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Sport Psychology Utilization among College Football Coaches: Understanding College Football Coaches' Attitudes about Sport Psychology

Aaron W. Halterman, Ph.D.
Lindeman & Associates, LLC

Jesse A. Steinfeldt, Ph.D.
Indiana University

Jeff Ruser, M.A.
Indiana University

Julia Cawthra, M.A.
Indiana University

Ashley Neidigh, B.A.
Indiana University

As the field of Sport Psychology (SP) continues to expand and become more embedded within college athletic programs, it is necessary to assess practices by which sport psychology providers can be effective in delivering services and accessing populations. Football represents a particular athletic subculture that paradoxically needs services but can be difficult to access. This current study examined perspectives of college football coaches in order to further expand the understanding of college football coaches' knowledge about sport psychology by assessing coaches' abilities to identify mental health concerns and their willingness to refer student-athletes to mental health services. Coaches revealed their beliefs about mental health concerns, barriers to accessing mental health services, as well as their perspective of the ideal characteristics of Sport Psychology Consultants (SPC), as it relates to the specific needs of college football players. Results can be used to inform best practices and provide practical implications for improving mental health and overall well-being among college student-athletes.

Keywords: coaches, football, perceptions, sport psychology

There are over 480,000 collegiate student-athletes competing in 90 sports (men's and women's sports counted separately) at over 1,000 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions (NCAA, 2016b). These hundreds of thousands of student-athletes often have to not only manage the same challenges as non-student-athletes, but also balance academic and athletic demands (Broughton & Neyer, 2001), cope with physical injury (Nippert & Smith, 2008), deal with role conflict predicated by athletic participation (Killeya-Jones, 2005), struggle with in-and-out-of-sport relationships (Etzel, Watson, Visek, & Maniar, 2006), manage sports-related career transitions (Lapchick, 2002), and maintain optimal physical conditioning (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Furthermore, by competing in the highly publicized and publicly scrutinized domain of intercollegiate athletics, student-athletes have additional stressors as they operate in a different environment than that of their non-athlete peers (Sack, 2001).

With these factors and the increased demands of participating in college athletics, student-athletes are at risk for developing or experiencing mental health issues. According to the National College Health Assessment surveys, about 31% of male and 48% of female NCAA student-athletes reported experiencing symptoms of either depression or anxiety (Brown, Hainline, Kroshus, & Wilfert, 2014), and some student-athletes experienced depressive symptoms more often than non-student-athlete peers (Maniar, Chamberlin, & Moore, 2005). Furthermore, student-athletes diagnosed with positive psychiatric symptoms (e.g., anxiety and depression) have higher rates than non-student-athletes of substance abuse (Miller, Miller, Verhegge, Linville, & Pumariega, 2002).

Despite the prevalence of these issues, student-athletes are reported to utilize counseling or psychological services at lower rates than their non-athlete peers (Watson, 2006). According to researchers, male student-athletes may represent a sub-group that holds a particularly negative view toward seeking psychological services as compared with female student-athletes (Martin, 2005; Martin, Wrisberg, Beitel, & Lounsbury, 1997; Watson, 2005; Watson, 2006). Martin (2005) found that male student-athletes who participate in contact sports, such as football and wrestling, have a greater negative attitude than those in other sports toward seeking psychological services. Researchers have found that attitudes or beliefs toward mental health is a major contributing factor in the likelihood of psychological service use (Moreland, Coxe, & Yang, 2017).

In addition to the above demands, football is unique among college sports because it is one of the largest money generating and highest profile (increased visibility on national television) NCAA sports (NCAA Revenues and Expenses, 2017). With the high profile and potential financial gains for universities come the potential stressors associated with winning and losing high stakes games. Furthermore, unlike many other collegiate sports, football has a limited number of games, usually 12 in a regular-season and potentially one or two post-season games if a team secures enough wins to be eligible. Thus, there is a potential for student-athletes playing football to be subject to elevated levels of stress and an increased risk of injury while playing football as compared to other collegiate sports (NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook, 2012).

