

# Multi-variation, Mini-mization, and Maxi-citation

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*"If you'll not settle for anything less than your best, you will be amazed at what you can accomplish in your lives." [Vince Lombardi, U.S. Gridiron Coach]*

In sport, we give as much of ourselves as we choose, and we take away from the experience as much as we choose. From a sport psychology perspective, the 'great' athletes are the ones who have learned the perfect balance for themselves in this arena. So, while there are countless varieties of controversy in sport, I'd like to focus on the more personal varieties. In other words, I'd like to take a look at the human controversies in sport: To give, or not to give.

**Multi-variation: We are motivated for multiple reasons**

What is it that motivates us to give or not to give? I see this as one factor in the *human* controversy in sport, because you could dig up at least as many opinions on this as people who are willing to give them. Consider this: each individual who participates in sport will experience various stages of motivation that - in no particular order - may include

thoughts such as 'I'm doing this for myself, 'I'm doing this for someone or something else', 'I'm not doing this anymore', and the ever-famous, 'Why the heck am I doing this, anyway?!' Furthermore, individuals may have experienced all or some of these stages, but may have also experienced several others in their personal 'multi-variation' journey.

My intent, though, is to highlight that all athletes and sport participants are likely to be 'multi-variation' through their sport journey, and the controversies with respect to multi-variation are exponential: Is there a 'right' type of motivation? If so, how can we tap it? If not, how come?! Do we even need to know the answer to these questions?

It is not 'news' that several researchers have explored motivation in the sport domain, and tried to identify *what* it is that causes some of us to be motivated, and others of us to - well - *not* be motivated. Laypersons and researchers alike, though, can easily point to stories from the heart about people whom they know who don't seem to 'fit' any of the logic that attempts to

outline a rationale behind the concept of motivation. For those 'odd folks out', as well as the 'non-anomalies', finding the balance here may just require that we don't question the *How* or *What*, if whatever it is that we are being motivated *by* seems to be working for us.

Maybe, then, to understand motivation, most of us would choose an 'easy' path to avoid the controversy that surrounds such a complex issue. That is, developing a clever term like 'multi-variation' as a means to incorporate the idea that there is no ONE way to understand *what* motivates us to give or not to give. This notion

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will remain a fascinating controversy, thanks to the many athletes out there who don't 'fit' anywhere. (Okay, maybe it's just the intent of this article to take the 'easy' path. Thank you for your patience.)

### **Mini-mization: Not knowing the true value of sport**

If I had a million dollars for every time I heard an athlete say, "I'm good at sport, but it doesn't do me any good in anything else I do" (or some near-equivalent to that statement), then I'd be a gazillionaire. Practically speaking, it would seem intuitive that the qualities that make individuals 'good athletes' would be easily recognizable as transferable to other areas of life. However, this does not seem to make sense to many folks out there. 'To give' in sport does not necessarily mean 'to give' in anything else.

The controversy here is that, quite honestly, many of us can get much too easily caught up in the idea that we've only got ONE niche in life. That's that. We're relegated to be a good carpet cleaner; a good newspaper delivery person; a good athlete (just to name a few). But the fact of the matter is that few of us - including the people's opinions who matter to us most and *could* make a difference in our thinking - recognize the true value of ourselves beyond the thing that we *do* see ourselves as being good at. And for good athletes, that mini-mization would include not knowing the true value of sport.

So the 'balanced ones' are the good athletes whom we hear about as being successful 'beyond sport'. Occasionally we'll even hear about Olympians, for example, who have experienced 'life after sport', such that they are accomplishing great things in other areas of their lives such as career and family. Without question, though, successful athlete-individuals - whether they've reached Olympic-level status, or not - aren't as common as we'd hope. (Maybe, then, the 'all-around' successful Olympian-people are *also* in the 'don't fit' category I spoke of above, and this article could really be titled something like, "Those who just don't fit". It's a thought, anyway.)

### **Maxi-citation: The product of multi-variation and mini-mization**

Possibly the greatest dilemma of all time (or at least of this article), would be to figure out how to achieve 'maxi-citation'. That is, by tapping into the magic of multi-variation (i.e., recognizing how to let *all* the contributing factors to motivation just 'be'), as well as by tackling mini-mization (i.e., recognizing our transferable talents as both people and athletes), we may embark on the solution to attaining maxi-citation (i.e., being maximally-excited in sport). You may be wondering, "How is this a controversy in sport?" Or, of course, you may just be wondering what this author is going on about. Both may seem valid questions, however the author chooses to

focus on the former of the two questions.

Quite simply, maxi-citation is a controversial concept in sport because the question is, Can we achieve maxi-citation in sport? Far too many of us wander around aimlessly in our sporting lives. This may be a direct or an indirect result of (lack of) multi-variation, or this may be due to our (unfortunate) ability to mini-mize. Nonetheless, if sport is such a powerful 'tool' (i.e., insert clever psychology 'buzz word' here, if you've got a better one), then can we attain a level of euphoria equivalent to that which is (clearly known to us all as) being maximally-excited?

As often occurs in life, this article will end in a similar fashion as it began: To give, or not to give. In the event that we give to sport, we will get from sport. So if we give maxi-citation, then we shall get maxi-citation.

In parting, while I'm not sure if I've even come close to those whom I most admire, I've taken an approach that I feel would meet the standard of those on my most-admired list: Keep it simple; amidst that simplicity, there is always the greatest of complexity. Thank you for taking my journey of multi-variation, mini-mization, and maxi-citation. (You're free to go now.)

*Antoinette Minniti is a Sport Psychology PhD candidate, working with Stephanie Hanrahan at The University of Queensland in the area of attribution retraining... and she believes that Maxi-citation is totally possible - even in today's day and age of professionalism within sport.*