# **Article Review**

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**Article Review**

Perfectionism that leads to burnout is an issue for athletes of all ages, genders, and sports. Aiming to be the best athlete at one’s sport is a tall task and can lead to psychological disturbances such as anxiety, loss of motivation, and exhaustion. It is important to understand the research on such relationships so I have chosen three articles that all pertain to perfectionism and burnout in young athletes. In this paper I will examine the similarities and differences between these three articles that all pertain to a case study of a teenage wrestler showing signs of burnout via perfectionistic thinking patterns and behaviors.

In the first article, Jowett et al. (2013) aim to examine the relationship between perfectionism and burn out through the lens of self-determination theory’s (SDT) autonomous versus controlled motivations on junior athletes in England. The same authors use a similar design years later to examine the outcomes of burnout versus engagement in junior athletes through the lens of basic psychological needs theory (BPN) satisfaction versus thwarting (Jowett et al., 2016). The difference between their two studies is the earlier study seeks to understand the relationship between perfectionism and burnout through the mediation of autonomic and controlled motivations while the later study examines the relationship between motivation types and burnout or engagement outcomes using BPN theory. A third article by Garinger et al. (2018) examines the relationship between perceived stress and perfectionism that leads to burnout on collegiate track and field athletes. Burnout remains the topic throughout all the articles but each researches a different variable.

**Literature Review**

All three articles agree on the definition of perfectionism as aiming for very high standards and exhibiting harsh self-criticism. They delineate between perfectionistic strivings as positive and healthy aspects like having high personal standards and goals versus perfectionistic concerns as negative and harmful aspects like self-doubt and self-criticism (Garinger et al., 2018; Jowett et al, 2013; Jowett el al., 2016). All three articles agree on the essence of burnout as what happens when the sacrifices outweigh the rewards. Enjoyment decreases or vanishes, motivation dwindles, and doubt or criticism can seep in. Perfectionistic behaviors that produce anxiety, depression, and other psychological disturbances can lead to burnout.

Jowett et al. (2013) hypothesized that perfectionistic strivings would be negatively related to burnout and perfectionistic concerns would be positively related to burnout. They also hypothesized that the perfectionistic concerns-burnout relationship would be partially mediated by a positive association with controlled motivation only and the perfectionistic strivings-burnout relationship would be partially mediated by a positive association with both controlled and autonomic motivations. Jowett et al. (2016) hypothesized that perfectionistic concerns and perfectionistic strivings would share opposing associations with athlete burnout and athlete engagement. They also hypothesized that basic psychological need satisfaction and thwarting would mediate the associations between perfectionism, burnout and engagement. Garinger et al. (2018) hypothesized that specialized athletes would experience more stress, perfectionistic behaviors, and burnout than multisport athletes. They also hypothesized that perfectionistic concerns would positively affect burnout and indirectly affect burnout through perceived stress.

All three articles mention self determination theory to understand athlete motivation. SDT posits that all humans are motivated to make their own choices and that behavior is motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Garinger et al., 2018; Jowett et al, 2013; Jowett el al., 2016). The three basic psychological needs of SDT are autonomy, or the ability to make one’s own choices, competence, of the feeling of being useful to society, and relatedness, or the feeling that you matter to those who matter to you. When these needs are satisfied, there is optimal functioning.

**Method**

All three articles used a quantitative design and surveys for their data collection tools. The target populations for both the articles by Jowett et al. (2013, 2016) are junior athletes in Northern England recruited from clubs and organizations in various sports and Garinger et al. (2018) focused their study on collegiate track and field athletes who specialize in one or more sports. The samples used for both Jowett et al. articles were 211 male and female junior athletes with a mean age of 15.61 from sports football, cricket, netball and swimming, and 222 male and female junior athletes with a mean age of 16.01 from football, rugby, cricket, swimming, and synchronized swimming. The sample from Garinger et al.’s article was 351 male and female NCAA Division II and Division III track and field athletes with a mean age of 19.97 that either specialized in one sport or participated in multiple sports.

Data was collected by all three articles using multiple surveys such as the athlete burnout questionnaire (ABQ) used by all articles to determine the extent of burnout symptoms. Others used were scales for perfectionism, basic psychological need satisfaction and thwarting, and perceived stress. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics for the mean and standard deviation for possible outcomes. Jowett et al. (2013, 2016) relied on maximum likelihood estimation (ML) as part of AMOS to test structural relationships between the variables and structural equation modeling. Garinger et al. (2018) relied on the same but more specifically, the path analysis model to show dependence between variables.

