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The Role of Spirituality in Sport Psychology Consulting: An Analysis and Integrative Review of Literature

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Abstract

This review suggests that the concept of spirituality should be considered seriously within sport psychology research and consultancy. Four key areas are addressed: how spirituality may be reconciled into the athlete-centered model, the integration of spirituality and religious observances into mental skills training (MST), the relationship between spirituality and positive psychological states such as flow and peak experiences, and the role of spirituality in counseling. Recent work has acknowledged the importance of spirituality in consultancy work (Ravizza, 2002a) and religious beliefs and rituals for some athletes (Czech & Burke, in press). Despite extensive study in psychology, research of spirituality in sport psychology has been slow to emerge. Some of the reasons for this are discussed and suggestions made in relation to how this important concept can be integrated into research and consultancy work. Future research and theoretical work should focus on both performance enhancement and life skills development.

Sport psychology consultants work with athletes who hold widely differing values and beliefs about their sporting and everyday life. Inevitably a significant number of these athletes will have spiritual or religious beliefs. Given this situation it is surprising that spirituality has received little attention in the sport psychology literature. The scientific study and acceptance of spirituality and religion has been slow to emerge in sport psychology. This is despite extensive study in our parent discipline, psychology (e.g., Richards & Bergin, 1997, 1999; Shafranske, 1996), and the recent founding of the "positive psychology" movement (e.g., Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The positive psychology movement views spirituality as having an important role in fostering excellence in human activities and enhancing health and well-being. Within the field of positive psychology, psychological constructs such as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and peak experiences (Maslow, 1968) are understood to encompass spiritual elements. This has provided a foundation for those wishing to explore spirituality in applied sport psychology.

A number of recent studies (Czech & Burke, in press; Dillon & Tait, 2000; Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, & Templin, 2000) and theoretical work (Nesti, in press; Ravizza, 2002a) has identified the important role that spirituality can play in enhancing sport performance, and contributing to personal growth and well-being. This work is closely linked to the recent shift in the field toward a more "athlete centered" model for sport psychology consultancy, where ". . . performance excellence is pursued only in the context of the athlete's overall health and well-being: physically, psychologically, and socially" (Miller & Kerr, 2002, p. 150). While a more holistic approach is welcomed, the absence of spirituality from this model denies both the athlete and the sport psychology consultant a valuable tool. It is suggested that research on spirituality in sport psychology can make a valuable contribution to the extant literature in the field. The aim of this review is to provide an outline of how spirituality may impinge upon practice and research in sport psychology, and to stimulate further discussion and study.

As spirituality and religion are notoriously difficult to define, it is important to offer a working definition. In broad terms, religion can be defined as ". . . a system of beliefs in divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed toward such a power" (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975, p. 1). Examples are Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism.

Spirituality can be defined from a religious or humanist perspective, where personal meaning is derived from whatever people deem to be ultimate, and valued in and of itself (Helminiak, 1996). With regard to performance excellence in sport, Ravizza (2002a) suggests ". . . when physical, mental, and emotional components join together movement takes on a spiritual dimension in the sense of purpose that is attained" (p. 14). In a broader context, spirituality could also refer to an athlete's close relationships, or extraordinary and self-affirming moments in life such as winning an Olympic medal, or securing a personal best.

Unless otherwise stated, these two descriptions of spirituality will be used in this review to discuss performance excellence and the broader life issues that may arise in sport psychology consultancy. The following section will critically evaluate existing literature that has dealt with spiritual issues in sport psychology, and highlight future directions for research.

SPIRITUALITY IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Sport psychology consultants have raised concerns over the apparent gulf that exists between academic research and "doing" sport psychology (Martens, 1979, 1987). Salter (1997) has been particularly critical of this, claiming that, ". . . what I was reading in the journals did not come close to capturing what I was being asked to work with as a psychologist . . . there is a pressing need to remedy the excesses of the positivistically based therapies with an awareness of the spiritual" (pp. 258-259). Following 25 years as a sport psychology consultant, Ravizza (2002a) has also argued for a more holistic approach in performance enhancement work. This includes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of an athlete's performance and life. He emphasizes the need to balance ". . . specific techniques and a broader philosophical perspective" (p. 5) when undertaking consultancy work.

