

## DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS AND WELLBEING IN ELITE ATHLETES COMPARED TO NON-ATHLETES

### Theoretical background

The adolescent years are the most important years for personality development. According to Havighurst (1974), adolescents have to solve a series of developmental tasks (DTs) to advance their personal growth and show adequate levels of wellbeing. Even though they spend a lot of time with their sports, young elite athletes have to solve the same DTs as non-athletes and furthermore additional sports related DTs (Ohlert & Kleinert, 2014). This may result in a different perception of the importance and thus to a shortfall in accomplishing certain general DTs, most of all expected for “**sexual relationships**”, “**circle of friends**”, “**role behaviour within society**” and “**vision of spouse**”. Thus, the aim of our study was to find out if the relevance of, progression in and satisfaction with different DTs would differ between athletes and non-athletes, and furthermore if satisfaction with the DTs would predict wellbeing.

### Method

#### Participants

In total, 316 adolescents aged between 14 and 19 years (31% male) participated in our survey. Participants derived from three different samples: a) squad athletes from handball, football (soccer), triathlon and canoe racing, b) sport students, and c) high school students. Students who trained 15 hours or more per week were grouped together with the squad athletes as elite **athletes** ( $n = 185$ ), the remaining 166 participants were labelled as **non-athletes**.

#### Materials and Analyses

Participants answered a questionnaire containing questions regarding the **relevance** of 10 different DTs in adolescence, perceived **progression**, and **satisfaction** with their actual progression, using wordings according to Dreher and Dreher, 1985. Furthermore, the WHO-5 measure for **wellbeing** was applied. MANOVAs were conducted to find differences in relevance, progression and satisfaction for the DTs between athletes and non-athletes and across cohorts (results for the cohorts can be requested from the first author). Multiple regression analyses was used to detect the impact of satisfaction with different DTs on wellbeing separately for athletes and non-athletes.

### Results

MANOVAs showed a significant main effect for sport (athletes vs. non-athletes) on relevance ( $F_{(10,314)} = 6.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ ) and progression ( $F_{(10,314)} = 2.02, p = .031, \eta^2 = .06$ ), and a tendential effect on satisfaction ( $F_{(10,299)} = 1.85, p = .052, \eta^2 = .06$ ). Table 1 shows those DTs with significant differences between athletes and non-athletes.

Results of the regression analyses are displayed in Fig. 1.

