

ALTERATION OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY WHEN APPLYING BRIEF COUNSELLING IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

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Introduction

Erikson (1968) observed that the most important task for an individual during the period of adolescence is self-identification. A specific self-identification directs an individual's behaviour in a particular direction. Thus one's physical self is prominently conceived, and it is included into a number of models of welfare and wellness (Myers, Sweeney, 2008) and directed towards a clearly motivated behaviour to be or not to be physically active (Weiss, Williams, 2004).

For approximately thirty years, researchers have been investigating the relationship between individuality (self-esteem and identity) and involvement in sports as well as sporting achievements. One of such human constructs of individuality is defined as athletic identity and related not to some specific behaviour or attitude but rather treated as a multidimensional construct. It has been noted that athletic identity has to be developed already during the period of adolescence (Daniels, Sincharoen, Leaper, 2005; Crocker, Kowalski, Hadd, 2008). It is likely that a strong sporting identity of an adolescent having been developed, it will contribute to superior health and more prominent physical activeness throughout the life of an individual (Daniels, Sincharoen, Leaper, 2005).

Some scholars define athletic identity as a construct describing the extent of a human's self-identification with his/her sporting activity or physical activeness (Brewer, Van Raalte, Linder, 1993; Anderson, 2004). It has also been claimed that athletic identity is shaped by the importance and exceptionality of physical activeness or sports as conceived by an individual as well as his/her self-identification with physical activeness or going in for sports (Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, Mahar, 1993). On the grounds of quantitative research, analysts suggest a number of multidimensional models striving to define the phenomenon of athletic identity.

Anderson (2004) claims that athletic identity is undoubtedly a multi-level and multidimensional self-realization, for which the attitude to one's sportiveness is essential (i.e. whether an individual is or looks sportive). This model also considers to what extent going in for sports/exercise/physical activeness is important, to what extent an individual is competent to practice sports and whether an indi-

vidual is able/skillful to perform various sporting activity. In her model, Anderson (2004) also highlights the importance of the social environment: the support/encouragement which can be provided by surrounding individuals such as friend(s), parent(s), teacher(s), etc. to a sporting individual for his/her sports or maintaining physical activeness. According to the scholar, all the components (appearance, importance, competence and encouragement) are equally important for the realization of one's athletic identity; however, the component of importance is still above all others. Anderson believes that the model supplements theories claiming that intentions or specific pre-planned actions increase the likelihood that a preconceived objective directed towards a specific behaviour will develop naturally. It has been observed that all the four components of sporting identity are significantly related with physical activeness of adolescents: by increasing the prominence of the components, athletic identity of adolescents also advances (Anderson, Masse, Hergenroeder, 2007).

In the course of changes in educational paradigms (Bitinas, 2005) influencing the instruction of physical education at school, by seeking good health and physical condition of a personality throughout one's lifetime, forms and methods are further investigated concerning the promotion of physical activeness of adolescents. As methods of cognitive impact are on the rise, the application of *solution focused brief counselling* as introduced by *de Schazer, 1985* regarding physical activeness should be seen as a means of a union between the promotion of physical activeness and health-related instruction within the curriculum of physical education at school (Rakauskienė, Kardelienė, 2009). **The objective of the research** is to identify the alteration of athletic identity of adolescents by applying *solution focused brief counseling* at school.

Research methodology

Participants of the research. 89 students of grades 10 to 12 took part in the research; age 16 to 19, age average 17.03 (1.49) years, of whom 53.9% (n=48) females and 46.1% (n=41) males. These students constituted the impact group (n=39) including 48.7% (n=19) males and 51.3% (n=20) females and the control group (n=50) including 44.0% (n=22)

males and 56.0% (n=28) females. The impact and the control groups were homogeneous in terms of gender and age ($p>0.05$).

Research methods. In order to define adolescent athletic identity alterations, *solution focused brief counseling* (de Shazer, 1985) was employed. Every adolescent was consulted three times on average; average number of counseling sessions was 2.69 ± 1.0 .

