

Sport Psychology

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Introduction / Abstract

Counseling and counseling psychology presents a large variety of career options beyond traditional roles. Health psychology, neuropsychology and organizational psychology are all relatively new specialization areas of great interest. Sport psychology is another area with a short but rapidly developing history that extends beyond performance enhancement and coaching techniques (Lent, 1993). Globally it is becoming intertwined with politics (Donnelly, 1996). Well over twenty journals are dedicated to sport psychology. The level of interest is magnified by many factors, including a large increase in participation in fitness activities and the growing popularity of professional athletics. Newspapers, television, Radio, and sporting goods store. Many counselors and psychologists are adding some aspects of sport psychology to their practice. Though all of the ethical and professional considerations apply to a counselor practicing sport psychology that apply to a more traditional role, this field has very special issues that are difficult and controversial. There is neither an established ethical code, nor competence standards, thus ethics, and competence issues have increased proportionally with the volume of sport psychology research and the involvement of psychologists in sports. To understand these issues, firstly we must examine what sport psychology is, then review the ethical considerations.

Sport Psychology - An Overview

Sport psychology focuses on six primary issues: "Motivation, personality, aggression, arousal/stress/anxiety, psychological skills training/intervention practices, and finally team processes" (Kremer & Scully, 1994, p. 7). Concerns in sport psychology are managing the factors involved in sports to deal with slumps, improving individual/team performance, coping with injuries, control of overtraining and stresses that come with athletics. (Kremer & Scully, 1994; Iknoian, 1996) Considerable research has been done in each of these areas. These six issues, however, stretch into many of our traditional psychological disciplines. Consulting opportunities exist to perform sport psychology within a clinical session (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993). Individual differences, personality, cognitive behavior, counseling

skills, and even psychoanalytic interventions and theories relative to sports are discussed in much of the literature. (Maynard , Smith & Warwick-Evans, 1995; Hillman, 1994; Smith, Smoll & Christensen, 1996). Because sport psychology is such a broad area, we will examine a very brief history of the field, and then review the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) guidelines of what sport psychology practitioners do.

Sports have had an impact on the psychology of people farther back than the Olympic games (which began in 776 B.C.) which were played in honor of the god Zeus (Marlan, 1994). "Formal" sport psychology in this country can be traced to origins in 1918. In the mid-20's, University of Illinois professor Coleman Griffith, who is accepted widely as the father of sport psychology, taught a class titled "Psychology and Athletics" and then established the Athletic Research Laboratory (Kremer & Scully, 1994). Though sports and games have been a part of almost all human history, it wasn't until the 1950's that research started becoming more organized and common (Nideffer, 1981). Soviet, East German and Italian researchers were very influential in the development of sport psychology this century, particularly, Ferruccio Antonelli in Italy who was a founder of the International Society of Sport Psychology (founded in 1965). This stimulated the formation of the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA - a research based organization). Later developments included USOC recognition by the USOC of sport psychology, and in 1985, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) was formed. This organization had more applied interests, unlike the more research oriented NASPSPA. APA recognized Exercise and Sport Psychology in Division 47 in 1986. We are starting to see some coherence in the sport psychology organizations, yet these are not necessarily all in agreement on what sports psychology is nor what to call sport psychology practitioners(Singer, 1992).

The USOC identifies three broad activities engaged in by sport psychologists: Clinical, Educational and Research. *Clinical* refers to working with athletes who experience severe emotional problems continuing over an extended period of time, crisis intervention, and other issues. This is usually working directly with an individual athlete. *Educational* is when the psychologist helps the athletes

develop the psychological skills to maximize performance and participation in the sport. Generally this service is group delivered rather than with an individual. *Research* is recognized by the USOC as a separate component which is for development of knowledge in sport psychology. This research is then used in the other two areas (United States Olympic Committee, 1983).

In Clinical Sport Psychology, many specialized interventions are used in addition to the basic psychology skills used for individual counseling. These typically come from traditional psychology and their sports applications are increasing rapidly. Table 1 is a sample of some intervention “packages” that are used (but it is by no means a complete list):

Table 1 - Sample Intervention Packages Used in Sport Psychology (Kremer & Scully, 1994).

