Introduction

Interest in sport psychology has accelerated in the last 15-20 years, partly due to the increased realization that the winning edge in many sports is not just physical superiority, but rather a combination of psychological, physiological and technical factors. Health oriented issues such as the importance of physical activity in relation to well being and quality of life (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002) and applied issues such as the development of professional philosophy as a basis for successful sport psychology delivery (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004) have also contributed to the rising interest in the field. In order to describe the current and future developments in sport psychology, Swedish students answered questions administered by the author.

Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology in the Mid ‘90s

In the 1980’s, numerous researchers believed than an intensive development of applied sport psychology would occur in the ‘90s (Alderman, 1984; Silva 1984), specifically aimed at coaches and leaders in sport (Connel, 1986; Isberg, 1989). Moreover, questions relating to the positive development of human action (Uneståhl, 1985) as well as towards health and well-being were expected to come in the 1990’s (Ogilvie, 1989). Some researchers also recognized the importance of using cognitive theories in describing human performance (Straub & Williams, 1984). As analyzed in the 1990’s in Sweden, as well as from an international perspective, voices were raised calling for a bridging of theoretical models and frameworks into practical guidelines (Johnson, Carlsson, Hinic & Wetterstrand, 1998) and also for sport psychology for youth sport (Gould, 1996). The importance of having an eclectic perspective in sport psychology research and
practice was also mentioned by some researchers (e.g. Singer, Murphy & Tennant, 1993). In addition, suggestions for the advancement of research in applied sport psychology settings were given (Strean & Roberts, 1992) (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristic features of sport psychology in the mid '90s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Key elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alderman (1984)</td>
<td>Intensive development of applied sport psychology</td>
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<td>Silva (1984)</td>
<td>Intensive training of applied sport psychology practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straub &amp; Williams (1984)</td>
<td>Cognitive aspects of sport performance will influence sport psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unestähl (1985)</td>
<td>Positive psychology will emerge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connel (1986)</td>
<td>Sport psychology more open for coaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isberg (1989)</td>
<td>Applied sport psychology more open for coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogilvie (1989)</td>
<td>Applied sport psychology more accepted and health psychology more focused</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Key elements</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strean &amp; Roberts (1992)</td>
<td>Case studies and quantitative research will be used more in applied sport psychology as well as research design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singer et al. (1993)</td>
<td>For instance the eclectic view of sport psychology, youth sport and applied issues will develop in the coming 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gould (1996)</td>
<td>Importance of bridging theory to practical guidelines for youth athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson et al. (1998)</td>
<td>Intensive development of bridges between theory and practice</td>
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</table>

Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology

In the mid ‘90s, expectations about the future of sport psychology were diverse (Table 2). While some researchers claimed that future trends in sport psychology would require more functional and theoretical models (Kunath, 1995), others suggested that sport psychology would be more focused on features related to performance enhancement (e.g. anxiety regulation and stress reduction) as well as social and group psychology (Hardy & Jones, 1994). Researchers also believed that sport psychology would become more accepted in mainstream psychology (Williams & Straub, 1998). An enhanced collaboration between applied sport psychologists and the sporting world was also predicted (Wylleman, De Knop, Delhoux & Vanden Auweele, 1999), especially between experts in sport psychology and sport students and coaches.
More recent publications on the features of sport psychology address a wide range of issues (Table 2). Some researchers believe in an expanded growth of social psychological issues in sport (Hanin & Stambulova, 2004) such as enhanced communication between researchers and practitioners (Johnson & Lindwall, 2000). Others argue for the establishment of academic certification in sport and exercise psychology (Morris, 2004), with some researchers even suggesting that the APA Code of Ethics be incorporated into applied sport psychology thinking, assessment and intervention in order to serve athletes both holistically and ethically (Moore, 2003).

**Table 2. Characteristic features of sport psychology today.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>Key elements:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hardy &amp; Jones (1994)</td>
<td>Accelerated study of group dynamics, stress and anxiety, and coping with adversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunath (1995)</td>
<td>Sport psychology will use theoretical frameworks in research and a need for more functional models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams &amp; Straub (1998)</td>
<td>Sport psychology in North America will become more acceptable to mainstream psychology and an increasing number of psychologists will become active in sport psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wylleman et al. (1999)</td>
<td>Need of collaboration between applied sport psychology and the sporting world</td>
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**Recent reviews**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>Key elements:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andersen (2000)</td>
<td>Professional training of sport psychologists will become more university based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson &amp; Lindwall (2000)</td>
<td>Effective communication between researchers and practitioners is prioritized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanin &amp; Stambulova (2004)</td>
<td>Increased knowledge in social psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris (2004)</td>
<td>Establishment of an academic certification of sport psychology</td>
</tr>
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More recent publications on the features of sport psychology address a wide range of issues (Table 2). Some researchers believe in an expanded growth of social psychological issues in sport (Hanin & Stambulova, 2004) such as enhanced communication between researchers and practitioners (Johnson & Lindwall, 2000). Others argue for the establishment of academic certification in sport and exercise psychology (Morris, 2004), with some researchers even suggesting that the APA Code of Ethics be incorporated into applied sport psychology thinking, assessment and intervention in order to serve athletes both holistically and ethically (Moore, 2003).

