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THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORTS

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Abstract: Sports psychology is essentially based on cognitive-behavioral psychology, thus focusing almost exclusively on conscious mental processes. Psychoanalysis, which focuses on unconscious psychic processes, has been used very little, if at all, until now. Psychoanalytic concepts such as the Unconscious, transference/countertransference, resistance, psychic structure, desire, anxiety, secondary gain and parapraxes are also explored. The use of psychodynamic instruments, such as projective tests and genograms, is also considered. Injuries, team building, cohesion and team spirit, audience effects, fame, pride, pressure, responsibility, guilt, self-presentation on social media, women, men, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion, are examined within a psychoanalytic framework. Many concrete examples are provided throughout the process to illustrate the real possible use of psychoanalysis in improving performance. Sports psychology must go far beyond mental skills training. The sports psychologist must be able to provide more than quick, short-term answers and solutions to problems and challenges. Using psychoanalysis can lead to sustainable change at an individual, personal and organizational level. In this sense, the objective is to carry out a bibliographical review that can discuss what these contributions are, using, initially, aspects of the classical theory of psychoanalysis that trace clues to its relationship with sport, to then make an analysis of what the authors say. studies that proposed to unravel the possible encounters with the performance of athletes.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis. High performance. Psychoanalysis and Sport.

INTRODUCTION

High performance sport, as we know it today, has its origins in England during the Industrial Revolution, contemplating its economic, political and social characteristics, still very much linked to traditional elements and tributes to harvests or for religious reasons. Urbanization and industrialization brought about fundamental changes in the way sports are established, having a great influence of other political and social factors of the time, such as the reduction of working hours – consequently, an increase in free time – and the modernization of communication and the transportation (DIAS; SOUSA, 2012).

Notably, the approach to psychology that gains more prominence in the scientific literature of sports is cognitive-behavioral, bringing the use of methods such as relaxation training, deep breathing, mental practice and goal setting. Although the literature on the subject is vast and proven to be beneficial in athletic performance, its limitations can also be established. In issues such as the athlete's resistance and more subjective aspects such as shame and guilt for the victory, for example, the techniques may not be sufficiently therapeutic to improve performance (FERRARO, 2022).

The introduction of psychoanalysis on the subject is with reservations, given that it is a clinical theory that does not value the adjustment of subjects to any performance standards, including high performance in sports. Despite not being the objective of psychoanalysis, the creation of a safe space for the production of narratives about the subject and his desire can have a positive influence on the way he understands sports activity and interacts with it, beyond the standards of success that are rigidly established socially, leading to greater satisfaction and expansion of the range of possibilities within the sports field, in addition to working on issues that could lead to mental illness related to high

demands (DIAS; SOUSA, 2012).

Authors such as Benchehida, Belmerabet and Benchehida (2016) classify the contribution of psychoanalysis in the sports field as marginalized compared to cognitive studies. In most theories, stress, anxiety and cognition are considered to be major influences on the way athletes are given attention, leading to a considerable imbalance between the way demand is perceived in relation to the ability to cope with her. In this context, mental issues are seen as essential for sports practices, and may even overcome or amplify barriers linked to athletes' physical abilities to some extent.

Thus, the importance of this study is justified both by the recent limitation perceived in cognitive techniques to help athletes in their performances, requiring deeper analysis, and precisely by the still great lack of investment in studies that relate psychoanalysis to performance. sport, although it can make important contributions. In this sense, the objective is to carry out a bibliographical review that can discuss what these contributions are, using, initially, aspects of the classical theory of psychoanalysis that trace clues to its relationship with sport, to then make an analysis of what the authors say. studies that proposed to unravel the possible encounters with the performance of athletes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sigmund Freud, the creator of psychoanalysis, placed narcissism as a necessary aspect of the human psychic constitution. It is defined as an intermediate phase between autoeroticism and object choice, characterized by the libidinal investment on the self, later detached from objects. In psychosis, there is a withdrawal of the libidinal investment on the external world, destining the libido to the ego, although, in neurotics, there is also a certain distance

from reality, but without suspension of the erotic bond with objects, which is maintained through the substitution of objects. real by imaginary (MARCOS, 2016).

Freud also describes a search for the return of childhood love for oneself, primary narcissism, through the construction of an ideal self, which seeks to assimilate itself to the perfection and completeness seen as a child. The ideal projected by the human being is a replacement for the narcissism lost in childhood, necessary due to the education and the capacity of judgment acquired. The origin of this ideal would be mainly in the critical influence of parents internalized by voice and moral conscience, linked to other influences such as authorities in general, teachers and educators who played important roles (MARCOS, 2016).

