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## SCIENCE

# Too much concentration causes some to 'choke'

*Washington Post*

The professional tennis player who double-faults at match point. The pitcher who walks the batter with bases loaded. The ballerina who trips and falls on opening night. Why do experts "choke"? Two psychologists think they have some new clues.

Sian L. Beilock and Thomas H. Carr of Michigan State University were trying to determine if peo-

ple choke because they are paying too much attention to a task that comes naturally, or because the distraction of a pressure-filled situation causes them to pay too little attention. It appears to be the former.

They trained 54 students to excel in putting a golf ball. The golfers then practiced either under normal conditions, while listening to a taped word test, or in front of a video camera. The idea

was that those who practiced in front of a video camera would get used to being self-conscious and would be less likely to choke under pressure. When the pressure was low, all three groups performed about equally well. But when the golfers were told they had to improve their performance to get a monetary reward, the only ones that putted better were those who did it in front of a camera. The others did worse.