NCAA Division I Coaches' Perceptions and Preferred Use of Sport Psychology Services: A Qualitative Perspective

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Although there appears to be greater acceptance and use of sport psychology (SP), fully integrating SP consultants and services into college athletic programs has yet to occur in most institutions. Decisions to initiate, continue, or terminate SP services are often made by coaches. Therefore, college coaches with access to services were interviewed to explore their beliefs and expectations about SP service use and how an SP consultant could work effectively with them and their athletes. Using consensual qualitative research methods, three domains in coaches' perceptions of SP consultants were revealed: who they are, what they do, and how they do it. Findings illustrate the importance of being "on the same page" with coaches, developing self-reliant athletes, and making an impact while remaining in a supporting role.

Unlike athletic training and strength and conditioning, mental skills training and sport psychology (SP) services are not yet fully integrated in university athletic settings (Bemiller & Wrisberg, 2011). Between 24% (Wilson, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Sailor, 2009) and 53% (Voight & Callaghan, 2001) of NCAA Division I (DI) athletic departments report using some form of SP consulting, with the majority of SP consultants being employed on a part-time basis. NCAA DI administra-

tors indicate that they value how athletes and coaches handle themselves in and out of their sport (Cooper & Weight, 2011) and recognize the benefits of SP services for performance-related purposes (e.g., dealing with pressure; Wrisberg, Withycombe, Simpson, Loberg, & Reed, 2012). Although NCAA DI administrators' receptivity to SP can influence whether services are integrated into the athletic programs, it can be argued that coaches' perceptions are even more important because of the significant role they hold within sport (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Steinfeldt, Foltz, Mungro, Speight, Wong, & Blumberg, 2011). Consequently, the decision to initiate, continue, or terminate SP services within programs is often made by coaches (Partington & Orlick, 1987a; Voight & Callaghan, 2001). Collegiate coaches indicate that mental skills are important for their team's success and report an interest in having SP services available to them; however, usage rates are relatively modest (e.g., between 20% and 30%; Wrisberg, Loberg, Simpson, Withycombe, & Reed, 2010; Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2007). This indicates an apparent discrepancy between

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importance placed on mental skills and actual use and integration of SP services. Thus, additional information is needed to clearly understand the influence college coaches' knowledge and experiences have on their use of SP services and their attitudes, expectations, and preferences of SP consultation.

Research specifically examining collegiate coaches' perceptions of SP services is limited, but what is available offers some insight into coaches' intentions toward seeking and using SP services. For example, Wrisberg et al. (2010) surveyed 815 NCAA DI head coaches about their perceptions of SP, and the vast majority (89%) reported they were willing to encourage their athletes to use SP services. Though most coaches seemed supportive of including an SP consultant as a full-time member of the athletic department, only 43% wanted one to be present at practices and competitions (Wrisberg et al., 2010). This poses a challenge given that informal interactions with an SP consultant seem to be valuable for building trust and facilitating an effective working relationship with athletes and coaches on the team (Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Sharp & Hodge, 2011). Unfortunately, coaches' reason for supporting or not supporting the presence of an SP consultant at practices and competitions has not been directly assessed. However, frequent exposure to SP, positive perceptions of the value of mental skills training, and confidence in the effectiveness of SP consultation have been found to influence coaches' decisions to begin or continue to use SP services (Partington & Orlick, 1987a; Sullivan & Hodge, 1991; Wrisberg et al., 2010; Zakrajsek, Martin, & Zizzi, 2011; Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2007).

Not only are coaches with positive SP experiences more likely to use related services, they are in a position to speak favorably about SP with other coaches. These personal recommendations can influence others' interest and willingness to incorporate mental skills or use SP services in the future (Fifer et al., 2008; Sullivan & Hodge, 1991). Hence, coaches with limited knowledge or experience themselves will most likely consider using mental skills and SP services in the future if the recommendation comes from coaches they respect and if their organizations provide support (Haslam, 2004). Therefore, positive SP experiences not only have the potential to enhance current working relationships with coaches, but they can also result in reducing barriers and stigmas of others who have yet to use those services. Unfortunately, research is also limited on NCAA DI coaches' perceptions of factors that influence a positive SP experience. An exception to this is research conducted by Gentner et al. (2004) who used the Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; see Partington & Orlick, 1987b) and found "fitting in with team", "useful knowledge", and "easy for athletes to relate to" as consultant characteristics most important for SP consultant effectiveness. Although the CEF is a commonly used instrument to evaluate SP consultant effectiveness (see Poczwardowski, Sherman & Henschen, 1998), Gould, Murphy, Tammen, and May (1991) found high levels of multicollinearity among the items on the

