

The Science of Accepting Yourself and Implementing Sports and Positive Psychology in The Clinical Setting

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Submitted : 6 Mar 2024 ; Published : 24 July 2024

Citation: Benjamin Pelz (2024). The Science of Accepting Yourself and Implementing Sports and Positive Psychology in The Clinical Setting. *J Psychol Neurosci*; 6(3):1-9. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.47485/2693-2490.1091>

Abstract

This presentation investigates the promising potential of integrating elements from Positive Psychology and Performance Psychology to promote self-acceptance within the realm of Clinical Psychology. In an era where mental health is of paramount importance, there is a growing need to incorporate strategies that extend beyond traditional symptom reduction, towards fostering self-acceptance, resilience, and personal growth. Positive Psychology, with its emphasis on individual strengths and subjective well-being, and Performance Psychology, which focuses on optimizing human potential in challenging contexts, both offer valuable tools to nurture self-acceptance. This presentation will elucidate how these concepts can be seamlessly incorporated into the therapeutic process, amplifying the efficacy of clinical interventions. We will explore the key theories, evidence-based techniques, and relevant case studies that highlight the transformative impact of this combined approach on self-acceptance. By integrating these perspectives into clinical practice, we aim to inspire clinicians to facilitate a more holistic recovery process for their clients. The ultimate objective is to encourage individuals to shift from merely surviving to thriving, by acknowledging their inherent worth, embracing their unique strengths, and leveraging their potential for an enriched life.

Keywords: Clinical Psychology, Psychotherapy, Performance Psychology, Positive Psychology, Self- Acceptance, Athlete Identity.

Introduction

The identity of competitive athletes not only shapes their view of their body and physical performance but also profoundly influences their self-image and psychosocial interaction. This paper examines how this specific identity influences athletes' mental health and well-being. It focuses on the potentially transformative power of sports psychology and positive psychology in clinical psychotherapy, particularly in promoting self-acceptance and healthy performance appraisal in individuals with a strong athlete identity.

This paper covers the implementation of sport psychology and positive psychology approaches in clinical psychotherapy. The topic is relevant because of the increasing attention to athletes' mental health and the realization that traditional therapeutic approaches may not adequately address the specific needs of this target group. Clinical psychology and positive psychology provide a suitable basis for examining this interface to gain insights into the therapeutic potential of combining these disciplines.

The main aim of the paper is to explore how integrating

elements of sports psychology and positive psychology into clinical psychotherapy can contribute to supporting individuals with a strong athlete identity. The aim is to demonstrate how these approaches can promote self-acceptance and healthier performance appraisal and what therapeutic interventions might result.

An extensive literature review will be carried out to achieve this goal, supplemented by reflection on personal experiences in competitive sports and a comparative analysis of various therapeutic methods in light of the research literature. Particular attention is paid to analyzing methods such as the "Meet yourself as a neutral person" exercise and its contribution to recognizing human weaknesses. It also examines how sports psychology can be used to support individuals who closely link their self-worth to their sporting performance.

The paper examines the current state of research on psychological distress in athletes, the role of sports psychology in therapeutic practice, and the contribution of positive psychology to well-being. Current research highlights the

need to provide psychological support for athletes, particularly during transitional or end-of-career phases that can be associated with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress. It also examines athletes' challenges in dealing with self-doubt after their active careers or during performance slumps.

The paper's structure follows a logical sequence that focuses on the core topics: First, athlete identity and self-concept are explained, followed by the basics of sports and positive psychology in a clinical context. The challenges of career transition are then discussed, and methods for self-encounter in the therapeutic setting are examined. Finally, the findings are summarized, and conclusions are drawn.

Athlete identity and self-concept

The chapter "Athlete Identity and Self-concept" examines the development and effects of athlete identity on the self-perception and self-acceptance of athletes. It sheds light on how the sporting environment and social interactions shape and change this identity and which psychological challenges can result. By analyzing various influencing factors, methods, and therapeutic approaches, we will look at how a healthy performance evaluation and differentiated self-acceptance can be promoted in athletes. This study forms the basis for integrating sports and positive psychology interventions in clinical psychotherapy, as explained in more detail in the following chapters.

