

Goodger, K., Wolfenden, L., & Lavalley, D. (2007). Symptoms and consequences associated with three dimensions of burnout in junior tennis players. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 38, 342-364.

Abstract

Raedeke (1997) conceptualized athlete burnout as the enduring existence of three dimensions: physical and emotional exhaustion, sport devaluation, and reduced sense of athletic accomplishment. The purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which Raedeke's conceptualization is efficacious within the context of junior tennis in the United Kingdom by exploring burned out players' perceptions of key symptoms and consequences associated with each dimension. Six former national junior tennis players who were identified as burned out underwent a structured interview exploring their experiences of burnout. Content analysis identified symptoms and consequences specific to each burnout dimension, but also considerable overlap and interrelationships among dimensions. In more severe cases of burnout, consequences continued after departure from the sport and were salient in non-athletic domains. Considerable significance was attached to reduced sense of athletic accomplishment, diverging from work-related literature where this burnout dimension is considered of limited importance (Cox, Tisserand, & Taris, 2005).

Symptoms and Consequences Associated with Three Dimensions of Burnout in Junior Tennis Players

The demands placed on young athletes have intensified considerably in recent years (Holt, 2007). This has been coupled with growing concern that the competitive pressures experienced by junior athletes may lead to discontinued sport involvement, and increased athletic burnout incidence (Gould & Dieffenbach, 2003). Much of this concern stems from shared beliefs that young athletes train too much, take part in too many competitions, focus entirely on one sport at too young an age, and continually have to learn to cope with pressure from parents and coaches (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006). This culminates not only in physical and psychological decrements in performance but also debilitating effects on general health and well-being (Coakley, 1992; Dale & Weinberg, 1990; Harlick & McKenzie, 2000). It is reasonable to expect that with such significant implications for the well-being of young athletes, burnout would be well researched; however, it is in fact an under researched and poorly understood phenomenon (Goodger, Lavalley, Gorely, & Harwood, 2006).

The first appearance of burnout within academic literature focused on job-related stress among staff workers (Freudenberger, 1974) and later extended to encompass the human services and helping professions (Maslach, 1976). It was not long before the observation was made that stressors in the competitive sport context were similar to those reported in the work setting (Dale & Weinberg, 1990), and research examining coaching burnout began (Caccese & Mayerberg, 1984; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman, & Soliday, 1992). More recently, there has been an increasing shift in attention towards the exploration of burnout in athlete populations (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2005a; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996, 1997; Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996; Harlick & McKenzie, 2000; Raedeke & Smith, 2004; Udry, Gould,

Bridges, & Tuffey, 1997), but the number of empirical studies remains small.

One of the major stumbling blocks to the advancement of burnout research in sport has been the lack of an agreed definition of burnout (Goodger et al., 2006). In a bid to establish an athlete-specific definition that could also be operationalized, Raedeke (1997) drew from the most widely accepted conceptualization in organizational and health psychology (i.e., Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach and Jackson proposed that burnout is characterized by the enduring presence of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment. Considering contextual differences between work and sport, Raedeke modified each dimension identifying them as physical/emotional exhaustion (PEE), reduced sense of athletic accomplishment (RA), and sport devaluation (DV). PEE is physical and emotional exhaustion associated with intense training and competition, and RA is a feeling of reduced accomplishment with regard to skills and abilities. DV refers to a loss of interest, “don’t care” attitude, or resentment towards one’s own performance and sport, and replaces the original dimension of depersonalization which has not been identified as salient to athlete burnout (Raedeke & Smith, 2001).

Within the work literature there has been ongoing debate as to whether there is a need for a three-dimensional conceptualization of burnout (Shirom, 2005). Emotional exhaustion frequently has been identified as the central component of burnout, followed by depersonalization (Taris, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2005). Reduced accomplishment has often been marginalized in comparison to the other dimensions (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). The performance nature of the sport environment may, however, represent an important contextual difference for burnout, as a competitive athlete’s competence is evaluated publicly through performance. Proponents of three dimensional conceptualization of burnout argue that it offers

‘conceptual richness’ (Leiter, 1993) and that a unidimensional perspective may lose “sight of the phenomenon entirely” (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p.403).

Raedeke’s (1997) conceptualization of athlete burnout has been operationalized in a number of recent studies (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2005a; 2005b; Raedeke & Smith, 2004) via the *Athlete Burnout Questionnaire* (ABQ; Raedeke & Smith, 2001), a self report measure that assesses each dimension with distinct subscales. Although the ABQ has demonstrated good internal consistency and construct validity (Raedeke & Smith, 2001), there has been little qualitative exploration of the three dimensions among athletes. Raedeke, Lunney, and Venables (2002) in a study of coach perceptions of athlete burnout and Cresswell and Eklund (2006a) in the context of professional rugby have provided the only qualitative explorations of how burnout manifests in the athlete. Further qualitative work is essential to extend the burnout knowledge base by exploring how it might be manifested within the context of (and relative to) the demands of alternative environments (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a). Contextual differences were central to Raedeke’s modification of Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) model, but there has been limited exploration of how different dimensions manifest in terms of symptoms and potential consequences from the perspective of athletes. For individuals working with an affected athlete (e.g., coach, sport science, and medical support), as well as athletes themselves, identification of symptoms and associated consequences can help inform identification, management, and treatment strategies.