Past research of spirituality in sport psychology has primarily focused on peak experiences (e.g., Ravizza, 2002b). However, the use of prayer in sport (Czech, Wrisberg, Fisher, Thompson, & Hayes, 2004), and the spiritual aspects of counseling (Nesti, in press) have also been acknowledged as important topics in sport psychology consultancy. This work provides a basis for future research and practice, and points us toward a more holistic understanding of sport psychology. Four broad research areas are proposed that could make a meaningful contribution to the sport psychology literature. First, examining how spirituality may be reconciled into current athlete-centered models, which seek to optimize both performance excellence and personal excellence. Second, exploring how spirituality and religious observances can be integrated into MST. Third, further investigation of the relationship between spirituality, and positive psychological states such as flow and peak experience. Finally, research focusing on how and when spirituality can be useful in sport psychology counseling.

Spirituality in the Athlete-Centered Model

The "psychology of athletic excellence", which is a well established and growing area within the field (Gould, 2002), may greatly benefit from expanding current models to incorporate spirituality. A key concept within this area is the athlete-centered sport model, wherein performance excellence and personal excellence are viewed as equally important developmental outcomes (Danish & Nellen, 1997). Performance excellence relates to quantifiable outcomes from competitive sport. Personal excellence refers to a wide range of life skills that may contribute to holistic health and well-being across the life span. Current life skills models encompass moral, social, psychological, emotional and intellectual aspects of an athlete's life (Miller & Kerr, 2002). It is argued that including spirituality under the umbrella of life skills in sport is an important step toward providing a truly holistic service in sport psychology. This is supported by recent literature in exercise psychology (Berger, Pargman, & Weinberg, 2002), which emphasizes the importance

of spirituality in promoting health and personal growth through the medium of exercise.

Research of life skills in sport (e.g., Curry & Maniar, 2003; Danish & Nellen, 1997) has led to an increasing number of sport psychology life skills programs in American colleges and universities. This can be seen as a response to the traditional performance oriented sport psychology interventions, where the accomplishment of performance outcomes was the principal aim (Miller & Kerr, 2002). In their review, which examined the relationship between performance and personal excellence, Miller and Kerr (2002) noted that the content of life skills programs frequently match problems identified in subsequent research that has investigated the cost of pursuing performance excellence in sport. Athletic retirement, career-ending injuries, poor identity development, and poor career planning are all areas normally covered within sport life skills programs. An understanding of spirituality may be particularly advantageous for sport psychology consultants faced with these issues. Past research has shown the often traumatic and stressful impact of athletic retirement (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2001; Lavallee, Gordon, & Grove, 1997) and career-ending injuries (Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Beck, 1997), which in some athletes has resulted in clinical depression and even suicide attempts (Ogilvie, 1987). Lavallee, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, and Edge (2000) have noted that when counseling athletes who have suffered career-ending injuries or are confronting athletic retirement, it is likely that existential questions related to meaning, values and spirituality will arise. Adopting a framework of meaning that includes spirituality would provide both the athlete and sport psychology consultant a valuable source for addressing both sport and non-sport issues. However, no such framework currently exists in the sport psychology literature. How then can spirituality be integrated into sport psychology research and practice?