CEF, suggesting that the 10 characteristics should not be analyzed separately. In addition, the CEF did not fully address all the themes associated with athletes' perceptions of SP consultant effectiveness (e.g., easy to talk to, having good listening skills, providing feedback, being available; see Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004). Subsequently, Martindale and Collins (2005; 2007) argue that the CEF is a generic assessment of specific favorable consultant characteristics and does not represent a comprehensive evaluation of applied SP practice. Using qualitative methods may provide a more in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Patton, 2002)—or in other words, provide a deeper understanding of NCAA DI coaches' views of how to gain entry and nurture a positive and effective SP consultation relationship.

Scholarly work utilizing in-depth interviews with coaches is sparse and has primarily focused on Olympic-level Canadian and U.S. coaches' evaluations of SP services (Gould et al., 1991; Partington & Orlick, 1987a). These studies indicated that, in addition to providing useful sport-specific strategies, SP consultants must be able to connect or "fit in" with coaches and teams and possess personal characteristics deemed important for the particular circumstance (e.g., being well trained, exhibiting confidence, being flexible and creative, and working in a nonintrusive manner; Gould, et al., 1991; Partington & Orlick, 1987a). Given the increased interest yet limited integration of SP at the collegiate level, it is important for SP practitioners to understand how best to communicate their services, gain access, and work effectively within athletic departments. Of particular importance, is to gain an understanding of collegiate coaches' perceptions regarding the value of SP services, since they are in a position to influence both athletes and athletic directors at their institution. Although many NCAA DI athletic directors report a need to hire an SP consultant (Kornspan & Duve, 2006), they often place a higher value on other support staff services (e.g., athletic trainers; strength and conditioning coaches; Wilson et al., 2009). If coaches advocate SP services, athletic directors may incorporate SP positions as part of the basic support services provided by the institution (Kornspan & Duve, 2006).

To date, no research has qualitatively examined collegiate coaches' views on how SP consultants can facilitate an effective relationship and nurture positive perceptions of the value of mental skills training. Therefore, we conducted semistructured interviews with NCAA DI coaches to explore their knowledge, preferences, and apperceptions of how an SP consultant could effectively work with them and their athletes. Coaches in this study had SP services available to them at the university; however, utilizing those services was not a criterion for inclusion. The university athletic department employed a half-time SP consultant who was also a half-time faculty member in an established graduate program that promotes the provision of SP services by faculty and students. There were two reasons for the decision to interview coaches with SP services available to them. First, it eliminated two

of the most commonly mentioned barriers to utilizing SP services (e.g., access and funding; see Scully & Hume, 1995; Voight & Callaghan, 2001; Wilson et al., 2009; Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2008). Second, with the barriers of access and funding being a nonissue, coaches could focus their discussion on controllable factors (either factors within the coach's control or factors within the SP consultant's control) that influence the initiation of services and a productive consultation relationship. Although it is understood that coaches may draw upon their previous experiences, the purpose of the interview was not to focus on the effectiveness of services offered at their institution. Rather, the questions asked were more general with regard to what would influence their decisions to use or continue to use SP services (e.g., expectations with regard to the process of consulting).

Method

Participants

Participants were eight college coaches who were coaching at an NCAA DI institution in the South Atlantic United States that competes in a major conference. There were five head coaches (three males, two females) and three assistant coaches (two males, one female). Each of the eight coaches represented different sports (i.e., baseball, basketball, crew, cross-country, soccer, track and field, volleyball, and wrestling). Three of them coached male athletes, four coached female athletes, and one coached both male and female athletes. The coaches self-identified their race as European American. Age ranges included 21–29 ($n = 2$), 30–39 ($n = 3$), 40–49 ($n = 1$), and 50–59 ($n = 2$). Coaches had an average of 16.5 years ($SD = 10.46$) of coaching experience and an average of 12.75 years ($SD = 11.47$) in their current position. Six coaches had previously used SP services for their teams. One of the two coaches who had not previously used SP services did report referring athletes to an SP consultant. At the time of the study, four coaches were using SP services with their team while four coaches were not.