Tennis is a sport in which burnout is evident (e.g., Gould, Tuffey et al., 1996, 1997; Gould, Udry et al., 1996; Harlick & McKenzie, 2000; Udry et al., 1997). Significant concern has been raised about the impact of burnout on personal and athletic development of young players, as well as their continuation in the sport at the senior level, yet a relatively limited understanding

of the phenomenon exists. In an effort to improve our understanding of athlete burnout, the purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which Raedeke's (1997) tri-dimensional conceptualization of the phenomenon is efficacious within the context of junior tennis by exploring burned out players' perceptions of key symptoms and consequences associated with each dimension. We were interested not only in the symptoms and consequences themselves, but also their interrelationships. For the purpose of the present study, symptoms will be defined as physical or mental signs or characteristics of burnout, and consequences as results or outcomes of burnout. It is proposed that symptoms and consequences are related in that consequences are the result of burnout as an enduring experience, and symptoms reflect the characteristics of this experience.

Method

Participants

The use of a selective sample to study specific phenomena is the most common and accepted procedure in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). The present sample comprised six former national junior tennis players; four females and two males (ages ranging from 15 to 21). All players had attended National Tennis Academies for training camps; they had also competed in the United Kingdom and abroad. At the peak of their playing careers all participants were ranked in the top 10 at national level (age group). Playing experience ranged from 7 to 12 years. None of the participants are currently playing at a competitive level; they had been out of the game for between four months and five years.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the research procedure was obtained from a University Ethics Committee. Players were approached on the basis of recommendations by coaches, who had

been asked to consider athletes they had worked with who had withdrawn from tennis at some stage of their career due to motivational loss. Physical withdrawal has been identified as a key component of burnout in the sport context (Raedeke et al., 2002; Smith, 1986) and has been utilized as a sampling criterion in previous athlete (e.g., Gould et al., 1996a) and organizational (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003) burnout studies. Although burnout may occur in conjunction with dropout (i.e., when an athlete withdraws as a result of burnout), it is only one of many explanations for athlete withdrawal from sport participation (Gould & Dieffenbach, 2002). Cresswell and Eklund (2006) argue that to enhance conceptual clarity burnout and dropout should be treated as separate, but related, constructs. The present study is in agreement with this perspective. However, the use of dropout as a sampling criterion was with the explicit intention of identifying individuals who had experienced burnout which resulted in their departure from their sport.

Participants were contacted via an information letter explaining the purpose of the research. All participants were made aware that involvement was voluntary and confidentiality would be assured. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and parents of participants under 18 years of age. Participants were initially asked to complete the ABQ (Raedeke & Smith, 2001), in relation to their experiences in the last month prior to their withdrawal from tennis. Internal consistency scores in the present investigation were in the acceptable range ($\alpha = .73$ to $.84$). At present there are no agreed cut offs points for the ABQ that classify cases of burnout, posing obvious problems for identifying individuals with burnout. In order to identify cases of higher perceived burnout in the present sample, scores were examined relative to the mid point of each subscale and athletes scoring above the midpoint on all of the subscales were invited to participate in a structured interview. From a total of 20 players

identified by coaches, eight were identified with higher perceived burnout. Six agreed to be interviewed (see results section for range of ABQ dimension scores).

Prior to the start of the interviews, a small pilot study was conducted with two tennis players (one female, one male) who were invited to participate in an interview designed to test the interview guide designed for this study. Following slight modifications to the guide, and feedback to the principal investigator on question design and interview technique, individual interviews commenced. A structured interview format was adopted to facilitate comparison across participants while also permitting flexibility in individual responses. Examples of interview questions are provided in Table 1. Participants were asked to respond to a standardized sequence of questions from the guide, the design of which was informed by previous research conducted on burnout in junior tennis (Gould et al., 1996b). Questions were divided into sections relating to: sport history, decision to stop playing, experiences in tennis, emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, devaluation, and reduced sense of athletic accomplishment. Probe questions were determined a priori in an attempt to minimize interviewer bias by ensuring similarity of follow-up questions. With reference to the dimensions, participants were first presented with a definition of a symptom and a consequence, and then asked to describe how they felt emotionally and physically on and off court, their attitude and motivation, and performance and accomplishment on court. Having rebuilt a picture of their experiences around each dimension, they were then asked to reflect specifically on what they would identify as symptoms and consequences. The use of the term burnout was avoided at this stage due to possible negative connotations associated with it (Gould et al., 1996b), and instead questions were framed around experiences of ‘motivational problems’, ‘motivational loss’, ‘withdrawal’, and ‘decision to stop playing’. At the end of the interview participants were presented with a definition of athletic

burnout based upon Raedeke's (1997) conceptualization and asked if they believed they had experienced burnout. Based upon the definition of burnout supplied, all players indicated that they believed they had experienced burnout.

Interviews were recorded on an audio tape, 60 to 90 minutes in duration, and later transcribed verbatim. All interviews were conducted in person by a female investigator trained in qualitative research and case study methodology as outlined by Patton (1990) and Merriam (1998). This investigator also had extensive tennis experience as a former competitive player and active coach.