The exacerbation of narcissism can be related to sports practices that lead to the formation of high-performance athletes. There is a culture, in this context, of being at all times overcoming one's own limits, whatever the cost, both physically and emotionally. In this sense, there is the glorification of a place of completeness and perfection that, generally, could only be occupied by one person or a podium, with three. For this, many sacrifices need to be made in a meritocratic bias, in which the results achieved are directly proportional to the effort made, going beyond the limits set for performance and often exerting great pressure on the subjects (DIAS, 2009).

These characteristics are part of the contemporary social imaginary. There is the glorification of heroes who manage to show that they are giving their all for a goal and the exaltation of a recognition that is only significant when it goes beyond the limits of a normal performance:

[...] The myth points to a contemporary social ideal that is present in the practice of high-performance sports and that is not

without consequences for the athlete who sets out to carry it out. If we have the image of the “athlete-hero” as a component in the psychic economy of a lost ideal dream, this speaks of the symptom of our time. [...] The subject is asked not to postpone, living as it were a delirium of omnipotence that feeds the imagination of an unrestricted subject [...] We have gone from a culture founded on the repression of desires, therefore neurotic, to one that it promotes perversion, that is, a psychic economy organized by the exhibition of *jouissance*, in which the subject is only recognized in the social if he is in high performance. If we only have an appetite for full satisfaction, it is the death drive that we aspire to, insofar as we understand it as the abolition of tension achieved by the encounter with the object of satisfaction. Making people believe in this possibility as if we were not interdicted by the very condition of language subjects is what characterizes contemporary society (DIAS; SOUSA, 2012, p. 732).

The consequences of this contemporary functioning point to the impossibility of constitutive lack, which condemns us to the full dissatisfaction of desires and moves us towards new possibilities, having placed the limitations imposed by culture, in a typical development, from an early age. The imperative of high performance, without space for the movement of desires from incompleteness, can lead to illness and the maintenance of automated patterns of being and inhabiting the world, with no room for the construction of the new (DIAS; SOUSA, 2012).

Psychoanalysis and sport, in general, find a distance relationship in the scientific literature. When thinking about high performance, few studies have been found, with a slightly greater amount of focus on mass issues, such as violence by organized soccer fans in the Brazilian context, for example, and some attempts to analyze the poor performance of athletes from unconscious aspects. Among

the analyzes of scholars is the performance of perfectionism and the rigid demands of sports performances at the service of the capitalist system, in a context of the search for victory at any cost and the glorification of movements seen aesthetically as beautiful. This relationship symbolizes human industrial production, in a constant comparison between human and machine, leading to debates about the mental health of athletes in a context of extreme competitiveness (ANJOS, 2019).

For Freud, the civilizing process leaves a mark on all human beings, who seek ways to be sublimated and compensated in some way by the subjects to deal with the malaise of castration and life in society. Among these attempts is work, which is usually a source of social exchanges, identity formation, instinctual balance and a way to obtain compensatory *jouissance*. The search for the annihilation of the malaise, however, is seen as skepticism, considering that it is part of the psychic constitution. Sport, in this sense, as well as work, would be another way of trying to deal with the inevitability of malaise and incompleteness that ends up failing due to the impossibility of this task in its essence (ANJOS, 2019).

For Rubio (2002) it is impossible to analyze the sports phenomenon without taking into account the social organizations that compose it and the influence of the mass media in the production of a spectacle. For the author, the complexity of the sports movement carries great representation and importance with regard to contemporary society, being able to express various manifestations present in the most diverse social groups. In this sense, for athletes, sports practice ends up occupying, in contemporary times, a place that goes far beyond physical activity or a natural disposition, glorifying victory at the expense of participation:

From the beginning of regular sporting

and competitive activity, this condition is reinforced by the argument that the winning athlete is the one who wins tournaments and is consecrated with medals. The interpretation of this situation points to an inclination of these athletes to fight, and consequently to agonistic. Despite an initial individual disposition to practice sports that can lead to professionalization, it is possible to perceive, throughout the trajectory of several athletes, the influence exerted by external elements, such as the life history of other sportsmen and the exposure to the system. Attic by the media of successful careers and situations, directly interfering in the construction of the concept of winner and in the constitution of the imaginary and of the sports repertoire, where the loser is rewarded with consolation. Indications like these point out that an athlete's career is not just the result of individual disposition and talent, the affirmation of a latent will or the determination to pursue goals. External factors such as parental influence, institutional policies and the role of trainers can influence and even determine the transformation of an aspiring athlete (RUBIO, 2002, online).

Unlike what happened at the origin of the contemporary Olympic movement, where participation was already seen as a victory and a reason for celebration, from the beginning of the 21st century onwards, victory at any cost prevails, being the only one capable of overcoming what probe the high-performance sport: defeat. It is in this context that mechanisms such as doping and corruption find their value in sports practices, in addition to great physical and psychological preparation that require extreme effort on the part of the competitors, in order to avoid, necessarily, that they are defeated (RUBIO, 2006).

