Burnout in high school athletic directors: A self-determination perspective

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For the 21st year, participation in high school sport increased and in the 2009-10 school year, reached an all-time high of 7,628,377 participants (National Federation of State High School Association, 2010). With this growth there has been a commensurate expansion of responsibilities and expectations for the athletic director (those persons charged with the administration of interscholastic athletics at the high school level), such as marketing, budgeting, compliance, and fund-raising duties. These administrative positions can be both rewarding but also very stressful, potentially leading to burnout, particularly if the athletic director has other responsibilities such as coaching and or teaching (Martin, Kelley, & Eklund, 1999). Researchers have used a symptom-based approach to investigate the potential causes and consequences of burnout with athletes and coaches (e.g., Hodge, Lonsdale, & Ng, 2008; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Rose, 2009; LeMyre, Roberts, & Stray-Gundersen, 2007; Ryska, 2009). This approach has led to important advances in research in the past decade, in particular the use of theoretical frameworks to explain burnout in sport (Googder et al., 2007). Few researchers, however, have examined burnout in athletic directors, particularly those at the high school level (see Martin et al., 1999 as an exception), and none have employed SDT to understand potential antecedents of burnout among high school athletic directors.

With these facts in mind, the purpose of this research was to examine correlates of burnout among high school athletic directors through the theoretical lens of self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2007). Eight hundred and twenty-nine high school athletic directors from a Midwestern state were contacted via email to request their participation in this study. Twenty athletic directors opted out and the remaining directors were sent a link to an Internet-based survey. Five hundred and eighty-seven initiated the survey and four hundred and seventy-seven completed the survey. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 68 (M = 45.78, SD = 10.24), had been working as athletic directors at their current schools for 6.26 (SD = 5.85) years and had been employed as athletic directors for approximately 8.5 (SD = 7.17) years. Respondents were predominately male (n = 88.2%), White (n = 94.7%) and well-educated (67.1% had attained their master's degree). The vast majority of respondents did not have a sport-specific degree (n = 80.7%) however 4.6% had an undergraduate or graduate (13.3%) sport-specific degree. Most respondents were employed at public schools (n = 85.5%) and fulltime athletic directors (n = 58.8%) with coaches just 30.7% of respondents. Schools in this state were divided into four groups by enrollment and our sample was well represented by all four divisions (Division 1 = 26.9%, Division 2 = 20.1%, Division 3 = 24.2%, and Division 4 = 28.8%).

Employing a cross-sectional design, our primary aims were to investigate the relationships between behavioral regulations and burnout and to examine whether self-determined motivation mediated relationships between basic needs satisfaction and burnout. Autonomy support was negatively correlated with control and burnout, and positively correlated with the three psychological needs and self-determination. Control was negatively correlated with the three psychological needs and self-determination, and positively correlated with burnout. The three psychological needs were positively correlated with each other and self-determination, and negatively correlated with burnout. Finally, self-determination was negatively correlated with burnout. The paths from relatedness and autonomy need satisfaction to self-determination were not statistically significant. A moderate and negative relationship existed between autonomy support and control. Autonomy support was a moderate and positive predictor of the three psychological needs, whereas, control was a moderate and negative predictor of the three psychological needs. A strong and positive relationship between competence and self-determination was found, as well as a moderate and negative relationship between competence need satisfaction and burnout. Finally, a moderate and negative relationship was found between self-determination and burnout. The motivational environment accounted for 53%, 30%, and 27% of the variance in athletic directors’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness need satisfaction, respectively. Further, psychological need satisfaction explained 55% of the variance in athletic directors’ self-determination, which, along with competence need satisfaction, explained 85% of the variance.
in burnout. The indirect effects in the model (Table 4) revealed that control indirectly and negatively predicted self-determination, and positively predicted burnout. In addition, autonomy support and competence need satisfaction indirectly and negatively predicted burnout.