Analysis

Interviews were analyzed thematically, using principles of content analysis recommended by Patton (1990). This approach has been successfully applied in previous research on burnout in tennis (Gould et al., 1996b). The following step-by-step analysis procedure was used:

1. Transcripts were read by all authors, and the taped interviews replayed so that the researchers were fully conversant with each participant and their experiences.
2. Raw data themes were highlighted within the main body of transcripts in all sections except sport history. These reflected responses given by players and were presented in the usual manner, namely a direct or paraphrased quote capturing a distinct idea/concept (Gould et al., 1996b).
3. Through an inductive process, common themes were identified in order to link smaller raw data themes. The coding system of identifying higher-order themes enabled the researchers to identify patterns of greater generality.
4. Throughout the analytic process elements of the constant comparative method were utilized, as advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). For example, as each piece of raw

datum was selected, it was compared with raw data themes and grouped with raw data conveying the same meaning. In the absence of similar “meaning units” a new theme was created. This iterative process permitted continuous refinement of the results (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and ensured raw data and higher-order themes were distinct and appropriately categorized.

5. Once higher-order themes had been identified, the researchers reviewed categorization decisions. Raw data themes were checked to confirm that they did fit coherently into the broader theme, and that the descriptors that had been used to identify the higher-order themes made intuitive sense (Gould et al., 1996b).

It was deemed important to incorporate a number of checks into the research design to ensure data trustworthiness and to maintain rigor. Throughout data collection and analysis the second author maintained a reflexive journal to help ensure her personal experience of tennis did not bias analysis. During data analysis the first and third authors, who had previous qualitative data analysis experience, also read the interview transcripts and coded the data independently. The researchers then came together, and reached a mutual consensus on the data.

Prior to the onset of data analysis, participants were engaged in a second interview. The interviewer met with each participant and provided her/him with a copy of their transcribed responses to the interview questions. Reviewing each question, participants were asked if the response given represented exactly what was intended. Several participants volunteered further detail, but overall original responses were corroborated.

Results and Discussion

Levels of perceived burnout

Levels of perceived burnout assessed via the ABQ in the present sample ranged, on a 5-

point scale, from 3.8 to 5.0 for PEE, from 3.7 to 5.0 for RA, and from 3.7 to 5.0 for DV.

Cresswell and Eklund (2005b), in their study of motivation in professional rugby players, reported average levels of PEE across the season from 2.39 to 2.43, RA from 2.04 to 2.50, and DV from 1.65 to 1.90. In a sample of adolescent swimmers, Raedeke and Smith (2001; Study 2) recorded average PEE of 3.06, RA of 2.30, and DV of 2.19.

Symptoms and consequences of the three dimensions

Content analysis of the interview transcripts indicate that physical/emotional exhaustion (PEE), reduced sense of athletic accomplishment (RA) and sport devaluation (DV) are dimensions of burnout that resonate with junior tennis players who have been affected by the syndrome. The tennis players' perceived symptoms and consequences of burnout, by dimension, are detailed in Figure 1. Through the interview, transcription, and analysis process it became apparent that players referenced links and interrelationships between dimensions as a matter of course when recalling their experiences. In an attempt to convey player experiences as fully as possible, we have highlighted these links throughout the results and discussion section and provide a subsequent section summarizing the associations identified.

Symptoms of physical and emotional exhaustion

Exploration of players' physical and emotional experiences pertaining to burnout identified four higher-order themes, namely, negative affect, feelings of isolation, lack of motivation/energy, and physical complaints. In general, these characteristics are consistent with those reported in job burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998) and previous athletic burnout investigations (Cresswell & Eklund, 2003, 2006a; Raedeke et al., 2002). In the athletic burnout studies specifically, PEE included experiences of fatigue (physical and mental), tiredness, frustration, illness, delayed recovery time, and entrapment.

Negative affect. This dimension was typically characterized by a depressed mood and/or being mentally exhausted, and was associated with feelings of irritability, tension, anger, anxiety, and frustration. Three of the players (P2, P4, and P6) spoke openly about their constant unhappiness at this time. P6 exemplifies this in the following statement:

“Just thinking about tennis could make me cry, that’s how bad it got. Towards the end I just hated feeling that way, I wasn’t myself. It was all just getting on top of me, I was getting more and more down each day.”

Feelings of isolation. Three participants (P3, P4, and P6) spoke of “feeling alone” with no one to talk to. P4 captures this: “I would get so worked up inside thinking about tennis all the time it would just wear me out. I couldn’t speak to anyone, nobody could understand how it was making me feel”. Isolation was also linked to difficulties in socializing with other people. Two reported that they would prefer to be left alone; “I would lock myself away just so I wouldn’t have to talk about tennis” (P3). Motivating these feelings of wanting to distance themselves from others were also experiences of guilt and embarrassment about declining athletic performance (P1, P2, & P5). Participants felt a strong sense of failure, low competence and low confidence in their tennis abilities which linked to their experiences of RA. In order to cope with this they chose to avoid contact with others, which in turn exacerbated feelings of isolation. Similar sentiments were expressed by tennis players in Gould et al’s sample (1997) where players did not seek help or support because they were embarrassed and afraid to admit they were having a hard time. Finally, for some participants the culmination of isolation was entrapment: “It became so bad that I was being rude, nasty to other players, my coach, everyone. I felt stuck, kind of trapped in this tennis court that I couldn’t get out of....” (P1). In a study of burnout amongst age group swimmers, Raedeke (1997) explored the relationship between commitment profiles and

levels of burnout. The experiences of entrapment expressed by tennis players in the present sample mirror those of ‘malcontented’ swimmers within Raedeke’s sample. Specifically these swimmers experienced entrapment through low perceived control over their swim involvement and high social constraints to maintain their participation compared to their peers, and reported the highest levels of burnout. Experiences of isolation and associated feelings of entrapment, therefore, lead to negative perceptions of sport involvement which, in turn, are likely to further exacerbate levels of emotional exhaustion.

