

The (perfectly acceptable) imperfect world of reviews: A response to Hill

Tim Rees, Lew Hardy, Tim Woodman

Author Affiliations and Addresses: Tim Rees, Department of Sport and Physical Activity, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University, Dorset House, Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, Poole BH12 5BB, UK; Lew Hardy, Sport, Health & Exercise Sciences, Bangor University, George Building, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2PZ UK; Tim Woodman, Sport, Health & Exercise Sciences, Bangor University, George Building, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2PZ UK.

Corresponding author contact details: Tim Rees, trees@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Telephone: +44 1202 965122.

We thank the Editor for the opportunity to respond to Hill's letter. We note three key points that the letter appears to make: (1) that we have been overly simplistic in dealing with the topic of perfectionism; (2) that we have referenced only a small proportion of the available literature on perfectionism; and (3) that we have referred to adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, when most perfectionism researchers now avoid using these terms because they infer that some sorts of perfectionism might always be adaptive or always be maladaptive.

We agree that our review simplified some complex issues. Of course it did; any review of what is known or thought to be true about all the physical, social, and psychological characteristics of any specific population is bound to simplify most of the complex issues. We are hopeful that other researchers across the multitude of other literatures that we covered in the review (Birthdate; Genetics; Anthropometric and physiological factors; Psychological skills and motivational orientations; Personality traits; Birthplace; Support from parents, family, siblings, and coaches; Athlete support programs; Volume of sport-specific practice and training; Early specialization versus sampling and play; and Other potential factors) will not deem it necessary to point out in a published letter that there is more to their topics than the one or two lines that we could accord them. For example, narcissism researchers accept that there is likely more than one facet of narcissism (i.e., grandiose and vulnerable [1]); social identity researchers encourage a wider view of support and coaching [2]. All the literatures in the review are more complex than a review could afford; there is nothing different about perfectionism.

We agree also that we selectively referenced the perfectionism literature; we selectively referenced all the literatures (see above). The aim of our review [3] was to "seek to identify what is known and what is thought likely to be true in relation to understanding the development of the world's best sporting talent (p. 1042)." To this end, we categorized the

samples used in the research reviewed as either non-elite, junior elite, elite, or super-elite. By way of example, the work of Gould and colleagues [4] on “adaptive perfectionism” (p. 172) was framed with a truly super-elite (multiple gold medal-winning) sample of athletes. Hill appears to assume that the population of elite and super-elite athletes is similar to the general population. We do not agree with this assumption. None of the papers cited in Hill’s letter were a study of the population of elite and super-elite athletes; it is thus unsurprising that we did not cite them.

In the super-elite performance world, perfectionists (yes, there is more complexity to this term; see above) who succeed (i.e., win) can be said to possess a somewhat *adaptive* form of perfectionism—they have successfully adapted their perfectionism to the demands of the environment (see also Gotwals et al. [5]). We did not, and do not, imply that those athletes will lead happy, well-adjusted lives. Indeed, we would suggest that it is difficult to see why anyone who was completely happy and well-adjusted would want to put themselves through all the hardships of being an elite or super-elite athlete. We [6] recently presented empirical evidence to support these claims; Hill does not provide any evidence with super-elite (or even elite) athletes, which was the aim of the review.

References

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