

Chapter 19

Taking the Field: An Introduction to the Field of Sport Psychology

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Chapter Overview

Sport psychology is a vibrant and growing field that examines the psychological factors that affect sport performance, as well as how sport affects the psychological outcomes of participants. This chapter is meant as a brief introduction into the field. To begin, we will define sport psychology and concisely discuss the different subfields within the larger academic discipline. Second, we will give a brief history of the field from first studies to the current state of research and practice. Next, we will talk about the roles that sport psychology professionals have in both the performance enhancement domain, as well as providers of mental health services. To complement this focus on the bifurcation of the field, we will discuss the jobs and careers in sport psychology along with the pathways necessary to obtain those jobs, with a specific focus on issues related to sport psychology professionals in the United States.

Introduction to the Field

The psychological components of sport have been something of interest for people dating back to the late 19th century. Understanding how people perform in unique sport situations, exploring athletes' state- and trait-like psychological factors, and helping coaches be effective in their techniques are all areas of early focus for the field. Sport psychology is defined as the scientific study of people and their behaviors in sport settings and the application of that knowledge (Gill et al., 2017). This definition is noticeably broad and does not put the academic discipline of sport psychology into a narrow area. It is worth noting in the definition that sport psychology involves both people (and all that is nested within people) and the behaviors that people engage in during sport participation.

Previous scholars have noted that there are two main objectives for studying sport psychology. The first objective is to understand how psychological factors might impact sport performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). An example research project for the first objective might be concerned with how anxiety affects an athlete before a game or how motivation affects the practice habits of elite athletes. Both of these example projects frame a psychological mechanism as a potential antecedent to the sport experience. In both cases, a researcher might hypothesize that the antecedent affects sport performance. The second objective of sport psychology is understanding how being an active participant in sport might affect an individuals' psychological well-being or health (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Researchers who study this objective could be concerned with issues like how sport participation might influence character development in athletes. Researchers could also be interested in examining if high levels of sport participation lead to burnout in athletes. In this case, sport participation is the antecedent and the various psychological consequences can be viewed as the outcomes.

Many subfields have developed in sport psychology over the decades the field has been in existence. Overall, the subfields still fit the guiding definition of sport psychology but are more refined in the research questions that might be studied. We present the subfields below not as exclusive categories, but as general guiding groupings.

Social Aspects of Sport Psychology

Sport rarely happens in a social vacuum. Even individual sports have coaches, officials, training partners, and competitors. This constant social impact is something that researchers have studied and continue to explore today. Some examples of research in the social aspects of sport psychology include working to understand under which social conditions athletes in relay teams work harder or have effort losses in elite competition (Hüffmeier et al., 2017). Researchers interested in social psychology of sport could also be focused on how the social ties between members of sports teams affect the social identity that individual athletes experience (Graupensperger et al., 2020). There are many exciting topics in this text that cover the social aspects of sport participation in Chapter 25 (Cotterill & Fransen, 2021), Chapter 26 (Kim et al., 2021), and Chapter 30 (Rumbold & Didymus, 2021).

Motivation in Sport Psychology

The attempt to understand sport motivation has been one of the driving factors behind the development of sport psychology as a field. Entire textbooks are dedicated to understanding the motivation of athletes under the unique condition of sport (see Roberts & Treasure, 2012). Motivation research is often rooted in theoretical perspectives such as social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984), and many others. There is some cross-theoretical research that is conducted, but it is less common than studies that focus on extensions of existing research paradigms. Motivation could be viewed as an outcome of other individual and group level processes as Pacewicz and colleagues (2020) demonstrated with their recent work. Motivation can also be examined as an antecedent to other variables related to sport

participation. Motivation also has negative components like perfectionism and burnout that are often studied from the sporting lens. See Chapters 27 (Hepler et al., 2021) and Chapter 28 (Madigan, 2021) for more information about motivation in sport psychology.

Individual Differences in Sport Psychology

There are a variety of individual differences that could affect sports performance. Some of the key variables to consider could be self-presentation anxiety, core self-perceptions (e.g., self-confidence, personality constructs, or self-esteem), or perfectionism. Some of the listed variables and concepts overlap with material in the applied sport psychology section, clinical sports psychology section, and the motivation in sport psychology section. However, some researchers might view these variables as stand-alone research concepts that are nested within individuals. For example, Hill and colleagues (2018) conducted a meta-analytic review evaluating the multidimensional perfectionism model in sport. In this text, individual differences are covered in Chapter 22 (Englert et al., 2021) and Chapter 29 (Didymus et al., 2021).

Psychological Skills in Sport Psychology (Applied Sport Psychology)

There are many journals and books that are dedicated to the understanding of psychological skills that athletes use to maximize their sport performance. Research in this area focuses on skills such as self-talk, imagery, goal setting, arousal management, and a host of others. The field typically conceptualizes these skills as foundational for performing well in a sporting context. The *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *The Sport Psychologist*, *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, and the *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* are all popular peer-reviewed journals where new research in applied sport psychology is published. There are many books that are focused on applied issues in sport psychology, however, the most impressive is likely *Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance* by Jean Williams and Vikki Krane (2021). In this text, Chapter 20 (Rymal et al., 2021), Chapter 22 (Englert et al., 2021), Chapter 23 (Karageorghis et al., 2021), and Chapter 33 (Moyle, 2021) deal with applied issues in sport psychology.