Lack of motivation/energy. This theme was mentioned by all players, and viewed as being one of the major symptoms of burnout. Similar importance has been associated with energy levels in earlier research in junior tennis (Gould et al, 1996b) and professional rugby (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a), and appears, therefore, to mark a key characteristic of athlete burnout. Participants typically spoke of a lack of motivation using terms such as, “sick of tennis,” “can’t be bothered,” “no drive to practice,” and “bored.” These feelings were summarized succinctly by P3 who stated: “I felt so tired and mentally drained that I wasn’t bothered if I won or lost anymore.” P6 added: “I just didn’t have the energy to dig in anymore in a hard match. I couldn’t fight or stick in like I used to. I’d lost the edge I used to have on court. I was mentally gone, I was sick of feeling like it”. These statements were in stark contrast to the responses given when participants were asked about how they used to feel about tennis: “completely committed,” “love the game,” and “determined”. The motivational shift observed can potentially be linked to developing feelings of devaluation. As players became increasingly drained, levels of motivation declined and a ‘don’t care’ attitude began to emerge. Similar characteristics have been associated with devaluation in both swimmers (Raedeke et al, 2002) and rugby players (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a).

Physical complaints. Research examining the relationship between physical health and burnout in the work setting has been inconclusive (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003), but in the sport setting physical complaints have often been linked to athlete burnout (Cresswell & Eklund, 2003; Gould et al, 1996b). Players in the present sample reported that experiences of being mentally drained coincided with a physical lack of energy. This was characterized by feeling “drained,” “run down,” and “physically/mentally shattered.” P5 explained:

“I was normally so lively and awake, but I became drained, had no energy at all. I couldn’t shake it off no matter how much sleep/rest I had. I was just generally run down and low. I was getting headaches, eczema, mouth ulcers, just little signs.”

In addition to the lack of energy, participants also reported suffering minor illnesses and somatic problems (e.g., prolonged cold/flu symptoms, sleeping difficulties, niggling injuries, and lack of coordination), which they related to their intense training schedules and prolonged exposure to stressful training environments. The perseverance of some of these minor complaints has also been reported in previous research in which athletes have reported struggling to recover from injury and illness (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a). Two of the four female participants spoke of significant changes in appetite and eating problems that developed as a response to negative experiences in tennis. For example, P2 stated:

“I’d feel sick every time before I had to go and play, for training and competitions; I would get so worked up, my stomach would be in knots and I wouldn’t be able to eat. I just didn’t want to eat, I couldn’t face it.”

Consequences of physical and emotional exhaustion

Fourteen raw data themes related to the consequences of physical and emotional exhaustion were identified. Four higher-order themes were derived from the raw data, including

lethargy, negative feelings toward tennis, withdrawal, and avoidance behavior.

Lethargy. Three participants (P2, P3 and P4) reported feeling both mentally and physically exhausted at the end of their playing career. In Gould et al.'s (1997) presentation of three case studies of burnout in junior tennis players, physical and emotional depletion was a common feature of each story and was linked to their departure from tennis. P4 summed up the general feeling of depletion:

“It was a really strange feeling – I was just completely gone, probably more mentally by the end, but physically also; I had nothing really to give any more. There was nothing left in me. After you have been training so hard for so long, traveling around all over, competing, it wears you out completely.”

Negative feelings toward tennis involvement. This main theme was reflected in statements relating to being “unhappy and emotional,” “dreading going to tennis,” and “feeling sick thinking about tennis”.

Withdrawal and avoidance behavior. Higher-order themes of withdrawal and avoidance behavior were characterized by both feelings of being alone as well as behaviors to avoid or withdraw contact with others. Participants mentioned “faking injuries”, “arriving late to sessions,” and “wanting to be ill” as forms of excuse making to avoid going to training and competition. In earlier research Raedeke et al (2002) identified withdrawal as a symptom of burnout distinct from the three dimensions. They reported that it was demonstrated primarily through physical withdrawal (e.g., stopping interaction with team-mates and leaving sessions early). For tennis players in the present sample, avoidance behaviors were one way of managing their feelings and emotions. P6 offered: “There were times when I just didn’t go; I convinced mum that I was too ill, or my shoulder was too sore to play.” P3 also stated:

“I was under pressure from my coach and parents, especially dad, to do well, but I couldn’t keep it up. I was waking up in the mornings wishing that I could be ill or just go back to sleep, because I didn’t want to have to face going back onto court again. I’d get angry and kick my rackets, throw them in the garage.”

Withdrawal and avoidance then, on both an emotional level and through actual physical withdrawal (or avoidance behavior) that emerged as a consequence of physical and emotional exhaustion, appear to represent maladaptive coping strategies. As such, they reflect a link between this dimension and sport devaluation.

Symptoms of devaluation

Players’ experiences of devaluation again largely complement existent research in the sport domain (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a; Gould et al., 1996b; Raedeke et al., 2002). A total of 16 raw data themes were identified under the devaluation dimension; six themes highlighted the symptoms experienced and the consequences were classified from 10 raw data themes. The six themes used to characterize the symptoms were condensed into one higher-order theme; decreased motivation.