Development of the "Athlete Identity"

Identity formation in competitive sports is a dynamic process that develops based on the individual's interaction with the social world of sport. Hänsel and Ennigkeit (2021) emphasize that the sporting environment and the social interactions within it contribute significantly to forming an athlete's identity. Identification with the athlete role does not occur in isolation but is instead embedded in a network of relationships with team members, coaches, and the sporting community. These group affiliations make it possible to adopt shared values and pursue goals, which can modify the self-image. However, the question arises as to what extent this identification creates a dependency on social recognition and group conformity and how this influences individual development.

The unique position of athletes also poses the challenge of finding a balance between adapting to the group and preserving individual characteristics. Hänsel and Ennigkeit (2021) emphasize that critical self-reflection and examination of personal values are necessary to develop a stable "athlete identity." In this context, which psychological mechanisms are at work in the event of inconsistencies between self-perception and group expectations and how targeted psychological support can promote a coherent identity that meets both sporting and personal goals should be questioned.

Furthermore, identity conflicts, such as those that occur during role changes or the transition to retirement, can have a significant impact on mental health. Research shows that

athletes are often confronted with identity crises when their sporting career is over, or they are unable to perform for a longer period of time. An in-depth examination of the strategies for coping with these transitions is therefore essential in order to integrate preventive and supportive measures into clinical therapy.

Finally, in positive psychology, the PERMA model is discussed as a possible approach for therapeutic support in the identity development of athletes. Seligman (2012) and Lerner (2019) provide the theoretical framework for this, emphasizing the five pillars of well-being - positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and achievements - as essential factors. It can be assumed that a strong athlete identity can positively and negatively influence these elements. The challenge in therapeutic practice is to consciously promote and integrate these pillars to support athletes in their development and enable them to lead a fulfilling life outside of sport.

Influence on Self-Acceptance and Performance Evaluation

The concept of "athlete identity" plays a central role in understanding competitive athletes' self-image, self-perception, and external perception. This identity is significantly shaped by how individuals perceive and evaluate their abilities and performance in a sporting context. A pronounced "athlete identity" can make it difficult to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses and view oneself neutrally. This is because the evaluation of the self is often strongly interwoven with sporting performance and the associated sense of achievement (Jünemann, 2015). On the one hand, this link provides encouragement and self-confidence in the event of performance successes, but on the other hand it carries the risk that failures in sport can lead to a fundamental questioning of self-worth.

The challenge is to promote healthy self-acceptance that is not solely dependent on sporting performance. Chamberlain and Haaga's (2001) research highlights the relevance of unconditional self-acceptance as a foundational element of mental health, even when feelings of self-worth are considered. This type of self-acceptance, which is independent of sporting success, creates a more balanced basis for athletes' psychological resilience. Therapeutic approaches need to be developed to support athletes in developing and internalizing such unconditional self-acceptance.

Mindfulness is another essential tool contributing to self-acceptance inside and outside the sporting arena. Through mindfulness practices, as described by Carson and Langer (2006), an increased awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings and behaviors can be achieved. This increased self-awareness supports the development of a self-perception that is decoupled from performance and promotes a state of inner peace. Xu et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of self-acceptance in this process by demonstrating that self-acceptance mediates the relationship between mindfulness and peace of mind.

Positive psychology also provides a framework for reinterpreting the definition of achievement Blickhan (2015)

argues that positive psychology interventions and techniques can shift the focus from a narrow understanding of success to a holistic view of satisfaction and well-being. By emphasizing what is suitable and enriching in life, athletes can be encouraged to detach their self-esteem from athletic performance and instead promote a strength-based and fulfilling life.

