



Department of Psychology
The University of Hong Kong

香港大學心理學系

Departmental Seminar (Via Zoom)

Performance under pressure: The Focus of Attention matters



2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. | July 23, 2021 (Friday)

Dr. Ines Jentsch

University of St. Andrews

Abstract

Choking under pressure is very common in a large variety of performance settings, from public speaking to highly skilled sports or music performances. Failure to perform well can impact peoples' careers and result in long-lasting effects on a persons' mental health. In the last few decades, sports scientists have suggested that the quality and accuracy of movements can depend on what the performer attends to while executing the action. More specifically, evidence across a range of sports disciplines (such as golf, baseball, basketball, and tennis) suggests that an external focus of attention directed at the effects of the movement on the environment leads to better performance under pressure than an internal focus where attention is directed at the performer's own body movements. The aim of the proposed research is to investigate whether the findings from sports psychology can be generalized to other settings such as music performance. The present study investigated the effects focus of attention instruction on the accuracy of piano performance. Participants with at least intermediate piano playing skills were asked to practice a set piano piece for seven days and then perform it to the experimenter under different performance instructions (no instruction, internal focus, external focus). We found that an external focus of attention instructions resulted in more accurate performance than internal instructions, as evaluated by the difference in the number of note pitch and timing mistakes between the two conditions. Implication of this and previously reported findings for music education and more broadly, performance anxiety across a range of domains, are discussed.

About the speaker

Dr Jentsch is a cognitive neuroscientist and a classically trained pianist, studying different aspects of attention and performance in humans. She is specifically interested in the processes that underlie our ability to plan and control our actions, using both behavioural and electrophysiological approaches. She is also interested in how these processes change as a function of expertise (e.g., in groups with high levels of motor skills such instrumental musicians), normal aging and psychological illness.

Zoom Meeting

<https://hku.zoom.us/j/3951550048?pwd=SncvL3RYakEycUtpL29vdDJEclEwdz09>

Meeting ID: 395 155 0048 | Password: psyc

~All are Welcome~

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