

Clinical Sport Psychology - Beyond Performance & Psychopathology

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In clinical sport psychology, athletes are not viewed in the narrow terms of their performance, but in the broader perspective of the athlete's entire life (Gardner & Moore, 2006), well-being (Gardner, 2007) and subjective experience. Currently, the majority of research on elite athletes, as well as intervention strategies, are performance-related (Sullivan & Nashman, 1998), thus focusing on a relatively narrow aspect of the athlete's psychology. This reduction to performance, even in sport consultation, has been recognized as limiting by an increasing number of sport psychologists, who are attempting to embrace a more holistic perspective in their practice (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). The importance of clinical psychology to holistic development of the athlete has been generally neglected, with clinical psychology mostly mentioned merely in the context of athletes' psychopathology (Stainback et al., 2007). However, clinical psychology has the potential to enrich the understanding of the athlete's subjective experience while he or she struggles to thrive in a demanding environment. The presentation will suggest Kohut's self psychology theory (1971, 1977, 1984) as a framework for understanding the subjective experience of the professional athlete. Self psychology emphasizes self-value as a basic human need (Wolf, 1988), and since the professional athlete's value is constantly examined every time he or she walks on to compete, the theory is highly suitable to the conceptualization of individuals in a competitive environment; however, it has not been employed in sport psychology for understanding athletes. Integration of a clinical psychology perspective (e.g. self psychology) into sport will enable us to grasp the athlete's subjective experience. It offers the opportunity to achieve better practice, conduct better research, and establish better rapport with athletes, in order to remove obstacles to their thriving within and outside the sport environment.