In conclusion, unconditional self-acceptance as well as mindfulness and positive psychology interventions are central to the psychological well-being of athletes with a strong athlete identity. These approaches open up new avenues for therapeutic interventions and make it possible to counteract a narrow, performance-based self-definition and instead create a supportive environment for self-acceptance and holistic well-being.

Sports Psychology in Clinical Practice

This chapter examines the role of sport psychology in clinical practice and its contribution to promoting self-acceptance and healthy performance evaluation in athletes. Specific sport psychology techniques are presented and their integration into therapeutic approaches is discussed. The impact of sport psychology methods on athletes' personal growth and mental health will be highlighted to show how exercise and sport can be used in psychotherapy to support athletes.

Basics and Applications

In clinical practice, it has been shown that the application of psychological training methods originally designed for the sporting context can have promising effects on the mental well-being of athletes. For example, mental training techniques and regulating arousal levels, as described by Stoll et al. (2010), can help patients develop coping strategies for stress and psychological strain. Adapting these methods to the therapeutic context makes it possible to create individualized approaches to improve mental health. However, it should be noted that a well-founded evaluation of these methods' specific applicability and effectiveness has yet to be carried out.

Equally important is the discussion of the transfer effects of sports psychology training methods on athletes' everyday lives. Studies suggest that techniques originally designed to optimize performance in sports can also be used in everyday life to reduce stress and increase well-being (Stoll et al., 2010). The individualization of these methods is another critical aspect, as only through tailored approaches can patients' diverse needs and personal goals be adequately met in the clinical setting. Particular attention should be paid to developing individualized interventions that are both empirically sound and feasible in practice.

Concerning the role of sports psychology in promoting personal growth, Stoll et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of self-regulation and goal-setting strategies. These can be used in psychotherapy to support athletes in developing self-regulatory skills and a healthy self-concept. Goal-setting training can be used to structure both short-term and long-term ambitions and thus promote personal growth. Furthermore,

self-talk can be used to manage stress and improve mental resilience. Adapting these sports psychology techniques to the specific circumstances of psychotherapy seems promising, but it requires both a detailed examination of the underlying mechanisms and a review of the transferability of these approaches.

The integration of exercise and sport into psychotherapy is underpinned by empirical evidence. Ströhle and Fydrich (2020) refer to the effectiveness of sports therapy activities in psychotherapeutic treatment. The recommendations already implemented in treatment guidelines, such as the S3 guideline on depression, confirm the need to incorporate physical activity into therapeutic concepts. However, the extent to which psychotherapeutic professionals have sufficient expertise in sports therapy methods and how these can be effectively and sustainably integrated into therapeutic practice remains unclear.

Lobinger and Brückner (2023) emphasize that the organization of sports psychology work requires clear structures and good communication between all those involved. Continuous training and further education are essential to meet the changing needs of athletes. These requirements for psychotherapists' qualifications in a sports psychology context are crucial for the quality of therapeutic support. Interdisciplinary cooperation and ongoing quality assurance measures must always be taken into account to ensure the best possible care.

In conclusion, it can be said that the use of sports psychology training methods in clinical psychotherapy offers a wide range of approaches to influence the mental health and well-being of athletes positively. However, a well-founded examination of the relevant theories and methods, as well as a critical consideration of the empirical findings, is required in order to implement and further develop these promising approaches in practice meaningfully.

Methods for Increasing Self-Acceptance

In promoting unconditional self-acceptance as a preventive approach to negative self-evaluations, unconditional self-acceptance is an essential building block for reducing vulnerability to self-esteem disorders in athletes (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). The challenge lies in developing specific therapeutic modules to teach and strengthen this aspect. A healthy self-concept can be cultivated through targeted interventions and workshops, characterized by a self-perception free of performance-related evaluations. Long-term effects play a significant role here, as increased unconditional self-acceptance contributes significantly to improving the mental health of athletes and increases the potential for preventing stress-related illnesses and burnout (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001).

