

Defining the Practice of Sport and Performance Psychology

Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of the American Psychological Association

Author Note.

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Abstract

Twenty-five years after the formation of both the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology and Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of the American Psychology Association, the question of who may practice as a sport psychologist persists. Some confusion still exists because the field has not fully answered the question “What does the *practice* of sport psychology entail?” Too often sport psychology is defined by whom we work with, not by the unique aspects of what we do. To provide clarity for the profession, the authors offer a definition of applied sport psychology conceptualized as a sub-field of performance psychology. The constructs of performance and performance issues are also defined. The distinction between performance enhancement and performance restoration is highlighted. Performance psychology is contrasted with exercise and health psychology, clinical and counseling psychology, positive psychology, and consulting psychology. Lastly, the implications of this definition for education and practice are shared.

Defining the Practice of Sport and Performance Psychology

As part of his Presidential Address at the first Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology¹ (AAASP) conference, Dr. John Silva (1986) stated: “The questions confronting the field of sport psychology include: Who is a sport psychologist?” This question persists today, more than 25 years later! Confusion still exists regarding who is a sport psychologist (or sport psychology consultant, mental coach, mental skills trainer, etc.) because the field has not fully answered the question “What is sport psychology?” More particularly, sport psychology professional organizations have not answered the question “What does the *practice* of sport psychology entail?” Most of the “standard” definitions are very broad, vague, and more focused on what sport psychologists research, instead of what they do. While these definitions may be appropriate for the discipline of sport psychology, they are impractical, less relevant, and potentially misleading when applied to the practice and profession of sport psychology.

The definition from the American Psychological Association’s (APA, 2009) Division 47 (Exercise & Sport Psychology) website states: “Exercise and sport psychology is the scientific study of the psychological factors that are associated with participation and performance in sport, exercise, and other types of physical activity” (What is Exercise and Sport Psychology?, para. 1). Many of the regularly used textbooks define sport psychology by stating that it is “the study of ...” without defining the profession of sport psychology as well (e.g., Cox 2007). The European Federation of Sport Psychology (1996) defines sport psychology as:

Sport psychology is concerned with the psychological foundations, processes, and consequences of the psychological regulation of sport-related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject(s) of the activity. The focus may be on the behaviour or on different psychological dimensions of human behaviour (i.e., affective, cognitive, motivational, or sensorimotor dimensions) (p. 221).

They also state that they use sport as an umbrella term to include exercise, sport, and physical activity pursuits. Note that these definitions limit sport psychology to research, not practice, and confuse things conceptually by including exercise psychology.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology's (AASP, 2010) definition appears to address the practice issue:

Applied sport and exercise psychology involves extending theory and research into the field to educate coaches, athletes, parents, exercisers, fitness professionals, and athletic trainers about the psychological aspects of their sport or activity. A primary goal of professionals in applied sport and exercise psychology is to facilitate optimal involvement, performance, and enjoyment in sport and exercise (About Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology, para. 1).

The inclusion of exercise psychology within this definition blurs some important distinctions.

Although all these definitions seem to delimit the components of sport psychology, the definitions end up implying: take everything in the practice of general psychology and relate it to people who move. These definitions focus more on the population than on theories, issues, and interventions. This makes it too easy for people to believe that doing anything related to the practice of psychology with an athlete is

sport psychology. Too many people (including licensed psychologists with little to no training in sport psychology) choose to define sport psychology based solely on working with an athletic population. However, as Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) recently observed:

One issue that appears to contribute to misunderstandings regarding the scope of [sport psychology] has to do with the demographics of the clientele. Oftentimes, people (both the public clientele and professional practitioners) will define any psychological work with an athlete as sport psychology. This is problematic because defining the field based on who the clientele is disregards the unique interventions, techniques, and professional literature that make sport psychology a distinct field requiring specific training and competency (p. 254).

It seems that there are really multiple, yet interrelated, labels in this discussion. The umbrella term sport psychology is primarily defined in relation to the academic discipline and includes a wide range of topics. Many professionals research and teach sport psychology but do not “do” sport psychology (at least not as a professional identity). For those who focus professionally on “doing,” the term Applied Sport Psychology was introduced. Initially this term was specific to the practice of sport psychology with athletes and coaches. However, many people today use sport psychology and applied sport psychology interchangeably. A clearer definition of applied sport psychology will ensure consumers receive competent, effective services. Thus, this paper will focus on clarifying what the practice of sport psychology (applied sport psychology) involves.