Youth Development and Sport Psychology

Youth sport is a common area of interest for sport psychology researchers. In the United States alone, an estimated 45 million children participate in youth sports each year. Therefore, scholars should spend time researching the impacts that youth sport has on participants due to the broad reach of sport in society. In sport psychology, there has been research that focuses on early youth sport specialization, the development of leadership skills in youth, youth sport dropout, and positive youth development in sport. A great example of research in this area comes from DiSanti and Erickson (2020) who took a critical look at youth sport specialization. Positive youth development is another common research interest for researchers who study the role that sport has in the development of youth sport participants (Camiré et al., 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008). Some chapters in this text that cover issues related to youth physical activity and development include Chapter 8 (Peyer, 2021), Chapter 24 (Mills et al., 2021) and Chapter 25 (Cotterill & Fransen, 2021).

Clinical Sport Psychology

An increasing number of jobs in the area of sport psychology are requiring that you be a licensed mental health professional. Due to the increase in clinical issues in sport focused on athlete mental health, there is also an increasing amount of research published on clinical issues in sport psychology. The *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* and *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology* are two journals that are often read by clinical professionals. These journals focus heavily on the practical recommendations, psychological skills training, substance abuse, depression, and therapeutic strategies

that can be used by mental health professionals working in a sports domain. See Chapters 29 and 30 for issues related to stress (Didymus et al., 2021; Rumbold & Didymus, 2021).

Table 19.1
Common Academic Journals Focused on Sport Psychology Topics

Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology	Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology
Frontiers in Psychology: Movement Science and Sport Psychology	Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology
International Journal of Sport Psychology	Journal of Sport Psychology in Action
International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology	Psychology of Sport and Exercise
International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology	Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology
Journal of Applied Sport Psychology	The Sport Psychologist

Note. This is not an exhaustive list, but a good primer for those interested in seeing the newest developments in sport psychology.

On the Shoulders of Giants: A Brief History of the Field

Sport psychology as an academic discipline became formalized around the 1960s with the development of organizations supporting the dissemination of research, the creation of certifications, and the development of more educational training opportunities (Benjamin & Green, 2009). However, before development of the key organizations, there were many people who were creating the research foundation that helped form the field over time. Below we will discuss the history of the field starting in the late 19th century, moving through time to modern day sport psychology.

Early History

The earliest studies in sport psychology dated back to the 1890s where many psychologists were interested in the unique psychological components associated with sporting behaviors (Benjamin & Green, 2009). American psychologist Edward W. Scripture, French physician Philippe Tissie, and American psychologist Norman Triplett all published studies in the 1890s focused on sporting behaviors, broadly speaking. Scripture was interested in understanding reaction times in expert versus novel fencers. Tissie had an interest in the psychological connection between extreme endurance events and experimented with a field cyclist riding for 24 hours to understand the connection between psychology and the ability to endure extreme fatigue (Benjamin & Green, 2009). The most famous of the three is likely Triplett, who is often cited as the earliest researcher in sport psychology (which is not entirely true as Tissie and Scripture published before him). Triplett had cyclists ride alone and then in groups to determine if people worked harder in the presence of others. Triplett is often credited as uncovering the first evidence for social facilitation using his studies, however, recent research has shed light on some flaws behind the reasoning of Triplett’s study being the first sport psychology study and evidence that it might not be the study that provided the first evidence for social facilitation (Martin, 2019). Early researchers around this time were starting to lay the groundwork for what would come in the following

decades. However, early research had issues with dissemination of results. There were no conferences, easily accessible journals, or Twitter accounts to follow at the time. There were also issues with limited numbers of schools where you could get an education in anything resembling sport psychology. Kinesiology programs did not yet exist, as most early programs were solely for physical educators. Disseminating the knowledge about the work these early scholars were doing was quite difficult, and likely stunted some of the early growth of the field.

Coleman Griffith

Coleman Griffith is considered to be the father of North American sport psychology. He was one of the first North American academics to build a laboratory (at the University of Illinois) that was focused on understanding the role of psychology in the sport experience (Green, 2009). Griffith did consulting work for the Chicago Cubs and the University of Notre Dame's famous head coach Knute Rockne. Interestingly, Griffith spent a lot of his time writing the results of his experiments in periodicals that were specifically for practitioners. He did write for traditional scientific journals as well, but appeared to enjoy communicating to coaches. Griffith also wrote many books including *Psychology of Coaching* (1926) and *Psychology and Athletics* (1928). Unfortunately, Griffith's lab was shut down by the university in 1932 either due to the Great Depression or an issue with football at the university no longer trusting the work he was conducting (Green, 2009). Griffith moved to an administrative position and then to the Chicago Cubs as a consultant.

Coleman Griffith never trained any graduate students to continue lines of research similar to his. Traditionally, in academia, faculty members train graduate students to go on to careers as faculty members. This system of training allows for senior faculty to foster and develop young scholars to continue similar lines of research. However, Griffith did not do this due to a variety of constraints (Green, 2009).

Other Key Early Figures

Edward W. Scripture built an early research program at Yale University that was focused on the reaction time of athletes. His early research was published in an in-house journal that was often not distributed widely and was no longer circulated after 1902 (Goodwin, 2009). Another trailblazing figure in the development of sport psychology as an academic discipline was Dorothy Hazeltine Yates. Yates was a professor of psychology at San Jose State University in the 1940s. During this era, there was focus on developing psychological strategies that would help athletes perform at high levels. One of the most popular psychological strategies at the time was learning skills associated with relaxation, as it was believed to be a main factor of athletic success (Kornspan, 2009). Yates also taught relaxation and self-regulation skills to military aviators (Kornspan, 2009). This application of sport psychology to another area was perhaps one of the first forays into a field that is today known as performance psychology.

Up until the 1960s the field was very fragmented, and specific training was sparse if available at all. As we are about to see, the field changed rather quickly during the same time that training programs started to become more readily available and conferences and organizations started to serve as homes for scholars in the field of sport psychology. As you could expect, there was little before the 1960s in terms of unifying theory or overarching ideas the scholars were working on. The work that was being conducted was quite siloed and this likely hindered the development of the field.