Decreased motivation. Common symptoms experienced by participants were, “changing priorities,” “lack of interest in tennis,” “other interests,” and “lack of concern about performance.” P5 summarized these feelings by stating:

“When I finished playing tennis wasn’t important to me at all, and I don’t think it will be again. I can’t explain to you how I felt about it, I just hated it in the end. I think that’s because I tried to keep going for so long when I knew for myself it wasn’t what I wanted to be doing. I wanted to do other things, be able to be included in things that my school friends did – they never used to ask me to do anything because I always had to be at

tennis. I wanted to find something to do that I enjoyed and was fun.”

It is clear from this and similar statements made by other players that motivation had changed and tennis was no longer the number one priority. As they grew older they wanted more from life away from tennis. They felt tennis was preventing them from trying new activities and meeting new people. Coakley (1992) proposes that the development of burnout is linked to sport ‘over’ involvement leading to the formation of a uni-dimensional identity in young athletes. As athletes are so heavily involved in their sport, they are unable to develop a multidimensional identity and begin to feel that they do not have a life outside of sport.

The motivational change associated with the devaluation dimension of burnout is not simply about a change of interest or wanting to do something else, but also the loss of motivation. In earlier research, devaluation has been associated with athletes questioning their sport participation (i.e., why am I doing this?) and expressing doubt about their continued involvement (Creswell & Eklund, 2003, 2006a; Gould et al, 1997). Changes in motivation have also been reported as a key characteristic of motivation in the work domain (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). Schaufeli and Taris explain ‘unwillingness’ is the motivational component of fatigue and that burnout is a form of occupational fatigue. The unwillingness component is represented by an ‘unwillingness’ to spend effort and “manifests itself by increased resistance, reduced commitment, lack of interest, disengagement and mental distancing” (p.259), all of which echo the experiences of athletes in the present sample.

Consequences of devaluation

Ten raw data themes identified for the consequences of devaluation were categorized into three higher-order themes: regret, negative reflections of tennis experiences, and role restricted.

Regret. Many responses in this category reflected the regret that participants had as a

result of their intensive participation in tennis throughout their childhood. The main explanation for this was the sacrifices they had made, and the overburdening time constraints that became associated with their tennis. Four of the six participants (P2, P4, P5, and P6) reported that they regretted the time spent on tennis and that they “wouldn’t do it all again.”

“If I could have seen into the future I definitely wouldn’t have even got involved in tennis. It’s just so intense when you’re so young. You spend so much time on your own, it’s not fun. You don’t get much help or support from anyone when you are struggling; coaches are just bothered about results, they didn’t really care about me as a person when I was finding things tough.” (P6)

On the other hand, when asked if it was all worth it, P1 and P3 said that although they would do things differently, it was not entirely a negative experience. P3 noted:

“Don’t get me wrong, I did have some really good times in tennis. When I was playing well and winning I loved it, it’s all I wanted to do, but then things changed. But it wasn’t all bad. I would never tell anyone not to play tennis because it’s a good game, but you just have to make sure it doesn’t take over your life.”

Negative reflections of tennis experiences. All participants had negative reflections of their playing careers and involvement in tennis, but to some these experiences continued to affect them even after leaving tennis. For example, P4 said that she still didn’t like to think of her playing days and would still get upset just thinking back to those times.

Role restricted. A common theme to emerge as a consequence of devaluation was categorized as “role restricted”. This was epitomized by phrases such as, “whole life was just tennis,” “all I ever did was play tennis,” “was hard to make friends outside tennis”, and “I didn’t have anything else to talk about other than tennis”. Participants felt that their tennis involvement

had a detrimental effect upon other aspects of their lives and their personal development. P6 stated:

“It’s hard to explain, but I didn’t really have anything else to life apart from tennis. I couldn’t make friends outside tennis because I never got chance to do anything else, so it was hard. Everything we spoke about at home was tennis, tennis all the time; that was it.”

Issues related to commitment, and resulting resentment, appear to be strongly associated with the consequences of devaluation. Players felt they had made significant sacrifices (high costs) and restricted their involvement in alternative activities (social constraints) and received limited return on their investment (benefits). In turn, this led to regret and the development of negative attitudes toward the sport. For some athletes these feelings were intense and the consequences of devaluation were long term. As one player (P1) described “never wanting to put anyone through what I went through. No one deserves to feel like that. I went from loving it to hating it.” Similarly, Raedeke et al. (2002) reported coaches’ observations that swimmers experienced resentment, disillusionment and hatred of their sport. As one coach commented, “I think for the most part, anyone who truly is burned out with the sport, basically it comes down to a hate. They just hate it. They don’t dislike it, they hate it.” (p.192). It seems therefore that the consequences of devaluation (and the other dimensions of burnout) are potentially accumulative, and in the case of the athletes in the present study who expressed continued resentment towards their sport, they may continue beyond their departure from sport.

Symptoms of reduced sense of athletic accomplishment

Symptoms of RA centered on training and competitive performance, and were reported as significant features of the players’ experiences of burnout. Concerns about athletic

performance have regularly been expressed under this dimension within existent research (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a; Raedeke et al., 2002). As outlined in Figure 1, the symptoms within this dimension were organized into four higher-order themes, which included lack of improvement, underperformance, inconsistent performance, and lack of training gains. All participants mentioned at least one of the symptoms, with four of the six reporting two or three symptoms from this dimension as being significant to burnout.