Without a clear definition of the profession of sport psychology, there cannot be a clear training model for the profession. Indeed, the field has been subjected to discontent, bickering, and turf wars over the years between practitioners with degrees in kinesiology

or exercise and sport science (ESS) and those with degrees in psychology. Yet, if every practitioner were appropriately trained to have competency in both sport science and psychology (using these phrases is technically incorrect as will be addressed later) then sport psychology would be a unified field, able to counter misperceptions and appropriately educate those who access our services.

How did we get to this point of conceptual and definitional elusiveness? A brief exploration of the history of the field serves not only to answer this question, but also provides the basis for a more precise, informative, and ultimately useful definition of what practitioners do.

The Origins of Sport and Performance Psychology

Coleman Griffith is often credited as the first person to apply psychological principles systematically to improve sport performance, when he was hired by the Chicago Cubs in 1938 (Cox, 2007). His primary focus was psychomotor skills, motor learning and the connection between personality variables and physical performance. Although Griffith was trained as a psychologist, his work did not attract the interest of his colleagues in psychology; ultimately, the academic home of sport psychology shifted into physical education (now Kinesiology or Exercise & Sport Science) departments. As Cox (2007) shares, “most of the research related to sport psychology was conducted within a laboratory setting and was referred to as motor learning research” (p. 6). During the “formative years” from the 1950s to the 1980s, sport psychology started to be its own discipline, separate from exercise physiology, motor learning, and motor control.

At this point in history, sport psychology was strongly connected to performance, particularly physical performance. Indeed, its early members could have just as easily

(and perhaps more accurately) labeled the field performance psychology. Somewhere along the way, two major shifts happened that have left the field in a state of confusion. The first was the inclusion of exercise in the title of the discipline. Many professional organizations began referring to sport and exercise psychology, which implicitly and explicitly connected them and perhaps even suggested they were the same profession. As seen above, attempts at defining exercise psychology and sport psychology concurrently have resulted in definitions that end up being both broad and vague.

The second issue has been the growing interest in sport psychology by those with primary training in the practice of clinical or counseling psychology. The first book examining sport from a psychological standpoint was Ogilvie and Tutko's (1966) *Problem Athletes and How to Handle Them*. The initial forays into the sport world by psychologists were, understandably, limited to what the field of psychology was focused upon at that time: psychopathology. These psychologists did not bring their psychological knowledge to the developing theories of performance, but rather stuck to their theories of personality. This trend continues today as psychologists with training in psychotherapy focused on psychopathology and addressing general life issues often refer to their treatment of athletes as "sport psychology." These psychologists fall prey to the old adage "you don't know what you don't know." Because they do not have the appropriate training in sport psychology and performance principles, despite being well-intentioned, they end up labeling therapy with someone who is an athlete as sport psychology. The end result is that athletes, teams, and coaches who are seeking sport psychology services to improve their performances are commonly disappointed when they discover the "sport psychologist" they hired is only proficient in mental health therapy and not in

understanding performance. These misunderstandings on both the practitioner's and the client's parts are the result of the ongoing lack of clarity regarding what sport psychology is. Unfortunately, the end result is often (and understandably) coaches and athletes giving up on sport psychology because they can see that the profession lacks a consistent identity.

APA approved a proficiency in sport psychology, recognizing it as a practice field within psychology. Although knowledge requirements are suggested within the proficiency, currently there is no mechanism for practitioners to determine whether they are sufficiently skilled in the practice. To push the training and practice of future sport psychologists forward, the field needs a clear definition of sport psychology, along with objectively verifiable competencies. Thus, we propose the definition that follows to allow better conceptual clarity in identifying the competencies for practice in this field.

Definitions: Performance Psychology and Sport Psychology

From the history of the field it is evident that the core *application* of sport psychology has been focused on performance excellence. As mentioned above, the discipline could have been referred to as performance psychology. Recently, Hays (2006) described performance psychology as helping people learn how to perform better and more consistently in endeavors where excellence counts. Her definition accurately characterizes the context of athletics and sport psychology. In this sense, sport psychology is really a domain within performance psychology; it is the study of performance psychology principles and interventions in the context of competitive athletics (rather than other types of performance). We believe conceptual and professional confusion can begin to be alleviated by first precisely defining performance

psychology. Building on Hays' description, we propose the following definition of performance psychology:

Performance psychology is the study and application of psychological principles of human performance to help people consistently perform in the upper range of their capabilities and more thoroughly enjoy the performance process. Performance psychologists are uniquely trained and specialized to engage in a broad range of activities, including the identification, development, and execution of the mental and emotional knowledge, skills, and abilities required for excellence in performance domains; the understanding, diagnosing, and preventing of the psychological, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and psychophysiological inhibitors of consistent, excellent performance; and the improvement of performance environments to facilitate more efficient development, consistent execution, and positive experiences in performers.