**Results**

The results for the Jowett et al. (2013) article found that perfectionistic strivings were more prevalent than perfectionistic concerns as well as a reliance on intrinsic motivations more than extrinsic motivations. Low burnout numbers support the hypothesis that athletes who rely on autonomic motivations are self-determined and less likely to treat oneself harshly over perfectionism. The results for the Jowett et al. (2016) article found similar results in more strivings than concerns, and basic psychological need satisfaction more than thwarting. There were high levels of engagement and low levels of burnout, matching with the hypotheses. The Garinger et al. (2018) article found that specialized athletes reported more perceived stress than multisport athletes. Much like the previous two articles, it was found that perfectionistic strivings were correlated with less burnout and concerns were correlated with more burnout.

**Discussion**

The results of all three articles show that athletes should be made aware of their perfectionistic behaviors, the type of motivations they rely on, and how they can prevent burnout. Jowett et al. (2013, 2016) show that a self-determined athlete is more likely to rely on autonomic motivation, keep perfectionism at a healthy dose, and avoid burnout if they are made aware of their thinking patterns and behavior. Integrated behavior is when behavior becomes aligned with interests. It would be wise for coaches and athletes alike to be aware of the signs of burnout, and perfectionistic concerns.

The limitations of the articles are similar because of the sampling and data collection methods. Convenience sampling was used to recruit volunteer athletes nearby in all of the articles. This is not a limitation if results are to be applied solely to the local demographic but these studies are intended to add value to the existing sport psychology literature as a whole. The samples were broadened for the Jowett et al. (2013, 2016) articles given the amount of sports they pulled from while the Garinger et al. (2018) article focused solely on track and field athletes. They did, however, add some range in the sample in level of expertise as the range of years was from one to twenty. The data collection methods used were self-reported and therefore the potential for athletes who were experiencing negative burnout symptoms and psychological disturbances may have been more or less inclined to participate.

The articles give recommendations for future research to explore motivations that relate to perfectionism. Data confirmed that perfectionism is not purely negative because perfectionistic strivings decrease the likelihood of burnout and increase the likelihood of engagement (Jowett et al., 2013). Suggestions for longitudinal studies on the topic would allow burnout and perfectionism to be monitored over time and through various events that could affect either. There is a wide opening of possibility in the area of sport psychology because of its relatively young roots. Testing specific interventions like education, awareness, and traditional psychological techniques would serve this topic well.

**Case Study**

For high school wrestler Shane, his love of the sport has been impacted by the pressure to be the best and remain on a track that his parents have for him. He states he feels exhausted trying to keep up with school and wrestling. He believes he must strive for a 4.0 GPA and “literally can’t lose a match”. He has accomplished many titles in his career allowing him the opportunity to attend university on a wrestling scholarship. He feels pressured to continue his path of wrestling because he can attend college tuition-free, taking the burden off of his parents. He defines his parents as strict. He feels he wants to explore other passions and can’t find the motivation to attend practices despite a big competition coming up. He was referred by the coach because of absences from practice and he is an asset to the team.

**Application**

Given the methods used in all three articles I would assess Shane using the athlete burnout questionnaire, psychological needs thwarting scale, basic needs satisfaction in sport scale, perceived stress scale, and the sport multidimensional perfectionism scale. With this information I can confirm whether Shane is struggling from perfectionistic behaviors, burnout, and stress. The basic psychological needs theory used in the Jowett et al. (2016) article would be used as a framework to see if Shane’s needs are met. Whether he feels he is close to his family, has a social group to rely on, spends time socializing, would all gauge his relatedness. His autonomy is limited because of his age and reliance on his “strict” parents who may have an authoritative style of parenting. His level of competence may or may not be satisfied with his titles, and depending on his current passions, he may not feel he is fulfilling all of his possibilities if he stays with wrestling despite being good at it.

The Garinger et al. (2018) article offers insight into specializing versus multisport participation as it is more stressful for collegiate athletes to focus on only one sport versus many. It may benefit Shane to add another sport in the wrestling off season. While the scholarship is available through wrestling, it would be possible for Shane to explore other sports and hobbies, perhaps relieving his perceived stress, increasing his autonomy and competence. In the face of perfectionism, athletes are susceptible to perfectionistic concerns that can undermine success and confidence. Teaching athletes about these habits can minimize psychological disturbances like Shane’s pressure to perform, and his possible burnout.

**References**

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