The adaptation of mindfulness-based methods for the sports context requires specific developments that are tailored to the realities of athletes' lives (Carson & Langer, 2006). Mindfulness training, which creates awareness of thoughts and

emotions far removed from performance, promotes a holistic view of the self and strengthens cognitive flexibility. Regular evaluations are used to check the progress of mindfulness training and adjust its effectiveness on self-acceptance and peace of mind accordingly (Xu et al., 2015).

Using self-acceptance as a mediator to achieve inner peace requires its operationalization within therapeutic programs. Specific exercises focus on the role of self-acceptance as a mediator between mindfulness practice and psychological well-being to achieve a state of inner peace (Xu et al., 2015). It is important to consider measurable outcomes in the therapeutic process that confirm that increasing self-acceptance can achieve increased peace of mind in athletes.

Positive psychology provides a framework to reframe the definition of performance. By introducing positive interventions, athletes can be encouraged to detach their self-esteem from athletic performance and promote a life based on individual strengths and satisfaction (Blickhan, 2015). The challenge in therapeutic work is to create a balanced view of the self and enhance life satisfaction and performance outside of sport.

In conclusion, unconditional self-acceptance, mindfulness, and positive psychology interventions all significantly contribute to supporting athletes with a strong identity. These approaches offer innovative ways to promote self-acceptance and contribute to a sense of well-being beyond mere performance evaluation.

Positive Psychology and its Tools

This chapter explores the application of positive psychology in the context of sports psychology therapy to promote self-acceptance and well-being in athletes. Specific interventions and techniques aim to enhance self-esteem and develop a holistic perspective on performance and personal growth. Using the PERMA model, mindfulness exercises, and other positive psychology approaches, the aim is to show how athletes can learn to define their self-worth independently of sporting success. This fits into the overall consideration of integrating sports psychology and positive psychology into clinical psychotherapy, as previously discussed.

Interventions and Techniques

Within positive psychology, particular attention is paid to various interventions that address the promotion of self-esteem in athletes regardless of their successes. These techniques aim to build self-esteem not solely on victories or defeats but on individual character strengths (Lerner, 2019). Alongside this, it is vital to establish optimism training that sees athletes not as personal failures, but as opportunities for personal growth. According to Lerner (2019), practical exercises that support athletes in identifying and developing their strengths and thus positively influence their self-image are particularly practical in this regard.

Seligman's PERMA model (2012) provides a sound theoretical

framework that guides interventions used in therapy. In particular, the elements of commitment and finding meaning need to be emphasized to encourage athletes to find fulfillment in areas beyond athletic performance. Emphasizing achievements and relationships outside the competitive environment can address the challenge of promoting an expanded definition of success, which can result in holistic performance evaluation and strengthened psychological resilience.

Mindfulness-based techniques are designed to raise awareness of internal psychological processes and contribute to a decoupling of self-worth from athletic performance in athletes (Carson & Langer, 2006). The practical implementation of these techniques in clinical settings requires consideration of the specific challenges athletes face. In addition, the link between mindfulness practices and cognitive flexibility must be emphasized to facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances, which is essential in times of career transitions (Carson & Langer, 2006).

Finally, positive psychology approaches focus on holistic life satisfaction concepts that aim to enhance psychological well-being by promoting self-acceptance decoupled from performance evaluation (Blickhan, 2015). The use of interventions that promote flow experiences, gratitude and enjoyment can play a significant role in this by encouraging athletes to broaden their perspective on what constitutes satisfaction and success.

In summary, the application of positive psychology interventions and techniques and the PERMA model offer deep insights into the complexity of human well-being and are promising tools to support athletes on their journey towards inner balance and a holistic view of their performance.

Effects on Well-being and Performance

Positive psychology, as a scientifically sound approach to promoting human well-being and human strengths, can make a preventative contribution to maintaining and improving mental health in the context of sport. Lerner (2019) explains that strengthening individual character strengths and training optimism are important for preventing mental stress in competitive sport. It can be assumed that athletes who have learned to see and appreciate personal strengths regardless of victory or defeat could develop greater psychological resilience.