Based on the above definition of performance psychology, and considering applied sport psychology to be a sub-focus of performance psychology, applied sport psychology can be defined as followed:

Applied sport psychology is the study and application of psychological principles of human performance in helping athletes consistently perform in the upper range of their capabilities and more thoroughly enjoy the sport performance process.

Applied sport psychologists are uniquely trained and specialized to engage in a broad range of activities including the identification, development, and execution of the mental and emotional knowledge, skills, and abilities required for excellence in athletic domains; the understanding, diagnosing, and preventing of

the psychological, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and psychophysiological inhibitors of consistent, excellent performance; and the improvement of athletic contexts to facilitate more efficient development, consistent execution, and positive experiences in athletes.

It is important to note that we focus here on the practice of sport and performance psychology. This definition (and paper) by no means minimizes other aspects of the larger field of sport psychology, including such areas as the research and promotion of healthy sport participation or use of sport for personal, social, and moral development.

Explaining the Definition

In order to more thoroughly understand this definition and to have practitioners share a consistent understanding, a few other definitions are necessary.

Definition of Performance

Unfortunately no standard definition completely fits what we mean when talking about performance. Performance can be thought of as a noun or a verb. As a noun, it describes a discrete event where a performer (or performers) showcases a specific set of developed knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Performance can also be a verb, which then describes the process of carrying out a plan of action for the execution of KSAs during a performance event. Thus, performance means using knowledge, skills, or abilities, as distinguished from merely possessing them. As Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) state, “successful performance requires both the development and mastery of KSAs and the capability to consistently and reliably deliver (i.e., perform) KSAs at the time of performance” (p. 254).

Our definition includes the following characteristics. Performance entails the development of context-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities over time and then the recollection and use of these KSAs during a discrete performance event. Performance entails working towards some accomplishment, which is usually measured against some standard of success. There is an expectation for how the KSAs are put into action; thus the execution of the KSAs is evaluated by the performer and others.

Performance involves an investment over time. This investment is normally elaborate and very often public. Performers rarely develop the appropriate KSAs or execute them at performance events in isolation. They usually have teachers or coaches, along with teammates, co-performers, and audiences.

This definition of performance should be distinguished from the typical use of the word in a business context. There it often refers to the financial status of the unit or organization. It may also be connected to productivity. Our use limits the term to very specific situations that the performer has prepared for and has one (or limited) opportunity to execute what they have prepared. Examples include: athletic competition, performance of a play, a military unit following a rehearsed plan, firefighters executing a rehearsed protocol, or salespeople delivering a detailed pitch they practiced beforehand.

Conceptualizing Performance Issues

Performance issues are those that prevent someone's performance from reaching their desired standard of success. These issues could impair someone's development of the KSAs necessary in their performance domain. Performance issues may also interfere with someone's ability to fully execute the KSAs they have developed. Thus, performance issues can be classified into two categories: those that interfere with

development of the necessary KSAs and those that interfere with the execution of the requisite KSAs. Examples of issues that interfere with development include performers' time investment, development plan, recovery plan, and types of standards they choose to work towards. Examples of issues that interfere with execution include problems with the execution plan, not delivering developed KSAs, and not meeting the necessary standard of success.

Performance issues should be conceptualized as distinct from mental health issues (such as counseling, clinical, or personality based issues; see Figure 1). Certainly, as people first, it is possible that performers may find themselves struggling with mental health issues. The presence of a mental health issue or a performance issue does not necessarily indicate the presence or absence of the other; these are two separate categorizations. Various theories of optimal human performance may differ in the extent to which they propose an interaction between these issues and differ in the nature of the planned interventions required to enhance consistent performance (Aoyagi, Poczwardowski, Portenga, Shapiro, & Haberl, 2010).

Performance enhancement versus performance restoration. Many sport psychologists find themselves addressing general life issues with the athletes with whom they work. Despite the fact that the athlete's performance might be suffering as a result of these issues, they cannot be categorized as performance issues. They may influence the performance process, but act secondary to the mechanisms listed above. Sometimes sport psychologists do need to ameliorate a mental health issue to be able to teach performance psychology principles. This serves merely to remove obstacles to improved performance, and is not directly involved in the improvement of developing or executing KSAs. Many

psychologists who work with performers note that performance can increase after working only with mental health issues. Ameliorating these life issues results in performance restoration, not performance enhancement (see Figure 2).