The 1960s–1980s

The development of physical education programs in the United States and sport science programs around the world led to further specialization of scholars who were interested in conducting research that broadly fit the definition of psychology in sport settings. The creation of sport psychology occurred when faculty broke away from motor learning and started focusing more on issues surrounding

social aspects of sport, motivation, athletic performance, and personality factors. This new set of research interests provided scholars the opportunity to explore new horizons of psychology specific to the sport domain. Many scholars started to gain interest in the research questions more related to sport psychology, which led to the formation of many conferences and organizations which still stand today. In 1965, the First World Congress of Sport Psychology was organized in Rome. At this initial meeting, the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) was founded. Both the Congress and ISSP are still in existence today with the World Congress occurring every four years.

Shortly after the development of the World Congress and ISSP, there was an uptick in the number of conferences and organizations that were started. In 1966, the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA) was formed, and they held their first conference in 1967. Also in 1967, the British Society of Sports Psychology and the French Society of Sports Psychology were formed (Eklund & Tenebaum, 2014). In 1969, the European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) was formed, and the membership quickly elected a Bulgarian named Ema Geron as their first president. Dr. Geron worked as a full professor at universities in Bulgaria and Israel and was considered a stabilizing force for sport psychology in Europe (Tenenbaum et al., 2011). It was also during this time that more literature became available for people interested in the field of sport psychology. Bruce Ogilvie and Thomas Tutko wrote the book *Problem Athletes and How to Handle Them* (Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966). Ogilvie is considered a pioneer in North American applied sport psychology and was actively working with athletes as a consultant during this time. John Lawther published his book *Sport Psychology* in 1972 making the field more visible and increasing interest in the academic discipline. Rainer Martens published *Social Psychology and Physical Activity* in 1975 creating specific texts targeted at those interested in studying and understand sport psychology. In 1979, the *Journal of Sport Psychology* (which is now *the Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*) was founded and published for the first time. There were also an increasing number of consultants working with professional and international level teams including Richard Suinn (United States), Brent Rushall (Canada), Antonli Alekseev (Russia), and Miroslav Vanek (Czechoslovakia; Eklund & Tenebaum, 2014). To sum up this time period, there were more opportunities to communicate sport psychology information via conferences and journals, and there were more people becoming interested in a new academic subdiscipline which led to much of the growth we see over the next few decades. There was also an increase in sport psychology consultants working with athletes during this time.

1980s–2000s

In 1980, Dorothy Harris was hired as the first ever resident sport psychologist for the United States Olympic Committee. Harris was a pioneer in the field of sport psychology as a full professor at Pennsylvania State University. She helped create graduate training in sport psychology at Pennsylvania State University, constructed an impressive line of research, was the first woman to win a Fulbright scholarship in sport psychology, and the first woman president of NASPSPA (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). During this time, journals continue to be created for the dissemination of knowledge in sport psychology. Those journals include *The Sport Psychologist* (1986), and *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (1989).

Organizations during this time continued to develop focusing on supporting research in sport psychology including, Division 47 (Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology) in the American Psychological Association (APA; 1986), British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES; 1984), the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP; 1986), the Spanish Federation of Sport Psychology (1987), the Australian Psychological Association creates a specialization in Sport Psychology (1988), and Asian South Pacific Association of Sport Psychology ([ASPASP] 1989; Eklund & Tenenbaum, 2014). The early leaders in these organizations helped promote the field and wrote many of the articles and texts that are often considered foundational readings today.

These organizations also started to discuss the role of a sport psychology professional. AASP created its certified consultant designation. In the United States, there were issues around professional practice ethics for people trained in both psychology and sport sciences. Later in this chapter, we will discuss some of the major training pathways that someone should consider when thinking of becoming a sport psychology professional in the US. The discussion about clinical psychology, sport science training, and the debate about the naming of sport psychology professionals rages during this time period (with many of the debates still largely unresolved).

2000–2020

At the turn of the century, even more journals were developed that focused on sport psychology including *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (2000), *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (2004), the *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* (2010), and *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* (2012). During this time, more universities than ever are offering training in sport psychology.

Opportunities for employment in the field are likely as high as they ever have been. Professional sports teams are hiring sport psychology professionals who are trained in providing mental health services or performance enhancement techniques (sometimes jobs would like a professional trained in both). Universities and colleges are also hiring sport psychology professionals, but they tend to put more stock in professionals who are trained via a mental health route. This distinction is important to understand because there are two major training routes in North American sport psychology. These two routes will be elucidated further later in the chapter. Unfortunately, due to the early divides in the field, and unresolved issues around training there are two clear outcomes of how a sport psychology professional can work in today's field.

Sport psychology during this time is growing around the world. There are universities on most continents that support training in sport psychology. A recent ISSP conference in Seville, Spain drew participants from over 70 countries (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). This worldwide growth in the field is quite exciting, but does bring about many challenges that still need to be addressed in terms of education, training, and job creation.

Women in Sport Psychology

Like most academic disciplines, the story of women scholars has often been overshadowed by their male counterparts. We have already discussed the groundbreaking work of Ema Geron, Dorothy Harris, and Dorothy Yates. In addition to these early scholars, sport psychology has pulled many concepts, ideas, and theories from pre-eminent women scholars in psychology including Carolyn Sherif, Susan Harter, and Carol Dweck (Krane & Whaley, 2010). Many of these scholars' ideas and theories helped advance sport psychology. It is clear that modern sport psychology has been shaped by female scholars.

