ATHLETE SATISFACTION AND THE PEAK EVENT: ADAPTING THE ATHLETE SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (ASQ) TO A NEW ZEALAND SETTING

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This research explored athlete satisfaction and the peak sporting event. Most athletes are achievement oriented individuals searching for ways of increasing their competitive edge. Consequently, an athlete’s satisfaction is a central variable controlling motivational forces throughout the development and execution contexts of successful goal-related outcomes. As a topic of interest, satisfaction is understood as a subjective domain-specific response articulated by an athlete when reflecting on all aspects of the achievement of a specific goal. It is psychologically dynamic based on both individual and environmental factors informing the articulated response. It is, therefore understood as a ‘discrepancy’ construct representing the difference between what one wanted to achieve and what one did achieve.

The research adopted an adapted mixed method approach. Because of the exploratory nature of the research a priori hypotheses were not tested. The combined participant cohorts across the two studies were New Zealand athletes (n = 381) from a wide variety of team and individual sports. Online data collection methods were utilised to access a broad participant base.

The primary aim of Study One was to develop confidence in the data collection tool to be utilised in Study Two, the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998). The difference between both environments was considered conceptually disparate enough given the original survey instrument setting, North American Collegiate (highly professional amateur athlete program dedicated to elite sporting performance) and the
current New Zealand (recreational – amateur elite athletes) sport setting, to warrant further investigation. Particular emphasis was placed on incorporating the ‘voice’ of the athlete in developing a better understanding of athlete satisfaction in the New Zealand setting. In general, Study One results showed the ASQ to be an appropriate survey instrument for administration in the New Zealand setting, although the re-distribution of the underlying factor structure of the instrument allowed for more context relevant data analysis in Study Two.

Study Two focused on investigating athlete satisfaction and a peak sporting event as an intervening variable and explored how satisfaction changed over time with respect to a peak sporting event, with particular attention given to gender and sport affiliation (team versus individual sport). Results from Study Two indicated no statistically significant differences in satisfaction between genders. In contrast, differences in athlete satisfaction trajectories between team and individual sport athletes were found. The findings relating to team and individual differences in satisfaction were interpreted using Hobfoll’s (1989) ‘Conservation of Resources’ Model which placed athletes in a context of managing and evaluating their immediate performance environment. An interpretation of the results in the model showed that athlete satisfaction for individual sport athletes increased leading to an event based on an athlete’s perceived control over the goal achievement process. In contrast, the reduction in satisfaction post event was interpreted as indicating goal achievement causality included more factors than an individuals’ pre-event assessment. Consequently, the range of resources utilised and their effect on goal achievement were incorporated more into the causal explanation after the event than before.
A further finding from the research process was that the hierarchy of satisfaction responses by team versus individual sport athletes differed substantially both before and after their identified peak sporting event, which can assist significant others to maximise situation-specific interaction with an athlete. From an applied perspective, such an understanding of the dynamics of athlete satisfaction both before and after a peak sporting event increases the likelihood of delivering appropriate responses to the athlete at different times during the athletic experience.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. 2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ 5
TABLE OF CONTENTS .......................................................................................................... 7
LIST OF FIGURES AND DIAGRAMS .................................................................................. 10
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. 11

Chapter One  An Overview of the Research ...................................................................... 13
  1.1  Introduction ................................................................................................................ 13
  1.2  Thesis Overview ......................................................................................................... 19