Procedure

Research was conducted in accordance with institutional review board standards. The authors developed questions used for the semistructured interviews based on an extensive review of the literature and consultations with SP professionals who have expertise in the content area (i.e., perceptions and attitudes toward SP consulting). The first author contacted potential participants by phone or in person. Coaches were chosen to obtain a sample that represented various sports. Eight head coaches were initially contacted. In three cases, the head coach was not available to participate and referred the first author to an assistant coach. All three assistant coaches agreed to participate. None of the research team members provided SP services to the potential participants or their sport teams. Semistructured interviews were conducted

by the first author in person, were digitally recorded, and lasted approximately one hour. After the first author and a research assistant transcribed the recordings of the interviews, four members of the research team analyzed the interview transcriptions using consensual qualitative research methodology (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Philosophically, CQR can be characterized as constructivist with some postpositivist aspects (Hill et al., 2005), and the CQR process incorporates elements from grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), phenomenological (Giorgi, 1985), and comprehensive process analysis (Elliot, 1989). The CQR process involves identifying domains, clustering categories within each domain, and constructing illustrative core ideas for each category. As an attempt to increase the rigor of the process, CQR also involves receiving feedback from an external auditor, reconvening to discuss and incorporate the external reviewer's feedback, and coding the categories to determine the validity of the domains and relative frequency of each of the categories in the data. CQR is considered to be an effective qualitative methodology "because it involves a rigorous method that allows several researchers to examine data and come to consensus about their meaning" (Hill et al., 1997, p. 204).

Data Analysis

The CQR process began with research team members sharing and discussing journal articles that described the process of conducting CQR (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005) and used CQR methodology (e.g., Steinfeldt et al., 2011). To attempt to address personal biases that can influence the results of qualitative research, researchers should discuss their own potential values, assumptions, and biases before engaging in the CQR process (Fassinger, 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Team members discussed their own cultural backgrounds and their various personal and professional experiences with coaching, SP, and other aspects of sport. Researchers reported that their experience and favorable impression of SP could potentially present a bias about how they interpret coaches' perceptions of SP consulting. Team members also shared their assumptions that coaches might report different views on SP services based on the nature of their sport (e.g., a coach in a physical contact sport might have a more negative view) and their presence within an institution with an established SP program. Researchers openly discussed and monitored these assumptions and biases throughout the multiple steps of CQR in an effort to keep the analysis process grounded in the data, instead of being unduly influenced by their own interpretations (Hill et al., 1997).

Research team members (first four authors) initially read the interview transcriptions on their own and independently coded the data to identify preliminary themes. The research team then met to discuss their individually derived themes with the intent of developing a consensus on emergent categories, domains, and core ideas. Domains represent clusters of common notions (i.e.,

categories) that are derived from the independently created themes. Core ideas provide detail to each category and are intended to integrate the data while remaining close to the wording of the original transcripts (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). In extracting categories, domains, and core ideas from the data, research team members presented, discussed, and negotiated their own analytical impressions of the data until consensus was reached. These preliminary results (i.e., themes, domains, categories, and core ideas) were then sent to the external auditor for suggestive feedback on the initial categorization, with the intent of providing diverse perspectives and curtailing groupthink tendencies among research team members. After receiving the external auditor's feedback, the research team met to incorporate these perspectives and once again used consensus to compile the final categorizations. A cross-analysis procedure was employed in an effort to strengthen the methodological rigor of the study by validating the domains and providing an account of the prevalence of each category within the data.

Results

Three domains comprising 17 categories emanated from the data: Who they are, What they do, and How they do it. The cross-analysis procedure validated the domains generated and indicated the frequency (i.e., general, typical, and variant) of the categories that emerged from the data (see Table 1).

Who They Are

The first domain, Who they are, embodied the preferences and values that influenced the coaches' confidence and willingness to work with an SP consultant. The first category, experienced, represented their preference for an SP consultant to have athletic experience, understanding of the athletic environment, and experience consulting with teams and individuals. Although collegiate athletic experience in the specific sport was not required, it did influence credibility and coaches' confidence that an SP consultant could relate to the athletic environment, provide practical suggestions, and provide anecdotal evidence. In addition, coaches expected an SP consultant to be well trained (e.g., direct training in SP and knowledge of SP) and have useful sport-specific knowledge, which impacted their perception of an SP consultant's ability to be helpful. One coach stated, "An athletic background…. to where that person has been through the action. They're not just talking information out of a book [but] can throw in a little anecdotal firsthand experience." Another coach stated that he wanted an SP consultant who "had experience working with a group of people before, not just individuals, because the team is more important than the individual."

In the second category, desirable characteristics, coaches valued personal traits and qualities—such as trustworthiness, high moral character, work ethic, pas-

sion for the field, a nurturing approach, competence, and confidence. For example, one coach stated, "I think the first thing you'd want is that person to be of high moral character, to have outstanding work ethic, and to be passionate about their field."