Lack of improvement. Five of the six participants spoke of their, “lack of improvement” which they experienced over the months leading to their departure from tennis. This theme can be summed up using phrases such as, “wasn’t getting any better,” “losing streak,” and “slump.” They felt performances were going backwards.

Underperformance. Underperformance was also experienced by participants, shown through failure to beat less competent opposition or to perform at their potential. P3 illustrates this experience:

“I was starting to lose matches to people that I would never normally lose a game to, and whatever I did I didn’t seem to be able to string points together long enough to win a game. I just went, my results went from bad to worse. It was so frustrating. In tennis, ratings and results are so important, and if you can’t win consistently then you can’t really go anywhere. I was like a different player completely.”

Inconsistent performance. Participants spoke about inconsistency and day to day fluctuations in their training and competition performance. Their performance had become unpredictable and was frequently erratic. This was also associated with dips in playing confidence and a lack of ability to find their form.

Lack of training gains. The final symptom reported for RA was a lack of training gains. Participants often responded to a lack of improvement or underperformance by training harder in the hope that things would improve. However, several participants (P2, P3, and P5) reported that this led to a continuing downward trend in their performance through insufficient rest and recovery, and subsequent fatigue. P3 noted:

“I got this way, just physically and mentally drained from all the training I was doing and having no time off to rest and recover. I was worse because I was just not improving or playing well, so I put more pressure on myself to train harder and longer. The more I lost the harder I would train to put it right, but I just drove myself down and down”.

Consequences of reduced sense of athletic accomplishment

Consequences of RA were organized into four higher-order themes; lack of focus and direction, lowered self-esteem, departure from the sport, and performance frustration.

Lack of focus and direction. Under this theme players reported that the culmination of erratic and inconsistent play, failure to improve and underperformance led to uncertainty about performance, a lack of ability to control performance and a gradual loss of commitment and interest as a result of feeling unable to change the situation. As P5 describes:

“I just couldn’t see where I was going; I mean I wasn’t in control of my game, it was all over. I didn’t know how to change things though I just got into bad habits. It’s hard from there to change it all round. I got kind of lost, not knowing how to get out of it”.

P6 adds: “It’s hard to stay focused and really committed when you’re losing; after a bit I expected to lose and didn’t really care whether I won or lost”. It is possible to see how RA may be linked to DV here when the failure to perform impacts motivation, and the sense of failure is exacerbated by the lack of control players possessed to change their performance.

Lowered self-esteem. Participants generally reported that this consequence was the culmination of events over a period of time that ranged from 1 to 4 years, and that the consequences intensified toward the end of their playing career. Three of the respondents (P4, P3, and P6) reported that they lost confidence in their ability; and that this extended to life outside tennis. P3 specifically stated:

“I just felt useless really, I felt as if I was a failure and I think that’s what other people were thinking about me. Because I had spent all my time on tennis and never really done anything else I felt as if I could never achieve at anything else outside tennis either”.

Departure from the sport and performance frustration. The themes of departure from the sport and performance frustration appeared to show some association in interview responses. Individuals reported “hating playing,” and becoming “upset and frustrated by performance,” and that these thoughts often coincided with thoughts that it was “time to quit” and that they had “had enough.” Performance frustration has emerged before in previous research (e.g., Gould et al., 1996b), and athletes have reported responding to this frustration by investing greater effort to ‘train through it’ (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a). The resultant effect, however, is to add to feelings of exhaustion and hence RA and PEE are linked here. These negative feelings associated with RA were varied and for some individuals (P2, P6, and P4) the decision to stop playing had been permanent and they vowed that they would never pick up a tennis racket again, whereas others (P1) said that they would consider going back to play tennis recreationally. Consequences of RA were further magnified for a number of tennis players (P3, P4, and P6) whose lives revolved around their tennis involvement. For these individuals a unidimensional tennis identity had developed and their confidence and self esteem were hinged on effective performance in tennis. In these instances, the long term consequences of burnout can again be seen.

For each player, considerable time was spent on discussion around the significance of the symptoms and consequences of RA in their experiences of burnout. Players placed considerable emphasis on the role of declining performance in them becoming aware that ‘something was wrong’ and in their ability to cope with what they were experiencing. This contrasts markedly with the work-related literature where RA is considered the least significant dimension of burnout (Cox et al., 2005). For all participants, it was through changes in performance that they first became conscious of a problem. Players’ observations at the time included “being concerned about my play”, feeling “things had changed,” “not wanting to see the court,” “inconsistent play,” “losing all the time,” and “starting to hate it”. The significance of RA in the players’ experiences may reflect an important contextual difference for burnout in sport compared to the work setting. The accomplishment and public evaluation context of sport, together with the highly results-driven nature of sports governed by ranking systems and placings, puts considerable pressure on athletes to be successful. As P4 explains: “Tennis is just all about results, so that puts a lot of pressure on you; that’s all everyone was worried about, my parents, the coaches, and all the other players, just about results and ratings.” P5 echoed these sentiments and explained the motivational impact:

“It’s all about results and ratings in tennis, so you have to be winning regularly. When you’re not, that’s when it all starts. If I had been winning all the time then I wouldn’t have lost interest because you still have a chance of doing something, but when you’re losing it’s hard to keep going. It’s all about winning and if you’re not then it’s really tough.”

