reviewed numerous studies indicating spirituality “to be an influential factor in helping African Americans cope with problems and stressful life events” \( \text{p. 195} \). The belief that “one’s final destiny is in God’s hands provides hope and inspiration” \( \text{p. 195} \) and is more common among the African American community than it is among other racial groups. Along these lines, Boyd-Franklin \( \text{2003} \) found from her review of related literature that “many African Americans will talk about their use of prayer to cope with life’s challenges” \( \text{p. 127} \). Although sport psychology researchers have ignored this area, it is plausible that African American athletes may adopt a similar coping style during the sport contest. Spiritual beliefs reflect an AvC coping style \( \text{Anshel, 2005; Anshel, Kim, et al., 2001} \). Results of the present study indicated that African American athletes were more likely to apply AvC coping than were their Caucasian peers, who were more likely to use an ApB orientation. The field needs future researchers to confirm this evidence in sport settings.

Roth and Cohen \( \text{1986} \) suggested that an avoidance coping style is preferred under conditions of low self-control, when there is not ample time to resolve the problem and when the task at hand is continuous and the environment is unstable, and if the stressful event cannot be resolved quickly. Krohne and Hindel’s \( \text{1988} \) results on elite table tennis players showed that better players were less anxious after making errors by using avoidance coping, confirming Roth and Cohen’s recommendations. Selected sources of acute stress in the present study (e.g., unfair call, injury, negative comment from others, unfair treatment by coach) associate with relatively low self-control, thereby making avoidance coping more effective than approach coping for managing stress.

The relatively lower stress intensity reported by African American athletes is probably juxtaposed with these athletes’ propensity to use an avoidance coping style. In contrast, the Caucasian athletes in the present study were more likely to apply ApB coping. This means that they were more likely to attend to, think about, and be distracted by the stressor under conditions that warranted an avoid-
ance coping style. Attending to sources of stress that are low in controllability may heighten perceived stress intensity (Krohne, 1993).

One result of the present study suggests that Caucasian athletes use an ApB coping style significantly more often than do African American athletes. A possible explanation for this result is that African American athletes have a different sport experience than do their Caucasian teammates. For example, Anshel (1990) reported in a qualitative study of U.S. college football players that although African American players agree that negative feedback and criticism are natural parts of competitive sport, they “do not respond positively to feedback that is couched in harsh, critical tones,” and they feel that “coach reprimanding leads to embarrassment, acute depression, and decreased physical effort in subsequent attempts” (p. 241). Along these lines, Anshel and Sailer (1990) found that African American athletes were less comfortable with coach reprimands and other actions associated with an authoritative leadership style than were their Caucasian teammates.

One effective way of coping with a hostile coach would be to use either of two avoidance coping strategies: discounting, in which the athlete perceives the unpleasant message as unimportant, or psychological distancing, in which the athlete considers the communicator of that message (i.e., the coach) as lacking credibility (Anshel, 2005; Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Along these lines, Boyd-Franklin (2003) described a common coping technique (an avoidance coping style) in the African American community as spiritual reframing. Members of the “traditional Black community” often form a “system of core beliefs, particularly spiritual ones . . . that highlights the inner strength of the person and the power of his or her faith” (p. 126). Thus, these results suggest that Caucasian athletes are more likely than their African American counterparts to cope with acute stress in sport through cognitive and behavioral forms of active engagement. In contrast, African Americans are more likely to respond to unpleasant information, or the manner in which it is delivered, as not credible or unimportant.

Avoidance coping may be a function of a person’s cognitive appraisal of the situation. Although the athlete’s appraisal of stressful events was not measured in the present study, it is plausible that avoidance coping, which is more common among African American athletes, may reflect lower stress intensity following CR stressors. It is also possible, therefore, that elite African American athletes are better able to distance themselves mentally from unpleasant encounters with their coaches (i.e., CR stress), particularly if the coach is Caucasian, by using one or more avoidance coping strategies. Future studies should incorporate athletes’ appraisals of stressful events in furthering our understanding of racial differences in the coping process.

**Gender Differences**

In the present study, both genders experienced PR stressors to a similar degree. However, female athletes were more negatively affected by CR stressful events.
than were their male counterparts. Sample stressor items included “arguing with my coach,” “coach was upset with me,” and “treated unfairly by my coach.” Male athletes appeared to be less stressed than were female athletes by CR stressors. One possible explanation for this finding is that women may find their coach more intimidating than do their male counterparts (Officer & Rosenfeld, 1985). In a rare study on this area, Officer and Rosenfeld examined the effects of sport team membership and coaches’ gender on the self-disclosing behavior of high school female athletes. They found that although the athletes disclosed the same amount of information to their respective male and female coaches, female athletes, as opposed to male athletes, perceived their male coach primarily as an authority figure. Disclosures to female coaches, on the other hand, were more intimate and concerned with personal development. The present study did not make cross-gender comparisons among athletes and their coaches, but Officer and Rosenfeld reviewed several studies indicating that female athletes are more likely than their male counterparts to disclose personal feelings to coaches whom they perceive as nonthreatening. It is plausible that female athletes may be more dependent than male athletes on positive communication with their coaches.