College football student-athletes' attitudes and perceptions of mental health and usage of mental health services are strongly influenced by the complex student-athlete social environment. That environment includes coaches, athletic trainers, academic advisors, athletic administration, teammates, friends, and family (Brown, et al., 2014; Sudano, Collins, & Miles,

2017). Of the social roles that individuals play in the lives of college football student-athletes, none are more salient than that of their coach. Collegiate student-athletes have previously reported that the interpersonal relationship between coach and player is one of the most significant relationships within the sport (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). National Collegiate Athletics Association Division I (NCAA D-I) football coaches set the social and cultural environment, determine the team's overall attitude, recruit and select players, and determine playing time. In a systematic review of literature regarding college student-athletes' mental health services utilization, Moreland, Coxe, and Yang (2017) found that attitudes and opinions of leaders, specifically coaches, become cultural norms influencing the actions of those under their leadership (e.g., coaches' attitudes and opinions of mental health service utilization heavily influence student-athletes' beliefs about utilization).

To date, studies on college football coaches and student-athletes have mainly focused on self-efficacy and performance (Myers, Feltz, & Short, 2004), masculinity and masculinity's influence of help-seeking (Steinfeldt, Foltz, Mungro, Speight, Wong, & Blumberg, 2011; Steinfeldt, Gilchrist, Halterman, Gomory, & Steinfeldt, 2011; Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2012), moral atmosphere (Steinfeldt, Rutkowski, Orr, & Steinfeldt, 2012), predicting athletic success (Spieler, Czech, Joyner, Munkasy, Gentner, & Long, 2007), examining emotional expression (Wong, Steinfeldt, LaFollette, & Tsao, 2011), and gender role conflict with regard to help-seeking (Steinfeldt, Steinfeldt, England, & Speight, 2009). Although these studies have provided great insight into specific issues college football student-athletes and coaches face, they do not directly assess attitudes of college football coaches' Sport Psychology (SP) usage and intentions for future engagement with Sport Psychology Consultants (SPC). Previous studies on SP usage and intentions for future use within the sport of football have focused on high-school coaches (Zakrajsek, Martin, & Zizzi, 2011) or college sports coaches in general with limited football coach representation (Wrisberg, Loberg, Simpson, Withycombe, & Reed, 2010). In order to fill this void, this study intended to explore college football coaches' attitudes toward SP use, barriers to usage, and potential future uses. Additionally, this study aimed to further expand the limited understanding of college football coaches' knowledge about SP by assessing coaches' abilities to identify mental health concerns and their willingness to refer student-athletes to mental health services.

Method

Participants

Nine participants were recruited from NCAA DI, DII, DIII, football programs across the United States. There was one head coach and eight assistant coaches. The coaches self-identified their races as European American (5), African-American (3), and Middle-Eastern (1). Age ranges included 21-29 (n=1), 30-39 (n=5), 50-59 (n=1), and 60-69 (n=2). Coaches had an average of 17.6 years (SD= 12.8) of coaching experience. All coaches have used SP with their teams at some point during their careers. Seven of the nine coaches had access to a SPC on staff currently. At the time of the study all coaches noted that have referred players to SP consultants in the past 6 months.

Procedure

Research was conducted in accordance with Institutional Review Board standards and potential participants were contacted by the primary researcher via email and telephone. They were given information about the opportunity to voluntarily participate in the study, and those who were interested were provided informed consent via email. Participants included coaches who both currently had and did not have access to SP services at their respective collegiate institutions. Including both allowed for participant perspective from those who may not have access to SP but would use SP services if available. Telephone interviews were conducted and digitally recorded with consent by the first author, and lasted approximately one hour. Congruent with recommended Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methodology (Hill, et al., 1997), interviews were then transcribed and randomly checked for reliability by sending a digital copy of the transcripts to participants for an opportunity to review and change responses or offer new insights (Ely, 1991; Patton, 2002). Next, four members of the research team analyzed the interview transcriptions using CQR methodology (see Data Analysis). The primary researcher stored the data in a password protected computer in a locked space.