Performance enhancement entails helping a performer improve their capability to perform up to their potential by helping them develop the mindset and mental/emotional skills to improve their KSAs or to better execute their KSAs. Performance restoration entails helping a performer remove barriers to allow them to return to performing at an already established level. Psychologists engaging in performance restoration do not help the performer directly improve their KSAs or help the performer learn how to better deliver their KSAs during a performance. They simply help the performer get back to a previous level of performing. Performance may increase following amelioration of mental health issues, but only back to baseline. Although therapy with a performer may have significant life benefits (maybe even in the performance domain) it is not performance psychology.

How Does Sport Fit Into Performance?

Very clearly, the principles of applied sport psychology are applicable to other performance contexts. Currently the largest employer of people with applied sport psychology training is the United States Army Comprehensive Soldier Fitness – Performance and Resilience Enhancement Program. Many sport psychology professionals have written about working with other types of performers (e.g., Hays, 2002, 2006, 2009; Jones, 2002; Taylor & Taylor, 1995). The general idea of referring to the discipline and profession as performance psychology has intuitive appeal for experienced practitioners. Within the field of performance psychology, practitioners

would still need to have specialty knowledge for each domain within which they choose to work (e.g., athletics, performing arts, medicine, military, high risk occupations). For example, the sport context is a unique performance environment that requires specialized training beyond general performance principles. This is due to the unique culture of sport and the need to understand psychophysiology, motor learning, and motor control if one intends ultimately to improve physical performance through mental or emotional means. Not all performance psychologists would be competent to work in the sporting arena. The same logic in regard to domain-specific knowledge applies to every other aspect of performance psychology (e.g., working with surgeons); in this article, we are focusing specifically on sport.

A More Thorough Understanding of the Practice of Performance Psychology

Performance psychology is designed to help people learn how to become the best they are capable of becoming in their performance endeavors. It is about helping people reach their potential rather than about ameliorating mental health issues. Traditional applied sport psychology is simply the application of performance psychology principles to performers in the sport environment.

The typical goals of performance psychology work are the development of adaptive philosophies of performance, mindsets, emotional regulation, and mental skills (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Balague, 1995; Ogilvie & Henschen, 1995; Orlick, 1986; Ravizza, 2001; Vernacchia, McGuire, & Cook, 1996). Performance psychologists teach people how to prepare for performance situations and deliver that performance more consistently to the best of their ability. Teaching about performance issues helps a person become better able to reach a specified goal. In order to be considered a performance

psychology intervention, there has to be a different way of practicing or performing the desired skill, including developing new mental/emotional skills. Historically, teaching, coaching, and consulting have been the intervention modalities (as opposed to a therapeutic model of intervention) that best fit this performance psychology foundation of applied sport psychology (Thompson, Vernacchia, & Moore, 1998).

Differentiating Performance Psychology from other Specialties of Psychology

It is important to distinguish performance psychology from other specialties of psychology. We will compare and contrast performance psychology with exercise and health psychology, clinical and counseling psychology, positive psychology, and consulting psychology. As all of these are subfields within psychology, they will have some overlap and commonalities. However, just because they have these commonalities does not mean they should be grouped together. The distinctions among these subfields (and others) are epitomized in the 54 divisions of APA.

Exercise and Health Psychology

Exercise and sport are differentiated for good reasons. What makes sport something other than exercise is the element of performance and competition. Although exercise may include elements of performance at times (e.g., recreational runners entering road races), there is a qualitative shift when moving from exercise to performance. The clients in these fields are both involved in movement, however, the goals, purposes, and contexts of the movement are quite different. Exercise psychology has as its major goal positive health outcomes (i.e., encouraging the adoption of healthy exercise behaviors or using exercise for health outcomes, including psychological functioning) instead of performance outcomes.

Exercise psychology and sport psychology have been connected due to their inclusion in Physical Education/Kinesiology/Exercise and Sport Science academic programs. Although they may have fit together well historically in terms of developing academic programs, in practice they are distinct fields. Exercise psychology is as much a sub-discipline of health psychology as sport psychology is a sub-discipline of performance psychology.

Clinical and Counseling Psychology

The application of performance psychology shares a great deal with counseling and clinical psychology. This includes key constructs such as building a working alliance, using clinical interviewing skills, and understanding the behavior change process. However, counseling and clinical psychologists use theories of personality development to inform their work, whereas performance psychologists' work should be based on theories of performance excellence. Indeed, trying to contort theories of personality to understand and describe performance has hindered the growth of performance psychology. Thus, the focus of the issues addressed varies significantly. Fortunately, efforts are being made to correct this situation (e.g., Aoyagi & Poczwadowski, 2011; Hays & Brown, 2004; Portenga, 2010).

