VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCE IN AN NCAA DIVISION I HOLISTIC INTEGRATED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,

have examined the research proposal entitled

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Presented by Katie McLean

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And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my encouraging and loving family. I would not be where I am today without my amazing support system pushing me and reminding me of my best self. Mom, you are such an amazing role model in my life. Your passion to help others and positivity shaped the way I view the world and interact with those around me. Dad, your steady faith and humor are constant sources of strength I can turn to consistently. Dan, I’m thankful for all of your words of encouragement. Thank you to all of you for always encouraging me to pursue my passions and do what I love.

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Abstract

Self-affirmation theory states each person has a self-system. This system is motivated to maintain optimal self-integrity, which is restored when people re-affirm their core values (Steele, 1988). Values, therefore, play a key role in our behaviors and motivation. From a sport psychology service standpoint, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Ravizza (2004) understand values as one of five foundational elements that define professional philosophy. Many research-practitioners shifted towards a holistic sport psychology (HSP) approach, emphasizing athletic performance and personal development (Anderson et al., 2001; Bond, 2002; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Owton et al., 2014; Ravizza, 2002; Wrisberg et al., 2012). With this approach, a sport psychology professional’s (SPP’s) role includes understanding whole person development to facilitate performance enhancement (Bond, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine ways in which a nationally recognized mental performance staff provides HSP services integrated within an NCAA Division I athletics program. Specifically this study hoped to understand how personal values and self-integrity impact delivery services to teams from many role perspectives. The sample consisted of five mental performance coaches (MPCs) and 28 coaches, athletes, and support staff who worked directly with those MPCs. Findings support six consistent themes across the mental performance staff. Additional across-group themes were constructed based on supplemental group experiences. These findings support some of the same findings with Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) in relation to roles, operating standards, personal growth and authenticity. Specifically, the emphasis on balance between a “friend” role and “professional” role, and how this connects to
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support. This study adds to the field in terms of how authenticity connects to sense of purpose and delivery. These findings also support Fifer et al. (2008), in that an integrated model builds trust between individuals and mental performance coach, as well as trust in holistic sport psychology services. Athletes, coaches, and support staff involved shared experiences’ valuing the comprehensive support across their programs, as well as how this positively impacted their experience with performance enhancement. Findings offer interpretation for SPPs and athletics departments collectively in understanding the range of roles integrated HSP delivery services can provide, including comprehensive support for performance enhancement.

*Keywords:* holistic sport psychology, self-affirmation theory, mental performance...
Chapter 1: Introduction

“As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” – Nelson Mandela

Personal Values

As human beings, we are motivated to act in ways that are consistent with our authentic selves. When we perceive self-integrity to be threatened, we are motivated to re-affirm our true self and our values (Steele, 1988). Values, therefore, play a key role in our behaviors, motivation, and the way we conduct our lives. From a sport psychology delivery service standpoint, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Ravizza (2004) understand values as one of five foundational elements that define professional philosophy. Personal core values are unique to every individual and provide a set of standards that people choose to evaluate themselves (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Cohen and Sherman (2014) argue that we manifest our own self-integrity through values-based thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Re-affirming such personal core values enhances the view of the self, as well as psychological well-being (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). These understandings have implications for sport psychology professionals’ delivery services and those they work with.

Current Study

This study looks to further examine the ways in which collegiate sport psychology professionals deliver holistic sport psychology to teams. Specifically, this study examines the way in which personal core values and self-integrity impact the delivery of holistic sport psychology services. Before addressing the particular details of the study, it is important to first acknowledge and understand the cornerstones that provide the foundations for this study. These essential elements will now be discussed.
Motivation

Motivation is the mobilization of energy and production of action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This is of utmost importance in leadership roles such as coaching (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A person can be motivated differently depending on the circumstances, and such motivation exists on a continuum from amotivation and extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation (Gagne, Ryan & Bargmann, 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The lesser forms of motivation have little existence of autonomy, and those motivated in such a way do so out of a belief to be no choice or say in the matter (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The third form of extrinsic motivation is identified regulation in which the behavior is adopted and valued by the individual. This type of regulation is associated with greater joy and interest in school activities and more effective coping strategies (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The last form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation. This form of regulation involves assimilation of the behavior into the person’s personal values and beliefs. Both identified and integrated regulation are more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and findings show these types of extrinsic motivation show increased engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), higher quality learning (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), and enhanced performance (Miserandino, 1996). Greater support for a person’s autonomy allows him or her to actively adopt a set of values as his or her own (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This process of internalized and adopted values enhances the effectiveness of the behavior, persistence increases, well-being is enhanced, and the person integrates better with his or her social group (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).
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The last form of motivation on the continuum, intrinsic motivation, is the most powerful form of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). According to Ryan & Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation is the best representation of human potential to allow an individual to reach his or her capacities. This form of motivation encompasses interest, exploration and mastery, which are all essential to personal and cognitive development (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation thrives in environments that acknowledge feelings and provide choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Additionally, more autonomous forms of motivation are fostered when individual psychological needs are met (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). The three basic needs that all humans must have for psychological growth are autonomy (being the origin of one’s choices and decisions), competence (feelings of mastery) and relatedness (feelings of acceptance and security with others) (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Ryan and Deci (2000) state that without these basic needs, humans cannot thrive. Additionally, research suggests that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs not only fosters more autonomous forms of motivation (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999), it additionally enhances psychological well-being too (Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, & Provencher, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagne & Blanchard, 2007; Gagne et al., 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim & Kasser, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014).

Positive Psychology, Well-Being and Flourishing
Prior to the 21st century, much of the psychological field research addressed pathologies, human unhappiness and weaknesses (Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2010). Positive psychology, on the other hand, is the science of positive subjective experiences, strengths, and positive traits that improve quality of life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2010). Additionally, positive psychology studies the overall optimal functioning of individuals, groups, and whole organizations (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2004). Within positive psychology, many studies have surrounded the understanding of human flourishing and well-being (Lundqvist, 2011).

According to Huppert & So (2013) flourishing is synonymous with mental well-being, representing the combination of optimal functioning and life satisfaction. Well-being is not defined as the absence of mental illness; rather it refers to optimal functioning and positive life experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2001). While there are many definitions of well-being in the research, all viewpoints overlap in that well-being is linked to optimal functioning (Ryff et al., 2004). Today researchers understand well-being as a complex and multifaceted construct that includes both hedonic and eudaimonic features of well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Lundqvist (2011) suggests that considerations for both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives allows for a more well-rounded understanding of the well-being of individuals.

Knowing that optimal functioning includes both positive feelings and positive functioning (Huppert & So, 2013), researchers now begin to understand the myriad of
beneficial outcomes for individuals with increased flourishing and well-being (Coffey et al., 2014). Some of these positive impacts include: decreased levels of stress and cortisol levels (Diener et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, & Love; 2004), increased physiological functioning, resiliency (Coffey et al., 2014), resource expansion and flexibility (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a), life satisfaction (Coffey et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2004; Lundqvist, 2011), organizational commitment (Kern et al., 2014), increased job performance and academic commitment (Coffey et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005a), stronger personal relationships (Coffey et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a), increased prosocial behavior (Diener et al., 2010; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a, 2005b), and a persistence towards mastery (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Seligman, 2011).

It is clear individuals and organizations as a whole could benefit from enhancing optimal functioning within their environments. Several studies have found ways to increase both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of well-being (Coffey et al., 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013; Kern et al., 2004; Lundqvist, 2011; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005b; Ryan & Deci; 2000, 2001; Seligman, 2011). In fact, researchers argue well-being is enhanced by the presence of the three basic fundamental needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013) and these needs foster more autonomous forms of motivation too (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999).

**Motivation with Athletes**

Because motivation is the ability to move athletes towards action, commitment, and buy in to program values, it is a primary interest for coaches and sport staff (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is the highest form of autonomous motivation one can
reach (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). According to Vallerand & Losier (1999), when an athlete is intrinsically motivated to participate in sport, he or she experiences pleasure and joy in the process of learning and mastering new personal levels of achievement. A person’s performance and persistence increases as the level of autonomous motivation increase (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Research shows that those in supervisory positions can influence their followers’ autonomous motivation (Blanchard et al., 2009). Coaches can impact athletes’ motivation by either providing a more controlling or more autonomous environment (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014). Parallel to sport skill instruction, coaches can increase performance by promoting autonomous motivation (Wu, Lai & Chan, 2014).

**Needs Satisfaction and Athlete Well-Being**

Meeting the fundamental psychological needs of athletes through coaching behaviors and leadership can foster intrinsic motivation and more autonomous forms of motivation (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Wu et al., 2014). Fundamental needs satisfaction can also affect the well-being of athletes (Gagne et al., 2003; Gagne & Blanchard, 2007; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Researchers found that transformational leadership impacted performance, group affect, and commitment too (Skakon et al., 2010; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014).

Transformational leadership is an approach where leaders share organizational values and visions and encourage followers to rise above their own personal interests for the good of the group, while still keeping individualized considerations in mind (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) captured several studies that suggest
coaches’ transformational leadership is linked to athlete motivation and performance. Additionally, studies suggest transformational leadership affects athlete well-being by mediating fundamental needs satisfaction (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014).

Needs satisfaction is crucial to athlete motivation and well-being, which have major impact on performance (Blanchard et al., 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Wu, Lai, & Chan, 2014). Based on the research, effective sport-related well-being is built after athletes have a solid global well-being foundation (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). It is reasonable to assume that because global well-being is a subjective contextual-free evaluation of one’s life, the ways in which dimensions of global well-being is understood and enhanced can be applied to both general population and athlete populations (Lundqvist, 2011).

An athlete’s evaluation of his or her own well-being is influenced by other parts of his or her life, both in and out of sport (Lundqvist, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Coaches and athletics staff should be particularly interested in athletes’ well-being because it impacts psychological functioning, emotional awareness, and long-term affects, which are all essential to optimal performance (Jones, Meijen, McCarthy, & Sheffield, 2009; Lundqvist, 2011). In fact, Lundqvist (2011) states that positive well-being can help athletes cope with the diverse challenges and stressors across their athletic careers.

**Demands and Challenges on Competitive Athletes**

High-level competitive sports demand a pursuit of high standards and highly valued performance goals against other athletes with similar competence (Lundqvist,
A great amount of dedication and commitment to extensive training and competition is required to see success in such a competitive environment (Lundqvist, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). High-level competitive sport demands often equate to part and full-time job commitments, and stressors can originate from competitive and noncompetitive sources (Dugdale, Eklund, & Gordon, 2002; Lundqvist, 2011). Identifying and understanding high-level competitive demands and stressors is essential to uncovering the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that impact performance (Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009). Many studies found increasing evidence that elite level athletes retain a variety of coping strategies to deal with stressors (Dugdale et al., 2002). Recognizing and understanding these stressors can help athletes better plan and prepare for the demands of high-level competitive sport in order to positively impact performance (Dugdale et al., 2002; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009).

**Successful Performance Characteristics**

Gould et al. (2002) revealed that Olympic champions reported to have higher levels of coping, mental toughness and optimism. Gould et al. (2002) linked mental toughness and effective coping with optimism. In fact, research findings suggest that optimism is the best predictor of sport performance (Nicholls et al., 2008).

Optimism is found to have a positive correlation with other effective coping strategies such as mental imagery, thought control, and effort (Gould et al., 2002; Nicholls et al., 2008; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). Another aspect of optimal performance associated with coping in demanding environments and activities is passion (Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2008). Vallerand et al. (2008) define
passion as a likeness or love of an activity that the individual identified as important. With passion, a person not only is willing to invest time and energy into this activity, he or she also internalizes it into his or her identity too (Vallerand et al., 2008). In addition to passion, perseverance is an important characteristic of world-class athletes (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010). Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) define GRIT as a passion and perseverance towards long-term goals. Researchers found that individuals with higher levels of GRIT outperformed those that had lesser GRIT scores (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Many other successful performance characteristics and skills have been identified with world-class athletes and optimal performance (Gould et al., 2002; Vallerand et al., 2008). In addition to positive characteristics, additional psychological skills have been linked to optimal performance too (Baker & Horton, 2004; Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Beaumont, et al., 2015; Chen & Wu, 2014; Cox, Shannon, McGuire, & McBride, 2010; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Dugdale et al., 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 1993, 2002; Hatzigeorgiadis, Galanis, Zourbanos, & Theodorakis, 2014; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002; Orlick & Partington, 1999; Poczwardowski et al., 2014). The identification of abundant characteristics, skills, and strategies related to optimal performance opened the door for sport psychology professionals (SPPs) to assist athletes and support staffs in building, planning, and preparation of such skills (Mellalieu et al., 2009).

**Traditional Roles of Sport Psychology Professionals (SPPs)**

As Mellalieu et al. (2009) mention, athletes are met with an array of challenges in the competitive environment, and as part of their role, SPPs can effectively prepare
athletes for those circumstances. Because of the field’s recent emergence, the role of the SPP has changed considerably over the years (Miller & Kerr, 2002). More specifically, Miller and Kerr (2002) claim the field’s philosophy in relation to performance and personal excellence changed significantly over the years.

Throughout with 1960’s and 1970’s performance excellence was the primary objective of the field, and examined such through personality assessments (Miller & Kerr, 2002). While performance excellence remained the main objective in the 1980’s, the field moved away from personality assessments and towards mental skills interventions (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Throughout the 1990’s, researchers began to see the damaging effects of the “win at all costs” mentality many elite athletes experienced and shifted towards an approach that focused on a amalgamation of both performance excellence and personal excellence. Since then, researchers in the field began a pursuit of a more holistic sport psychology delivery model (Bond, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Owton, Bond, & Tod, 2014).

**Holistic Sport Psychology**

Physical and mental skills acquired in sport are transferrable across other life domains and can promote personal development, however sport itself does not promote personal development (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Danish et al., 1992). Rather SPPs must value and intentionally design sport psychology delivery programs to include personal development (Danish & Nellen, 1997). Many researchers suggested SPPs should build programming based around both athletic performance and personal development (Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; Bond, 2002; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Owton et al., 2014; Poczwardowski, Sherman,
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& Henschen, 1998; Ravizza, 2002; Wrisberg, Lind Withycombe, Simpson, Loberg, & Reed, 2012). In fact, athletes have started to recognize the value of utilizing sport psychology techniques to enhance non-sport domains of their lives (Danish & Nellen, 1997).

Many researchers shifted towards a more holistic approach to sport psychology delivery, with emphasis on both athletic performance and personal development (Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; Bond, 2002; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Owton et al., 2014; Ravizza, 2002; Wrisberg et al., 2012). With this approach, a SPP’s role is expected to include an understanding and assistance in whole person development in order to facilitate performance enhancement and preparation for a successful life beyond sport (Bond, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010).

According to Friesen and Orlick (2010), there are three viewpoints that define the practice of holistic sport psychology: 1) the acknowledgment that non-sport contexts can affect athletic performance, 2) the recognition that optimal athletic performance is best achieved through whole person development, as developing the core person promotes excellence in all aspects of life, including athletics, and 3) the understanding that human beings function across multiple overlapping dimensions (thoughts, emotions, physiology, and behavior), and each individual dimension can affect one another in relation to performance. At the heart of the holistic sport psychology model, the SPP believes the athlete and the rest of the self are not separate; therefore the SPP is working with the whole person (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011).

Many researchers argue there is no one “right” way to delivery a sport psychology program, rather it should fit the needs of the athletes and organization (Danish et al.,
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1992; Fifer et al., 2008; Owton et al., 2014; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). In the holistic sport psychology service delivery model, whole person development is the core means to optimal performance, which remains the ultimate objective (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Holistic SPPs challenge athletes to reflect on their own personal values and beliefs, assist them with organization and life balance, and cooperate with other organizational staff in the development of a positive sport environment (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Friesen & Orlick, 2011). While collaboration with sport staff is particularly important for holistic sport psychology programs, researchers across the field also argue a SPP’s integration into the sport setting is essential to overall program effectiveness (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

An Integrated Approach

Friesen and Orlick (2011) stress the importance of professional awareness. From a holistic sport psychology perspective, this involves awareness of non-sport areas, personal development, and the interacting emotional, psychological, physiological, and behavioral states of athletes and staff (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). It is, therefore, essential for SPPs to observe at practices, team meetings, organization functions, as well as competitions (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) suggest several integration techniques such as being present in the team room before or after competitions, attending practices, and traveling with the team. Not only do athletes and coaches report integration to be a key piece of sport psychology delivery programs, SPPs argue for it as well (Dunn & Holt, 2003; Fifer et al., 2008; Gould et al., 1991; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

According to well-respected professionals in the field, integration amongst teams allows
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SPPs to develop trust and rapport, gain insight into team culture, show commitment to the team, and learn from the coaches and athletes (Fifer et al., 2008).

One of the foundational perspectives of holistic sport psychology is that athletic performers function across multidimensional aspects; therefore holistic sport psychology holds an appreciation for other sport science disciplines (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). As a result, holistic sport psychology delivery services require collaboration with the entire sport staff organization (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Friesen and Orlick (2011) maintain that interdisciplinary support allows for a truly holistic perspective and whole person development of athletes.

This integrated approach allows for cohesive communication across disciplines, and teachable moments with coaches and support staff (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Poczwardowski et al. (2004) claim when mental skills are incorporated with physical and technical skills, learning is enhanced faster. Researchers suggest integrated SPPs should teach coaches to deliver physical and mental skills together (Poczwardowski et al., 2004).

Being integrated with sport teams allows SPPs the time to invest in an ongoing relationship with the coach and understand his or her coaching philosophy (Fifer et al., 2008). Miller and Kerr (2002) suggest SPPs can better educate coaches on how personal development can be the means to optimal athletic performance, focusing on approaches such as transformational leadership. Similarly, coaches, trainers, and other support staff members are whole people too (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). Based on the holistic sport psychology philosophy, SPPs should assist coaches and support staff in developing optimal performance in their own lives too (Friesen & Orlick, 2011).
Researchers suggest more self-awareness and work-life balance are essential to these sport staff members’ health, well-being, and overall job performance (Fletcher & Scott, 2010; Giges, Petitpas, & Vernacchia, 2004; Mazerolle et al., 2015). When coaches and trainers are stressed and depleted this can have major impact on the sport environment, and possibly affect athletic performances (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Giges et al., 2004). Giges et al. (2004) recommend SPPs employ mental skills and holistic sport psychology strategies with this population to enhance their professional performance. By holistically developing the coaches and support staff this not only influences the athlete experience, it also educates the sport staff on the broad range of services a SPP can provide to a sport organization (Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Wrisberg et al., 2012).

**Future Directions**

While coaches, athletics administrators, and support staff perceive sport psychology services to be beneficial, more education is needed to understand the potential range of benefits offered within sport psychology services, specifically integrated holistic sport psychology services (Bemiller & Wrisberg, 2011; Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Wrisberg et al., 2012; Zakrajsek, Martin, & Wrisberg, 2015; Zakrajsek, Steinfeldt, Bodey, Martin, & Zizzi, 2013). Unfortunately, the research available shows in NCAA Division I programs, only 24-53% utilize SPPs, and most of these are either part-time or independent contractors (Zakrajsek, Martin, & Wrisberg, 2015). Wrisberg et al. (2012) recommend future research be conducted in programs that have employed sport psychology professionals full-time to determine perceptions of impact on sport psychology services. Additionally, researchers suggest newly trained sport psychology consultants and advanced graduate sport psychology students in applied roles could offer
rich perspectives in the delivery of effective sport psychology services (Owton et al., 2014; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

While some studies have looked at general perceptions of sport psychology services from the perspective of SPPs, coaches, administrators, athletes, or athletic trainers (Dunn & Holt, 2003; Gould et al., 1991; Halliwell, 1990; Fifer et al., Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987; Wrisberg et al., 2012; Zakrjset et al., 2013, 2015), no current studies to date have examined a holistic, integrated sport psychology program from a whole picture perspective (SPPs, athletes, coaches, support staff). Friesen and Orlick (2010) encourage future studies to employ a case study methodology and examine ways that other SPPs deliver holistic sport psychology services. More specifically, they recommend examining how those they work with (athletes, coaches, support staff) view their service delivery.

Researchers within the sport psychology field encourage future research questions and design be shaped by how SPPs’ values and beliefs influence their particular delivery of holistic sport psychology programming (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2004).

**Purpose**

Poczwardowski et al. (2004) emphasized the need for all sport psychology delivery services to be built upon a professional philosophy. This philosophy consists of personal core values and beliefs of the SPP. Values play an important role in every person’s life. According to self-affirmation theory, each person has a self-system that is motivated to maintain an optimal integrity of the self (Steele, 1988). People re-affirm their own personal core values in order to restore self-integrity, eliminate threat and
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dissonance, and reestablish an image of the self that is morally and adaptively adequate (Steele, 1988). These theoretical tenets provide an excellent framework for this current study.

This study looks to examine the nationally recognized mental performance staff that is integrated within a Power Five, Division I athletics program in the Midwestern United States. This study seeks a detailed examination of the ways in which holistic sport psychology delivery services are provided within this model. Specifically this study hopes to understand how personal values and self-integrity impact ways in which holistic sport psychology services are delivered to sport teams. The study is built around the following research questions: (1) How do personal core values impact the ways in which a mental performance coach delivers holistic sport psychology? (2) How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence performance with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with? (3) How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence personal development with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with?
Chapter Two: Literature Review

“Our ultimate goal is to help people reach their personal goals and live a higher quality of life... Our quest is to help people excel at the mental game for both short- and long-term gains, which includes improved performance, health and happiness. If they achieve athletic or performance 'success' and there is no benefit to health or happiness, we don’t see that as being truly successful” (Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza, & Rotella, 2003, p. 11).

This review of the literature will first introduce the motivational spectrum, including the most lacking to most power and sustaining forms of human motivation. Next, the emergence of positive psychology, as well as its impact on well-being and flourishing will be discussed. The literature review will then shift towards specific motivation with athletes, and what drives athletic performance. Then needs satisfaction and the importance of athlete well-being in relation to optimal performance and functioning will be addressed. In regards to well-being, the demands and challenges competitive athletes face will be discussed. High functioning affords high performance; therefore, successful performance characteristics will then be highlighted. The review then moves to point out the traditional roles of sport psychology professionals that helped facilitate high performance in athletes. These traditional roles provide the foundation for where the field has moved today. Today, sport psychology professionals have expanded former duties to include both performance enhancement and personal development qualities. This newly recommended model of practice, holistic sport psychology, is discussed. Additionally, the importance of an integrated professional approach to sport psychology delivery service is argued. Finally, the review of literature ends with recommendations for future applied research and practice in sport psychology.

Motivation
Motivation is the mobilization of energy and production of action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The ability to impact others to act is primarily important in leadership roles such as coaching (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation can look differently depending on the person or circumstances, and exists on a continuum from amotivation through to intrinsic motivation (Gagne, Ryan & Bargmann, 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Ryan and Deci (2000), describe amotivation as having no intention to act or a lack of action. This state is due to a person seeing no value in the activity (Ryan, 1995), feeling incompetent to proceed in the activity (Bandura, 1986), or anticipating an undesirable result (Seligman 1975). Ryan and Deci (2000) describe four stages along the motivation continuum categorized underneath extrinsic motivation. The first, nearest to amotivation, is external regulation. This type of behavior is controlled or performed to satisfy external demands. The next type of extrinsic motivation is introjected regulation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) this type of regulation is typically controlled as well, and a person behaves in certain ways to avoid guilt or anxiety. Additionally self-esteem is contingent on performance (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The third form of extrinsic motivation is identified regulation in which the behavior is adopted and valued by the individual. This type of regulation is associated with greater joy and interest in school activities and more effective coping strategies (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The last form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation. This form of regulation involves assimilation of the behavior into the person’s personal values and beliefs. Both identified and integrated regulation are categorized as more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and findings show these types of
extrinsic motivation show increased engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), higher quality learning (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), and enhanced performance (Miserandino, 1996). Greater support for a person’s autonomy allows him or her to actively adopt a set of values as his or her own (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As a person internalizes an activity, the behavior is more effective, the person’s persistence increases, well-being is enhanced, and the person integrates better with his or her social group (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The last form of motivation on the continuum, intrinsic motivation, is the most powerful form of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). According to Ryan & Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation is the best representation of human potential to extend an individual’s capacities. This form of motivation encompasses interest, exploration and mastery, which are all essential to personal and cognitive development (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation thrives under the right circumstances, such as acknowledgment of feelings and provided choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Additionally, more autonomous forms of motivation are fostered when individual psychological needs are met (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Ryan & Deci (2000) developed self-determination theory from many years of research that identifies three psychological needs that are essential to human functioning, motivation, growth, integration and well-being. The three basic needs that all humans must have for psychological growth are autonomy (being the origin of one’s choices and decisions), competence (feelings of mastery) and relatedness (feelings of acceptance and security with others) (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin,
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2014). Ryan and Deci (2000) state that humans cannot thrive without meeting these three basic needs. Additionally, research suggests that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs not only fosters more autonomous forms of motivation (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999), but additionally when basic needs are met psychological well-being is enhanced too (Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, & Provencher, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagne & Blanchard, 2007; Gagne et al., 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim & Kasser, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Additional research supports the relationship between needs satisfaction and increased well-being across cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Tay & Diener, 2011).

Positive Psychology

Research interest in well-being and human flourishing spiked in more recent years due mostly to the rise of the positive psychology movement (Lundqvist, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Prior to the 21st century, much of the psychological field research addressed pathologies, human unhappiness and weaknesses (Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2010). Positive psychology, on the other hand, is the science of positive subjective experiences, strengths, and positive traits that improve quality of life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2010). Additionally, positive psychology studies the overall optimal functioning of individuals, groups, and whole organizations (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2004). Within positive psychology, many studies have been conducted related to human flourishing and well-being (Lundqvist, 2011).

Well-Being and Flourishing
According to Huppert & So (2013) flourishing is synonymous with mental well-being, and it is the combination of functioning effectively and life satisfaction. Well-being is not defined as the absence of mental illness, but rather it refers to optimal functioning and positive life experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Well-being has been defined in a multitude of ways, however all definitions are derived around two particular philosophical viewpoints, the hedonic and the eudaimonic perspectives (Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

The hedonic perspective centers on the idea that the purpose of life is happiness and pleasure (Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001). According to Lundqvist (2011), well-being is, therefore, achieved by seeking pleasurable moments, goals that align with individual values, and increased positive affect. Ryan and Deci (2001) state hedonic perspective also sees well-being and optimal happiness as equivalent terms. Many researchers have referenced hedonic psychology as subjective well-being, which includes positive affect, happiness and life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Tay & Diener, 2011). Additionally, intentional activities have been found to enhance well-being as well, focusing on increased happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

On the other hand, eudaimonic perspective argues that well-being is separate from human happiness (Lundqvist, 2011). Beyond temporary pleasures, eudaimonic philosophy argues well-being calls for human growth, a realization and recognition of personal strengths and pursuit of optimal human potential (Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). Well-being is achieved through a person’s activities and challenges that seek to enhance personal growth and development, align with personal values, and enhance engagement in such activities (Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan
& Deci, 2001; Ryff et al., 2004). According to Waterman (1993), these activities and pursuits allow for a person to align with his or her true self. Ryff & Keyes (1995) proposed the term psychological well-being in contrast to subjective well-being; this is a construct of human actualization that includes autonomy, personal growth, self, acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The point where hedonic and eudaimonic viewpoints overlap is that well-being is linked with optimal functioning (Ryff et al., 2004). Today researchers understand well-being as a complex and multifaceted construct that includes both hedonic and eudaimonic features of well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Lundqvist (2011) suggests that considerations for both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives allows for a more well-rounded understanding of the well-being of individuals.

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) understands that when the three basic psychological needs are met, eudaimonic well-being and subjective well-being are enhanced. Additionally, Seligman (2011) developed the well-being theory, which defines well-being as a construct with five measureable elements (PERMA) that encompass it: positive emotions (of which happiness and life satisfaction are all aspects), engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement (mastery). Research studies have provided both cross-sectional and longitudinal support that Seligman’s PERMA model of well-being theory is helpful to predict flourishing (Coffey, Wray-Lake, Mashek, & Branand, 2014, Huppert & So, 2013).

Huppert and So (2013) define flourishing to be synonymous with an optimal state of well-being. To better understand the characteristics and qualifications for flourishing,
researchers had to look at those who personified flourishing, rather than those that simply lacked mental disorders and pathologies (Huppert & So, 2013). Diener et al. (2010) identified eight components of flourishing that include purpose and meaning, supportive relationships, engagement, contribution towards others, competence, optimism, respect, and self-esteem. The combination of these components provided accurate representation of optimal levels of well being (Diener et al., 2010).

Knowing that optimal functioning includes both positive feelings and positive functioning (Huppert & So, 2013), researchers now begin to understand the myriad of beneficial outcomes for individuals with increased flourishing and well-being (Coffey et al., 2014). Some of the positive impacts of enhanced well-being include: decreased levels of stress and cortisol levels (Diener et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, & Love; 2004), increased physiological functioning, cardiovascular health, endocrine and autoimmune health systems (Diener et al., 2010; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005b; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, & Love; 2004), overall vitality (Coffey et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005b), resilience (Coffey et al., 2014), resource expansion and flexibility (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a), life satisfaction (Coffey et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2004; Lundqvist, 2011), job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kern et al., 2014), increased job performance and academic commitment (Coffey et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005a), stronger personal relationships, including marriages and friendships (Coffey et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a), increased prosocial behavior (Diener et al., 2010; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a, 2005b), as well as persistence towards mastery, which also related to higher GPA, life satisfaction, and participation in extracurricular activities (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009;
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Seligman, 2011). Additionally, positive affect is shown to present more frequent positive characteristics such as optimism, self-efficacy, likeability, effective coping with challenges and stress, and originality (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a).

It is clear with such beneficial outcomes that individuals and organizations as a whole could profit from enhancing optimal functioning within their environments. As mentioned previously, several studies have found ways to increase both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of well-being (Coffey et al., 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013; Kern et al., 2004; Lundqvist, 2011; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005b; Ryan & Deci; 2000, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009) examined 51 positive psychology interventions and found significant enhancement in well-being. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005b) found well-being is enhanced through practice of virtues such as gratitude and forgiveness. Several researchers found that the enhancement of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement (PERMA) increase flourishing too (Coffey et al, 2014; Kern, et al., 2004; Seligman, 2011). Among other factors, additional features that enhance optimal functioning are competence, relatedness, and autonomy, as outlined in Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory. Not only is well-being enhanced by the presence of these three fundamental needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013), these needs foster more autonomous forms of motivation too (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999).

Motivation with Athletes

Motivation is a primary interest for coaches and sport staff, and the ability to move athletes towards action, commitment, and buy in to program values (Ryan & Deci,
Intrinsic motivation is the highest form of autonomous motivation one can reach (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). According to Vallerand & Losier (1999), when an athlete is intrinsically motivated to participate in sport, he or she finds pleasure and joy in the process of learning more about the sport and mastering new personal levels of achievement within the sport context. A person’s performance and persistence increases as the level of autonomous motivation increases (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Comparably, when athletes experience more autonomous forms of motivation they also demonstrate other beneficial outcomes such as positive emotions, satisfaction, and effort (Matosic & Cox, 2014).

The most autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation are identified and integrated regulation (Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Matosic and Cox (2014), when an athlete is extrinsically motivated through integrated regulation he or she participates in the sport because it is a part of his or her own identity. Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2000) describe a person with higher extrinsic autonomous motivation to adopt the instructor’s values as his or her own. Research supports a positive relationship between basic psychological needs (competence, relatedness, and autonomy) and autonomous motivation in sport settings (Blanchard et al., 2009; Joesaar, Hein, & Hagger, 2011; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Kern et al. (2004) found positive relationships have the strongest association with organizational commitment.

**Coaches’ influence on motivation.**

Research shows that those in supervisory positions can influence their subordinates’ autonomous motivation (Blanchard et al., 2009). Coaches can influence athletes’ motivation by providing a more controlling or more autonomous environment
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(Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014). A more controlling coach chooses intimidation, criticism and other coercive behaviors (Blanchard et al., 2009; Matosic & Cox, 2014), whereas a more autonomous coach provides opportunities for choice, instructive and positive feedback, and shares in perspectives with his or her athletes (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014). Additionally, athletes’ perception of autonomous-supportive coaches enhances their perception of their basic psychological needs and supports the presence of more autonomous forms of motivation (Blanchard et al., 2009; Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014). Parallel to sport skill instruction, coaches can increase performance by promoting autonomous motivation (Wu, Lai & Chan, 2014).

Needs Satisfaction and Athlete Well-Being

Meeting the fundamental psychological needs of athletes through coaching behaviors and leadership can foster intrinsic motivation and more autonomous forms of motivation (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Wu et al., 2014). Fundamental needs satisfaction can also influence the well-being of athletes (Gagne et al., 2003; Gagne & Blanchard, 2007; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). According to Stenling & Tafvelin (2014), well-being is essential for athletes to maintain long-term productive participation is sport. Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, and Guzman (2010) reviewed 30 years of research to determine that transformational leadership behavior increases follower well-being amongst employees. In addition to well-being enhancement, researchers found that transformational leadership impacted performance, group affect, and commitment (Skakon et al., 2010; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014).
Transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership is an approach in which leaders share organizational values and visions and encourage followers to rise above their own personal interests for the good of the whole group, while still keeping individualized considerations in mind (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) located several studies that suggested coaches’ transformational leadership is linked to athlete motivation and performance. Additionally, studies suggest transformational leadership affects athlete well-being by the mediation of fundamental needs satisfaction (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014).

Why well-being in sport?

Needs satisfaction is crucial to athlete motivation and well-being, which have major impact on performance (Blanchard et al., 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Wu, Lai, & Chan, 2014). Lundqvist and Sandin (2014) examined elite athletes and highlighted many of their characteristics of positive well-being which include: satisfaction with perceived health, sport and life balance, absence of injury and sickness, happiness, security, mental and physical alertness, interest and enjoyment in the sport itself, quick mental recovery, positive self image and personal self acceptance independent of performances, self-awareness, positive interpersonal relationships, trust and security with the coach, autonomy, life purpose, and personal growth as both a person and an athlete. It seems that to build effective sport-related well-being, athletes must first have a solid global well-being foundation (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). It is reasonable to assume that because global well-being is a subjective contextual-free
evaluation of one’s life, the ways in which dimensions of global well-being is understood and enhanced can be applied to both general population and athlete populations (Lundqvist, 2011). As discussed, some of the positive impacts athletes can experience with enhanced global well-being include: decreased levels of stress and cortisol levels (Diener et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, & Love; 2004), increased physiological functioning, cardiovascular health, endocrine and autoimmune health systems (Diener et al., 2010; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005b; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, & Love; 2004), overall vitality (Coffey et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005b), resilience (Coffey et al., 2014), resource expansion and flexibility (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a), life satisfaction (Coffey et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2004; Lundqvist, 2011), organizational commitment (Kern et al., 2014), increased performance and academic commitment (Coffey et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005a), stronger personal relationships, including marriages and friendships (Coffey et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a) increased prosocial behavior (Diener et al., 2010; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a, 2005b), as well as persistence towards mastery, which also related to higher GPA, life satisfaction, and participation in extracurricular activities (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Seligman, 2011). Additionally, positive affect presents more frequent positive characteristics like optimism, self-efficacy, likeability, effective coping with challenges and stress, and originality (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a).

An athlete’s evaluation of his or her own well-being is influenced by other parts of his or her life, both in and out of athletics (Lundqvist, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin,
Coaches and athletics staff should be particularly interested in athletes’ well-being because it impacts psychological functioning, emotional awareness, and long-term affects, which are all essential to optimal performance in high pressure environments over time (Jones, Meijen, McCarthy, & Sheffield, 2009; Lundqvist, 2011). In fact, Lundqvist (2011) states that positive well-being can help athletes cope with the diverse challenges and stressors across their athletic careers.

**Demand and Challenges on Competitive Athletes**

High-level competitive sports demand a pursuit of high standards and highly valued performance goals against other athletes with similar competence (Lundqvist, 2011). A great amount of dedication and commitment to extensive training and competition is required to see success in such a competitive environment (Lundqvist, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Along with demanding training schedules, elite level athletes deal with extensive travel, changes in time zones, high level competition, and constant spotlight in the public (Barbour & Orlick, 1999). In fact, according to Lundqvist (2011), high-level competitive sport demands often equate to part and full-time job commitments, and stressors can originate from competitive and noncompetitive sources (Dugdale, Eklund, & Gordon, 2002). Identifying and understanding high-level competitive demands and stressors is essential to uncovering the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that impact performance (Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009).

**Competition stressors.**

Competition stressors are common to high-level competitive sport and involve all the demands associated directly with competitive performances (Hanton, Fletcher, &
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Coughlan, 2005; Mellalieu et al., 2009). Some of the topics associated with competitive stressors include: preparation (physical, mental, technical, and tactical), injury, goals, expectations (internal and external), performance issues, pressure (closeness of competition), self-presentation (coach/teammate/parent/spectator evaluation, event factors (start/nature of competition/performing complex skills/closing out an event/quality of officiating), and opponents (ability/behavior) (Dugdale et al., 2002; Gagne et al., 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Additionally, Dugdale et al. (2002) determined thoughts (positive and negative), confidence, performance errors, pregame talks and instruction, fatigue, and role in lineup were identified as supplemental competitive stressors for elite athletes. The demands of competitive sport and emphasis on “win at all costs” mentality can have serious impact on autonomous motivation and well-being of athletes (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Lundqvist and Sandin (2014) stated that in addition to the normal competitive stressors that surround high-level competitive sport, athletes are also surrounded by non-competition factors that impact their well-being too.

**Organizational stressors.**

Non-competitive, or organizational stressors, are defined by Hanton et al. (2005) as the environmental demands that athletes interact with within the environment he or she is operating in. While competitive stressors have impact on performance, research findings support the notion that organizational stressors may have the greatest influence on performance (Hanton et al., 2005; Jones, 2002). Similar to the business environment, athletics organizational stressors can result from lack of resources, poor communication, and lack of role definition (Hanton et al., 2005; Jones, 2002). Organizational stressors
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involve dimensions such as environmental issues, personal issues, leadership issues, and
team issues (Dugdale et al., 2002; Hanton et al., 2005; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).
Mellalieu et al. (2009) associate organizational stressors with topics including roles in the
sport organization, sport relationships and interpersonal demands, athletic career and
performance development issues, and organizational environment structure and climate
of the sport. More specific subcategories of these organizational factors involve
teammates, coaches, media, time demands, nutrition, expectations, team atmosphere and
support (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009).

Many studies found increasing evidence that elite level athletes employ a variety
of coping strategies to deal with competitive and organizational stressors (Dugdale et al.,
2002). Recognizing and understanding these stressors can help athletes better plan and
prepare for the demands of high-level competitive sport in order to positively impact
performance (Dugdale et al., 2002; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009).