Interrelations among Burnout Dimensions

In early burnout research it was common to define burnout through a list of symptoms

(Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). However, it became evident within the present investigation that distinguishing symptoms from consequences is not straightforward. This study identified considerable overlap between dimensions, and responses of a number of players suggested that some consequences of one dimension could manifest as a symptom of another. For example, the *lethargy* that was experienced as a consequence of PEE was linked to the *motivational* symptoms that were displayed through the DV dimension, and conversely the *role restriction* which resulted from DV may have contributed to the feelings of *isolation* shown as a symptom of PEE. Through the retelling of player experiences in the interview process it became apparent that there were significant interrelationships among burnout dimensions. These relationships have been theorized about, and subsequently investigated in, the work domain through process models of burnout (e.g., Ashforth & Lee, 1997; Taris et al., 2005) that attempt to explain how burnout manifests over time. However, there has been a notable absence of such research in the sport context (Goodger, Lavalley, Gorely & Harwood, 2007). Although a number of contrasting process models have been advanced, they share basic assumptions about underlying causal mechanisms centred on sequentiality and interrelationships between the three dimensions of burnout. In the present study, participants indicated that DV was the result of RA. Over time, and as a consequence of a prolonged period of failure, individuals felt that frustration, aggression, feelings of incompetence, feelings of failure, feelings of being lost, and resentment of the amount of time and sacrifices they were making impacted their attitude towards tennis and the development of DV. Cresswell and Eklund (2006a) also reported a link between these dimensions in rugby players. However, it was not clear how RA developed. In the present sample, together with the study by Cresswell and Eklund, participants talked about training harder in response to lowered performance (performance frustration). This generated greater

feelings of exhaustion, and therefore may also reflect a link between RA and PEE. Furthermore, this suggests that a self-perpetuating cycle might exist in that further exhaustion leads to further decrements in performance, and so on.

However, it should be noted that any presentation of sequencing must be cautiously forwarded, as the work-related literature suggests that burnout may develop without an individual realizing it (Etzion, 1987). Although tennis players expressed that they first became concerned about how they felt physically and mentally towards their tennis involvement when their performance became affected (RA began to increase), there may have been a preceding period of PEE that led to RA. Because physical exertion and exhaustion are hallmarks of sport training, problematic forms of exhaustion may be difficult for athletes to detect. It is proposed, therefore, that further exploration of the interrelationship between symptoms and consequences of burnout dimensions will be valuable to understanding the developmental course(s) of the syndrome.

Conclusion

Symptoms of athlete burnout identified in the present study were generally consistent with earlier qualitative research (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a; Raedeke et al., 2002), and hence serve to offer further validation of Raedeke's (1997) conceptualization of athletic burnout as physical and emotional exhaustion, sport devaluation, and reduced sense of athletic accomplishment. The reported consequences of burnout also mirror findings from previous sport-related research (e.g., Gould et al., 1996b; Udry et al., 1997), but further suggest that consequences can extend beyond an athlete's departure from the sport. Withdrawal from sport involvement has generally been considered the final stage of burnout (Coakley, 1992; Smith, 1986). However, tennis players in the current study reported that feelings associated with

burnout did not simply disappear when they withdrew from tennis. This suggests that in order to fully understand burnout, researchers may need to extend the time frame of enquiry beyond the point when athletes leave the sport. This presents obvious challenges in an area where it is already difficult to sample individuals experiencing burnout, and where there is likely to be resistance to such involvement because of the nature of burnout. It is for this reason that we suggest further research could benefit from conducting retrospective interviews with athletes who have actually experienced burnout. A further opportunity fostered by a retrospective approach is that these athletes possess the long-view on the time course of burnout, a syndrome that takes time to develop. This affords the potential to uncover, from the athlete's perspective, causal processes that underpin burnout. Pines and Aronson (1988) suggest that burnout is a negative state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that is the end result of a gradual process of disillusionment, and hence burnout is both a state and a process. In the sport context the majority of research has been cross-sectional in nature and therefore has adopted a state perspective of burnout. Greater exploration of the development of burnout over time may do much to inform understanding of what comprises burnout, its associated consequences and how it manifests.

While the present study has contributed usefully to the empirical base and scholarly discussion relating to athletic burnout, there are research design limitations that must be considered. The generalizability of findings is limited given the small sample and select population from which participants were derived. It has been proposed that burnout occurs more in individual sports than team sports (Coakley, 1992), but as yet there are no empirical findings to support this. In enhancing understanding of the causes, symptoms and consequences of burnout associated with Raedeke's (1997) multidimensional conceptualization, future research should

look to explore the dimensions across a range of different types of sports and sport contexts. The limitations of retrospective research, and issues of memory decay specifically, have already been acknowledged in the design of the present study but it should also be noted that the nature of the interview process was reliant on the athlete's level of self awareness at the time they were experiencing burnout, and subsequent to the experience. As was observed earlier, RA played a significant role in the experiences players recalled and it has been proposed that objective (e.g., win versus loss) and subjective (e.g., satisfaction) performance outcomes can influence recall (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a). In the present study there was no triangulation of athlete accounts with other sources such as family, peers or coaches, or the use of objective performance measures, and hence this would seem a useful addition to future research examining retrospective accounts. As the study sought to further validate Raedeke's (1997) dimensions, the interview guide and analysis were framed within these three dimensions. Athletes were given limited opportunity to explore their experiences beyond these dimensions. There has been debate in the work related literature concerning the rationale for Maslach and Jackson's (1984) original dimensions. Schaufeli and Taris (2005) summarize the dimensionality debate as three key questions: Do three dimensions suffice? Are the three dimensions the right dimensions? Are three dimensions too many? These questions could also be applied to Raedeke's dimensions, and future work exploring these matters is warranted.