Usually, the efficiency of *solution focused brief counseling* is established by employing the evaluation of the complicatedness of a specific issue on a scale graded from zero to ten where zero points stands for the gravest level of the issue while ten points mean that the issue is no longer present (Iverson, 2002). The method of evaluating the efficiency of counseling has also been employed when working with adolescents at school (Goštautas, Rakauskienė, 2007; Rakauskienė, Kardelienė, 2009). As *solution focused brief counseling* is based on the potential ability of the counseled individual to change, his/her independent actions, strive to seek and discover appropriate solutions leading to the desired wellness of the counseled individual and his/her behaviour in an imagined situation when the issue is no longer present, consequently, changes in self-identification of the counseled individual are likely. The present research concentrates on the efficiency of *solution focused brief counseling* concentrating not on the specific issue which had led an adolescent to be counseled but rather on the athletic identity of the adolescent and its constituent elements (looks, self-importance, competence, incitement). In order to achieve this goal, an athletic identity questionnaire (Anderson, 2004) was employed. The internal integrity of the scales is sufficient for performing group calculations; *Cronbach's* alpha varied between 0.79 and 0.96.

The course of the research. The research took place at Kaunas City N school of general education, Lithuania. Two groups of adolescents were drawn during the research, the impact group and the control group. The adolescents belonging to the impact group were consulted by applying the method of *solution focused brief counseling*. The adolescents were consulted regarding various difficulties related

with physical activeness; 23.1% (n=9) of the students claimed that it was the teacher of physical education who was/is to blame for disagreements (humiliation in the face of others, faultfinding, rare praising and informing on the student to the class master were the most frequently indicated causes); 28.2% (n=11) of the students admitted that it was their behaviour that conditioned disagreements with the teacher of physical education (e.g. missing lessons of physical education, indifference/passiveness during the lessons, frequent arguments) while 48.7% (n=19) of the students were consulted concerning insufficient physical activeness in order to (re)discover motivation for going in for sports, to assist them to undertake physical activity more frequently and regularly.

Before and after the counseling, these students also filled in the athletic identity questionnaire. The control group was drawn from the adolescents who were not consulted but twice approximately during the period of one month (at its beginning and end) also filled in the athletic identity questionnaire.

Counseling sessions took place in the school psychologist's room, and each session took 50 to 60 minutes. The counseled individuals were explained the confidentiality of the process and were aware that the data of counseling will be used in a generalized form only. Agreements from the parents of under-18 aged adolescents regarding their children consultations and attending counseling sessions with the school psychologist were obtained.

Statistical analysis of the data was performed by employing SPSS *Statistical Package for Social Science* Version 18.0. *Student's t* criterion was used for calculations for independent and dependent batches. Before performing calculations and selecting the parameter criteria, the distribution of scales following the regular distribution was performed on the basis of *Shapiro-Wilk criterion*. The selected level of significance was 0.05.

Research results

The impact and control adolescent groups were drawn so that their evaluation of athletic identity should not differ before initiating the counseling of the impact group (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Values of athletic identity components (M(SD)) in impact and control groups of adolescents before counseling the impact group adolescents*

Athletic identity scales	Evaluation of the adolescent		
	Impact group (n=39)	Control group (n=50)	p
Appearance	3.64 (2.6)	3.59 (2.2)	0.724
Importance	2.67 (1.8)	2.84 (1.7)	0.674
Competence	3.72 (2.7)	3.81 (2.8)	0.598
Encouragement	3.18 (3.2)	3.27 (2.6)	0.478
Athletic identity	16.62 (5.5)	16.91 (5.2)	0.814

Note: M = mean, SD = Standard deviation

Table 2 presents separate evaluations of the impact and control groups of the adolescents in terms of their athletic identity. The impact group is represented by values before and after counseling while

the control group is shown by values obtained in the first and second counseling sessions by observing spontaneous alterations in athletic identity.

Table 2. *Values of athletic identity components (M(SD)) and their alterations in the impact and control groups of adolescents before and after counseling the impact group adolescents*

Athletic identity scales	Impact group (n=39)			Control group (n=50)		
	Before consultations	After consultations	p	First time	One month later	p
Appearance	3.64 (2.6)	3.85 (2.0)	0.641	3.59 (2.2)	3.62 (2.1)	0.724
Importance	2.67 (1.8)	3.42 (2.4)	0.021	2.84 (1.7)	2.81 (1.6)	0.887
Competence	3.72 (2.7)	3.84 (1.7)	0.761	3.81 (2.8)	3.84 (2.9)	0.846
Encouragement	3.18 (3.2)	3.21 (1.9)	0.836	3.27 (2.6)	3.26 (2.6)	0.903
Athletic identity	16.62 (5.5)	18.01 (4.2)	0.043	16.91 (5.2)	16.97 (5.4)	0.894