Generally speaking, counseling psychology focuses on helping people work through normal developmental issues in life, whereas clinical psychology focuses on helping people with serious mental health issues (allowing for some considerable overlap at times). But, as described before, "Doing therapy with a person who happens to be an athlete is not sport psychology" (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010, p. 254). Another general distinction is that performance psychologists often address environmental, organizational,

and systemic issues (e.g., coaches, team dynamics) in addition to working with individuals. Although clinical and counseling psychologists may sometimes work with families and systems, the performance environment requires different roles and responsibilities as practitioners intervene with (and within) multiple levels of organizations. This requires additional training to be competent to work effectively with coaches, teams, and organizations. Despite these differences, the fields of clinical and counseling psychology provide a good foundational basis for a general understanding of people and for the challenges in building a strong working alliance within helping relationships. As described earlier, performance restoration may be vital for many performers as a foundation to performance enhancement.

Positive Psychology

Performance psychology also shares many elements with positive psychology. The main focus of positive psychology is about people finding happiness and meaning in life, which is an important part of developing performance excellence (Balague, 1999). Although important, it is one of many foundational elements and does not address the core issues of performance. Finding happiness and meaning in life do not always equate with optimal performance. Positive psychology is focused on day to day functioning in life. Many of the constructs present in positive psychology textbooks may have a place in a performance psychology textbook, but there is much more to the development and execution of performance KSAs than the discipline of positive psychology addresses.

Consulting Psychology

The Society of Consulting Psychology (Division 13 of APA, 2006) defines consulting as:

a helping relationship that assists people, groups, or organizations in meeting their mission, goals, or objectives. Consultation is typically multi-dimensional, often with multiple concurrent clients and inter-related factors. Consultants can be change agents, facilitators, collaborators or experts in the working relationship with clients. A consultant's work focus includes people, processes, and/or organizational structures (Article I - Name and Purpose, para. 2).

Consulting psychologists typically, but not universally, work in a business context helping people become more productive at their jobs. Performance psychologists often use a consultation model of intervention in addition to individual interventions, however the contexts and issues addressed are typically different. Performance psychologists emphasize the development and execution of KSAs at a discrete time and in a public fashion. Although consulting psychologists may work to help “performance,” this is primarily related to ongoing functioning or productivity, as opposed to the type of discrete performance described earlier. Despite the different issues, the field of consulting psychology has a tremendous amount to offer performance psychology with respect to research and scholarship regarding interventions and ethics.

Implications for Education

Clarifying the definition of the practice of performance psychology has significant implications for educating new professionals and for those experienced psychologists who are seeking to develop ethical levels of competency in performance psychology. Unfortunately, there is currently no clearly articulated training model for applied sport psychology or performance psychology. Undoubtedly there is a need for constant evolution in educational programs to create and incorporate new knowledge and teach

current best practices. Due to the wide variety in training models, too many students graduate underprepared for the profession and must develop their professional skills and abilities through experience instead of systematic educational opportunities.

A clear and distinct definition of the profession of performance psychology highlights the necessary challenge and opportunity to systematically integrate multiple disciplines to properly train future professionals. The training of new sport psychologists should prepare them for the range of issues, interventions, and contexts that are now a part of professional practice. Knowing the basic performance psychology interventions (i.e., the basic mental skills) is a great start, but competent practice requires knowing performance psychology theory and research to make informed choices about interventions applied in a given context (Spruill et al., 2004).

We previously mentioned the need for kinesiology and psychology training, while stating that these labels were inaccurate. Most discussions on competency and training create tension and stall because these labels are misleading. These labels refer to the academic departments where courses are taught, but do not adequately describe the knowledge being taught. Kinesiology programs are invaluable in today's environment because they are almost exclusively where one can learn the psychology of performance and a consulting model of intervention. However, kinesiology programs do not "own" this information. In actuality, the field is relying on kinesiology programs to teach psychology knowledge because too few psychology programs do so. The reality is that this knowledge fits better in psychology programs, even if it has not historically been housed there. If a discipline were to "own" sport psychology or performance psychology, it would be psychology. Kinesiology training is currently a must only to the extent it

remains the only place to get psychology of performance and consulting knowledge and experience. There is nothing inherently unique to the knowledge relevant to sport psychology being taught in kinesiology departments. Thus it is theoretically possible to include the aspects of kinesiology “knowledge” or training relevant to performance psychology completely within a psychology program. Continuing to refer to knowledge or training using the broad labels “kinesiology,” “ESS,” or “psychology” obscures the salient issues and hinders the real discussion that is needed to continue to push the field forward. To further the discussions related to training, and the field, we should talk specifically about the knowledge and training in psychology of performance, consulting, ethics, etc. and no longer make this a kinesiology vs. psychology debate.

