

Research Article

The Power of Inner Dialogue: The Impact of Self-Talk Techniques on Athlete Performance

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Abstract

Self-talk is a pivotal psychological technique within sports psychology that significantly influences an athlete's performance and mental resilience. It involves the process of athletes engaging in internal dialogue to achieve specific psychological objectives such as enhancing motivation, improving focus, and managing stress. This technique encompasses various forms of self-directed communication including positive affirmations, instructional reminders, and motivational statements. Understanding the different types of self-talk and their effects is essential for athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists who aim to develop effective mental strategies for athletic success.

More Information

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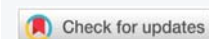
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Introduction

Self-talk refers to the internal verbal communication that individuals engage in to influence their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It encompasses a range of verbal and non-verbal techniques aimed at achieving specific cognitive and emotional outcomes in athletic contexts [1]. Self-talk can be categorized into several distinct types, each serving different purposes and having varying effects on athletes' performance and mental resilience:

Positive self-talk

Positive self-talk involves statements and affirmations that encourage and support athletes. It is used to boost self-confidence, reduce anxiety, and promote a positive mental attitude. Research indicates that positive self-talk improves self-confidence and reduces competitive anxiety, which enhances overall performance [1].

Instructional self-talk

Instructional self-talk focuses on providing specific cues and reminders related to techniques, strategies, or performance goals. It helps athletes concentrate on particular aspects of their performance. Instructional self-talk has been shown to improve focus on technical skills and enhance performance by directing attention to specific performance elements [2].

Motivational self-talk

Motivational self-talk includes statements aimed at energizing athletes, encouraging perseverance, and sustaining effort during challenging situations. Motivational self-talk is effective in increasing effort and persistence, which leads to improved endurance and resilience in both training and competition [3].

Self-talk, the internal dialogue individuals engage in, can have significant effects on various aspects of performance, including the duration of physical or cognitive activities. This section explores how self-talk impacts activity duration, supported by theoretical frameworks and empirical research. Self-talk influences activity duration through several mechanisms: motivation, focus, persistence, and mental fatigue. Understanding these mechanisms can help elucidate how self-talk affects how long individuals can maintain or engage in activities effectively.

Motivation and endurance

Self-talk can influence an individual's motivation to persist through the entirety of an activity. Motivational self-talk, which involves positive reinforcement and encouragement, helps individuals maintain their energy levels and motivation throughout the duration of the activity [4]. For instance, athletes might use phrases like, "Keep pushing" or "You're



almost there” to encourage themselves to complete a long-distance run.

Focus and attention

Effective self-talk helps individuals focus on the task at hand, which can influence how long they are able to engage in an activity before losing concentration or experiencing fatigue. Self-talk strategies that promote concentration can extend the duration of effective engagement in the activity [1]. For example, a swimmer might use self-talk to keep their mind on their stroke technique throughout a lengthy training session.

Practical application for athletes of self-talk strategies

Athletes can incorporate self-talk strategies into their training routines to address specific performance goals, such as improving technique or increasing endurance. Regular practice and self-reflection can help athletes optimize their self-talk approaches. A marathon runner might use motivational self-talk to maintain pace during long runs and instructional self-talk to perfect their running form. Self-talk is a versatile and impactful cognitive strategy that can be employed in various ways to enhance activity duration and overall performance. By understanding different types of self-talk and implementing effective strategies, individuals can improve their motivation, focus, persistence, and management of negative thoughts. Future research should continue to explore the nuances of self-talk in diverse contexts and develop tailored interventions for different types of activities.

Support and understanding

Self-talk is a widely utilized technique among elite athletes to enhance their performance, manage stress, and maintain motivation. Below are examples of renowned athletes who effectively employ self-talk strategies in their careers.

Michael Jordan, the legendary basketball player, was known for using self-talk techniques to maintain focus and drive during challenging situations. Jordan often used positive self-talk during high-stress moments to boost his confidence and perseverance. Phrases like “We can win this game” or “I can make this shot” helped him stay motivated and focused, contributing to his success and legendary status in the NBA [1].

Tennis champion Serena Williams employs self-talk to stay motivated and manage pressure during her matches. Williams uses phrases like “Keep going” or “You can do this” to motivate herself and stay focused. Her use of self-talk has been integral to her success on the court, helping her manage the mental challenges of competitive tennis [1].

NFL quarterback Tom Brady uses self-talk techniques to stay focused and motivated during games. Brady employs self-talk phrases like “This is our moment” or “We can win this” to

maintain his focus and manage stress during crucial moments. His strategic use of self-talk has contributed to his success and numerous NFL championships [5].

NBA star LeBron James uses self-talk to motivate himself and stay focused during games and practices. LeBron James often uses positive affirmations like “This is your time, show your strength” to boost his confidence and performance. His self-talk strategies are a key component of his sustained success in the NBA [6].

World-renowned sprinter Usain Bolt uses self-talk techniques to prepare for races and manage pre-race anxiety. Bolt uses phrases like “I’m ready, this is my race” to build confidence and focus before his sprints. His effective use of self-talk has been a significant factor in his record-breaking performances [6].