Data Analysis

Consensual Qualitative Research was used to analyze the qualitative data in the current study; CQR is considered an effective qualitative methodology that is “ideal because it involves a rigorous method that allows several researchers to examine data and come to a consensus about their meaning” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 204). Previous research has used the CQR method to explore issues in SP, specifically with coaches (Steinfeldt, Foltz, Mungro, Speight, Wong, & Blumber, 2011; Steinfeldt, Zakrajsek, Bodey, Middendorf, & Martin, 2013; Zakrajsek et al., 2013).

Research team members read journal articles that outlined the process of conducting CQR (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005), as well as studies that applied the CQR methodology in sports (Steinfeldt et al., 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2013, Zakrajsek et al., 2013), prior to starting the data analysis. To minimize the impact of bias, CQR protocol recommends that researchers discuss potential assumptions, biases, and values before engaging in the CQR process (Fassinger, 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Thus, prior to data analysis, team members addressed potential biases and assumptions about SP, football, college football coaches, and college football coaches’ beliefs about SP. Research team members also discussed their backgrounds and previous experiences with SP, football, college football, and college football coaches; the purpose of this discussion was to consider any useful insight it could provide, along with any potentially biased interpretation of the raw data (transcripts). Assumptions and biases were consistently checked and evaluated throughout the CQR process to address the biases and minimize their effect in the data analysis process (Hill et al., 1997).

To identify preliminary themes, research team members independently coded the data after reading each interview transcription on their own. In an effort to develop consensus, in multiple meeting sessions, the research team discussed how their individually derived themes could be organized into categories and domains. Categories represent clusters of common ideas that emerge from the group member discussions about themes, and domains represent clusters of the common categories. Research team members presented, discussed, and negotiated their own analytical impressions of the interview data until a consensus was reached to create an organizational structure consisting of categories and domains.

Additionally, the team created core ideas (i.e., phrases constructed to provide detail to the categories while still remaining close to the interviewees' conveyed meaning) to provide meaning and clarification to each category (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The external auditor was then sent the preliminary organizational structure (i.e., themes, domains, categories, core ideas) for their feedback. This step was intended to elicit an additional perspective and, most importantly, address potential groupthink tendencies that may have emerged in the consensus building process. After receiving the external auditor's feedback, the research team met to consensually incorporate the external auditor's perspectives to enhance the preliminary categorization structure.

Finally, a cross-analysis procedure was utilized to strengthen the methodological rigor of the study and determine the prevalence of each category within the data based on the preliminary categorization structure. Research group members then independently coded the transcripts according to themes, domains, categories, and core ideas. The frequency of each category was labeled *general* (i.e., category was found in all transcripts), *typical* (i.e., category was found in a majority of transcripts), or *variant* (i.e., category was found in a minority of the transcripts). Last, members met to discuss their independent cross-analyses, reconcile any discrepancies, and agree upon the final categorization structure.

Results

The research team's analysis of the participating coaches' interview transcripts identified 16 categories across five domains: (a) Barriers to SP/SPC Usage; (b) Attitudes, Knowledge, and Usage; (c) Coaches' Ideal SP Program, (d) Coaches' Ideal SPC; and (e) Mental Health Concerns. The cross-analysis procedure validated the generated domains and indicated the frequency (i.e., general, typical, variant, and rare) of the categories that emerged from the data.

Domain 1: Barriers to SP/SPC Usage

The first domain, barriers to SP/SPC usage, reflects the multiple perceived hurdles coaches face in using SP or an SPC within their programs. The first category, lack of knowledge, reflects barriers to using or seeking SP and SP services in the forms of coaches lack of understanding of what SPCs do, where SPCs work, and a perception that their players lack similar knowledge. One coach stated, "I think maybe one out of every ten coaches is truly trained in psychology, so for the most part, I think coaches are naturally scared or don't invest the time in the things that they actually know." Another coach stated, "student-athletes are not as educated on the psychology part as they are on the training, physical part."

The second category, misperceptions, involves coaches' or others in the fields' beliefs that are not actually true such as misperceptions of confidentiality, believing players will see themselves as weak for seeking help, players perception that seeing a SPC is punishment, negative stigma, and players using mental health issues as an "excuse" for poor performance. One coach stated,

That's the fear of having them (SPCs) around, watching practices and everything else like that. Right, and I think you worry about again, the biggest fear is that, you have a sports psychologist who sits in your meeting and you want him to watch the kids, and all of a

sudden he comes back to the staff, and we're in the staff meeting, and he's like, "well I'm really concerned with the way coach is speaking to the student-athletes."