Moving away from a simplistic and misleading kinesiology vs. psychology training debate, it seems adequate education for the practice of performance psychology would include developing competence in four general areas:

1. Competence in the psychology of performance (including theories of optimal performance and interventions, coaching and leadership, group and team dynamics, motivation and emotion, and human growth and development),
2. Competence in mental health counseling (e.g., clinical interviewing, developing and maintaining a working alliance, motivational interviewing, facilitating behavior change, multilevel and systemic diagnosis and intervention, and group facilitation), including training and experience that results in eligibility for state licensure,
3. Competence in consulting psychology theories and interventions,

4. Competence in a performance specialty domain (e.g., sport, performing arts, business, high-risk occupations; APA, 2009).

Recognizing that these are merely initial recommendations, we strongly endorse a performance psychology competencies conference similar to Boulder (Baker & Benjamin, 2000), Vail (Fretz, 1974), and Pikes Peak (Knight et al., 2010).

Another vital educational consideration, long overlooked in sport psychology training but fortunately now gaining momentum, is the importance of supervised practicum experiences (Silva, Metzler, & Lerner, 2007). Although experience can sometimes be a great teacher, it is clear that not all experienced practitioners become experts (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Thus experience alone is not sufficient to develop competence (Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988; Kahneman & Klein, 2009). As the old saying goes: Ten years of experience is not the same as one year of experience repeated ten times. Because practitioners vary in their self-awareness, research has shown that professionals' confidence in their clinical knowledge and skill is often unrelated to their actual abilities (Betan & Binder, 2010; Kahneman & Klein, 2009; Overholser, 2010; Rector & Cassin, 2010; Skovholt & Starkey, 2010). Thus, supervision must be a mandatory part of all practitioners' education. As Welfel (2006) notes, "[The APA ethics codes] imply that informal, unstructured approaches to developing new competencies are likely to be insufficient. Professionals seeking to extend their competence to a new area should have a plan consistent with existing standards and committed to a comprehensive understanding of the new area" (p. 51). Welfel goes on to state that supervised experience is a necessary part of this plan, although the amount will vary for each professional.

The importance of ethics in professional practice cannot be stressed enough. Performance psychologists need to have an advanced knowledge of ethics due to the nature of the context in which they often practice (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). Their practice involves multiple roles, boundary crossings, challenges to confidentiality and informed consent, and the allure of the performance environment. As such, performance psychology practitioners need specialized training and insight regarding ethics beyond what is required for traditional therapy (Hays, 2006; Stapleton, Hanks, Hays, & Parham, 2010).

The fields of consulting, military, and rural psychology have much to offer the ethical training of future practitioners. Sufficient ethical training would address such issues as boundaries and dual relationships (e.g., Gottlieb & Younggren, 2009; Gutheil & Gabbard, 1998; Hines, Ader, Chang, & Rundell, 1998; Johnson, Ralph, & Johnson, 2005; Lazarus & Zur, 2002; Moleski & Kiselica, 2005), ethical psychological consultation (e.g., Fuqua & Newman, 2006; Newman, 1993; Newman, Gray, & Fuqua, 1996; Newman, Robinson-Kurpius, & Fuqua, 2002), practice as an embedded or internal consultant (e.g., Bianco, 1985; Block, 1999; Buford, 2004; Frisch, 2001; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1978), and character and fitness issues (e.g., Johnson & Campbell, 2002, 2004).

It is also hoped that the definition of the profession presented in this paper sparks new, integrative, creative theory development in the area of human performance. Researchers and practitioners should collaborate to develop theories of performance that cut across contexts (e.g., Aoyagi & Poczwardowski, 2011; Hays & Brown, 2004; Portenga, 2010). Although there is much research in the literature relevant to human performance, little of it has been captured into coherent, concise theories. Looking at

performance across contexts could include more researchers and ideally more funding opportunities. Performance psychology practice would also benefit from more systematic research into neuropsychological correlates of performance. At present, much of that research is supplied by companies that make neurofeedback equipment; they may have a vested financial interest in the research outcomes that they report.