Title	Originator	Brief Description
Stress Inoculation Training	Meichenbaum, 1977	Four phase approach using self-talk and relaxation to cope with imagined stress
Stress Management Training	Smith, 1980	Five phase approach using self-awareness and relaxation to cope with imposed stress
Anxiety Management Training	Suinn, 1983	Relaxation training under conditions of arousal (e.g. anxiety, anger)
Visual Motor Behavior Rehearsal	Suinn, 1984	Combination of relaxation and mental imagery techniques to desensitize athletes to stress
Seven Steps to Peak Performance	Suinn, 1985	Seven step approach including relaxation training, stress management, positive thought control, self-regulation, mental rehearsal, concentration and energy control.
Psychological Skills Education Program	Boutcher & Rotella, 1987	Four phase approach for improving closed skills involving self-awareness, motivation and various interventions

Other techniques are also used including hypnosis, relaxation, computer aids and cognitive intervention (Maynard, Smith & Warwick-Evans, 1995) The clinical practitioner also is prepared to deal with other personal issues (e.g. relationship, etc.) that may be more emotionally pressing on the athlete. Of crucial importance is understanding of the athlete's particular stressors and lifestyle so the psychologist can

relate to their current experiences in context. This extends to knowledge about jargon, rituals, superstitions, drugs, living conditions, relating with team members, and even rules of the game. Retirement is such an issue that is inevitable - the athlete will retire, be forced out of competition, or complete college or high school (Baillie, 1993).

Educational sport psychology is an applied psychology though specialized to groups, teams and organizations. While some of the interventions are the same as in the clinical version, in educational sport psychology, these would be as applied in a seminar or training series. Table 1 also can be applied to educational sport psychology when applied in groups or teams. Coaching is generally an educational sport activity that may overlap with a psychologist role (Buceta, 1993).

As researchers continue to develop the knowledge base about people, sport psychology research also grows at a rapid pace. Research runs across the variety of sporting experiences from archery to soccer, and the spectrum of psychology from cognitive interventions to family systems. Diagnosis of mental disorders is a growing concern so that sports practitioners can make appropriate referrals. Much work has been done to help these practitioners diagnose personality and mood disorders (Anderson, Denson, Brewer & VanRaalte, 1994) and relating exercise to other pathologies (Potgieter & Venter, 1995). Intervention research has primarily focused on cognitive behavioral approaches (Maynard et al., 1995; Smith et al., 1996). Tests have been developed specifically for athletics and assessing psychological skills related to sports performance (Smith, Schutz, Smoll, Ptacek, 1995). Other recent research has focused on anxiety assessment and treatment (Newton & Duda, 1995), learning life skills through sports (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1993), looking at enjoyment (Kimiecik & Harris, 1996), team cohesion (Spink, 1995; Copeland & Straub, 1995) the home advantage in high school basketball (Gayton & Coombs, 1995) using hypnosis to improve archery (Robazza, & Bortoli, 1995) and even benefits of taking martial arts (Kurian, Caterino & Kulhavy, 1993; Lawton, 1993; Terry & Slade, 1995). While there may be some areas that aren't being explored, there is no shortage of volume of research in the field.

Practitioner Competence/Credentialing

There is no standard process to become involved in sport psychology. There are over 100 masters and doctorate programs in sport psychology in this country, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and South Africa (Sachs, Burke, & Butcher, 1995) and there is a directory of USOC approved sports consultants, but the types of training, the titling (what can go on your business card), and certification is not universally accepted as a standard. The USOC and the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) have different guidelines for sport psychology services.

The USOC identifies three broad activities engaged in by sport psychologists and therefore has three different titles for practitioners: Clinical Sport Psychologist, Educational Sport Psychologist, and Research Sport Psychologist. This is consistent with the three areas of research that are recognized and described above. These areas have their own credentialing as follows:

Clinical Sport Psychologist:

- Degree in clinical/counseling psychology or psychiatry from an accredited American Psychological Association (APA) university.
- Meets standards required for full membership in the APA or American Psychiatric Association.
- Psychologists must have a current license/certification. Psychiatrists must have a current license and be board-eligible in psychiatry as well as meeting minimum standards set for physicians engaged in USOC sports medicine programs.
- Demonstrated experience as an athlete, coach or practitioner in the application of psychological principles to sports.
- A personal interview with a Review Board member may be requested.

Educational Sport Psychologist:

- Doctorate in psychology or psychiatry or in a related field with background in psychology that would meet standards required for full membership in the APA or American Psychiatric Association.

- At least 3 years of demonstrated post-doctoral experience as an athlete, coach or practitioner in the application of psychological principles to sports.
- Reference letters from recognized institutions/organizations related to the applicant's teaching educational facilitation skills
- A personal interview with a Review Board member may be requested.

Research Sport Psychologist:

- Doctorate in psychology or psychiatry or in a related field with background in psychology that would meet standards required for full membership in the APA or American Psychiatric Association.
- Evidence of scholarly research contributions to the field of sport psychology.
- Reference letters from recognized institutions/organizations related to research conducted by the applicant.
- A personal interview with a Review Board member may be requested. (USOC, 1983)

Recognition in one of these three areas allows one to be published in the USOC directory of sport psychology practitioners.