**Expectations about the Future of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Field**

At the start of the new millennium, an increasing number of articles and books were to be found concerning future expectations and the development of sport and exercise psychology. Some researchers in Sweden suggested that programs in applied sport psychology would become
licensed (e.g. Johnson & Fallby, 2004) and science-oriented exercise psychology programs would develop health-related focuses (Silva, 2001). Moreover, expectations about specific interest in life-span development (Hanin & Stambulova, 2004; Morris, 2004) and advances in sport psychology training (Andersen, 2000) were predicted. Stelter (2005) hypothesized that sport psychology will become fully integrated in human, social and cultural sciences and Gardner and Moore (2006) argue that proficiency in sport psychology will foster a professional environment that allows more psychology departments to offer clinical sport psychology (Table 3).

In summary, some distinct features can be identified in the development of sport psychology during the last 25 years. In both the 1980s and 1990s, predictions were made for the development of applied sport psychology courses and programs as well as for health related issues. Moreover, suggestions on how to optimally bridge theory into practical guidelines for coaches and athletes were discussed by many researchers. In the beginning of the 21st century, the question about an academic certification of sport psychologists was highlighted, as well as the need to integrate social psychology into team sports. Predictions for the next decade are for a wider view of human participation in sport, where life-span as well as health development are keywords. From a Swedish perspective, it is expected that an academic qualification in sport psychology will be acknowledged by our sport federations.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to analyze answers from Swedish sport psychology students from two different time intervals (1995 and 2005), and examine how they describe the current

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Silva (2001)</td>
<td>Interest in applied aspects and practice of sport psychology will continue grow. More health related focus will emerge, graduate programs in applied sport psychology will be certified and technology will play a major role in the practice of sport psychology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stelter (2005)</td>
<td>Sport psychology as a human, social and cultural science - “The new approach”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanin &amp; Stambulova (2004)</td>
<td>Courses in life-span development for young and old athletes will emerge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson &amp; Fallby (2004)</td>
<td>Certification system in Sweden is established. Theory driven practice, based on scientific and practical working models, and the establishment of ethical norms as the basic foundations of applied sport psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris (2004)</td>
<td>Life-span development and further development of intervention and longitudinal research design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardiner &amp; Moore (2006)</td>
<td>More psychology departments will offer clinical sport psychology</td>
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and future (10 years ahead) development of sport psychology. This was done by a modified cross-sequential design based on written essay (Figure 1). The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the most characteristic features of sport psychology in the mid ‘90s as perceived by Swedish sport psychology students in 1995.
2. To examine the most characteristic features of sport psychology of today as perceived by Swedish sport psychology students in 1995 and 2005.
3. To examine the most characteristic features of sport psychology in 2015 as perceived by Swedish sport psychology students in 2005.

Method

Population

In 1995 a total of 45 sport psychology students from Halmstad University, Sweden participated in the study. Their mean age was 25.8 years (range 19-45 yrs), comprising 49% men and 51% women. In 2005, 29 sport psychology students from the same university participated in the study. Their mean age was 26.8 years (range 20-50 yrs), and the sample was divided between 41% men and 59% women. Students answered essay questions about the current and future development of sport psychology. Students from 1995 were given the following question: Think of techniques, thoughts and ideas that dominate the area of sport psychology today. Think of how you wish/think the future development will be (2005) (see Johnson 1995 for more information). As a mandatory assignment, students from the 2005 class answered the same question as students from 1995, with future development for the year 2015.

Procedure

The timetable of the research is schematically presented in Figure 1. Students were instructed to document their perception of the current status and future development of sport psychology in
5-10 pages of computerized text. The author analysed the data and a colleague, trained in qualitative analysis, read parts of the student’s text. Measures for achieving trustworthiness when categorizing the text was done in accordance with suggestions by Granheim and Lundman (2004). Data analysis was performed through a five-step content analysis as recommended by Berg (2004) and Granheim and Lundman, (2004).