One method would be to draw on the science of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which provides an appropriate theoretical framework and empirical literature base for studying spirituality in sport psychology. Integral to the positive psychology field is the notion of "flourishing." This means to discover and experience a sense of meaning, enjoyment and health and well-being in life (Keyes & Haidt, 2003). A central tenet of flourishing is the prevention of psychological pathology. Themes such as perseverance, optimism, wisdom, and courage are encouraged and developed to provide resistance from psychological conditions such as depression. Within this taxonomy of human strengths and positive psychological attributes, Emmons (2003) advocates spirituality as an important part of attaining health and well-being. He suggests spirituality is particularly important in offering purpose and meaning to human activities and life. This approach to psychology closely relates to the aims of the athlete-centered approach advocated in sport psychology. By fostering personal qualities such as perseverance, courage, and optimism, and encouraging an awareness of the spiritual, consultants can help athletes become more able to cope with the adversities and pressures of high-level sport. Similarly, the use of spiritual and religious observances in sport, especially prayer, for dealing with performance anxieties and personal difficulties has been shown to be an important yet neglected area of research.

Spirituality and Religious Observances in Mental Skills Training

The relevance of spirituality in mental preparation for sport may be significant in two distinct ways. First, the use of spirituality in the development of mental skills for sport and non-sport issues across the life span. This is in line with the recommendations of Miller and Kerr (2002) that have recently stressed the need for sport psychology consultants to view mental skills training (MST) as a means of developing life skills in addition to performance enhancement. They suggest a number of cognitive-behavioral methods, such as arousal regulation, anxiety control, and

motivational techniques, which can be useful in everyday life. Where necessary, it is suggested that broadening traditional MST approaches to include spirituality may prove to be beneficial to both athlete and consultant.

The personal beliefs of the athlete, and the nature and length of the athlete-practitioner relationship, may dictate whether spiritual or religious concerns will arise. If the athlete-practitioner relationship is relatively short, it may be less likely that spiritual or religious matters will be considered. However, where an athlete and a sport psychology consultant work together over a considerable period, and build a close and trusting relationship, the potential for broader life issues and existential concerns to emerge in applied practice is increased (Nesti, in press). According to Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, and Robinson (2002), the main aim of the sport psychology consultant is to enhance performance, alongside secondary concerns such as improving the quality of the sport experience, increasing psychological skills, and facilitating athlete well-being and personal development. In following these suggestions, sport psychology consultants need to reflect upon the neglect of spirituality in research and practice, especially where this involves more long-term counseling work.

The second way, in which sport psychology consultants may benefit from incorporating spirituality into MST programs, is when working with athletes who hold specific religious or spiritual beliefs. The existence of organizations such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and The Center for Sport and Jewish Life in America, and Christians in Sport in the United Kingdom, is evidence that a large number of sports participants hold religious or spiritual beliefs. A study by Vernacchia et al. (2000) identified the importance of spiritual and religious factors in athletes' lives. Fifteen Olympic track and field athletes (nine male, six female) were interviewed and a thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. Emergent themes included mental skills and attitudes, developmental concerns, socioeconomic factors, and spiritual and religious factors. Of those interviewed, six athletes identified how spirituality, religion and prayer had been an important element of their athletic careers. Results showed that athletes relied on spirituality, religion and prayer to overcome failures, struggles and adversity, when suffering from injury and personal problems that impacted upon their athletic life. It was also found that athlete's spiritual and religious beliefs provided a deeper meaning to success and failure in their careers, and helped them remain faithful to training regimes. The following quote from an athlete encapsulates many of these themes:

> Just remember that down the line you'll be successful, it may not be tomorrow. It may not be the next day, and it may not be a year from now, but if you can be patient, and keep your goals, and just keep those in sight, and trust in God that He'll give you what you want, then it'll come eventually . . . its not the victory, it's the path that you take to get there that makes you a better person, and it's the sacrifices, and the training and the struggles and the work that you put in that's going to make you a better person than rather just winning and standing on the top rung of the award stand. (Vernacchia et al., 2000, p. 19)

These comments illustrate how athletes' spiritual and religious beliefs are inextricably bound to their sporting experience, and psychological interpretation of the world. Notably, athletes in Vernacchia et al.'s (2000) study also reported the frequent use of prayer in their careers. This has become common place in the world of sport, with many athletes utilizing religious practices, especially prayer, as a coping mechanism and performance enhancement technique (Acevedo, Dzewaltowski, Gill, & Noble, 1992; Czech & Burke, in press; Czech et al., 2004; Park, 2000).