AAASP's credentialing vehicle is to become a Certified Consultant, AAASP (CC, AAASP). This credential refers to recognition by AAASP that the person has attained a professional level of experience and knowledge in applied sport psychology. AAASP defines the role of the Certified Consultant to include:

- Educating individuals, groups and organizations about psychological factors in sport
- Helping develop specific cognitive, behavioral, psycho-social and affective skills for application in sport, exercise and physical activity context. This may include goal-setting, concentration, imagery, moral reasoning and group cohesion.
- Help players control arousal, anxiety, audience effects and decision making skills.
- Provide information to the sport community regarding communication, team cohesion, adherence to exercise, motivation and program development and evaluation.

AAASP's requirements for becoming a CC, AAASP include work in 14 different knowledge areas:

- Ethics and standards in practice and research
- Sport psychology subdisciplines (e.g. intervention/performance enhancement, health/exercise psychology, social psychology)
- Biomechanics and/or exercise physiology
- Historical, philosophical, social or motor behavior bases of sport.
- Psychopathology
- Basic counseling skills training
- Supervised experience with a qualified person (at least 400 hours)
- Skills and techniques specialized for sport psychology
- Research design, statistics, and assessment

at least 2 of the following four criteria must be met through educational experiences that focus on general psychological principles

- Biological bases of behavior (e.g. biomechanics/kinesiology, comparative psychology, exercise psychology, neuropsychology, psychopharmacology)
- Cognitive bases of behavior (e.g. cognition, emotion, learning, motivation, memory, motor development, motor learning/control, perception)
- Social bases of behavior (e.g. ethnic, cultural and group processes, gender roles in sports, organizational/systems theory, social psychology)
- Individual behavior (e.g. developmental psychology, exercise behavior, individual differences, personality theory, health psychology)

Once certified, every 5 years you must re-certify by

1. Having continuous AAASP membership.
2. Payment of an annual certification fee.
3. Attend at least 3 conferences, one of which must be the AAASP annual conference.
4. Participation in a sport psychology workshop

The title "CC, AAASP" is used instead of certified sport psychologist so there are no conflicts with state licensing laws which might be at odds with the AAASP certification if the term "psychologist" was used (Sachs, Burke, & Butcher, 1995).

Ethical Issues

There are a multitude of ethical issues that come into view in this specialization (though legal cases on the subject have generally fallen under traditional psychology situations, so they wouldn't be efficient to include here). Sport psychologists are often involved with parents, coaches, administrators (schools), owners (professional teams), and unfortunately the media. "Who" the client is, is commonly a problem for the psychologist that is hired by a team owner or a coach to help a pitcher improve his game. In a 1994 survey, AAASP members were surveyed to obtain data on ethical beliefs and behaviors. The top ten (based on percent of respondents who responded that rarely are these behaviors ethical) are listed below:

Table 2 - Ethical Issues in Sport Psychology - Rankings of Unethical Behavior
(Petitpas, Brewer, Rivera & VanRaalte , 1994).

Rank	Description of Issue	Percent Who Judged it Un-Ethical
1	Promoting unjustified expectations through advertising	89.1
2	Including unverified claims in promotional materials	88.5
3	Claiming affiliation with organizations that falsely implies sponsorship or certification	86.3
4	Providing inadequate supervision to trainees	86.1
5	Insulting or ridiculing a client in their absence	83.6
6	Betting on a team or individual with whom you are working	81.2
7	Allowing out-of-town clients to reside in your home while services are being provided	81.2
8	Using Psychological Tests (e.g. MMPI) without attaining appropriate user qualifications	78.2
9	Sharing athlete data with coaches without athlete's written consent	76.4
10	Practicing without clarifying who is and who isn't the client (e.g. coach, athlete, management)	72.7

Obviously betting on (or against) a team based on your client relationship is unethical, but there are also other concerns illustrated here such as confidentiality, dual relationship, supervision, and credentialing concerns in sport psychology.

Confidentiality is an issue here that may be worsened by the visibility of the individual athlete. Based on table 2, it appears that the psychology professionals do not wish to break confidentiality, yet there may be high pressures to do so from the organization, media and due to health concerns (i.e. a player playing when he/she is hurt and shouldn't). Using clients names in advertising may certainly damage a clients reputation and unfairly bias against those practitioners who may not feel right in using

clients names. This is a tough issue because to many athletes this is hard to make it a “secret” activity, yet at the same time the psychologist may feel a need to demonstrate experience and results with their client to get additional business (i.e. testimonials). As listed elsewhere, coaches goals may conflict with the psychologist and result in asking the practitioner to release information without consent (e.g. to decide whether to cut a player). Recently I attended the Arizona Psychological Association conference on sport psychology where one of the sport psychologists passed out a letter from Jeff Feagles, a Cardinals football player extolling the virtues of the psychologist’s help (Feagles, 1996). This might persuade us to believe that it is common for players not to mind breaking confidentiality since it is often only in the context of improving performance. Players, notably, are not as quick to derogate another athlete if they are known to see a sport psychologist (VanRaalte, Brewer, Brewer & Linder, 1992). Of course, informed consent must be given before any client's name could be used. Table 3 lists some interesting confidentiality items that were not judged to be highly un-ethical in the AAASP Survey.