**Successful Performance Characteristics**

Looking at the elite level performers, researchers found that athletes utilize
multiple coping strategies and techniques to successfully manage stressors (Dugdale et
al., 2002). Athletes must cope with many different stressors effectively in order to
perform optimally (Dugdale et al., 2002; Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett, 2002; Nicholls,
Polman, Levy, & Backhouse, 2008; Poczwardowski, Diehl, O’Neil, Cote & Haberl,
2014). Effective planning and preparation for the competitive environment and conflicts
can have a positive influence on superior performance (Dugdale et al., 2002; Fletcher &
Wagstaff, 2009).

**Mental toughness.**
Gould et al. (2002) revealed that Olympic champions reported to have higher levels of coping, mental toughness and optimism. Nicholls et al. (2008) state that recently mental toughness is thought to be an important characteristic of athletic success. Mental toughness can be characterized by the ability to withstand physical demands longer than others, a higher sense of self-belief that can withstand adversity, and the ability to maintain control under pressure situations (Nicholls et al., 2008). According the Nicholls et al. (2008), mental toughness is also associated with higher levels of approach coping strategies rather than avoidance coping strategies, and it is suggested to potentially be associated with high achievement. Gould et al. (2002) linked mental toughness and effective coping with optimism. In fact, research findings suggest that optimism is the best predictor of sport performance (Nicholls et al., 2008).

**Optimism, passion, and GRIT.**

Optimism is found to have a positive correlation with effective coping strategies (task oriented coping) such as mental imagery, thought control, and effort (Gould et al., 2002; Nicholls et al., 2008; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). Also, Nicholls et al. (2008) found that more optimistic people pursued increased effort towards goal attainment. Optimism helped elite level athletes with transitions to Olympic training facilities as well (Poczwardowski et al., 2014).

Another aspect of optimal performance associated with coping in demanding environments and activities is passion (Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2008). Vallerand et al. (2008) define passion as a likeness or love of an activity that holds strong importance to the individual. Not only is the individual willing
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to invest time and energy into this activity, he or she also internalizes it into his or her identity too (Vallerand et al., 2008).

In addition to passion, perseverance is an important characteristic of world-class athletes (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010). Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) define GRIT as a passion and perseverance towards long-term goals. Researchers found that individuals with higher levels of GRIT outperformed those that had lesser GRIT scores (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). GRIT is associated with high-level performers throughout many research studies (Duckworth et al., 2007, Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2014).

Long-term goal attainment focused on personal improvement and high competence can also been viewed as mastery (Beaumont, Maynard, & Butt, 2015). Mastery, or the commitment to excel in the sport, is a characteristic consistently associated with elite level athletes (Beaumont et al., 2015; Cox et al., 2010; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2014; Vallerand et al., 2008). According to Vallerand et al. (2008), harmonious passion is a predictor of mastery goal pursuit. This harmonious passion results from an autonomous internalization of the activity into one’s own identity without any contingencies (Vallerand et al., 2008). Such mastery goal pursuit is a positive predictor of deliberate practice (Vallerand et al., 2008), and hard work ethic and deliberate practice are positively linked with high performance (Baker & Horton, 2004; Dugdale et al., 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, Finch, & Jackson, 1993; Gould et al., 2002;
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Helsen, Hodges, Winckel, & Starkes, 2000; MacNamara et al., 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2014; Vallerand et al., 2008).

In addition to mastery and deliberate practice, harmonious passion leads to a personal endorsement to engage in the activity, where he or she freely chooses to participate in it (Vallerand et al., 2008). Because of this, Vallerand et al. (2008) state that this passionate activity fits in harmony with other pieces of the person’s identity rather than overpowering the identity. This is particularly important since two other characteristics of optimal performers include a healthy athletic identity (Martin, Fogarty, & Albion, 2014; Poczwardowski et al., 2014) and sport life balance (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2014; Poczwardowski et al., 2014; Vallerand et al., 2008). Martin et al. (2014) attest to research that found athletes who invest in academic and social goals, as well as athletic goals, perform better athletically.

The autonomous integration associated with passion, according to Vallerand et al. (2008), leads to positive athletic identity, sport life balance, mastery, deliberate practice, and ultimately, optimal performance. As previously mentioned, research found that the greater the autonomous motivation, the greater the persistence and performance (Gagne et al., 2003; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomous motivation is continuously associated with high-level performers (Baker & Horton, 2004; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gagne et al., 2003; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010; Matosic & Cox, 2014; Poczwardowski et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Additional psychological skills.

Together with the aforementioned characteristics, many psychological skills are related to world-class athletes and optimal performance (Gould et al., 2002). Some of
these skills include: (a) self-talk/rational thinking (Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Beaumont et al., 2015; Dugdale et al., 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 1993; Hatzigeorgiadis, Galanis, Zourbanos, & Theodorakis, 2014), (b) positive focus and time orientation (Baker & Horton, 2004; Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Dugdale et al., 2002; Gould et al., 1993, 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (c) confidence (Baker & Horton, 2004; Beaumont et al., 2015; Chen & Wu, 2014; Cox, Shannon, McGuire, & McBride, 2010; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Freeman & Rees, 2010; Gould et al., 2002; Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2014; MacNamara et al., 2010; Orlick & Partington, 1999; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (d) imagery (Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Beaumont et al., 2015; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010), and (e) precompetition mental rehearsal (Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Beaumont et al., 2015; Dugdale et al., 2002; Gould et al., 1993; Orlick & Partington, 1999).

**Other characteristics and skills.**

Beyond psychological skills, other factors influence optimal performance such as social support, team cohesion, and trusting relationships with coaches and others (Chen & Wu, 2014; Dugdale et al., 2002; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Freeman & Rees, 2010; Gould et al., 1993; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 2014; Rees & Hardy, 2000; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Other optimal performance characteristics include: (a) resiliency (Baker & Horton, 2004; Gould et al., 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (b) moral (Gould et al., 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (c) competitiveness (Baker & Horton, 2004; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; MacNamara
et al., 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (d) creativity (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002), and (e) gratitude (Chen & Wu, 2014; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Lambert, Graham, Fincham, & Stillman, 2009; Rees & Hardy, 2000). Supplemental skills and strategies such as (a) time management (Dugdale et al., 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 1993), (b) goal setting (Beaumont et al., 2015; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2014; Orlick & Partington, 1999; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (c) self-awareness (Beaumont et al., 2015; Gould et al., 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2014), (d) evaluation (Barbour & Orlick, 1999; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; MacNamara et al., 2010), and (e) strengths development (Beaumont et al., 2015, Orlick & Partington, 1999) are associated with high-performance too.

With the abundant characteristics, skills, and strategies associated with elite-level performance, research indicates it is essential to plan and prepare in order to deliver optimal performances (Dugdale et al., 2002). Sport psychology professionals can assist athletes and support staffs in this planning and preparation process (Mellalieu et al., 2009).

**Traditional Roles of Sport Psychology Professionals (SPPs)**

Dugdale et al. (2002) state that well-learned and well-practiced coping strategies are worth developing in preparation for major competitions. As Mellalieu et al. (2009) mention, athletes are met with an array of challenges in the competitive environment, and as part of their role, SPPs can effectively prepare athletes for those circumstances. In fact, Dugdale et al. (2002) claim this planning and preparation is related to optimal performances.
In examining competition stressors, Mellalieu et al. (2009) highlight several factors a SPP can specifically help athletes with. SPPs can help performers focus on what’s controllable, provide interventions to assist in effective coping strategies, create pre-performance routines in practice, and prepare re-focusing strategies (Mellalieu et al., 2009). Additionally, Fifer, Henschen, Gould, and Ravizza (2008) recommend discussing several specific topics to prepare athletes for the major competition environment, such as dealing with distractions and lowered self-confidence, treating the competition like any other, sticking with normal pre-performance routines, focusing skills, and preparation for unexpected events.

Veteran SPPs highlight characteristics and procedures representative of successful professionals in the field (Fifer et al., 2008; Halliwell, 1990). Fifer et al. (2008) offer that SPPs with successful entry into sport programs are hard workers, creative, genuine, have knowledge of applied sport psychology research, a willingness to learn, and passion for the role. Halliwell (1990) claims experience and practice, along with confidence in ability to deliver mental skills are essential to the role. Additionally, these researchers discuss several topics and interventions for successful mental skills training program delivery (Fifer et al., 2008; Halliwell, 1990).

The primary step of mental skills programming is first assessing the needs of the team or individuals, and tailoring the program to fit those needs (Fifer et al., 2008; Halliwell, 1990). The next most important step to mental skills interventions is gaining trust and rapport with the athletes and sport staff (Fifer et al., 2008; Halliwell, 1990). Some specific programming topics suggested by successful SPPs are goal setting, communication, confidence, stress management and relaxation techniques, enjoyment,
frustration, travel planning, distraction control, fatigue and burnout, focus skills, pre-performance routines, refocus strategies, visualizations, and self-talk (Fifer et al., 2008; Halliwell, 1990). Finally, these researchers all suggest SPPs be adaptable and flexible, as many of the most effective opportunities to meet with athletes and coaches take place in unexpected or non-traditional meeting spaces while traveling with the teams (Fifer et al., 2008; Halliwell, 1990).

**Perceptions of sport psychology professionals (SPPs).**

While it is important to learn successful strategies and characteristics from experienced professionals in the field, it is also essential to examine the effectiveness of SPPs from those they work with too (Gould, Murphy, Tammen, & May, 1991). U.S Olympic coaches affirmed 11 characteristics of effective U.S. Olympic SPPs: (a) useful knowledge, (b) individualize mental training and needs, (c) flexibility/collaboration, (d) positive-constructive attitude, (e) trustworthiness, (f) relatable, (g) fit in, (h) draw on strengths, (i) help overcome problems, (j) provide clear, practical, concrete strategies (Gould et al., 1991). Athletes rated positive-constructive attitude, draw on athletes’ strengths, and clear strategies to have the most effect on athletes (Gould et al., 1991). Additionally, athletes claimed fitting in with the team, positive-constructive attitude, and trustworthiness to influence the team the most (Gould et al., 1991).

These findings support Fifer et al. (2008) findings that SPPs should convey compassion, care, empathy, and sincerity to gain trust with the team, and should offer practical advice. These findings also supplement Halliwell’s (1990) claim that trust and confidence is essential when working with athletes. Furthermore, this research supports Partington and Orlick’s (1987) findings that examined Canadian Olympic coaches’
perceptions of effective SPPs. These coaches found the most effective SPPs to be good listeners, relatable to the athletes, energetic, hard working, flexible, open, and demonstrated practical and relevant sport psychology skills (Partington & Orlick, 1987). Additionally, Orlick and Partington (1987) found Canadian Olympic athletes claim effective SPPs work individually with them, are good listeners, are interested and caring, and provide follow-up meetings through ongoing programming. Again, these findings support Fifer et al. (2008) findings that SPPs should be fun loving, flexible, caring, sincere, and knowledgeable in applied sport psychology research. Sharp and Hodge (2014) also found athletes identified effective SPPs as those that were flexible, open, honest, and respectful.

Moreover, Dunn and Holt (2003) examined collegiate hockey players’ perceptions of their applied sport psychology program and were favorable of their SPP. The players favorably perceived the SPP to have multiple roles in which he was invested in the team, relatable to teammates, part of the team in many ways, yet still seen as still part of staff, and a liaison between the coaching staff and athletes (Dunn & Holt, 2003). The players also state that effective characteristics of their SPP are respect for team and coaches, equal treatment amongst players, respect for team history, approachability and accessibility, positive and supportive, straightforward and incorporate athletes’ language, and trustworthy (Dunn & Holt, 2003). These characteristics are consistent with previously mentioned research, and Dunn and Holt’s (2003) findings suggest SPPs may have multiple roles amongst the teams they serve.

**Historical change in professional roles.**
Landers (1995) suggested the field of sport psychology really began to blossom between 1950 and 1980, in which specific journal articles dedicated solely to sport psychology were created, graduate programs in sport psychology were established, and professional organizations took off. Because of recent emergence, the role of the SPP has changed considerably over the years (Miller & Kerr, 2002). More specifically, Miller and Kerr (2002) claim the field’s philosophy in relation to performance and personal excellence changed significantly over the years.

Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s performance excellence was the main objective in the field (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Performance was primarily examined through personality assessments, and the goal was to better understand and predict optimal performance (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Miller & Kerr (2002) state performance excellence remained the primary objective throughout the 1980’s, however the field moved away from personality assessments and shifted towards mental skills interventions. The primary focus, as outlined in other research above, was to create programming that taught psychological skills such as focus, imagery, visualizations, relaxation, biofeedback, and goal setting, with the intention to regulate psychological factors and enhance performance (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Athletes, coaches, and administrators now acknowledge the positive effects mental skills training can have on performance enhancement (Shaffer, Tenenbaum, & Eklund, 2015). Unfortunately few research studies examined elite-level athletes outside of the sport domain to better understand the impact of performance excellence on personal development (Miller & Kerr, 2002).
As Miller and Kerr (2002) point out, the examination of long-term effects of performance excellence on personal development did not begin to take priority in research until the 1990’s. While performance excellence was still a main objective of the field, researchers also saw damaging effects of the “win at all costs” mentality many elite-level athletes later experienced (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Researchers found student-athletes to be at risk of an imbalance of identities, placing too much emphasis on athletic identity and not enough of other identities that relate to career and personal development (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996).

Miller and Kerr (2002) suggest a merge between performance excellence and personal excellence, highlighting leadership, teamwork, and career planning as some of the positive factors to counterbalance elite athletes’ sole focus on optimal athletic performance. Life Skills programs were introduced into collegiate programs in the 1990’s, emphasizing whole person development (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Danish and Nellen (1997) suggest SPPs have a role to play in whole person development as well, keeping equal concern with an athlete’s personal and athletic development. If the role of the SPP is to help athletes focus and perform to their potential (Dugdale et al., 2002), researchers suggest this performance potential should extend beyond the sporting arena (Bond, 2002; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). They suggest mental skills training can be transferrable to other aspects of life (Danish & Nellen, 1997). In more recent years, researchers continue to emphasize the need to pursue a more holistic sport psychology delivery system (Bond, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Owton, Bond, & Tod, 2014).
Holistic Sport Psychology

The earliest discussions of a holistic sport psychology approach came from researchers like Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1992), who suggested sport psychology interventions to be primarily based on a human development framework. Their particular life development intervention focuses on growth and change, with intentions that by preparing for critical life events more effectively, confidence and success could be increased as well (Danish et al., 1992). Physical and mental skills acquired in sport are transferrable across other life domains and can promote personal development, however sport itself does not promote personal development (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Danish et al., 1992). Rather SPPs must value and intentionally design sport psychology delivery programs to include personal development (Danish & Nellen, 1997).

Many researchers have suggested SPPs should be concerned with both athletic performance and personal development (Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; Bond, 2002; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Owton et al., 2014; Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Henschen, 1998; Ravizza, 2002; Wrisberg, Lind Withycombe, Simpson, Loberg, & Reed, 2012). Because athletes have a strong inclination to focus solely on athletic development, SPPs may need to focus more attention on personal development (Gould et al., 1991). However, athletes have started to recognize the value of utilizing sport psychology techniques to enhance non-sport domains of their lives (Danish & Nellen, 1997).

Regardless of a professional’s approach to sport psychology delivery, the rapport between the athlete and SPP is most important to have successful programming (Dunn & Holt, 2003; Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Halliwell, 1990; Orlick &
Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Ravizza, 2002). The best way to build trust and rapport with the athlete is to care about him or her as a whole person, rather than simply as an athlete (Fifer et al., 2008; Ravizza, 2002). In fact, researchers found optimal athletic performance is best achieved through the optimal growth, understanding, and development of the individual person (Bond, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002). As such, relationship building is particularly important in a holistic sport psychology delivery model (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

Many researchers shifted towards a more holistic approach to sport psychology delivery, with emphasis on both athletic performance and personal development (Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; Bond, 2002; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Owton et al., 2014; Ravizza, 2002; Wrisberg et al., 2012). With this approach, a SPP’s role is expected to include an understanding and assistance in whole person development in order to facilitate performance enhancement and preparation for a successful life beyond sport (Bond, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Several researchers suggest mental skills alone are not enough to equip athletes to handle the stressors of elite athletics and multifaceted dimensions of their identities that can also disrupt optimal performance (Bond, 2002; Dugdale et al., 2002; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Hanton et al., 2005). In fact, athletes are welcoming SPPs who extend their programming beyond athletics, and emphasize issues outside of sport (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Many researchers have mentioned the concept of holistic sport psychology; therefore Friesen and Orlick (2010) clarified what specifically is encompassed within a holistic sport psychology model.
Defining holistic sport psychology.

According to Friesen and Orlick (2010), there are three viewpoints that define the practice of holistic sport psychology: 1) the acknowledgment that non-sport contexts can affect athletic performance, 2) the recognition that optimal athletic performance is best achieved through whole person development, as developing the core person promotes excellence in all aspects of life, including athletics, and 3) the understanding that human beings function across multiple overlapping dimensions (thoughts, emotions, physiology, and behavior), and each individual dimension can affect one another in relation to performance. The holistic sport psychology tenets are summarized as environmental effects, development of the core individual, and the athlete’s whole being (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). At the heart of the holistic sport psychology model, the SPP believes the athlete cannot be separated from the rest of the self; therefore the SPP is working with the entire person (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011).

Environmental influences.

Throughout an athlete’s life, different experiences and factors can influence his or her overall state and, in turn, his or her performance (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Hanton et al., 2005). Poczwardowski et al. (1998) warn SPPs to adjust and individualize programming based on the needs of the individual athletes and organization to provide expanded program effectiveness. Studies show elite athletes experience stressors inside and outside of the competitive environment (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Hanton et al., 2005; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Some of these stressors include life balance, relationship problems, academic stress, coping with setbacks or failure, lack of support, transition periods, and organizational stressors (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Hanton et al., 2005;
Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). In fact, Hanton et al. (2005) state organizational stressors such as poor communication, ineffective leadership methods, lack of team cohesion, insufficient resources, and aggressive coaching styles may have the greatest impact on performance.

Aoyagi, Cox, and McGuire (2008) examined underperformance in elite level sport and argue by enhancing organizational citizenship behavior, athletic performance increases too. Team cohesion, leadership styles, and organizational support can enhance the athletic experience and the performance (Aoyagi et al., 2008; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Hanton et al., 2005). A SPP’s sole focus on mental skill training could prove ineffective in dealing with organizational stressors (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Hanton et al., 2005). Alternatively, by holistically developing the athletes, a more quality team environment is established (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). In turn, Friesen and Orlick (2011) point out an enriched team environment extends the holistic development of the athletes. Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) suggest SPPs can carefully assist in shaping a constructive organizational environment, as doing so can influence individuals’ performance and well-being.

*Well-being and whole person development.*

The most successful and long-lived elite athlete careers are classified by athletes who possess several aspects of well-being such as hope and optimism, high perceived ability, high self-esteem, sport-life balance, effective coping skills and elevated mental and emotional health (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002; Lundqvist, 2011; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). In facilitating leadership development, team cohesion, and personal excellence, SPPs are not only enhancing the athletic performance and
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individual development of the athlete, they are also increasing well-being. The holistic sport psychology approach affords SPPs the opportunity to incorporate interventions that foster enhanced well-being, which are known to improve health, relationships, positive affect, productivity, and performance (Coffey et al. 2014; Diener et al., 2010; Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Huppert & So, 2013; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) recommend incorporating positive psychology techniques into professional work, particularly with athletes who are highly motivated to improve. Several researchers argue for gratitude, hope and optimism training to be included in sport psychology delivery models (Chen & Wu, 2014; Nicholls et al., 2008). Other researchers suggest incorporating signature strengths development with athletes (Beaumont et al., 2015; Morton, 2014; Poczwardowski et al., 1998). Development of signature strengths not only impacts sport performance, but also enhances athletes’ self-awareness. Lundqvist and Sandin (2014) discovered holistic interventions aimed to improve well-being in elite athletes also influenced their self-awareness, while additionally enhancing other aspects including: positive relationships, autonomy, sport-life balance, environmental mastery, purpose in and out of sport, and personal growth as both an athlete and person. Morton (2014) incorporated positive psychology interventions into collegiate sport psychology services and found increases in team cohesion, communication, perceived support, engagement, positive affect, and meaning and purpose in and out of sport. Like Lundqvist and Sandin (2014), Morton (2014) also reported that positive psychology interventions enhanced the growth of the collegiate
student-athletes. Friesen and Orlick (2011) argue the primary purpose of holistic sport psychology is personal growth.

Personal growth is the key to unlocking human potential and a receptiveness to new experiences (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). By developing the core person, athletes not only enhance their athletic experiences, but also increase their personal understanding of themselves (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Holistic SPPs have a responsibility to assist athletes in their pursuit of excellence beyond sport (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). SPPs can enhance athletes’ self-awareness of their whole person identities, and their interactions with others as engaging members of society (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

With a solid, trusting relationship with athletes, SPPs can challenge athletes to realize their own personal beliefs, values, and philosophy (Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002). When such self-awareness is conceived, these skills are transferrable across all realms of life, setting athletes up for success beyond sport (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Identifying their true selves helps alleviate stress of competition, allowing them to live and perform to their potential, authentically to their own values (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Friesen and Orlick (2011) argue such holistic training techniques improve awareness of the interaction between the emotional, mental, and physiological states all people possess.

*Multidimensional human functioning.*
The final tenet of holistic sport psychology is the understanding that humans function across several different dimensions (thoughts, emotions, physiological state, and behavior) (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). In order to impact a change in behavior (sport performance), all other aspects must be considered (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). Based on Friesen and Orlick’s (2010, 2011) statements, it is clear to see how complex it is to influence sport performance. For these reasons, a holistic SPP must work in collaboration with other sport staff to design best strategies to meet the multidimensional needs of the athlete (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Ravizza (2004) emphasize a SPP’s delivery model may change over the years based on experience and professional development. While some SPPs may not agree that collaboration with other sport staff is part of the defined SPP’s role, it fits the holistic sport psychology philosophy (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 1998, 2004).

Holistic philosophy.

Reviewing decades of research, Poczwardowski et al. (1998) identified 11 key factors to consider when designing and implementing an applied sport psychology delivery program. One of these important factors is professional philosophy, in which Poczwardowski et al. (1998) argue it is what drives the direction of the sport psychology program. Several years later, Poczwardowski et al. (2004) examined many research studies that discussed professional philosophy and conceptualized the following professional philosophy definition:

Professional philosophy refers to the consultant’s beliefs and values concerning the nature of reality, the place of sport in human life, the basic nature of a human being,
the nature of human behavior change, and also the consultant’s beliefs and values concerning his or her potential role in, and the theoretical and practical means of, influencing their clients towards mutually set intervention goals. (p. 449).

Poczwardowski et al.’s (2004) definition of professional philosophy can be condensed down to five major elements: (a) personal core beliefs and values, (b) theoretical paradigm concerning behavior change, (c) model of practice and the consultant role, (d) intervention goals, and e) intervention techniques and methods. All of these elements are well-grounded in the literature and independently linked to each other (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) have since revised the sport psychology delivery service heuristic to include professional philosophy as part of the foundations of service.

The professional philosophy definition proposed by Poczwardowski et al. (2004) is generalized to fit many sport psychology delivery models. Many researchers argue there is no one “right” applied sport psychology program, rather it should fit the needs of the athletes and organization (Danish et al., 1992; Fifer et al., 2008; Owton et al., 2014; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Keeping optimal performance central as the ultimate outcome, whole person development is at the core of the service delivery model for holistic sport psychology philosophy (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Lundqvist & Sherman, 2014; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

Friesen and Orlick (2010, 2011) interviewed several world-renowned, self-identified holistic SPPs to understand and determine a general professional philosophy of holistic sport psychology. The primary purpose of Friesen and Orlick’s (2010) study was to identify broad internal philosophical factors of holistic sport psychology. Friesen and
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Orlick (2010) depict the following beliefs at the foundation of a holistic sport psychology philosophy: athletes are regular people, each individual has multiple identities and he or she is a total person, stress is a most telling time to observe a person’s authentic self. Additionally, holistic SPP’s hold specific values such as care, authenticity, and professionalism (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). As far as theoretical paradigm, many researchers recently are adopting a more eclectic approach, which creatively combines rigorous theories across theoretical perspectives to meet the needs to individual athletes and organizations (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 1998). Researchers suggest holistic SPPs embrace a person-centered approach to model of practice, as the relationship between a SPP and athlete is extremely important to have an effective holistic program (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

Friesen and Orlick (2011) expanded upon their previous work to illustrate general external philosophical factors of holistic sport psychology. In order to deliver a successful holistic sport psychology program, experienced holistic SPPs took on four main roles: friend, Jack-of-all-trades, educator, and observer (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). The role of the friend extends to inclusions of support, care, trust and authenticity, while still maintaining professionalism (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). The jack-of-all-trades role suggests SPPs should be willing and able to take on unexpected (and sometimes odd) jobs to show commitment to the organization (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). According to Friesen and Orlick (2011), the educator role is not how most would traditionally perceive it; rather this role is viewed as a guide who helps in the pursuit of athletes’ own self discovery. Finally, Friesen and Orlick (2010, 2011) emphasize the need for holistic SPPs to have awareness of many holistic aspects and their influence on
athletes. The role of the observer is primarily important in the enhancement of that holistic awareness (Friesen & Orlick, 2011).

In addition to roles, Poczwardowski et al. (2004) suggested intervention goals techniques, and methods should be determined. While some may assume the goal of holistic sport psychology is personal growth, the SPPs argued the primary goal of holistic sport psychology is to help athletes reach their physical potential (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). From a holistic model, optimal physical performance is best achieved through personal growth (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Lundqvist & Sherman, 2014; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Finally, Friesen and Orlick (2011) state the techniques and methods incorporated in holistic sport psychology delivery models emphasize the multidimensional relationship of the whole person (thoughts, emotions, physiology, and behavior). Holistic SPPs not only emphasize techniques and strategies that focus on the interaction between thoughts and behavior, they also apply methods that highlight the relationship between emotions and physiology (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). Some specific strategies include imagery, mental rehearsal, and recovery awareness (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). Additionally holistic SPPs challenge athletes to reflect on their own personal values and beliefs, assist with organization and life balance, and cooperate with other organizational staff in the development of a positive sport environment (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Friesen & Orlick, 2011). While collaboration with sport staff is particularly important for holistic sport psychology programs, researchers in general argue a SPP’s integration into the sport setting is essential to overall program effectiveness (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

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Friesen and Orlick (2011) highlight the importance of professional awareness. From a holistic sport psychology perspective, this involves awareness of non-sport realms, personal development, and the interacting emotional, psychology, physiological, and behavioral states of athletes and staff (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). It is, therefore, essential for SPPs to take on the role of the observer at practices, team meetings, organization functions, as well as competitions (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). One of the reasons collegiate athletes report having positive views of their SPP is because of easy accessibility (Dunn & Holt, 2003). When Olympic athletes were asked about ineffective SPP experiences, limited contact was one of the main factors (Gould et al., 1991). By being integrated with the team, this allows for informal conversations with athletes, coaches, and staff members, which well-respected SPPs report are often the most transformative interactions (Fifer et al., 2008).

Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) suggest several integration techniques such as being present in the team room before or after competitions, attending practices, and traveling with the team. Not only do athletes and coaches report integration as a key piece of sport psychology delivery programs, SPPs argue for it as well (Dunn & Holt, 2003; Fifer et al., 2008; Gould et al., 1991; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Fifer et al. (2008) report observations at practices and competitions can enhance a SPPs awareness of how athletes respond to pressure situations, coaching critique, and adversity or failure. According to well-respected professionals in the field, integration amongst teams allows SPPs to develop trust and rapport, gain insight into team culture, declare commitment to the team, and learn from the coaches and athletes (Fifer et al., 2008).

Sport staff collaboration.
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Researchers stress the point that psychological factors are a small piece of the overall athletic performance (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). One of the foundational perspectives of holistic sport psychology is that athletic performers function across multidimensional aspects; therefore holistic sport psychology holds an appreciation for other sport science disciplines (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). As a result, holistic sport psychology delivery services require collaboration with the entire sport staff organization (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2004).

Friesen and Orlick (2011) maintain that interdisciplinary support allows for a truly holistic perspective and whole person development of athletes. Poczwardowski et al. (1998) define professional boundaries as a person’s professional limits. In a holistic sport psychology model, working with the entire organization allows for a greater picture of each athlete (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). If and when issues arise that are out of a SPP’s professional boundaries, they are readily able to refer to mental health professionals within the organization (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 1998). Mellalieu et al. (2009) suggest by working collaboratively with other support staff, SPPs can help identify and prevent potential crises from occurring.

The integrated collaboration with support staff allows for everyone working with athletes to be on the same page, speaking the same language (Dunn & Holt, 2003; Friesen & Orlick, 2011). Furthermore, mental skills can be taught alongside sport skill instruction (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Poczwardowski et al. (2004) claim when mental skills are incorporated with physical and tactical skills, learning is enhanced.
faster. Researchers suggest integrated SPPs should train coaches to deliver physical and mental skills together (Poczwardowski et al., 2004).

**Coaching the coaches.**

Building trust with the coaches, trainers, strength staff, and athletes takes time and patience (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2011). Fifer et al. (2008) suggest when SPPs build trust and rapport with coaches over time there will be opportunities to recommend supplemental techniques. An integrated holistic model allows SPPs to instruct coaches and support staff on ways to implement sport psychology techniques into their own domains (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). McGuire and Scogin (2013) propose an integrated holistic model within a collegiate athletics department supports a culture of excellence, and allows sport psychology services to provide greater impact on athletes’ performance and well-being when delivered through additional athletics staff.

Coaches are the driving force to the sport environment and overall athletic experience (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Being integrated with sport teams affords SPPs the time to invest in an ongoing relationship with the coach and understand his or her coaching philosophy (Fifer et al., 2008). Miller and Kerr (2002) suggest SPPs can better educate coaches on how personal development can be the means to optimal athletic performance. Aoyagi et al. (2008) recommend SPPs work with coaches to enhance athlete satisfaction and leadership. Other researchers determined by manipulating the sport environment, essential optimal performance characteristics such as confidence, self-esteem, and coach-athlete relationships could be enhanced (Beaumont et al., 2015; Chen & Wu, 2014). Well-being and needs satisfaction are two important environmental elements that holistic SPPs can incorporate into coach education (Blanchard et al., 2009;
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Coffey et al., 2014; Gagne et al., 2003; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Finally, Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) suggest SPPs can educate coaches on transformational leadership skills. Their study supports the claim that transformational leadership enhances athletic performance, motivation, team cohesion, and athlete well-being. According to Stenling and Tafvelin (2014), followers that experienced transformational leadership exhibited more optimism, happiness, and enthusiasm, which all contribute to high performance characteristics. Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) also state transformational leaders themselves reported lower stress levels, increased well-being, and decreased levels of burnout. Given the foundational viewpoints of holistic sport psychology, strategies such as these are important to have readily available when working with coaches and support staff (Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014).

**Staff development.**

An important component of integration and collaboration with support staff that cannot be left out is the piece of holistic sport psychology philosophy that believes the SPPs role is to assist athletes, coaches, and support staff in optimal performance and personal development (Poczwadowski et al., 2004). Coaches, trainers, and other support staff members are whole people too (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). Based on the holistic sport psychology philosophy, SPPs can assist coaches and support staff in developing optimal performance in their own lives too (Friesen & Orlick, 2011).

Collegiate coaches and other support staff, such as athletic trainers, are reported to experience high levels of stress and burnout (Fletcher & Scott, 2010; Mazerolle, Goodman, & Pitney, 2015). Researchers suggest more self-awareness and work-life
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balance are essential to these sport staff members’ health, well-being, and overall job performance (Fletcher & Scott, 2010; Giges, Petitpas, & Vernacchia, 2004; Mazerolle et al., 2015). When coaches and trainers are stressed and depleted this can have major impact on the sport environment, and possibly affect athletic performances (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Giges et al., 2004). Giges et al. (2004) recommend SPPs employ mental skills and holistic sport psychology strategies with this population to enhance their professional performance. By holistically developing the coaches and support staff this not only influences the athlete experience, it also educates the sport staff on the broad range of services a SPP can provide to a sport organization (Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Wrisberg et al., 2012).

Recommendations for the Future

While coaches, athletics administrators, and support staff perceive sport psychology services as beneficial, it seems that more education is needed into the potential benefits of sport psychology services, specifically integrated holistic sport psychology services (Bemiller & Wrisberg, 2011; Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Wrisberg et al., 2012; Zakrajsek, Martin, & Wrisberg, 2015; Zakrajsek, Steinfeldt, Bodey, Martin, & Zizzi, 2013). Unfortunately, the research available shows in NCAA Division I programs, only 24-53% utilize SPPs, and most of these are either part-time or independent contractors (Zakrajsek, Martin, & Wrisberg, 2015). Most programs across the nation have not integrated SPPs into their programs (Bemiller & Wrisberg, 2011; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Wrisberg et al., 2012; Zakrajsek et al., 2013, 2015). Wrisberg et al. (2012) recommend future research be conducted in programs that have employed sport psychology professionals full-time to determine perceptions of impact on sport
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Psychology services. Additionally, researchers suggest newly trained sport psychology consultants and advanced graduate sport psychology students in applied roles could offer rich perspectives in the delivery of effective sport psychology services (Owton et al., 2014; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

While some studies have looked at general perceptions of sport psychology services from the perspective of SPPs, coaches, administrators, athletes, or athletic trainers (Dunn & Holt, 2003; Gould et al., 1991; Halliwell, 1990; Fifer et al., Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987; Wrisberg et al., 2012; Zakrajset et al., 2013, 2015), no current studies to date have examined a holistic, integrated sport psychology program from multiple perspectives (SPPs, athletes, coaches, support staff). Friesen and Orlick (2010) encourage future studies to employ a case study methodology and examine ways in which other SPPs deliver holistic sport psychology services. More specifically, they suggest examining how those they work with (athletes, coaches, support staff) view their service delivery.

Lundqvist and Sandin (2014) recommend further qualitative, single-case studies that explore athletes’ experiences with applied whole person developmental programs that incorporate well-being interventions. Additionally, Coffey et al. (2014) argue further applied research is needed that examines the experiences, programs, and practices that foster well-being. Researchers within the sport psychology field encourage future research questions and design be shaped by how SPPs’ values and beliefs influence their particular delivery of holistic sport psychology programming (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2004).
Values driven direction.

Poczwardowski et al. (2004) first highlighted the importance of building a foundational philosophy within sport psychology service delivery models. Many components comprise a professional philosophy, including personal core values and beliefs (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) argue, “philosophy and values underlie everything” (p. 516). Self-affirmation theory states there is the existence of a self-system that functions to maintain an optimal integrity of the self (Steele, 1988). Steele (1998) asserts when we re-affirm our own personal values we eliminate threat and dissonance, and restore self-integrity. Self-affirmation is shown to reduce stress, re-establish self images of adequacy and integrity, foster resiliency and performance (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1998). Additionally, self-affirmation theory provides framework for both an individual and collective level of professional functioning (Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

This study looks to examine the nationally recognized mental performance staff that is integrated within a Power Five, Division I athletics program in the Midwestern United States. Self-affirmation theory, established by Steele (1988), provides an excellent theoretical framework for this study. Specifically, the study hopes to understand how personal values impact the ways in which the mental performance coaches deliver holistic sport psychology to their teams. Additionally, this study will examine how the mental performance coaches’ maintenance of self-integrity influences performance and personal development with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with.
Chapter 3: Methods

“There is no substitute for the knowledge that is gained by experiencing the world yourself, but learning directly from those who have gained valuable expertise is the next best option” (Fifer et al., 2008, p. 357).

Introduction

The variety in research methods can be traced back to the diverse ways in which researchers come to understand knowledge (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Quantitative research seeks the ‘truth’ about phenomenon (Milne & Oberle, 2005; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) describe this ‘truth’ to be objective, and according to Merriam (2009), an experimental quantitative design allows researchers to understand the cause and effect and predictability of such phenomenon. On the other hand, qualitative researchers seek knowledge through the meaning of a phenomenon and how people’s experiences influence the ways in which that meaning is constructed (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). This qualitative researcher’s understanding of knowledge is subjective (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe, qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, with an effort to interpret what meanings people bring to those things. Qualitative research is defined as an umbrella term, “covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520).

Researchers within applied social science fields such as education, health, psychology, and business tend to adopt a more qualitative approach to research methods
because the social world they work in is complex and different than the natural world (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). More specifically, Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) argue “society does not exist in an objective, observable form; rather, it is experienced subjectively because individuals give it meaning by the way they behave” (p. 6). There are multiple realities and ways in which people interpret a single event (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Researchers suggest the best way to study people is to learn about, describe, and interpret their experiences to better understand particular phenomena (Merriam, 2009; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

Vealey (1994) encourages applied sport psychology researchers to advance beyond traditional methodologies and pursue qualitative research designs. While qualitative research offers a multitude of interpretive techniques, there are four features that encompass the nature of qualitative research: (1) the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning, (2) the researcher is the primary data collection and analysis instrument, (3) the process is inductive, and (4) the product is full of rich description (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Van Maanen, 1979). As mentioned, this study is a qualitative design. This research approach is particularly valuable to this study for several reasons. In addition to these techniques, there are several reasons to choose qualitative methods.

First, many researchers argue experimental research designs are not an appropriate fit for applied social sciences, or specifically for applied sport psychology research (Mahoney, Anderson, Miles, & Robinson, 2002; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Controlling and manipulating specific variables creates an artificial environment
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(Mahoney et al., 2002; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013), and Mahoney et al. (2002) argue this does not accurately represent a sport practice environment.

Next, there is limited research within the field on holistic sport psychology delivery service models, and even less data on NCAA Division I programs that employ full-time SPPs (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Wrisberg et al., 2012; Zakrajsek et al., 2013, 2015). Applied sport psychology researchers encourage future qualitative studies on how SPPs deliver holistic sport psychology services because the rich description is most appropriate when limited data is available on the phenomenon (Fletcher & Arnold, 2009; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) state that the rich description offered in qualitative research gives the reader the whole picture of people’s experiences. This study aims to understand the experiences of the mental performance coaches’ delivery of holistic sport psychology, and seeks the whole picture of this experience. Rather than randomized selection, qualitative research participants are purposefully selected for their ability to provide knowledge for the given phenomenon (Milne & Oberle, 2005).

According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), qualitative researchers describe the beliefs that are meaningful to the participants. The study’s aim to describe the mental performance coaches’ values and how they come to understand those values in their delivery of holistic sport psychology aligns with qualitative research design. Finally, Patton (1985) defines qualitative research as “an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (p.1). This study is unique, and to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, it is the first study of its
kind. The rich data description, intentional selection of participants, and specific aim to understand the meaning of the mental performance coaches’ values and how they intersect with experiences in delivering holistic integrated sport psychology make qualitative research design a valuable and appropriate fit for this study.

Because of the benefits of qualitative research, I will employ a qualitative methods design, specifically case study. The remainder of this methods chapter will review the research questions for the study, discuss the theoretical foundations, discuss the specific case study design, provide contexts of the study, outline the data collection process, highlight the specific data analysis procedure, and offer insight into the study’s trustworthiness. First, the research questions will be revisited.