Implications for Practice

Clarifying the definition of the practice of applied sport psychology also has significant implications for improving the practice of performance psychology. To reiterate, it is clear that although athletes and other performers may need therapy, therapy with an athlete is NOT sport psychology. However, all professionals have job duties beyond just their titles. Ask any Division I coach how much time they actually get to coach! Therefore, being able to provide therapeutic services may be an important part of a sport psychologist's job responsibilities. Indeed, many of the new full-time positions in college athletics or with the United States Olympic Committee require a license to provide psychotherapy. These organizations may need to hire someone with a license for liability reasons or may need traditional therapeutic services in addition to performance psychology services. Thus, performance psychology professionals who have a mental health license will be increasingly well positioned for new jobs in the future.

Furthermore, performance psychology consultants who are competent to address life issues are going to be more effective in more settings with the performers with whom they work. A practitioner who can do performance enhancement and performance restoration can obviously help more people than a practitioner who engages exclusively in one or the other. As stated earlier, if every practitioner were appropriately trained to

have competency in both the psychology of performance and the psychology of personality, then performance psychology would be a more unified, understood, and established discipline and profession.

The definition presented here is congruent with elements of Poczwadowski, Sherman, and Henschen's (1998) model of sport psychology service delivery. They propose that competent practice occurs when interventions are implemented within the framework of a professional philosophy and theory. The proposed definition would insist that practitioners have a clear theory of performance to guide their planning for the scope, type, and organization of interventions (above and beyond their theory of personality). Just teaching the traditional mental skills (e.g., relaxation, concentration, imagery, self-talk, routines, goal setting) would not be considered good practice without an overarching theory as a guide. These mental skills are merely tools. Sometimes they are ineffectively used because they are applied haphazardly and not in the service of deliberate performance planning that addresses specific performance issues.

Performance psychology relies primarily on consulting, teaching, and coaching as interventions. Teaching can be described as "a process of imparting, in a planned systematic way, a specified body of information" (Conoley & Conoley, 1992, p. 4). Coaching is a type of intervention where the aim is to develop a specific skill and the coach uses feedback to guide the coachees' training or practice. Consulting has been defined as "assisting consultees to develop attitudes and skills that will enable them to function more effectively with a client, which can be an individual, group, or organization for whom they have responsibility. Even though the parameters of the consulting relationship in many ways parallel those associated with a therapeutic

relationship....consultation does not focus on the psychological problems of consultees directly” (Brown, Pryzwansky, & Schulte, 2005, p. 6). What all of these interventions have in common is that they are proactive, preventative, future oriented, and focused on skill and knowledge development. Practitioners should have education and supervision in each of these areas of intervention to be competent.

Additionally, the contexts for performance psychology service delivery may vary greatly as compared to a typical psychotherapy practice. A foundation in consulting psychology will help prepare sport psychology professionals to work in the diverse settings in which they are called upon to provide service. Practitioners with this interdisciplinary training will be more readily able to practice in accordance with the clarified definition of applied sport psychology as a sub-focus of performance psychology, i.e., the application of performance psychology principles to athletes as compared with other types of performers.

What Individuals and Organizations Need To Look For In Selecting A Sport & Performance Psychologist

There are a few key questions about which individuals and organizations intending to hire a performance psychologist should ask. They should inquire about the potential candidate’s educational background. The candidate should have explicit training in the psychology of performance. This training should include supervised experiences from a competent sport psychology consultant. Asking about AASP certification can help assess educational background, but as of yet, it is not enough to ensure competency. If a potential employer has concerns about the range of issues that may be presented, checking for mental health licensure would be an important consideration. Word of

mouth and referrals are a good way to get a sense of how the performance psychologist works.

Concluding Thoughts

To resolve ongoing questions regarding the role, purpose, and activities of sport psychologists, and to give structure to the training of sport psychology professionals, we proposed definitions of performance psychology and sport psychology. We hope these definitions bring clarity and unification to the profession of performance psychology. What is required for the health and development of the field is an adequate pool of performance psychology professionals who have received appropriate training in the psychology of performance, the psychology of personality, and consulting skills, and who are capable of facilitating both performance enhancement and performance restoration for individual athletes, teams, and sport organizations.

Footnotes

¹The Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) changed its name in 2007 to the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP).