Another coach stated, "because football's such a macho sport. You can't be weak mentally."

The third category in this domain was lack of availability, represented why using SP or SPCs was not always feasible, such as office hours and type of therapy modality, finding funding, and the lack of services in the area. One coach stated, "little bit of flexibility with these sports psychologists, of when they would be able to meet with the kids. So that would be the challenge, making it work in our daily schedule."

Domain 2: Attitudes, Knowledge, and Usage

The second domain that emerged in the interviews was attitudes, knowledge, and usage reflected participants general attitudes and understanding of SP and SPCs along with detailing their current SP or SPC usage. The first category, *SP/SPCs seen as tools*, described how coaches thought SP and SPCs are tools to be used to maximize personal potential, performance enhancement, and coaching effectiveness. One coach stated, "How to ultimately get athletes to perform at the highest level over a long period of time in their ability to maybe shut the outside noise out."

The second category to emerge in this domain was mental training as essential, reflected coaches views of mental training (i.e., SP or SPCs) as compared to other forms of training. Coaches described mental training as important to student-athletes' success as physical conditioning and football practice. One coach stated, "sport psychology is on the same wavelength as football practice, fall season strength and conditioning."

The third category found in the data was *coaches reducing stigma*, encompassing coaches' attitudes toward reducing stigma associated with SP and SPCs through open dialogue with their players, personalizing messages, using SP to strengthen instead of "fix", and noting that SP a mandated part of the athletic program. One coach noted how he personalized the message, "introducing them to it, and hearing it from me and knowing my experiences as a player and doing what I had to do, they kind of take heed to it." Another coach stated, "Before, psychologists were looked at as a tool only when things were going wrong. When there was a problem, a psychologist was brought in... We can use it to strengthen our players, not just fix our players."

The final category in this domain, *SPCs unique role*, represents coaches recognizing the unique nature of the SPC and student-athlete relationship and the confidentiality associated with the counseling relationship. One coach summarized the category, "the sport psychologist doesn't care how many plays you played. Doesn't care if you're a star. And they could maybe talk with you about some problems that I [coach] can't relate to."

Domain 3: Ideal SP Program

The third domain, ideal SP program, embodied how coaches would design a SP program to be most helpful to their teams if they could remove all constraints. The first category, availability, represented the necessity of services being available based on football's unique schedule, being available year-round, and coaches' ability to dictate time and place for services. One coach described his ideal availability would be on a regular basis to see "flows", "I think

you have to have somebody there on a fairly regular basis so he didn't see episodes, but he saw flows." One coach stated, "I could see that as an environment (practice and games) for SPs to watch and evaluate... but for them to talk to somebody during that time, I don't think that is the time and place."

The second category in this domain was provide value, represented the ways in which coaches thought SP and SPCs could be helpful to their programs. Coaches responses were similar to domain 2's SP/SPCs seen as tools; however, these responses specified how they could see results from the use of those "tools." Coaches described using the "tool" of psychology or SPCs as another way to evaluate student-athletes, maintaining player stability, giving teams an advantage or setting themselves apart from others, and by "checking a box." One coach stated, "but it's another tool that coaches are really starting to depend on to evaluate their, the ongoing evaluation of their players and the psychological of it has a big part of the ongoing evaluation." Another coach stated, "It's (SP) is a positive in you're checking a box... just like a trainer or a minister, you have a resource there, in the administration's eyes."

The third category of this domain is football tailored interventions, represents the desire for SP and SPCs to deliver interventions relevant to not only football but the individual student-athlete through giving applicable examples and interventions. One coach reflected on his desire for SPCs to have application-based knowledge about content by saying, "are you (SPC) just gonna tell me what it said in chapter seven about anxiety, or are you gonna relate that to something that you've done that you can speak more to the language of the kid that needs it?"

