

EATING DISORDERS and ATHLETES: PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AND THE PARENTAL SUPPORT



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ALEXIAN
BROTHERS

HEALTH SYSTEM

WHY?

Is it the sport?

Expectations from parents?

Demands from coaches?

Desires to be successful?

Are athletes and individuals with eating disorders
similar in some way?

Why do we see so many athletes
with eating disorders?

Eating Disorders and Athletes

0-8% of college and elite athletes have eating disorders

14-19% of college and elite athletes have disordered eating patterns

(Greenleaf, Petrie, Carter, & Reel, 2009)

Adolescents who participate in high level competitive sports which involve intense training are particularly at risk.

Disordered Eating in Athletes

Disordered eating behaviors

- Disordered eating may progress to anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and eating disorder NOS

(Ackerman & Nazem, 2012; Budd, 2007; Scarano & Kalodner-Martin, 1994)

Anorexia athletica does not meet the criteria for either anorexia nervosa or bulimia, but includes serious disordered eating behaviors

Anorexia athletica is defined as:

“An intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat even though one is underweight (at least 5% less than expected normal weight for age and height for the general female population). This weight loss is usually accomplished by extensive or compulsive exercising. Frequently these people report bingeing, self-induced vomiting, or the use of laxatives or diuretics.” (Doninger, 2003, p.10)

Athletes Characteristics

Perfectionism

(Krane, Stiles-Shipley, Waldron, & Michalenok, 2001; Anshel & Mansouri, 2005; J. G. H. Dunn, Gotwals, & Dunn, 2005)

Conformity

(Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Leary, 1992; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Smith & Link, 2010)

Aestheticism – particularly in “leanness” or “aesthetic” sports

(Krane et al., 2001; Brooks-Gunn, Burrow, & Warren, 1988; Petrie, 1993)

Obsessive-compulsive traits

(Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008; Reardon & Factor, 2010)

Perfectionism

Defined as:

- Exceedingly self-critical
 - Standards of performance that are extremely high
- (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990)
- Adaptive perfectionism utilizes high standards that are achievable and reasonable while being forgiving of errors.
 - Maladaptive perfectionism sets standards that are unreasonably high, and in addition, the individual is overly self-critical and seeks approval from others
- (Flett & Hewitt, 2005)

Perfectionism

Athlete

- Higher expectations that can be
 - Self-driven (internal desires)
 - External influences (parents, coaches, peers)
 - Society

(J. G. H. Dunn, Craft, Dunn, & Gotwals, 2011)

Eating disorder

- Disordered eating in response to
 - low body-esteem (dislike for their body)
 - weight dissatisfaction (lower body weight)

(Ferrand et al., 2007)

Conformity

Defined as the tendency to change personal views, attitudes, and behaviors to meet the opinions of others or social cultural views (Reber, 2001)

- Conformity may be sustained by receiving acceptance and approval from others

Conformity

Conformity in the athlete

- follows rules and meets team expectations

(Beyer & Hannah, 2000)

- form bonds with teammates
- negative results such as compulsive exercise and control of diet

(Hughes & Coakley, 1991)

Eating disorder

- desire to conform to the feminine ideal as shown in magazines and advertisements

(Andersen & DiDomenico, 1992)

Aestheticism

Refers to emphasis placed on the beauty of the individual. In aesthetic sports, such as gymnastics, a lean body style is emphasized and believed to enhance performance and to be competitively beneficial

(Salbach, Klinkowski, Pfeiffer, Lehmkuhl, & Korte, 2007)

Aestheticism

Athlete

- desire to achieve an ideal body type in order to be competitive (Petrie, 1993)
- athletes may experience different levels of body satisfaction (daily life versus their sport)
 - athletes in leanness sports appearing more satisfied with their bodies in their daily life than in their sport
 - athletes in non-leanness sports having opposite feelings, more satisfaction with their body in their sport than daily life

(A P (Karin) de Bruin et al., 2011)

Eating disorder

- striving for an ideal body shape often driven by a desire for positive perceptions by others (Krane et al., 2001)

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Traits

Obsessive-compulsive behavior in the athlete

- Excessive or compulsive exercise, similar to persons with anorexia nervosa (Yates et al., 1983)
- Athletes commonly engage in the same patterns or rituals before, during, and after a performance (Reardon & Factor, 2010)

Eating disorders

- Correlations have been found between eating disorder and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (Anderluh et al., 2003; Garcia et al., 2009)
- Individuals with Anorexia Nervosa, compulsive exercise serves two main purposes, first to affect weight and body shape and secondly to manage mood (Grave, 2010)

Personality Characteristics of the Athlete

The presence of the above mentioned personality characteristics in athletes raises some questions:

Whether the characteristics themselves are affected by the athlete's participation in sports, and

Whether the presence of these characteristics may impact healthy development in the athlete.