Seligman's PERMA model (2012) offers a sound strategy for improving wellbeing by encouraging athletes to view performance and success in a broader psychological context. The premise that wellbeing does not arise purely from sporting success, but also from factors such as interpersonal relationships and meaning, could support the development of a stable psychological balance that is independent of sport and thus preventively counteracts mental stress in sport.

Another approach to increasing mental resilience is to promote positive emotions, engagement in meaningful activities and

nurturing interpersonal relationships. These elements, along with a sense of making a difference and finding meaning in life, form the cornerstones of the PERMA model, which in turn form the foundation for psychological resilience. The PERMA model could, therefore, not only serve to improve the immediate well-being of athletes during their sporting career but also strengthen their mental health in the long term in the form of preventative measures.

Expanding the concept of performance beyond the boundaries of sport can help to better prepare individuals for future challenges. The PERMA model can be used to redefine performance - moving away from a focus on sporting results to an understanding of performance that includes personal achievements and positive relationships. This redefinition of performance not only promotes psychological resilience, but also the ability to adapt to a changing environment and the challenges of life after sport.

The use of mindfulness training in therapy has great potential to improve mental health and performance in sport. Carson and Langer (2006) point to the benefits of mindfulness for emotional regulation and adaptability, which are key in competition and training. In the long term, regular mindfulness training could have a positive impact on the overall performance of athletes, again highlighting the need for empirical research to evaluate the effectiveness of this training approach.

To alleviate the pressure of success, positive psychology approaches can be used specifically to focus on personal development and life satisfaction. Concepts such as gratitude, enjoyment and a growth mindset could help to steer athletes' self-assessment towards a more holistic self-concept. Initiatives that support such holistic development could have a long-term impact not only on life satisfaction but also on performance, highlighting the relevance of ongoing scientific research into these methods.

Finally, it becomes clear that positive psychology techniques and mindfulness promotion are indispensable tools for strengthening athletes' well-being. Building on the PERMA model's pillars, together with mindfulness practices, represent a symbiosis that can support athletes in overcoming sporting challenges while contributing to a fulfilling life beyond sport.

Transition from a Sports Career to a Life Career

Transitioning from a career in sports to a career in life is a critical phase for many athletes and is associated with considerable psychological challenges. This chapter explores the psychological stresses experienced during career endings and examines strategies for successfully managing this transition. It highlights the importance of dual careers and specific counseling frameworks that can support athletes in adjusting to their life after sport. The aim is to demonstrate the integrative role of sport and positive psychology in guiding athletes through this crucial phase of their lives and promoting their long-term mental health.

Challenges at the End of a Career

The end of a sports career can be a source of substantial psychological distress for athletes, especially if it is involuntary (Wippert & Wippert, 2010). This realization underscores the urgency of understanding the end-of-career process and providing adequate support. The loss of the athlete role often also means the loss of a central component of one's identity, which necessitates a redefinition of the self. Involuntary termination, whether caused by injury, age, or lack of performance, can lead to a sense of loss of control, making the transition to life after sport more difficult and prolonging the period of psychological adjustment.

Research clearly shows that the degree of subjective control over the end of a career significantly impacts the level of psychological distress (Wippert & Wippert, 2010). People deprived of essential control over their end of their careers tend to go through longer and emotionally challenging transition phases. This underlines the importance of preventative measures and targeted support, including end-of-career preparation, to promote psychological adjustment and avoid long-term consequences such as depression or anxiety.

About the traumatic stress that can result from an involuntary career end, it has been shown that a considerable number of athletes exhibit clinically relevant symptoms even months after they retire from sport (Wippert & Wippert, 2008). Coping with an abrupt end to a sports career can be akin to dealing with trauma and therefore requires specialized therapeutic approaches. Support from coaches and the social environment are considered important preventative factors against the stressful consequences of the end of a career. The use of interventions tailored to the development of resilience and the promotion of traumatic stress could help to minimize the occurrence of long-term consequences and stabilize the psychological well-being of the athletes concerned.