The third category, uncertainty about characteristics and qualifications, represented coaches' uncertainty or indecision with regard to demographic characteristics of the SP consultant (e.g., gender and age) and qualifications (e.g., credentials). As stated in the first category, it was clear coaches expected an SP consultant to be competent and well trained; however, this category highlights their uncertainty as to what is required to become a qualified and experienced consultant. One coach discussed wanting someone knowledgeable about SP but was unsure of the qualifications, "I'm not really familiar with the different certifications in the field or anything like that." Another coach stated, "If you think hard about it, most organizations have a licensing board or certification board and you would like to feel that person working with your team is current and has gone through all appropriate organizations that they should." Coaches seemed to be aware of or had a preference regarding an SP consultant's gender or age; however, coaches were more concerned with an SP consultant being competent, relatable, and able to establish clear professional boundaries. One male coach of female athletes expressed a preference for gender by saying, "A woman, mainly because the staff that we got right now is two males, and just appreciating the fact that there are times when they [might not] feel that comfortable having a conversation with two males." This coach went on to say "I wouldn't mind a male who's, like I said, been in the ranks, been in athletics." One coach discussed a preference for age because it might infer a level of experience, "I just don't know enough about y'alls process to when you guys think someone's qualified. I can't say a 25 year old wouldn't have enough experience, but I gotta figure a 40-year-old would." Another coach stated, "You don't want [the SP consultant] too close [to the athletes' age] and you've got to be able to be professional enough and able to draw that line."

The final category, presence, represented coaches' desire for an SP consultant to have presence during team sessions. For example, coaches desired working with an SP consultant who is energetic, has personality, and is able to hold the athletes' attention as well as command respect. One coach specifically stated, "I would expect them to have a bit of presence in front of people because they have to run meetings with the team and be the center of what's going on in their explanations."

What They Do

The second domain, What they do, reflected coaches' perceptions of approaches that need to be considered when working effectively with coaches and athletes. The first two categories, communicate and possess relational skills represented the importance of open communication and developing a trusting relationship between the

Table 1   Summary of Domains, Categories, Core Ideas, and Frequencies

Domains/Categories	Illustrative Core Idea	Frequency
Domain 1: Who they are		
a) experienced	preferred athletic experience, understanding of athletic arena, knowledge of the specific sport, and experience consulting with teams/individuals while direct training, knowledge of SP, and ability to apply SP knowledge was required	general
b) desirable characteristics	trustworthy, high moral character, work ethic, passion for the field, nurturing, competent, confident, and mature	typical
c) uncertainty about characteristics and qualifications	someone who relates to athletes yet maintains professional boundaries and has credentials, but unaware of credentials in SP	typical
d) presence	comes in with energy, personality, gets a hold/attention of the group, and has presence in front of people	variant
Domain 2: What they do		
a) communicate	open communication with team, individual athletes, and coach, gives direction or feedback to the coach, and speaks at a level athletes understand	general
b) possess relational skills	builds a relationship and rapport with athletes and coaches by gaining trust and being approachable and empathetic	general
c) provide content: performance enhancement	a tool, resource, and added advantage in skill development and performance (e.g., mental skills, imagery, self-talk, relaxation, team building)	general
d) provide content: emotional issues	assists with personal issues/problems, self-esteem, factors outside of sport, thoughts of personal injury, and pathology	typical
e) get "buy in" on sport psychology	athletes and coaches need to buy into (e.g., confidence) the benefits of SP and need total support from the coach	typical
f) provide value	effective SP consultants are helpful, make improvements, have a positive impact, and prevent problems	typical
Domain 3: How they do it		
a) accessibility	someone who is available when needed and the coach can fit SP in when they want or when they "can" fit it in their schedule	general
b) logistic uncertainty	coaches expressed uncertainty with how much time they would be willing to commit and how much they would pay for services	general
c) logistic certainty	wanted multidimensional contact (team, individual, coach meetings) and frequency of contact related to time of season	general
d) balance of control/ be "on the same page"	Some coaches fear they will need to give up control and it is important to keep the coach informed, be "on the same page" as the coach, and work within the coach's system	general
e) paradoxical positioning	desired SP to be embedded and part of the "landscape" yet used SP as a special event and as something "extra"	typical
f) paradox of role	someone who is active yet passive and in the background (e.g., observer and in a supportive role)	typical
g) challenge with stigma	some coaches were concerned SP would be part of the problem (e.g., put ideas in athletes' heads, use SP as an excuse, overthink, and depend on the SPC) and they wanted athletes to be self-reliant	typical

Note. General = all the cases; typical = more than half the cases; variant = half the cases or less.