Note: M = mean, SD = Standard deviation

The results of the research revealed that the counseled adolescents stated that after consultations, the importance of physical activeness ($p < 0.01$) increased for them significantly while there were no substantial alterations in other criteria of the scale of athletic identity including the assessment of one's appearance ($p > 0.5$) and competences ($p > 0.05$) or support from others ($p > 0.05$) for involvement in physical activities. The general evaluation of one's athletic identity among the counseled adolescents significantly increased. No significant changes were observed in the students within the control group.

Discussion of the results

In our previous works we demonstrated that adolescent difficulties on the basis of subjective adolescent self-evaluation significantly decrease after adolescents get *solution focused brief counseling* (Goštautas, Rakauskienė, 2007; Rakauskienė, Kardelienė, 2009; Rakauskienė, Kardelienė, 2010). We have also observed that an adolescent's ability to act and deal with arising difficulties increases after counseling. It has also been established that adolescents who were counseled by employing *solution focused brief counseling* method tend to show better results in terms of health, communication and cognitive processes in comparison with previous years. Such differences were not established in adolescents who were not counseled (Goštautas, Rakauskienė, 2007). The performed research overlaps with the results of the previous research. Presently, adolescent subjectively conceived alterations were assessed. It is evident that adolescents themselves observe positive changes after consultations. This not only validates the efficiency of application of solution-focused counseling at school but also once more confirms usefulness of the application

of this method at school as well as opportunities of its application in contributing to the education of a healthy lifestyle and to the improvement of physical education instruction and learning process at school. The data of the research also contribute to the opinions of numerous authors (Murphy, 1994; Littrell, Malia, Vanderwood, 1995; Birdsall, Miller, 2002; Goštautas, Čepukienė, Pakrošnis, Fleming, 2005; Goštautas, Rakauskienė, 2007) that brief counseling is efficient when dealing with psychological issues of adolescents.

It is likely that changes in athletic identity after counseling are short-term; hence further research is necessary in order to explore changes in athletic identity in counseled individuals after a longer span of time.

The present research validates the idea that *solution focused brief counseling* model positively affects problematic behaviour of adolescents in various psychosocial areas even though adolescents seek advice regarding some specific difficulties (Molnar, Lindquist, 1989; Goštautas, Čepukienė, Pakrošnis, Fleming, 2005). Besides, the results after consultation sessions employing *solution focused brief counseling* method confirmed the opinion expressed in Bruce, Hopper, 1997 that the application of this impact model results in rapid changes.

Conclusions

Solution focused brief counseling is suitable for consulting adolescents at school since not only the target issue (motivation to be physically active or difficulties in pedagogical communication with physical education teachers) which initially constituted the object of contacting a psychologist was affected but also the athletic identity of the adolescent was boosted.

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Summary

In the process of alteration of educational paradigms influencing physical education at school when the achievement of individual health and good fitness throughout the life is desired, forms and methods promoting physical activity of adolescents have been sought for. *Aim of the study*: to identify the alteration of adolescent athletic identity when applying solution focused counselling in the school setting. *Subjects and methods*: 39 adolescents were consulted in the frame of solution focused brief counselling. 50 adolescents were not consulted and constituted the comparison group. An athletic identity questionnaire (Anderson, 2004) was filled in twice by all the consulted adolescents before and after consulting while the members of the comparison group did it twice within the period of one month. *Results*: The counselled adolescents stated that after consultations the importance of physical activeness ($p < 0.05$) increased for them significantly while there were no substantial alterations in other criteria of the scale of athletic identity including the assessment of one's appearance ($p > 0.05$) and competences ($p > 0.05$) or support from others ($p > 0.05$) for involvement in physical activities. The general evaluation of one's athletic identity among the counselled adolescents significantly increased. No significant changes happened in the students within the control group. *Conclusions*: Solution focused counselling is suitable for consulting adolescents at school since not only the target issue (motivation to be physically active or difficulties in pedagogical communication with physical education teachers) which initially was the object of contacting a psychologist was affected but also the athletic identity of the adolescent was boosted.

Keywords: Athletic identity, brief counselling, adolescents.