Domain 4: Ideal SPC

The fourth domain that emerged in the interviews was ideal SPC, embodied coaches preferred characteristics and traits of an SPC working with them or their teams. The first category, traits, reflects the desired individual traits of SPCs working with the coaches' players and teams. For one coach it was about being relatable, "You gotta be relatable... you can't be just a talking head, you've gotta be someone, that, whether you're confiding in why you're struggling, or what you feel, you can't go in and be guarded just because it's required." Coaches noted they wanted more than just relatability and needed to feel a connection as stated by one coach, "I think somebody that can connect with ... You have to connect with the players."

The second category in this domain was specific football knowledge and experience, represented qualifications. Coaches named that they would prefer SPCs working with their student-athletes and teams to have past sport experience. One coach illustrated the desire to have someone working with the student-athletes and coaches that has sports experience by detailing how intimidating a "little skinny scientist" can be, "a lot of players are going into the field because they know that they can become sports psychologists and still be part of it (sport)..." Another coach stated, "...having someone who played, I don't know how someone could coach or help people do something as hard as what we do without ever having experienced it."

The third category in this domain, being on the same page, this category's content was significant, namely SPCs "being on the same page" with coaches' overall goals and methodology and being trustworthy. One coach specifically stated his desire for SPCs "that understood what the true goals of the program were so that their goals were never different from mine."

Domain 5: Mental Health Concerns

The final domain that emerged from the interviews was mental health concerns, describing coaches' ability to recognize student-athletes' mental health concerns and coaches' willingness to refer student-athletes to SPCs or mental health professionals. The first category, taking an active approach to mental health, represented coaches awareness of mental health issues and proactiveness in looking for signs and symptoms of "something wrong" with their student-athletes. One coach summarized taking an active approach with his comment, "you have to know the kids... so you get to see who they are and what they're about... if you see changes in their actions and their mood."

The second category that emerged in this domain was coaches assess student-athletes first, meaning when they (coaches) suspect "something wrong" with their student-athletes they will check in with their resources such as other student-athletes, athletic trainers, and support staff before possibly referring them to an SPC. One coach noted, "when I get concerned, I try not to jump to the conclusion that it's mental health...there's something here I'll talk to his peers. I try to get all the information first."

The third category to emerge in this domain was coaches' willingness to refer, based on coaches' descriptions of a) knowing when a mental health concern was beyond their ability to help a student-athlete and b) explanations of how they would refer them to an SPC or mental health professional if necessary. One coach acknowledged his competencies and discussed what he would do for a student-athlete struggling with mental health concerns past his abilities: "I'm immediately man enough to understand that's outside the realm of my expertise, and I'd get them into the right circumstance. I have created access to a professional here, but they're not sports psych. It's mental health." Coaches discussed how they would refer to the athletic trainer for information on their student-athletes well-being. Furthermore, one coach summarized both his limits regarding competency with mental health and his willingness to refer a student-athlete when help is needed,

And I'm not a psychologist, so by no means am I going to try to pry into somebody's life to try to help him figure out his answers. I'm just looking for some sign, or for him to show me in some way that, yeah coach, there's some issues going on. The only thing I can do is say, hey, would you like some help? I can point them in the right direction to somebody on campus to help them get that help.

Discussion

This study represents an effort to enhance the understanding of college coaches' attitudes about sport psychology by viewing it through the lens of an understudied population: college football coaches. Previous research examining coaches' attitudes regarding sport psychology usage and perceptions of mental health is sparse, especially of those who coach college football (Zakrajsek, Martin, & Zizzi, 2011; Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2007; Wrisberg et al., 2010). Given the dearth of research on the attitudes and knowledge of sport psychology within the college football coaching population, the results of this study suggest potentially advantageous ideas for practitioners to gain entry, build clientele, and strengthen the therapist-coach and coach-athlete relationships within football.