Czech et al. (2004) recently investigated the use of Christian prayer in sport and state that ". . . prayer and/or spiritual rituals are becoming common for athletes before, during, and after

sporting contests" (p. 3). Qualitative data was collected by interviewing nine former division I collegiate Christian athletes. Phenomenological methods were used to analyze interview transcripts. Results showed that ". . . ritualistic activity has a powerful influence on athletes" and that ". . . athletes use prayer as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress" (p. 6). These findings are congruent with prayer studies in the psychology of religion (Finney & Malony, 1985; McCullough, 1995) and medical science (Bernardi et al., 2001; Leibovici, 2001) that demonstrate the positive psychological and physiological effect of prayer.

Clearly, religious observances such as prayer appear to be extremely helpful for athletes who hold strong religious convictions. They seem to provide the athlete with a type of pre-competition awareness training that helps center the performer and alleviate performance-related anxieties. The effects of prayer for reducing stress and anxiety in sport is supported by empirical research in non-sport contexts (Janssen, Hart, & Draak, 1990; Koeing, 1988). Whilst high quality empirical research is imperative, these findings largely substantiate the ancient teachings of all the monotheistic religions. Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers down the ages have used prayer as a means of strength and comfort in times of trouble and adversity.

To date, research in sport psychology has only examined the prayer experiences of Christian athletes in sport. It is plausible that athletes from different religious traditions will employ different types of religious practices in their sporting life. Athletes who are adherents of the three major monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, will most likely use prayer directed to God. While, athletes following eastern religions and philosophies, such as Buddhism or Hinduism, may be more likely to use meditative techniques to quieten the mind and attain focus prior to competition. Consequently, there is extensive scope for further research in sport psychology examining the diversity of religious observances and meditative techniques that may be used by athletes.

When dealing with religious athletes, it is proposed that sport psychology consultants can include prayer and other religious practices as a useful adjunct to conventional MST. The degree to which prayer or meditative techniques replaces, or is used alongside traditional methods such as imagery and relaxation techniques, will depend on the situation and athlete. If we are to recognize religion as a legitimate and important area of research in sport psychology, there are many questions to be addressed: How can a consultant with little or no knowledge of the athlete's religious worldview adequately understand their intrinsic motivations? Moreover, do we need to follow the lead of clinical psychology (Brawer, Handal, Fabricatore, Roberts, & Wajda-Johnston, 2002) by incorporating spirituality and religion into educational models in sport psychology? What is the relationship between the use of prayer and sport performance? If the athlete has spiritual problems, for example a crisis of faith, how does this affect their psychological status and sport performance? Beyond the consideration of specific religious beliefs, sport psychology consultants could also benefit from a greater understanding of the spiritual aspects of flow states and peak experiences in relation to performance.

Spirituality in Flow and Peak Experience Research in Sport

A major aim of applied sport psychology research is to facilitate performance through the investigation of positive psychological states, such as flow and peak experiences. There are strong conceptual links between recent studies (e.g., Dillon & Tait, 2000) and theoretical work (Ravizza, 2002a) addressing spirituality in sport psychology and past research of flow and peak experiences in sport (e.g., Della-Fave, Bassi, & Massimini, 2003; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Hollander & Acevedo, 2000; Ravizza, 1977, 1984). This has provided a valuable starting point for researchers wanting to examine the relationship between positive subjective states and the spiritual.

An important addition to the literature is a recent exploratory study which examined the relationship between spirituality and "being in the zone" in team sports (Dillon & Tait, 2000).

Dillon and Tait (2000) hypothesized that there would be a relationship between spirituality and the experience of being in the zone in a team sport setting, using the Spirituality in Sports Test (SIST) and the Zone Test (ZT). The validity of the SIST and ZT were tested by correlating the results with The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale-26 and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 respectively. The authors refer to the term being in the zone as synonymous with the concept of flow. Spirituality is defined as ". . . experiencing the presence of a power, a force, an energy, or a God close to you" (p. 93). This broad definition of spirituality included religiosity, and was deemed appropriate for a preliminary investigation. Results showed a statistically significant relationship between scores on the SIST and the ZT, $r(55) = .49$, $p < .001$. Dillon and Tait suggest their findings provide ". . . empirical verification for the relationship between spirituality and being in the zone in sports" (p. 91).

