



September, 2005
Volume 7, Issue 3

Introduction to Cultural Sport Psychology: Special Edition

***Robert J. Schinke, Ginette Michel, Richard Danielson,
Alain Gauthier, & Patricia Pickard***
*School of Human Kinetics
Laurentian University
Sudbury, Ontario
Canada*

The concept of cultural difference is not new to sport psychology. In 1987, Yessis wrote to the North American audience, and spoke of the secret practices of sport scientists including sport psychologists from the now former Soviet Union. His reflections reiterated Russian techniques that predominated in twentieth century sport, and have recently come to light again with the translation of Puni's research-driven practice (see Ryba, Stambulova, & Wrisberg, 2005). Yessis' acknowledgement of sport systems and sport practices reflecting diverse nationalities was known to sport literature during the 1980's (see Weinberg & Gould, 2003). The first author of this paper, at that time an under-graduate student and aspiring elite athlete, read his book with interest, all the while wondering whether practices that are successful in one country [and with one population] would be successful with another. Would sport psychology practices employed with eastern Europeans, for instance, suit a North American audience? Adding to the discussions indirectly, Cox, Qui, and Liu (1993) noted later that sport psychology, as a domain, extends to Asia, Western Europe, Oceania, and North America. Since, there have also been written contributions from South America (e.g., Moraes & Salmela, 2001). Is it possible that this diversity in locations and people affect applied techniques, delivery of service, and methods of inquiry?

The international flavor of sport psychology speaks to more than the broad array of international research representing diverse locations. The voices within our domain also reflect unique cultural perspectives, and likely, unique needs (Krane & Baird, 2005; Sparkes, 2002). Though sport psychology praxis to the present has been confined to generic techniques, as noted by Ryba and Wright (2005), new discussions are bringing to

light reflexive possibilities for research and practice at the levels of societies, and within each one, numerous communities. Some are beginning to find that motivational techniques must be meaningful at the socio-cultural level in order to be inspirational to their intended audience. Each region and race can potentially benefit from some techniques that span region and population, some cultural twists to pre-existing protocols, and potentially some population specific sport psychology techniques. It is being advocated throughout this entire installment that the emergence of culturally sensitive techniques will extend the scope of applied practice and research in a way that universalism leaves untouched, and therefore, unspoken.

Within this installment of Athletic Insight, cultural sport psychology is the focus of discussion. The catalyzing influence leading to an entire installment devoted to cultural sport psychology is logic. Similar to one of its predecessors, social psychology (see Myers & Spencer, 2003), sport psychology must reconcile different voices, reflecting different beliefs, standpoints, and ontology as Martens (1987) teased nearly twenty years ago. Cultural sport psychology reflects unique aspirations and needs stemming from race, ethnicity, gender, and geography, among other considerations. The authors throughout this entire installment all echo that cultural reconciliation offers tremendous possibility to sport psychology for researchers seeking new lines of inquiry, and practitioners seeking meaningful client-focused approaches.

Earlier Considerations from Social Psychology: A Starting Point

There are certain global similarities across people [including sport performers] such as commonly interpreted facial expressions reflecting universal emotions (Myers & Spencer, 2003). Despite commonalities, there are also clear differences in the area of expression and interpretation when people including sport enthusiasts are compared by culture. Cultural uniqueness spans differences in hand gestures, differences in attribution style and resulting accountability, and differences in material and interpersonal wishes (Myers & Spencer, 2003). Any of the aforementioned nuances provides pause when the intention is to enable and support motivated behavior and resilience as opposed to misunderstanding and its resulting consequences (Bruner, 1990).

Cultural sport psychology, then, has risen to the fore with good reasons. It is wrong to assume that in sport, what works for one person's frame of reference, be it an athlete, parent, coach, or administrator, will necessarily work for another (Martens, Mobley, & Zizzi, 2000; Schinke & da Costa, 2000). Though the potency of motivation as a general imperative cannot be understated, socio-cultural aspects need to be considered as a possible gateway leading to motivational skill refinement and revision. Frame of reference inevitably plays a role in what is regarded as meaningful. For instance, it has been recognized that not all cultures are inspired through self-determined and intrinsic motives (Baron, Byrne, & Watson, 2005). Some cultures are motivated through group process and shared achievement. The diverging values that belie individualism and collectivism are among myriad of potential differences that result in shared perception or misunderstanding in life, and so, in sport.

Cultural Sport Psychology and this Issue

Leading to this installment of *Athletic Insight*, a growing number of researchers have begun to consider culture within their sport and performing arts studies (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003; Ryba & Wright, 2005). For instance, Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002) have considered a cultural approach that better represents the needs of African Americans. In Australia, Hanrahan (2004) explored a culturally meaningful way to understand aboriginal people. Most recently, cultural investigations have also included a community-based approach to understanding and shared ownership, leading to participant empowerment and refined service provision with Canadian aboriginal peoples (see Gauthier, Schinke, Michel, Pickard, & Guay, 2005). These reflexive approaches, among others, are currently adding to an expanding web of practical considerations, and endless research ventures for sport academy to pursue. It is hoped that these endeavors will secure culture as a basic tenet within sport psychology's future.

The present installment of *Athletic Insight* has been developed with research and practice in mind. The submissions to follow are not peer reviewed. Instead, the co-editors invited contributions from active cultural sport psychology researchers. Look further, and you will find that there are submissions that portray Mexican culture, African-American culture, and South American Latin culture. Further, the submissions herein represent academy from Australia, the United States of America, South America, and Canada. In short, the submissions to the September 2005 installment of *Athletic Insight* are both multi-cultural and multi-national.