A thoughtful review of the role of women scholars in sport psychology was conducted by Vicki Krane and Diane Whaley (2010). Early in their paper, they introduced that women scholars have always been present in sport psychology, but they have often been overlooked for a variety of reasons including sexism. The focus of this review was to *re-place* women back into the history of sport psychology. Women scholars have been foundational in the development of many societies that focus on sport psychology and have been presenting at the conferences since their inception (Krane & Whaley, 2010). Dorothy Harris and Jean Williams each authored early texts in applied sport psychology, with the Williams text still being used today (with many updates over the years; Harris & Harris, 1984; Williams & Krane, 2021). Dorothy Harris, Diane Gill, Jean Williams, and Tara Scanlan all were early scholars in sport psychology that presented at early NASPSPA conferences.

Krane and Whaley (2010) also highlighted eight women scholars, nominated by their peers, who

are considered trailblazers in sport psychology. These scholars were a part of a focus group that reflected on their careers, including the challenges of building the field through scholarship and contributions to their professional organizations and universities. This paper highlighted the careers of Joan Duda, Deborah Feltz, Diane Gill, Penny McCullagh, Carole Oglesby, Tara Scanlan, Maureen Weiss, & Jean Williams (Krane & Whaley, 2010). Their contributions to the field as of 2010 included "...advising 157 masters, 147 doctoral, and 11 postdoctoral students; at least 500 refereed journal articles, 20 textbooks, 200 book chapters, and well over 800 national and international conference presentations; President of 9 national or international organizations (21 total presidencies among them); and editors of *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (JSEP), *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (JASP), *Research Quarterly for Sport and Exercise* (RQES), and *Quest*." (Krane & Whaley, 2010, p. 361, italics added). This contribution to the field does not just manifest in terms of quantity, but these scholars' work is known for its high level of quality. It is important to also consider that these numbers were as of a decade ago and most of these scholars are still active researchers today.

Although the Krane and Whaley review of trailblazers in sport psychology ended before 2010, there are still women scholars currently pushing the frontiers of scientific advancement in sport psychology. Joan Duda has been cited by scholars in the sport sciences with over 45,000 citations in academic articles and book chapters! Professor Duda has also served as the President of the European College of Sport Science, which is an organization that promotes multi- and interdisciplinary research in the sport and exercise sciences. She is not alone in her contributions to the field. Gabriele Wulf is a highly cited scholar in the field of sport psychology and motor learning, and Maria Kavussanu is the editor-in-chief of *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, a leading journal and official journal of Division 47 of the American Psychological Association. While it is near impossible to reduce an academic career to a single metric, it is evident that women have a central role in the current state of sport psychology.



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It is clear that women have had a strong hand in the development of the field of sport psychology. Without the contributions of these scholars (and many more not listed here), our field would not be what it is today. Moving forward, we should continue to look for other voices from

underrepresented minority groups who have not been as visible in the field including people of color, individuals with disabilities, individuals from countries who do not have strong academic institutional support, and others who have not been heard from before. These unheard voices can only make our field stronger as we continue moving forward.

A Divide in the Field: Performance Enhancement vs. Mental Health Counseling

With the growth of sport psychology as a field, there have been new divides in professional practice roles. There are two main roles that sport psychology professionals can hold: performance enhancement or mental health counseling. In this section of the chapter, we will provide two short case studies that demonstrate some of the key differences between performance enhancement and mental health counseling.

Riley's high school volleyball team is tied 13 to 13 in the final set of their match. They cannot give up a point and must score twice in a row to win. The importance of this match is very clear to everyone, and it has been talked about all week. Riley's team will advance to playoffs for the first time in school history if they are able to come away with this win on their home court. The high stakes of this competition draws a large crowd. The noise in the gym is deafening and there is a constant buzz of excitement from the fans. By chance, Riley is in position to potentially win or lose the match with what could be the final serves. Riley rotates into position to serve and feels sudden increased shoulder tension, sweaty palms, and has some difficulty breathing. Riley's heart is beating faster and harder than normal, and the idea of unsuccessfully executing these serves becomes an overwhelming thought. Unfortunately, Riley's mechanics appear to be interrupted and the serve is rushed resulting in the ball going straight into the net. Riley does not walk away with the match winning points, and the team goes on to lose.

In this scenario, we see that the pressure of this big moment got the best of Riley who was not adequately prepared to handle it. Athletes like Riley benefit from applied sport psychology services equipping them with the skills needed to increase their chances of performing optimally. This is an example of when a performance enhancement model of delivery would be most appropriate. A sport psychology professional with a performance enhancement background could help Riley with managing arousal levels and concentration. The goal with performance enhancement is to help athletes like Riley to be able to perform close to the top of their ability levels more consistently, especially in important moments. The psychological factors that can influence performance vary from athlete to athlete and no two experiences are the same. The next scenario also presents a decline in performance but you will notice the source of the psychological stress is different.

Sam has always been a highly competitive soccer player who has been with the same club team for five very successful years. This season is an important one as Sam hopes to be recruited to play college soccer. As a consistently high performing player and a leader on the team, it is no surprise that Sam enters the season with confidence. Early in the season, coaches were suggesting that this confidence was "visible". This confidence and previous history as a quality player contributed in part to a promising start to the season. After a few successful weeks of training and competition, coaches begin to notice a significant change in Sam. That visible confidence has disappeared, and Sam appears lethargic, unfocused, and more reserved than normal. These behaviors continue and a decrease in Sam's performance is evident. One day after practice the coaches overhear Sam's teammates discussing that Sam is having trouble sleeping, struggling in school, and withdrawn during social events. This all seems completely out of character. There is a growing concern by Sam's coaches and teammates that Sam will miss out on the opportunity to play soccer in college if help is not provided soon.