While Dillon and Tait (2000) should be commended for addressing a much-needed area of research, one limitation of their study is the use of questionnaires to measure the experiential states of spirituality and being in the zone. Researchers of flow in sport (Czikszentmihalyi, 1992; Jackson & Marsh, 1996) and spirituality in psychology (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999) have voiced concerns about utilizing quantitative instruments to measure experiential states. Jackson and Marsh (1996) advocate the need for a multi-method approach when investigating flow in sport. Future research of spirituality in sport psychology may benefit from collecting supporting qualitative data, thus adding depth and meaning to quantitative results.

From a more applied perspective, Ravizza (2002b) has noted that the spiritual aspect of peak experiences in sport is often neglected in traditional sport psychology approaches. For Ravizza, the spiritual dimension of peak experiences in sport is when athletes experience ". . . a feeling of being connected to a greater whole" (p.14). In his role as a sport psychology consultant, Ravizza uses "awareness training" as a means of exploring greater personal meaning in athletes' lives, and optimizing performance excellence. He suggests that this helps athletes ". . . transcend the uncertain and uncontrollable aspects of sport performance and move towards total immersion in the act" (p. 14). The majority of Ravizza's (2002a) consultancy work has been with elite athletes. Future research may wish to examine the importance of spirituality in athletes of different movement competencies. As task mastery is one of the key factors in achieving peak experiences (Maslow, 1968) and flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), it is plausible that spirituality may not be as important for novice or less skilled athletes.

Elsewhere, Ravizza (2002a) has noted the similarities between the characteristics of peak experience and certain elements of Zen philosophy and Hatha Yoga. In particular, their effectiveness in facilitating athletes to transcend the ego, become immersed in the task and enter a state of relaxed concentration, which can lead to performance enhancement.

This is supported by the results of Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) much earlier qualitative study of flow in rock climbing. Thirty rock climbers of varying skill and ability levels were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Nine of the subjects reported "deep-flow experiences", which they categorized as ". . . transcendent, religious, visionary, or ecstatic" (p. 88). One participant commented that, "It's the Zen feeling, like meditation or concentration. One thing you're after is one-pointedness of mind . . . somehow the right thing is done without ever thinking about it" (p. 87). Another important finding of this study was that the lack of external rewards and the inherent danger and risk involved in rock climbing acts as a vehicle for participants to explore deeper personal meaning and purpose. Research of ultra-marathon runners has also shown that the

extreme mental and physical demands placed on the athlete often require different psychological strategies not used in traditional sports (Acevedo et al., 1992). Reflection on existential and spiritual questions, such as the meaning of life, the natural environment and God, and the use of prayer and singing during events was reported by participants. This is congruent with Ravizza's (2002a) understanding of spirituality in consultancy work as ". . . the sense of purpose an athlete has in their performance , because when they know why they perform and what they enjoy about performance, it is easier to persevere through the difficult times" (p. 15).

Although Ravizza's consideration of philosophical and spiritual issues is relatively new to academic sport psychology, in the last 30 years there have been a number of publications closely related to peak experience and flow research (e.g., Cooper, 1998; Leonard & Murphy, 1995; Murphy, 1977, 1995; Murphy & White, 1995). Arguably, Michael Murphy is the most prominent of this group having written extensively on the mystical and spiritual nature of sport. Murphy and White (1995) conducted an extensive review of literature, documenting over 1,000 meta-normal experiences in sport, which they label as ". . . mystical, occult, or religious" (p. 4). The central thesis of Murphy's work is that sports offer us the potential to awaken the deeper self and experience personal growth. Murphy's work has received little attention in academic sport psychology. However, there have been notable exceptions (Berger et al., 2002; Ravizza, 1977, 2002b).