The first contribution is authored by Dr. Leslee Fisher from the University of Tennessee, Ted Butryn from San Jose State University, and Emily Roper from Temple University – United States. Previously, Dr. Fisher and her colleagues considered the benefits of culturally sensitive practice to client and service provider in both formal education and sporting arenas. In this submission, they have re-visited their conceptual discussion, and have expanded on their thoughts. Their paper speaks to the areas of the dominant voice within sport psychology, the consequences of personal assumptions to applied practice, and the bridging of cultural differences for improved service delivery and education.

The second contribution is authored by Dr. Anthony Kontos from the University of Orleans – United States. In past work, Dr. Kontos overviewed a number of pertinent conceptual issues relating to sport psychology service provision for people of color. Within this installment, he has partnered with a colleague from Uruguay, and they speak about general and sport-related cultural similarities and differences among clients from Central America and South America. Their discussion and consequent suggestions address practical topics including client engagement in health and sport psychology service provision, social support needs, religious differences, and communication spanning languages.

The third invited contribution is authored by Dr. Stephanie Hanrahan from the University of Queensland - Australia. Dr. Hanrahan is an eminent sport psychology

researcher who studies and facilitates improved understanding of cultures including Australian Aboriginals, and most recently, Mexican orphans. In her article, Dr. Hanrahan speaks of the development and delivery of a successful mental training intervention for thirty-four adolescent Mexican orphans. Through her program, she shares how her mental training intervention builds the global self-worth and perceived life satisfaction of participants. Of note, Dr. Hanrahan provides an example of cultural sport psychology research, and she does so while also accounting for researcher and respondent cultural differences.

The fourth contribution is written by Tatiana Ryba, from the University of British Columbia - Canada. Recently, Dr. Ryba overviewed the practices of Russian sport psychology. She has also recently commented on the general scope and status of cultural sport psychology research and practice. Within this installment, Dr. Ryba was asked to consider the field of cultural sport psychology one more time and to suggest future directions for cultural sport psychology researchers and practitioners.

Closing Remarks

The authors for the September 2005 installment of *Athletic Insight* provide only a taste of the socio-cultural sport psychology discourse currently surfacing within the literature. The contributors are not an entire representation of this new and exciting discourse. In keeping, their findings tease at possibilities and implications for those touched by the domain, primarily sport science researchers, professors, applied sport psychology consultants, coaching staff, and athletes. As you read through this installment, consider what each contribution offers to you AND those you are in contact with through sport.

The consideration of culture within the fold of sport psychology is undoubtedly daunting given the quantity of perspectives to reconcile and the associated complexities of each within our global sport community. To counter though, never has there been more of a need for shared understanding and pooled academic and practical effort. With more efficient communication mediums than ever before, there is more opportunity for severed and bridged communication among sport enthusiasts and sport professionals. Cultural psychology offers a challenging future with a rewarding outcome for those who embrace human differences [as well as human similarities] in the pursuit of unified vision and shared growth within the auspices of sport.

References

- Baron, R.A., Byrne, D., & Watson, G. (2005). *Exploring social psychology (4th Canadian edition)*. Toronto, Canada: Pearson.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *The act of meaning*. Boston, MA: Harvard.
- Cox, R.H., Qui, Y., & Liu, Z. (1993). Overview of sport psychology. In R.N. Singer, M. Murphey, & L.K. Tennant (Eds.) *Handbook of research on sport psychology* (pp.3-31). New York: Macmillan.
- Fisher, L.A., Butryn, T.M., & Roper, E.A. (2003). Diversifying (and politicizing) sport psychology through cultural studies: A promising perspective. *The Sport Psychologist* 17(4), 391-405.
- Gauthier, A., Schinke, R.J., Michel, G., Pickard, P., & Guay, M. (2005). *Sport psychology research in Northern Ontario, Canada: Cultural and geographic challenges*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Society for Sport Psychology and Motor Learning. Saint Catherines, Ontario, Canada.
- Hanrahan, S.J. (2004). Sport psychology and indigenous performing arts. *The Sport Psychologist*, 18(1), 60-74.
- Kontos, A.P. & Breland-Noble, A.M. (2002). Racial / ethnic diversity in applied sport psychology: A multicultural introduction to working with athletes of color. *The Sport Psychologist*, 16(3), 296-315.
- Krane, V., & Baird, S. (2005). Using ethnography in applied sport psychology. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 17(2), 87-107.
- Martens, M.P., Mobley, M., & Zizzi, S.J. (2000). Multicultural training in applied sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*, 14(2), 81-97.
- Martens, R. (1987). Science, knowledge, and sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*, 1(1), 29-55.
- Myers, D.G. & Spencer, S.J. (2003). *Social psychology: Canadian edition*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Ryba, T., Kashope Wright, H. (2005). From mental game to cultural praxis: A cultural studies model's implications for the future of sport psychology. *Quest* 57, 192-212.
- Ryba, T.V., Stambulova, N.B., & Wrisberg, C.A. (2005). The Russian origins of sport psychology: A translation of the early work of A. Tc. Puni. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 17(2), 157-177.

Salmela, J.H., & Moraes, L.C. (2003). Development of expertise: The role of coaching, families, and cultural context. In J.L. Starks & K.A. Ericsson (Eds.) *Expert performance in sport: Advances in research on sport expertise* (pp.275-294). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Schinke, R.J., & da Costa, J. (2000). Qualitative research in sport psychology. *Avante*, 6(1), 38-45.

Sparkes, A.C. (2002). *Telling tales in sport and physical activity: A qualitative journey*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Weinberg, R.S., & Gould, D. (2003). *Foundations of sport and exercise psychology* (3rd edition). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Yessis, M. (1987). *Secrets of soviet sport fitness and training*. Toronto, ON: Collins.