**Research Questions**

Determining ‘who’ or ‘what’ to study is one of the most influential decisions a researcher makes because that particular phenomenon then shapes what the study’s research questions will be (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Merriam (2009) suggests the majority of research topics in applied practice fields come from personal interest and from the practice setting itself. The research questions are formed through the research problems, presented as gaps within the research knowledge (Merriam, 2009). As mentioned in the previous chapter, qualitative data is needed that describes ways in which other SPPs deliver holistic sport psychology services (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Additionally, several researchers urge applied research to be shaped around understanding how SPPs’ values and beliefs influence their particular delivery of holistic sport psychology delivery services (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Poczwardowski et al., 2004).
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These specific gaps in the knowledge base helped shape the following research questions for this study: (1) How do personal core values impact the ways in which a mental performance coach delivers holistic sport psychology? (2) How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence performance with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with? (3) How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence personal development with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with?

A qualitative methodological approach provides the best design to address these research questions. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) argue that qualitative researchers strive for the whole picture perspective and argue that values are important within qualitative research. Merriam (2009) claims that those conducting a qualitative design “would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). This study’s research questions aim at understanding the ‘how’ perspective. Specifically, these questions seek understanding of how mental performance coach makes sense of his or her life and experiences in relation to personal values and holistic integrated sport psychology delivery. The key to these research questions is understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the mental performance coaches rather than the researcher, which supports Merriam’s (2009) definition of qualitative research.

The research questions also investigate the holistic view of these participants’ perspectives. This ‘whole picture’ understanding is harmonious with qualitative research design as Patton (1985) states:

Understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting –
what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s
gothing on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that
particular setting. (p. 1).
Because the aim for the study is to understand, interpret, and describe how these mental
performance coaches come to understand their experiences, qualitative methodology is
the best approach to address these research questions. In particular, I will draw upon case
study methods, which I will describe later in this chapter. Savin-Baden and Howell
Major argue that noteworthy, credible qualitative research design requires philosophical
underpinnings to guide the researcher’s work. The next section provides insight into the
paradigmatic viewpoint and theoretical framework of this study.

**Philosophical Perspective and Theoretical Framework**

As mentioned, philosophical perspective is the foundation for a strong qualitative
study (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Qualitative researchers tend to adopt one of
the following paradigms: critical social theory, pragmatism, phenomenology, post-
structuralism, or constructivist/interpretivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2009;
Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The paradigms differ in ways in which realities
and knowledge are viewed (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). One
study can be directed in many different directions, depending on which philosophical
perspective shapes the study (Merriam, 2009). A philosophical paradigm helps the
researcher locate oneself within the study (Savin-Badin & Howell Major, 2013). The
paradigmatic viewpoint that fits most naturally with the researcher and the nature of this
study is a constructivist perspective.
Constructivism, also interchangeable with interpretive research, is founded on the assumption that reality is socially constructed, rather than one single, objective reality (Merriam, 2009). Instead, there are multiple realities, in which individuals seek subjective meaning through their experiences and interactions with others (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The nature of this study fits a constructivist perspective as the researcher desires an understanding of the complexities of the meaning individuals draw from the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2007). Knowledge is obtained through the unpacking of these individual experiences (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Constructivist researchers recognize the research process to be holistic, which also supports the qualitative design of this study (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Savin-Badin & Howell Major, 2013).

It is important for the researcher to not only inform the reader of the epistemological underpinnings, but also the theoretical framework for which the study is structured (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is often inductively built; therefore, theories can shape a single phenomenon in many different ways (Merriam, 2009). Because no study is designed without some form of explicit or implicit questions, a theoretical framework allows qualitative researchers to be transparent with the reader on the stance he or she brings to the study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 1993). As such, the research questions, data collection, and analysis techniques of the study are framed within the theoretical components (Merriam, 2009). Because the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative work, a theoretical framework provides a broader context and interpretive lens through which the researcher can view the data (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Jackson and Mazzei (2012) also
describe this ‘thinking with theory’ as a way of plugging the theory and data into one another, where researchers use the theory to think with the data and use the data to think with the theory.

The review of literature within the previous chapter stresses the essential role personal values play in the SPP’s delivery of applied sport psychology services. As Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) state, “philosophy and values underlie everything” (p. 516). Additionally Miller and Kerr (2002) support such claims arguing, “any conception of excellence is value-laden” (p. 141). With this important piece of the literature in mind, the researcher relied on features of self-affirmation theory to inform this study. Self-affirmation theory draws on the foundational understanding that people have a basic need to maintain a global integrity of the self, both morally and adaptively adequate (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Steele, 1988). Steele (1988) claims three propositions of the self-affirmation processes: 1) Perceived threat to the integrity of the self arouses motive to re-affirm the self and re-establish a perception of global self-integrity, 2) Behavior and/or thought changes that reduce threat or restore perceived self-integrity can decrease the need for self-affirmation, and 3) the means of self-affirmation are determined by an individual’s availability of resources.

The central premise of self-affirmation theory is that all people possess a self-system where the overall goal is to maintain self-integrity (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1998). Maintenance is achieved through reaffirmation of personal core values (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Creswell, Dutcher, Klein, Harris, & Levine, 2013; Creswell et al., 2005; Sherman, Bunyan, Creswell, & Jaremka, 2009; Steele, 1988). According to Cohen and Sherman (2014) personal values are defined as “the internalized standards
used to evaluate the self” and are self-tailored to each individual person (p. 337). These reaffirmed values of the self can be drawn from a variety of roles or identities, not just the threatened domain (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman et al., 2009; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). In reaffirming such values, it expands the perspective view of the self and its’ resources while weakening the threat to personal integrity and enhances psychological well-being (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). Because a self-affirmed person no longer depends on the immediate situation for self-worth, he or she can process the event in a balanced, evenhanded manner (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Additionally, self-affirmation of core personal values is shown to enhance performance while under stressful conditions, improve education, health, interpersonal relationships, coping resources, confidence, and engagement (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Creswell et al., 2005; 2013; Sherman et al., 2009; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988).

Applying concepts from self-affirmation theory to SPPs’ delivery of holistic, integrated sport psychology led to a focus on a couple main theoretical aspects. First, the primary idea that the self-system is not geared at resolving particular threats to self-concept; rather it is geared at “maintaining an overall conception of self-integrity” (Steele, 1988, p. 267). Cohen and Sherman (2014) add to this stating, “rewards and praise are secondary to opportunities for people to manifest their integrity through meaningful acts, thoughts, and feelings” (p. 336). This concept will be explored within the holistic sport psychology delivery model, looking at how self-integrity is maintained by the mental performance coaches through meaningful thoughts, actions, and emotions in their professional role with teams. Additionally, this theoretical component will be
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incorporated into the exploration of how such meaningful acts of self-integrity are received by athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with.

Second, self-affirmation theory asserts that through affirmations of personal core values, performance and problem solving under stressful circumstances is enhanced and leads to balanced processing (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Creswell et al., 2005; 2013; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman et al., 2009). Additionally such self-affirmation of values fosters enhanced interpersonal relationships through promotion of trust and closeness (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Such concepts can be examined through the personal perspectives of the mental performance coaches by investigating how personal core values influence the ways in which they delivery holistic sport psychology within stressful circumstances, and how those experiences impact the relationships of those they interact with.

Self-affirmation theory offers a framework to support essential domains of functioning “at both the individual and collective levels” (Sherman & Cohen, 2006, p. 231). Using self-affirmation theory as the theoretical framework for this study provides ideal support to examine the experiences at both the individual and collective levels of the mental performance staff. Key concepts of this framework will be utilized throughout the data analysis process to conceptualize how the mental performance coaches attribute self-integrity and personal core values to their delivery of sport psychology services within the holistic integrated model.

Qualitative Case Study Methodology

The self-affirmation theoretical framework and constructivist paradigmatic perspective discussed within the previous section shaped the aim of this particular study.
As discussed, this design supports the fundamental aspects of qualitative research methodology. The constructivist philosophical perspective also supports the study’s specific methodology, which is a qualitative case study design (Hyett et al., 2014). Yin (1984) and Stake (1995) first introduced qualitative case study research to the field of education, both basing their approach in a constructivist paradigm, declaring the importance of the subjective creation of meaning (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Merriam (2009) suggests case study research is particularly important to the advancement of applied fields of study and knowledge gained can help improve practices.

A case study is defined as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). More specifically, Yin (2014) defines a case study to be the investigation of “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context” (p. 2). Case study research is particularly valuable when you cannot manipulate the behaviors of participants within the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). The goal of a case study is not to understand other cases, but rather to understand the uniqueness and complexities of this particular case (Stake, 1995). In addition, Yin (2014) defines a case study as an appropriate methodology “when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16).

Yin’s (2014) definition of case study inquiry reflects the fact that the boundaries between SPPs’ delivery of holistic sport psychology and the context of an athletics department cannot readily be distinguished within the real-world context. Applied sport psychology researchers recommend qualitative case studies to understand how other individual SPPs deliver holistic sport psychology (Friesen & Orlick, 2010) based on the
in-depth description this type of research design affords. As reviewed in the literature, very few collegiate athletic programs have hired full-time positions, and even fewer have established an entire full and part-time staff of SPPs integrated with many of the teams. The mental performance coaches participating within this study work within a nationally recognized pioneer program for holistic integrated sport psychology delivery services. To the researcher’s knowledge, this is the only program of its kind. The case study methodology is principally relevant to this study because it seeks to explain the “how” and “why” of this particular phenomenon and requires an extensive, in-depth description of such a unique and complex case (Yin, 2014). ‘How’ personal values and self-integrity impact the ways in which holistic, integrated sport psychology is delivered is of utmost importance within this study. Without a qualitative case study design, the researcher would not otherwise have access to learn about this phenomenon within its context (Merriam, 2009).

**Bounding the case.**

The goal of the qualitative case study methodology is to understand this particular staff for its own uniqueness and complexity. The bounded system, or the case itself, is the single unit of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009). A bounded case narrows the scope, and limits the case to a specific number (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Creswell (2007) suggests a case be bound by time and place. This unit of analysis can be a person, group, program, or community that exemplifies a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the unit of analysis is the holistic, integrated mental performance staff at the Midwestern United States Power Five, NCAA Division I institution. The case is specifically bounded to those staff members designated as mental
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performance coaches that worked with the athletics department’s teams over the 2015-2016 school year.

Specific case study design.

The specific features of the study further characterize qualitative case studies and its overall purpose (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). This case is particularistic, in that it focuses specifically on one program or phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, this case “is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent,” since it is the only one of its kind (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). This is also specifically categorized as a descriptive case study because the goal of the case is to provide rich, thick description of the current phenomenon of study (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014).

In addition to specific features, strong case studies have formal design too (Yin, 2014). There are four different formal case study designs according to Yin (2014) including: single-case (holistic) design, single-case (embedded) design, multiple-case (holistic) design, and multiple-case (embedded design). The single and multiple case categories relate to the number of contexts or cases, while the holistic and embedded descriptors represent the number of units of analysis within the design (Yin, 2014). The single-case (holistic) design is most appropriate for this study, as the researcher is looking at one single group/case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2014) also argues single-case study to be the best approach for an unusual case such as this, which is better understood as a case that deviates from everyday occurrences. Furthermore, this study supports the holistic design because it looks to examine only a single organization/program/staff, therefore a single unit of analysis (Yin, 2014). Lundqvist and Sandin (2014) urge the
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applied sport psychology field to direct future research towards qualitative single-case studies to enlighten the field on holistic views of the athlete experience in and out of sport. This particular case fits with these suggestions, as it examines a single sport psychology staff, and looks to understand the whole view of the holistic sport psychology delivery model.

On the other hand, if a case were considering a single context with multiple programs/staffs, or sub-units of analysis, then a single-case (embedded) approach would be deemed most appropriate (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). Likewise, if the study hoped to look at several cases within one study and compare them, then a multiple-case design is most appropriate (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). To the researcher’s knowledge, there is no other staff or collegiate program across the country with a similar model of holistic sport psychology delivery services; therefore examining multiple staffs/units of analyses does not seem feasible for this study. Additionally, if the study seems to be interested in several cases across several sub-units or programs, then a multiple-case (embedded) design is the best choice. Because this study looks to understand the complexities of a single, extreme group, considering holistic aspects of the mental performance coaches’ service delivery, a single-case (holistic) case study design is the best fit (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014).

**Generalizations within case study.**

While case studies are not generalizable, researchers argue that as readers bring their own experiences to the case, new knowledge is produced by reader interpretations (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, Yin (2014) suggests that because rigorous qualitative design calls on a theoretical framework, the case study may not be able to
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generalize populations, however the case study can expand and generalize the theory itself. This analytic generalization can be based on: (a) support, modification, rejection, or advancement of theoretical concepts, or (b) new concepts constructed after the completion of the case study (Yin, 2014). Designing the case study based off of self-affirmation theoretical foundations gives external validity to this single-case study, and allows the findings to be analytically generalized (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014).

A single-case (holistic) design allows for thick description of the unique mental performance staff and analytical generalization since this study has a theoretical framework behind the research questions and design (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). Once a formal case study design is identified, preparation is required to ensure a rigorous qualitative case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). Unlike many quantitative designs, qualitative case study participants are often purposefully selected for their unique ability to inform the particular phenomenon of study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hyett et al., 2014; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Stake, 1995, Yin, 2014). While the study is focused on a single case that cannot be generalized across all populations and athletics departments, the vivid description within a case study provides avenues of learning for the reader (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). It is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what understanding from the study can be applied to his or her own contexts (Merriam, 2009). Congruent to constructivist beliefs, by reading the study the reader interprets and reconstructs his or her own knowledge and determines which pieces of knowledge are personally useful (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

Rigor within qualitative case study design
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Adequate description and methodological foundations are paramount to a credible qualitative case study (Hyett et al., 2014; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Detailed description preserves the meanings constructed within the specific case, while also providing readers the opportunity for transferability (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). A description of the case in its entirety is essential to a single-case (holistic) design (Houghton et al., 2013; Hyett et al., 2014; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers recommend multiple sources of data to obtain such a holistic picture of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Baxter and Jack (2008) describe each data source as a piece of the puzzle that connects the researcher to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Yin (2014) speaks to the need for reliability within a rigorous qualitative case study. The goal of reliability is not to replicate the case across multiple other case studies; rather it is to ensure many researchers would arrive at the same meaning and understandings as the primary researcher (Yin, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) describes the concept of reliability as case study credibility. The collection of several types of data can enhance verification of findings, and allows for strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to enhance the research reliability or credibility (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). In addition to credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest rigorous case studies should meet the following criteria: dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Houghton et al., 2013). These criteria can be achieved through audit trail and researcher reflexivity. Furthermore it is suggested the researcher be immersed in the setting for a long period of time to grasp the
particular context of the study (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With rigorous protocol in place, the specific contexts of the study will now be discussed.

**Contexts of the Study**

The previous section discussed the specific bounds of the case study. The unit of analysis is the holistic, integrated mental performance staff at the Midwestern United States Power Five, NCAA Division I institution. A holistic approach to sport psychology is not the objective of all SPPs in the field, therefore to better explore holistic sport psychology delivery services it is important to select a group that identified as such (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). This particular group was carefully selected because this mental performance staff acknowledges a holistic approach to sport psychology delivery services. The case is specifically bounded to those staff members designated as mental performance coaches that worked with the athletics department’s teams over the 2015-2016 school year.

**Participants.**

Qualitative case study design requires careful and purposeful selection of participants, characterized by the ability to inform the specific phenomenon of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hyett et al., 2014; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Stake, 1995, Yin, 2014). Over the 2015-2016 school year, the athletics department mental performance staff was made up of a director of mental performance, a full and part-time counseling psychologist, and 10 doctoral students in sport psychology. Within this group, six of these staff members were acknowledged as mental performance coaches, designated and integrated with many of the University’s NCAA Division I competitive sport teams. Two of these six identify as male and four as female. All of these mental performance coaches
are Caucasian. Their ages range between 27 to 32 years old. The other doctoral students are involved within the program in observational/shadowing capacities.

The case is bound to this specific group of the mental performance staff because the aim of the study is to examine the delivery approaches of holistic sport psychology services to sport teams at this institution. The researcher identifies as one of these mental performance coaches, and will therefore not be included along with her sport teams within the data collection to avoid potential personal biases. All other five mental performance coaches are selected as participants within this study. Each of these mental performance coaches is either full-time staff or upper level doctoral students. Each participant received significant training and mentoring under a world-renowned sport psychology advisor, who worked at Olympic, collegiate, professional, and youth levels of sport within his professional career.

**Participant one: Stella.**

This participant is the Director of Mental Performance with this institution’s athletics department. She has worked with teams at this institution for five years, and over the 2015-2016 year was integrated on the women’s basketball, women’s volleyball, and softball teams. She is a former collegiate basketball player. She received her Master’s degree in Health Promotion and Education at a Northwestern United States institution and received her Doctoral degree in Health Education and Promotion with emphasis in Sport Psychology in 2014 at this University. She is a Certified Consultant (CC-AASP) within the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. She is originally from the Northwestern United States.

**Participant two: Ben.**
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This participant is a part-time employee within the institution’s athletics department. He has worked with teams at this University for three years, and over the 2015-2016 year was integrated with the men’s and women’s golf teams and women’s soccer team. He received his Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology with focus in Sport and Career Psychology at this University. He is in his final year of the Doctoral degree program in Health Education and Promotion with emphasis in Sport Psychology. He is a member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. He is originally from the Midwestern United States.

**Participant three: Mason.**

This participant was a volunteer assistant coach for the men’s and women’s swimming teams over the 2015-2016 year, and has been in this role for four years. He additionally is designated as their mental performance coach. He is a former collegiate swimmer, and participated in two different United States Olympic Trials in swimming. He received his Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology with focus in Sport and Career Psychology at this University. He is in his final year of the Doctoral degree program in Health Education and Promotion with emphasis in Sport Psychology. He is a member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. This participant is originally from the Southern United States.

**Participant four: Avery.**

This participant is a graduate assistant for the institution’s positive coaching program, and has worked with sport teams at this University for four years. Over the 2015-2016 year she worked with the women’s soccer team. She is a former collegiate cross country and track & field athlete. She received her Master’s degree in Counseling
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Psychology with focus in Sport and Career Psychology at this University. She is in her final year of the Doctoral degree program in Health Education and Promotion with emphasis in Sport Psychology. She is a member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. She is originally from the Southwestern United States.

**Participant five: Blake.**

This participant is a part-time employee within the institution’s athletics department. Over the 2015-2016 year she worked with the men’s and women’s diving teams. She is a former collegiate volleyball player. She received her Master’s degree in Sport and Performance Psychology from a Central United States institution. She is in her third year of the Counseling Psychology Doctoral program at this institution. She is a member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. She is originally from the Northern United States.

**Site location.**

This site for this current qualitative investigation is at a Midwestern United States institution. The University is a Power Five, NCAA Division I sport program, nationally recognized for its innovative approach to integrated, holistic sport psychology delivery services. This staff has delivered professional workshops and presentations at the national conference for the Association for Applied Sport Psychology related to building comprehensive, integrated programming at Division I institutions.

The mental performance staff’s delivery model is a unique case study because no other known program in the United States has several designated SPPs integrated amongst collegiate sport teams at one, single institution that are employed by the athletics department. Furthermore this mental performance staff’s program mission reflects the

**Positionality statement from the researcher.**

As a researcher, my positionality is based on the stance I take within this particular study. No matter what type of design, research is always conducted from a particular point of view. As human beings we have different experiences, beliefs, backgrounds, and viewpoints that we bring to a research design. Positionality is a way to acknowledge, clarify, and embrace a particular stance to allow for greater self-awareness and prevent personal influence to sway the findings in the wrong way.

Positionality stems from a researcher’s specific frame of reference when it comes to knowledge and reality. As mentioned, I bring a constructivist perspective to this particular research design. In doing so, I acknowledge that reality is constructed subjectively, and there are also attempts to build meaning collectively too. This paradigmatic point of view embraces the belief that each participant forms his or her own reality and meaning through personal experiences. This paradigmatic lens influences the way in which the study is designed and data is collected and analyzed too.

In addition to philosophical perspectives, I embrace theoretical framing as well, based on the discussed characteristics of self-affirmation theory. This particular lens allows me to utilize these theoretical concepts to design and analyze the data, rather than relying on my own personal experiences that may lead to bias. The theoretical lens creates transparency with the reader as to what concepts influence the study from the beginning. Furthermore, Stake (1995) argues that the constructivist stance encourages thick description of raw data to allow the reader to construct his or her own meaning from
the material. Self-awareness and reflexivity is necessary as a researcher, to understand my own personal biases and ensure the analysis and interpretation of the data is in line with the participants’ perspectives and theoretical framework.

Depending on the paradigmatic viewpoint and theoretical lens the researcher selects, a qualitative case study allows for flexibility in which role the researcher takes on within a particular study (Stake, 1995). Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) insist that a researcher addresses his or her influence on the research in relation to the subject, participants, and research context and process. Transparency creates greater self-awareness as to what impact my positionality may have on the particular study (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

As an identified mental performance coach at this particular institution, I am extremely close to this particular subject and case itself. Having personal experience working on a staff within a holistic integrated sport psychology delivery model, I have many specific views, experiences, and interest in this specific phenomenon. I hold personal beliefs about a holistic delivery of sport psychology services based on personal experiences that are relevant to this study. With this in mind, I intentionally referred to literature within the sport psychology discipline and identified self-affirmation theory as the specific theoretical lens to guide the study so that my own personal experiences or views were not the source of study design and research questions. Additionally, my belief about holistic sport psychology delivery models is consistent with the literature’s perspective as well. As a result, both the research questions and qualitative case study design are based on theoretical and scientific concepts. While I am close to the study’s subject, Yin (2014) suggests that extensive familiarity with the subject is crucial to
quality case study research. Having a grasp on concepts and language in relation to the subject and particular case allows me the opportunity to see through multiple modalities at one time for more extensive data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014). Moreover, Houghton et al. (2013) recommend researchers be engaged within the study’s contexts to enhance credibility and understanding of the specific case. I have worked within this program’s athletics department for five years now. Within that time I have familiarized myself with language and concepts within the sport psychology program and athletics department as a whole. Additionally over this time period I have built extensive rapport and trust with many department staff members, including our coaches, athletes, support staff and mental performance staff.

In addition to familiarity and proximity to the subject, I am also located extremely close to the participants as well. As mentioned, I am a fellow staff member with the participants, which can impact ways in which data is collected or left out. Acknowledging the proximity to the participants allows for intentional preparation so that data collection procedures are in line with the research questions, theoretical lens, and participants’ viewpoints, rather than my own personal views. Hyett et al. (2014) argue a constructivist perspective supports the position that the researcher should have personal interaction with the case itself. The sport environment, typically at the collegiate and professional levels, is continuously in the spotlight to the public. Having personal interaction with the case itself, I have a personal lived experience and understanding of what this is like to work in such a publically displayed field. I have cultivated trust and rapport with the mental performance staff participants, as well as informants such as coaches, athletes, and support staff. I believe this will further the detailed discussion and
intense data that can be collected compared to a researcher who appears to be an outsider to this group. Additionally, specific measures such as member checking is part of the data analysis and trustworthiness procedures to ensure the experiences and meaning constructed by participants are being accurately portrayed.

Finally, my role as a researcher in regards to the context and process of the study will be to conduct the data collection and analysis personally. Qualitative case study design is flexible and traditionally designates the researcher as the primary instrument within the study (Merriam, 2009). Acknowledging how my professional relationships with participants can impact the data collection and analysis is important. Specifically, it is crucial to acknowledge such potential influence with the participants themselves, to ensure the greatest possibility for authenticity and accuracy in their responses. Providing the participants and informants with important information as to what the study is looking for prior to data collection will allow time to reflect on and prepare for the interviews. This gives the best opportunity for thick, meaningful data. Member checking and triangulation with a peer debriefing team will also be critical to ensure accurate collection and analysis within the study.

Acknowledging potential biases, personal beliefs, and theoretical views that I bring to this study enhances my own self-awareness and intention with the preparation of this study’s design. Keeping positionality in mind not only enhances my own self-awareness, but also impacts the particular data collection to ensure it deliberately creates a holistic understanding of the study’s design and research goals.

**Data Collection**
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A description of the case in its entirety is essential to a single-case (holistic) design (Houghton et al., 2013; Hyett et al., 2014; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers recommend several sources of data to obtain such a holistic picture of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Within qualitative single-case (holistic) design, each data source has a particular role to play to accurately portray the study’s phenomenon holistically (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Traditionally, interviews and document analysis are frequently used and appropriate forms of data collection within qualitative case studies (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Stake, 1995). Yin (2014) suggests interviews and document analysis are appropriate when the case study’s unit of analysis is a collective group, such as the mental performance coaches, yet also seeks individual perspectives and experiences to support the study. For this reason, the three types of data collection methods used within this study are individual, semi-structured interviews, mental performance staff document analysis, and personal document analysis. Description and rationale for each selection of data collection will now be discussed.

**Interviews.**

Yin (2014) describes interviews as “one of the most important sources of case study evidence” (p. 110). In agreement with constructivist perspective, interviews are the most appropriate type of data collection to obtain multiple realities (Stake, 1995). While semi-structured interviews have specific questions in place, each interview is guided and shaped around the specific participant. Each participant has unique experiences; therefore their constructions of meaning will differ from one another (Stake, 1995).
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Semi-structured interviews are most appropriate to understand the unique, holistic experiences of the ways in which mental performance coaches attribute their own values and self-integrity to their personal delivery of holistic sport psychology. This method is in line with the main goal of the study. Additionally, interviews support the theoretical framework, as self-affirmation theory supports the claim that each individual’s core personal values are subjective and vary from person to person (Steele, 1988). Interviews are the best method to better understand these subjective values and the ways in which they influence holistic sport psychology delivery methods. See Appendix B for the specific semi-structured interview questions.

To ensure the data collection provides a holistic understanding of the ways in which values and self-integrity are attributed to holistic sport psychology delivery services with teams, additional supplemental semi-structured interviews will be conducted as well. The intention behind single-case (holistic) study design is to describe and explain the whole picture of a phenomenon within the given context (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Supplemental interviews with the sport teams that the mental performance coaches work with will provide this thick description and holistic perspective. Stake (1995) discusses the importance of informants within case study data collection. These informants “provide observations… that the researcher cannot see for themselves” to add to the study’s holistic understanding (Stake, 1995, p. 67). See Appendix C for the specific semi-structure supplemental interview questions.

Head coaches, support staff (assistant coach, director of operations, etc.), and student-athletes are designated informants and will be interviewed separately. The mental performance coaches will select these informants. Two well-respected
professionals in the field, Keith Henschen and Ken Ravizza, state that not all people that work with holistic SPPs are ready for it or love what you do (Friesen & Orlick, 2011). It is not the role of the SPP to obtain buy in from every person, rather to build relationships with those that are ready and willing to invest time in the process. Qualitative research design allows for careful participant selection so that those involved can provide the richest understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. Part of the nature of holistic integrated sport psychology delivery services, as described within the review of the literature, is to promote performance enhancement and personal development with the athletes and staff that the SPPs work with. The supplemental semi-structured interviews intend to provide essential data collection to understand how the people SPPs work closely with receive, experience, and understand these delivery services.

**Mental performance staff document analysis.**

Researchers suggest that professional documents such as program mission statements and staff meeting notes are also important to qualitative case study research (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Documents can provide the researcher specific language and clues about the specific case’s context (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). These professional staff documents are intended to supplement individual interviews and provide specific language that has been created by the participants themselves (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). The particular characteristics of self-affirmation theory described in previous sections will be used as means to analyze these documents and better understand how values contribute to this staff’s holistic delivery service model. This method is most appropriate for this study, and provides actual context and reference
from the staff’s environment. See Appendix D for an example of one of the documents that will be used for analysis.

**Personal document analysis.**

Finally, a holistic sport psychology perspective acknowledges that whole person development impacts athletic development (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). As Miller and Kerr (2002) argue, performance excellence is achieved through means of personal excellence. Applied sport psychology research claims that holistic sport psychology services intend to develop personal life skills that can be used beyond the scope of sport, and assist athletes in successful performance outside of their athletic careers (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, 2011). In support of such acknowledgments that are in line with this study’s phenomenon, this study seeks to analyze personal documents provided by former student-athletes on their experiences with the mental performance coaches while they were in college. Four former student-athletes from this institution that have worked with any of the mental performance coaches participating in the study have been selected to participate in these journal reflections. These personal reflections intend to understand the ways in which former student-athletes construct meaning and describe their personal experiences with sport psychology services at this institution. Additionally, this form of document analysis looks to understand how former student-athletes interpret these experiences in relation to their current lives, post-collegiate athletic careers. These documents will also provide supplemental context to the participant interviews. This form of data collection supports the mission of this study and provides an additional piece to the whole picture of this case and phenomenon.

**Data Analysis**
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

This study intends to understand the individual experiences as well as the collective meaning that values and self-integrity play in the delivery of holistic sport psychology services at this NCAA Division I, Power Five institution. Semi-structured individual interviews, staff document analysis, and personal document analysis offer unique and appropriate methods of data collection to support the goals of this study. Yin (2014) argues that a credible qualitative case study has a well-developed plan of analysis that supports the goals of the particular study. Because there is both an individual and collective interpretation within this study, the data analysis process calls for pattern identification through within-case and across-case analysis. The analysis will rely on the theoretical objectives identified within self-affirmation theory to inform the data, in hopes that the data can additionally inform the theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Keeping the goals of this qualitative case study in mind, the data analysis process intends to understand the case itself utilizing patterns to inform the study. Stake (1995) suggests coding and pattern identification are valid, appropriate data analysis methods for interviews and document analyses. Transcripts will be read multiple times for preliminary whole picture understanding. Ideas and concepts referred to as initial codes will be identified during these preliminary reviews of the transcript. Peer debriefing team members will initiate the same procedures. Once initial codes have been identified, all members will carefully and critically read through the transcript, marking the transcripts with the initial codes. This process is referred to as tagging. As information is tagged, marginal remarks, like those recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) will be noted to summarize initial impressions of the data. After initial tagging and coding of the transcript, peer debriefing team members will reach consensus on what code each tagged
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data represents. A data chart will be created for each participant, noting the particular code, transcript data, page and line numbers, and additional comments. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend these organized display charts for within-case analysis because it prevents selective stacking and allows for a full range of understanding, comparisons, pattern noting and themes to be constructed. The display charts will then be organized by code and initial themes within the case will be identified. The process will be executed for each participant.

After completion of the within-case analysis, the primary researcher and peer debriefing team will conduct a constant comparative analysis as well (Boeije, 2002). Throughout this process, “the data in hand are then analyzed again and compared with the new data” (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). According to Boeije (2002) constant comparisons increase the internal validity of the findings and is connected to external validity as well. Boeije (2002) describes, “When the sampling has been conducted well in a reasonably homogeneous sample, there is a solid basis for generalizing the concepts and the relations between them to units that were absent from the sample, but which represent the same phenomenon” (p. 393). This is particularly beneficial to this case study, as this sample is unique; and with ability to generalize concepts and relations between units that are absent that represent the same phenomenon this could have beneficial implications for the direction and development of future holistic integrated sport psychology programs at other collegiate institutions.

As part of the constant comparative analysis, additional organized display charts will be constructed to group and compare themes across all participants within an entire group. Charts will be noted by common themes, including participants, common features
of the theme, differences between features of the theme, and supporting data explicitly from the raw data itself. Themes and findings will be re-evaluated once all organized display charts are complete, looking for groups within the common themes and constructing depth within the categorized themes. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher will continue to go back to the focus of the research questions to ensure the analysis stays within the aims of the study (Yin, 2014).

Finally, as the last step in the constant comparative analysis, themes constructed through the across-case analysis in the supplemental groups will be compared to the across-case themes created in the mental performance staff across-case analysis. Because the aim of the study is to understand the whole picture within this context, a constant comparative analysis across groups will be beneficial in providing both “traceability and credibility of researchers’ analysis in their qualitative studies” (Boeije, 2002, p. 406).

Trustworthiness

Several proposals have been suggested as to how to ensure trustworthy, valid, and rigorous work (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The criteria identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that all superior qualitative case studies should possess are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. These are overlapping strategies to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Qualitative case study work must provide enough detailed description of the case itself so that the conclusions that have been constructed by the researcher make sense to the readers (Merriam, 2009). Additionally such conclusions should reflect upon the self-affirmation theoretical components that framed the study’s research questions (Yin, 2014).
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

To establish trustworthiness within this qualitative case study the following procedures are addressed: prolonged engagement with the case environment, purposeful sampling, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and an audit trail of interpretive rationale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Yin, 2014). Prolonged engagement within the case environment enhances the credibility of the research because the researcher gains a full grasp of the phenomenon under investigation (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling is essential to qualitative case study research to ensure the participants provide thick description about this unique case and inform the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation enhances the credibility of the case in that several methods of data collection are utilized to ensure a holistic account of the phenomenon and confirm other forms of data with each other (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). As mentioned, a peer debriefing team consisting of advanced doctoral students in sport psychology that have training within qualitative research will be included within the analysis process. Peer debriefing creates greater credibility within the case and provides support from other knowledgeable colleagues while preventing personal bias on the primary researcher’s part (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Houghton et al., 2013; Savin-Baden & Howell Major). Peer debriefing allows the reader to feel confident that the meaning and conclusions determined by the researcher have also been determined by others as well. Member checking involves checking in with participants to verify the interpretations are congruent with their own views and personal perspectives (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Finally, an audit trail provides a comprehensive outline of the decisions
and rationale taken throughout the entire study, and ensures dependability and confirmability within the study (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). According to Houghton et al. (2013) this allows the reader to understand the rigorous components that went into the study and understand how the researcher reasonably reached the study’s conclusions. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) state that an audit trail may consist of the following: description of the research process, records of raw data, analysis processes, process notes, intentions and disposition, reflective journaling, and instrumental protocol.

These procedures throughout the study process were intentionally planned and executed to align with the study’s philosophical and theoretical perspective and guarantee trustworthiness within this case study. Elaborate, detailed methods to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability enhance the rigor and merit of this qualitative case study design.
Chapter 4: Findings

... you coach a team it’s like cooking Chinese food... you have different ingredients, they stir-fry and they have different dishes coming out with different flavor. I think a mental performance coach would be one of the ingredients every Chinese dishes have to have, but not too much. It’s salt... you know you have a certain amount and it depends on the group of cabbage you have, or meat you have. She’s the person always give the taste. Without salt, all tastes the same. Too much is not going to be good. It just has the right amount, but you know it’s really necessary. You have to have it... That’s how important it is (Faith, p. 7, lines 301-310).

Preliminary Findings

The within-case analysis and across-case analysis process are described as follows. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after data collection was complete, transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were read for initial review. Initial codes were identified in the process of initial review of the transcripts. See Table 1 for list of initial codes.

Table 1 Initial Codes from Tagging Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Code</th>
<th>Initial Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Trust, connection, buy in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of sport</td>
<td>Structure, philosophy, range of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique program features</td>
<td>Individualized, personalized, specific to team and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components of sport psychology services</td>
<td>Focus/re-focus, perspective, growth mindset, emotional regulation, self-awareness, positive mindset, team cohesion, team unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of integration</td>
<td>Life/relationship issues impact on performance, personal development as foundations of performance, skills that translate in and out of sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role(s) of mental performance coach</td>
<td>Knowledge, 3rd party perspective, bridge, sounding board, support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal impact</td>
<td>Growth, self-awareness, self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance impact</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Components of holistic sport psychology framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal traits identified by services</td>
<td>Characteristics, values, beliefs, meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Through the process of tagging, marginal notations were marked throughout transcripts, and initial codes were highlighted in accordance with color code associated with the initial codes. An example of this tagging process is provided in the Appendix F. Peer debriefing team members participated in the same tagging process and initial codes were compared. Peer debriefing team members’ initial codes and marginal notations were consistent to the primary researcher’s review. As part of the within-case analysis process, data charts were constructed for each participant, identifying page and line numbers, transcript data, associated code, as well as marginal notation and comments. An example of the case analysis charting process is provided in the Appendix G as well.

Following the participant charting, themes and sub-themes were generated for each participant. Themes and overarching findings of each participant will be described below. According to Yin (2014), regardless of medium a case report should be engaging. Additionally, evidence should be presented neutrally, with both supporting and challenging data. The evidence should be presented in a way that shows the reader that all participants have been given equal attention, and that the “researcher ‘knows’ her subject” (Yin, 2014, p. 205). Finally, Yin (2014) shared that case study reports should be rich in narrative. For these reasons, the themes and overall experience of each participant will be reported separately, with thick description and raw data quotes, so the reader is able to better know the participants.

Following within-case analysis, an across-case analysis of each group was conducted. Additional organization charts were created to group and compare common themes across participant groups. Finally across-case themes were created for each of the
four groups: mental performance coaches, head coaches, athletes, and support staff. Themes across each group will be discussed in this chapter.

After within-case and across-case analysis, member checking was conducted to ensure accurate representation of the participant experience. Each participant was encouraged to provide feedback on the findings. The following responses were representative of the comments that were received back:

- “I think it’s all accurate. Everything I’ve read matches what I think and feel, and what I shared with you. Additionally I think you were able to explore my personal experience and create a larger collective meaning”
- “I love it! These themes are very true and summarizing of my experience.”
- “I agree with all of it! Well done!”
- “I definitely agree with all of that with my experience!
- “Looks good! I’d say that’s pretty accurate!
- “Yes I do agree with those themes and I have experienced these. In particular I think two of them are something I have benefitted from!”

**Within-Case Analysis: Mental Performance Coaches**

**Avery.** One of the overarching pieces Avery discussed in her experience was the unique role that she played as a mental performance coach. Something that Avery stressed from her experience in her role was how much more “involved” and “immersed” it was. She talked about how being immersed within a team culture, how often her role became more about support through life, rather than simply teaching mental skills. She explained,

What I thought, that it was just tangible skills. Then I realize that when you're immersed, how much other, you know, how many other things really do pop up.
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It's not always going to be -- you're not always get each other a 30 minute time slots where you talk about focus, you know, and while that is certainly a part. It's a huge part of it. There's so much more. It's just real life and the person in a role can help with that can help with all aspects of that. It's not just about focus skills, you know, and a player on the team had a mom who ended up passing away and it's like, you know, in that time period, focus didn’t matter. It's not about focus…It was this girl needs support. She's going through this hard time, navigating time and somebody in our role can help her get through that. Our role can – (sport) aside, help it and help the cultural life…the tools, to nourish and support and that aspect…imagine what you're going through, let me be here with you. So again, before I thought it was just, you know, one week you do focus and then next week you did resilience, next week you do, you know, any kind of tangible – mental…now that I’m immersed I'm just finding more and more, how much your life plays into it.

Another unique piece in this role according to Avery was that she intentionally provided support for the person, not just the athlete. She said the unique piece about support in this role is that it “comes from somebody who doesn’t decide whether they play on the next day. But somebody who genuinely wants to be there, and care as well.”

She explained that she starts with “the person first” because

Ultimately yes we do want, high achievers out on the field and on the court, but we also understand that there's so much more than that as well. And that if we start with the person, then naturally, it’s going to trickle down into the performance and so that's where support comes in.