Similarities between the Athlete and Eating Disorders

- The most significant traits included perfectionism, aestheticism and conformity in athletes with eating disorders. Madison & Ruma (2003)
- Other studies found the same traits with individuals with eating disorders in the general population

(Catalan-Matamoros, Helvik-Skjaerven, Labajos-Manzanares, Martinez-de-Salazar-Arboleas, & Sanchez-Guerrero, 2011; Ferrand, Magnan, Rouveix, & Filaire, 2007; Mahalik, Morray, Ludlow, Slattery, & Smiler, 2005; Anderluh, Tchanturia, Rabe-Hesketh, & Treasure, 2003)

- In the general population, adult females with eating disorders reported higher levels of obsessive-compulsive traits in childhood, in comparison to healthy subjects (Anderluh et al., 2003)

View

Eating Disorder or Athlete?

Common personality traits inherent in both high performance athletes and individuals with eating disorders:

perfectionism, aestheticism, conformity, and obsessive-compulsive personality characteristics

Interestingly, these common personality traits may be seen different depending on whether one views the individual as an athlete or as a person with an eating disorder

Factors that influence Athletes

- 1) Parental involvement and other supports can help with psychological well-being and overall general health
- 2) A course of intense training and participation in highly competitive sports may impact healthy development in areas of weight, perfectionism and commitment to performance
- 3) Eating and nutrition patterns will be affected by intense training and participation in competitive sports.
- 4) Understanding the potential for conflict between an athlete's ideal body image for his or her sport and the ideal body image outside of the sport

For example, the conflict between
“perfect” by social pressures and to “small” for sport

Early Intervention or Yellow Flags

Eating disorders may be progressive

- increase in weight preoccupation and body image
- higher the likelihood of eating disorders.
- early intervention model may be most beneficial

(Scarano & Kalodner-Martin, 1994).

Behaviors that increase concern:

- restricting his or her diet
- counting calories
- exercising extensively

May be perceived as “yellow flags.”

Another Yellow Flag

Potential “yellow flag” that should be considered is the type of sport in which the athlete participates.

For example, research has shown that athletes in so-called “aesthetic” or “leanness” sports, where body shape is considered more relevant to athletic success, may be more susceptible to disordered eating.

Supports of the Athlete

- Coach
 - Many sports have different coaches to work with athletes
- Athletic Director
- Athletic Trainer
- Sports Psychologist/Therapist
- Parents
- Nutritionist

Parenting the Athlete

Authoritative Parenting

- May develop healthy perfectionist orientations (or decrease the likelihood of developing unhealthy perfectionist orientations) in youth sport
- Less likely involvement in drugs, alcohol, delinquent behaviors or other anti-social behaviors
- Ability to create secure attachments (promotes independence, emotional availability, mood and emotional regulation, moral development, management of stress, less behavior problems, and higher academic performance)
- Creates development of resiliency and problem solving skills
- Less influenced by peer pressure and aligned to values

Creating Value-Based Goals and Utilizing the Support System to Attain Those Goals

Identify the athlete's particular values

- Apply those values to create goals which are consistent with both sports-related objectives and non-sports-related objectives that improve the athlete's personal well-being.
- A greater payoff may be obtained by combining sports-related goals (such as adding muscle to improve performance) with consistent non-sports-related goals (such as improving diet and exercise habits).

The athlete has a supportive team, such as parents, family, coaches and teammates. The athlete can build on the reassurance and support that they already receive from their support system in pursuing sports-related goals. Essentially, they can call on their support system to assist in pursuing consistent, non-sports-related goals.

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Resources

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