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What's the most interesting part of your findings, according to you?

I would highlight two things that I find especially interesting. First is the 'dark' side of rivalry. My research suggests that many people behave more unethically when competing with their rivals. Furthermore, even just thinking about a rival can put people into a more Machiavellian mindset, where they are more willing to bend the rules to get ahead. Second, some of my work in progress highlights the unique nature of the rivalry relationship and the bond that it creates between competitors. Rivals are not simply enemies - in fact, they feel linked to one another and derive benefits such as increased motivation and performance from the rivalry.

Who does it affect?

It can affect pretty much anyone who regularly competes in some arena with other identifiable competitors. That could be sports, business, academics, politics, etc. So far my research suggests that it affects men and women equally. There is still more research to be done on whether certain types of people (e.g., certain personality types) are more prone to developing rivalries, or more prone to their effects.

In what kind of sports is the benefits of rivalry the most obvious?

Rivalry is probably most beneficial to sports with a larger effort component. These could include endurance sports, where motivation and willpower are key to success. Rivalry may be less beneficial to sports that require careful precision, such as darts or golf. That said, rivalry can still serve as fuel to motivate these athletes to train longer and harder outside of competitions.

How can "regular" people benefit from having a rival?

Having a rival can be a great source of motivation, whatever your goals might be. Rivals are often close friends so this does not imply a negative relationship. Forming a friendly rivalry can help motivate you to go to the gym, eat healthier, work more productively, make more sales, study harder, etc., etc.

Who is your biggest rival?

My biggest rival would be my oldest friend. We grew up together and competing on many different dimensions, physical and mental. This rivalry is still evident when we spend time

together today.

Is there a difference between men and women, when it comes to performing better in the presence of a rival?

So far I have not observed any gender differences in terms of the benefits of rivalry. However, my primary evidence for the athletic benefits of rivalry came from samples of regular long-distance runners. Thus, these may have been men and women who were already quite competitive, who may naturally respond well to rivalry. There is other research suggesting that women more generally are not as enthusiastic about competition as men, and thus it is possible that the same is true of rivalry. Ultimately each individual needs to learn the motivational triggers and forces that work best for them, through a process of experimentation and self discovery. Although there are certainly general trends, each of us has a slightly different psychology and there are rarely universal principles that apply to everyone.

Rivalry is really fascinating for several reasons:

One is that the fact this is a complex relationship, it's not just a situation in which two competitors hate one another. It's more a situation in which two competitors are inextricably linked to one another. They have a shared history of competition. And in terms of it's consequences, rivalry can push people to new heights of performance and motivation.

How much better does having a rival make us perform?

Rivalry is a very powerful motivator for athletes. There are all kinds of great examples of rivalries; John McEnroe and Björn Borg in tennis or Magic Johnson and Larry Bird in basketball. Those rivals are used as a constant source of fuel for trying to get better. Rivalry will motivates athletes to train harder, to practise longer and typically to perform at their very absolute best when they are competing with a rival.

It's hard to put an exact percentage on that question, but some data that speak to this comes out of running. By observing a sample of roughly 90 regular long distance runners the results showed that when a runners rival was also running in the race, that elevated their performance to the tune of roughly 5 seconds faster per kilometer. In a course of a 5K race this would come out a 25 second improvement in race performance.

How people respond physiologically when they come face to face with a rival:

By coming face to face with a rival leads to increases in heart rate, in the competition hormone testosterone and in skin conductance, a measure of stress level.