In this scenario, it is unlikely that Sam's decline in performance can be credited to something happening within sport. Rather, it appears that something outside of soccer and unrelated to the team

may be taking a toll and help is needed. Sport psychology services would benefit athletes like Sam as well, but the approach to providing support would be different. Sam's needs likely require more of a therapeutic approach or mental health counseling to address the unknown issue affecting performance and behavior across contexts. We provide further distinctions between performance enhancement and mental health counseling approaches to providing sport psychology services in the following section.

Understanding the Performance Enhancement vs. Mental Health Counseling Delivery Models

The development of sport psychology as an applied profession has involved establishing a balance between integrating core principles from diverse disciplines while also distinguishing itself from those same fields. This effort, however, has led to some confusion regarding the services provided by sport psychology practitioners. People tend to think of sport psychology services in one of two ways, namely (a) as a psychological aid to enhance athletic performance or (b) a therapeutic resource to address mental health concerns of athletes. These delivery models will be referred to as *performance enhancement* and *mental health counseling*, respectively. In this chapter, we offer simple distinctions between performance enhancement and mental health counseling, differentiate between their respective procedures of practice, and highlight how these models of delivery may realistically operate within sport.

Performance Enhancement

The primary goal of sport psychology from a performance enhancement perspective is to help athletes and performers build psychological and emotional skills that can optimize their experiences by consistently performing in the upper range of their capabilities and more thoroughly enjoying the overall performance process (Hays, 2006; Portenga et al., 2017). The performance enhancement model involves implementing systematic and consistent psychological skills training to address a series of psychological factors that account for fluctuations in performance and experience quality. Such psychological skills may include enhancing sport confidence, improving focus and concentration, regulating emotion and arousal, and maintaining motivation and commitment. The techniques used by applied professionals can target individual or even group needs by educating and implementing strategies such as self-talk, energy management, imagery, goal setting, and team building. Psychological skills training is valuable to many and can be provided to a number of diverse individuals and organizations within sport and other performance contexts (e.g., athletes, coaches, officials, soldiers, musicians). Ultimately, these practitioners hope to provide enough training so the performer is able to self-regulate and manage their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Now that the objectives, procedures of practice, and populations who benefit from a performance model of applied sport psychology have been briefly identified, we can apply this knowledge to our previous example where Riley struggles in a big moment. Following the conclusion of the season, Riley makes the decision to see an applied sport psychology consultant. Meetings with this practitioner help Riley recognize key signs of heightened arousal that lead to suboptimal performance (e.g., increased heart rate, intrusive thoughts, disrupted breathing pattern). With the knowledge that these things need to be managed, Riley and the consultant spend time working on key strategies. For example, the two may focus on self-talk techniques to address the negative thoughts Riley experiences or breathing exercises to manage Riley's heart rate and other physiological responses in high pressure moments. In working consistently with an applied sport psychology consultant, Riley is now more equipped to manage challenging moments in a match.

The description provided and application to Riley's scenario should demonstrate that the performance enhancement model is more of a consulting or educational model with a specific focus on performance issues (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). Performance enhancement is not concerned with assessing, diagnosing, and addressing mental health difficulties even if they disturb an athletes'

performance. In fact, most sport psychology practitioners following a performance enhancement model of service are not qualified to attend to these concerns. These mental health concerns are the focus of clinical or counseling psychologists (i.e., licensed mental health providers). Just like athletes or performers need help managing psychological performance factors, they may also need mental health support to enhance their general well-being and quality of life.

Mental Health Counseling

Broadly speaking, the term *mental health counseling* in this chapter refers to helping people work through normal developmental life issues and/or serious mental health issues and disorders (Portenga et al., 2012). An individual does not have to meet the full criteria for a particular disorder to qualify for mental health support, but rather experience significant distress or impairment in their life. Such challenges can affect anyone, including athletes and performers, but mental health counseling is not specific to a particular population. Serious mental health concerns licensed professionals address can include grief, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, and personality disorders. Mental health counseling professionals differ from performance enhancement experts in regard to how they deliver their services, who they work with, and their ultimate goals. A performance enhancement professional will often work with individuals as well as groups of people in a variety of settings (e.g., locker rooms, training rooms, on the field), and the structure and timing of these sessions tends to vary (Andersen et al., 2001). These individuals may attend practice and training, sit on the sidelines during competitions, and even travel with the team. The more traditional clinical nature of mental health counseling contributes to a more rigid form of delivery that tends to be restricted to work with a single individual for an hour in a private office setting (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; McCann, 2005).

When working with athletes and performers, it can be challenging to determine when referral to licensed mental health professionals is necessary. Considering appropriate action steps for Sam's scenario may add further clarity. The different people who have observed Sam's change in behavior clearly have concerns that something serious is causing distress and ultimately impairing performance. Sam's coaches intervene and recommend Sam see the team's "mental coach". They likely make this recommendation assuming all sport psychology professionals provide mental health care, but the individual they consult with only provides performance enhancement services. Sam and the practitioner meet anyway, because neither is fully aware of Sam's needs. At the conclusion of initial meeting, Sam and the sport psychology practitioner decide it may be best to refer Sam to a licensed mental health practitioner who can provide appropriate care. This decision was made because Sam's prolonged negative psychological state is disruptive in a number of life domains and the source of the issue is not a sport-related psychological factor. The sport psychology practitioner suspects Sam may be experiencing depression and is not qualified to work with athletes on mental health issues such as this. Fortunately, Sam is able to meet with the licensed mental health professional for an assessment and obtains the appropriate treatment needed.