Furthermore, research emphasizes the essential role of dual careers during the transition phase (Debois et al., 2015). Pursuing a sporting and professional career in parallel can potentially reduce uncertainty about the post-athletic professional future and help promote completeness and success. The positive impact on self-perception and identity after an active sporting career is increasingly coming into focus against this backdrop.

After all, successful coping with career transitions is crucial for a fulfilling life after sport (Stambulova, 2012; Stambulova et al., 2009). Using the "Five-Step Career Planning Strategy" can help to structure the process of dealing with upcoming transitions and preparing for life after a career in sport. This approach not only supports athletes in transferring their experience and skills to new areas of life, but also promotes active participation in shaping their personal life plan and career transitions together with individually tailored counseling approaches.

The complex challenges and psychological stresses that athletes are exposed to during and after the end of their sporting

careers become clear. A combination of preventative programs, individual counselling and targeted therapeutic interventions appears to be essential to effectively counter these. It is important to consider both the individual circumstances and the specific support needs of athletes and to gain and integrate further insights in future research.

Support Strategies for Athletes

The promotion of dual careers is becoming increasingly important in preparing athletes for the end of their sporting careers. The focus on dual careers helps to facilitate the transition into the labor market after the sports career and thus contributes to psychological stability (Debois et al., 2015). Active counseling regarding dual careers should, therefore, be an integral part of psychotherapeutic support in order to make athletes aware of the need to plan their future career paths at an early stage. The planning and support of dual careers are essential to ensure sustainable success beyond the sporting career and thus secure long-term well-being. An intersectional view of athletes' careers is needed that integrates athletic as well as academic and professional development pathways (Debois et al., 2015). However, this holistic approach requires a detailed examination of different career paths and an adaptable counseling structure.

The development of role model and mentorship programs offers athletes an additional dimension of support. By exchanging ideas with former top athletes who have completed a dual career, athletes can gain important insights and strategies for their own career planning. The existence of role models can play an inspiring and guiding role and contribute to broadening the horizons of the supported athletes.

Using the Five-Step Career Planning Strategy as a framework in sports psychotherapy offers athletes a systematic approach to upcoming transitions. Initially developed by Stambulova (2012), the strategy is a valuable tool that enables athletes to proactively manage their careers and prepare for life after sport. By establishing such a structured approach, therapists can encourage personal development and active planning of the athlete's own career, which positively influences mental health in the long term.

Furthermore, the need for specialized psychological intervention programs during the transition process is evident. The development of such programs, tailored to the individual psychological challenges of athletes, is essential to successfully support the transition from the athletic to the post-athletic career phase (Röthlin, 2021). Where possible, these programs should strengthen resilience and adaptability and support athletes in defining their self-worth independently of sporting success. Constantly reviewing and adapting these programs makes it easier to address individual needs and ensure their effectiveness.

The involvement of mental health initiatives, such as MentalEmpowerment and the Robert Enke Foundation, allows psychotherapists to create a comprehensive network

of expertise and support services. These external resources help to raise awareness and understanding of the mental health challenges in competitive sports and, at the same time, offer specialized support options. In particular, the importance of reducing the stigma of mental stress should be emphasized, as this promotes access to support services and thus strengthens health prevention in sports.

In view of the above points, it is clear that support strategies for athletes that are designed to take a comprehensive view of individual career paths and psychological needs can make an essential contribution to shaping the transition from sport to a life career. The implementation and ongoing development of these strategies are key to ensuring long-term mental stability and promoting a fulfilling life after sport.

Methods for Self-Encounter

This chapter explores the "Meet yourself as a neutral person" method and the importance of mindfulness in therapeutic practice. These approaches demonstrate how athletes can develop their identity and self-acceptance independently of sporting performance. These methods are essential to help athletes cultivate a balanced self-image and thus contribute to mental health and resilience. The chapter links the findings of sport and positive psychology with practical interventions to promote mental wellbeing in a clinical context.