Avery talked about how building personal development, starting with the person, can translate to performance. She gave an example on the way an athlete takes critique from her coach compared to other domains, such as the classroom, to create a greater perspective:

With criticism, you know, it's just what's being said, and how are you taking it? Are you able to separate what they're trying to instruct or say. The professors--Instructor is trying to correct your skills to get better. But then what you do with that, you know, are you able to separate instruction from personal attack? That's the way a lot of them see it. You know. (Coach) just picks on me, always picks on me. How—How they choose to run with that…So, that's an ongoing conversation, but again it-- It generates way past the (sport). You know, even in their close relationships with their significant others it pops up. And so, it's—my perspective,
in my opinion, that really which one I accept, because I think that
there's...overlap, and it's always nice to get dialed in on one or the other, but...
they really do kind of coincide... I'm at least able to, kind of, listen to or provide
perspective.

In providing perspective in another performance area, such as academics, Avery
provided perspective for them to think about how they handle critique on the field
compared to the classroom. In turn, she felt this could help no only in their personal
development, but in their performance too.

Another aspect of the role Avery found “crucial” was being integrated on the
staff, present for team practices and meetings, and attending staff meetings. When
talking about the integration she said “it's really helpful upon my growth, just because
you get the realness.” She said being present during team functions created opportunity
to help “even like walking from the field to the locker room.” By attending staff
meetings with the coaches, Avery said she heard the “coach’s philosophy coming out”
and saw “how their coaching style is reflected on the practice field. She felt these
experiences and integration helped her professionally, and stated,

I think in my perspective, it's helped me professionally because it almost brings
another side to applications with the girls. So if I know how this program is
founded, what it's built upon, what the coaches believe in, then I'm able to have a
similar conversation with a girl, one-on-one, or -- And they are able to have a
similar conversation, and still portray, still elicit the same message, but in my own
words and, kind of, from my perspective…that hopefully at the end of the day
we're all working towards making better people, adding to the brilliance that
walked through our door, adding that consistency, me being involved in the
coaches meetings brings consistency all the way across. Which is so vital, because
a girl is able to hear the same message delivered multiple different ways.

Avery spoke about how comprehensive messages can build success on and off of
the field:

The hope is, the goal is that it's fixed, and that she is receptive to it and, can learn,
and grow, and become better after, you know, talking with the whole group
collectively after her 4 or 5 years she leaves with a better understanding on the field, and off the field.

Avery shared this holistic piece “guides my delivery services” and further supports comprehensive messages because “if the message can come from the coach but then also come from myself... that impacts greatly because of all of us working towards a shared goal, a shared mission.” She talked about how powerful it is when all of the parts that surround the athlete have a shared message:

They’ve got the trainer. They've got strength and conditioning, they've got coaches, they've got-- I mean even-- even, you know staff that works in this building. So the people who clean the locker rooms- who provide laundry for when we go out on the field. The people who, nutrition. All these different pieces coming together, again, with that same mission of high-performance. Performance excellence, and they're all affecting, they're all impacting, you know, working towards the same mission of lets get building.”

She said all of these people speaking the same message was “comforting” and helpful for performance enhancement:

Your keywords may not impact the individual as much as you think, was in that moment. But then they like, hear that same message in a very – from a different avenue or a different, you know, spoke of the wheel, and I think that is not all on your shoulders and likewise it's not all on the coach’s shoulders.

Ultimately, Avery believed that comprehensive messaging helps build opportunity for successful performance, and reinforcement of the coach’s message.

In addition to building a common message, Avery associated being integrated on the team with better understanding and closer connection to the team. She described,

I think it's been incredible, it's been, you get so much more of the big picture when you are, when you do get to go through the day-to-day things that maybe other people don’t put value in...because it's the bigger picture. You're not just looking at a small piece and helping to come in and a give a 30 minute blow out speech, and then leave. It's much more of, I think what people value is sitting through, that being there for, you know what, you may not seem like it’s important, but them seeing you and you seeing them, it works both ways. It’s
important for both parties there, of that understanding of like yeah no this is important.

Avery found that deciding to be present for day-day activities showed commitment and impacted her trust and relationships with the athletes. She said,

I'm learning more and more, how much of being there with that trust there. And I can only imagine if I wasn't there, it's like to call another motivational speaker or another person that's going to come in and get out very temporary and I think that's how the athletes view it when that has been the case for us sometimes with other ones that come in. And like okay, well that was cool, but see you later… That's the mentality whereas in our role, we do get to be there, and that speaks volumes in itself, a kid athlete feels more inclined to go and talk to you.

In a similar way, she found that the coaching staff perceived her to be more invested when she came to daily activities. This helped her build trust and support with them too:

I would say a very similar fashion, and in particular as I mentioned with the assistant coaches, because when they know that your commitment is there … that's somebody who is committed, actually I think that's human, and then be much more inclined to open up and to get after these issues, that are deep or to be able to engage even at the surface level, they’re more inclined to kind of seek out.

After trust was built with the coaching staff, Avery expressed they were more open to feedback. Since then her role evolved into providing support for both athletes and coaches, and was able to bridge the communication for both of them. Because the head coach is more open to feedback and appreciated her perspective, she was able to share her observations and feedback from the athletes to help the coach adjust his message to be most effective with the team. She described a specific moment,

I was able to address specific things, you know like he always emphasizes the shut out, and he always tells the girls shut out, shut out, shut out. I'd like to get the shut out. But then the girls go on the field, they’re playing the first half and the other team scores, so this idea of a shut out, is completely- they already had this idea of failure, because coach is telling me to get a shut out. But, hey guess what, we still have 50 minutes to play. And so, I would see this continually happen, and just like this disappointment with this body language change with these girls. And
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I think that realizing when was it appropriate to insert my opinion, and what I'm feeling like. Generally--I think that that felt professionally--Him being the coach and me being--Having that pretty open dialog…That was a pretty cool conversation to have. How can we change that? How can we modify that?

According to Avery, her values play an important part in the work she does. In talking about her own personal values, Avery shared the ones most important to her are relationships, ability to relate and connect with people, hard work, courage and perspective. She said instances like sharing her perspective with the coaches, and “speaking up in staff meetings” definitely required her to use courage. She described, “It is hard sometimes. Like, sometimes all the eyes in the room are looking for you and you’ve got to say something or you got to know the situation out …You have to have some kind of courage.”

She said that not only are these values important to her, but they are “engrained in me.” She also noted these values are “something that if I try to separate myself with I really can’t. It’s so much part of me.” Avery believed these values played a key part in her professional role too. She shared,

I’d say they shape my role very much so…that there is that trust component that you know the girls aren’t just going to walk up to you and ask you for help…you're you know when you're open to form that relationship or that you’re willing to work harder. You're willing to have some kind of insight… likely perspective. They're not gonna see that unless you're willing to kind of be transparent in your values.

Avery believed that being transparent about what she valued helped her build trust with the team, which led her to relationships and them seeking her out for help. She explained, “I think the connection’s strengthened because they are able to see, hey she does stand for these, and it all comes back to that relationship piece.” Additionally, these values shaped her relationships with the coaches as well:
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Each of those that I shared with you are such a part of that beginning loving relationship that leads to further conversation, further discussions, further growth. You know a coach you know knowing that that understanding of knowing kinda what I stand for and that authenticity. That piece of authenticity that I value a lot in my initial conversations and kept them going in that relationship.

Avery believed authenticity was a key component in deeper relationships with people on the team; therefore they were more willing to seek her out for help.

Authenticity is important for her in her role as a bridge between athletes and coaches too.

Avery described,

It’s hard because we are seen as this bridge between athlete and coach, and so we do get to hear both sides, and sometimes you know it’s easy to agree with this side, and then agree with that side, and just kind of be this person that’s just in the middle but you’re not bridging. You’re just facing one party then turning your back and facing this other party and it’s like you get caught in the middle but you’re not connecting the dots, and I think you know for this self-integrity piece sometimes it’s been hard because I’ll hear what an athlete is saying and really buy into it, feed into it, see that perspective, see where they’re coming from, and it’s been real hard but sometimes I’ll have to tell the coach this is what she’s saying, this is what she’s feeling, this is the behavior she’s exhibiting. This is what happens when she leaves practice. This is what happens when she comes to practice, on and on and on. And that because in my heart of hearts I see that side and so to have to look at the coach and uphold my own integrity and being able to transmit that message to them it’s hard but I think again it goes back to kind of what I stand for.

Fortunately, Avery discovered when she is courageous and honest, it is also appreciated by the coaching staff:

I’ve found that when I’ve been able to be bold and uphold this integrity that I know is internal, but sometimes it’s difficult for me to relay it because of this conflict or this sense of what’s going to happen, this what if. What if she never talks to me again? What if he thinks I’m just siding with the players? All that internal dialogue and kind of fear is always when you get down to the root of it it’s all based in fear in my opinion. But you know I’ve just come to realize more and more each time that I’m able to face these hard conversations or I’m able to uphold my integrity it’s much more well received than just giving the answer that they want to hear. And that’s something I’ve learned even being in the coaches meeting. If you just agree with everything they say you’re not, what are you providing you know? It’s like, you’re in the room for a reason and have your opinion. If you agree with coaches, great, say you agree, but if there’s something
that you think could be changed or maybe your role in that meeting is just to listen for that day, great, uphold your role and move forward. But long story short I think it’s been received really well and I think the willingness to go there, and be transparent, and uphold your integrity has larger implications for work that you can do on down the road than just the simple answer or just the sometimes even just the comfortable answer.

With Midwestern University’s mental performance program’s focus on “the person first” Avery believed her values are reflected well within the program. She said when talking about a person, “a person and a person’s values will go hand in hand.” She believed the program model and her mental performance role challenged her to consistently reflect on her values and reevaluate what makes her her. She said,

Like most things it’s still very much a work in progress for that but it really when it comes down to it, it comes down to foundationally who I am again, how I was raised, my values come back into play. And it’s like continuing to discover what makes me me helps shed light on that. And it becomes this thing of this issue of not having to try but just having my inner being, my what makes me me live if that makes sense. Like living who I really am, and it’s I think that comes with maturity, I think that comes with conversations like this. I think it comes from asking myself what I do value, what I do, how I do live day-to-day life.

**Ben.** One of the messages that stood out most in Ben’s experience was his appreciation and respect for the individual. Understanding the context and the person were specifically meaningful to Ben in his work. He shared that his experience being integrated within the culture further supported this idea that each person has unique needs. He described,

The more I've experienced being in the culture of these teams, I recognize it's like a-- that day-to-day struggle with every individual and so the way you approach it changes and it changes subtly, in that every person's different, and the way they maximize their performance is going to be different than their teammates. And so, I guess the big thing I have learned through being in the role that I am here, is that, it's not enough to just be able to recite theory and research, the relationship part of getting to know the coaches and athlete and being integrated is very much important.
In building relationships by being integrated on teams, Ben learned that the role of a mental performance coach expands beyond simply teaching mental skills. He shared,

I think if you're integrated with the team it allows you to even expand upon your role and so, it's about performance, talking to individuals and how they can get better day-to-day. But it's also about how they relate to their teammates and how the coaches are coaching and again, it depends on the sport you're talking about too but I just found that there was so many other layers than just what the theory says about mental performance and as it relates to the science and mental skills training, and things like that.

Communication was something that was particularly meaningful to Ben. In his role, communication was an important means to deliver impactful services to the teams he worked with. The two roles he described most frequently in regards to communication were his role as a collaborator and a middleman. Having developed relationships with the coaches, this also created trust and collaboration with them. Ben shared it was meaningful to him to be able to share insights and observations through his lens to add to the coach’s perspective:

In my second year is really where the relationship – work I put in worked through observing and not saying a lot – really allowed me to enact a lot more change and so, I feel like the more relationship you have, that the more the players are going to text you out of the blue asking you for help. If I had the coach, by the end of the season, calling me after a loss and he’d be like, “Ben did we do everything right? What’d you see out there?” And that was amazing, it’s incredible to have this you know, 50-year-old coach, who’s one of the best coaches in the country, going over to get a new license every year asking me, not a soccer player, what I think, you know. That was an incredible experience.

Additionally, Ben felt he could learn from the coach’s knowledge of sport too. He shared how he did not always have the best approach saying, “You know, you're not the end-all be-all of the strategy. You're trying to have a collaboration. I think coaches really respected me when I was like, ‘Look, I have some ideas, you have some ideas, together we're going to come up with a great idea.’” He described a time they were able
to work together to collaborate and come up with the best approach when an athlete made a mistake,

He’s like, obviously this needs to be fixed so in the moment he's like, “I’ve got to fix this right now,” and I'm like, It needs to be fixed too, but maybe let's change the way we go about doing that. Then we would meet in the middle. I'm not knowledgeable about soccer. I didn't know that Meredith messed up on that play. I wouldn't have known to talk to her. He did, he picked up on it right away. But the way he was going about it, I don't think it was the most effective way. Challenging him on his approach, I think that's the way we worked together.

In addition to his role as a collaborator, Ben described his role as a middleman too. He explained that because he had a relationship with the coach and athletes, he was able to understand both sides, and communicate the other’s perspective to bridge the gap in communication. He found this particularly important to performance saying,

Communication I think is a performance issue as much as anything. So, being able to go to a soccer player or golfer and be like, "I know that you’re upset with your coach right now but that’s not really what they are thinking, in my opinion, I talked to him yesterday, here’s what" you know and maybe give them some understanding and at the same time, coach is really upset and you know they might be blowing a gasket in the next practice. You’re like, look, she’s had a lot of schoolwork going on this week or whatever it may be. So you kinda appease both sides. It's challenging sometimes, but if you are able to do that effectively, maybe you prevent something, a coach or a player will do, that will disrupt the communication or motivation for the next week of practice. It's kind of how it's-- it evolves a lot but that's kind of the basic layers of just what we’re talking about.

Being able to understand both perspectives helps bridge communication and prevent potential performance issues. In addition, having him integrated on the team helps create more communication between athletes and coaches. Often when he met with athletes, Ben would try to encourage the athletes to address issues as they arose:

Every time I talked with a girl, I am like, "I really appreciate you coming to tell me this. It would be incredible if you were able to talk to the coach about it." And so, a lot of times they weren’t ready-- so we would make a progress towards that. But I noticed a lot of, you know, kind of after a few months of working with me they would be more comfortable that I would always just really encourage that
and be like, "Well, coach is performing too, he's not perfect." But he is not going
to be able to understand everything that is going on, unless you tell him.

Another important piece to delivery services for Ben was his appreciation for
individual needs. He shared that knowledge of the sport and language was particularly
important in developing buy in:

Without dropping any of the language about the sport, I think they would respect
it and they would be able to learn but I guess the language really allows you to
apply what you’ve learned from the textbooks to an actual situation whether it’s
in practice, during the game and I think athletes and coaches really value that.

In understanding the sport, Ben found that golf was particularly important to have
an understanding of individual needs. Being integrated on the teams, Ben developed
relationships with athletes and staff, so he understood some of their individual needs, and
the needs of the sport. He was able to serve as a bridge between coach and athlete if the
coach’s message contradicted what the individual needed to perform at his best. Ben
explained,

So like coach Fred likes to do the rah-rah speech like, "Come on guys, we're five
spots out of regionals. If we just do this, this, and this we're going to get there." And
knowing what I know about the guys, that talk is a great message for about
three of them. And for the other four or seven of them it's- and so then I'll go to
him and be like, it's hard to be a coach because you can't have one message. All
we can do is get to know our guys on their individual level and then we go
through it individually. I think the rah-rah speech really works for Robert but
maybe not Matthew. So having those conversations, and I think he really values
the third party input on that. This relationship has extended beyond the office. I
mean we've gone to get a drink occasionally. I think it's really cool because it
allows- I'm not just a professional that shows up in a suit once a month. I'm here,
I'm with the guys and it's something practically that they can use a lot.

He said the coaches he works with appreciate the honest feedback and perspective
because of the relationship he built with them. He believed that a reason why they are
receptive to feedback is because he models making mistakes and being wrong too:
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I think, you got to model-- in our role. Which is, is a scary thing to do, but you got to model sometimes being like, "I don't have all the expertise" or "I make mistakes occasionally." because you saying that, you saying that you're imperfect allows-- frees them up to admit that in themselves.

One of the values most important to Ben was humility. He shared, “so, personal development for me, I think, is being able to admit your flaws and taking an honest look at what you're doing and learning from your mistakes. So, I think I can model that in my role.” In addition, Ben talked about how his values work well in his role:

I think there is a lot of things in the sports context, given the pressures, that we all go through where people can slip in to self-deprecating or blaming others. And positivity is the biggest, blessing people have a gift at, you know…So if you get everybody, you know, you go to the positive people, all of the sudden it's gonna be like, just being around people, it's gonna change the way they think. I think that's a huge weapon. So, the other values I have are hard work, support for one another, communicating, interacting respectfully, showing love for one another, living it and acting the way-- that way all the time. So, it's not just like, you can't be all talk. You gotta be able to have the conversations when no one else knows about it, where you're still living these values…keeping an open mind, I feel like these are some of my big-- the work I do.

This piece of authenticity, “living it and acting that way all the time,” was something especially important to Ben. He said when he’s being true to himself,

It just makes me happier, it makes me better in every endeavor I pursue. And that it's like if we're in the business of helping people perform better, I just think that you've got to be authentic, you've got to be true to yourself.

In regards to how authenticity intersects with his sport psychology services with teams, Ben shared,

The big value I have of being true to myself and so, I'm never talking about stuff that I don't believe in and that makes it really easy for me to say, you know. So, I just speak from my heart. I speak from what I've learned, the experiences I've had and I just try to be the best in that moment, you know. I'm constantly evaluating myself. A lot of times, you know, going to bed at night I'll think about, "Why did I say that?" And I think it's, it's an important part of the process but I just think ultimately, you know, my values, I'm being authentic with myself and, and true to myself.
Blake. One of the most meaningful pieces to Blake’s delivery services is starting with the foundation of growth mindset. She explained,

So the very first lesson I’ve taught each of them was growth mindset because for me that’s really what it comes down to is this ability to judge your own performance based on yourself and based on continuing to grow and being honest with the idea that like I told them I couldn’t enjoy the last, my last season because I was so wrapped up in this comparison, this threat, and so learning how to do this is only going to help you. So it really, growth mindset is really kind of the foundation that I use when working with athletes.

Blake expressed that when athletes have a growth mindset, they have the “opportunity to embrace challenges, to take risks, to learn from your mistakes.”

Additionally she found that growth mindset is a great foundation because she is able to meet each individual where they are and “knowing how to take them towards the general direction that we want to go.”

Another foundational theme to Blake’s work was the importance she placed on understanding the needs of those she works with and tailoring her services to fit those needs. These needs included understanding the sport, the individuals, and the team culture. She explained that relationships are crucial to impactful services:

They have to trust me and I have to trust them cause if we don’t have a good working relationship they’re just going to ignore what I say um and there’s a lot of things that go into developing that working relationship.

One of the ways she established this trust and relationship with the team was through integration on the staff and being present for practice. This integration was crucial for several reasons, particularly in gaining an understanding of the sport itself. Blake explained,

Really I thought integration was so vital because I didn’t have an understanding of the sport and without being there without seeing the athletes, seeing their growth like sitting next to the coach and learning the sport I don’t think I would be nearly as effective as I have been with them. And that’s not saying I think I’m
perfect or anything like that but such a huge component in me figuring out how to deliver sport psych is learning the sport.

Additionally, being integrated and present for practice showed investment to the athletes, which helped her establish a relationship with them. She explained,

Those opportunities to be there, to prove that you’re invested almost, cause I really think that’s what it is, is the athletes know I care about them because when they know I’m busy, they know I’m a student and all that but they know I care about them because I’m there. And I can’t always be there and this is kind of what I told Curtis and what I’ve told them is you know I am busy and that’s one of the hard parts is trying to balance being a grad student with doing this work, so I can’t always be there but I promise you that when I can be there I will be.

Not only was integration and presence key to gaining understanding of the sport and rapport with the athletes, observation was also imperative to Blake. She said,

Like the first 3 months so June through August I didn’t do anything, I didn’t do any sport psych work, I just sat next to the coach and tried to figure out what in the world was happening.

Finally when Blake was comfortable initiating services, she found that integration was helpful in finding intersections and opportunities for individual, informal meetings. She explained a particular example where integration was crucial:

Typically I’ve met anywhere random from like staying on the pool deck after practice cause sometimes that happens too actually is like an athlete will come sit next to me and be like hey X and just like can we chat after practice? Or something like that and I’ll then I’ll hang around and talk with them too but those aren’t always planned or other reason why it’s important to be integrated cause if I’m not there I mean, there was an instance this summer with one athlete who was really really struggling to get to go do a dive off 10 meter and ended up not going cause they were very scared and almost like froze up there and so afterwards I kind of went over to the hot tub when they were sitting there and just said hey you know do you want to talk, do you want to talk? And they were like not right now, no. And I was like okay I’ll be over here just let me know if you want to and just left it at that. And so they came and sat next to me, but like didn’t really say anything so I just kind of waited for like 15 to 20 minutes for until finally like the athlete broached the subject and then we had a really good conversation and were able to figure out a plan for how to make the athlete feel comfortable getting that dive off. Um but like I said if I’m not there, if I’m not there watching, if I’m not
there to say hey if you want to talk, like I’m here, you just miss those opportunities.

In addition to supporting the athletes, Blake shared that another role for her is to support the head coach. She explained she is able to offer additional perspective, and typically they collaborate on how his message can best support the needs of the athlete. She explained they are able to provide balance for each other, and it is important that the message is still coming from the coach in his own way. She said,

Cause ultimately like yes I have sport psych training and experience but he’s also been a diving coach for the last 10 years so it’s you know obviously he has a ton of knowledge to bring to the table and so I really like that we can meet in the middle cause it’s still authentic to him.

In addition to providing perspective, part of her role with Curtis is to provide a non-judgmental space for him to share his thoughts. She said,

I’m really just able to one, like listen to him without judging it and he doesn’t have to sensor himself for me cause he jokes about his internal monologue a lot how it’s like internal monologue becomes external and he doesn’t always sensor it but for me it’s just been like the entire time like okay, you know and I just I don’t judge it I don’t, here I just listen to it and respond.

The honest relationship she described stems from the fact that they both share the same values and approach to performance. She explained,

Our values are lined up, I know that we’re both trying to work towards the same thing that we’re putting the best needs of the athletes first and obviously we want that to also translate into performance enhancement and for them to do well in the diving well but ultimately recognizing that you know performance in the diving well also comes from being together as a person.

She said she feels supported by him in the services she provides because they both have similar beliefs and are able to articulate the same message to the team from their own authentic voice. She approaches service delivery in a way that also supports her
definition of holistic sport psychology, which is “person over performer.” She further described,

Anything can get in the way of performance which means that we have to be willing and able to address everything and that includes all aspects of an athlete’s/person’s life because if we’re limiting ourselves to just the performance domain I think we’re really losing a lot of our ability to do quality work.

For this reason, Blake’s services are tailored to fit the individual needs of each athlete, and she approaches her work in a way that allows for reevaluation in order to find the best approach for each person. She is intentional about letting the athletes know they can talk to her about anything, whether it is related to sport or not. This also supports her personal value to be authentic. She is open with them about her personal life to an extent, so they know they can be open with her too.

Additionally, kindness is a personal value for Blake. She explained she uses kindness to further support Curtis in his role stating,

It’s that willingness that kindness plays into that willingness to help out wherever I can cause like I said I mean he’s doing it alone and so for me it’s like any way I can help you out I’m willing to do whether that’s sometimes it’s like he’s sitting there judging diving meets all day I’m like hey do you want me to go grab you a sandwich? Like do you need some food? And so knowing that like I’m there for him and in the same way that I’m there for the athletes too has been a huge factor in establishing that connection and having someone who can support him and can really help him out since he doesn’t typically have that.

Finally in keeping with her belief of “person over performer,” Blake stays authentic in the services she provides in that everything overlaps between personal development and performance enhancement. She explained,

Actually honestly couldn’t think of specific examples for either cause I feel like everything I do applies to both. Cause it’s just the general flavor of the work that I do so and some definitely leans more towards one area or the other and that’s fine but like most of it has flavorings of everything.
Mason. One of the unique characteristics about Mason is that he holds a coaching role and the mental performance role. Additionally, he was an athlete for the head coach, therefore, he recalled that he has close relationships with the coaching staff, and understands the goals and vision of the program. He explained helping the coach’s professional development and being integrated with that person was a crucial part for sport psychology to consistently live in a sport culture:

I still believe that the coach is the most influential figure in an athlete’s life. I mean we have so many voices but the coach is the central, unifying factor. He’s the one that ties it all together and makes it relevant to them, and he’s also the one responsible for them. And so, helping that person develop and develop the culture within the team is the most impactful way to do it. Well, if you’re not on the pool deck or not in the gym or not on the basketball court, you can’t do that because you don’t know what they’re doing. And so having that many people involved is just such a huge attribute, advantage.

Mason had previous experiences as a college athlete where the sport psychology professional was not knowledgeable of the sport, therefore he did not feel like it was beneficial. Because of this past experience, Mason shared,

To me it was finding a way, the challenge was finding a way to make sport psych relevant to swimmers. And creating a language to which they could relate that would be true to their experience and that… and just create a foundation for them to work with… a general understanding where they could all understand the language, they all understand the principles and then they could grow from there. That was my goal.

Mason was able to find that common language in “continuing to develop the relationships and being relentless” with the coaching staff, so they are open to alternative perspective. One thing Mason shared was that the staff was very close with each other. He expressed,

One of the great things about our staff is that we go to breakfast several times a semester and we sit there and chat about the things we believe and we challenge each other and I think that that’s just part of being on a really great functioning
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staff, just filling that role and being yourself and bringing your own opinions to the table.

For this reason Mason feels he is able to challenge the coaches in some aspects.

He shared part of his role is being able to bring a different perspective:

I think the biggest thing about having a sport psych person working with the coaching staff does is it just brings awareness to action. It’s an understanding that the things that they do and say have an impact that maybe was unintended and… is far reaching… that their behavior matters, the things they say, the things they do will affect performance because we think, you know, in our sport they think well, you know, we train hard, we swim fast, great. What does what I have to say have anything to do with their performance in the pool? Well, it has everything to do with it. Your body language in a meet when we’re getting out butts kicked has everything to do with the way we’re swimming. You know, and just that awareness I think changes things for them.

Another major piece to Mason’s approach to delivery is that now he is “a bit more relaxed” in his approach:

It’s like we just kind of hang out and have a conversation about it versus this massive intervention work where there’s all this pressure and you have to fix all their problems in one setting. And it’s like, no, we’re just going to build a relationship, we’re going to continue to talk through this, and we’re going to work through it together.

Additionally he finds ways to fit the services to meet the needs of the team at that point in time. He found the best time to provide sport psychology now is during team meetings, so that the head coach can reinforce it. He said,

So then all of a sudden you have the head coach who’s presented a message, you’ve given maybe a little bit or tweaked it a little bit or given your piece from sport psych and then he steps back in and reiterates it and drives it home and then all of a sudden it’s living in the program. Every other coach heard it, all the kids heard it, and now he’s saying it and it’s like, that’s it, that is the day-to-day of it.

He described “those meetings are where you lay the foundation for it so it’s not like, you know, when I’m talking about focus because something’s come up later in the season, that we’ve never talked about it.”
In addition to his own coaching staff, one thing Mason appreciates about the Midwestern University mental performance program staff is that you can be your authentic self, and your values are supported within the model. He shared,

I think that what’s really cool about our staff’s model is that every perspective and value system, as long as it is about personal, within kind of the realm of positive coaching of developing people and high performance excellence, I think as long as those are your goals and you mean well, then you’re going to fit in. And I think that’s what’s really cool.

He explained that because everyone is able to deliver services in their own authentic way it creates a mutual sense of respect amongst the staff. Respect for people is one of Mason’s core values, therefore being respected is particularly meaningful for him. The other value Mason holds extremely high is hard work. He said these values work well together in his work, because “if you believe in that respect thing, then you have to, you have to work for them because if you respect them enough, if you respect their effort enough then you have to give them everything that you have.”

Mason has a strong desire to help others find meaning and value in their lives. He shared,

I believe that the noblest thing a human can do is work tirelessly toward some pursuit in their life and it doesn’t matter what that is as long as you develop and you devote yourself 100% to it. And, to me, it’s my goal with my athletes to help them find the value, their values and find a pursuit where that is how they work… and hopefully it’s within swimming. For some of them, you know, swimming is something they do and that’s fine and they do great at it, but, and there’s other avenues in their life, whether that’s spiritually or there’s some relationship in their life or, but finding that mean, helping them find that meaning in their life I think is a big deal.

In this way, Mason is able to utilize his own personal values to impact others through personal development and performance enhancement both in and out of sport.
Stella. Stella’s experience was different than the other mental performance coaches in the program, as she has worked within this program for the longest duration, and now holds the Director of Mental Performance role at Midwestern University. To best understand this program model, unique facets, and overall goals and intentions, Stella very descriptively shared,

Yeah so I don’t really know of any other program that has a group of mental performance coaches who have PhDs and mostly performance enhancement that are funded in an athletic department. And that’s one something unique that we have a team you know which is awesome, and then one that has also works very well in the same house as their counseling psychologists. That’s in the same house as the athletic training staff, that’s in the same house as strength and conditioning, or the academic coordinating. You know and so that’s what allow us to be integrated. That’s what allows us to have multiple intersections. We’re gonna leave this interview. You’re going to walk out, you’re going to say hi maybe to a gymnast that walks by, then you’re gonna run into the academic coordinator, then you’re gonna go over to dining hall and you’re going to say hey to the strength and conditioning coach and the trainer hey did you talk to this person about this? Yeah, did you reconnect with so and so? So it allows us to have this conversation and so I mean we obviously owe a lot of to Doc for sharing the need for this as a track coach, cause he was a coach, but that kind of lends itself to all these multiple intersections that we have. But it just couldn’t be us too, so if we didn’t have the counseling psychologists to realize things that are out of our scope of competence just to walk hey I think this is – I understand, I care about ya, but I have someone else that’s going to help you better here you know. And again there just seems to be no stigma here you know we see athletes going in and out of counseling psychologists office, in and out of here, and everybody knows the intention of they walk into our office, we’re at practice, we’re here to help them get better. It’s not a fixing thing. We’re here to get better. It’s not to come in here and vent and the woah is me, at the end of the day we are driving high performance excellence.

Stella continued to describe how this program model has an opportunity to provide support for coaches in a unique way. To best understand the goals and focus of the program, Stella passionately continued to share,

Our role what makes it unique too is that what we do, we’re not doing a good job if we’re not going to and through the coach. At the end of the day, our job is to help coaches help their athletes. Or help administration help their athletes. Kids meet sport at the coach. You know and they’re already doing lots of amazing things that they might not think is sport psychology that very much is. And that’s
where we learn. We learn from our coaches. And then we get to come back to our mental performance meetings every two weeks, coach did this the other day, or my coach did woah that’s great I’m gonna share that back with Pat. I’m gonna bring that to Ryan, I’m gonna bring that to Ian. You know and so one of the awesome things is not necessarily the knowledge that we bring to the table, it’s the shared knowledge from the group, this integrated program that we get to act as conduits between sport programs. Cause our head coaches are not all in the same room, as with other (conference) schools. They’ve got their own island and they become isolated. And what we help to do is to bridge those gaps, and you know I think it’s so important that the coach knows that you’re there for them and supporting the goals/visions of their program. Then when you meet with the athlete it’s not a threat, that at the end of the day you know we don’t need to share everything and I think they understand that too that we share the main themes. At the end of the day the coach understands the athlete better. The athlete understands the coach better. And that we don’t become a threat to the coach-athlete relationship. Our goal is not to build a better relationship with the athlete than the coach. Then we’re not doing our work. That’s then us getting in our own way, like we need to feel needed and liked and that’s not our role. And I think once you get there, it takes a couple years to build trust, and then you can hold them more accountable, you can have higher standards and they know it’s coming from a place of care just like we’re asking the coach to do too. So what makes it unique is I think it’s the only one. What makes it unique is that we’re funded by the athletic department. What makes it unique is that we are building relationships with every person that touches the athlete. Yeah what makes it unique is that it’s sustaining itself because they see it as a service that they want. It’s not like you have to incorporate into your program …you need strength and conditioning and academics. We’re here because we’ve shown that this service is of is a value. That’s what makes it unique.

With so many staff members in the program focused specifically on mental performance, the model offers unique learning, and Stella tries to model mutual learning, through vulnerability and shared experiences. Talking about specific learning moments with a colleague Stella states,

Hopefully that she can learn from those and that I can be open and vulnerable with her you know cause I wish someone could have been that for me. You know and so that’s what makes my job rewarding is that we can have those type of conversations and help with you and vise versa. So I think it’s empowering for me when I can open and share things with her and to know that I am not standing on a soapbox cause obviously it could have been hard. We were all GAs and all of a sudden now Stella’s the director, and now she’s my boss, and this is weird but I don’t ever felt like there’s been weird tension in there. You know that we’ve already had so many conversations in our cohort to know what we’re doing here
that we don’t feel that you know and if we didn’t have that then this wouldn’t be working the way it does. So I so much value her and the other team members that are totally in tune, not that we don’t’ have our own views or ideas of how we look at things but we understand our approach, what we’re trying to do here.

This experience was similar to Mason’s experience previously reported above, that they have the same goals for performance excellence and personal development, however they are encouraged to be themselves, according to their own values, and find the approach that works best for each of them to achieve those goals. Stella described the essential role values play in her own delivery of sport psychology services, as well as the role they play in finding the best fit:

I think every sport psychology consultant or mental performance coach has a way that works for them. You know and I think the values that I have are definitely behind my delivery you know and again I guess it goes back to in a professional role you also gotta know that you’re not gonna be the right person for everybody you know. And so I think part of it is too is knowing that sometimes there’s gonna be better fits and knowing that if one place is not the best fit that’s not an attack on your competence or character. And so your values and my values help me come to this feeling that I can be ok with that, and know that what that’s saying there and also know that for you in this role that you can continually be putting yourself and spend your energy in moments that it does feel authentic you know and that you are feeling like you’re having a positive influence and everybody around you is on the same page. And I think you need to actively continue to seek those out because it’s just you’re never always going to be the right fit for someone and you can’t judge yourself for that. I think keeping close to your values can help you be more at peace by that you know. It’s like that’s ok this is not the best fit or this isn’t the right environment but I can use this to help me again continue to have that growth mindset but also position myself in places that are not as draining. That you’re still you’re feeling really passionate about it and you’re not experiencing that burnout you know that you’re finding the right environment for your work.

In her experience, Stella described how imperative it is to work in an environment where everyone is on the same page. Therefore, according to Stella, not only do her values shape her role, they also help her evaluate whether that particular team environment shares in her particular values and beliefs. For her, being able to act and
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work authentically to her values ignited her passion for her work, rather than feeling drained and burned out. A simple way Stella described it was, “what does that life mantra mean to me you know.” For her, she said, “and so as corny as it may sound, be true and be the best you.” She described that she is able to know when she is that best self:

Because I know days when I go home and go ick that wasn’t me. I didn’t like it. And I know days I can go home and go well that was really, really challenging and it that still hurt but I really like the way I conducted myself through it. And I want to make those days more consistent.

When she is true, and her “best you,” she spends less time “getting stuck” in the moments of disappoint and defeat with the teams she works with. When she is her best self,

That’s how I have the ability to go ok have the discipline to go to the next moment because at the end of the day going ok I get honest with myself, clear with the moment, I’m gonna have more self compassion for where I screwed up and tomorrow I’m gonna have a commitment to do it better. And I need to have that in this job because I can get really hung up and stuck with people cause I’m like just ugh I want you to feel better. I want you to move on, so we can all go, you know and that’s just not realistic. So I think those values help me get to the next moment and I think that’s how they show up in times of… we obviously find ourselves in conflicts, tough moments, and I use those to create enough space to guide that interaction.

This road map of values that guides her interactions in tough moments and everyday life, include values like “genuine presence,” and,

I think the value is the care, is having a very strong moral compass, being brave, courageous and finding different ways to be brave and courageous, you know, the vulnerability thing became huge for me you know, to show signs of weakness, to show that you’re embracing this growth mindset, the opportunities to learn, and being really honest.

In particular, Stella was passionate in sharing how her values can help her do the right thing and challenge the sport culture and people involved. She explained,
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That I stand behind my convictions. That I have bravery to stand up for what I believe in. And especially in this environment you know. That’s when I can go back to those things about why I’m here you know and what I’m trying to do here. But see with the growth mindset this doesn’t mean like I’m gonna defend what I think all the time but I know also what’s true and what’s right or wrong. That’s what helps me be more courageous. When I go out there and do things and be brave and have those tough conversations, and be able to challenge coaches and athletes appropriately, administration, and challenge sport society appropriately, is that I can feel good about myself that whatever happened whatever adversity or thing that I might be struggling with, at the end of the day if I can leave there saying I like the way I handled that you know because I showed up with that piece you know of who I am and didn’t go back to my shadow self. Even though the shadow self is what we’d all like to go, that I showed up with the integrity piece, displaying good judgment.

She shared one way she thought she could help change the sport environment is by modeling values consistently, because “if you don’t have the discipline to model your best authentic self, day in day and be totally consistent in that you can’t expect coaches or athletes to do the same.” She shared that the holistic sport psychology philosophy that the program is built on, the care and appreciation for the whole person, provides an optimum opportunity to live the concepts that are taught:

That’s how our model keeps living and breathing if we continue to reinforce what we’re asking people to do, and have the awareness of when we’re not. And hold each other accountable to that. And that’s when we get really fun and engaging conversations that we’ve had in this last year because it, we’re also I think we’re very much so in tune with that.

She shared the connection between the holistic sport psychology services she provides and her personal values:

It’s like a continuous cycle. You know my values are very much part holistic and the more I learn about holistic the more it shapes my values and my work… they’re that’s just definitely this continually ebb and flow of the more I have strong conviction in the value piece the more holistic psychology seems like the obvious thing what we’re trying to do here. And that’s where I even get stronger so I think just very much a part of what we do.
Through self-awareness, Stella’s personal values and holistic sport psychology services continue to reinforce each other. She said a piece of holistic services that is helpful to her work with teams,

It’s like one thing with our holistic is that when people meet us they know what they’re gonna get. They’re gonna get consistency. They know what the conversation’s gonna come back to. You know, and so I think what we hope to be is just that really grounded strong presence they can come back to. Yeah. The huge support system.

Particularly in this role, Stella felt that one of the biggest pieces of the job,

Where we are is just to show that support, that care, is huge. Like coach I care about you. I’m not always going to have maybe the right answer but I’m going to work my damndest to find it for ya. And I’m gonna show this consistency and this composure that you need right now. You know I’m not gonna get you worked up for no reason and at the end of the day I think what my coaches know is that I’m gonna tell them you know what’s what’s on my mind…they know that Stella’s gonna tell me things I may not want to here, some things that I do need to hear, but I hope that they can say at the end of the day she cares you know. And she shows up with some insights, some things that I’m missing, some perspective piece that she keeps perspective for us. And that’s going back to the values of this holistic model.