The use of a qualitative methodology employed in the present study allowed for exploration of athletic burnout experiences from the athletes' perspective. Utilization of such methods has been limited to date within burnout research, but given the idiosyncratic nature of burnout (Gould et al., 1996) qualitative approaches may offer valuable insights. Within the present study, the interview process enabled interrelationships between dimensions to be

observed, as well as the identification of potentially important contextual nuances influencing athlete burnout that point to the significance of RA. Although larger samples as afforded by self-report measures could help to validate present research findings and enhance generalizability, a larger sample size does not automatically yield more conclusive results. As identified by Cox et al. (2005), a significant weakness of burnout research is the fact that much has been based upon study participants who do not have burnout. Individuals in the present study are believed to have experienced burnout and hence provide an opportunity to learn from real life experiences.

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Table 1

Examples of Interview Guide Questions

Sport history

- At what age did you start playing tennis recreationally/competitively?
- How did you start playing tennis?

Decision to stop playing

- At what age did you stop playing tennis?
- Was your decision to stop playing tennis sudden or did you consider stopping playing over a period of time?

Experiences of tennis

- Can you give me a few words that would describe your feelings when things were going well in tennis?
- Can you give me a few words that would describe your feelings when things were not going well in tennis?

Emotional exhaustion

- How did you feel emotionally at the time you decided to stop playing?
- Did you experience any feelings of physical or emotional exhaustion at this time?
- What symptoms would you associate with these feelings of exhaustion?
- Do you think any of your typical behaviours towards training or competition changed at this time?

Physical exhaustion

- From a physical perspective did you notice any difference between when you were playing well and when you were not playing very well? What was different?
- What do you perceive to be the physical demands of tennis?

Devaluation

- At the time you finished playing did you have negative feelings towards tennis? If so, can you describe these feelings in more detail?
- How important was it for you to win on the tennis court? Did you become less concerned about how successful you were when you were playing less well?

Reduced sense of athletic accomplishment

- Did you have clear aims/targets that you wanted to achieve in tennis?
 - What were your aims?
 - Did these aims change throughout your career?
 - Did you experience feelings of not achieving much in your in tennis and not performing to your ability? How did this affect you?
-

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Higher-order (in italics) and raw data themes for symptoms and consequences by burnout dimension

Physical and Emotional Exhaustion	
Symptoms	Consequences
<i>Negative affect</i> I felt frustrated Angry Unhappy I was really emotional I had negative feelings towards tennis I was anxious a lot of the time	<i>Lethargy</i> Mentally gone Mentally tired/exhausted Low energy emotionally Physically drained Constantly tired Nothing in the tank
<i>Feelings of isolation</i> Felt trapped Had no one to talk to I felt guilty I was embarrassed Found it hard being around others Lacked confidence	<i>Negative feelings toward tennis involvement</i> I was unhappy and emotional a lot Dreaded going to tennis Feel sick thinking about tennis
<i>Lack of motivation/energy</i> Lack of motivation No drive I was sick of tennis I was mentally drained I had no energy I was emotionally low	<i>Withdrawal</i> Didn't want to talk to anyone Lock myself away
<i>Physical complaints</i> Loss of appetite I couldn't eat properly I had problems eating Constantly tired/run down Feeling/being sick Took longer to recover Lack of coordination Niggling injuries Had difficulty sleeping	<i>Avoidance Behavior</i> Faking injuries to get off tennis Wanted to be too unwell to go to tennis Arrived late to training
Sport Devaluation	
Symptoms	Consequences
<i>Decreased motivation</i> Lost all interest in tennis Sick of playing Fed up of training Didn't care as much about tennis Wasn't bothered about results any more Bored with amount of time spent on tennis	<i>Regret</i> Regretted the sacrifices I made Wouldn't do it again Hasn't been worth it
	<i>Negative reflections of tennis experiences</i> Never want to play again Don't like to think about my time in tennis Wouldn't put anyone through that
	<i>Role restricted</i> Whole life was just tennis Socializing problems because all I did was tennis Lack of confidence Difficulties communicating with others
Reduced Sense of Athletic Accomplishment	
Symptoms	Consequences

<i>Lack of improvement</i> Didn't improve Wasn't getting any better Slump in my game Losing streak	<i>Lack of focus and direction</i> Loss of commitment to training and competition Less interest in tennis Lacked concentration Lost my focus I had no direction
<i>Underperformance</i> Losing to players should never lose to Not playing to my potential	<i>Lowered self-esteem</i> Didn't believe in myself Felt inadequate/incompetent Loss of confidence
<i>Inconsistent performance</i> Never sure how I was going to play Good one day, awful the next Inconsistent	<i>Departure from sport</i> Pack it all in Time to quit Had enough
<i>Lack of training gains</i> Training harder but not getting any better Going backwards	<i>Performance frustration</i> Hated playing Never want to play again Upset with my performance Frustrated with my performance