Whilst acknowledging the limitations of Murphy's work, those undertaking empirical research of the spiritual aspects of flow and peak experiences in sport, can greatly benefit from reading this literature. Due to Murphy's sympathy for eastern philosophies, a significant part of his work has focused on the spiritual and transformative characteristics of the martial arts.

Proponents of martial arts have long recognized the benefits of integrating mind and body through spiritual awareness (Abe, 1986; Herrigel, 1971/1999). Drawing on the precepts of eastern philosophies, primarily Zen Buddhism, martial artists and sports coaches (Jackson, Delehanty, & Bradley, 1996; Parent, 2002), have formulated various frameworks for teaching, coaching, and enhancing spiritual growth. Zen, can be defined as ". . . action with awareness, being completely in the present moment" (Parent, 2002, p. xv). It is often viewed as synonymous to the flow and peak experience constructs, or what athletes describe as being in the zone. Commonalties include a feeling of effortlessness, increased mastery, feelings of awe and perfection, acute intuition, profound joy, and feelings of self-transcendence (Cooper, 1998). Nonetheless, researchers should note that whilst there are many similarities and corresponding qualities between these subjective mind states, there are also a number of subtle differences.

Timothy Gallwey (1974, 1986) has synthesized many of these principles into a workable set of theories for sport performers. The basic premise of his *inner game* philosophy is that mental interference, in the form of self-doubt, anxiety, lapses in concentration, and fear of failure, significantly inhibit our sport performance potential. Through reworking elementary meditative and psychological techniques, Gallwey has devised a whole set of exercises to overcome these mental obstacles (Cooper, 1998). Gallwey's inner game philosophy is ". . . a mixture of Zen, Yoga and common sport psychology" (Wertz, 1977, p. 70). Hence, his approach has many affinities with Ravizza's (2002b) research of spirituality and peak experiences, and the use of Zen philosophy and Hatha Yoga in his consultancy work (Ravizza, 2002a). In summary, Gallwey's work may provide a valuable source of knowledge for future research in this area, especially for building bridges between academic sport psychology and the coaching community.

Clearly, significant gains are to be made from further investigation of the spiritual aspect of peak experiences and flow, and its links to both performance excellence and personal excellence.

Topics that deserve further exploration include: the relationship between spirituality and experiential states in sport; methods of enhancing spiritual awareness in sport; appropriate epistemologies and methodologies for investigating the relationship between positive psychological states and spirituality; further development of quantitative instruments for measuring spirituality and experiential states in sport; and the role of spirituality and experiential states in developing performance excellence and personal excellence. When facilitating athletes to achieve positive psychological states and self-growth, consultants may also need to consider the role of spirituality in counseling.

Spirituality in Sport Psychology Counseling

In a recent symposia at the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) 2002 conference, Sverduk, Albaugh, Ravizza, and Moore (2002) discussed ways in which to incorporate spirituality and alternative philosophies into sport psychology consultancy. These included existential, humanistic, and theological philosophies. Ravizza (2002a) and Nesti (in press) have identified the usefulness of existential philosophy in sports psychology counseling. They suggest that sport psychology interventions that encourage greater self-awareness, a search for meaning, and absorption in the activity, can help facilitate an athlete's journey toward spiritual growth and performance excellence. Existential-phenomenological research has become increasingly popular with sport psychology researchers and consultants (e.g., Brawley, Caron, & Widmeyer, 1992; Dale, 1996, 2000; Fahlberg, Fahlberg, & Gates, 1992; Nesti, in press). When athletes try to describe important yet difficult to articulate areas of their life, existential concerns such as spiritual meaning, values, and anxiety, phenomenology provides researchers with an appropriate method for collecting data from the athletes' "lived world".