- First, each students report was read in order to get an overall understanding of the content.
- The text was then condensed into topics related to the objectives of the study.
- The topics were abstracted from the underlying meaning of the text.
- Units of significance were formed from the topics.
- The final process involved abstraction of the whole material through codes, categories and themes. Categories appear by combining different codes with each other. Second level categories are used to structure the material further.

**Results**

Altogether 15 categories and 28 second levels categories emerged from the data based on approximately 530 pages of manuscript. The emergent themes are provided below in relation to both groups of students.

*Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology in the Mid ‘90s*

Three main categories were identified by the students in 1995 in their perception of the then current status of sport psychology (Figure 2). Firstly, that sport psychology was synonymous with psychological skills training, with the dominating techniques being relaxation training, motivation and goal-setting, and "think positive” was a popular buzzword. Secondly, that sport psychology was a new concept in Swedish sport society and, despite a risk of charlatanism, it had a fine future potential. Finally, that sport psychology was solely for elite athletes on an individual level.
Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology Today

In 1995, the students identified four main categories when considering how sport psychology might develop by the year 2005: education, accessibility, collaboration and technological development (Figure 3). Students envisioned a call for certified sport psychologists at federal as well as local trainer education level. Knowledge of sport psychology would be accessible in both public and economic life. Collaboration between universities and sport federations would happen, as well as between sport psychologists and sport pedagogies. Finally, technological developments, such as use of video and advanced computers, would continue to expand in the sport psychology field.
The students in 2005 identified three categories on the topic of sport psychology in 2005 (Figure 3). Firstly, that sport psychology is an accepted discipline and available to people both within and outside of sport. Secondly, that sport psychology is only used by elite athletes on individual level. And finally, that a lack of licensed sport psychologists is the driving force behind a call for more licensed applied sport psychologists and is also a contributing factor in the existence of various myths surrounding the discipline.

**Sport Psychology in the Future**

Five different future themes were identified in the answers from the 2005 class (Figure 4). It is suggested that the need for sport psychology theory and practice will increase for both sports
federations and society in general, as well as elementary and high schools and sports teams. A systematic development of new technology and research methods is important. Certification of qualified sport psychologists will be carried out and there will be a call for sport psychology expertise in sport and exercise settings. The working market will be limited, which will mean few jobs and limited economic resources. Despite this, students foresee a bright and promising future with a number of different and alternative working possibilities. As one respondent indicated “Every large sport federation (e.g. soccer) will have one or more sport psychologists working for them”.

Figure 4. Theme, categories and second level categories describing the future of sport psychology in 2015 by students in 2005.
Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze essay reports about the current and future development of sport psychology based on a sample of 74 Swedish sport psychology students from 1995 and 2005. Both groups of students shared similarities but also demonstrated differences in their descriptions of current and future developments of sport psychology.

Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology in the Mid ‘90s

In the mid 1990s, students characterize sport psychology in terms different psychological skills training techniques. This could partly be due to the fact that, at this time, the most popular textbooks for Swedish students clearly emphasized the importance of skills training techniques in competitive sport (Martens, 1987; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). Researchers in the 1980s also expected an intensive development of applied sport psychology and skills training techniques (Alderman, 1984; Isberg, 1989; Silva, 1984). Another characteristic perceived by the students in 1995 was a belief in a positive future for sport psychology. Interestingly, Uneståhl (1985) also spoke about a positive development of sport psychology to come, when sportsmen would use their full mental capacity in competitive situations. At this time in Sweden, Uneståhls “Mental training concept” (Uneståhl, 1988) was making an important contribution to university-based sport psychology, and as a result probably influenced the thinking of the students participating in the study. The exclusive focus on elite sport, usually at individual level, is probably linked to media reports about sport psychology for individual athletes in sports such as golf, tennis and track and field. Moreover, few comprehensive textbooks existed covering group dynamics in sport. This led to the publication of a textbook for Swedish sport students (Lindwall, Johnson & Åström, 2002) based on “Group Dynamics in Sport” (Carron, 1988).

Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology Today

Although the students in 1995 identified education, accessibility, collaboration and technological development as features of sport psychology in 2005, only accessibility (i.e. acceptance and availability of sport psychology professionals to broader groups in society) is identified by the 2005 students. One feature identified by the 2005 students and also recognized by current research is the importance of establishing the academic certification of sport psychologists (Morris, 2004). Current opinion in Sweden also recognizes the value of academic certification of sport psychologists (Johnson & Fallby, 2004) as a quality marker. Development of new and advanced courses in applied sport psychology based on theory driven practice (Johnson & Lindwall, 2000; Kunath, 1995) including features of applied social psychology (Hanin & Stambulova, 2004) is an important step towards certification of applied sport psychologists. Halmstad is currently the only university in Scandinavia to offer advanced courses in applied sport psychology with both an individual as well as a team sport approach (for more information see Fallby et al., 2004).