SP consultant and coach and SP consultant and athletes. Coaches discussed the desire for an SP consultant to provide feedback and direction to the coach as well as communicate on a level that athletes understand. It was clear coaches wanted established lines of communication between an SP consultant and the coach as well as SP consultant and athletes. All the coaches wanted an SP consultant who could build rapport with the athletes and coaches as well as gain their trust. Coaches described

building a relationship with coaches and athletes through being relatable, approachable, and empathetic. To illustrate these categories, one coach desired feedback and stated, "I'd want that person to be direct and honest in their evaluations of the team makeup and how that person thinks the team responds to coaching…critical suggestions of how maybe a coaching style can be improved." Building a relationship and trust was illustrated by a coach stating,

Establishing a bond with the players, collectively and individually…if you're looking at interactions with a collective group of individuals, there has to be a trust factor between the player or players of the team and the psychologist or it's not going to work.

The third and fourth categories in this domain, provide content: performance enhancement and provide content: emotional issues, identified approaches and types of services coaches wanted from an SP consultant. All coaches viewed SP consulting as a resource or tool and desired strategies that can provide an added advantage to performance or skill development. For example, one coach stated, "How to enhance the athlete's performance through the mental aspect and the mind and body connection." Coaches valued performance enhancement skills such as imagery, relaxation, and self-talk. Although all coaches desired SP services for the purpose of enhancing performance, the majority of coaches also discussed that SP consultants may be used for the purpose of assisting with the personal development of their athletes. One coach stated, "The sport psychologist deals with the whole gamut of things, the team related stuff or the sport related stuff as well as a little bit into the individual."

The fifth category, get "buy in" on SP, represented the need for an SP consultant to get buy in from coaches and athletes, meaning that coaches and athletes believe mental skills training is important and can improve performance. Coaches discussed that some athletes may be skeptical about mental training. Lastly, coaches discussed the need for an SP consultant to gain the total support of the coach. One coach stated, "If the coach doesn't trust, doesn't believe in it…then [SP] is not gonna work anyway."

The final category, provide value, represented coaches' desire for an SP consultant to make a positive impact and improve their athletes. One coach described how an SP consultant would provide value, "When they have individual appointments, do the athletes leave saying that felt good, I really enjoyed that, it felt good, it was helpful, do they come out with a sense that was productive?" In addition to feedback from athletes, coaches identified outcomes such as an increase in score or win/loss record, as evidence of improvement. For example, "If a sport psychologist is worth one basket, two points in a game, I think it would be worth having that sport psychologist, cause that might mean winning." This coach later described additional ways an SP consultant could provide value, such as "change behavior when needed, raise self-esteem, enhance the environment when needed. You want that person to have an impact on your group, however subtle." Interestingly, some coaches reported an SP consultant could provide value by preventing problems, "I don't think you have to have problems to use [an SP consultant]. I think they help you to more avoid problems than having to have a big team crisis in order to have one."

How They Do It

The third domain, How they do it, pertained to coaches' expectations about the process of SP consulting. The first category, accessibility, coaches indicated they expected an SP consultant to be available for athletes and coaches when needed and would use services that fit their schedules. One coach stated, "I would love to have the opportunity for kids to go on their own and to know that there's someone there they could talk to really readily available."

The next two categories, logistic uncertainty and logistic certainty, reflected coaches' uncertainty or certainty with regard to the logistics of using SP services (e.g., time commitment, cost, frequency of SP service use). NCAA regulations limit the number of hours coaches can work with their athletes each week. Because of these limitations, coaches were uncertain about how many hours they would commit to SP with their athletes and teams. One coach stated,

We're limited by NCAA rules [on] how much [and] how many hours we can spend with the team per week. So, time is crucial. I mean 30 minutes to an hour a week sounds minimal but it's really a major chunk of time.

In addition, coaches were unaware of how much SP services would cost. Coaches agreed that SP professionals should be paid and payment also adds value or respect for those services; however, coaches did not know the standard rate a consultant might receive. Coaches also discussed that SP resources are available to them at the university; however, if a consultant was not available then the decision to hire a consultant would partly depend on their budget and resources. One coach stated,

Depends on what kind of resources we have. We're fortunate we have the resources….If, as a coach I feel that having a sport psychologist is paramount then I will pay what I need to pay to get that psychologist to be with my team.

