

Public Abstract

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Title:Athletes' Experiences of Sport Psychology Consultation: Exploring a Multi-Season, Cross Gender Intervention

Applied sport psychology consultations can provide beneficial services to athletes and coaches, particularly regarding performance enhancement. This study examined the experiences of ten wrestlers involved in a long-term sport psychology program through the use of in-depth interviews. Grounded Theory methodology guided the analysis of the data which led to the creation of five main themes: Athlete Characteristics; Intervention Characteristics; Outcomes; Social Processes; and Sport Psychologist. Participants acknowledged their initial resistance to working with a female sport psychologist, based on gender stereotypes and fears of being negatively perceived by other members of the team. Issues around physical attraction and the degree to which a female could be seen as knowledgeable in a male-dominated sport impacted the consultation until services were ended. However, the social hierarchies that at one time prevented athletes from exploring these services eventually helped the team redefine what actions were considered acceptable. Participants developed an understanding of how sport psychology could help them achieve their athletic goals. They emphasized that having a sport psychologist who was at their "disposal" (highly available) and did not require them to censure their behavior or language contributed greatly to the establishment of trust. They also discussed many ways in which they felt that sport psychology had unexpectedly contributed to their lives within and beyond sport; for example, many felt more connected with their teammates after attending team talks. Finally, most participants believed that the most significant outcome of working with a sport psychologist was that of gaining a friend and positive support.