Valle (2003) problematizes the consequences of an athlete identity necessarily associated with a heroic character. In a context in which they need to be seen as winners and capable of overcoming any adversity, it is quite

sickening to have to deal with performances that are not considered exceptional, leading to the concern of mental health professionals, given that no one can maintain an excellent performance. at all times. In sports in which individual performance, which depends exclusively on the athlete and not on a team, is valued, the exacerbation of the value given to performance and, consequently, the pressure suffered by the subject, are more accentuated. This can lead to a feeling of emptiness that seeks to be filled, for example, in drug abuse and training overload, given the unacceptable character attributed to any perceived decline in performance.

Athletes subjectivize themselves from a contemporary logic focused on competitiveness and sportsmanship. Personal fulfillment in this context often ends up taking place through the control that one is able to exercise over oneself, finding manifestation especially in the body. This way, an important narcissistic gain can be seen from the production of an athlete body, notoriously one that manages to correspond to the culturally recommended ideals. The body, in this sense, is a privileged place of privilege of the imperative discourses of well-being and happiness present in contemporary ethics (VALLE, 2003).

It is necessary to analyze the experience lived by high performance athletes from their specific context, and not through general factors applied to usual sports practitioners, for example. The subjects in this area end up experiencing a paradox: while they achieve prestige for their accomplished goals and have the opportunity to, for example, travel the world, they often end up being judged for not dedicating themselves to a formal study and being pressured not to only for about their sports performances, as well as for them to take care of a college (VALLE, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ferraro (2022) rescues interesting analyzes regarding the relationship between anxiety suffered by athletes and the feeling of separation. Success or victory can induce in athletes a feeling of separation from the family or the public, producing considerable anxiety and shame, which lead to inhibition of performance. There is also the heightened sensation of exhibitionism that comes with performing in front of an audience. The feeling generated by a large number of people watching can cause, for example, panic attacks that drastically affect athletes. The author cites the case of an athlete who suffered from this situation and reported that, with the increase in the public who watched her and her fame, she began to have to deal with intense shame linked to the feeling that the audience was aware of the abuse she had suffered. suffered in childhood, leading to the possibility of linking situations like this to the reliving of traumatic moments.

Success carries with it, at various times, considerable guilt. Some athletes still carry with them a fear related to victory due to the negative feeling about the feeling that they are superior to others. Often, occasions like these are seen in female athletes who were raised with a strong understanding that aggression is not a good thing, or even in subjects from lower socioeconomic classes who, when achieving professional success, have to deal with the feeling that they are leaving their families behind. To deal with the challenging contexts that arise in high-performance sports, a solid sense of self-esteem developed during childhood may be necessary, and a fragile sense of self can tend to collapse in the face of pressure situations. Early life experiences are also observed when sport is related to aggression, which is inhibited in response to traumatic episodes. The issue is even more complex when analyzing a possible secondary

gain in defeat, which can be attractive to some individuals as a way of highlighting its benevolent aspects (FERRARO, 2022).

Cochand (2019) brings the benefits found in the use of free association, a technique of psychoanalysis, in the treatment of athletes, as a way of going beyond the assumptions rooted in the sports environment and finding spontaneous narratives that reach questions that, in other ways, would not be accessible. Many athletes, despite recognizing the need for treatment, end up not looking for it or abandoning it after quick sessions, in a process of resistance, which aims to bar access to the Unconscious, often motivated by guilt, the need to suffer, secondary gain. of symptoms or repetition compulsion. In an attempt to deal with their challenges without facing treatment, many athletes end up resorting to means such as superstitions, performance-enhancing drug use, eating disorders and overtraining. About the possibilities of treatment within psychoanalysis, it is possible to say:

[...] the cognitive-behavioral approach is too restrictive to effectively deal with anxiety. In addition, generic treatments such as relaxation are often ineffective because anxiety is multidimensional and depends on intra-individual conditions and situations. For example, analyzing and deconstructing an athlete's representation of the opponent will allow them to exercise their full potential, whereas an unanalyzed transfer can disrupt in a powerful way. There may not be time before a game to conduct sufficient exploration and reach levels of unconscious representation through free association, but it is worth the attempt. Once a player becomes familiar with free association, tackling a sufficient number of unconscious elements may not take too long and work to significantly reduce anxiety. Also, when there is little time available, the psychologist can use a semi-structured interview to guide the player during the exploration (COCHAND, 2019, p. 15).