Representing logistic certainty, coaches were interested in devoting more time to SP services during the off-season (e.g., regular team meetings). During the season, coaches expressed the desire for an SP consultant to be available for individual athletes who were interested; however, they did not want to devote as much time to team meetings and teaching mental skills. One coach stated, "Once you get in season, you're always in such a manic pace where you don't have a lot of time that you want to take out of practice time." This coach goes on to say,

We probably get two months where every Tuesday [the SP consultant] comes in, then we phase it out. He becomes a consultant individually for those who want to make individual appointments that groundwork has been laid to where they know who he is, they're comfortable with him, they're more likely to use him.

Coaches wanted contact with an SP consultant to involve team, individual, and coach meetings. Coaches desired to meet with an SP consultant up front when

planning for the season, which would allow the coach and SP consultant to map out when and how to fit SP into their program. Many of the coaches expressed a preference for an SP consultant to meet with the team as a whole and build a relationship before meeting with athletes individually.

The fourth category, balance of control/be "on the same page," represented coaches' desire for an SP consultant to keep the coach informed yet understood the need to maintain boundaries of confidentiality. Many discussed that coaches may be resistant to SP service use because they may be territorial and fear giving up control. It was clear coaches wanted an SP consultant to be "on the same page" with them and work within their system. One coach illustrated this by saying,

> So I think it's important that the head coach, whoever they bring in [to] speak to their team understands what kind of message is being given, what's your, you know the guts of the operation, what's important to that head coach. That's got to be an understanding, got to be on common ground.

One coach expressed the balance between confidentiality and keeping the coach informed,

> I would want to know what they were going over, whether it's confidence, leadership, what kind of topic it is. I think there are things we need to know and things we don't. The confidence needs to be there between the team and the sport psychologist that what they say is gonna be held confidential. If they think something was traumatic, that they were like 'I think the team is going to crumble and fall on top itself', I think we need to know that.

Categories five and six, paradoxical positioning and paradox of role, represents the discrepancy that exists with how SP consultants are positioned and used. Coaches discussed the paradox in how SP consultants are positioned by describing the desire for an SP consultant to be embedded within the program and part of the landscape yet using an SP consultant as more of a special event such as a periodic meeting (e.g., once a week, once a month, or at the beginning of the season). For example, coaches discussed the importance of consistency and integration of SP services, yet, as one coach stated, "I don't want to say it's hit or miss, but it's when we feel like we can work [SP] in." Paradoxical positioning was also represented by one coach who described SP as more of a special event and used when the team goes to a resort,

> We go there for a few days; it could be a great opportunity for [a] team bonding setting for people to get to know each other. And obviously have a sport psychologist available to come in for one or two of those…come in for an evening session, stay the night, and leave the next day.

Coaches described the paradox of role by wanting an SP consultant to be active in the program yet wanting him or her to be passive and more of an observer. Coaches discussed wanting the SP consultant to consistently observe practices (e.g., two to four times a week) to gain an understanding and an appreciation of the athletes' experiences and the goals of the program. One coach stated, "The more [the SP consultant] would observe practice the more he or she learns about the team and the individuals that compose it. The more impact [the SP consultant] can have the more he or she watches." Another coach discussed that observing practice would help the SP consultant understand what athletes go through; however, did not want the SP consultant to be a distraction or the athletes to feel like they were being watched. It was clear coaches wanted an SP consultant to be helpful but not intrusive and someone who could be in the background in a supporting role.

The last category, challenge with stigma, represented the stigma that may be associated with SP consulting. Some coaches discussed the fear that SP would become part of the problem, in which coaches did not want their athletes to use SP as an excuse or become dependent on the consultant. For example, one coach stated, "Sometimes you wonder…are [SP consultants] putting things into [the athletes'] head? It's not intentional, I don't think. But everything can be fine, then all of a sudden it's like 'Maybe I am burned out' or 'Maybe I am this or that'." Another coach stated, "Not wanting your athletes to be dependent on [the SP consultant] for their performance. Just because, knowing that if we don't have sport psych this semester, we will be okay."

Discussion and Conclusions

This study provided insight into NCAA DI coaches' perceptions of SP and what they consider to be important for consultants to do to work effectively with them and their athletes. SP consultants' ability to build a trusting relationship was central to a productive consultation process. A nurturing and trusting relationship has been highlighted in both SP consulting (see Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Sharp & Hodge, 2011) and counseling (see Sexton & Whiston, 1994) literature as essential and the most consistent factor impacting the effectiveness of services offered. The categories that emerged in this study were reported independently; however, many of the categories are interrelated and were "pulled" together when discussing the results.