Existential-phenomenological psychology is a particularly useful approach for dealing with those many issues facing athletes that are unlikely to be adequately addressed by MST. Athletes will often encounter boundary situations in sport, such as retirement, moving onto a different level or team, or suffering a career threatening injury. These events in an athlete's life can be accompanied by normal anxiety. This type of anxiety is described by existential psychologists as being ". . . not disproportionate to an objective threat, involves little repression and can be dealt with constructively . . . and; that neurotic anxiety occurs when a person has failed to meet the challenge of normal anxiety" (Nesti, 2002, p. 39). Following from this, existential counseling in sport psychology is oriented towards assisting the athlete to face normal anxiety constructively, which should then lead to personal growth and a stronger sense of self.

From a different perspective, Corlett (1996) has argued for the usefulness of Socratic philosophy in consultancy work. He suggests that the most important task facing sport psychology consultants is to provide counseling aimed at developing greater "self- knowledge" in athletes. Miller and Kerr (2002) support this, emphasizing the importance of sport psychology consultants encouraging self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-knowledge in athletes and coaches. In consultancy work, this could mean encouraging the athlete to take more responsibility in making important decisions and facilitating them in exploring personal meaning. Encouraging athletes to read literature from philosophy, psychology, and theology, may be one practical way to develop critical and self-reflective thought in athletes (Nesti, in press). The viability of this approach will depend on the age, beliefs, and educational status of the athlete. Sport psychology consultants should carefully select and suggest appropriate literature for each individual.

The efficacy of this approach is evidenced in the life of Jonathan Edwards, Olympic triple jump champion and practising Christian. Following the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Edwards experienced a crisis of meaning in his life, which was the catalyst for ". . . a period of soul

searching" (Folley, 2001, p. 285). "I thought hard about what direction I was going in, why I was feeling like this? I had lost all my motivation", Edwards explained; his jumping ". . . had become joyless and hard work" (p. 285). It was through reading a book on personal meaning by existential psychiatrist Victor Frankl, that Edwards found guidance and direction. The result was a reorganisation of his life, especially in prioritizing between his work as a professional athlete, his family life, and Christian faith. This highlights the valuable role that existential psychology can play in consultancy work.

In terms of the work of sport psychology consultants, Buber (1958) has claimed that the role of the counselor or therapist is to meet the client in an encounter where they are viewed as a person rather than as an individual. Buber describes that this involves the desire on the part of the counsellor to approach the other as a *Thou*, rather than an *It*. This distinction has been discussed in other work in relation to sport and the experience of flow (Progen & DeSensi, 1984). An *I-it* relationship is where each party views the other as an object and is dominated by a functional and utilitarian perspective. The *I-thou* mode requires an unguarded self-giving of one person to another. This is closely related to the personality of the sport psychology consultant, and their capacity to maintain an attitude of "disponibilite" (Marcel, 1948) or spiritual availability. Corlett (1996) and Nesti (2002) have argued that to develop self- knowledge and the spiritual dimension of their personalities, sport psychology consultants would benefit from a greater understanding of philosophy and the humanities in preparation for applied work. This is in line with recent recommendations for the need to further develop consultants' personalities, especially their humanistic skills, through sport psychology training programs (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004).

There are many possible areas for future study of spirituality in sport psychology counseling. Future investigations could address: the experience of the spiritual within the practitioner-athlete relationship; the place of spirituality in existential psychology approaches to counseling in sporting contexts; and the role of training and education in developing the personality of the sport psychology consultant.

SUMMARY

The aim of this review has been to provide an understanding of how spirituality can play an important role in sport psychology research and practice. A number of key research areas and aspects of consultancy work have been outlined that may benefit from further investigation of the spiritual. These include: exploration of how spirituality can assist in achieving performance excellence and personal excellence in sport; the use of religious observances and spirituality in MST; the relationship between spirituality and experiential states, such as flow and peak experience; and how spirituality can be integrated into sport psychology counseling. As this is a relatively new area of enquiry in the field, the potential for further research is vast. Initially, there is a need to further document the importance of spirituality in the lives of athletes and the work of sport psychology consultants.

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