A challenging tension sometimes in this holistic support and honesty that Stella values is that she has “strong personal relationships with coaches,” and “you establish really good relationships with people sometimes you got to be careful. That makes it even harder to say things they need to hear.” Ultimately, whether she is challenging a coach or an athlete though, Stella felt like it comes back to care. She posited,

I think athletes might want to come here to see me or coaches because at the end of the day they know they’ll that they’ll leave feeling better but not because of this false praise or affirming things that they want to hear. They’re going to get there because they’re going to have a solution at the end of the day because I’m gonna be coming from a place of care, that I’m honest with them, that I’m asking them to do the most brave and courageous thing.

Another way she is able to support the coaches using her own values is through vulnerability and growth mindset. In addition to challenging them, she models the idea
of learning too. She said this type of openness helps them feel comfortable learning and sharing with her because it is then a reciprocal learning relationship. She explained,

And also having conversations with them you know and playing the role of the learner with them and adopting a growth mindset of ways you can learn from them too. Providing times for them to even think and pull on their own insight cause we can have meetings with head coaches and not talk and sometimes they bring themselves full circle. Cause at the end of the day you know they just need that space for reflection time too with someone they can trust and care just to pour it all out that’s not judging them.

This call to care is consistent with one of Stella’s core values. One way she is able to uphold this is through the program’s opportunity to have mental performance coaches integrated on teams. She said this further reinforces the action of care with the athletes they work with:

I think that’s where they see your investment and engrossment like Katherine cares, Ben cares, they’re, they could be anywhere and they’re just watching practice for three hours and that must be boring. They must be really invested in me you know. Next time something comes up Katherine understands because she sees me, and she sees me interact with all these people and so I’m going to go talk to her. You know so I think athletes really do see the investment piece you know.

Not only did integration and presence at practices create openness to services, she said the most essential component of her role is the relationships. She explained,

The importance of the relationships behind what I do you know and who to go through to get to the athletes and understanding all the nuances you know between either the coach the athlete, the athlete the coach, the coach the support staff, the support staff, you know all of that you know how that all becomes a big piece of how they view sport psychology and understanding are we meeting the athlete where they are, instead of bringing my knowledge to them.

Understanding the needs of the team, athletes and staff was crucial to the role, according to Stella. She talked about being true to the genuine presence she values:

I think that helps me be in tune with other people. You know that I can be really present, that care piece, helps me meet them where they’re at rather than being lost into my own mind of what I what I think I need to get out of this conversation.
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She explained that understanding “where they’re at” helped figure out what they need. She described the role to foundationally be about support, and the most effective way Stella was able to do that was by providing support and knowledge when it was appropriate to their needs. She explained how this was crucial in relation to support not only for the athletes, but for the coaches as well:

I think when you go in with anything where you’re trying to prove your value it’s really easy to overstep boundaries and is this me feeling that I need to be needed or is this really what the coach and athlete needs? You know and I think it’s really hard and it took me a while to figure out what that balance is, that the more that I’m doing that the more that I’m again inserting myself and where it might not need to be inserted. You know that I really need to meet them where they were at and figure out what my role is and let them guide that relationship, at the same time being confident in my delivery.

In addition to meeting the needs of the program and individuals she works with, she said her services are most impactful when they’re also believable. Going back to the piece of living what she preaches, she said you can tell when she’s teaching something authentic to her own beliefs:

In order for them to get a feel to be believable in what I’m saying they got to see my authenticity behind the work that I do. And I think that’s what they see that Stella comes in here passionate, excited because she’s a strong believer in the work that she does you know. I want the values come out of that and they’ll know when I’m not convincing. If I’m talking about something and I’m getting hooked up and not able to piece it together that means I’m having a hard time articulating it myself you know. And what I’m trying to share. So I think they see my values come out. They know what they’re going to get from me you know. And again I think that’s what makes each of us convincing when we go in the room.

Keeping consistency to the holistic sport psychology services and living true to her own values, Stella has a passion and excitement for building personal development with those she works with, as she believes this is the best way to maximize high performance. She explains,
The strong personal development is what yields that high performance you know. That’s kind of the foundation of being able to think right at the end of the day. You know we can go in and teach skills of positive self-talk, concentration, think right but if they don’t have a healthy relationship with themselves and with sport, the skills of focus won’t hold as much weight. They’re going to be so distracted by these other things that that fit so much about who they are as people first you know we can’t ask them to do that…it’s like I think Michael Gervais even said you know it’s if they have a really good idea about their psychological framework, meaning who they are and how they fit in the world, then the mental skills can help patch that framework when they get out of their authentic space. So it’s like I know who I am and then I’m also realizing the shadow self, shadow self is coming in now I’m going to use my self talk with my values to get back to where I need to be. I’m going to use mastery rehearsal to help loosen the anxiousness and nerves or whatever that might be. So it’s like the idea of the psychological framework, and how we see ourselves and view the world is directly related to how we see and view our performance and what’s at stake.

Not only is Stella able to help those she works with have a better understanding for their own values and best self, she is constantly reevaluating her own values in this role, so she can intentionally bring her “true you” to the role more consistently. She shared how her values and being her “best you” help her in maintaining passion in the role and performing better for those she works with. She reflected,

I think when you’ve stopped growing you know you need to find something different. I mean when you’re telling yourself that I’ve learned all I can because in this work we’re doing the more you get to know, the more you understand, the more you don’t know. And so I think as long as you can keep that and that passion for your work, that’s the path of mastery we’re all on. And I’m learning more about my values every day. I don’t think they change but maybe some different language to help me understand them more. So I can show up more authentically in those situations you know. Even having this conversation is helpful yeah. And also realizing some of the things about myself you know. But it takes this active intentionality.

**Within-Case Analysis: Athletes**

**Adele.** Adele shared how her experiences working with Mason gave her an overall more positive outlook on her experience as a college swimmer. Adele believed it
was helpful to have Mason integrated on the staff, particularly because he understood the sport. She described this by saying:

I really enjoyed it just because I felt like it was so specialized because it was like a specific person who knew how our sport was. In swimming, I just feel like swimming is so different and not a lot of people really understand it unless you’re really involved with it and have been through it and so I think it was just I think it made our team a lot better. Just to have somebody that everybody could feel confident in going to.

She appreciated the activities he did with the team, collectively. Being integrated on the staff, she said Mason understood the program and was able to create specific activities tailored to the needs of the team. One activity that was particularly meaningful for Adele was related to the identity, goals, and values of the team. In talking about this team activity she stated:

Yeah, I think our whole team has benefited from it a whole lot and for example like the thing we did last year that I was talking about. Just like coming together with the senior class and all like making this big poster and everything I think that it really gave somebody, like our whole team just something to think about and just I think it’s impacted everybody.

She explained that these activities Mason would do with her and the team brought more meaning to the experience. With a clear idea of team values, Adele said:

I think it was really cool because it was just it gave us something to think about like instead of just going to practice every day we could kind of just like we thought of like things that we shouldn’t be saying at practice you know just to work on the things we should be saying more support for the team and everything so I think that was the main thing it just gave us something to think about kind of just a goal in mind to just live our lifestyle by.

In addition to team activities, Adele shared that meeting with Mason one-on-one was meaningful too. He created activities to specifically help her with what she was struggling with. Coming into college, Adele struggled with no longer being the best
athlete on the team. Mason was able to offer a different perspective, encouraging her to be grateful for everything the experience provides. She said:

I don’t know for whatever reason that just kind of changed my whole thought about it I was like I don’t have to just be hard on myself to always go the best time but I should just be thankful for this opportunity and like what I have. So I think he just put it in a different aspect for me to think about and ever since that meeting I just kind of enjoyed it a lot better. Just the actual sport.

Adele enjoyed having Mason as a part of the staff because “he was extremely positive.” Mason and another former coach collaborated to create a notebook for Adele where she would not only write her practice logs, she would write happy thoughts too. She described this activity saying, “I think just as a swimmer and as a person, I don’t know he really just helped me enjoy this whole process of just working hard and you know being a Midwestern University swimmer.” She said his positivity was beneficial for her mental game. When describing his role on the team she said:

Just helping the mental game. I think just really like going through the process and just like just bringing positivity and just really, yeah helping mentally. Just like thinking about other things directing your focus on something else. Just helping a person not be down on themselves all the time but to just think of the positive things that you have accomplished or are going to accomplish and just yeah directing your mindset on something else.

Beyond the actual sport performance, Adele said Mason helped her enjoy the experience, and be proud of the commitment she made to the program. When reflecting on her time on the team working with Mason she stated:

Well, I guess I’ll never forget all of the things and just like instead of leaving Midwestern University swimming like disappointed in my performance and everything I think that yeah, I think I’ll like take away that all of the things he told me that I was just so lucky to have the opportunity and I’ll always look back on it as a positive experience. I went maybe a few best times all four years but like to him and to other coaches that didn’t matter and it’s just like you know the fact that I’m here and I was able to do it and he was the one who really relayed that message to me.
Amy. One of the biggest things Amy appreciated in working with Ben is his perspective. Amy had previous experiences with sport psychology professionals throughout her golf career. She said her experience in this program with Ben though has been much better because he is integrated on the team and has knowledge of the sport.

She described:

I find it really helpful. Previous sports psychologists I’ve worked with in the past haven’t really known that much about my sport. So I’ve maybe worked with a sports psychologist that’s just assigned to like a lot of sports and don’t really have a good understanding of like how our game is played which is I feel quite important when you play golf because you need to know a few things. So I’ve really enjoyed like having him right there at practice and being able to talk to him after a round. I find that really helpful and you can just observe things that you don’t see while you’re playing because there’s a lot of things that you kind of are oblivious to while you’re performing.

Amy said because Ben understands golf, she does not have to spend time explaining the sport to him. Since Amy developed a relationship with Ben and he understood the sport, she said they were able to have deeper conversations tailored specifically to her mental game. She explained:

Like once I got to know Ben, a little bit better like there is specific things that we can work on and he knows sort of habits that I fall into in terms of like mentally thinking and stuff like that. Just sort of developing that relationship with him I feel like he knows some things that I like just fall into after a while.

Having a good relationship with him, and knowing what some of her mental habits are, Amy found it particularly beneficial having him integrated on the team where he could be present at practices and tournaments. In this role he was able to offer feedback on what they were working on individually. She said, “He’s just good at observing and seeing things.” She also felt that his services continued to improve because he has a “deeper understanding of things” since he has been with the team for several years and spent more time with them.
Additionally, having Ben present for practices and tournaments helped remind her to have a good mindset while she was playing. She said his presence helped her keep her mental goals in mind more consistently. In talking about the importance of having Ben there, she said:

I’ve come to realize it’s more important to have sort of a mental performance coach there. I quite like that he sort of comes in once in a while to talk to the team and it just kind of gets us back on the straighten arrow. Like people after a while they get a little like sort of like maybe stray off and you’ll see that people maybe will once in a while get more frustrated or they’ll really get down on themselves. I mean that happens but I think once he comes in it just kind of reminds us that that sort of thing doesn’t really help. If you can keep a good mindset about things that’s always going to help you so. I think it’s just good to have him there to every now and again sort of get us back on track.

Because Ben is part of the staff he was able to travel with the team to some tournaments too. Amy stated:

When he could travel with us I thought that was really helpful. Especially just if he’s watching like a practice round or watching a tournament day because like tournament days are completely different to practice. There’s so much more like pressure of the tournament situation so that has been really helpful when he’s there. You can sort of sit down with him after the round and discuss what’s going on and it just keeps you sort of focused on your mental goals for that tournament or that practice.

Ben provided Amy and the rest of the team a process-oriented perspective that she found beneficial to performance. Amy shared:

I think really just keeping a good mindset whether it be like on the golf course while you’re playing just sort of focusing on the process instead of the results and really making sure you go through your routine and you just focus on the process while you’re hitting the shot and then once you’ve hit the shot you just have to I mean you’ve got to deal with the result. You just sort of switch off until you like get to your next shot. Really good with that stuff on the course.

Not only has his perspective on the process been helpful for Amy, she said that in Ben’s role he has helped the coaches also stay focused on the process. In helping the coaches, she said:
I think before that, they would probably be really focused on results. I know a lot of like collegiate coaches like they’re probably under the gun from like the AD like if you don’t get these results then they’ll bring in new coaches. But our coaches over the past couple of years, especially last year and more so this year, they’ve been really good at just letting go of the outcome. And like, focusing on the process in practice and on the golf course like their body language while they’re on the golf course is especially in tournaments has improved a lot...before my freshman year they’d be sort of you can get live scoring on a golf tournament so they’d be looking at the scoring like...now they just don’t look at their phone at all and they’re focused on the process of like what someone else is doing behind do they need help or like Amy’s got a shot to the green here go and help her where the flag is at today so just like that I think really has helped.

Amy said it was important Ben helped the coaches with this perspective because he cannot always be there. She said this focus on process built a culture on their team, including their team mantra. She described:

What’s important now? Win. So yeah you win from focusing on what’s important now which is the process and that really sort of helped me having them focusing on that because then it means like if you kind of get out the way and start focusing too much on the result they’ll sort of be like what’s important now. So it just helps having someone to get you back on the straight and narrow and having Ben sort of work with them and them sort of implementing that. Because he’s not there all of the time, has really helped. I mean, having him there is sort of an extra person as well to work with us. It really helps just sort of creates a good community in our team. I think definitely sort of getting our coaches to get away from the results and I mean they’ve always cared about us as people but like even more so now.

Amy shared this process perspective has helped her not only in golf, but in life as well:

…like just staying positive to other things in life like with school or academics. If you have like a bad test I’ll kind of look at it like well I’ve still got the other, like the rest of the semester to pick this up or if you have a bad day or just like an argument with someone we’ll just try and make it better or I don’t know just taking the positive side of things. Like it’s not the end of the world type of thing. I don’t know I think a lot of the things he teaches you can apply to other things other than your sport just especially like not focusing on results or stuff like that. I feel like I came from a background that was more focused on results than the process in everything like grades or sport so I feel like it’s really helped just focusing on my process and applying that to other things in life.
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She said based on her experiences with Ben, one thing that defines the role of a mental performance coach for her is someone who is always willing to help and really listen. She said listening was so important “because everyone isn’t going to think the same way or have the same situations or experiences. It’s really being able to adapt to the athlete’s needs or what the athlete is trying to achieve. I think that’s very important.”

**Lucie.** In her experience, Lucie shared how she built mental skills that she has been able to utilize on and off of the soccer field. She stressed that the reason she felt like mental skills were effective for her were in large part due to her investment in practicing them. She stated, “I don’t think it will work if you don’t believe in it kind of. So, yeah I think it’s a lot to do with if you’re willing to try and invest in it correlates with your outcomes.” The skills that resonated most with her were related to visualizations and building on her strengths. She shared that the combination of mental preparation and physical fitness helped her be fully focused and be happy with her performance her senior year:

I think he definitely like helped me not have any regrets my senior year because I felt like he helped me be my mentally best if that makes sense. And then I felt like physically good so I’m just glad looking back I didn’t like hesitate, I wasn’t second guessing myself, I felt in the game, present like I knew how to shake things off and not let it drag me down longer and I think without him I would have been really focused on this is my last game like oh my gosh I’m freaking out like I want to do this and that but instead I just kind of took everything as it came and like when there was good or bad it didn’t really swing too much because I was just pretty level headed.

Based on her experience, she described Ben’s role as helping her become mentally tough and stable regardless of what happens in a given situation. In regards to soccer, she said this helped her because:
If you want to win you’ve got to just not let things shake you up too much because you can lose track of the final goal really easily and this kind of just keeps you on the straight and narrow path for as long as you can.

She said that building this mental toughness and stability helped increase the longevity of her confidence as well stating:

Just like noticing like my own experience like I felt my confidence last longer through games and when I would mess up I knew how to like park it and readjust and things that actually helped me I could see benefitting my play.

She also expressed how these skills she learned are transferable between soccer and other aspects of life:

I mean, I think like just through life I can calm myself down a lot easier and just like keep mentally focused and strong when things get hard. I’m working at the hospital now and I’m in nursing school so like when I start to get really stressed I just like use a lot of the skills he taught me I guess. You just like park it you do like one thing at a time and so yeah I just like that I can carry it with me past sports too.

In addition to the mental skills that she incorporated into her sport and life, Lucie expressed having a comfortable relationship with Ben for several reasons:

He’s really open and non-judgmental so I think anyone would feel comfortable going to him and he doesn’t, there’s no like motive behind what he does he just really like wants you to be your best you and so like when I would go into his office I trusted him that he wasn’t going to go to the coaches with like certain things and yeah he was just really open and understanding and it felt genuine it didn’t feel like this is just his job.

Lucie believed that having Ben present at team functions was beneficial for the athletes and coaches. She felt like seeing Ben on a regular basis was a helpful reminder of the messages they would talk about individually and as a team. For example, she thought having Ben at practice had a positive impact on team dynamics:

I liked it because like everyone knew why he was there so everyone tried to like be a good teammate because we had talked about that with him so like if it was like us and the staff and Ben everyone kind of held to like a standard where you
would want to like be beneficial to the team like through your actions and so since he was there I think everyone kind of behaved better.

Not only did Lucie feel like his presence helped the team hold themselves to a high standard, Ben’s presence was also calming during stressful situations and team conflict:

He knew just how to like come in and like bring a calming manner and then get people to like vocalize what’s frustrating them and what’s stressing them out rather than just like burying it and like being snippy with one another. Just like, let’s talk about this put this out there and let’s overcome it not be scared of it and just like walk around it not confront these issues let’s confront them in like a mature way and just go through them rather than spend all our time trying to bury things.

For this reason, Lucie felt like having Ben in this role helped the team solve issues rather than avoid them. She said that surrounding herself with a good person like Ben helped bring out the best in those around him.

**Lydia.** The core of Lydia’s experience having Blake a part of their team was rooted in Blake’s understanding of context. This understanding, in many capacities, helped build trust between Blake and Lydia. The initial way Blake was able to build relationships and trust with the team was by better understanding the sport itself.

She’s been really great so one thing that she did that was really amazing is she just came and watched us and like observed what practice was like because she never really knew, I’m a diver so she didn’t really know much about the sport of diving and so my coach was like I don’t really want anyone messing with my divers heads who doesn’t understand the sport and for an entire summer she just came and sat next to my coach and observed and watched and listened to how he coached and to what he was saying and asked him about things… so she got to understand the sport and got to kind of get a little taste of our world. So that was really helpful and then yeah then she started taking our team once a week through you know whatever topic she wanted to talk about and I think she started with like growth mindset and that was I think really helpful for a lot of us.

Blake’s initial observations built an understanding of the sport of diving, the coach’s approach, and the team’s overall goal. Growth mindset supported the team
culture as Lydia stated, “it kind of gives us all like an oh yeah understanding of the goal kind of thing that we want to have as a team.” These initial observations also helped Blake build an understanding for the divers themselves. Lydia felt more connected to Blake through this experience sharing:

It was helpful in the fact that like number one I felt I could trust her because she’d been around you and we’d have conversations here and there just to kind of build that you know friendship or relationship or whatever you want to call it but then there was also helpful that I could trust her because I thought she knew what she was talking about versus because diving is unique, she’s a volleyball player, so diving is different from volleyball the way we think the way we prepare it’s just totally different and yeah I think any individual acrobatic sport tends to be different than a team sport you know. There’s aspects that are the same but they need to be I don’t know adjusted slightly to this sport and so yeah that was helpful and she could then kind of get an idea just from observing us like how maybe she could help us.

Another component of understanding that Lydia appreciated was Blake’s belief that each person has specific needs. Lydia explained that in order to understand what those needs are, a relationship needed to be in place first. Since Blake was integrated on the staff, she was able to observe and be present at practices. Lydia felt like this approach was beneficial to building that relationship and personal understanding:

I think it’s huge. I mean from some of the pieces I’ve just like building a relationship with somebody and thinking that you can you know trust them and I think there’s where if you’re doing that and someone just comes in and gives a talk then you’re doing that cookie cutter thing where like okay everybody’s got to fit somewhere in this box and I’ve only got this much time to and you don’t have as much time to like really talk through what somebody’s thinking because like your brain is so complex like all of the thoughts and you know the person that you are. You really do have to get to know a person I think before you can have any idea of how they think and where they can get better at thinking. Because if you don’t build that relationship you don’t understand what makes the person think the way they do I think that’s really important in making them think a way that’s going to work so yeah I think just here and gone doesn’t really work…I just think yeah it takes time to get to know somebody to really do that you have to be around and like to trust that person with a relationship and to trust if they know what they’re talking about. If she hadn’t come and observed the sport and seen us
in practice and seen things go maybe not right and things like that then it’s like well what do you know?

Lydia also felt that Blake sharing personal information helped Lydia relate to and build trust with her as well. She stated,

I guess one other thing that’s been helpful with Blake is that she was an athlete and she can relate and so yeah she would kind of share with us how this impacted her and stuff like that and that was kind of helpful in building that trust and stuff and when things would sometimes be going like a little a rye in her life she would be able she could communicate that with us too and that helped build trust.

Having a stronger relationship and understanding of the sport gave Lydia confidence that Blake had a better understanding of each person’s needs and those individual differences. She stated, “She also does a really good job of being available to meet one-on-one with people because each one of us thinks differently and each one of us need to think differently to compete well.” Lydia explained that one-on-one sessions are critical to performance:

I think the biggest thing is we really do all have a different mindset when we compete. So, like some of my teammates I mean they just they even think of little pieces and like specific things that are going to make their dive go well. I need to like if I’m thinking of a specific technique piece, I’m going to blow the whole dive. I’m going to do that piece really well and then the rest of the dive is going to be garbage and you know I have some teammates who need to you know like feed off the energy and stuff like that and other teammates need to like pretend it’s not there or you know like I don’t know and it’s just very different for each person and so having a one-on-one session and figuring out what it needs to look like for me like it’s huge.

Additionally, in relation to respecting an individualized approach, Lydia said that Blake is “good at like honoring that and valuing whatever it is that you think is going to work for you.” She said Blake was “open to whatever style you want to try” and Lydia did not feel like Blake was ever offering a “cookie cutter method.” This further
supported her belief that Blake understood that each person needed individualized services.

Lydia found meditation and awareness of her thoughts particularly important to her diving. In addition, she found that these skills were also transferable across other domains of life, such as school:

I mean a lot of concepts and stuff like that in sport can apply to your life but specifically the getting like head space time I just think that is so important in functioning well everywhere like being present and like being in what you’re doing because everything kind of compounds so like if you’re thinking about something else and you’re not present in your test and you bomb your test well then now you’re going to be moving onto the next thing still thinking about your test and then it’s like well if you would have just thought about your test when you were doing your test then you probably wouldn’t have bombed it.

In addition, she found there was a relationship between diving and life and when she has better awareness in diving, it translates in other aspects of her life:

The idea of like awareness of how you’re feeling and how you’re thinking has been really important in just like everyday life because so often in that fear thing comes up so much so often I think we react on a fear and we don’t even notice it and I think like being mindful of like how am I feeling right now where did that response that maybe I didn’t love where did that come from. That’s been big in stuff that I’ve learned from her. Then yeah I think everything in life is so connected so being able to you know be confident and dive well in you know practice that makes practices better so I’m overall just like happier and then that you know I can you know and a lot of energy that maybe used to be spent in like freaking out about a dive or freaking out about something I don’t know what but freaking out about anything a lot of the energy that was spent there can then be spent on like caring for people and loving people and stuff like that. So kind of frees up some head space.

Finally, through this experience with Blake, Lydia found that there are several unique roles that a mental performance coach can hold. One of these roles was to be a support to both the athletes and the head coach. Lydia found that there are some conversations she would rather not have with her coach directly. Blake provided a space for her to have those conversations. Lydia described,
You always want to like please your coach and that’s kind of like natural what you want to do so to go to your coach and be like I’m not thinking right you know you don’t ever want to admit it to your coach to like I’m doing something really wrong you know. You want to kind of hide that from them but like from Blake you’ll be like I need help like fix me like not thinking right and yeah that’s what she’s there for.

Additionally if there were specific statements that athletes did not find productive, Blake was able to help bridge the communication between the coach and the athletes. Lydia also observed that it was helpful for the head coach, Curtis, to have support and someone to share ideas with stating, “Honestly just having somebody because Curtis doesn’t have an assistant coach. So having somebody else that now at this point kind of understand the sport and what’s going on in our heads and things like that to kind of bounce our ideas off of has been really good.” And lastly, in describing how she would define a mental performance coach’s role, she explained how in her experience this person has been a support to her in and outside of athletics. She shared how this personal support connects with performance:

I feel like they do a lot. I mean part of their role is to just be the glue kind of cliché but it holds things together like all the pieces of our life that are sometimes feeling like they’re falling apart she kind of like picks them up and puts them back together like you can do this you know and all the pieces of our team you know when pieces are falling apart she goes we’re a cohesive unit so you know and sometimes that bridge between your coaches and you so kind of bringing that together so that’s kind of the biggest thing and yeah just being just someone you can always go to and always talk to about whatever it is you know like whether it’s school or you know diving or home you know all of it is connected to your performance in everything so having that one person who literally no matter what you need to talk about like she’s there and she’s going to give you solid advice and she’s going to you know kind of help you through it in a beneficial way.

**Maria.** Overall, based on her experience, Maria described a mental performance coach’s role to be a balance between supporter and teacher. She described:

I feel like that’s something that makes her effective for sure because if it’s only someone who kind of lectures you and isn’t your friend you’re like this is like
class I don’t want to listen, I’m in class all day I don’t. So, then if it’s too close of a friend relationship either it’s kind of that joking like nah I’m not going to pay attention either but I don’t know I think she does a really good job at having a good relationship with us while also like teaching us. I’d say that’s something that she does really effectively.

As a friend, Maria felt that Stella was there to help and listen no matter what, and explained that having a relationship with Stella based in friendship helped her to reframe her mindset, even when things happened outside of volleyball that impacted her mental performance:

She’s a really kind of friend. If you ever need anything like if I broke up with my boyfriend and I’m a wreck and my mental performance is horrible because I can only think about my boyfriend then I can go in and talk to Stella and she can help me reframe my mind but no it’s great because she’s always there to listen.

As part of the supporter role, Maria felt it was important that Stella could relate to her experiences too. This helped her feel valued on the team regardless of whether she played or not:

Being a senior on the team and I don’t play and I have in the past like I was a starter last year and Stella went through the same exact thing herself. She was a starter her junior year I think and then didn’t play her senior year and so we’ve kind of chatted about that some and she’s pointed out in team meetings how proud she is of me for being a good teammate and supporting my teammates and I just try to be the best teammate I can for everybody else and push everyone to be their best everyday even though I can’t really contribute in games and stuff but she just helps her kind words and like support just help me feel better about where I am and I don’t know because I know she went through it too and she said she wishes she would have had a different mindset and so hearing her experiences it like helps translate into mine. I’d say that was the most meaningful thing to me was just her acknowledging that I am important because sometimes I feel like I’m not.

Stella’s ability to provide support for Maria and the rest of the team helped them reframe their mindset as well:

Not only does she help teach us how to reframe our minds for performing and for game time but she’s also just a great supporter. So it’s always so comforting when we see her show up at practice because it’s like oh, Stella’s here. I mean she can tell by just observing what we’re struggling with mentally and so she comes up
with ways and little activities for us to do as a whole team to help us reframe our mindset and so we can improve on that for the next time.

Having Stella integrated on the team was beneficial for Maria because it helped Stella understand specific needs of the team. Maria said,

It’s definitely great having her integrated because like I said, she’s been here for all four of my years of college and she can truly see the team transitions and the teams ups and downs and she’s there for it all just like we are and versus someone who would just come in and out they wouldn’t get the whole picture they’d only see like whatever they saw for that day or whatever they were going to present that day wouldn’t necessarily fit what the team is going through so I think it’s great having her be there at practice, travel with us, meet with us once a week. So she is really in tune with what is actually happening and what all of our feelings are and what we’re going through. So I’d say that definitely helps.

Not only did integration help Stella tailor team meetings to help the team reframe their mindset, her presence served as a helpful reminder to continue to practice that mindset too:

I mean she’s not allowed to coach us obviously like in practice or in games but she’s just comforting because I don’t know when someone’s there that has helped you in the past mentally like prepare she helps remind you of the things you can do. Even though she can’t verbally remind you I guess but just seeing her it helps like oh I can do better at this today.

Additionally, being integrated on the team, she was able to provide support to the athletes and coaches, and act as a bridge between the two. Maria described,

I feel like if I needed something I would go to Stella and then she could relay that to coach but I mean. I think having a good relationship with Stella where we tell her like our goals and what we strive for and she basically knows everything about us like how we receive information, what we need as people, blah blah blah whatever our values and she knows all about it and like I said it’s nice for her because then she can tell coach all those things and we can implement then into practice and he can use those because he can gear practice towards those things we need.
Maria appreciated that Stella was always willing to help support her in volleyball and in life. She felt the skills she learned from Stella helped with team cohesion and helped her perform in a variety of ways, both on and off of the court:

Well for me, I mean she definitely helped me like refocus my mindset on to volleyball and I guess not thinking about stuff on the court unless it’s volleyball and leaving everything else off because like I said, boyfriends and school and this and that whatever I’m going through at the time. I’d think about it at practice and that’s not what you should be thinking about while you’re at practice so that’s something she definitely helped me with but also on a more personal level I feel like everything she’s taught us, although it’s geared toward sport it can also be translated into anything else we do as far as like interviewing for a job or like working in the real world. Anything like that I feel like I will be able to use the things she’s taught me for the rest of my life which is awesome. So, I even used a whole bunch of stuff she taught us to do one of my speeches for class last year so I mean it was so cool and I got to use some of the things she taught us in presenting my speech not only presenting on the stuff but you know I had to use it to give the speech. So I mean obviously so many benefits and it helps also make the whole team connected, like united it’s not just, I don’t know the team can be vulnerable with each other after going through like a Stella session and everyone’s just closer and we can trust each other more.

One of the traits Maria appreciated most about Stella was her positivity. Maria stated, “She can put a smile on your face and make your day but I don’t know I just feel like everything she does she does it with a positive mindset and that’s just how she lives her life.” Maria felt her positivity helped in the mental performance coaching role to reframe the team’s mindset and build constructive coping strategies to handle any type of adversity:

I would say that the role of a mental performance coach is to just teach and train athletes to reframe their thoughts and their mindset to positive things and whatever they’re doing because thinking negative things can harm your performance but positive thoughts can help you I guess get through anything and I guess it makes everything easier and she just teaches you to embrace everything. Embrace the suck, embrace the good times, embrace whatever like take in the whole experience because it all matters. So even though there would be hard times it’s okay because it’s going to pay off later and you’re going to use that experience to get you something else so. I don’t know she’s just there to retrain your mindset and to look at things in a more positive way.
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Matthew. Matthew expressed how important it was for sport psychology professionals to understand the sport they are working with. In his previous experiences he shared,

I had a couple of one-on-one experiences and that was with a sports psychologist that didn’t know anything about golf bizarrely. I found it for the most part to be quite ineffective due to the lack of knowledge about golf.

Because Ben had knowledge of the sport, Matthew felt like his perception of mental coaching has changed saying,

I think that’s changed a lot from what I originally thought was the mental coaching side. I would say that now it’s more like a conversation that I can talk to somebody that’s experienced and knows the right things to say to me about my game about my mental performance and now it’s just a conversation now I would really say and I’m able to express some of my thoughts and sometimes talking about that is quite beneficial to me.

Matthew expressed working with Ben was most beneficial to his performance because it was in combination with his technical training too. He felt this helped accelerate his technical game:

It’s been very helpful and you know it’s not the only reason why I’ve started playing better it’s I’ve been working on it another reason is why I’ve started playing better but I had to improve technically and I’ve done that and I would say that working on my mental performance has helped that speed that change along.

Another important piece of the mental performance services Ben provided was his willingness to meet individually. He shared,

I would say because I think it’s really important to have individual aspect. I don’t think the group aspect really works too well because I wouldn’t be comfortable saying all the things I say to Ben in front of all my teammates. Not necessarily like hugely personal but sharing the way I think practice is going or the way some other people are doing sometime so some of my own goals and aspirations and that wouldn’t be, I don’t want to talk about that with anyone with my team. So I think it’s been hugely beneficial having him like really available to work with.
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Working with Matthew individually helped Ben support Matthew’s needs and serve as a bridge between the athletes and coaches. Matthew said,

Ben’s able to speak to them and say well maybe you should try to not say as many things or try to say more things because to the guys because I think it’s having quite a big effect on them and especially since he’s working with quite a few of us I think that’s actually been quite important. I feel like he has been a really good messenger between…

Matthew felt like it was important to understand what works for each athlete, and felt like what works for one person may not work for another. Meeting with Ben individually was constructive for Matthew because he listened and asked questions to better understand Matthew. He felt like Ben’s ability to offer suggestions rather than tell him there is one way to do it was helpful too:

I think he’s effective because he the main thing he does is that he’ll ask you before he says anything, which is quite good normally he’ll ask me a whole lot of stuff before he says anything. Which is, it’s good and normally he’s able to form some ideas after that and I think that also the way that he presents his ideas it’s not a case of well you must do this I think this is what you’re doing wrong its well maybe you should consider doing something like this or it could help you if you do. There’s a lot of coaches and stuff to tell you you know this is what you need to do and you’re doing it all wrong you know but I would say that Ben’s not like that he he’s very good at planting the idea in your mind so that at some point you think it’s your idea.

Having Ben integrated on the staff provided opportunity to meet regularly with Matthew. He expressed these regular meetings impacted his approach to the mental game more consistently, as well as his overall attitude towards practice:

I’ll be doing all this stuff and then 6 months later I’ll maybe not be doing stuff and I’ll be like oh I need to do more of that stuff and so I’ll start doing that again and I think that meeting with him every week or so every couple of weeks has helped bring in more consistent level of mental effort too and not just when I’m at a tournament but there for practice each day and that just the attitude in general because I think quite a lot of my, when you’re at university obviously that’s time consuming and playing golf I just sometimes come with an attitude to practice because I’m like I have all this work to do I truly don’t want to be at practice I’ve got to try and get this work done and then suddenly my practice isn’t very good
and if I keep this going then ultimately it’s going to lead to worse athletic performance of course and I think that just having conversations every couple of weeks has helped bring a more consistent attitude to practice and playing and that’s been overall beneficial.

Finally, Matthew felt like one trait that helped in the mental performance coaching role is a genuine passion to help others succeed. He described his experience with Ben saying,

I just think it’s been really beneficial for me for the whole team and I think it does depend on who the coach is you know I’m sure there’s plenty of coaches, mental coaches that really care that much I think. Ben has really invested in wanting all the guys to do the best they can and is really happy when they do well.

**Piper.** Piper’s experience with a mental performance coach created an understanding for her that Avery has several roles, and therefore provided several different perspectives. She shared,

I think she has three jobs. I think she would be a staff member, a teammate, and then like a like a friend. I think she plays the role of all three of those very well and like does an even job on all of them.

She was able to assist the team in each of these three roles. Piper expressed,

As a staff member, she knows her place in what to say in meetings as she’s like thinking of the players not just the staff members around her. And as a teammate, she knows what to say to us but she also keeps into account that she is a staff member so…by doing that she can give us advice on how to be successful in our meetings, and then as a friend she just always checks in whether it has something to do whether you’re in a good place, bad place, whether you have a test the next day, she’ll always just check in.

These roles and perspectives allowed her to be a bridge between the coaches and athletes many times. In describing Avery’s role Piper shared, “So it’s just like a really helpful source for someone especially who isn’t necessarily on the team but isn’t a coach as well. She’s like a middle person.” According to Piper, as a middle person Avery was able to be extremely beneficial for her and her teammates because she helped deliver
messages to the coaches and worked with them on ways to best communicate with the coaching staff in a constructive way:

It’s just a good middle man because whenever we have questions uh and some of the majority of the time we don’t want to bring it up to the coaches cause we don’t know how they’re going to respond to us. Avery figures out a way for us to like put it into simpler terms or like a nicer way to approach it without being so heated going into the argument or she’ll bring it up herself. She’ll be like the messenger, you know so, those two ways are the most important ones for us.

Piper felt this bridge between the two was not only helpful for the athletes, it was also valuable for the coaching staff. Piper recalled having Avery as a bridge between the athletes and coaches under stressful circumstances was constructive:

I think it’s helpful for both sides actually for the coaches’ perspective and our perspective because she doesn’t just like relay messages for us she also relays messages for them. So like when we’re on the road and it gets tense for any reason she’s there to help like both sides out instead of like us just being like crabby and like walking away kind of thing. So when we’re on the road I think that’s helpful just because it does get tense sometimes, but we do like to have fun so she plays a good middleman there.

Piper described this role being important to the team, as they were able to find common ground in a lot of instances and come to a productive solution. In addition to bridging the gap between the team and coaches, Avery also supported Piper and the coaches under stress by maintaining a positive perspective. She shared how Avery went about this:

I think the willing that she’s she likes to listen and instead of having like my best friend interrupt me and say oh Piper you did this wrong blah blah blah it’s just nice that she just listens and doesn’t talk until you’re done telling the whole story kind of thing, and then she always finds the light in the story instead of always darkness… so she has more of like a positive perspective while at the time we would have a negative perspective.

In addition to providing that positive perspective for athletes, she also spoke about how Avery helps the coaching staff during team meetings as well stating,
Like when there’s serious time he’ll look to Avery cause Avery can speak for the players but also speak as a staff member so she’ll help him out with looking at like a positive perspective…

Piper enjoyed having Avery integrated on the team because she helped her be more aware of her actions, both as a teammate and a person. Avery’s genuine support for others inspired Piper to hold herself to a higher standard as well:

Influence is being like a better teammate. She just like inspires me to be like a better person overall but because of like with soccer so I just that’s my first priority when it comes to teammates so I want to like be a better teammate to them and just be more supportive like she is like she’ll always come in, check in, like whether it was a text message, a call, whatever it is, so like I’ve been trying to do that with certain teammates when they go through tough times so she like kind of sparked something in me when it comes to that.

**Regina.** One of the most meaningful features for Regina in having Stella integrated on the team was the opportunity to develop real, meaningful relationships. According to Regina, these authentic relationships helped Stella acquire greater understandings of individuals on the team and overall team needs. Regina found this also helped Stella adjust her services from year to year to fit the unique characteristics of each team. She shared:

It’s like you have one great talk or one great but you know he’s in LA or whatever so it’s not like there’s a real connection and we talk every once in a while back and forth but that’s one of the really powerful things about having Stella is that she’s here. We can stop by her office any time, she’s at practices, she’s able to be engaged and have relationships with all of us and our coaches and stuff so just like being able to facilitate like the true specific needs of our program you know because like with every team every year it’s been different and Stella has changed it up based on that so that’s been really valuable in her seeking to tailor it specifically towards what our team needs and just in that year not even in the culture of our program so she definitely has like an understanding for that because it’s not you know because what our team’s weaknesses are or strengths are are very different from other teams you know how you have so there’s certain areas. Even to the depth that we can go. I remember one time she’s like oh yeah I knew you guys could go that deep like I want to push you guys outside your comfort zone constantly. So what that looks like is different for each team outside of one comfort zone because she’s been working with us for a long time and a lot of us
are older, been there for a while, she doesn’t want to stay at the same let’s just go through a PowerPoint but wants to take us to deeper levels. So her being there for an extended time and just being available has been really valuable.