Mental preparation has been increasingly

used in sports, in a unanimous finding that it goes hand in hand with physical preparation, with stress being the main problem to be addressed. The main objective is to improve the athlete's performance during competitions. For this, an attempt is made to improve the athletes' decision mechanisms, having the understanding that the desire to act and the ability to perform a thoughtful and conscious act is not what gives impetus to action, but something that is at the level control, guidance and correction. In addition, there is a constant focus on improving aspects such as attention span and self-confidence (BENCHEHIDA; BELMERABET; BENCHEHIDA, 2015).

There are psychoanalytic considerations that can be specifically related to extreme sports. With the practice of this type of activity, there is an intensification of the feeling of presence in the world through the realization of a proof of authenticity. As in extreme sports, human existence occupies a place of oscillation between vulnerability and security, both collectively and individually. The practitioners' reports go towards an attempt to give meaning to life and make it lighter, through a constant search for adrenaline. With psychic and physical stimuli, there is a search for what is difficult to explore and brings a sense of satisfaction that intensifies with each stimulus, medal, trophy or experience (CARNEIRO *et al*, 2017).

It is indisputable that physical training can improve sports results, as well as having the potential to make the body healthier or more beautiful, according to values and social norms that vary historically. However, it is argued that, in order to make the body operational, it is necessary to frame it in a series of norms in favor of a better performance, considering it modelable and adaptable as a condition for training, not always taking into account knowledge and self-knowledge. about the organism in question and its particularities.

In this sense, in order to be done properly, the training must contain, in its elaboration, a case study of the biological individuality and that manages to overcome the universalizing character (VAZ, 1999). When done with the aim of supplying all weaknesses at any cost, it is possible to fall into a place of cruelty, where:

[...] there is no room for pain, since the body ends up being an object dissected by science and potentiated in the form of progress and success. Pain is no longer seen as an ally in defense of life, a living expression of corporeality, but as an obstacle to be overcome, mastered, ignored, becoming, perhaps, even a source of pleasure. The big issue of tolerance to pain and suffering is related to the possibility of cruelty – and with it violence and obedience – to be mediated, controlled and prescribed in a rational, scientific way. [...] Sport and the strengthening of the body seem to revive the utopia of an eternal life, as they share the belief in infinite progress, something that makes us forget about death. What is posed, however, is that the reduction of the body to a disqualified materiality causes it to be seen as machinery, blind nature, or, what is worse, as a corpse (VAZ, 1999, p. 104).

Outside the scope of psychoanalysis, although the authors still consider it to be in the initial phase of studies, research can be found that use advanced technologies as contributions to sport psychology. Among the approaches is virtual reality, one of the most promising possibilities with regard to performance improvement, used when, for example, extrinsic factors prevent athletes from training in real conditions. With virtual reality, notable gains were observed both psychologically and physiologically, in addition to important gains in the motor area. The use of motor images is also significant, creating or recreating an experience generated through memories, being a practice extensively used by athletes not only in conditions of impediment of the real training, but as a

complementary function of improvement (JEUNET; HAW; MILLÁN, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The relationship between psychoanalysis and high performance sports practices is still notoriously underexplored, especially when compared to cognitive-behavioral areas - despite being pointed out as techniques that are not complex enough for all the challenges faced. Psychoanalytic studies, among the few that can be found, are much more focused on issues related to the social context that produces contemporary sports practices and group aspects than interventions themselves aimed at athletes.

As an exception, the study by Cochand (2019) stands out, pointing out the benefits of classic psychoanalysis techniques, such as free association, in the deinstitutionalization of practices and thoughts rooted in the midst of athletes. It is quite pertinent to try to use this approach as an alternative to the compensatory practices of athletes who need treatment, but do not seek it - such as eating disorders and drug abuse.

In psychoanalytic studies, a problematization regarding the exacerbation of the cult of performance and the impossibility, on the part of athletes, of showing any fragility in their performances is quite present in psychoanalytic studies. This discussion is quite consistent with the understanding of psychoanalysis that the lack is part of the human psychic constitution, although different compensatory mechanisms are used by the subjects, such as work and sport itself. In this sense, the impossibility of expressing the compensatory insufficiency of incompleteness brought about by insertion in the culture and castration is extremely sickening and puts athletes in a position they cannot sustain: that of unshakable heroes. Not by chance, the discussion about the

performance of the imperatives present in these areas in favor of the capitalist system ends up being the most cited aspect in the psychoanalytic studies of sport.

Understanding the issues of social ties that probe high performance sport and the drive mechanisms that constitute it is of great importance for mental health professionals who work with athletes. Issues such as aggression and repulsion that many athletes feel towards it and the feeling of being superior when they win, for example, are an essential part of the context and must not be neglected in detriment of essentially cognitive-behavioral interventions - although these also present many benefits in the literature.

Finally, despite the lack of more studies, psychoanalysis presents itself as an excellent tool for analyzing the context that constituted sports practices. Several socio-historical aspects developed by the theory provide a very broad view of the sport that, many times, ends up being left out in other studies.

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