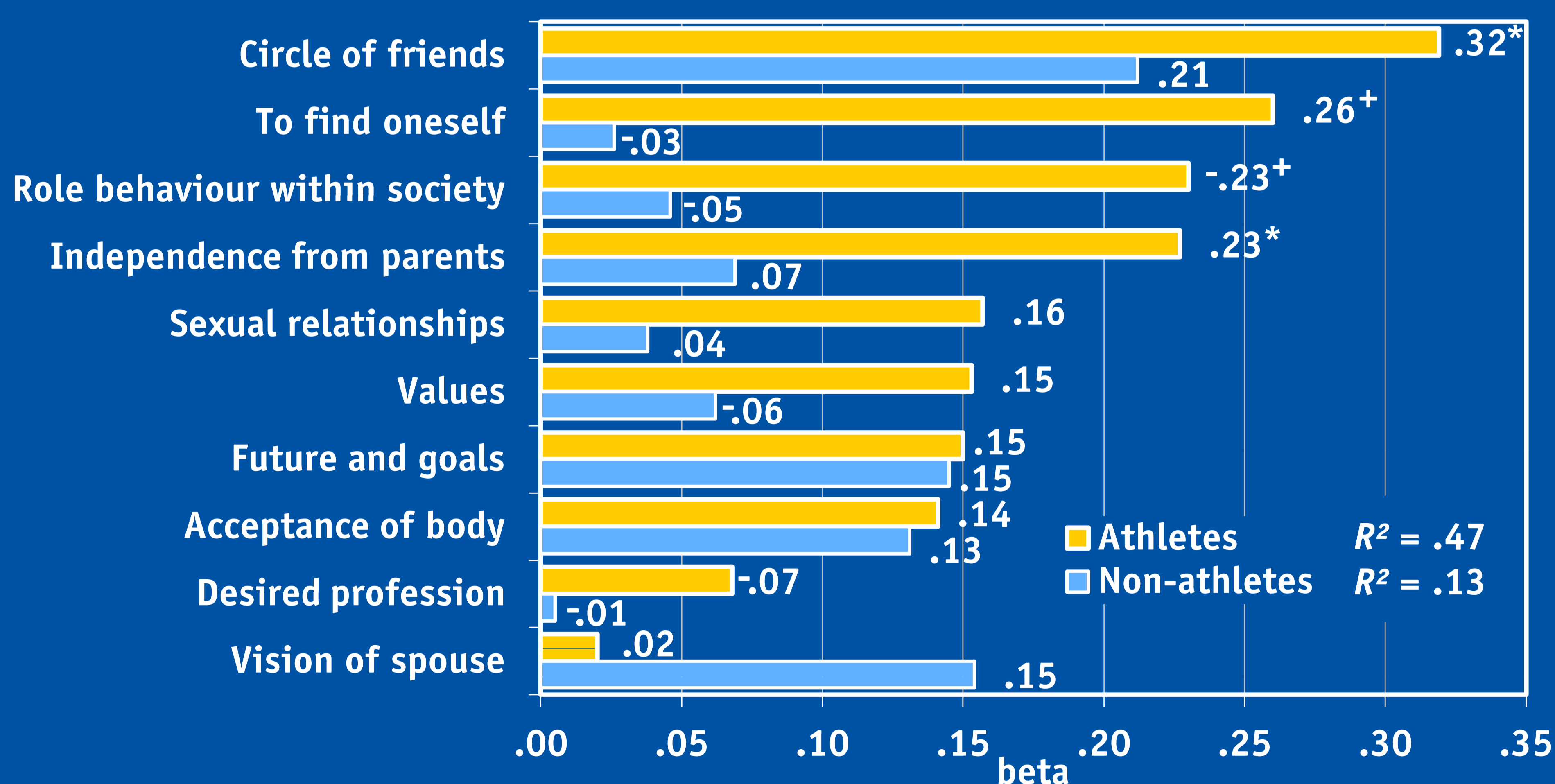


Fig.1: Regression of satisfaction with the different DTs on wellbeing, separately for athletes and non-athletes. Numbers indicate beta values, significant values ( $p < .05$ ) are marked with \*, tendential effects ( $p < .10$ ) with +. Values of explained variance for the whole model are noted within the legend.

### Discussion

Our results indicate that as expected, elite athletes report a different relevance of, progression in and satisfaction with DTs compared to non-athletes. Particularly for relevance, several differences are evident, even though the effects are small. For differences in progression and satisfaction, the results are less dominant, but this is being explained by the fact that a failure would only be relevant for people reaching adulthood without having accomplished a certain DT. Regression analyses showed that satisfaction with the DTs has a higher impact on wellbeing in athletes than in non-athletes. It seems that athletes put more value in accomplishing DTs, consequently a failure has a bigger impact on wellbeing compared to non-athletes. Thus, our recommendation for sport federations would be to ensure that adolescent athletes receive enough personal and structural resources to accomplish their developmental tasks.

### References

- Dreher, E. & Dreher, M. (1985). Entwicklungsaufgaben im Jugendalter: Bedeutsamkeit und Bewältigungskonzepte [DTs in adolescence: relevance and coping concepts]. In D. Liepmann & A. Stiksrud (Eds.), *Entwicklungsaufgaben und Bewältigungsprobleme in der Adoleszenz [DTs and coping problems in adolescence]* (S. 56–70). Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Havighurst, R. J. (1976). *Developmental Tasks and Education (3rd ed.)*. New York: McKay.
- Ohlert, J. & Kleinert, J. (2014). Entwicklungsaufgaben jugendlicher Elite-Handballerinnen und -Handballer [DTs of youth elite handball players]. *Zeitschrift für Sportpsychologie*, 21(4), 161-172.



Table 1: List of DTs with significant or tendential differences between athletes and non-athletes. Significant results ( $p < .05$ ) are marked with \*, tendential results ( $p < .10$ ) with +. Yellow writing indicates that athletes show higher values, blue writing indicates higher values for non-athletes.

Developmental task	Eta <sup>2</sup>
<b>Differences in relevance</b>	
Circle of friends*	.07
Future and goals*	.03
Acceptance of body*	.02
Independence from parents*	.03
Vision of spouse*	.02
Values+	.01
Role behaviour within society+	.01
<b>Differences in progression</b>	
Vision of spouse*	.01
Desired profession+	.01
To find oneself+	.01
Future and goals+	.01
Independence from parents+	.01
<b>Differences in satisfaction with progression</b>	
Independence from parents*	.01
Acceptance of body+	.01