The first domain suggests that coaches in this study had an awareness of the stigma associated with seeking mental training or for seeking help with mental health concerns; however, coaches also indicated a lack of knowledge about an SPC's role. More specifically, this study highlighted some coaches' lack of understanding of confidentiality: coaches were worried about being fired for what they said and about information shared with SPCs being used for gambling purposes. This result also highlights the disconnect surrounding coach understanding of confidentiality and their expectations for access to information about their players. While this disconnect may vary based on coach and institution, this is an issue that needs to be addressed moving forward. SPCs can use this information to continue psychoeducational efforts to reduce stigma and increase awareness of what SPCs can do with coaches, teams, and individual players. For example, SPCs could potentially frame discussions using specific terms, such as mental performance and mental training, instead of mental health in an attempt to address myths or skepticism related to SP and increase confidence in the usefulness of SP services (Zakrajsek, Martin, & Zizzi, 2011). Similarly, Martin (2005) suggested reframing services as "performance enhancement," instead of "sport psychology skills" while providing information on what SP is and how it works and addressing expectations.

Like the results of previous research with non-football college coaches, the current study suggests that availability is potentially a large barrier to coaches' utilization of SP services (Moreland, Cox, & Yang, 2017; Wrisberg et al., 2010; Zakrajsek et al., 2013). College football programs maintain rigid and time-consuming schedules (NCAA, 2016a), so practitioners may consider holding non-traditional office hours to accommodate the often- hectic schedules of coaches and student-athletes. Coaches in this study also suggested that they wanted an SPC available to the coaches, the team, and the student-athletes year-round. In addition, coaches stated they want an SPC present in team meetings, in coaches' meetings, at practice, and in office hours. This finding is encouraging because SPCs have reported that being embedded in the team setting is a key contribution to their effectiveness (Poczwadowski & Sherman, 2011). Although being embedded in a setting is important, SPCs must also set appropriate professional boundaries due to ethical issues, such as multiple relationships within the field of sport psychology (Poczwadowski & Sherman, 2011). Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) stressed SPCs maintain appropriate boundaries by being aware of the different roles they play and the expectations associated with each role.

Sport psychology services may also consider compensation and administration structure due to cost of services for a licensed SP professional; often D-II and D-III schools do not have the funding to support SP services at the same level as D-I schools (Kornspan & Duve, 2006). One potential work around, as seen recently in university job postings, is to hire SP professionals or someone with SP knowledge through a collaboration between university counseling centers and athletic departments, thus splitting the SP professional's time between athletics, student-athletes, and non-student-athletes.

These results also suggest that SPCs working with or hoping to work with college football teams need to be knowledgeable and skilled in how to maximize student-athlete potential by enhancing player performance through mental skills training, thus providing value to coaches. Moreover, mental skills training needs to be "tailored" to fit the needs of football coaches and the individual student-athletes. To accomplish this goal, SPCs could relate material in a "real-world" football-centric manner and provide personalized examples to illustrate key concepts or ideas.

Results from this study support previous research findings that student-athletes and coaches prefer to work with someone with a similar sports background or sport-specific knowledge (Lopez & Levy, 2013; Lubker et al., 2012; Wrisberg et al., 2010; Zakrajsek et al., 2013). Moreover, as Greenspan and Anderson (1995) suggested, student-athletes and coaches may not be comfortable seeking help from outside the athletic department from those who do not understand the special concerns, needs, and pressures faced by student-athletes.

Furthermore, these results suggest that SPCs working within the university athletic department or counseling center could benefit from networking or increasing their visibility with coaching staffs for referral purposes. Coaches in this study named actively looking for signs and symptoms of mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder) and an overall willingness to refer players to SPCs for those concerns. Through building relationships with coaches, SPCs could potentially increase coaches' perceived confidence in SP, SPCs skills, and SP and SPCs ability to help (Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Sharp & Hodge, 2011). In addition to building those relationships, practitioners could provide consultation to coaches on how to "follow through" with a psychological evaluation. For example, coach 8 explained, "The truth is, a lot of times the evaluation, the psychological evaluation can be done by the psychologist, but the follow through with helping these kids with their problem is on the coaches."

This study's findings suggest that college football coaches share similar attitudes toward and knowledge of SP services as non-football college coaches. In addition, these findings highlight a contrast between previous literature, suggesting that college coaches are more supportive of SP services for performance enhancement than for personal concerns (Wrisberg et al., 2010). Furthermore, the results provide researchers and practitioners with a more detailed perspective of the constraints to SP services, the ideal SP service framework, and the ideal SPC characteristics in the previously understudied population of college football coaches.