Over time, being a part of the team helped Regina buy in to mental performance services because “you have to build a trust that they’re invested and that they want what’s best for you know and that they truly care about the team and the program. I mean that’s definitely a big component of it.” She also explained that the relationship piece was essential because “there’s definitely a component of each individual’s different so they have different things that drive them and motivate them so the more that you can have like a strong relationship the more that they can compel you and drive you.” Not only does a relationship help Stella understand individual values, but also the team’s values as well. She stated,

From a holistic team aspect the expectation is she helps be a facilitator of bringing us together a facilitator we have team meetings even with our coaches and just be genuine and real and really be able to go as deep as you want to go but really be a facilitator of okay these are our core values I want to build the best of what our team’s core values are we want to build upon those.

Regina found it important that Stella facilitated these discussions around team values as they provided a foundation they “can fall back to when adversity hits when hard times hit.” Additionally, Regina explained that Stella created opportunities for coaches and athletes to come together and have genuine conversations. Regina felt like this built a better understanding between coaches and athletes:

I think we’re at a point where we definitely break up into small groups, mix up coaches and players and that is never a problem to share those things and understand that we all have like struggles and ups and downs so just be real about is pretty cool to hear our coaches stories and our coaches to hear our stories that’s really good.
In Regina’s opinion, this understanding that was built between coaches and athletes translated to athletic performance as well. She explained,

A relationship with your coaches is essential so and just to be on the same page and understanding and you know there’s ups and down days where we’re able to give each other the benefit of the doubt and help each other like through those moments and yeah. It’s helped a ton I can’t even put into words how much it’s impacted the way that our programs changed and like people can see it just by watching us play and the type of chemistry and the type of it’s real just keeping it real.

In addition to relationships with coaches and athletes, Regina shared that Stella built relationships with other support staff, and “she just understands that everything’s valuable and understands all the moving parts and just the different roles everyone plays.” Regina shared this understanding of various roles helped the athletes “really just have that mutual understanding” with staff such as athletic trainers.

Finally, Regina believed the role of a mental performance coach to be similar to a sport coach. She shared,

There are aspects you have to take ownership and you have to improve upon but they’re there to be an external force and motivator and to be an encourager and challenger and to compel you towards what they see as your best self or what your absolute best is.

By taking on this role, Regina felt that Stella helped her understand what motivated her, not only as an athlete but also as a person. She believed Stella impacted her by:

Understanding why my why is behind it and understanding what just what drives and motivates just my philosophy on life and sport so just I think that’s a huge component of me being a better basketball player, better teammate, better person.

**Sarah.** One of the most meaningful parts of Sarah’s experience with Stella was the support she received both athletically and personally. Sarah found it important that Stella cared about her personally from the beginning. She shared,
With Stella there’s always been like that personal relationship on a personal level and any time you like go in her office or she talks to you it’s like how are you. Not how’s your sport, how are you and I think that that makes a big difference. Because she felt like Stella cared about her as a person, she was open to the services Stella had to offer. She shared that Stella helped her develop both athletically and personally:

We need someone there that can be there for us on a more personal level and that’s kind of what Stella has provided for us along with a mental performance side of really when she travels with us we always do like a mental performance kind of lesson before you know we go play and just for me the biggest thing that Stella’s helped me with is just I think like parking it and refocusing…And just like the growth mindset has been huge because I’ve always heard about growth mindset but never like I guess understood it or what it’s like you know to have a growth mindset so you know I think that’s like where she’s helped me personally the most and also just with the personal aspect.

Additionally, Sarah felt like Stella was a support for everyone on the team. One aspect that was important to her was that Stella stayed neutral through team conflicts.

She was just always there to talk or even just to vent to because A you didn’t know who you were venting to because you didn’t know who was on what side, even if there wasn’t sides you just had to be very careful about who you talked to and she made it clear from day one that she was always open minded communication and then just like the way that she supported our team, like she still supported our team even our teammates that maybe had a different view point from each other and we would go in there and we’d all vent to her and she’d just stayed really neutral through the whole process. Which is like super helpful.

Not only was Stella able to be helpful by being neutral through conflict, Sarah also expressed, “I think the biggest thing is that she’s been the bridge between like our coaching staff and the players.” Being able to provide support and communication between players and coaches was very beneficial to Sarah.
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Sarah talked about in order to be receptive of support a relationship with that person was key. In previous experiences she did not want to talk about difficulties she was struggling with athletically. She shared,

I didn’t even know the man…Honestly I’m sure he was a great guy but I just couldn’t get over the way he like literally would say the same statement like over and over and over again and I’m sure it’s because we didn’t get a lot of time to work with him but I was like I’m not going to go talk to him about that.

Unlike that past experience, she was open to sharing with Stella because she felt like she could relate and understand her experiences as an athlete. Additionally it was important that Stella was personable:

I feel like she can come from a place where she understands what we’re going through so she’s effective at delivering what we need to hear because she’s been there before and she’s like man if I would have had someone delivering this to me I would have been better. I also think something that just really makes her good at what she does is the fact that she, and I think this kind of goes for anything you do she’s just really personable and so like when you form relationships with people you start to trust them. When you start to trust them then you start to believe in what they’re doing and then when you believe in what they’re doing I mean you’re bought into the process.

In addition to being personable and relating to her experiences, Sarah was receptive to both Stella and Wally, the counseling psychologist, because both were present with the team frequently:

I think the biggest thing is just seeing them there at practice, seeing their travel or when she does travel with us she travels with us quite a bit she’s at all home games, she comes to all practices or even just like Wally comes to our practices and travels with us and so it’s like you’re comfortable with them because you see them there all the time and you also can talk like I feel like they have better understanding of where you’re at because they see you on the field and they see you playing rather than someone coming in once a month and is probably just going to give you the baseline lecture of sports psych whereas when someone’s there every day or someone’s in your facility every day and you walk around you’ll see them in the MATC and just like hey how are you and you talk it’s like they’re able to tailor their message to where you’re at personally. Then also just the personal aspect of seeing them there every day and getting to know them and
them getting to know you and being able to really form that relationship so that they can tailor their message because they know you on a personal level.

Finally, Sarah believed that Stella and Wally helped her build skills to handle adversity. She noticed that those that went to see Stella seemed more mentally strong stating,

the thing with Stella is that her office is always open and I don’t know I’ve kind of noticed that the people that go and meet with her on a more regular basis, I don’t want to say are more successful but are definitely more I think capable of bouncing back or just I think we have the strongest mental side of our sport because we meet with her.

In addition to working the Stella, she found that working with the counseling psychologist, Wally was helpful. With a focus on helping and supporting the athletes, Sarah perceived the stigma that used to exist around counseling to no longer be there:

It was just like I didn’t want to go because I was nervous about what people would think about me or if I went it would be like super private because I just didn’t want people to know that I was seeing a psychologist you know but now I’m like super open about it like yeah, I go all the time. They have helped me tremendously.

**Within-Case Analysis: Head Coaches**

**Bob.** One of the most consistent themes across Bob’s experience having Mason a part of the staff was the relationship and trust he had with him to deliver services that are consistent with his program structure. It was easier for Bob to trust Mason because he said “Mason and my relationship goes back further. So that was actually very easy to incorporate him in because he swam for me.” He acknowledged that Mason’s understanding of the sport of swimming and the way he runs his program are crucial to the role. He explained,

That I think would have been different if it would have been somebody else and it’s certainly somebody that didn’t have a swimming background. So when you qualify that by that statement up front but it’s been very seamless to have Mason
as part and doing that role because he knows how I function and what I you know focus on and I try to keep sports psychology very simple.

Simplicity is a key piece to his program, and he believed Mason delivered services in a way that was consistent with that approach. Bob explained that it would take some time to have a new person working with his program because he would want to trust that they have similar beliefs. A lot of this stemmed back to the responsibilities that weigh on a head coach in a Division I collegiate athletics program. He said,

If I was talking about you know someone else that I mean I grow to trust people more and more and more. So for somebody that comes in for a year or even two, by the end of the first year I’m probably starting to trust them and that’s the same with anything and also being now with NCAA culture where the head coach is responsible for everything it’s almost like I have to be careful about anybody that comes onto my program.

Some of the responsibilities Bob placed on himself were to help with individual needs of athletes. He stated that “sport psychology is kind of one thing out of a hundred things that we’re trying to take care of individuals needs.” Additionally, Bob felt this role filled a gap on the team. As Bob explained,

I mean you’re right I’m an expert of my own experience and probably other people’s experiences too that I’ve worked with but I am not an expert in the sport psychology field. So, he came in and filled in some gaps for the kids and gave them some things to think about and kind of individually.

Additionally, the services Mason provided were in line with Bob’s program model. In talking about Mason’s services he shared, “He, because of his research and school and all of that stuff, kind of tried to hang meat on the structure and go more in depth too.” Bob shared that all of his coaching staff is available to meet with athletes, however Mason provided a unique skill set that can meet specific needs. He shared,

Well, I think we’re all about meeting individual needs so in that regard that’s great that he can meet people where they are. He’s not the only one but on that if
somebody’s really really stuck, they know they can go see Mason and we call Mason our ‘head’ coach that’s kind of what we do.

One thing that Bob shared that made Mason effective in delivering services to the team was that he was intentional about tailoring them to meet the needs of the team. In understanding the needs of the team, Bob stated, “I don’t think he is impetuous with it or zealous with it where when he learns something he wants to integrate it right away. He learns it and he figures out if it fits and how it fits.” For this reason, Bob felt that the services Mason provided help the team and coaching staff see things in a new perspective. He said, “Well, I mean learning new stuff or new ways to look at things is always helpful so I’m sure that we’ve picked up some lingo from him that the guys that the swimmers can identify with.” Not only has Mason’s services helped athletes think in a new way, Bob felt like his own thinking changed personally and professionally as well. He shared, “oh gosh I mean he’s certainly brought a lot of information that I’ve been exposed to that has probably changed the way I think about some things, I can’t put my finger on it, but I’m sure he has.”

In addition to consistent program messages and providing knowledge to fill a gap for individual needs, Bob felt that having Mason integrated on the staff helped him trust that they were on the same page in their thinking. He shared, It makes it a lot easier because I don’t have to worry about what he’s thinking or I know what Mason’s thinking most of the time and most the time he knows what I’m thinking. So that just makes it a lot easier and that saves steps every time you get somebody new in it just takes more time.

Bob felt like having someone consistent over many seasons that he trusted also helped the program grow, and have a smooth transition from year to year:
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It has really saved a lot of time and we start from a higher lever. We don’t have to kind of never really start over but you do back up and we haven’t really backed up at all we’re getting along better than ever.

Curtis. Based on Curtis’ experience, one of the biggest pieces that he found important about the mental performance coach role was that it was able to provide services that filled in gaps where needs were not being met. One of the most important needs Curtis talked about was creating a cohesive culture on the team:

One of which being strong chemistry between teammates the other being the right culture of like-minded individuals with kind of along the same lines of ethical and moral standards I guess you’d say and then everyone buying into kind of the same thing. We had a lot of success but it felt like a team of a bunch of individuals just going in all different directions and we had success but there was no cohesion to it.

According to Curtis, Blake was able to provide services to fit this need. He described how much this has impacted his team’s relationship with performance now:

My team has absolutely wrapped themselves around everything we do with Blake is wrapped around this idea of the growth mindset. You know, and we’ve talked about in the past we’ve touched on it in the past but like we live by it and you know you see it more so in other people and you know we’ve adopted it because we go to other meets and there’s people devastated by their performance or getting angry and kicking trash cans and slapping the water and just being silly. And we’re looking at them like they just don’t get it. You know whereas us, losing isn’t the same that it used to be. It’s not losing anymore, there’s always a take away and if it didn’t work it’s because it wasn’t ready to work, It wasn’t time to work… there’s still work to be done. If it didn’t work properly it wasn’t an accident. There’s a reason behind good performance and there’s always a reason behind poor performance. You know, and getting to the root and working on it with a growth mindset that’s the only way you come out of it.

Curtis adopted the team’s growth mindset philosophy into his own life as well. He expressed this by saying, “I don’t really know how people can live with themselves now that we do live the growth mindset. How do you deal with when it’s just failure and there’s nothing else?”
Another benefit this role was able to provide was the full time dedication to sport psychology. He expressed his frustrations in trying to integrate this piece of training alone prior to having a mental performance coach integrated on the team:

It was like seven weeks in a row I’d do a lesson every week for seven weeks and it would address certain topics but that was just seven weeks in the beginning of the season and it’s easily forgotten about and not adopted as our philosophy as the way we think and do things.

Curtis added to this by sharing how much responsibility he already has as a head coach trying to train his athletes:

As a coach who has to recruit and write workouts and develop them physically and mechanically that’s just one other piece and it’s more than that. You know and you have a Blake who’s full time dedicated to thinking right in sport and being the right type of person in and outside the pool and things like that it is a full time job. And when it was only 1/8th of all the other things that coach had to do it didn’t work.

He said having her integrated on the staff helped the message stick consistently. He described,

Blake keeps it in the front of your mind every day at all times and that’s what makes the big difference not slight education about general sport psychology. You know, what does this athlete need? How does this athlete work and what does this athlete need? And so, that’s been the big difference.

He shared how Blake was not only able to help the specific needs of the athletes, but also serve as a reminder for him too and the values he seeks to uphold:

I mean like every time I go to a meet you know. The part that I think is beautiful is she doesn’t just help the student athletes she helps me more than anything. I’d say 70% of the work she does is through my communication. You know, I run everything by her. You know, like we’re human beings I’m flawed I’m a sinner I’m a human being and I go to a competition and I’m up and I’m excited too and what I want to do, the way I want to communicate with the student athlete the direction I want to go with helping them through a meet a lot of times it’s to ease my anxiety instead of what’s actually right for the student athletes and she can sit on the outside of that and see it as this third party over here just watching this thing play out. And now I run ideas by her and the response I get is well you know I’d just kind of think back to you know what we talked about early season
and what our core values are and...and I’m like alright I get it. You’re right. We need to go back to what we’ve been consistently talking about all year instead of derailing doing something totally different because now the outcome’s not working like we expected. And I’m like you’re right. It’s stuff like that where if she weren’t there to bounce that off of I would get the best of myself.

This role supported his needs, by providing outside perspective. He described this ability to bounce ideas off of her as beneficial because by helping him stay “consistent with our values” this “in turn helps the athletes a huge amount.” This outside perspective Curtis talked about provided him clarity in which direction to take. He describes,

It’s a lack of confusion. Like every day I drive to work and every day I try to take a moment and say to myself, every decision you make today every interaction you have do what’s right. Even if it’s the hard thing, make your decisions upon what the right thing to do is. For a human being, not a diver, what’s the right thing to do in life? But the hard part is that’s really complicated. It seems so simple, but to figure out what the right thing by another human being what that looks like I mean there’s it’s confusing.

When he faced moments where he had confusion he said, “My first thought was I need to go over this with Blake. Get a clear vision.” He said she helps him bring out the best message because he is able to talk to her about his authentic thoughts, without fear of judgment. He described,

She’s amazing because I can communicate with her absolutely freely. Like absolutely and it didn’t take long before that could happen. Me and her nobody else around I can my thoughts can just flow out of my mouth without a single filter without any reserve my inner monologue comes out... she can help me filter through and deliver the correct message the right way in a positive way.

Not only did Curtis believe having her integrated in day-to-day activities helped provide beneficial services, he thought because she was a non-coaching staff member that this played a key part in performance enhancement. He described,

The biggest thing I told her when I brought her on was you know all I do is coach these kids every day and all I mean 90% of the time I’m about as positive as a coach gets I would think but I mean just the way it works 85% of the time you’re telling them what they didn’t do right. And so that much communication
conditions the athlete over time over years to believe that okay if he’s communicating with me it’s because I’m not doing something right if he’s communicating with me it’s because I’m broken and need to be fixed...and to the point where if I try and talk to these kids about their sport psychology about their way of thinking in practice if I try to talk to them you know in a way to try to help performance, enhance performance, well sometimes it does the opposite because me opening my mouth at all on a subject their first reaction from a psychological standpoint is oh, I must not be doing it right. I must be broken with regards to being a competitor. And because it’s coming from coach I’m broken I’m not good at it and I need to be fixed. And I said that’s not at all the case I understand that high performance has to come from thinking right in sport but if it’s coming from me it doesn’t work. So we need someone who is not even associated with coach your technique not even associated with telling you what you need to do differently to get better at the sport of diving and just listening to you and educating you as a person on how to maximize what you can do with this sport that you’ve been given this training you’ve been giving. And so from her it is it’s like if I get some help from Blake I can increase this and get even better but if it’s coming from coach a lot of times it’s I’m broken and need to be fixed. Which isn’t the case.

In addition to having a role outside of technical coaching, Curtis felt it was important that Blake knew the sport prior to providing services in order to be most effective. He said,

It was almost like a summer of residency. She did, she came for a whole summer and didn’t do anything. She just sat next to me, she listened she watched I talked to her about okay this kid won’t go struggled with whatever, anxiety, this that and the other. She just sat and learned the sport until she became an expert on the sport and then she dove in there with the experience that she has and it made all the difference in the world.

The combination of knowledge of the sport, individuals, and sport psychology, as well as the ability to be present consistently and provide outside perspective were what Curtis felt made Blake’s services most impactful on the team and individual needs.

Fred. Based on Fred’s experience, he described the two main roles of a mental performance coach to be someone who provides knowledge and support to the student-athletes and coaching staff. In talking about his experience, Fred believed the mental performance coach should be someone other than the coach. He said, “The message has
to come from a different person because the student athlete sees the head coach in this role and sees the sports psych person in this role. They need to be different people.” He believed that by having different people on the staff delivering the same message it enhanced learning:

It’s just good when you deliver a message from different perspectives you know so I’m different than Coach Wayne is. Coach Wayne is different than Ben, Ben and myself so you know you get it’s kind of like from teaching. You know, if you’re teaching you want to deliver the message multiple ways because if you have a group of learners, students, they all don’t learn the same way you know and so delivering the message from a different perspective or saying it a different way helps you get across to more people. So, it was great.

In addition to providing consistent messaging from multiple people, having Ben on staff helped Fred cope with stress both professionally and personally. He said Ben helped him, “because of the different personality or different perspective you know what I mean. Sometimes it kind of calms me down.” More specifically, Fred appreciated that Ben was “more understanding and more compassionate.” He said that “it’s helpful because you know although they may not have the same stressors they can relate and you know again the sports psych person is usually that calming personality that person that brings the positive or the bright side.”

Fred shared that not only was Ben able to help him deal with stress, he also provided feedback to help him deliver a message that would be most constructive to the team. He stated,

What Ben provided he was also a sounding board for the coaching staff. You know there were often times when he’s you know I could say you know as an outsider what do you think if I say this or what do you think if I do this and there were times when it was very beneficial that I kind of ran it by him, got his feedback and then I changed my delivery to the team.
Fred found it beneficial that Ben provided that perspective on how the athletes may interpret his message. Ultimately, Fred felt Ben provided a variety of services in his role. He was not only a support for the athletes, but for his coaching staff too. In talking about the role of a mental performance coach, he shared,

First and for most is probably to deliver the message you know the mental training stuff. Whether that’s, you know what I mean, routine or focus or goal setting or relaxation or whatever facet of sports psych so first and for most it’s delivering the message. Then beyond that I think it’s the relationship with the student-athlete to say hey look it here’s another person in my corner another resource that I have. And then also to the coaching staff, to the head coach to know that hey here’s another resource, here’s another person to help, another option…somebody else to get out an oar and paddle in the same direction.

Fred felt that Ben provided support and services consistent with the goals he had for his program.

Pat. Pat spoke very highly of her experience having Stella on her staff. She explained that she thought Stella was a person that “everybody on our staff and team feels very comfortable going to.” She associated this with Stella’s ability to “connect people from all different backgrounds into a common, common theme that everybody can really buy into, and so she relates really well to people.”

Pat shared how important it was to her to have a personal relationship and trust with her staff members that work closest to her student-athletes. She said it could be difficult for a head coach to trust people in other student-athlete support services. She explained,

As a coach you got so many people that are touching your athletes and so you know initially on one hand it’s like another person touching them and you want your message to be carried out to your student-athletes, and it’s almost like when you get so many people involved in your program sometimes your words get watered down, and they can find somebody else to go to to seek validation or just to be enabled, and so I think as a head coach you’re really careful how many people are really touching your athletes on a on a very personal level.
While she was guarded at first, she said,

That did not last long as I realized that Stella’s desires were truly to enhance our program and she wanted to have a very strong understanding of you know what my expectations or desires would be for a position in her role, and how she could enhance what we’re doing. And so I think that’s been really really key as you let other people into that inner circle then you know you’re aligned as one.

Pat explained that having Stella integrated on the team provided a full picture of the team’s experiences, and enhanced the personal relationships she had with coaches and athletes:

It’s such an incredible blessing and you know somebody that’s walking through the journey with us and that’s there during the highs and helping us out through the lows. And there’s a personal relationship, and so there’s a comfort zone there you know. Stella does a great job of stopping by practices, certainly travels with us some on the road, but so they’re familiar with her. It’s not just a once a month type interaction where you can’t get, there’s only so deep you can go when you don’t really know a person. And so I think the value of that has been huge.

Having established trust and a personal relationship with Stella, there were several characteristics that Pat felt made Stella extremely effective in her work. One in particular helped Pat in her own personal and professional growth:

One of the things I value most about Stella is that she does not shy away from tough conversations, and I think it can be really challenging to be so transparent with the head coach and help her or him look themselves in the mirror and see where their flaws or shortcomings may be. And so that could be a very intimidating thing to do but she’s never shied away from that and I think it’s because well with Stella it’s easy to tell where her heart is, and so she’s coming from a really good place to truly help all of us. And so those conversations that we’ve had, not, above and beyond what she’s done for my players, but the conversations her and I have had together and her transparency and not afraid to say tough things I think has been so valuable for me.

In addition to her transparency and genuine passion to help others, Pat felt the traits that stood out most about Stella were her confidence, willingness to help in any way, great listening skills, vulnerability, and knowledge. She said the best part about her
knowledge is that, “you never get the sense from Stella that she’s just speaking from a textbook of this is how I’m supposed to deliver the mental performance side of sports. It always feels like it’s genuine and it’s real and it’s from the heart.”

Pat also felt like her staff and athletes bought in to her services “because she can relate to people” and “she’s willing to be vulnerable herself.” Pat appreciated that Stella’s messages were transferable beyond sport. In describing her role, she shared:

I think what Stella does is plants a lot of seeds and then continues to water them. And over time you know that goes way way beyond when they are in college. You know they’re going to be able to rely back on those messages and teachable moments that they had with Stella.

In addition to building transferable skills for her athletes, Pat shared that Stella’s unique perspective allowed her to grow not only as a coach, but as a person too:

I mean just her positivity and outlook and perspective. I think you know everything we do in that locker room as a staff and as a team at the end of the day it’s all it’s a carry over in life. You know it’s just that’s the big thing with our program. We just feel like there’s you know so many teachable moments and they all at some point will parallel life. That’s the beauty of sport.

Platini. Platini spoke highly about how important this role was to his program. He found this to be a collaborative role that helped his coaching staff achieve their ultimate job, which he described as equipping athletes with skills to help them build successful performance on and off the field:

For me personally, it’s essential. It’s a big part of the process because again as coaches we have two hours of practice, three hours of practice, and then you know this isn’t their only thing. They’re not pro athletes. They have school. They have this, that and the other, so I think…our job is to help prepare them for the real world. Then we have to help them perform on the athletic world, but again it’s soccer, being away from home at such a crucial time, that the small window of time that we have that we can help them be their best and take advantage of practice, how to deal with setbacks, so when they’re done playing… we can help them leave here when they’re at IBM and they can pull from this you know I’m competing with another sales person at IBM… Do I quit or do I have the skill set
that Avery taught me, or gave me a strategy for, or Coach Platini or collaborative part, that they leave here and they go impact the world.

Platini explained that this role provided a space for athletes to open up when they need support, and the mental performance coach can deliver feedback in a non-threatening way. He found this role helped players talk more candidly:

They’re safe, the players don’t think they can really determine if they play or not, and so they can deliver truthful, honest, hard information at times and it’s not taken as harsh and defenses are less to go up because of that.

In addition to delivering messages to and from coaching staff, he said Avery was able to connect players back to coaches as well in order to communicate more with coaching staff. In describing her role he said,

Well it’s the middle person. It’s the person that can see both perspectives. It’s the safe way into every player and even staff members… anytime someone feels like you’re not determining their playing time but you can enhance their playing time or it can be a recommendation like well hey I’m glad we’re talking but you need to go knock on Platini’s door, and then you can have a face to face. You want me to be there? And all that kind of stuff.

He described how important it was for this person to be fully integrated into the environment in order to meet the needs of the athletes and coaching staff. He explained,

It is a full time role and the best thing in my perspective is that someone in that program has to be all or nothing…until you’re down and dirty you’re realizing that wow look at the athletes, this is what different people need at different times.

Platini believed that issues on and off the field impacted performance. Being integrated allowed Avery to help support players in a variety of ways, which he felt gave his program an edge when competing at this high level. He described a recent experience stating,

Avery just met with one of our players that had been dating some kid you know from high school and obviously that plays in performance…it isn’t just about giving them confidence. It might be they just had a relationship issue and so it’s so intertwined for all of us to be at our best that social issues do matter and mental
issues do matter and it’s not just, that’s why where the game is going, at the highest level everybody’s fast, everybody can jump, everybody’s going to be a hard worker, generally, and the difference is the is that small.

Platini described the collaboration between the coaching staff and mental performance coach to be “invaluable.” He said it is hard to keep track of 25 athletes, and Avery helped him do that:

I have kids all along the spectrum from you know just going to class to parent issues that they had or you know so I think it’s a for me it’s a great way that we can communicate and we can say you know Lucy’s really struggling and so Avery please go find out what’s going on. We tried and we haven’t connected, maybe you can connect or she can come back to us and say listen you know just so you’re aware when you’re at practice if you’re on Lucy just know right now she’s really stressed out about finals, or maybe that’s why she’s not performing or she’s have a relationship issue. So those are really great things that we can go back and forth, and there’s always confidence you don’t have to share everything.

Platini shared, “It’s a great role cause now also that person in that role can also be part of a staff and privately work with the head coach, privately work with staff, in addition to the players.” He believed Avery’s kindness and compassion helped her be most effective, and appreciated her honest feedback:

Just having frank conversations. I’m able to have enough of a trust factor that I can go, hey what’d you think about that halftime talk? Or this is what I said to um Lucy you know what do you think? And over time we’ve built a relationship that she can go hey that was really great and at times when she first started she didn’t want to tell the head coach anything meaning like hey you should do this thing differently. So we opened the door enough and had enough trust that hey this is why you’re here, otherwise we don’t want yes people. That doesn’t help us. So you got to give your honest evaluation and you know you don’t have the say that really sucked Coach. You can, I’m ok with that but you have to say hey you know maybe you should think about this or maybe you should think, whatever your own style is… in my mind your job is to give feedback, you know honest feedback.

Platini shared how her feedback impacted him both professionally and personally in his communication with others saying,

I think it’s been really great because she has a whole different perspective. And she gets more information than I can get at certain times, so oh yeah she’s helped me evolve whether to soften language or yeah maybe need to be a little more truthful. Cause the truth is ok it’s just the way you deliver it.
**Ryan.** One of the biggest themes that came from Ryan was how important it was to have trust that the mental performance coach supported his message. He shared,

Knowing who that person is knowing what that person is all about you know their approach for me from a coaching standpoint it was really important to know I know what’s going to happen. You know trust is a big thing in that position so having the same person over time really kind of allowed us to I think, I know what she’s going to do, I don’t have to worry about what’s being said and you know having open lines of communication was really very important and I thought it was done really well.

This trust helped him know that she had the best interests of the program in mind when she delivered services to the team. As a head coach, this was something that he was concerned about in the past with other support staff roles. He described,

I think it’s been really good because I do think that her honesty and I think her openness and forthrightness I think have gone a long way to building that relationship that I can trust this person you know that they have the best interest of the program and the kids and the coach you know because it’s a scary thing for a coach and this is something from just looking through the coaches lens is it’s great to have all of these different folks providing all these different services to what I look at as my kids and so the scary part for a coach when all this stuff starts happening is I’m not hiring that person. I didn’t hire the strength coach, I didn’t hire this nutritionist I didn’t hire Stella, I didn’t hire the trainer so you know from our sport perspective being able to really trust these people because somebody like Stella carries a like I said it’s a pretty powerful position when you think about what that person does so I think just that it’s that whole trust thing has been really good and that I think is what allows the whole thing to work.

Because he felt like this person holds a very powerful role on the team, it was important for him to have someone there consistently. Ryan believed having the role integrated on the team regularly helped with that consistent training:

This position has to be I think considered on the same terms on the same lines as our training in any other area. The value is the training and the work over time so just having somebody come in you know so the difference between having somebody come in like once a month and let’s give a 30 minute talk on something and then go you know that doesn’t really work very well. So the real value is to integrate this to me in my opinion this is just like our on court practice, our strength and conditioning our academic coordinators our nutritionist. It’s just as
important part of that puzzle as any other thing and that’s where I think the real value comes.

In addition to providing training to the athletes regularly, Ryan felt another important component of this role was the communication he received. Stella provided a unique perspective, sharing insights into their team meetings, and he was also able to incorporate some of the concepts into his own coaching:

I think it’s always beneficial for me I think to just hear a different perspective and I think it’s just been very helpful you know like any other resource where I hear maybe things that maybe she’s presenting like she’s going to meet with our team today and so this is what she’s going to talk about kind of thing and then just getting feedback from her as to maybe what you know things that bullet points of things that people maybe said in meetings that helped me as a coach kind of know where individual players are coming from maybe. Just hearing thing and when she’s explaining things and talking about things that she’s done with the team just little things that okay that was good, I’ll remember that one.

These open lines of communication were not only beneficial in understanding thoughts of players, but also in Ryan’s own coaching development. He shared a particular experience that helped him build relationships with his athletes:

I think the last three years is just the for years I was always kind of you know my approach always kind of was you know I’m the guy that decides who plays and who doesn’t play. I’ve got to make the decisions that basically piss kids off often so I always kind of felt like I don’t want to get real close with any of these kids because one, it’s going to make me feel worse if I gotta tell a kid you’re not starting or you’re not playing or they from their standpoint it’s like hey wait a second I thought you and I had this good relationship and now you’re telling me I’m not playing, what was that all about. I think over the three years I kind of changed my attitude a little bit and through her meetings with those kids and her feedback from all those kids I think you know it was really almost the opposite is in reality I think is they, I was mistaken really I think in my viewpoint if we have a really good relationship and you know that I care about you you’re not going to be as upset because you understand that I do care about you but I’ve got to make a decision even though you don’t like it. So in that respect just having somebody like that around also I think was very beneficial for me as a coach professionally too.
The combination of information, perspective, and knowledge Stella provided was helpful to Ryan. In particular he said, “It’s been helpful for me just to hear somebody else talk about things.” In particular, he talked about how the needs of his athletes are different now than when he first started coaching. He said, “Having somebody like Stella mental performance coach I think is kind of helped me it’s been very beneficial in trying to navigate and okay how can I you know modify my approach to connect with this generation of kids.”

The unique position of the role was something that Ryan also thought was important. He shared that the person was integrated enough to understand the context of the team, however because this role was not part of the coaching staff it provided a safe space for the athletes to receive support when they did not want to talk to their coach about it. He explained,

Having a mental performance person that’s part of your staff on a regular basis just allows you to do so much more and I think it’s very helpful to have somebody who’s not on the court every day. You know as your sport, you know it’s kind of a safe person that you can go talk to a little bit without having to you know if you don’t feel like it’s comfortable or I feel awkward going to one of the coaches.

Finally, Ryan felt it was important this role supported the athletes in coping with stressors outside of sport, as he believed this had impact on performance too. He shared,

Going back to roles to be able to help individual kids, student athletes I think kind of navigate and kind of handle a whole slew of stresses including it may just be academic it may be you know relational it may be sports related I mean that person really wears a lot of hats. So it’s not just about whether or hey when I go back to serve you know I’m just really freaked out, that’s a big part of it but a lot of times there’s a lot of other things that factor into that too and so that’s a big part of it. Then also I think just helping the team dynamics I think really have playing be the major point to the person in developing a good healthy team dynamic in terms of relationships and trust between teammates and doing that sort of thing. So again I can’t overstate in my opinion the importance of having somebody that can do that for you.
Seymour. One of the features of this program that Seymour found most helpful was being proactive and consistent in building skills with her athletes. She said it was particularly helpful when Ben “reached out to incoming freshman and the new players that he hasn’t had one-on-ones yet to let them know that that’s what he’s available for so he’s been proactive on that end.” She described that by building skills with her athletes, they were able to create more consistency and cope when problems arose:

It has to be consistent and generally you would probably see people be more reactive than proactive as far as seeking help. They wait until the wheels fall off you know like when we talk about tutors or just psychology in general well I’m just going to wait until it hits the fan and then ask for help. Well no let’s kind of work on it now so you’ve got those tools in place to help you so you don’t have a break down in the middle of a round or so yeah I would think the misconception of just sport psychology is that you would have a problem …and now I think it’s always that we have a big need for that so I think now people are open and understand I don’t have a problem to see somebody I want to get better, use these tools to get better. So, I think that’s probably the thing that’s happening now is people aren’t looking at it as a negative thing but how do I get an edge. We’re all looking for that edge. This is another tool to maybe gain an edge on an opponent.

She shared that having Ben integrated at practice and rounds helped build an edge mentally. In particular being able to observe performance was helpful saying, “I mean yeah you can’t go wrong with actually seeing them play in practice and seeing what happens when things are good and things are bad and comparing those so I think that was really good.”

She described their relationship to be “great from the beginning” and in having a good relationship, she said, “I think he’s easy to talk to we can bounce ideas off.” She described a few things that made him effective in understanding her perspective, and additionally being able to be honest and offer an alternative view:

He’s very genuine and very compassionate so sympathetic you know like understand what you’re going through but you know have you thought about
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doing it this way. So, giving those like not totally feeding me what I want to hear but I think being constructive with that too.

Another piece that stood out for Seymour was the belief that each person has specific needs, and it was important to her that Ben asked how he could tailor his services to fit those needs. When describing having Ben on her staff, Seymour stated,

I think it’s been a big positive for us. I think it’s good for he does a great job of reaching out to us before the season starts and asks kind of what our needs are, what we would like to focus on, we brainstorm ideas, whether it be on our team mantra or some team building activities or just simply him going over some things that he’s learned recently.

Not only was he able to help meet the needs of the team, he also helped her reinforce messages with the girls when individual needs could be addressed. She said having another person outside of the coaching staff was helpful because “maybe they won’t listen to us but we can use him to get the point across and then maybe the light bulb goes off. I think we’ve done that before too. So, that’s helpful.” Seymour described a particular example where Ben could reinforce her message in a way that resonated with the student-athlete:

Like we can say hey you know you don’t look like you’re in a good place right now you’re shoulders are down, you’re head’s down and then you’re body language and they can say well like I don’t think I’m doing that but someone like Ben can say that and they can go oh like I am I didn’t realize that so I think that just having an extra set of eyes and someone who is a mental performance coach tell them like hey this body language is not beneficial for you. You know you’ve got, I know he’s talks about different ways of letting go a bad shot whether or not it’s taking off the glove, ripping the bad shot away you know walking a few steps you know there’s all kinds of different ways to deal with it and let it go and move on and I think he works well I know he works with each individual on their own way of letting it go.

Within-Case Analysis: Support Staff

Arwin. One of the key pieces in Arwin’s experience working with Stella that she found most beneficial was the integration. She described how having Stella integrated
with the team allowed for a relationship to develop, and she was able to get to know everyone on a more personal level, including athletes and staff. She explained,

I mean I know I go to her a lot just to talk about what’s in my head and I know the girls are really comfortable with her because she, well one thing that I like is she does have specific sports and it’s not just all sports so she actually gets to have the opportunity to get to know our girls which is you know that’s that connection that I think someone in her position should have. You know I know our program is unique with that and I think that it makes it so much better because having a connection makes the girls more comfortable and they feel like they can go in and talk and you know how can I make myself better in this situation.

Arwin used to play for Midwestern University, and she said compared to her experience, the sport psychology services now are completely different:

I didn’t know it was by the title you think well somebody’s just going to come in, give this textbook speech and you know almost like a classroom because I think when I played here it was kind of like that. We had somebody come in like once or twice and it was like something from a textbook or a lesson and then they move out and then that’s it. So, I guess that’s kind of what I was expecting and then what we got was something that was completely different. It was completely practical and involved and like I’ve said, and you know I’ve gotten to know Stella and a lot of the girls go in so there’s that relationship there. So it’s exceeded in the expectations I had or could have even imagined to have which is like I said it’s really I feel really I feel good for me but for the girls especially because I know that they’re going through things and growing.

She described that people come in to make themselves better. Stella often gave Arwin books to read, and other resources to help her own development. The ability to be integrated and more invested in the team created a connection with the people involved, and Arwin believed this helped the services not only be more involved, but more practical as well. She explained her definition of practicality was that she was able to take life situations and apply it to their sport. She said,

She always brings it back to how it relates particularly to us and our situation as individuals or how we might think that it would. You know, and that’s what I’m talking about that the practicality of it is you know without that I think people could walk out of there and be like well that was a waste of time… I just think that that’s really because it gives them that perspective outside of the sport too.
that to me would help with my mental performance because I’m keeping things in perspective and in a larger picture.

Arwin shared that she lost her dad when she was playing, and that was what gave her that outside perspective. She explained if she had had someone like Stella when she was playing to give her that personal application, perspective, and support she felt it would have helped her athletic performance:

I think I would have gained that perspective before my junior year before my dad and just having someone to go to, to talk to I you know I didn’t have that except for my family. I didn’t have that and you just kind have kept it in and you know that’s just what you did so having someone to talk to about how do I get over this hump to make me get back to being successful faster. You know, I think that would have been big. I think maybe my slumps in hitting wouldn’t have lasted as long or I could have grown a little bit faster to get to the point in which I did my junior year. You know, I wouldn’t have felt like I wasted a couple of years. I didn’t feel like I wasted I mean there was always that time period where you learn and you adjust but I think it would have been faster. I think that learning curve would have been a lot smaller if I had access to something like that.

Even as a staff member, Arwin felt like Stella had an impact on her development. She described,

It starts as me just saying hi…but then I’ll, I can’t really nail one particular because it seems like every time I have an experience like go in there I end up staying in there for like an hour and we’ll talk about just you know work and then sometimes personal things and just and like I said she’s given me two books to read…I can’t tell you one it’s seems to be a very consistent thing that, it will impact me in a way to where I change or continue to think that way.