In many ways, performance enhancement needs and mental health difficulties can be challenging to separate as both have a place within sport and can be present simultaneously. Although the two may overlap in sport and performance settings, it is still necessary performance enhancement and mental health counseling professionals understand the limits of their expertise in order to remain ethical in their practice (see AASP Ethics Code below; Association for Applied Sport Psychology, 2011). The AASP ethics code provides general principles and ethical standards for AASP members, but this ethics code is not universally accepted worldwide. It is worthwhile to search the ethics codes specific to the country where consultants practice. There are, however, some practitioners who have formal education and training in sport psychology and clinical or counseling psychology and are qualified to deliver performance enhancement as well as mental health counseling services. In this chapter, those professional are referred to as *clinical sport psychology practitioners*. These individuals can offer much

broader services as they are able to assess, diagnose, and address mental health difficulties while also implementing psychological skill training programs (Aoyagi et al., 2012). However, far fewer practitioners are qualified to provide services in performance enhancement and mental health counseling. Thus, current and future practitioners must understand some of the most basic distinctions between these two models so they may act within the boundaries of their professional competencies.

While some of the information presented in this section will apply to other territories, many of the issues surrounding practitioner roles and protected titles are specific to the United States. In summary, there exists two primary groups of practitioners in the United States with distinct training and professional competencies who provide different psychological services to athletes and performers, specifically in the United States. While some of the information presented in this section will apply to other territories, these issues around protected titles are specific to the United States. To confuse matters further, both groups of practitioners share the terms “sport psychology” to label what they do. However, it is important to note that there is legal protection around the title of “psychologist”. Only those with counseling and clinical training and licensure may use it, and practitioners trained exclusively in performance enhancement are unable to legally use the title of “sport psychologist”. This is why we see various alternative titles within the profession (e.g., mental performance coach). Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) distinguish performance enhancement from mental health counseling by stating, “Doing therapy with a person who happens to be an athlete is not sport psychology” (p. 254). Those who follow the performance enhancement model of practice utilize an educational approach to help athletes and performers reach optimal engagement and performance success. In many instances, these individuals are not trained from a counseling or clinical perspective which adds limits to their services. On the other hand, those who align with the mental health counseling model deliver more therapeutic focused work for people (some of whom may be athletes) and have received training in more traditional psychological disciplines. Without the aforementioned knowledge about these models of delivery, it is unclear who is qualified to provide particular services. While the field is continuing to develop and address this confusing issue, it is important to understand the current distinction.

Table 19.2
Association for Applied Sport Psychology Ethics Code

Principle A – Competence
AASP members maintain the highest standards of competence in their work. They recognize the boundaries of their professional competencies and the limitations of their expertise... They provide only those services and use only those techniques for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience.
Ethical Standard #2 – Competence
(a) AASP members represent diverse academic and professional backgrounds. These different training histories provide different competencies. Those trained in clinical and counseling psychology must be aware of potential limitations in their sport science competencies. AASP members trained in the sport sciences must be aware of their limitations in clinical and counseling psychology. Individuals from different training backgrounds must deliver services, teach, and conduct research only within the boundaries of their competence.

Note. This Ethics code is based in large part on the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and code of conduct (*American Psychologist*, 1992, V47, #12, pp.1597-1611).

Jobs and Careers in Sport Psychology

Opportunities for careers in sport psychology have seen significant growth in recent decades. However, the field of sport psychology is unlike many others in that there is not a prescribed career path everyone follows. Professionals with sport psychology backgrounds hold a variety of positions with different titles across a number of settings. This level of professional diversity in the field can be difficult to navigate for those who do not already find themselves within this unique professional network. The diversity of careers available is largely a function of education and training. Therefore, we will briefly introduce different jobs and careers in sport psychology and the steps it takes to acquire such positions.

Prior to exploring specific employment opportunities, it is important to briefly acknowledge that the field of sport psychology has research and applied components. These components are distinct from one another but also integrate and influence each other in a manner that continues to push the field forward. Research provides the field with scientifically backed theories and principles that shape the work done in performance settings by applied practitioners. The systematic application of techniques informed by research often highlight knowledge gaps that warrant further exploration. It is necessary for us to acknowledge these components and the reciprocal nature of their contributions because they are what shape typical job opportunities in the field. Thus, career types in the field of sport psychology are often characterized by applied or research responsibilities and occasionally both. One's chosen career path will depend on academic history and various experiences in disciplines associated with sport psychology.

Academic Training in Sport Psychology

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the field of sport psychology has links to the broader sport science and psychology academic disciplines. Understanding human behavior in sport and performance settings and the application of that knowledge requires that future professionals in the field acquire training in various areas of specialization within sport sciences and psychology. These include but are not limited to biomechanics, physiology, motor development and control, sociology, counseling, and educational psychology. The academic path to a professional career in sport psychology depends largely on individual aspirations but will typically involve undergraduate and graduate studies.

The academic training one receives will move from broad foundational knowledge to more narrow and tailored training. It may come as no surprise that earning a bachelor's degree in health or sport sciences, kinesiology, or psychology will provide high quality foundational knowledge necessary for a successful future career in the field. Those who choose to major in one of the aforementioned topics and minor in another may even experience a greater benefit. For example, one may choose to major in psychology and minor kinesiology or vice versa. This combination of educational programs is not absolutely necessary as many students with unique undergraduate experiences are admitted to and successfully perform in sport psychology master's programs. Rarely do students receive extensive sport psychology-specific education at the undergraduate level, and obtaining a master's degree in the area is needed for future professional success. Earning a master's degree in sport psychology enables people to begin providing applied sport psychology services and may also train them for more advanced research at the doctoral level. Earning a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in sport psychology is not a requirement in the field, but many people choose to pursue the degree for a variety of reason. If someone is interested in providing psychological and mental health services to athletes full-time, then they likely pursue a PhD, Doctor of Psychology (PsyD), or Doctor of Education (EdD) in counseling or clinical psychology. Alternatively, if an individual is interested in conducting research and teaching, then a PhD in sport psychology would be the proper path to travel. Occasionally the educational process does not stop there and some complete a postdoc or residency. This may be a requirement of a clinical or counseling program or a choice made by the individual because they believe it will advance their knowledge, skills,

and abilities. This brief breakdown of academic stepping stones is by no means a comprehensive one, and those interested in future sport psychology studies should connect with professionals in the field and conduct thorough research of programs prior to making decisions.