Chapter Two  Defining and Conceptualising Satisfaction .................................................... 21
  2.1  Introduction ................................................................................................................. 21
  2.2  A Brief History of the Study of Satisfaction .............................................................. 23
  2.3  Defining Satisfaction .................................................................................................. 26
  2.4  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 30
  2.5  Distinguishing Satisfaction from Similar Psychological Constructs ...................... 31
      2.5.1  Contentment ....................................................................................................... 31
      2.5.2  Happiness .......................................................................................................... 32
      2.5.3  Joy ...................................................................................................................... 33
      2.5.4  Gratification ....................................................................................................... 33
  2.6  Perspectives of Satisfaction ....................................................................................... 34
      2.6.1  Cognitive Processes Perspective ....................................................................... 34
          2.6.1.1  Appraisal .................................................................................................... 35
      2.6.2  Social and Behavioural Perspectives ................................................................. 36
          2.6.2.1  Social Perspectives .................................................................................... 36
          2.6.2.2  Behaviourist Perspectives .......................................................................... 41
      2.6.3  Trait and State Satisfaction .................................................................................. 43
      2.6.4  Factors Relating to the Person .......................................................................... 47
          2.6.4.1  Demographic Factors ................................................................................ 47
          2.6.4.2  Affective and Attachment Factors ............................................................... 52
          2.6.4.3  Personality Factors (Satisfaction) ................................................................. 54
          2.6.4.4  Behavioural and Social Competence Factors ............................................. 55
      2.6.5  Factors Relating to the Situation ....................................................................... 58
  2.7  Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 64

Chapter Three  Methods ..................................................................................................... 66
  3.1  Introduction ................................................................................................................. 66
      3.1.1  Research Question 1 ......................................................................................... 66
      3.1.2  Research Question 2 ......................................................................................... 67
3.1.3 Research Question 3 ..........................................................................................68

3.2 Research Methodologies ................................................................................. 69
3.2.1 Mixed Methodologies .................................................................................... 69
3.2.2 Research Methods ....................................................................................... 72
3.2.3 Surveys ......................................................................................................... 73
3.2.4 Longitudinal Studies ................................................................................... 74
3.2.5 Developing Parameters for Choosing the Survey Instrument ...................... 77
3.2.6 Methodological Approaches to Assess Satisfaction ..................................... 78
3.2.7 Explaining the Developmental Pathway from Generic to Athlete Satisfaction
Survey Instruments ............................................................................................... 81
3.2.7.1 Prime Beneficiary Perspective ............................................................. 85

3.3 The Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ) ................................................ 90
3.3.1 Embedding a bipolar framework of satisfaction into the ASQ ....................... 92
3.3.2 The Bi-polar and Multidimensional Nature of Athlete Satisfaction ............. 94
3.3.2.1 Bi-polarity ......................................................................................... 94
3.3.2.2 Multidimensionality ........................................................................ 95

3.4 Research demography ..................................................................................... 96
3.4.1 North American Collegiate Sport ................................................................. 97
3.4.2 Athletes in the Current Research Setting ..................................................... 98

3.5 Summary ........................................................................................................ 99

Chapter Four Investigating the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire in the New
Zealand Tertiary Education Setting Study One, Phase One .................................. 100

4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 100
4.2 Method .......................................................................................................... 102
4.2.1 Data Collection ............................................................................................. 102
4.2.1.1 Procedures ......................................................................................... 102
4.2.1.2 Measures .......................................................................................... 105
4.2.1.3 Participants ....................................................................................... 106
4.2.2 Data Analysis ............................................................................................. 106
4.2.2.1 Factor Allocation by Peer Review Group Members ............................. 107
4.2.3 Results ....................................................................................................... 108
4.2.3.1 Descriptive Statistics ......................................................................... 108
4.2.3.2 Sport Affiliation ................................................................................ 110
4.2.3.3 Differentiating Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction Data ......................... 111
4.2.3.4 Incorporating statistically weak and ‘non-fit’ items into the athlete
satisfaction construct ....................................................................................... 117
4.2.3.5 A bi-polar approach to athlete satisfaction response interpretation .. 118
4.3 Discussion ..................................................................................................... 120
4.4 Conclusion .................................................................................................... 124

Chapter Five Investigating of the Underlying Structure of Athlete Satisfaction
Questionnaire Data Capture from the Current Research Cohort ............................. 126

Study One, Phase Two ......................................................................................... 126
7.2.3.2 Differentiated Perspective of Athlete Satisfaction ........................................ 174

7.3 Discussion ........................................................................................................ 178
  7.3.1 Causal Attribution and Self-Determination Theory ........................................ 181
  7.3.2 Dynamic Equilibrium Theory ....................................................................... 182
  7.3.3 Goal-Setting Theory ...................................................................................... 183
  7.3.4 Data Interpretation ....................................................................................... 187

Chapter Eight Discussion and Conclusions ................................................................... 194