Having someone you can talk to that you can trust is what Arwin felt like was essential. For this reason, Arwin felt like Stella’s help with team cohesion in turn helped with performance. In describing having someone to trust she said, “I think that makes the team more united and more of a cohesive unit in the end and I think that translates into us performing better.”
Arwin said Stella was able to listen to her viewpoint and offer an alternative perspective, “putting a different spin on it like okay yes this is your perspective but here’s a different way you can look at this that might be that will be positive for you hopefully if you’re willing to accept this.” In what makes Stella most effective Arwin described,

She’s very sincere when she speaks to you and you know she looks at you in the eye and listens and the sincerity and the genuine feeling that you get from her that she’s concerned about you and your particular situation I think is what makes her really effective.

This genuine support has helped Arwin both personally and professionally.

Bruce. One of the most impactful aspects of Ben working with Bruce’s team was his ability to be a bridge between the athletes and the coaching staff. Bruce shared that having Ben helped them become better coaches and understand their players more as individuals. As the assistant coach, Bruce said,

I think it’s been a huge help honestly. Just having somebody that’s kind of a bridge between the coaching staff and the players you know that’s kind of like my role on the team is to be a bridge between the players and our head coach when it comes to sort have day to day operations. You know and Ben can sort have do that from a mental perspective.

One of the reasons why Bruce felt like Ben did such a good job providing a bridge was because “he can relate to them, but also someone who has you know a golf background.” The combination of helping the student-athletes feel comfortable and knowledge of the sport were beneficial aspects of the role for Bruce. Additionally, Ben provided a space for support when the guys needed to talk about something, but did not feel comfortable talking to a coach about it, in addition to knowledge of sport psychology. Bruce shared,

Graduate student or not, like having someone that has some level of expertise that can come in and talk to the team and again be that guy that you know you feel comfortable going in and talking to saying hey look I appreciate you not saying
something to coach here, but can you tell him that I prefer to be coached this way or whatever and so sometimes it’s easier for Ben to come in and say look you know Jim would prefer if you approached it this way or you know if you wouldn’t prefer it if you just left him alone out there he likes to have more of a singular thought process on the golf course.

Bruce shared, “I just want to have somebody that can you know help us learn more about our players.” In particular, Bruce shared that Ben helped the coaches understand some specific individual needs about his players.

The unique perspective that Ben offered was something Bruce appreciated about his role too. He was able to offer some advice to the coaches as far as approach, but more as a suggestion rather than a demand. He shared,

There are times where Ben will come in and say something and we’re kind of like alright yeah we can take that with a grain of salt but then there are also times where he’s come in and said you know or we’ve brought up an idea to him and we’ve been like we’re going to address this with the team and he’s like you might want to wait and address that in the off season or whatever so I think they’re no yeah I think it’s different having somebody that’s kind of you know I don’t think outside of the program’s the right way because Ben really is involved with us so that’s not really the right way to put it but yeah I think it’s good. It’s constructive because you want to have somebody kind of providing checks and balances to a certain degree at least from the mental perspective with Ben. You can kind of get off track and I’ve felt like over the last year because of Ben we’ve learned a lot of things individually about each of our players.

As Bruce described, it was nice to have a perspective as a coach from someone who is involved in the program, but not as much as the coaches have to be. This helped him stay more on track. Bruce shared the ability to be integrated rather than an outside consultant provides

Just that instant level of comfort you know like we know this guy, we know what he’s about, we know what he’s good at for the most part or how he’s going to deliver his talks to us and so I think it’s like having him for two years in the program has really gone a long way. I think seeing the same faces and seeing just having somebody here every so often…that isn’t your head coach but also you know from a players perspective he’s invested and wants to be here and wants to help you just goes a long way.
Bruce said that because the guys feel comfortable seeing Ben, they “have bought into what he’s trying to teach,” and he noticed over the past year now these are the guys that also played more consistently. He explained,

It’s crazy you know, you look I mean especially last year we had probably three or four guys that were going in and working with Ben on a consistent basis and all of them were playing in the line up for us. And yes they were talented golfers so I think that helped, but I think on a team like this where I think we’ve really got ten guys that could play and only 5 are going to go to the tournament you’ve got to do something to give yourself an edge. And I think the guys that make the commitment, the guys that go in and make a weekly appointment with Ben, are getting better. Yes they’re talented golf-wise but I think he’s helping them you know take their game to the next level.

From his perspective, Bruce felt like working with Ben also improved the head coach’s performance as well. Working with Ben created more of a collaborative environment on the team:

Ben has helped him see that his way may be right for him but it’s not necessarily right for everyone and I think that’s something that he had a hard time understanding last year and I think this year he’s kind of been like you know what, is my car perfectly spotless all the time or my desk completely clean? Yes, and that works for me but you could be successful if your car has a bunch of crap in it in the back you know. He’s always on our guys about their lockers being neat or whatever and you know, yeah that’s discipline, and those sorts of things but I think Ben has helped him understand that there are ways you can prepare for a tournament that’s maybe different than what he would have done or what I would have done... So I think he’s become a little more open to this isn’t a dictatorship this is all of use working together.

With last year being Bruce’s first year with the team, he felt like the collaborative efforts of his perspective and collegiate playing experience, Ben’s perspective in his role, and the head coach’s years of coaching experience helped create a new culture and “having those sorts of things has really helped our program.”
Ultimately Bruce felt like what makes a mental performance coach effective are the relationships he or she builds. He said the relationships were so important for the person in this role because

If they don’t (build a relationship with the players) they’re not going to be able to do their job very well. Then secondly they have to be able to tell the coach what they’re doing right and what they’re doing wrong.

**Faith.** One of the biggest messages that came across in Faith’s experiences is that this role requires a lot of trust. Collectively, Faith shared that “you trust someone that for their profession and also as a person that you know she’s doing the right and the good things and you know that she will have the best interest your players, and the team, and program.” She said fortunately Stella could “be there that you can trust and you know that she’s going to do the right things and she will communicate with you.” She said in order to do this she needed to understand the specific needs of the team because if you “go into a staff and a team that I really don’t know much you know what I can really do?” She said it is important to understand the needs of the team because “every team’s unique and have different personalities of all the players, and coaches, and styles, and it’s a both way I think it’s learning.”

Another important aspect of the role for Faith was the “personal connection,” especially because “mental performance is something talking about our connection and emotion too.” She said that integration allowed for that personal connection with Stella. One unique aspect for Faith as an assistant coach was that “like everybody’s crazy busy. It takes time to I think a personal connection,” and she said having someone integrated on the staff “helps this.”
In certain cases, Faith shared “if you have great thing, you have an outsider come in to talk, everybody can buy into it.” However, for Faith there was a difference between having someone come in compared to having a mental performance coach integrated instead:

This is kind of long-term thing too. So when you have good foundation it’s always easy to built instead of you coming in with like ok start building foundations and this missing piece, that missing piece, and the whole thing will be stable.

Faith believed that with integration you can build a foundation and you “can make it fancier.” Stella having a connection with the athletes and staff was particularly important to Faith because as an assistant coach it is “hard for a coach to have that much energy,” particularly under stressful circumstances. She expressed,

When we are kind of sky-falling kind of feeling and during the season, especially knowing somebody’s taking care of the girls and that she can have, you know, really honest connection and the communication with us. I really do enjoy talking to her a lot. You know feels like sometimes make fun of myself like okay my personal psychologist. You know, it’s just fun that somebody in (that) profession could be a friend but also on the staff, have that kind of thing.

Faith described that for Stella to have both a friend and staff role was helpful because she was able to provide both personal support and sport psychology knowledge.

Because of the personal connection Faith had with her she said, “I am very open and trust her opinions and it’s really easy to for me to kind of getting wiser.”

Faith thought that Stella was able to connect with so many different people because she had an “open mind.” She described, “I’m sure she’s dealing with different coaches here how many sports we have and all the coach has different philosophy, different personalities,” so it is important to be open to connect with a lot of different
people in this role. She also said Stella’s “knowledge, and of course her willingness to work” made her effective in this role too.

This openness helped Stella build connections with the player as well. Faith appreciated that this role was “someone other than the coaches they can just go for it, because she doesn’t really command anything.” In addition to her openness, her “passion for the players” helped Stella build a personal relationship with them. Faith said this role provided a space for the girls to be able to vent about things. Faith said,

I think it’s really good when they talk to Stella. They know cause the personal relationship with them you know she had, they know sometimes she’s going to challenge them and they know she might be right, other than the coach thinks that, and they have to think hard and adjust from there.

Faith thought the personal connection allowed Stella to be honest and challenge them.

**Katie.** In describing her experience having Stella on the staff, Katie shared, “I think she does a great job just being able to present material and…engage and also is very much what can I do for the team, you now, what angle you know, what are they going through?” Stella’s approach to reach out to the coaching staff and ask for their feedback was beneficial to Katie because “it makes you more open to stuff and then you learn more stuff.” She shared,

I think just Stella reaching out makes it feel like it’s not this..this is the system it’s gotta this is what we’re going to do for everybody, it’s very much tailored to sort of different angles, what we’re going through, so it’s just it’s very productive. And it’s the fact that she inquires with us makes it even more productive, and I feel like she gets a true sense of where we’re at and she can really actually try to dive in and really actually assess and try to get something across to our kids that’s really going to help them.

By asking the coaching staff for feedback, they were more open to learn from her and she in turn gained a greater understanding for how to best assess the needs of the
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team and collaborate on what was going to help. Having Stella integrated on the staff helped fill a role for them. Katie shared,

We’ve always dived into this stuff you know whatever we’ve brought in some people that we’ve seen…it was always a big piece it’s just that we it was nothing very consistent because we didn’t have anything consistent, so it was just a matter of trying to find that you know. And we weren’t able to like completely invest all of our time into it because we had to coach and recruit and all that stuff, but just having that piece I think is instrumental. And I think at first the positive coaching sometimes might come across as like fluff…our staff is very much wired like old school we didn’t have this when we played you know, so it’s a different feel but I think the more and more you allow yourself to see it works, and what it’s about it’s not the fluff…some stuff that works for us, and some stuff I agree with and some I don’t, but at the end of the day I don’t know everything so I think it’s beneficial.

In talking about the types of services Stella provides she shared,

It just makes you more aware of stuff, think of stuff that you just never knew or situations and I think you try to obviously incorporate it to them as players to coaches in those moments but also a lot of it’s life applicable which I think is outstanding…just keeps me open to my growing as a person and coach, mom, and I just think it’s not going to hurt anything. I think the way that Stella presents it and just the fact that our kids refer back to stuff can, you can tell that they’re it’s helping them than to me it’s very productive.

Katie shared one experience that was particularly meaningful for her:

She had met with the team and basically said you know this is the stuff we’re going to do talk about our own story and I think more just not knowing everybody comes from different walks of life. You’ve got new kids every year and I think just to really succeed as a team you’ve got to be invested in each other you’ve got to understand each other and if you don’t truly understand each other until you get to know the background of stuff and so it was probably the most vulnerable moment our team and programs ever had where we just went around the room and everybody I think from how she had presented it and lead up to it allowed everybody to let their guard down be vulnerable and really try to get the most out of it for this team to try and be productive and just what came from it was a better understanding of people you know just what they’ve been through.

She said being vulnerable as a staff allowed the athletes to trust them more because they were seeing the more personal side and struggles they have been through too. She thought, “That showed a sign of unity and just was able to build more trust
throughout our team.” In addition to building trust between staff and athletes, Katie felt having Stella integrated on the staff helped them trust her more too:

I think the ability for her to show up at practices, to travel with us shows the commitment and responsibility and I think that to our kids is like okay it’s a big deal and she’s invested and our team and everybody else has been doing this piece is obviously invested so I think it’s a two way street as far as I’m going to present you this stuff and you’ve got to trust me and I’m going to try and help you and then you’re also going to see it means something and it’s not just oh I got my two appointments this week I’m done. It’s not a, I don’t know, it’s not like a 9-5 job where you just punch a card and you’re done. It’s a complete investment I think for this day and age these kids need to see that piece and I think it allows them to trust it more and to really be very open to it.

Being on the staff in a way that is not the same capacity as the coaches, Stella was able to provide “a different set of eyes because sometimes as coaches you can get very tunnel visions with what you’re feeling and sometimes to hear it from somebody on the outside it might not seem as bad or as good.” On having this outside perspective, Katie said,

I think it’s good because you know especially with Stella, you know she’s an extension of us so if kids are meeting with her or she’s having team time you know and it’s it might be hit or miss but at least gives us a gage on stuff and I think just as coaches you get so focused on stuff you might think you have a feel for stuff and sometimes we’ve learned in our however many years of coaching that it might not be that way. So It’s a way to keep a pulse on your team, keep a pulse on just the overall feel or mindset, so it’s just actually to me an added benefit because Stella never like crosses the line she never tries to insert herself more than she needs to. So I think it’s a good working relationship between our staff and her because she trust us and we trust her. There’s really never any issues along those lines.

The thing that Katie liked most about Stella was her authenticity. As a coach this allowed her to trust that Stella was completely invested in the program. She explained,

She’s just really real and she is very open and she’s not like dead set in her ways. She’s willing to learn and I think she can just relate to a lot of people. She’s got a really great personality. She’s professional but yet she can also laugh with you like she’s just very down to earth and I think that piece in itself with what we do, the grind of our job that’s what I love about her is that she’ll just be like hey how
are you? It’s just like the realness to her. She’s a good person. She’s pure like there’s not hidden agenda there’s no… like what you see is what you get. Which I think is great and so you just know that she’s completely engaged and invested in what she does.

She shared that Stella was able to support everyone on the staff. She felt,

I think, you know, collectively our whole staff would say that in some way or another she’s helped us whether be our personal life with coaching with the team I think everybody can say that they’ve been able to take something away from what she’s done.

Lily. For Lily, based on her experiences, one of the most impactful services that a mental performance coach can provide is support. She explained,

Players having an issue with something Avery has been a really good person and or Ben when he was with us, but a good person for them to go to, and then she’s able to kind of help guide them, maybe if they need to see like a (counseling psychologist) or someone else to get you know professional that’s either a good resource or help guide them like hey maybe go back to your coaches.

For Lily, this role was able to provide space for athletes to talk when they have issues, and they were able to help point them in the right direction in order to cope successfully with the issue. In providing support for the athletes, Lily said,

I think that position has really kind of facilitate communication that normally wouldn’t have happened. Even to the extent where like you know I think it was a couple weeks ago we had a player that broke up with her boyfriend and she was dealing with a lot of stress with it, and she reached out to Avery as like can I talk to you about it, and I thought that was super cool.

Lily talked about how supporting athletes with personal and every day stressors has a connection to sport performance:

She also really helps with just the mental side of being a student and the mental side of being a student athlete and how to perform while having all the stresses of life... And that’s a part of mental performance is getting them mentally clear enough to compete.
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Not only was Avery able to support the athletes’ needs, in turn she was also able to support the coaches through their own professional stressors and support their program mission:

Like our job is to win here. We’re at the Power Five conference level. We have to win…with that we have to develop them into great humans, help them get an education, but in the end if we don’t win we get fired. So it helps because it helps us it allows us to do our jobs a little bit more, put more effort into other things that will help and knowing that that side is getting taken care of I guess so it’s I think it’s been huge, and really beneficial to our staff. Like I said I think if we didn’t have it we would be losing a piece to our staff.

Lily said having the mental performance coach integrated on the staff, “it’s just like it’s like another job like I don’t see my job any more important that what Avery does. I think she fills a role and need for us. Not only did she fill a specific role, Avery was intentional at seeking out ways to better understand what the needs of this team were.”

She described,

That’s been really helpful is when Avery first started she came to me and she said well hey what can I do to help your girls? What do you think they need, but what do you need as an assistant? I thought that was really helpful and beneficial cause I was like what do I need? I don’t know and so really I was like you know Platini really values it, and I was like I need you to really connect with Platini on a sport psych level cause he really values it and he likes to communicate. So I said if you could do that cause that then helps him de-stress a little bit and then that helps me able to do my job a bit more.

Lily shared she thought this role needed to be someone outside of a sport coaching role, because they are then able to offer a unique perspective. In regards to Platini,

He likes to communicate through things and it’s I think sometimes helpful for him to have someone else outside of myself or (other assistant coach) to be able to talk through maybe player things or whatever because they’re giving a perspective you know she’s giving a perspective that’s may be different than mine because I’m doing the on field coaching and that sort of a thing so she’s able to provide him with good perspective.
In addition, Lily said for her personally, “I think it’s been really good just cause she’s a good sounding board, good feedback. She provides a skill set of something we need.” For Lily, it was helpful to have someone with this specific knowledge and education, who was also not a sport coach. She explained,

If we didn’t have her we’d have to find a way to get done what she’s doing. So it takes work off of me so I’m able to do other things. We’re able to put more time into different areas and different things that can help the team. Cause if we don’t have Avery then all of a sudden we’re like ok how like what team building stuff? You gotta research it, you gotta figure it out and is this really the right thing to do? I still think you have to find you have to find a way to connect to the kids and maybe find a different person then that can volunteer or help so I think it just for me personally it just it takes a huge amount of responsibilities, gives them to that person, that’s her profession, so she’s, I didn’t go to school in it. Now I can dabble in it, I can go to workshops and courses, and I like sport psych a lot and mental performance but I’m not a professional.

Additionally, having a professional in this role other than a coach provided a non-judgmental space for athletes to feel comfortable talking about issues they may not want to share with a coach. She explained,

I think for all of the kids like they feel judged on their skill set, and I’m not sure about other sports, but a big thing for our sport is playing time, and so like coaches control playing time and so I think sometimes for kids that don’t feel comfortable all the time, saying like I don’t want to say this cause it affects my playing time, and so just to have that third party in there that’s not going to affect their playing time… It’s just a it’s been a welcome benefit to have the kids have someone else in it who’s not a coach. You know so it’s really helped I think the kids feel more comfortable, and which then helps them perform better, which helps us.

Lily said student-athletes also felt more comfortable reaching out to Avery because she was so integrated on the team. She described,

Avery I mean the nice thing for her is we try to get her to be around us for everything, so she comes, she doesn’t come out to every practice but she comes to a lot so like see the kids compete. She’s at every game. She travels with us, so like we charter for some games, but we make sure Avery is on every time we have a team together, Avery’s on that bus so if we ever had to split into two groups she would go with the group where all the players are because so she’s constantly, we
just have her around them so she can get to know them, they feel comfortable, but you know it’s really helped our players so they you know they can go to her.

After meeting with student-athletes, Avery communicated any major issues or concerns with the coaching staff, and having this collaboration helped “diffuse problems quicker and so you’re not snowball effect with problems.” Lily added that the girls also sought out Avery for support and performance enhancement because they knew she cared for them:

I think that’s where she’s found success… because once I think a kid feels like you trust them and you love them and you care about them they’re willing to open up and then try the different methods, and then once you see your performance enhancing you know then it’s like ok well I’m willing to you know, so she’s done some team building stuff that really worked out for them and so once you kind of see that ok well this worked once let’s try something else. So she’s been able to kind of approach it in that manner.

Finally, Avery helped the coaches with performance enhancement in their areas too. Lily thought that Avery’s presence at games helped the head coach cope with stressors and have more self-awareness. Additionally, she said Avery “helped me learn different ways to communicate things.” Finally, Lily believed Avery’s authenticity helped her as a person, and in turn as a coach. She explained,

How good of a listener she is and how she cares so the influence she has had on me is I try to like when I talk to people or I’m trying to like ok I need to make sure I’m as invested as Avery with so yeah I try to like I’m going to take that into my practice when I speak to the players cause I she does a really good job of getting people to believe she cares about them because she does care about them so much. She’s being truthful and honest.

**Luke.** For Luke, he said it’s a unique opportunity to work alongside Mason, since they are both on the coaching staff together. He said having Mason in a sport coaching and mental performance role for the team brings “joy” and “a more positive atmosphere.” Luke said, “he’s a very passionate individual so you know I mention how
much energy he brings it’s not because he’s faking it it’s because he’s excited.” This genuine energy is something Luke found beneficial to bring to the coaching and sport psychology roles. Luke explained,

He’s involved with every athlete as far as a sports psychology goes he’s available to our entire team he’s done presentations to the entire team and you know that knowledge on top of his passion brings quite a good cocktail of coaching meets sports psychology. It’s pretty perfect.

While they coach different events, Luke said both of them have a very similar, positive coaching approach. He loved having a resource like Mason; he was able to get affirmation of some of his coaching ideas, and that they had been supported in the research. In addition he appreciated honest feedback when an approach may be harmful to performance, and said, “It’s nice to have Mason to bounce those ideas off of. So I think it’s really great to have him around right now you know every day.”

One thing in particular Luke found meaningful was that Mason was confident and willing to be honest with any other staff member if he saw something that could be destructive to performance enhancement. He explained that to “tell you know whoever hey we have a responsibility to these athletes. That was pretty cool.” Ultimately, he loved that Mason is a coach too:

We can relate on that level. We’re striving for the same goals no matter what. Our goals of performance goals and from what I understand that’s what sport psychology is there to support. Ultimately I think almost anyone in sport psychology agrees that the ultimate goal is peak performance. So that’s something I think he shared with me, but again knowing that he’s a coach like me probably allows me to completely trust him.

Because Mason shared similar goals and understood the perspective of the coach, it allowed Luke to fully trust him. Having Mason integrated on the staff also allowed athletes to come to him for advice and available to everyone. Luke expressed,
I can’t think of a single athlete where it’s had a negative impact on them. So, if we’re talking, we’re batting a thousand because he’s on board I mean talk about a benefit you know. Again even athletes that he’s not interacting with on a daily basis they understand his education they understand he’s about to get his doctorate in sports psychology and they’re not afraid to tap into that wealth of knowledge.

Since Mason and the head coach, Bob, had a prior coach-athlete relationship Mason knew Bob extremely well. Luke explained,

Knowing Bob intimately allows Mason to maybe plant an idea or plant a seed of an idea of what he thinks is beneficial without telling Bob it is sports psychology if that makes sense. So I think it’s been great.

This allowed the message to come from the coach, and live in the environment, without actually labeling it sport psychology. In addition, having Mason around every day served as a visual reminder for Luke of what his goals are and helped him stay focused on them. He shared,

Mason is my focus trigger I guess essentially. He’s literally my focus trigger whereas without him around I think I’d get lost a little more often and get side tracked for sometimes days at a time. You know, when he’s around it’s an easy reminder of what I’m trying to do as a coach and a person with a positive attitude.

Luke believed that having a mental performance coach integrated early on before season would help build a solid foundation of skills and knowledge so “you won’t have to spend as much time later.” He shared this was helpful in their program:

Having that mental performance coach involved in every regard is ideal so for us. We had them at staff meetings… We had that individual here bouncing ideas off the coaching staff before they bring it to the athletes.

Having a mental performance coach integrated and available for Luke personally,

Really helped me organize my goals as a coach allowing me to be more effective. Allowing me to be more efficient. Isn’t that the key? We all want to maximize our efficiency again we’re limited 20 hours a week and we’re in a sport, swimming specifically is a sport where every minute counts. So, I mean when I’m talking about there impact on me as a coach to other coaches in the swimming community, it’s really, I try to obviously take some and I’ve already done it with
you. I try to take personal credit, like I had these ideas first right, but they weren’t nearly as good or as organized as they should have been, and I’ve been so fortunate to have someone like Mason…around to help me implement all these thoughts in a much more efficient manner.

Mason was able to take his own knowledge and provide organized, efficient ways to help tailor it to Luke’s coaching values and approach, which he found very helpful.

**Trixie.** Trixie said what was beneficial in working with Ben was his knowledge and understanding of the sport of golf, sport psychology, and positive psychology concepts. She said Ben did a great job of understanding and meeting their expectations in regards to services that fit the needs of the sport and the needs of the team:

> With our team, golf in general is such a mind game that any time we can have somebody sort of help players understand themselves and have an awareness, and develop a routine and a game plan on how to stop things that are going on that are negative and turn them around in a positive fashion that was kind of what we expected out of him. He’s done a really good job of that for sure.

Trixie said, “He’s done a great job of building relationships and forming relationships with our team members so that they’re comfortable with you know talking to him. Whether it’s with golf or outside of golf stuff.” Additionally, Trixie found it helpful that Ben took time to meet with the head coach, Seymour, and herself prior to team meetings so he could develop services consistent with the needs of the team. She explained,

> He’s always willing to come in early, meet with Seymour and I and get our take on things before meeting with the athletes. He’s always ready to check in with us and just so he gets all perspectives involved and kind of some background on things. I really enjoy the team meetings that he does when he uses…videos or anything like that, just media in general instead of just kind of talking at players…they don’t feel like they’re in the classroom. They feel like they’re a lot more engaged and it’s more of a conversation than anything else.

As the assistant coach, Trixie believed a mental performance coach is most effective when he or she is “able to kind of broaden the delivery” and relate “to each
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person individually, and helping them out in that way.” Ben was able to provide individual feedback through observations he made during tournament rounds. She said,

> It’s fantastic because Seymour and I we’re usually so busy we can only be with one person at a time so any there’s two of us and five to nine people on our team out on the course at once so the more eyes we can have out there helping out the coaching staff definitely the better for sure.

She mentioned he was a support for the coaching staff as well “just being able to bounce ideas and things off of him and kind of listen to his opinion because it’s valued for sure.” For her personally, Ben always “brings a great energy” so he is great to have around.

According to Trixie, their program vision and “job is to find resources for our players to help them gain an edge competitively or just in life in general.” She said Ben has definitely been one of those resources for their team. In fact, she said it would be great if they were able to have a mental performance coach on their staff that they did not have to share with other sports. She said this would add more consistency:

> A consistent message all around. Everybody hearing it from all angles every single day. Having that person on the road with us. They’re a member of the coaching staff basically, so just want to have them around as much as possible.

**Wally.** In the athletics department, Wally has many roles. He works alongside the mental performance staff as a counseling psychologist, and also with Stella as a support staff member with one of the sport teams at Midwestern University. He explained his many support staff roles he had on the team:

> One of them has been meeting with individual athletes. I guess, partially in the counseling context partly in the mentor/adviser context. I’ve also had interactions with (sport) athletes as they participate in the…leadership institutes and as I’ve provided some support for the coaching staff and the team as they particularly last, as they went through some challenging times.
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From his perspective the thing that stood out most about having Stella integrated on the staff as the mental performance coach was

The relationships that have been built so that they can come to her for advice, support, coaching on handling different situations I think has been really valuable. Particularly, when they’ve found themselves in stressful situations I think they’ve really been able to benefit from having the perspective where Stella knows what’s going on, understands the dynamics, but she’s not a part of the coaching staff so I think they’ve been able to get a lot of really helpful advice and some work from her.

Wally felt they worked well collaboratively, since neither was a member of the coaching staff. He thought bringing together the perspectives of those they had relationships with helped create a larger understanding of the team dynamics. He explained,

When some conflict arose on the team amongst athletes it was just real helpful because she had different relationships with different people than I did and there was some overlap and differences and it was really helpful I think for us to be able to have the conversations that allowed me to understand more so I could support the people I was working with and helping them understand some other perspectives and so I think Stella and I were able to have a good learning conversation about trying to understand the broader dynamics there versus just the perspective that perhaps my person brought a perspective and sometimes her person or persons brought a perspective. I think our conversations were probably helpful for both of us to understand it a little better.

Based on his experience, Wally shared what he thought made Stella effective in delivering sport psychology services is her balance between “confidence and humility.” He said this stemmed from her respect for the coach, the coach’s knowledge, and desire to manage the team. He explained,

I think she balances this idea of the strength of having something to offer along with a willingness to defer to coach perspectives or to try to reframe some of her work so that it fits well into the coaches, whether it’s vocabulary or goal structure, whatever it is some experts expect others to accommodate their model. I think it really helps her where she maintains her principles and the value of certain techniques but she’s pretty good at working with coaches to make those palpable to the coach.
The major advantage of having mental performance coaches integrated on the team according to Wally was “the relationships that get formed and the trust that that generates.” He described,

So it’s a lot more than the ideas or skills or techniques that get brought in and you know you can bring somebody in who can teach or share or whatever but when that person leaves what they’ve offered is some knowledge but I think this model allows by having people there on an ongoing basis relationships get built with the athletes and with the coaching staff and those relationships lead to generally, a level of trust which allows greater confidence I think, coach trust the mental performance person.

Having Stella on the staff with Wally under stressful circumstances brought him greater confidence to understand the situation and develop a plan to move forward. He said,

When there’s not only another set of eyes but some eyes that I trust so I think it just leads to a much greater comfort level that we’re going to understand what’s happening and we’re going to see some ways to move forward. That is much greater than if it’s just me trying to assess it myself.

Based on Wally’s experience, the role of a mental performance coach is

Someone who has some particular expertise in understanding all the factors that contribute to effective performance, particularly the cognitive and emotional components that affect performance. So it’s a person who has knowledge and skills about that and who understands team dynamics, group dynamics, motivation, all the parts that make groups work or not work. Somebody who understands some of the important attributes of coaching that are helpful or not helpful in terms of performance. So somebody that has that expertise but then somebody who is able to join with the team, with the coaching staff to be a resource as needed. To use any of those skills, any of that knowledge, any of that expertise to help the coach reach his or her goals and help the team reach their goals. So it’s somebody who has a lot of capacity but ideally, that capacity is delivered on a kind of an as needed basis. If the team doesn’t need something then I think the level of expertise is such that as, okay we’re good, I don’t have to do it just because I know how to do it.

**Across-Case Analysis: Mental Performance Coaches**
Values Driven Delivery: A Case Study

After careful and thorough within-case analysis of each of the mental performance coaches’ experiences, consistent themes were organized together across all participants to determine the overarching themes that were consistent across the group. These themes were continuously compared back to the research questions to ensure these themes were consistent in answering the true purpose of the study. Six themes were constructed, and sub-themes and key description notes are noted in Table 2 (p. 185). The six themes shaped by the experiences of the mental performance coaching staff were as follows: 1) Authenticity strengthens sense of purpose, 2) Self-integrity builds trust, 3) Reaffirmation of values promotes receptiveness, 4) Desire for understanding fosters genuine support, 5) Services cultivate comprehensive support, and 6) Performance extends across domains. Further discussion on how these relate to the research questions will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Across-Case Analysis: Head Coaches

Following careful within-case analysis of all participants within the head coach group, analysis charts were built, organizing meaningful data across all group participants. Five themes were consistent across all head coach participants. The sub-themes and descriptor notes are notes in Table 3 (p.186). The following five themes were constructed from the head coaches’ experiences: 1) Trust in mental performance coach to deliver services to further support coach’s goals and vision was essential, 2) Understanding context impacted value placed on services, 3) Mental performance coach provided comprehensive support, 4) Mental performance delivery services transferable across all domains of performance – Athletic, personal, academic, professional performance, 5) Person in mental performance coach role should not be the head coach.
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As with the mental performance coaches, these themes were also compared to the study’s research questions to ensure they inform the intentions of the study. Final themes were sent to head coaches, and asked for feedback to ensure member checking. There were no comments returned to the primary researcher, other than thanking me for sending the information on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Across-Case Analysis: Mental Performance Coaches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Authenticity strengthens sense of purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-integrity builds trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaffirmation of values promotes receptiveness</td>
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<td>Desire for understanding fosters genuine support</td>
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<td>Services cultivate comprehensive support</td>
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<td>Performance extends across domains</td>
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### Table 3: Across-Case Analysis: Head Coaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trust in mental performance coach to deliver services that further support coach’s goals and vision was essential</strong></td>
<td>• personal relationship – knowing who they are and what they’re about</td>
<td>Honest feedback and consistent messaging means to support coach’s goals and vision</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• authenticity – being real</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• investment – integration and observation are means to understand context and support coach’s goals and vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding context impacted value placed on services</strong></td>
<td>• Sport itself</td>
<td>Individualized services to meet needs are means of understanding context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program as whole</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mental performance coach provided comprehensive support</strong></td>
<td>• Whole person – Belief that personal stressors impact performance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Across team – liaison between coaches and athletes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of purpose – passion for helping others, optimism, hard work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mental performance delivery services are transferable across all domains of performance (Athletic, personal, academic, professional performance)</strong></td>
<td>• Self-awareness – thoughts, behaviors, emotions, purpose</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-regulation – thoughts, emotions, behaviors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal development transferable across all domains of performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Person in mental performance coach role should not be the head coach</strong></td>
<td>• Immense knowledge of sport psychology – ability to dedicate time to further knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Does not decide who competes – creates more open dialogue with athletes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding of context while outside of coaching – provides alternative perspective, particularly under stress</td>
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Across-Case Analysis: Athletes

Consistent with the mental performance coaches and head coaches, the student-athletes’ experiences were reviewed extensively in a within-case analysis. Reoccurring themes across all group participants were organized into across-case analysis charts. Five themes were shaped from the athletes’ experiences. These five themes as well as their sub-themes and descriptor notes are presented in Table 4 (p.188). These themes were evaluated within the study’s research questions to ensure that they were answering the purpose of the study. The five themes composed from the student-athletes’ experiences were as follows: 1) Relationships guided value placed on services, 2) Understanding of context impacted trust of services, 3) Integration enabled service reinforcement, 4) Mental performance delivery services transferable across domains of performance – athletic, personal, academic, performance, and 5) Mental performance coach provided comprehensive support. These five themes were sent to student-athlete participants, and eight out of the nine participants responded. All shared similar messages that these themes accurately portrayed their experiences. These themes will be discussed further in Chapter 5 in relation to the research questions.
### Table 4: Across-Case Analysis: Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Relationships guided value placed on services** | • Personal connection  
• Authenticity – being real  
• Trust |  |
| **Understanding of context impacted trust of services** | • Sport  
• Individuals  
• Team  
• Roles |   |
| **Integration enabled service reinforcement** | • Comprehensive messaging  
• Reminder of individual’s best self standard | Presence and customized services implied understanding of context |
| **Mental performance delivery services are transferable across domains of performance** | • Self-awareness – thoughts, behaviors, emotions, purpose  
• Self-regulation – thoughts, emotions, behaviors |  |
| **(athletic, personal, academic performance)** | • Whole person  
• Across team – bridge between staff and athletes |  |
| **Mental performance coach provided comprehensive support** | • Unique perspective – listening, relating, and observing means of gaining perspective  
• Sense of purpose – investment, care, hard work, optimism |  |

### Across-Case Analysis: Support Staff

Lastly, an across-case analysis of the experiences of support staff was conducted.

After careful within-case analysis of individual support staff experiences, common themes were organized into case analysis charts. Six themes were created based on the
group participants’ experiences. These six themes are represented with sub-themes and descriptor notes in Table 5 (p.190). The six themes represented by the support staff experience are as follows: 1) Integration on staff allowed for personal connection, 2) Desire to understand unique needs of context created openness, 3) Mental performance coach able to provide comprehensive support, 4) Authenticity shaped trust and services, 5) Personal development was a means of performance enhancement, and 6) Role of mental performance coach should be someone outside of coaching staff. These six themes were consistently compared to the study’s research questions to make certain these findings were consistent with the purpose of the study. Interpretation of these findings in relation to the purpose of the study is discussed in Chapter 5. Themes were sent to the support staff participants, and the participants who responded back thought “the information is consistent for what we talked about.”
### Table 5: Across-Case Analysis: Support Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Integration on staff allowed for personal connection** | • Relationships  
• Trust  
• Investment – willingness to help  
• Consistency  
• Comfortable reaching out – opportunities for intersection | **Perceived care for others** |
| **Desire to understand unique needs of context created openness** | • Feedback  
• Perspective – given and received  
• Learning | **Context includes program, individuals, team and sport** |
| **Mental performance coach provided comprehensive support** | • Whole person – athletes, coaches, support staff  
• Team – cohesion, culture, communication, needs  
• Care, hard work, collaboration, connection, listening | | |
| **Authenticity shaped trust and services** | • Genuine/Real  
• Honest  
• Understanding of goals and values – individual and program | **Able to provide services consistent with goals and values** |
| **Personal development was a means of performance enhancement** | • Performance across domains  
• Person and performer unable to be separated  
• Belief that life stressors can impact performance | | |
| **Role of mental performance coach should be someone outside of coaching staff** | • Effective knowledge and services requires education, planning – coaching staff does not have time for quality consistent services  
• Outlet for athletes, coaches, and staff to talk openly without judgment – sounding board, solution focused  
• Perspective – different lens outside of sport coach, 3rd party  
• Ability to relate to anyone | |
Triangulation

Yin (2014) suggests quality case study research studies should consist of multiple sources of evidence. To ensure the themes shaped by the experiences of the participants are consistent from other angles, additional supplemental data was collected using mental performance staff documents and personal documents.

**Mental performance staff document analysis.** Documents from the mental performance staff collected from the 2015-2016 school year were used to conduct a pattern analysis to either support or contradict findings across the mental performance coach group. By examining staff documents, including meeting notes, mission statement, program recruiting flyers and other sources of staff documents, there was a consistent support for “high performance excellence” across the program. For example, there was reference in the overall program mission statement that the staff provides these “performance enhancement services for athletes, coaches and support staff” and part of the program mission included “support for performers.” Additionally, staff meeting notes described a presentation from a fellow staff member entitled “High Performance Culture” and discussed ways to connect with various support staff members that surround the athlete. Activities, discussions, and program statements mention “holistic well-being” too. This supports Theme 6, related to performance across all domains. The findings support Theme 4 and 5 listed in Table 2, which discuss comprehensive support for the individuals and team and understanding of context (p.185). Additional documents expressed consistent emphasis on “strong personal development” and “strong team development.” One particular discussion noted in a staff meeting talked about activities centered around “leading people from different backgrounds” and suggested sharing
stores to “feel connection with others.” Specific values-based staff activities related to “Noble Self,” discussed “values” and “noble self characteristics,” consistent to the way in which self-integrity is defined within the theory and framework in this study. Therefore, based on program document analysis, findings suggest support for Theme 1: Authenticity strengthens sense of purpose (sense of purpose based in individual’s values), Theme 2: Self-integrity builds trust, and Theme 3: Reaffirmation of values promotes receptiveness (reflection and evaluation means to reaffirm values) listed on Table 2 (p. 185).

**Personal document analysis: reflective journal entries.**

In addition to staff documents, the research looked at reflective journal entries provided by four former student-athletes who utilized services from one of the five mental performance coaches within this study in their prior collegiate athletics experience. Looking at the reflections, the documents appear to support the athlete across-case themes listed in Table 3 (p. 186). Specifically, Theme 1: Relationship guided value placed on services, sub-theme: personal connection was supported in statements like, “we had someone there that understood what we thought and why. I felt more confident having Ben as part of the team because he understood my thoughts.” One athlete described during a post-season competition, “I had a dedicated coach cheering the whole day and I felt so focused,” and with mention of personal connection (Theme One), one participant stated, “all day I was committed to what Ben and I had worked on.” These statements support Theme Four – self-awareness and self-regulation, as well as understanding of context impacted trust of services (Theme Two).