"Meet yourself as a Neutral Person"

Confronting one's identity away from the athlete role is a significant therapeutic intervention that promises deep insights into self-image and internalizing personal values. In the therapeutic context, procedures that enable such self-encounters are, therefore, increasingly being used. The "Meet yourself as a neutral person" exercise aims to look at oneself from an indifferent, non-judgmental perspective. This process can help to release the identification with the role of the athlete and thus not base one's own self-assessment exclusively on sporting performance (Blickhan, 2015). It is important to examine how this exercise can support athletes in developing a more holistic self-image that goes beyond the narrow focus on athletic performance and brings personal values and non-sporting areas of life to the fore.

The therapeutic application of this method requires not only a deep understanding of mindfulness processes (Carson & Langer, 2006), but also skillful guidance so that athletes can find a space in which they can meet each other without the pressure of sporting performance expectations. It is essential to be accompanied by qualified professionals who use mindfulness and positive self-awareness techniques to support the therapeutic process. Studies dedicated to the effectiveness of this method of self-awareness focus on the emotional and psychological well-being of athletes and how they deal with failures and setbacks.

The "Meet yourself as a neutral person" exercise has the potential to empower athletes to no longer base their self-worth solely on their performance but to build on unconditional self-

acceptance (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). In the long term, repeated use appears to help reduce intense self-doubt and negative self-evaluation. This type of self-narration may play a role in enhancing mental health by helping to promote a self-view that is independent of external evaluative standards and performance-based conditioning.

Finally, promoting a comprehensive view of the self, which includes strengths and weaknesses, is a central concern of this self-encounter method (Jünemann, 2015). It supports athletes in acknowledging human imperfection and developing a stable sense of self-worth that is independent of sporting success. Ultimately, “Meet yourself as a neutral person” aims to promote self-confidence based on the acceptance of one’s own personality and not on athletic performance (Jünemann, 2015), and thus represents a promising approach in the therapeutic treatment of athletes.

Mindfulness and its Therapeutic Application

Promoting a state of inner balance through mindfulness routines can be crucial for athletes. Particularly in high-performance sport, where performance evaluation and competitive pressure are omnipresent, there is a need to develop one’s own mental stability independently of experiences of success. Mindfulness-based approaches, as described by Carson and Langer (2006), support the establishment of an increased awareness of inner processes and promote a self-perception that is decoupled from sporting results. This enables athletes to operate in constructive performance states without basing their self-esteem solely on sporting achievements.

Xu et al. (2015) also emphasize the need for increased cognitive flexibility as a result of mindfulness-based practices. Mindfulness creates a space in which athletes can consciously regulate their thoughts and emotions during competition. This ability plays a performance-optimizing role, especially under competitive conditions, as it contributes to stress management and adaptation to changing situations.

In addition, research results indicate a significant correlation between mindfulness and an improvement in mental well-being, as Xu et al. (2015) were also able to demonstrate. Promoting mindfulness-based techniques in a therapeutic context can therefore have a direct impact on overall performance by not only strengthening athletes psychologically, but also intensifying their experience of positive emotions.

The implementation of self-acceptance interventions based on mindfulness is another therapeutic pillar. Xu et al. (2015) suggest that self-acceptance acts as a mediator between mindfulness and the experience of peace of mind. A therapeutic approach that systematically integrates self-acceptance exercises into mindfulness training could help athletes to develop a lasting state of inner peace and thus become more resilient to performance-related anxiety and self-doubt.

Strengthening self-acceptance through mindfulness is a key element in transforming performance anxiety. Techniques that

combine mindfulness and self-acceptance should therefore not be used exclusively for relaxation, but rather to cultivate unconditional self-acceptance. This can act as a counterbalance to stress-induced negative self-assessments and thus have a stabilizing effect on the mental health of athletes.

The next step is to develop a structured mindfulness training curriculum that is geared towards the specific requirements of athletes. Such a curriculum would not only contribute to increasing self-acceptance, but also to optimizing athletic performance. It is important to emphasize that such training must be continuously reviewed and adapted to adequately reflect the needs and developments in competitive sport.