Table 3 - Ethical Issues in Sport Psychology - Significant Confidentiality Issues (Petitpas et al., 1994).

Description of Issue	Percent Who Judged it Un-Ethical
Reporting abusive coaching practices	10.9
Reporting an athlete who uses cocaine	20.0
Reporting an athlete who uses steroids	20.6
Reporting an athlete's gambling activity	23.6
Reporting an athlete who committed rape	22.4
Reporting an athlete who committed burglary	21.2

This data indicates that practitioners have a very different attitude toward reporting athletes in these circumstances. Reporting drug use in traditional counseling is not common, more likely we would try and help the client get other treatment, but in this arena (no pun intended) it is not thought of as that un-ethical. Note though, that reporting drug use happened 2.4% of the time (Petitpas et al., 1994). Sports provides a background of broadly varied confidentiality issues.

Supervision is very important for the practitioner, not only to learn types of interventions, and get feedback, but to pick up the “culture” surrounding the particular sport. The supervisor/supervisee relationship forms the model for future practice. Ethics in supervision cover at least two broad areas. Firstly, monitoring of the supervisee’s ethics and competence in the athlete-client / counselor relationship. The second area is in the relationship with the supervisee and supervisor. In the latter, the ethics are quite similar to counseling psychology, while in the former their are some more complicated issues. The supervisor is very important in helping the supervisee deal with issues such as when a client wants to play with an injury because pro scouts are watching, but this may result in some permanent damage. The “do not harm” maxim in application to sports is valid, but what the athlete chooses to do or not do is ultimately his decision. (Anderson, 1994) Another troubling statistic is that only 30% of the above AAASP respondents said that they were receiving any kind of supervision. (Petitpas, et al., 1994).

While typical dual relationship issues apply (e.g. sexual relationships, etc.), there are some additional considerations that effect the role of the counselor in an athletic relationship. One such dilemma is when the sport psychologist is the team’s coach. Combining these two roles may cause conflict since the psychology “side” of the coach-psychologist protects the welfare of the client (i.e. “do no harm”), yet the coach side may be interested primarily in the team’s success (i.e. “win at all costs”). Some suggest that this is a role that should be avoided (Ellickson & Brown, 1990) while others contend that it is a role that may have advantages (e.g. coach can have more insight into players, its more economical, the psychologist doesn't have to answer to anyone) if handled properly (Buceta, 1993). In fact, AAASP certification as a CC, AAASP is worded so as not to exclude coaches and coaching is listed as a means of achieving a certifying requirement (Burke & Johnson, 1992). In addition, the AAASP survey results show that only 21.8% of sports practitioners felt that this was never ethical (Petitpas et al., 1994, p 143). This may be one reason that the USOC distinguishes between educational and clinical sport psychologists.

Credentials, as discussed previously are not broadly accepted. There is controversy surrounding whether there should be any certification (Anshel, 1993). While many practitioners are from other fields,

some feel that there should be less restrictive requirements than the AAASP or USOC guidelines. Some however feel that stronger qualifications protects the field from unqualified participating practitioners. According to a study of chairs of 102 APA approved programs in clinical psychology, there is no clear cut answer to credentialing foreseen in the near future (LeUnes & Hayward, 1990).

Summary

Sport psychology has such a wide variety of aspects, it almost seems like an entity upon itself, separate from the general psychology and counseling field. In reality it continues to grow out of psychological practices used in many other areas. In addition sport psychology is sometimes crossed back into mainstream psychology (Clay, 1996). The special environments, goals, and economics in sports add a new level of concerns regarding ethics. Though credentialing and titling are unresolved issues (Dishman, 1983), we also have two organizations credentialing four distinct areas of sport psychology. That is a beginning for wider recognition. Regarding practice, clinical and educational branches of sport psychology have much to draw from as far as techniques and interventions. Research in sport psychology is advancing at a rapid pace due to the increase in sports interest in our society. All of these aspects of sport psychology are important components to be familiar with depending on your area of interest in the field. Though sport psychology is in its early stages, it is very promising as a discipline that can help people achieve new goals both on and off the field.

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