Our findings support previous research with coaches (Gentner et al., 2004; Gould et al., 1991; Partington & Orlick, 1987a), which identified personal characteristics (e.g., ability to fit in with the sport program; ability to relate easily with athletes and coaches) as important components of consultant effectiveness. Coaches in this study perceived fitting in as an essential attribute which can be influenced by SP consultants' sport background (e.g., previous athletic experience), professional SP experience (e.g., working with teams/individuals), interpersonal skills, presence, high work ethic, and practical sport-specific knowledge. It was necessary for

SP consultants to fit in with the team and relate well to the athletes; however, coaches also made it clear that SP consultants need to maintain clear professional boundaries. Although this is of particular importance for graduate students being supervised and young SP professionals, even experienced consultants need to be aware of professional boundaries (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). The importance of self-awareness and self-regulation has been emphasized before in applied SP literature because SP professionals will likely face ethical issues such as multiple relationships. Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) emphasized maintaining appropriate boundaries by knowing what role the SP consultant is fulfilling and what the expectations are associated with the job. In fact, prominent SP consultants have regularly pointed out that professionalism and ethical behavior is central to building trust (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Consultants need to be personable, relatable, and competent; however, those who become too friendly or act as a coach will likely be viewed as violating professional boundaries and these types of behaviors would be harmful to the consultation relationship.

Perhaps the most important finding related to establishing an effective consulting relationship was the need for an SP consultant to be on "the same page" with the coach and to be able to work within the coach's system. Discussing the coach's philosophy and approach to building a successful program can enhance the open communication process and facilitate a relationship where feedback is more likely to be effectively received. Possibly two of the most essential interpersonal skills SP consultants can develop are listening and empathy (Yukelson, 2010). Actively listening to coaches and understanding their philosophy can help get buy in from them, while simultaneously demonstrating interest and facilitating rapport. Showing an interest in their coaching philosophy while developing rapport can provide opportunities to address misconceptions about SP (e.g., some coaches feared losing control when working with an SP consultant) and will likely help individualize services that are specific to the coaches' and athletes' needs rather than offering them "menus" or "packaged" programs.

Coaches in the current study also provided insight into their expectations and preferences with the consulting process, which may also help SP consultants be on the same page and work within the coach's system. Most coaches expect some type of follow-up information from SP consultants, regardless of whether it is an individual or group SP session. It seems relevant for SP practitioners to consider how they can work in a way that keeps coaches informed while maintaining the boundaries of confidentiality. Coaches often talk openly with their staff about their athletes (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Speed, Andersen, & Simons, 2005), and those who are paying for SP services (e.g., athletic department, coach, sport academy) may expect SP consultants to explain the services provided to individual athletes (Sharp & Hodge, 2011). Coaches in the current study understood confidentiality; however, consultants may need to reinforce their ethical obligations when providing SP services, particularly why confidentiality is so important in gaining trust and working effectively with everyone involved. Discussing and determining the boundaries of confidentiality up front, including what SP consultants are willing to divulge from their formal and informal conversations with various members of the team, can help ensure a positive consultation relationship (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Sharp & Hodge, 2011).

Similar to other research examining elite coaches (Partington & Orlick, 1987a; Steinfeldt et al., 2011), coaches in the current study desired SP consultants to be embedded within the program yet be in a supportive role and work with athletes and coaches in a nonintrusive manner. Coaches supported, and even encouraged, an SP consultant to be present at practices, which is contrary to a recent study with NCAA DI coaches (Wrisberg et al., 2010). Although reasons for this contradictory finding are not clear, differences may exist in this instance because the coaches in our sample worked in an environment that funded a half-time SP consultant and regularly granted graduate students training in SP access to the athletes and coaches. Coaches in this study also believed that being present at practices would help a consultant understand what athletes are going through and get a feel for the program, and this role was supported as long as the SP consultant was an observer and not a distraction. This is encouraging given that SP consultants report that being embedded in the setting is a key factor contributing to their effectiveness (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Results revealed that in the off-season, coaches wanted SP consultants to meet with the team frequently whereas during the season they wanted SP consultants to shift their focus to individual athletes who approach them. Lastly, coaches wanted SP consultants to be flexible and available when needed. Taken together, these results suggest that open and honest communication between SP consultants and coaches can help align expectations about the process of consulting and impact effectiveness.