8.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 194

8.2 Study One ......................................................................................................... 196
  8.2.1 Practical Implications of Study One Findings ................................................. 201

8.3 Study Two ......................................................................................................... 203
  8.3.1 Practical Implications of Study Two Findings ................................................ 208

8.4 Limitations and Future Research ..................................................................... 211

References .................................................................................................................... 213

APPENDICES ................................................................................................................... 235

Appendix 1 Athlete Satisfaction Item Generation Questionnaire .......................... 235
Appendix 2 Sports Represented in Study 1, Phase 1 .............................................. 240
Appendix 3 Study One, Phase Two Participant Sports .......................................... 241
Appendix 4 Independent t-test Results for Individual Factors (1 – 6) and the Aggregated 56 –Item ASQ. ............................................................. 242
Appendix 5 Independent t-tests for Satisfaction and Sport Affiliation (Individual Sport and Team Sport) ................................................................. 246
Appendix 6 56 Question (amended) Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire ............ 250
Appendix 7 Hierarchical Placement of Non-Differentiated Items of Athlete Satisfaction ............................................................. 254
Appendix 8 Individual and Team Sport Hierarchical Analysis of Items of Satisfaction (Prospective and Retrospective) ........................................ 256

LIST OF FIGURES AND DIAGRAMS

Figure 2.1 Examples of bibliographic databases showing comparisons between key words ‘Motivation’ and ‘Satisfaction’ ........................................................................ 24
Diagram 4.1 Interpreting findings using a satisfaction/dissatisfaction continuum .... 118
Figure 5.1 Screeplot for factor retention highlighting 4 and 6 factor solutions ........ 130
Diagram 6.1 Box Plot scores for final distribution of Athlete Satisfaction Scores .... 150
Diagram 6.2 ‘Skewness’ histogram of Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire data .......... 151
Diagram 7.1 ‘Non-Differentiated’ Athlete Satisfaction................................................... 172
Diagram 7.2 Differentiated Perspective of Athlete Satisfaction................................. 175

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Research Methods employed in current research............................... 72
Table 3.2 Survey instruments incorporating Athlete Satisfaction dimensions ....... 81
Table 4.1 Comparative Athlete Demographic Data between the original ASQ
research and the current study................................................................. 109
Table 4.2 Team/Individual sport and gender and cross tabulation............... 109
Table 4.3 Example of participation distribution for current research versus
national demographic data ................................................................. 110
Table 4.4 Differentiation between Gender and individual or team sport groups and
the percentage of facets used in each group compared with overall facet
numbers ............................................................................................. 111
Table 4.5 Current Research Responses relating to the Athlete Satisfaction
Questionnaire categories (Satisfaction)............................................... 112
Table 4.6 Current Research Responses relating to the Athlete Satisfaction
Questionnaire categories (Dissatisfaction)........................................ 115
Table 4.7 Hierarchy of satisfaction and dissatisfaction responses across athlete
satisfaction categories ....................................................................... 119
Table 5.1 Summary data confirming the utilisation of Factor Analysis and the
presentation of factor classifications..................................................... 131
Table 5.2 Hierarchical Description of Factor One Items ................................. 134
Table 5.3 Hierarchical Description of Factor Two Items................................. 135
Table 5.4 Hierarchical Description of Factor Three Items............................. 136
Table 5.5 Hierarchical Description of Factor Four Items.............................. 137
Table 5.6 Hierarchical Description of Factor Five Items............................. 138
Table 5.7 Hierarchical Descriptions of Factor Six Items.............................. 139
Table 6.1  Independent $t$-test for Gender and Athlete Satisfaction .............................. 153
Table 6.2  Independent $t$-test for Sport Affiliation and Athlete Satisfaction ............... 154
Table 6.3  Hierarchical structure of the 6-factor model of the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (differences between team and individual sports) ................ 155
Table 6.4  Item loadings for satisfaction with Individual Performance (Factor 4) ...... 156
Table 7.1  Top 10 (of 56) items of Athlete Satisfaction from a non-differentiated pre/post event perspective ......................................................................................... 173
Table 7.2  Differences in satisfaction between team and individual sport athletes, a pre/post event perspective ......................................................................................... 177