Gymnast Simone Biles uses self-talk to manage performance anxiety and maintain focus during competitions. Biles often uses calming and encouraging phrases such as “Stay calm, this is your moment” to manage the pressures of competitive gymnastics. Her self-talk techniques have supported her in achieving numerous Olympic and World Championship titles [4].

Tennis player Rafael Nadal uses self-talk techniques to stay focused and manage stress during matches. Nadal employs self-talk phrases like “Focus on the present, play your best” to keep his concentration and manage the mental aspects of high-stakes tennis matches. His self-talk strategies have been instrumental in his Grand Slam successes [7].

Soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo uses self-talk to motivate himself and stay focused during matches and training. Ronaldo uses affirmations such as “You can achieve this, it’s your time” to maintain motivation and confidence. His use of self-talk is a crucial part of his success and longevity in professional soccer [5].

These examples illustrate how famous athletes utilize self-talk as a psychological tool to enhance performance, manage stress, and stay motivated. Self-talk techniques have proven to be effective in various sports disciplines, demonstrating their significance in achieving and maintaining high levels of success. For athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists, understanding and applying self-talk strategies can lead to improved performance outcomes and greater mental resilience.

Methods

Literature search strategy this systematic review adhered to the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines [2] and was initiated on October 26, 2021, with no time span specified regarding the initial date of publication. An updated search was conducted on June 25th 2024, and revealed three more meta-analyses,

two that did not fit inclusion criteria and one that was added. The four following databases were systematically searched: PsyNet (PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES), Medline and Web of Science. The following keywords were used: (schizophren* or psychotic or psychosis or schizotyp* or “psychotic like” or “psychosis like” or “psychosis risk” or “psychotic risk” or paranoia or hallucination* or delusion*) and (bias* or distortion or “dysfunctional attitude” or “dysfunctional thought*” or “dysfunctional thinking” or distortion* or “distorted attitude*” or “distorted thinking” or “distorted thought*”) and (“meta analysis”).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Meta-analyses included were those examining the association between reasoning cognitive biases 120 and psychotic features. As such, we find studies that: (1) compare reasoning cognitive bias scores 121 in groups of individuals with psychotic disorders, psychotic symptoms, psychotic-like experiences 122 or psychosis risk (psychotic characteristics) to those of a control group or; (2) examine correlations 7 123 between reasoning cognitive bias and symptoms levels in individuals with clinical, sub-clinical 124 symptoms as well as healthy populations or (3) measure the effect of psychological interventions 125 on cognitive biases within a sample of individuals with psychotic features. Meta-analyses were 126 also screened according to the following criteria: (a) systematic reviews with meta-analysis (b), 127 peer-reviewed (e.g., books and conference abstracts were excluded), (c) include adults only or age 128 means over 18, (d) articles published in full text, in English or in French. 129 Analogue studies (i.e. experimental designs in which the procedures or participants used are similar 130 but not identical to the situation of interest) in which participants did not have psychotic symptoms 131 but could have other psychotic-like experiences, were at risk for psychosis or were rated on a 132 psychotic-like experiences scale (e.g. The Community Assessment of Psychic Experience (CAPE) 133 questionnaire [5]) were included. Meta-analyses about emotion recognition were excluded as these 134 are largely considered a social cognitive deficit [5,7] rather than a cognitive bias. 135 Aggression bias was excluded because it refers more to a score of behavioral intention of 136 aggressiveness than to a cognitive bias. Need for closure was also excluded, since it refers to the 137 motivation to achieve finality and absoluteness in decisions, judgments, and choices, often 138 prematurely and is typically considered an underlying motivation that can explain the jumping to 139 conclusion bias, or a personality trait. The decision to include or exclude reviews 140 were conducted in triplicate by three of the authors (C.S., T.L. and S.P.) with 100% consensus.

Data extraction

Information on nine factors were retrieved when available, namely: 1) study design, 2) outcomes 143 (e.g., type of cognitive biases, psychotic characteristics studied), 3) effect

size, 4) confidence 144 interval, 5) consistency (homogeneity, I squared, Cochran's Q statistic), 6) number of studies and 8 145 number of participants, 8) publication bias and, 9) consideration of confounding factors (e.g., age, 146 sex, IQ).

Conclusion

Self-talk is a potent psychological tool with significant implications for performance enhancement and mental well-being in sports. This conclusion summarizes the key findings about the role of self-talk in providing support and fostering understanding, based on theoretical frameworks and empirical research. In conclusion, self-talk is a multifaceted psychological tool that offers significant benefits for performance enhancement and emotional support. By understanding and applying different types of self-talk, athletes, coaches, and therapists can improve performance outcomes, manage mental states, and foster personal growth. The integration of structured self-talk frameworks and reflective practices provides a foundation for future advancements in sports psychology and related fields.

Author's contributions

Veysel Temel: Conception and design of the study, interpretation of results, and short communication, literature review, data collection, and short communication editing, interpretation of data, and critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content.

All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Data availability statement: Data is available on request from the authors.

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