Jobs and Careers in Sport Psychology

In this chapter, we discuss four general categories of jobs and careers for those with a background in sport psychology: (a) applied sport psychology practitioner, (b) clinical sport psychology practitioner, (c) physical activity and health practitioner (non-sport psychology professional), and (d) academic sport psychology professional. Aside from providing details about the responsibilities of these respective positions, we will also discuss specific examples of current employers when appropriate. Finally, the more difficult realities of pursuing these various careers will be mentioned as will insight into how to successfully find, apply for, and earn desired positions (also see Chapter 33; Moyle, 2021).

Previous research has documented that upcoming professionals in the field of sport psychology tend to be initially interested in a career goal that focuses specifically on working directly with athletes providing applied services (Andersen et al., 1997; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Applied positions like these are referred to by a number of names (e.g., sport psychology consultant, mental coach, mental conditioning coach, mental performance coach, mental skills trainer), but the title *applied sport psychology practitioner* will be used to encompass the variety of existing titles. The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP), defines applied practitioners as those who are trained in sport and exercise and provide individual or group counseling focused on performance-related issues. Ultimately, the goal of applied sport psychology practitioners is to help athletes optimize their sport experiences by consistently performing in the upper range of their capabilities and more thoroughly enjoying the overall sport performance process (Portenga et al., 2017). This is achieved by extending theory into the field and applying sport psychology principles to educate sport personnel (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents, fitness professionals; AASP, n.d.). Applied sport psychology practitioners use systematic psychological skills training to help improve performance. A focus on the use of these skills to address *performance enhancement* and not *mental health* distinguishes these positions from clinical sport psychology practitioners.

Many emphasize the term *performance* over *sport* when discussing the role of applied sport psychology practitioners because the core principles of sport psychology are applicable within other performance contexts (Portenga et al., 2017). Those with the appropriate academic education, supervised training, and additional experience working with a variety of performers are capable of working in a number of performance domains (e.g., athletics, performing arts, medicine, military). Believing applied job opportunities only pertains to working within athletics limits where and with whom practitioners can work. This is an important consideration to bear in mind as one seeks out potential job opportunities as listings may not reflect one's training directly. For example, one of largest employers of applied sport psychology practitioners is the United States Military and rarely do graduate students gain applied experience with military personnel as a part of their sport psychology programs. However, applied practitioners working with military personnel utilize many of the same theories and frameworks from sport psychology to apply to high pressure situations that military professionals might face.

While there are more opportunities for applied work than ever before (e.g., Olympic organizations, Major League Baseball, youth sport academies) there are limited chances to obtain highly coveted full-time positions. Therefore, young applied sport psychology practitioners should not expect to obtain a full-time position working with elite athletes and teams merely because they have earned a sport psychology degree. This is a difficult truth for many young practitioners to accept, but one that is necessary to mention (Martin, 2020). Whether it is due to the lack of formal professional positions or personal aspirations, many applied sport psychology professionals take an alternative route into private

practice. This requires quality entrepreneurial skills, high drive, and a deep client base in order to build a successful business working with diverse clients at the organizational, team, or individual level.

Typically, individuals who identify as an applied sport psychology practitioner have completed a sport psychology master's program, occasionally a doctoral program, and their AASP Certified Mental Performance Consultant[®] (CMPC) certification. There are, however, legal limits to one's practice with this education and training. These professionals must be mindful not to assist athletes or performers with mental health-related issues as it exceeds their professional competencies. In fact, when said issues are beyond the scope of the applied sport psychology practitioner's ability referrals are necessary. Such referrals can be made to those who we will refer to as *clinical sport psychology practitioners*. Applied and clinical practitioners may provide similar services by delivering in-depth mental skills training to clients, but clinical practitioners are qualified to address mental health issues within and outside of the client's respective performance domain. With this added professional responsibility comes added educational and licensure requirements. Clinical sport psychology practitioners must develop competence in both sport psychology and counseling or clinical psychology. Therefore, earning master's and doctoral degrees in these areas is necessary. Legally, clinical sport psychology practitioners must also become licensed nationally and within the state they work. The extensive education and training are often deterrents to those interested in pursuing a career in sport psychology, however pursuing clinical or counseling route may offer more diverse employment opportunities within and external to performance contexts.

As previously mentioned, clinical sport psychology practitioners are able to deliver the same sport psychology services to clients as applied practitioners without clinical training. Therefore, similar employment opportunities apply to both types of practitioners. It is common to find clinical practitioners working with athletes in their own private practice, hospital settings, and academic institutions. More advanced education and training in mental health tend to make clinical practitioners more attractive to some employers. Athlete mental health has received greater attention in recent years and continues to be a large concern for many programs and organizations (Chang et al., 2020). As a result, an increasing number of colleges and universities with strong athletic identities have begun to employ licensed clinical sport psychologists. These positions are often housed in college or university athletic departments or counseling centers, but some may be hired as a consultant and work out of their private practice (Connole et al., 2014). Clinical sport psychology practitioners provide services targeting performance enhancement in sport and academics, personal development, and holistic student-athlete wellbeing, including mental health difficulties (Weinberg & Williams, 2010). Positions such as these are a promising advancement in the field, especially for those who express a desire to work in collegiate athletics.