Limitations

Although the sample size of eight participants met methodological recommendations (Hill et al., 2005), the current sample included assistant coaches of varying positions (e.g., offensive line, defensive line, wide receivers) and across varying NCAA divisions (i.e., Division I, Division II, Division III). Therefore, responses may differ from a monetary standpoint, meaning that coaches at larger schools may have more experience with or access to SP services due to fewer financial constraints. Additionally, coaches' attitudes toward SP could be impacted by these different competitive environments (e.g., pressure to retain players, scout, win games) across different divisions of play. The actual utilization of SPC could also be impacted by the reputation of the university football program at a particular institution (i.e., traditionally high winning records vs. low), which is a stressor that can impact the mental health of coaches and players, which is another factor that should be specifically examined in future research.

The categories in the current study were stable and consistent across half (variant), most (typical), or all (general) cases, representing similar patterns of responses and, thus may be considered descriptive of the overall sample (Hill et al., 1997). Moreover, participants all had previous exposure to SP services, either in their playing careers or in working as coaches, which may have positively impacted their knowledge and attitudes about SP and SP services. Previous findings have suggested that coaches' openness to SP services may increase with more exposure

to SP services or SP concepts (Lubker, et al., 2008; Martin, 2005; Sullivan & Hodge, 1991; Wrisberg et al., 2009; Wrisberg et al., 2010).

Conclusion

The results from this study suggest that college football coaches do share attitudes and knowledge about SP services and SPCs as non-football coaches, but they also have significant differences. Studies involving college coaches have focused primarily on non-football coaches' perceptions and intentions to use SP (Zakrajsek et al., 2013; Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2007; Wrisberg et al., 2010). Therefore, additional research is needed to gain a better understanding of potential differences between coaches in different settings (e.g., contact vs non-contact sports; male vs. female coaches; team vs. individual sports). Moreover, future research could focus on comparing high school, collegiate, and professional coaches' attitudes and intentions to use SP. Such research could help inform SPCs about the barriers limiting SP service usage at each level. And finally, previous studies have focused on intentions to use and preferred use of SP, so future research is needed to better understand actual usage rates of these useful professional services.

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Table

Table 1
Summary of Domains, Categories, and Frequencies

Domains/Categories	Illustrative Core Ideas	Frequency
<i>Domain 1: Barriers to SP/SPC Usage</i>		
a.) lack of knowledge	coaches lack of understanding of what SPCs do and where they work	typical
b.) misperceptions	confidentiality, potential for SPCs to get coaches fired, players being seen as weak, players seeing mental health as punishment, stigma, players use as an "excuse" for poor performance	general
c.) lack of availability	lack professionals in the area, plus lack of time and funding	typical
<i>Domain 2: Attitudes, knowledge, and usage</i>		
a.) SPCs seen as tools	maximize player potential, player performance enhancement, used in coaching strategies	general
b.) mental training as essential	mental health as important as physical health and mental training as necessary as strength training and practice	typical
c.) coaches reducing stigma	sharing mental health perspectives with players and using SP to strengthen instead of "fixing"	typical
d.) SPCs unique role	different relationship between SPC and player, especially confidentiality of relationship	variant
<i>Domain 3: Ideal SP program</i>		
a.) availability	access will dictate time and place of services	general
b.) provide value	how SP/SPC could be helpful, evaluations, player mental stability, use to set teams apart, checking a box	typical
c.) football tailored interventions	relevant to football, relevant to football players, giving examples, brief interventions	typical
<i>Domain 4: Ideal SPC</i>		
a.) traits	able to foster connections, confidently commands respect, firm convictions	typical
b.) specific knowledge to football	previous football experience, but also ability to relate to what players are going through	typical
c.) being on the "same page"	team's common goal, coaching methodology, trustworthy	variant

<i>Domain 5: Mental health concerns</i>		
a.) taking an active approach to mental health	looking for signs and symptoms	general
b.) coaches assess student athlete first	knowing something is wrong with player based on established relationship with coach	general
c.) coaches' willingness to refer	limitations of own competencies	general

Note: General = applicable to all of the cases; Typical = applicable to at least half of the cases; Variant = applicable to less than half of the cases