Coaches also wanted SP consultants to be capable of making a positive impact on their team. All coaches in this study preferred a consultant to be able to provide performance-related strategies and were concerned with enhancing sport performance. This mirrors a recent study with NCAA DI coaches (Wrisberg et al., 2010), in which coaches preferred performance consulting more than personal counseling. Although coaches may primarily want an SP consultant trained in sport and performance psychology to help performers learn and acquire mental skills, it is likely that life issues outside of sport also influence sport performance (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010) and in some settings (e.g., Olympics) everything may be considered a performance issue (McCann, 2008). Regardless, coaches in this study were concerned with whether SP consultants' advice was effective and if their presence actually made a difference. Evidence of improvement varied and included feedback from athletes, subjectively noticing an increase in self-esteem and confidence, and more "tangible" improvements in performance

or win/loss record. These findings are consistent with previous research, in which Olympic level coaches identified making a difference and long-term improvement in performance (e.g., international standing) as part of the criteria for retaining consultants (Partington & Orlick, 1987a). Coaches in the current study also wanted athletes to be self-reliant and empowered; in fact some were concerned that athletes would become dependent on the SP consultant, which would create problems. Viewing an athlete's problem as one that only the consultant could fix creates dependency and contributes to the stigma attached to the field of SP (Partington & Orlick, 1987a). To create a positive consultation relationship, SP consultants need to be aware of the type of services that would best meet the needs of the athletes (e.g., performance consulting or personal counseling), work within their own boundaries of competencies and actively make contributions, yet also empower athletes to use sport-specific strategies and skills on their own.

Lastly, a couple of concerns surfaced from the findings that are relevant to the field of SP. Although coaches want to work with well-trained SP consultants and perceive SP effectiveness to be influenced by education, they did not know what a qualified SP consultant "looked like" in terms of credentials or training. This is consistent with previous research that indicates 84% of coaches (Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2008) and 66.7% of NCAA DI athletic directors (Wilson et al., 2009) surveyed were unaware of Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) certification for SP. Providing potential consumers with information on the basic qualifications and educational backgrounds of well-trained SP professionals appears to be important for consultants and AASP. Coaches and athletic directors could use this information when seeking an SP consultant, in addition to the requirements that coaches view as important (e.g., application of knowledge and practical sport-specific strategies). Coaches in this study also indicated that an effective SP consultant is embedded within the sport and athletic department, but discussed time constraints in practice due to NCAA restrictions. It appears coaches want to integrate SP into their athletes' training, yet may also view mental skills training as something to be "added" to the existing practice schedule. This highlights the need for SP consultants to address their consultation style up front and be mindful of how the provision of services can be integrated into the coach's system and existing program.

This study it is not without limitations. For example, data were collected from coaches representing different sports at one institution that supports the use of SP services. Therefore, results may be influenced by the unique environment and dynamic of this particular athletic department. Although usage patterns and perceptions of effective consultation relationships may be different at institutions that do not have SP consultants readily available, taking an in-depth look in this manner may help consultants gain insight into general issues that may exist when attempting to gain entry with college athletic departments and coaches. Future research should inves-tigate collegiate coaches who do not have access to SP services within the athletic department to determine if differences exist. Although a sample size of at least eight participants is recommended when utilizing CQR methodology (Hill et al., 2005), the current sample included head and assistant coaches, male and female coaches, and those who coached male and female athletes The categories that emerged in the current study were stable and consistent across half (variant), most (typical), or all (general) cases representing similar patterns of responses and, thus, may be considered descriptive of the overall sample (Hill et al., 1997). Nonetheless, future research should consider including a more homogenous sample (e.g., all head or assistant coaches, all male or female coaches) and possibly comparing samples for differences in perceptions and preferences for SP service use.

Results of the current study indicated that building a positive SP consultation relationship is a multidimensional process, and that evaluating consultant effectiveness is complex. Themes within this study overlap with CEF items; however, the findings extend Partington and Orlick's (1987b) work by revealing themes not addressed by the CEF. Therefore, future researchers may want to consider developing an instrument that is more comprehensive in its evaluation of consultation effectiveness. The current study revealed the importance of being "on the same page," keeping the coach informed, developing self-reliant athletes, having presence, and being able to make an impact in a supporting role. It also highlighted that coaches may want to use an SP consultant differently in the off-season as compared with during the season, which underscores the need to develop a trusting relationship with the team during the off-season in order for athletes to feel comfortable approaching the SP consultant on their own while in season. Furthermore, individualizing SP services to meet the unique needs of coaches and athletes will likely enhance the consultation relationship and provide additional opportunities in the future.

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