The combination of mindfulness and traditional sports psychology techniques results in a symbiosis that complements and enhances mental training with mindfulness practices. By integrating mindfulness into sports psychology training, a holistic approach to performance optimization can be created that focuses on both cognitive and emotional components. A scientifically sound examination of the effectiveness of these combined methods can be achieved in particular through empirical studies that shed light on the added value of this integrated approach.

In conclusion, the combination of mindfulness and positive psychology can be seen as a promising approach to supporting the mental health of athletes. Applying the PERMA model in conjunction with mindfulness techniques can enhance well-being in a variety of ways, contributing to the holistic promotion of positive emotional states and the development of stable interpersonal relationships. The challenge lies in developing and implementing individualized programs that incorporate both mindfulness and positive core psychological principles to make a meaningful contribution to the well-being of athletes in sport and beyond.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the integration of sport psychology and positive psychology into clinical psychotherapy to help promote self-acceptance and healthy performance appraisal in individuals with a strong athlete identity. This specific identity can have profound effects on self-image and mental health, not least through the close link between self-worth and athletic performance. It was, therefore, necessary to identify appropriate therapeutic approaches to meet the specific needs of this target group.

The research began with a detailed analysis of athlete identity and its role in self-perception and self-acceptance. It discussed how this identity is shaped by the sporting environment and social interactions and the psychological challenges that can result. Identity conflicts and the constant pressure to perform can lead to reduced self-acceptance and have potentially negative effects on mental health. In this context, the PERMA model was presented as a useful framework to help promote athletes’ wellbeing.

An essential part of the work was the discussion of methods to decouple self-worth and athletic performance. In particular, the exercise “Meet yourself as a neutral person” was seen as an effective method for promoting self-reflection and recognizing human weaknesses. This exercise can help athletes to develop a healthier self-perception by looking at their identity independently of sporting success. In addition, the role of mindfulness was explored as a tool to decouple self-assessment from performance and help increase cognitive flexibility.

Sports psychology was highlighted as a valuable complement to clinical psychotherapy. Techniques such as mental training and regulation of arousal levels were identified as potentially useful to support athletes in the therapeutic setting. Specific sports psychology interventions were shown to promote personal growth and establish healthy performance evaluation. In addition, the integration of exercise and sport into psychotherapy was considered an effective method for promoting psychological well-being and stress management.

Positive psychology also offers valuable approaches to promote well-being and self-acceptance in athletes. Positive interventions such as optimism training and strengthening character strengths were considered effective in boosting athletes’ self-esteem. The PERMA model provided a framework for structured promotion of well-being in a therapeutic context. Mindfulness exercises were presented as a means of increasing reflective capacity and cognitive flexibility, which can contribute to a more holistic self-awareness and reduced pressure to perform.

Another significant aspect was the examination of the challenges that athletes face when transitioning from a sporting to a life career. The psychological distress associated with involuntary career endings was examined in detail. Strategies for successfully managing this transition, such as dual careers and specialized counseling frameworks, were discussed. These strategies can help to promote the mental health and life satisfaction of athletes during this critical phase.

In summary, it was shown that the integration of sport psychology and positive psychology into clinical psychotherapy offers valuable approaches to promote self-acceptance and healthy performance appraisal in individuals with strong athlete identity. The methods and theoretical approaches presented provide a solid foundation for addressing the specific needs of this target group and supporting their long-term mental health.

Placed within the existing body of research, this work highlights the need for specific therapeutic approaches for athletes. It helps to emphasize the relevance of the intersection between sports psychology, positive psychology, and clinical psychotherapy. Future research could focus on further investigating and optimizing the interventions’ practical applications and long-term effectiveness. A particular focus here could be on qualitative research into the individual experiences of athletes in order to evaluate and further improve the effectiveness of the methods. In this way, the integration of the two disciplines

could be further refined, and the provision of psychological support for athletes could be comprehensively optimized.

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