

Changing Concepts of a Career in Sport Psychology

Corrie White

Department of Sport and Performance Psychology, University of Western States

COUN6550/8550: Sport Psychology

Dr. Jaime Ringstad

December 18, 2023

Changing Concepts of a Career in Sport Psychology

Did you have any initial ideas or expectations about the topic?

When I started this program I had no idea what to expect regarding career direction. My son had worked with a Sports Psychologist and they did Brain Spotting, a technique derived from EMDR. It was semi-effective at clearing out old patterns, but it didn't teach him new, more positive, and goal-oriented patterns. She was also quite expensive. I knew that the field would be full of different approaches, and different theories, but I had no idea the research was so expansive. Reading about Achievement Goal Theory or Self Determination Theory and their application to the field of Sports Psychology was so fascinating. Having a master's in Psych, I learned these theories ten years ago, but in a much different manner. Doing the readings and having them apply to the field of Sports Psychology made me rethink how the field of psychology is not just about mental health and well-being but has applications in so many different areas of life and the human experience. In some ways, a bit of the theory we learned about, for instance, leadership theory, (Horn & Smith, 2019) felt like it came directly from Organizational Psychology. Which, in a way, I guess it did because there is so much overlap between the two fields of working with a sports team and with a corporate team. It's been very eye-opening to learn about the many concepts of psychology and how they relate to this field I have just begun to learn about. Honestly, it makes me very excited and I feel there is potential to be a lifelong learner, which is what I aim to be!

As far as career options and opportunities, I never had the dream to work with famous athletes or Olympians. I live in such a remote community in rural Colorado that I knew there wouldn't be an opportunity for me to take a career path of this nature. Granted, we do churn out some Olympic skiers, so maybe there is a chance it could happen. However, I want to work with

adolescents, teens, and young adults. I have seen firsthand the lack of mental performance coaching and the real need that there is in our area for a specialist in this area. When we searched for one for my son, we had to find one 5 hours away and all calls were telehealth, which was annoying because the platform never worked (drove me crazy to pay 185\$ an hour and spend half the time talking about if the connection was good or bad or had a reverb!). I see the need for kids to have mental performance support because I have seen so many kids leave our little valley and go to bigger areas to seek out more advanced training opportunities. I also love teenagers, because they are in the process of figuring out who they are and each developmental stage is so different. I firmly believe in the power of sports and performance activities to give kids a lifetime of success that otherwise may end in drinking/drugging, which is sadly a very common outcome for kids who grow up in the culture of a ski town. All that to say, I want to be an asset to my community, a positive resource for kids, and help keep families local to our area, while pursuing a career that will be fulfilling to me.

Were those ideas supported or refuted as you progressed through the topic?

I think most of what we learned via the text was theory-based, but there were many opportunities to see the real-world impact of positive coaching and influences on athletes. Watching the movie the 99ers (Leyden, 2013) was so powerful. Imagine getting to be part of an experience like that. I don't aim for that on a level as high as the World Cup, but I can it happening with a girl's high school soccer team or even with a Girls on the Run program (YouTube, 2020). Those are the moments I have seen in the supporting materials that we read and processed that have influenced me that this is the right decision. Kids today face a WILD world, and to be able to help give them the experience of a positive, healthy, and encouraging environment is so attractive to me. The text was very informative and gave a great theoretical

basis for what we are learning but it was the supporting materials that supported my ideas about what I hope for in my future career.

What was most impactful about the topic?


Learning about the theories of Sports and Performance Psychology made me realize how applicable and necessary so, so many of these theories are to everyday life. We listened to Jonathan Fader talk about the applicability of Sports Psychology techniques to real life (TedX, 2017) in the first week, so I was excited about the possibilities of learning how these theories apply to daily life. But then to read in-depth and learn about the theories and the research it is glaringly clear that so many theories can be used to help nearly any person (who isn't struggling with mental illness) to level up their life. If I can share what I learn casually, or eventually in a more broad level, how powerful will this education be? I am learning what it takes to thrive and succeed and the science behind those. Success and thriving are 2 goals of nearly anyone I know. Again, a great example is the theory of Self Determination. If a person is motivated to improve their life or reach optimal living, they can then be coached on autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Horn, 2019). I do think this theory can be used to offer some type of goal-setting program or seminar. This is not appropriate for the stage I am in, but this class has allowed me to dream a bit bigger about the impacts of the depth of this field on helping others reach maximum performance in their lives.

How can you use what you've learned to continue your own professional development?

I think the best way to use what I have learned is to, at this point, just continue to learn as much as there is to learn. I am motivated to read new books and learn about the field in general by researching practitioners online, looking at Instagrams, and seeing how people are using the CMPC certification and in what different capacities. One of my goals when I graduate is to have

a vision for how I want to build my business and the more I learn about the real-world application of what we are learning and how other professionals (that I respect, admire, and are behaving ethically) are offering and using these techniques to positively affect the lives of others, the more prepared I will be when I get out of school to know who exactly I want to serve and how I want to prepare my offerings. I am very excited about the opportunities ahead.

References

- Horn, T. & Smith, A. (2019). *Advances in sport and exercise psychology (4th Ed)*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Leyden, E. (Director). (2013). The 99ers (Season 1, Episode 8) [TV series episode]. *Nine for IX*. ESPN.
- TedX Talks. (Dec 18, 2017). Win the Game of Life with Sport Psychology [Video]. You Tube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Lxj5FEpEG4>
- YouTube (2020). *How to Coach a Girls on the Run Practice Step-by-Step*. Retrieved on December 10 from  How to Coach a Girls on the Run Practice Step-by-Step