The results of the present study confirm the conclusions of an extensive review of the sport psychology literature by Hoar et al. (2006) that “males and females generally cope differently” (p. 61). In particular, female athletes are more inclined to cope by social support, help-seeking, and increased and more intense coping efforts toward emotion-coping functions than are men. Men, in contrast, more often use active coping and venting emotions than do women. These results are similar to the ApB coping style detected in the present study. On one hand, the female athlete’s tendency to cope through social interaction strongly relates to her need for a positive relationship with her coach. On the other hand, a negative relationship—or interaction—with her coach is viewed as highly stressful, as evidenced by the present findings.

The results of previous studies have clearly indicated that gender influences an athlete’s selection of coping styles and strategies (for reviews, see Crocker, Kowalski, & Graham, 1998; Hoar et al., 2006). Similar outcomes have been found for both adult (Anshel & Kaissidis, 1997) and child athletes (Anshel & Delany, 2001). Anshel and Kaissidis, for example, found that highly skilled male and female athletes both used more ApB coping strategies in comparison with their lower skilled counterparts, whereas avoidance coping was preferred among lower skilled female athletes. In their study of 11- and 12-year-old male and female field hockey players, Anshel and Delany found that girls used more confidence-building self-talk than did boys, whereas boys used more resignation (e.g., “I reminded myself that things could be much worse”) than did girls. However, in their study of coping and self-esteem among male and female tennis players, Lane et al. (2002) found no gender differences on coping with failure and changes in self-efficacy. They also found that maladaptive coping (e.g., self-blame, behavioral disengagement) was associated with low self-esteem for both genders.
There are several implications from the present study for racial and gender differences in the coping process. Practitioners and researchers have traditionally neglected examining individual differences for improving the coping skills of athletes. With respect to the present study, acknowledging the unique needs and coping tendencies of athletes as functions of their gender and race improves the predictability of the athletes’ coping responses (Crocker et al., 1998). In addition, the use of categories of stressors and coping styles in the present study allows researchers and sport psychology consultants to address the personal factors (e.g., cognitive appraisal, perceived stress intensity, coping style, selected personality traits) and situational factors (e.g., game characteristics, sport type, position) that will improve the quality of clinical interventions (McCreary et al., 2006).

The present study was not without selected limitations. For example, despite an adequate overall sample size, African Americans (n = 59) and Hispanics (n = 41) were underrepresented. In addition, participants were current university students who had competed in high school sport. The passage of time may have compromised the accuracy of the athletes’ ability to recall past stressful experiences and their coping responses. Nevertheless, evidence of racial and gender differences lend credence to the need in future research to consider race and gender as moderator variables in attempts to understand the coping process in sport. In addition, the present findings warrant future research using the approach and avoidance conceptual framework as a function of both gender and race.

AUTHOR NOTES
Mark H. Anshel is a professor in the Department of Health and Human Performance at Middle Tennessee State University. His primary research interests are examining individual differences in the coping process—sources of acute stress, cognitive appraisals, and coping styles—in competitive sport, particularly as a function of gender, skill level, culture, sport type, and race. Toto Sutarso is a research and statistical consultant in the information technology division at Middle Tennessee State University. His research interests include attitude measurements, satisfaction, missing data, equation modeling, business emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, group differences, and cross-cultural issues. Colby Jubenville is an associate professor and head of the sports management and marketing program in the Department of Health and Human Performance at Middle Tennessee State University. His primary research interests concern factors that influence diversity in sport, sport socialization, and sports marketing techniques.

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### APPENDIX

**Sources of acute stress items designated as performance related and coach related.**

**Factor 1: Performance related**
- I received an “unfair” call from the referee.
- I was injured and played in pain.
- I received a negative comment from others.
- My opponent cheated but was not caught.

**Factor 2: Coach related**
- I argued with my coach.
- My coach was upset with me.
- I was treated unfairly by my coach.

**Coping style items categorized as approach behavioral, approach cognitive, and avoidance cognitive.**

**Factor 1: Approach Behavior**
- I discussed the problem with others.
- I asked other people to give me their opinion.
- I complained to a friend or another objective party.
- I discussed the problem with another person.

**Factor 2: Approach Cognitive**
- I tried to obtain more information.
- I tried to use logic or reason to overcome the problem.
- I thought about what to do next.

**Factor 3: Avoidance Cognitive**
- I prayed to help me deal with the problem or situation.
- I believed the situation was in God’s hands.
- I thought to myself that things could be worse.
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