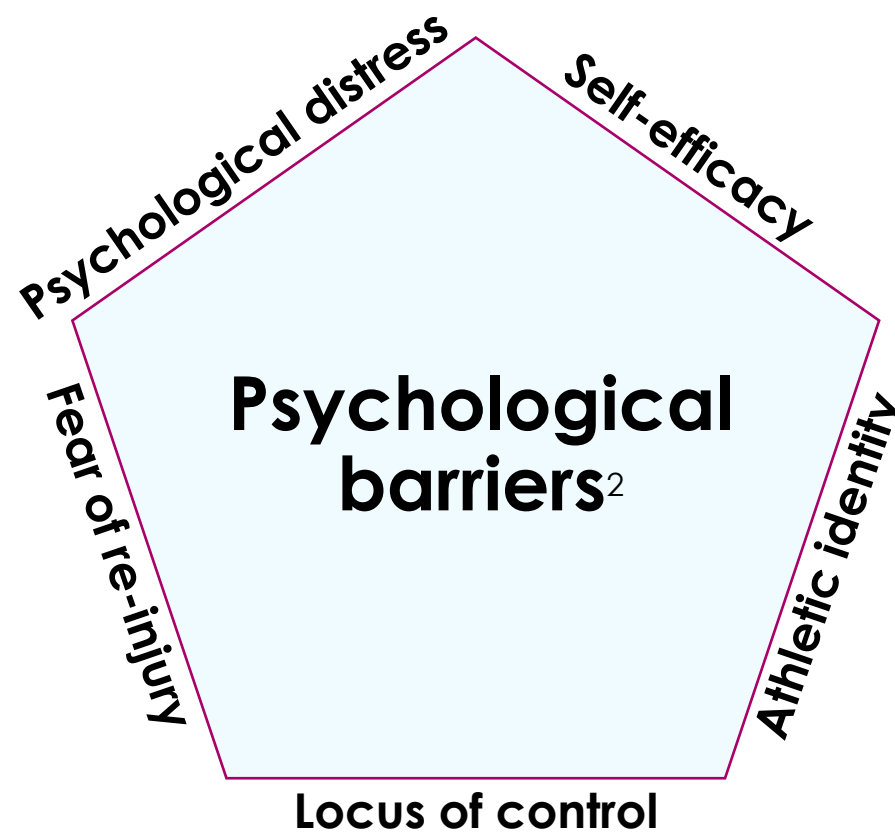


There are many demands placed on female athletes when returning to sport after injury. Self-belief, identity, and fear of getting hurt again are some of the psychological factors that will impact their return. Studies have found that compared to male athletes, female athletes may feel more anxious about how the injury affects their life and their physical abilities. Therefore, it's crucial to address these psychological aspects during recovery to help female athletes get back to their sport. Including psychological interventions during rehabilitation, like relaxation techniques and positive self-talk, can lead to better mood, pain management, and compliance with exercise¹.

In their research, Lisee et al. (2020) identified five overall psychological barriers to returning to sport.

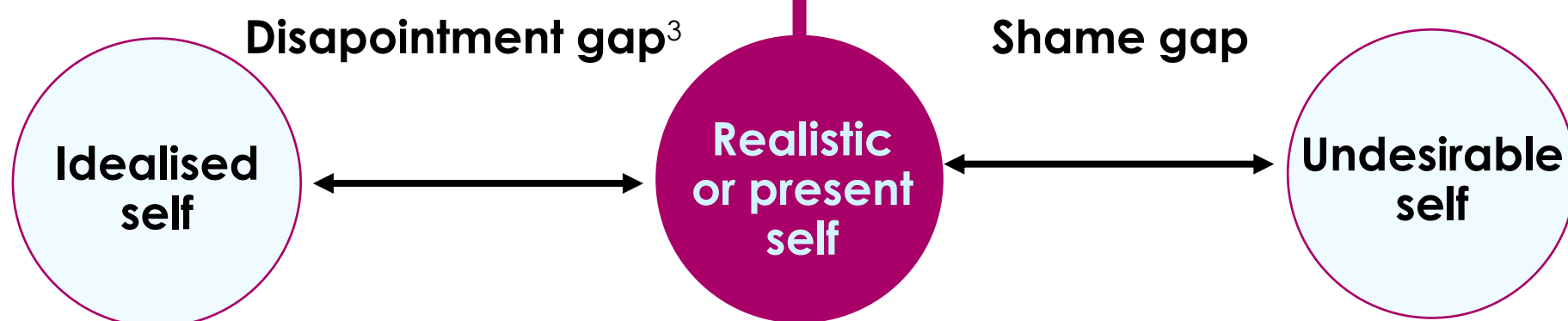
Participants talked about feeling different emotions like anger and anxiety during their recovery.

Overall, most were determined to get back to being active and felt their identity as an athlete was important, but some struggled with motivation for rehab and social activities following surgery.



Themes identified from female athlete responses:

- Paid close attention to their feelings and motivations during recovery, experiencing ups and downs in mood depending on how their recovery was going
- Preferred support from peer role models and health care professionals
- Felt a large impact on their athletic identity, associated with self-worth



The disappointment gap is the space between an athlete's expectations and the actual outcome of their performance.

The shame gap arises when athletes feel a sense of inadequacy or failure, leading to feelings of shame and self-criticism

By understanding the concepts of the disappointment gap and shame gap into their support system, athletes can develop resilience, self-awareness, and compassion toward themselves, ultimately enhancing their performance and well-being.

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Process goals: Set specific actions that can be executed in training, focusing on aspects within your control, such as technique, strategy or effort. Process goals promote a growth mindset by emphasising improvement and skill development rather than solely focusing on outcomes. Regular monitoring and adjustment of process goals ensure they remain challenging yet achievable.

Staying present: Mindfulness, breathing and grounding techniques are skills to support present moment thinking. The present is the only place you have control. When feeling overwhelmed...

Acknowledge → **Come back into** → **Engage in the present.**
 thoughts, name your emotions your body, focus on deep breathing What can you see, hear, feel, smell, taste?

Self-compassion: Helpful self-talk uses encouraging, and constructive inner dialogue to enhance performance, manage emotions, and build resilience. Treat oneself with the same empathy and support one would offer to a teammate or friend facing similar challenges.

Compassionate culture and debriefing: Create an environment where empathy understanding and support are prioritised and ingrained in the values and behaviours of the team. Incorporating regular debriefing sessions, encouraging athletes to openly reflect on experiences, challenges and emotions, increases well-being and collaboration.

Add perspective "mistakes will happen" **Be curious** "hm, that voice is back" **Gratitude** "thanks but no thanks"

1: Gianakos, A. L., Abdelmoneim, A., Kerkhoffs, G., & Mulcahey, M. K. (2022). Rehabilitation and Return to Sport of Female Athletes. *Arthroscopy, Sports Medicine, and Rehabilitation*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asmr.2021.09.040>.

2: Lisee, C. M., DiSanti, J. S., Chan, M., Ling, J., Erickson, K., Shingles, M., & Kuenze, C. M. (2020). Gender Differences in Psychological Responses to Recovery After Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction Before Return to Sport. *Journal of athletic training*, 55(10), 1098–1105. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-558.19>

3: Reference: Gilbert, P. (2013). The compassionate mind. Constable:UK