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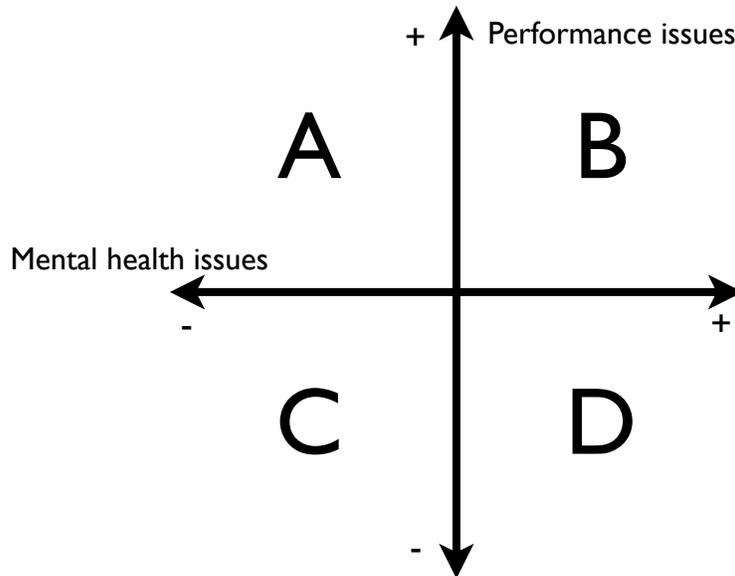


Figure 1. Performance Issues vs. Mental Health Issues. Performance and mental health issues, although sometimes interrelated, can be categorized as dichotomous issues. Performance issues are those psychological processes or characteristics that interfere with the development or execution of the knowledge, skills, or abilities needed to consistently perform at the performer's upper range of capability. Mental health issues are those psychological or behavioral issues that interfere with a person's well-being. Quadrant A represents a person with performance, but not any mental health, issues. Quadrant B represents a performer working through both performance and mental health issues. Quadrant C represents a performer currently functioning without either type of issue. Lastly, Quadrant D represents a performer with only mental health issues and would thus benefit solely from traditional counseling

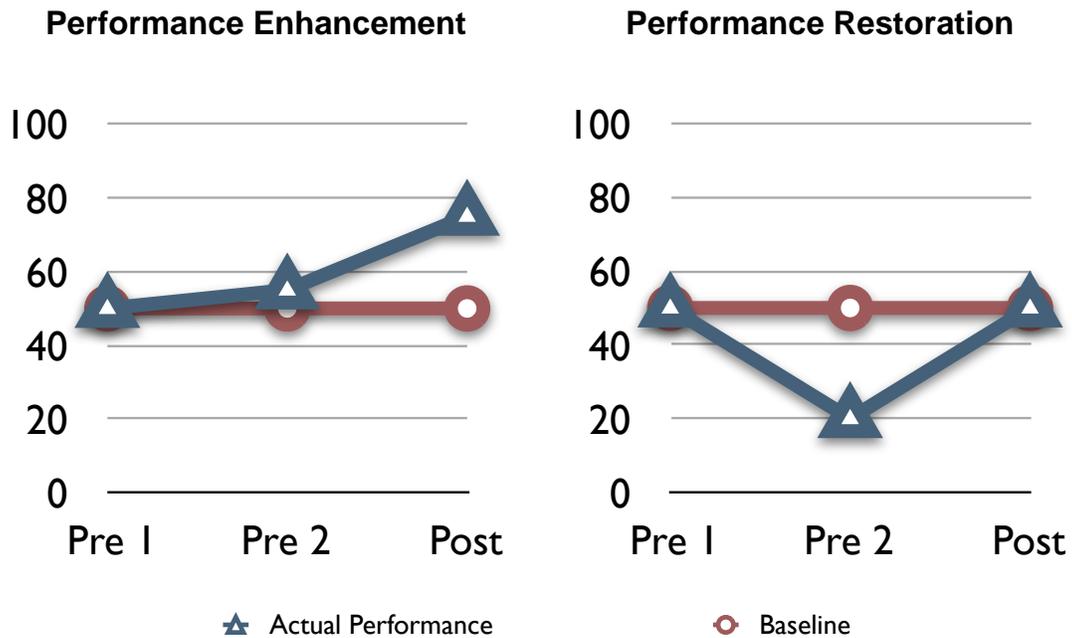


Figure 2. Performance Enhancement vs. Performance Restoration. Performance enhancement entails helping a performer improve their capability to perform above their baseline level. This is evident in the graph as the performer's actual performance improves from pre-intervention to post. Performance restoration entails helping a performer remove barriers to allow them to return to performing at an already established level. This is evident in the graph as the performer's actual performance only returns to baseline from the drop in performance at time Pre 2. Thus, the intervention has not increased baseline performance, but merely restored performance from a decrement to the original baseline level.