The development and use of advanced technology, which was predicted for 2005, is a reality today. Examples include behavioral analysis via video of soccer players (Jordet, 2003) and computer software programs such as Superlab. Silva (2001) also recognizes this point. In Sweden, an embryo of collaboration is also visible between various Universities and sports.
federations, organized and administrated by a special scientific sport psychology group and economically supported by both the Swedish government and sport federation. However, from an international perspective, this future prospect is sparsely documented, probably due to the differing political structures of sport and higher education in other countries.

**Characteristic Features of Sport Psychology in 2015**

The prediction that sport psychology will reach a broader population and that an intense collaboration between sport psychology/academic and sport society will be likely in 2005, suggested by the students in 1995, is further elaborated on by students in 2005. For instance, sport psychology will be a natural and integrated part of team sports and theories of group dynamics in sport will be more accessible to competitive teams. Isberg (1989), Hanin and Stambulova (2004), and Lindwall et al., (2002) all share this conviction. It is to be expected that more competitive team sports call for psychological help in preparing not only for competition, but also for enhancing effective communication and fostering positive group development. This author believes that an increased call for professional psychological help for team sports will be a challenge in the near future. A recent example is the Swedish Football Federation that has just employed a sport psychologist to be responsible for working on carrier transition issues with talented Swedish youth soccer players (Fallby, 2006). Students also predicted that sport psychology will be accepted as a significant subject in most high schools with a sport and exercise focus, and even in some elementary schools. This is already a reality in Sweden. At least a handful of high school have employed sport psychologist in the education of their pupils. Students from 2005 believe that full certification of sport psychologists will be a reality in 2015. Unfortunately the advances gained in the last 5-10 years are rather small from a Swedish perspective. Hopefully students from 2005 are correct when they predict that in the years to come academically trained sport psychologists will have a major advantage in comparison to non-academically trained sport psychologists. From an international perspective, the debate about what constitutes a proper academic education in sport psychology appears to have been resolved in some countries. For instance, both The British Association of Sport and Exercise Science and The Australian Sport Psychology Society have already developed comprehensive educational programs for licensed sport psychologists. Current researchers have suggested that the development of health related issues (Silva, 2001) and possibilities for psychological departments to offer clinical sport psychology (Gardner & Moore, 2006) are both areas for future development opportunities. These important issues are not identified in the student responses from 2005, however they did predict an elevated interest in technological development.

**Future Risks in the Development of Sport Psychology**

Students from 1995 described one negative future scenario for sport psychology, namely that of a continued focus on competitive sport and less on youth and exercise. The risk of charlatanism or commercialization of sport psychology raised in 1995 is also apparent in 2005. Another future issue that students from 2005 identify is the lack of employment opportunities and appropriate economic compensation. An additional issue to be solved in the near future is the importance of defining complex concepts and theories in a way that non-specialists can understand the underlying meaning. If this is not addressed, there is a risk that knowledge will
stay at university level without contact with or benefit to the rest of society.

Summary and Conclusion

The area of sport psychology continues to develop and many of the predictions of students in 1995 have been realized today. It is therefore interesting to speculate which predictions from 2005 will occur by 2015. The debate about certification and an accepted educational platform for licensed sport psychologists should be a priority. In the future, poorly educated sport psychologists will probably face problems, something identified by students from 1995 and 2005 as well as many leading experts in the field. In addition, it is emphasized by both students and researchers that demands by society for professional knowledge and education about health and exercise psychology will increase. The foundations of life-span development have not yet been established in the education of Swedish sport psychology students but there is a growing interest in studying the “whole person approach” (see also Stelter, 2005), including both younger and older persons in relation to exercise. A continued interest in research, theory development and construction of new sport related questionnaires and sport specific qualitative and diagnostic instruments are mentioned amongst international researchers as well as from the student’s perspective. Applied sport psychology, based on theory driven practice, is probably another future area of expansion, as noted by international and national researchers as well as the Swedish students participating in the study.

How will sport psychology look in ten years to come? The call for certified sport psychologists will probably accelerate in especially non-traditional sport areas such as private companies and in school related domains. This is probably also true for team sports such as soccer, ice hockey and handball. One critical aspect that must be solved is the communication of sport psychological principles in an ordinary and non-academic way. Only then will the broader public be able to use the full potential of sport psychology.
References


