

A Win at all ‘Values’ Mentality:

A phenomenological investigation of lived experiences of college gymnasts and volleyball players in a comprehensive positive psychology intervention

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand college athletes' perceptions of the influences of a comprehensive positive psychology intervention (PPI), delivered by their sport psychology consultant, aimed at improving well-being through maximizing PERMA elements.

The criterion sample for this study consisted of twenty-one female collegiate gymnasts and volleyball players working with the lead researcher in a large public university located in Midwestern United States. Athletes participated in an intervention involving seven weeks of empirically-based positive psychology exercises: *identifying signature strengths*, *three good things*, *best possible selves*, *counting one's blessings*, *the gratitude visit*, and *practicing acts of kindness*. In-depth interviews ranging from 20-60 minutes were conducted with each participant 2-3 months post intervention.

A rich and thick description of participants' experiences in the positive psychology intervention revealed *mindfulness/ awareness* and *self-reflection/ introspection* provided a means to (a) strengthen *relationships*, (b) discover *meaning and purpose* in and out of sport, (c) achieve personal and collective *growth*, (d) increase *engagement in the exercises*, and (e) reap *positive emotions*.

The results of this study revealed similar attributes related to well-being with studies measuring the characteristics of highly accomplished athletes. PPIs may provide the means to develop, cultivate, and promote positive traits and attributes in athletes. Sport psychology consultants are encouraged to adopt a holistic approach to their sport psychology practice, emphasizing the primary importance to develop the person before the athlete. Further research is recommended to explore intervention implementation through other influential gatekeepers from athlete support personnel.