Additional support for Theme Four, as well as for Theme Five, transferable performance services, and mental performance coach provided comprehensive was
reflected in another participant's statement. This person reflected, “The mental performance program helped tremendously in college and still helps me today… helped me with performance in golf, but most of the ideas we talked about apply in every situation. You learn how to handle yourself in all situations.”

Additionally one participant mentioned how services were transferable stating,

I am far better able to relate to other people and communicate with others even if we have differences. It made me much better able to understand my own values and then live them every day in every aspect of my life. Being a leader is being able to step out of your comfort zone to understand those around you and how to serve them best. Stella gave me the courage to build on weaker relationships, be vulnerable with my teammates and have tough conversations when I needed to which has prepared me for the challenges that arise in conflict of everyday life and relationships.

Finally, the last participant talked about comprehensive support, transferable across other domains, genuine support, service reinforcement and personal connection by sharing,

She taught me that it is okay to not be okay, and that I need to find a friend that I can trust to talk to rather than just bottle-up and drive my mind insane. She brought me out of a very dark place. I would not be where I am today without the constant support from Stella. She always was available to listen, to be honest with me, and was never afraid to tell me what I needed to hear even when it was tough. Even now that I am not competing, I still drop in to chat with Stella about life. It is so comforting to know that I have someone that loves me unconditionally and will always take time out of her day to catch up on life.

In addition to supporting the athlete across-case themes, this experience and reflection additionally supports all of the mental performance coach group themes that are listed on Table 2 (p.185) in a variety of capacities.

Overall, the staff documents and personal reflective journal entries provided consistent patterns and key components that support the across-case themes that were constructed.

Across-Group Comparison
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To understand the experience of mental performance delivery services within the program model as a whole, the researcher compared across-case group themes to the mental performance across-case themes. Figure 1 represents the consistent thematic findings across both the mental performance staff and athletes. Next, the researcher compared the themes constructed from the mental performance staff and head coaches. Figure 2 (p.195) represents these consistencies. Finally, the researcher conducted the same cross comparison between the mental performance coaches and the support staff group. Figure 3 (p. 195) lists these commonalities.

Figure 1. Across-Group Thematic Consistencies: Mental Performance Staff and Athletes

- Authenticity in relationships and behavior impacts value of services
- Authenticity builds trust in relationships, therefore trust in services—care for person (not just athlete), honesty, investment, desire to understand, hard work, listen, relate to people key internal trails to relationship and trust (with MPC and services)
- Understanding the context/unique needs of individuals, team, sport
- Presence/integration reinforced support for performance enhancement and comprehensive messaging
- Services provide comprehensive support—whole person, team and staff (bridge between coaches and athletes)
- Services provide support for performance enhancement across all domains (help individuals (athletes/coaches) perform better in all areas of life including sport
- Personal development/self-awareness transfers to sport performance
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Figure 2. Across-Group Thematic Consistencies: Mental Performance Staff and Head Coaches

Figure 3. Across-Group Thematic Consistencies: Mental Performance Staff and Support Staff
Chapter 5: Discussion

It’s a work in progress. It always is. I think that you’re, I mean, just like I talked about with meaning and purpose and direction and value in life is, is figuring out what you stand for and I think that those things can change slightly from year to year. I think that as you grow you realize different ways to look at things and how to honor other people and yourself and your mission and... I’m not saying they do a 180, but I’m just saying, like, you learn to see things through different lenses and different experiences open your eyes and it’s more tools on your tool belt... So it’s just, it’s something that you constantly have to come back to and revise, and the most important thing about it is there has to be some level of critical conscious reflection about it (Mason, p. 29, lines 1287-1295).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the ways in which a nationally recognized mental performance staff integrated within an NCAA Division I athletics program delivered holistic sport psychology services. Specifically this study aimed to understand how personal values and self-integrity impacted the ways in which holistic sport psychology services were delivered to sport teams.

Consistent with qualitative case study research, this study sought to provide a detailed description of this phenomenon and how people’s experiences influence the ways in which that meaning is constructed (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The rich description offered within this qualitative case study research provides the reader with the whole picture of the people’s experiences (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The thick description, intentional selection of participants, and specific aim to understand the meaning of the mental performance coaches’ values and how they intersect with experiences in delivering holistic integrated sport psychology made qualitative case study research design a valuable and appropriate fit for this study.

Because no study is designed without some form of explicit or implicit questions, a theoretical framework allowed the qualitative researcher to be transparent with the reader on the stance she brought to the study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Schwandt,
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1993). As such, the research questions, data collection, and analysis techniques of the study were framed within theoretical components (Merriam, 2009). Particularly this study drew upon the theoretical tenets within Steel’s (1988) self-affirmation theory.

Applying concepts from self-affirmation theory to SPPs’ delivery of holistic, integrated sport psychology led to a focus on a couple main theoretical aspects. First, the primary idea that the self-system is not geared at resolving particular threats to self-concept; rather it is geared at “maintaining an overall conception of self-integrity” (Steele, 1988, p. 267). Cohen and Sherman (2014) added, “rewards and praise are secondary to opportunities for people to manifest their integrity through meaningful acts, thoughts, and feelings” (p. 336). This concept was explored within the holistic sport psychology delivery model, looking at how self-integrity was maintained by the mental performance coaches through meaningful thoughts, actions, and emotions in their professional role with teams. Additionally, this theoretical component was incorporated into the exploration of how such meaningful acts of self-integrity are received by athletes, coaches, and support staff they worked with.

Second, self-affirmation theory asserts that through affirmations of personal core values, performance and problem solving under stressful circumstances is enhanced and leads to balanced processing (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Creswell et al., 2005; 2013; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman et al., 2009). Additionally, such self-affirmation of values fosters enhanced interpersonal relationships through promotion of trust and closeness (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Such concepts were examined through the personal perspectives of the mental performance coaches by investigating how personal core values influence the ways in which they deliver holistic sport psychology under stressful
circumstances, and how those experiences impacted the relationships of those they interacted with.

The three primary research questions for this qualitative case study consisted of:

1. How do personal core values impact the ways in which a mental performance coach delivers holistic sport psychology?

2. How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence performance with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with?

3. How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence personal development with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with?

Self-affirmation theory offered a framework to support essential domains of functioning “at both the individual and collective levels” (Sherman & Cohen, 2006, p. 231). Using self-affirmation theory as the theoretical framework for this study provided ideal support to examine the experiences at both the individual and collective levels of the mental performance staff. Key concepts of this framework were utilized throughout the data analysis process to conceptualize how the mental performance coaches attributed self-integrity and personal core values to their delivery of sport psychology services within the holistic integrated model.

Summary of Findings

A rich and thick description of the participants’ experiences within this sport psychology program shaped several themes across each groups. For the mental performance staff, these themes consisted of: a) authenticity strengthens sense of purpose, b) self-integrity builds trust, c) reaffirmation of values promotes receptiveness, d) desire for understanding fosters genuine support, e) services cultivate comprehensive
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support, and f) performance extends across domains. Based on the head coaches’ experiences, the following themes were constructed: a) trust in mental performance coach to deliver services to further support coach’s goals and vision was essential, b) understanding context impacted value placed on services, c) mental performance coach provided comprehensive support, d) mental performance delivery services are transferable across all domains of performance, and e) person in mental performance role should not be the head coach. The athletes’ experiences shaped the following themes: a) relationships guided value placed on services, b) understanding of context impacted trust of services, c) integration enabled service reinforcement, d) mental performance delivery services are transferable across domains of performance, e) mental performance coach provided comprehensive support. Lastly, the consistent themes across all of the support staffs’ experiences were: a) integration on staff allowed for personal connection, b) desire to understand unique needs of context created openness, c) mental performance coach provided comprehensive support, d) authenticity shaped trust and services, e) personal development was a means of performance enhancement, and f) role of mental performance coach should be someone outside of coaching staff.

In regards to the research questions, findings suggest personal values shaped the way in which mental performance coaches delivered holistic sport psychology. It was through their own personal values that they chose how to deliver services to teams. As Stella shared, “I think the values that I have are definitely behind my delivery.” She spoke about her values as her “life mantra” and that when she acted in ways consistent with her values, both in and out of sport psychology, she was “true” and her “best you.” Ben shared similar descriptions of the role values play in his sport psychology services.
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He said, “I just think ultimately, you know, my values, I'm being authentic with myself and true to myself.” Similarly, Avery described her values are “something that if I try to separate myself with I really can’t. It’s so much part of me.” Avery believed her values “shape my role very much.” Consistently, Blake shared that being authentic was key to the work that she does:

Honesty came up and I think I view that a little more as authenticity like for me that comes in being authentic to myself in the work that I do um because I think there’s a lot of different styles and there’s a lot of different ways that you can approach sport psychology and for me it’s really important to find out the way that feels right for me.

Finally, Mason described how not only do his values guide his work, but that the mental performance staff model supports this idea of delivering services based on your own personal values:

I think that what’s really cool about our staff’s model is that every perspective and value system, as long as it is about personal, within kind of the realm of positive coaching of developing people and high performance excellence, I think as long as those are your goals and you mean well, then you’re going to fit in. And I think that’s what’s really cool.

The within-case analysis provided rich description of how each of these mental performance coaches individually use their own values to provide services that are authentic to themselves. Receptively, all three supplemental groups experienced genuine and authentic support and experiences with services. Athletes’ thematic findings showed that the mental performance coaches’ authenticity shaped their relationships with them, creating personal connection, trust, and in turn positive reception of services. Additionally, head coaches shared that “being real” built personal relationships and trust in the mental performance coaches’ services because they felt confident that they know
who they are and what they are about. Pat described her experience with this authenticity and how it has helped her be her own best self:

Just the transparency that you know we can have conversations with and you know she’s got a way to deliver it in a way that’s not it’s not abrasive. And again it’s really from the heart and truly desiring to help all of us be the best we can be and so you know Stella does a great job of looking at things through a different set of lenses and I think definitely helps you play up on your strengths and at the same time shore up on some areas that maybe you had blinders to, and I think that’s really really important cause there’s not a lot of people, I think in life that you surround yourself with that can you know have that kind of transparency and be so real with you.

Finally, across the support staff experiences, authenticity shaped their trust in the delivery services provided. Ultimately, the data suggests that mental performance coaches’ values shape their delivery services, therefore helping them deliver services that are authentic, real, and honest to their true selves. This in turn builds personal connection, relationships and trust with those that receive the sport psychology services.

Self-affirmation theory’s central premise is that the overall goal is to maintain self-integrity. People achieve maintenance through reaffirmation of personal core values. This reaffirmation occurs through meaningful thoughts, actions, and emotions. Throughout the individual experiences of the mental performance coaches, they shared experiences where they were able to uphold self-integrity and act consistently to their values. In many cases, these experiences were in relation to honesty or courage, where they acted according to such values in difficult moments. Specifically, being honest with athletes and coaches was described as difficult, however they maintained this self-integrity by being honest anyways. Additionally, values such as care and kindness shaped the way they delivered difficult messages. As evident in Pat’s experience the
message was “not abrasive” though, and she appreciated the “transparency” and being “so real with you.”

As described in Chapter 4, all three supplemental groups identified that the services this staff provided created comprehensive support not only for individuals, but for the sport programs as well. Additionally, all three groups shared consistent thematic findings that these services created means for performance enhancement. Therefore, findings support the statement that when these mental performance coaches maintain self-integrity, this has a positive impact on performance for athletes, coaches, and support staff.

Finally, across-case findings suggest athletes, coaches, and support staff believe that non-sport factors can impact performance. They consistently shared experiences where personal development impacted their performance across all domains, including sport performance. These findings suggest that personal development can impact performance. Additionally, athletes, coaches, and support staff shared times when genuine support and personal connection created openness to sport psychology services. The mental performance coaches all experienced personal development as means to help build performance in sport too. Describing her services and the intersection with her values and self-integrity, Blake explained,

I can talk about (sport) all day with them but ultimately if they’re having like a really nasty breakup with their boyfriend like and I’m trying to say ok, focus and I’m not addressing this it’s all going to go over their head. And so for me holistic sport psychology is the ability and the willingness to value them for more than their athlete role and recognizing importance of all aspects of themselves on performance and address all of them, whether that be you know talking with them about academics, about their personal life, in sessions like making sure that when I’m describing stuff that we talk about how it applies to diving but also other life stuff.
Interpretation of Findings

Constant comparative analysis allowed the researcher to take the data in hand and analyze it again. Through another re-evaluation of the data, the themes constructed by each of the supplemental groups were then compared to the mental performance staff. This helped the researcher better understand what was consistently experienced across all groups, and make meaning out of not only what those delivering sport psychology consistently experienced, but also what those receiving such services consistently experienced. The comparative analysis consisted of comparing themes from each group to the mental performance staff. Finally, the thematic elements that were still stable across all four groups were identified and grouped together.

Taking into account the within-case analysis, across-case analysis and the across-group comparisons, the researcher constructed Figure 4 (p.203) and Figure 5 (p. 204). These figures represent the common elements that overlapped between all three supplemental groups when compared to the mental performance staff. Not only do these figures represent the consistent intersections across groups, they also give suggestion as to how these findings connect back to the major tenets of self-affirmation theory.
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Figure 4. Foundational Support Elements for Performance Enhancement Services
The commonalities in the experiences across all four groups suggest there are several consistent elements that make up performance enhancement services provided by the mental performance staff. Based on the findings, the mental performance staff focuses on providing comprehensive support for individuals and programs to enhance performance. These foundational support elements for performance enhancement are represented in Figure 4 (p.204). The way in which these support elements were present in delivery service experience was particular to a mental performance coach’s personal values. Personal values were at the core of all five mental performance coach’s approach to delivery services, and therefore guided the ways in which they authentically support
performance enhancement. The consistent elements that support performance enhancement are discussed below.

Across the participants’ experiences, personal connection and relationship were the foundations of service delivery. Next, care, investment, honesty, and openness were described to be meaningful ways in which trust was built within their relationships and connections. Through trust, the participants shared that the mental performance coaches had strong understanding of the individualized needs of the athletes, coaches, and programs as a whole. They all shared that having an understanding of the context and the needs within that context created genuine support for performance enhancement. Trust, therefore, was experienced and facilitated services that were tailored to the specific needs of the teams, athletes and staff. In turn, these services were associated with performance enhancement.

As described earlier, while the goal of the program is performance enhancement and personal development, the way in which these goals are met varies based on the personal core values of the mental performance staff members. Figure 4 (p.203) illustrates how values not only impact the ways in which services are provided, but the meaning and evaluation experienced by the mental performance coaches also re-shapes their values in new ways. Each of the mental performance coaches described this evaluation process as one that happens over time, and helps shape the ways in which they better understand their own values. Experiences in their role, as well as past experiences created meaning for the mental performance coaches, and led to deeper understanding of their own authentic values.
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Additionally, Figure 5 (p.204) illustrates the types of roles experienced by participants. Across groups, findings revealed that the mental performance staff roles are consistent with findings presented by Fifter et al. (2008), in having a balance between a friend and professional role. They described the friend role in regards to support for the person, and professional role as support for the sport context specifically. In turn, maintenance of self-integrity impacted the way in which they balanced these two roles on the teams. Meaningful ways in which they expressed their values consistently across all groups were described throughout the experiences as the following actions: coach, model, relate, listen, challenge and learn. Participants experienced each of these actions in all three supplemental groups. Additionally these same intentional actions were reported by the mental performance staff as ways to uphold their personal values and act authentically. They shared that through such experiences they associate growth and greater understanding for their values in these experiences. As Stella described,

I think when you’ve stopped growing you know you need to find something different. I mean when you’re telling yourself that I’ve learned all I can because in this work we’re doing the more you get to know, the more you understand, the more you don’t know. And so I think as long as you can keep that and that passion for your work, that’s the path of mastery we’re all on. And I’m learning more about my values every day. I don’t think they change but maybe some different language to help me understand them more. So I can show up more authentically in those situations you know. Even having this conversation is helpful yeah. And also realizing some of the things about myself you know. But it takes this active intentionality.

Conclusions and Theoretical Application

As Yin (2014) described, the case study’s theoretical foundations allow the findings to be analytically generalized. The study’s findings can therefore be applied specifically back to self-affirmation theory itself. This analytical generalization and theoretical application led to two specific theoretical conclusions.
In conclusion, findings suggest: 1) meaning matters, and 2) self-evaluation matters. In regards to self-affirmation theory, findings suggest the meaning that is created by each individual in the process of maintaining self-integrity is particularly important. This meaning can be created from experiences and from specific values. However without meaning, it would be difficult for a person to understand his or her own authentic self-integrity.

Additionally, while the theory speaks about maintaining self-integrity and reaffirmation of values through meaningful actions, thoughts, and emotions, there is no discussion within the theoretical framework about the evaluation of values, and how these values may change over time. The findings suggest these changes may be slight, however the values can be altered to best fit the person’s true self. Findings show this evaluation process must be intentional, and helps a person determine more clear actions or language that authentically represent one’s true self.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

While the data collection and analysis in this study was rigorous and inclusive of many different experiences and sports, one of the limitations to the study was that there was only one male student-athlete participant. In addition, another limitation was that no “revenue generating” male sports were involved in this research either since none of the five mental performance staff members were integrated with these teams during the 2015-2016 year. This suggests future research studies should look to understand the experience of the male athlete, and more specifically in higher profile sports, to understand their experience with holistic sport psychology services. Additionally, this program is comprised of many staff members delivering sport psychology. Future
research may want to compare the experience of holistic sport psychology services at an institution where only one staff member is able to provide services to all of the teams. Since the majority of programs that have a full time sport psychology professional only have one person, it would be helpful to understand the specific differences in experiences with one mental performance coach compared to a whole staff. Finally, the findings showed that all five mental performance staff members had a common value of hard work. Future research could investigate how this particular value plays a role in holistic delivery services.

Implications

While case studies are not generalizable, researchers argue that as readers bring their own experiences to the case, new knowledge is produced by reader interpretations (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, Yin (2014) suggests that because rigorous qualitative design calls on a theoretical framework, the case study may not be able to generalize populations, however the case study can expand and generalize the theory itself. This analytic generalization can be based on: (a) support, modification, rejection, or advancement of theoretical concepts, or (b) new concepts constructed after the completion of the case study (Yin, 2014).

Findings within the data expressed support and advancement of the theory, based on previous studies related to self-affirmation theory. For example, more recent studies on self-affirmation theory assert that through affirmations of personal core values, performance and problem solving under stressful circumstances is enhanced and leads to balanced processing (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Creswell et al., 2005; 2013; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman et al., 2009). Several participants shared experiences where the
mental performance coach offered “neutral” perspective, or helped keep perspective when coaches and athletes were in the midst of stressful circumstances. Additionally, a recent study found such self-affirmation of values fosters enhanced interpersonal relationships through promotion of trust and closeness (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). These findings are consistent with this qualitative case study as well. All three groups experienced trust and connection through the mental performance coaches’ authentic actions.

As previously discussed, this study’s findings suggest two conclusions in relation back to self-affirmation theory: 1) meaning matters and 2) self-evaluation matters. These general conclusions can further expand the tenets within self-affirmation theory itself. Further research is needed to understand the role self-evaluation plays in the affirmation of personal values across other populations.

Finally, this study’s findings suggest implications for future directions in building and implementing sport psychology services in NCAA Division I programs. Discussing constant comparative analysis, Boeije (2002) described, “When the sampling has been conducted well in a reasonably homogeneous sample, there is a solid basis for generalizing the concepts and the relations between them to units that were absent from the sample, but which represent the same phenomenon” (p. 393). This is particularly beneficial to future directions, as this sample is unique; and with ability to generalize concepts and relations between units that are absent that represent the same phenomenon this has beneficial implications for the direction and development of future holistic integrated sport psychology programs at other collegiate institutions. Particularly this has implications for athletics’ departments who are focused on assisting student-athletes to be
successful performers inside and outside of college athletics. To quote Stella and her experience,

That can be hard sometimes you know that the realistic thing of the world that we work in is that it’s driven a lot by money and politics. You know and we can tend to as athletic departments’ hide around really sexy sayings about student-athlete well-being. We’re not just about athletic success we’re about graduating student-athletes, personal development, etc. And then when we look at all of these decisions that are being made, are our actions and choices lining up with our core beliefs? Sometimes I feel decision makers that don’t have much interaction with the athletes or coaches in the athletic department you know that’ll be hard to wrap their head around cause they are not in touch with their experiences. They don’t know what they don’t know. So if they’re not really in tune with the coach experience, the student-athlete experience, they’re not seeing that’s still trickling down and contributing to unnecessary pressure and stress. And I think again it’s just a reality of the work that we do but media plays a huge piece, our fans play a huge piece, with these expectations of where these 18-22 year olds need to be. And that’s the noise and distractions that create these internal conflicts for our student-athletes and coaches in getting away from this value piece of who they are and upholding their integrity. It reinforces that fixed mindset … they’re only of value when they’re winning, when they win national championships; and as a result their well-being is compromised.

I hope this study inspires new knowledge for athletics directors and departments as a whole. The goal is that we can all show up authentically for those around us, and help everyone strive to be their best performers in sport and life.
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References


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VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY


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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form
(For Participants in Dissertation Research)

Principal Researcher and Contact Information:
Katie McLean, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, Sport Psychology
(913) 220-4686
kamyrd@mail.missouri.edu

Project Title: Values Driven Delivery: A Qualitative Case Study Exploration of the Experience in a Holistic Integrated Sport Psychology Program

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study.
This form provides you with the information about the study. The researcher will describe this study and answer all of your questions. Furthermore, you will receive a copy of this consent form before participating in this study.

When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participate. Please ask the researcher to explain any information that you do not understand.

Right of Refusal
You have the right to know what you will be asked to do, so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in the study if you do not want to. There will be no consequences if you refuse to be in the study. If you decide you no longer want to participate, you may stop at any time without penalty. If you choose to stop participation in this study, simply notify the researcher of your desire to stop the study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which collegiate sport psychology service providers deliver holistic sport psychology services to teams. Specifically, this study primarily looks at the mental performance coaching staff members at the University of Missouri Athletics that are designated to specific sport teams to deliver sport psychology services. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will gather detailed information on the ways in which personal core values and self-integrity impact the delivery of holistic sport psychology services.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in one in-person interview. This interview will consist of questions related to your experiences with holistic sport psychology. The interview will take approximately 120 minutes of your time. The interview will be audio recorded.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

• Your participation in this study is not expected to cause you any potential risks greater than those experienced in everyday life
• Participants have an opportunity to reflect upon their personal experiences and to inform a developing field.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:
• All information collected during the research process will remain confidential. Only the researcher and research team members associated with this project will review the recorded data.
• Your name as well as any other identifying information that could be associated with you will not be changed to protect your privacy and anonymity. Space to choose your pseudonym is provided at the end of this form.
• Any data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will not contain any identifying information that could be associated with you.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Missouri-Columbia and member of its Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications and presentations will use pseudonyms to protect your identity.

Signatures:
I have read and understand this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below represents my voluntary choice to participate in this study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without consequences.

Participant’s Name (Printed): ___________________________ Date: ________________

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Participant’s Pseudonym: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Principal Researcher’s Signature
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: MENTAL PERFORMANCE COACHES

Date: ___________  Location: ________________  Time: __________ to __________

Interview Procedure
Thank you for participating in this interview process. Obviously, you and I have a comfortable working relationship outside of this study, however the goal here today is to gather as much information as possible from your own perspective on how your personal values and self-integrity impact that ways in which you deliver sport psychology services to your team(s). Please feel free to explain or elaborate on topics more than you typically would in a work setting, as if you were describing your experiences for the first time to someone outside of our program. I hope to further understand how you interpret holistic sport psychology. You are the expert of your own experiences, so the goal here today is to simply gather information from your own perspective about your own experiences. If there are any questions you don’t want to answer, you don’t have to. Just so you know, your name as well as any other names or key identifiers mentioned will be changed. So, to my understanding you have been integrated on a sport team as their mental performance coach for at least the past year now. What teams do you work with and how long have you been with those teams?

Interview Questions

1) What made you want become a mental performance coach?
   a) What were your expectations for what this role would be like?
   b) How have your expectations changed in regards to your role after your experience with the team(s) you work with?

2) Based on your experience, what specifically stands out about this mental performance program model?
   a) What is similar to other sport psychology programs?
   b) How is this mental performance staff unique?

3) Talk to me about your day-to-day activities with your team(s)?
   a) What are your interactions like with your head coach(es)?
   b) What are your interactions like with your athletes?
   c) What are your interactions like with the support staff?

4) How would you define holistic sport psychology based on your experiences?
   a) How does this definition guide your delivery services, if at all?

5) What would you describe to be your personal core values?
   a) Talk to me a little bit about why these values are specifically important to you
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6) How do these core values guide your everyday life?
   a) How do they shape your professional role as a mental performance coach?
   b) How do these values complement or contradict your definition of holistic sport psychology?
   c) How are your own values reflected within the mental performance staff’s model?
   d) How are your values embodied within the athletic department’s mission?

7) Talk to me about a specific example when you used one of your core values in your work with your sport team(s)?
   a) Are there other examples that standout to you? If so, what?

8) Based on your experience, what is it like to be integrated within the sport team you work with?
   a) How does this impact your relationships with athletes?
   b) How does this impact your relationship with coaches?
   c) How does this influence your relationship with support staff?

9) How do your values come into play in relation to your connection with athletes and coaches?

10) What are some specific ways you have worked with athletes on performance enhancement?
    a) How do your values influence the ways you went about doing so?

11) What are some specific ways you have worked with athletes on their personal development?
    a) How have your values impacted the ways you went about doing so?

12) What are some specific examples of things you’ve done with coaches in regards to their own professional performance enhancement?
    a) How do your values influence the ways you went about doing so?
    b) What about other support staff members?

13) What are some specific examples of things you’ve done with coaches in regards to their own personal development?
    a) How have your values impacted the ways you went about doing so?
    b) What about other support staff members?

14) What would you describe to be the biggest challenge about this role?

15) How are you able to uphold your own self-integrity in this role?
    a) What obstacles do you face in doing so?
16) Researchers have suggested that, “Rewards and praise are secondary to opportunities for people to manifest their integrity through meaningful acts, thoughts, and feelings.” Can you think of a specific time you maintained your integrity in a meaningful way with athletes you work with?
   a) How did the athlete(s) receive such an action?
   b) Do you feel this impacted their performance or personal development in any way? If so, how?

17) Talk to me about a time you demonstrated your own integrity in a meaningful way with a coach or support staff member.
   a) How did he/she receive this action?
   b) Do you feel this impacted their performance or personal development in any way? If so, how?

18) What are your experiences with tension between personal development and performance enhancement?
   a) How do you maintain self-integrity with such tensions?
   b) How do your values impact the ways you deal with these tensions?

19) Thinking about your own personal values, how have they influenced the way you deliver sport psychology services under stressful circumstances?
   a) Can you think of any specific examples that standout?

20) How have your personal values changed, if at all, based on your experiences working as a mental performance coach?
   a) How has this impacted the way you go about delivering sport psychology services to teams?

21) Do you have any other thoughts on your own experiences in your role as a mental performance coach you’d like to share?
   a) Is there anything else you’d like to share about your own values or self-integrity as a mental performance coach?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your time spent sharing your own personal experiences is very much appreciated. If you think of anything else you’d like to add to this interview, you can reach me at kamyrd@mail.missouri.edu.
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

APPENDIX C

SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: COACHES

Date: ___________  Location: ________________  Time: __________ to __________

Interview Procedure
Thank you for participating in this interview process. While you and I may have a comfortable working relationship outside of this study, the goal here today is to gather as much information as possible from your own perspective on your experience as a coach with an integrated mental performance coach on your team. Please feel free to explain or elaborate on topics more than you typically would, as if you were describing your experiences for the first time to someone outside of our program. I hope to further understand how you interpret your experience with sport psychology. You are the expert of your own experiences, so the goal here today is to simply gather information from your own perspective about your own experiences. If there are any questions you don’t want to answer, you don’t have to. Just so you know, your name as well as any other names or key identifiers mentioned will be changed.

So, to my understanding you have had a mental performance coach on your sport staff for at least the past year. Who was your mental performance coach this past year?

Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me what that was like having him/her on your team?
   a) What were your expectations for what his/her role would be like?
   b) How have your expectations changed in regards to sport psychology after your experience working with him/her?

2) Talk to me about a particular experience you had with (mental performance coach) that was meaningful for you?
   a) Are there any other meaningful moments that stand out?

3) What is it about (mental performance coach) that makes him/her effective in delivering sport psychology skills?
   a) How has that impacted your relationship with him/her if at all?

4) What is it about (mental performance coach) that makes him/her ineffective in delivery sport psychology skills?
   a) How has that impacted your relationship with him/her if at all?

5) What is it like having a mental performance coach integrated on your staff?
   a) What personal benefits, if any, do you see in having (mental performance coach) on your team?
   b) How has this impacted your athletes, if at all?
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

c) From your perspective, how has this impacted your support staff, if at all?

6) What influence, if any, has (mental performance coach) had on you as a coach?

7) What influence, if any, has (mental performance coach) had on you as a person?

8) Talk to me about what it is like to have (mental performance coach) with you and your team under stressful circumstances?

9) Based on your experience, what would you define the role of a mental performance coach to be?

10) How would you describe your experience with (mental performance coach) to other head coaches outside of our program?

11) Do you have any other thoughts on your own experiences having a mental performance coach on your staff you’d like to share?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your time spent sharing your own personal experiences is very much appreciated. If you think of anything else you’d like to add to this interview, you can reach me at kamyrd@mail.missouri.edu.

C. Supplemental Interview Protocol

SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ATHLETES

Date: __________ Location: _________________ Time: __________ to __________

Interview Procedure
Thank you for participating in this interview process. While you and I may have a comfortable working relationship outside of this study, the goal here today is to gather as much information as possible from your own perspective on your experience as an athlete with an integrated mental performance coach on your team. Please feel free to explain or elaborate on topics more than you typically would, as if you were describing your experiences for the first time to someone outside of our program. I hope to further understand how you interpret your experience with sport psychology. You are the expert of your own experiences, so the goal here today is to simply gather information from your own perspective about your own experiences. If there are any questions you don’t want to answer, you don’t have to. Just so you know, your name as well as any other names or key identifiers mentioned will be changed.
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

So, to my understanding you have had a mental performance coach on your sport team for at least the past year. Who was your mental performance coach this past year?

Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me what that was like having him/her on your team?
   a) What were your expectations for what his/her role would be like?
   b) How have your expectations changed in regards to sport psychology after your experience working with him/her?

2) Talk to me about a particular experience you had with (mental performance coach) that was meaningful for you?
   a) Are there any other meaningful moments that stand out?

3) What is it about (mental performance coach) that makes him/her effective in delivering sport psychology skills?
   a) How has that impacted your relationship with him/her if at all?

4) What is it about (mental performance coach) that makes him/her ineffective in delivery sport psychology skills?
   a) How has that impacted your relationship with him/her if at all?

5) What is it like having a mental performance coach integrated on your team?
   a) What personal benefits, if any, do you see in having (mental performance coach) on your team?
   b) How has this impacted other teammates, if at all?
   b) How has this impacted your coaches, if at all?

6) What influence, if any, has (mental performance coach) had on you as an athlete?

7) What influence, if any, has (mental performance coach) had on you as a person?

8) Talk to me about what it is like to have (mental performance coach) with you and your team under stressful circumstances?

9) Based on your experience, what would you define the role of a mental performance coach to be?

10) Do you have any other thoughts on your own experiences having a mental performance coach on your team you’d like to share?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your time spent sharing your own personal experiences is very much appreciated. If you think of anything else you’d like to add to this interview, you can reach me at kamyrd@mail.missouri.edu.
C. Supplemental Interview Protocol

SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SUPPORT STAFF

Date: ___________ Location: ________________ Time: __________ to__________

Interview Procedure
Thank you for participating in this interview process. While you and I may have a
comfortable working relationship outside of this study, the goal here today is to gather as
much information as possible from your own perspective on your experience as a staff
member with an integrated mental performance coach on your team. Please feel free to
explain or elaborate on topics more than you typically would, as if you were describing
your experiences for the first time to someone outside of our program. I hope to further
understand how you interpret your experience with sport psychology. You are the expert
of your own experiences, so the goal here today is to simply gather information from
your own perspective about your own experiences. If there are any questions you don’t
want to answer, you don’t have to. Just so you know, your name as well as any other
names or key identifiers mentioned will be changed.

So, to my understanding you have had a mental performance coach on your sport staff for
at least the past year. Who was your team’s mental performance coach this past year?

Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me what that was like having him/her on your team?
   a) What were your expectations for what his/her role would be like?
   b) How have your expectations changed in regards to sport psychology
      after your experience working with him/her?

2) Talk to me about a particular experience you had with (mental performance coach)
   that was meaningful for you?
   a) Are there any other meaningful moments that stand out?

3) What is it about (mental performance coach) that makes him/her effective in
   delivering sport psychology skills?
   a) How has that impacted your relationship with him/her if at all?

4) What is it about (mental performance coach) that makes him/her ineffective in
   delivery sport psychology skills?
   a) How has that impacted your relationship with him/her if at all?

5) What is it like having a mental performance coach integrated on your staff?
   a) What personal benefits, if any, do you see in having (mental
      performance coach) on your staff?
b) How has this impacted your athletes, if at all?
c) From your perspective, how has this influenced the head coach, if at all?
d) How has this impacted other support staff, if at all?

6) What influence, if any, has (mental performance coach) had on you professionally?

7) What influence, if any, has (mental performance coach) had on you as a person?

8) Talk to me about what it is like to have (mental performance coach) with you and your team under stressful circumstances?

9) Based on your experience, what would you define the role of a mental performance coach to be?

10) How would you describe your experience with (mental performance coach) to other professional peers outside of our program?

11) Do you have any other thoughts on your own experiences having a mental performance coach on your staff you’d like to share?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your time spent sharing your own personal experiences is very much appreciated. If you think of anything else you’d like to add to this interview, you can reach me at kamyrd@mail.missouri.edu.
1. Mission

**Primary Mission:** High Performance Excellence

**Secondary Mission:** Provide Support for Performers

2. Services: Comprehensive and Integrated

**Sport Psychology - THINKING RIGHT IN SPORT!**

Performance enhancement services for athletes, coaches, and support staff. Anchored by the skills of FOCUS- Time Orientation, Positive Self-Talk, Composure, Concentration, and Confidence. Grounded in strong personal and team development and holistic well-being.

**Mental Performance Team**

- Dr. [Name] - Director - Volleyball, Women’s Bball, Softball
- Dr. [Name] - Tennis, Gymnastics
- Dr. [Name] - Golf, Soccer
- Dr. [Name] - Diving
- Dr. [Name] - Swimming
- Dr. [Name] - Soccer

- Dr. [Name] - Gymnastics
3. Sport Psychology

Coach/Team Support
Individual Coach Support
Individual Athlete Support
"Women for Women", "Men for Men" Programs
Tiger Leadership Institute
Monthly "Mindset" Communication
Psychological Rehabilitation of the Injured Athlete with Athletic Trainers
Within Athletic Training/Sports Medicine Program
Within Strength & Conditioning Program
Within Total Person Program

4. Positive Coaching- Demanding NOT Demeaning!

Ultimate Application of Sport Psychology- To and Through the Coach!

Coach and Staff Education- 24 Guiding Principles of Positive Coaching
Coach and Athlete-Driven Collaboration
Department Wide Workshops
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

APPENDIX E

Graduation Date (May/December/August and Year): ____________________
Former College Sport: ___________________________
Team Mental Performance Coach: ______________________
Current Job/Professional Role: _______________________

Reflective Journal Questions

What was it like for you personally to have a mental performance coach on your team?

Describe a particular experience you had with your mental performance coach that was meaningful for you.

What aspects of mental performance program were most useful to you? Why?
What have you taken away from the mental performance program? How, if at all, does it help you be successful today?

Do you have any other thoughts on your experience having had a mental performance coach on your team you’d like to share?

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on your personal experience with sport psychology! 😊
Interview Tagging Sample
## Case Analysis Chart Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amy</th>
<th>Lucie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding context is beneficial to services</td>
<td>Investment and trial and error with mental skills helped find what worked for her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being integrated within the context reminds you of your mental goals, helps you stay on track</td>
<td>- Strengths and visualizations, self-awareness, mental toughness/stability/transferability of skills to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the process rather than the outcome</td>
<td>Relationship and trust built on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation/perspective</td>
<td>p. 1, lines 32-38 – individualized needs, knows her therefore can talk more specifically/deeper about her goals and mental habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the sport, understanding the team, understanding her</td>
<td>p. 1, lines 26-69 – understands golf and can talk after a round about things she can’t see while she’s performing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Integrated, presence reminder at practice and competition what’s important and what’s destructive</td>
<td>p. 2 88-91 – understanding the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process in golf and out of golf, impact on culture and coaches</td>
<td>p. 3, lines 96-103 – travel to competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 4, lines 165-174 – creating a culture with process oriented, ownership by the coaches too</td>
<td>p. 5 – 201-209 positive perspective, process in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 5-6, lines 228-230 listening because needs are different</td>
<td>p. 3-4, lines 137-139 – keeps you on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

APPENDIX H

Research Questions

1. How do personal core values impact the ways in which a mental performance coach delivers holistic sport psychology?

2. How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence performance with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with?

3. How does a mental performance coach’s self-integrity influence personal development with athletes, coaches, and support staff they work with?
VALUES DRIVEN DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY

VITA

Katie was born in Dallas, Texas. She was a competitive gymnast for 10 years, and competed in track and field for six years. Prior to high school, Katie moved to Overland Park, Kansas, and attended Blue Valley Northwest High School. During high school, she coached gymnastics, which ignited her curiosity in the mental aspects of sport performance. She attended the University of Kansas, and graduated with Bachelors’ degrees in Sport Science and Psychology. While at KU, she oversaw the Student Relays Committee, and was intricately involved in the Kansas Relays event.

Prior to graduate school, Katie earned an internship position with the University of Missouri, shadowing the Director of Sport Psychology, Dr. Richard McGuire. During her Master’s degree work, Katie worked as a graduate assistant in Mizzou Athletics’ Student-Athlete Development department. She graduated in 2014 with her Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology with a focus in Career and Sport Psychology. Over the course of her doctoral work, Katie worked as a Mental Performance Coach in Mizzou’s Athletics Department. She assisted with several teams developing comprehensive, integrated performance enhancement services. Katie directly oversaw all mental performance services for the Mizzou Gymnastics and Tennis programs.

Throughout her graduate work, Katie taught several sport psychology topics in various courses. Additionally she co-presented several workshops and seminars at the annual Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) conference. She was first author in AASP’s Performance Excellence Movement publication. While at Mizzou, Katie served as a Women4Women committee member. This was a social responsibility initiative built to empower female student-athletes while addressing various relevant
topics such as body image, alcohol awareness, healthy relationships, and personal identities. The past two years she served as a Tiger Leadership Institute facilitator. She facilitated leadership development programming to student-athletes across various sports. Katie will be honored this year at the annual AASP conference as the 2017 Distinguished Doctoral Student Practice Award recipient.