A third type of practitioner is one who would likely not identify "sport psychology professional" as their primary career goal. It is common in the field of sport psychology for individuals with other physical activity- and health-related career intentions to pursue supplementary education in sport psychology. These professionals often include sport coaches, athletic trainers, and strength and conditioning coaches to name a few. The core principles of sport psychology certainly have value in outside disciplines such as these, and it is not uncommon for these professionals to continue their education in graduate sport psychology programs. Typically, the goal of these individuals is to enhance their professional value by building upon the services they provide to their athletes as well as finding answers to questions about the "mental game" they have observed through their various sport-related experiences. For example, a strength and conditioning coach may believe there is something more to learn about the unique relationships between coaches and athletes that will enable her to be more effective when working with a number of athletes with different skill levels.

There are varying perspectives on whether or not it is the ethically responsible for other physical activity and health professionals to provide applied sport psychology services. Again, it depends on the

history of one's education and applied training. For example, if a youth soccer coach chooses to pursue a sport psychology master's degree after years of coaching, then there is very little preventing this coach from doing applied work with athletes. Alternatively, if a coach simply has an interest in sport psychology and does not have a corresponding degree or certification, then they are not properly equipped to replace applied sport psychology practitioners. In short, with adequate education and supervised training these individuals are able to combine core sport psychology concepts with their primary profession.

While there are a number of individuals with diverse applied careers in the field of sport psychology, they only represent a portion of the professional network. Others have career goals of teaching or conducting sport psychology-related research. For these individuals, academic positions as sport psychology faculty members at colleges and universities have been a consistent professional placement (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Williams & Scherzer, 2003). *Academic sport psychology professionals* have typically earned a Ph.D. and have some teaching and research experience from their doctoral studies prior to pursuing an academic career. This professional career path varies by institution type and departmental needs but often involves teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Teaching expectations can include teaching undergraduate and graduate sport psychology and other sport science courses. Research often involves working independently, with a student research team, or with others in the field to conduct sport psychology experiments and studies. Regularly publishing this work in peer reviewed journals is also a common expectation. Service often refers to work within and external to one's institution as well as within their respective research community assisting with projects, committee work, and the review of research. Additionally, advising and mentoring students is commonplace, and often academic sport psychology professionals are training future applied practitioners. Some positions might also include some applied delivery of sport psychology content as well, but these positions have historically been less common. Many academic professionals find great satisfaction in these positions because they are regularly working with students, designing new courses, conducting research projects, and identify as a lifelong learner.

Professional careers in sport psychology are diverse and rewarding, but require specific education and training and can be highly competitive. The academic requirements and training can be extensive but will prepare individuals for a successful future career. There are a few additional suggestions you can consider as you prepare to pursue a career in the field. First, many young professionals may assume they are or are not qualified for a position by simply investigating the title of a job posting. For example, it may mention terms like "mental training", "counseling", "sport psychologist" and these may be somewhat ambiguous at surface level. You should be sure to read the entire posting and use the descriptions of positions above to determine their personal qualification. Second, you should consider becoming members of sport psychology organizations (e.g., AASP, NASPSPA, APA Division 47, BASES, BPS-DSEP). These organizations regularly share employment opportunities and valuable professional development resources. Third, you are also encouraged to begin to develop your professional network by attending academic conferences where a number of diverse individuals with research and applied backgrounds will be present. Building connections with professionals in the field and seeking out personalized mentorship will have value prior to and throughout one's career. Finally, you should aim to gain diverse research and applied experiences working with a variety of individuals. Experience such as this will reflect a greater degree of competence than what is gained through coursework alone. By engaging in experiences related to professional choices, you will likely gain a better view of who you want to be as a professional and this will guide your future educational and training choices.

Table 19.3*Typical Academic and Licensure Pathways for Careers in Sport Psychology*

Career Type	BS/BSc Psychology/ Kinesiology/ Sport Science	MS/MSc Sport & Exercise Psychology	PhD Sport & Exercise Psychology	PhD/PsyD/EdD Counseling or Clinical Psychology	Postdoctoral research or Residency	CMPC [®]
Applied sport psychology practitioner	✓	✓	+	or +		+
Clinical sport psychology practitioner	✓	✓		✓	+	+
Physical activity or health practitioner		✓				+
Academic sport psychology professional	✓	✓	✓	or ✓	+	+

Note. ✓ = typically required for career; + = not necessary but provides an advantage for future employment opportunities

Conclusion

This chapter is meant as a broad introduction to the field of sport psychology. The early stages of this chapter discussed what sport psychology is and the historical development of the field. Additionally, the chapter focused on career paths and training need for specific jobs that are often available with training in sport psychology. Sport psychology is an exciting career that has career pathways in research and consulting. Consulting careers can have a focus in either performance enhancement or mental health concerns. As we noted above, there are many interesting avenues in the research domain that examine the role that psychological factors play in sport performance. The future of sport psychology is exciting and bright, but as we highlighted, early scholars should have a clear focus on the type of work they expect to do and engage with their academic studies with a future career in mind. As you read further chapters in the book, you will receive more detail about specific sub-fields and research areas that have answered many interesting questions. You will also see many future research projects that can be conducted. There are still many unanswered questions that could use the attention of upcoming scholars.

Learning Exercises

1. Define “sport psychology”.
2. Identify three different subdisciplines in sport psychology and create a research question that someone in that subdiscipline might be interested in studying.
3. Discuss the role of women in the development of sport psychology.
4. Who had an influence in the development of early sport psychology? Outline what they contributed.
5. Compare and contrast performance enhancement and mental health counseling in sport psychology.
6. Identify typical careers types in sport psychology.
7. Explain why someone in the field of sport psychology may pursue a PhD, PsyD, or EdD.
8. Identify the career path you are most interested in and explain the typical academic and licensure pathway.
9. Explain why there is confusion around professional practice roles in sport psychology.

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