The psychology of performance addresses the ways in which performers think, feel, and behave so as to obtain optimal results in their particular domain. Performance psychology addresses both the processes involved in developing performers’ knowledge, skills, and abilities and the execution of those skills during a discrete performance event (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). Performance psychology, thus, can be characterized in terms of both process and outcome. In turn, performance psychologists are “defined by what we do (i.e., performance enhancement), not whom we do it with (e.g., athletes)” (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010, p. 254). As will be described further, the psychology of sport, or sport psychology, holds a privileged position within performance psychology: It is one of the major performance domains, offers a long history of research into psychological factors influencing performance, and provides a rich resource of research and example.

In the sections that follow, I will examine the psychology of performance from a number of different angles: definitions of performance psychology and sport psychology, the sources for or roots from which performance psychology emerges, the conceptual relationship between performance psychology and sport psychology, the significant issues that are addressed within the psychology of performance, and a brief overview concerning consultants’ appropriate training and application. The chapter concludes with some suggestions regarding future directions for the field.

Definitions of Performance Psychology and Sport Psychology

In its broadest definition, performance psychology might be viewed as the psychology of performance—that is, what people do when they are behaving purposively. The common features of performance psychology are described as interrelated fields. At the same time, with its long history of research as well as practice, sport psychology holds a particular, privileged position within the broader field of performance psychology. The roots of performance psychology lie in the fields of applied sport psychology, psychotherapy, and consultation or coaching. The chapter reviews critical issues in the psychology of performance: standards and excellence, competition, emotion, temporal factors, audience, pressure, performance consequences, and performers' developmental trajectories. Issues of appropriate preparation for performance psychology practice and performance psychologists' roles and ethics are briefly addressed. In the various domains of performance psychology, clients' attitudes toward consultants may vary. Further research, training, and practice implications are reviewed.

Key Words: Performance psychology, sport psychology, performing arts, executive coaching, excellence, competition, pressure, consultant, coach
psychology, however, are more specific and targeted: Performance psychology refers to the mental components of superior performance, in situations and performance domains where excellence is a central element. Performers “must meet certain performance standards: They are judged as to proficiency or excellence, there are consequences to poor performance, [and] good coping skills are intrinsic to excellent performance” (Hays & Brown, 2004, p. 19).

A temporal dimension is critical as well: A performer’s particular talents and skills must be delivered at a specific point in time (Brown, 2001). Performance includes the achievement of competence at a particular activity in which performance before others is a central defining feature (Emmons & Thomas, 1998).

Although performance itself is defined by its outcome, sport and performance psychologists focus particularly on the processes that affect those performance outcomes. Performance can be viewed as a combination of the development and execution of knowledge, skills, and abilities in a given performance domain (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010).

Four general areas or domains of performance—sports, the performing arts, business, and high-risk professions—have been the focus of both research and application. Although seemingly diverse, these four areas share certain characteristics. In particular, high levels of performance in these areas are both critical and, often, difficult to maintain (Hays & Brown, 2004). The task of the performance consultant is to assist in the development of more effective performance within the particular domain (Collins & Kamin, 2012, Chapter 37, this volume; Kampa & White, 2002).

In the process of defining the field of performance psychology, it is important to highlight the domain of sport psychology in particular. Sport psychology is in itself an academic discipline, typically, although not always, housed within departments of physical education or kinesiology. Sport psychology addresses the interaction of mind and body to produce highly skilled sport performance. Sport psychology includes such areas as learning, performance, and skill; developmental issues and youth sports; mental/psychological skills; counseling; group dynamics; and well-being (Singer, Hausenblas, & Janelle, 2001). Issues of injury and recovery are critical to performers whose body is their performance tool (see Strean & Mills, 2012, Chapter 31, this volume).

With its long history based primarily within the sport sciences, but increasingly recognized and valued within psychology, sport psychology has been clustered and subdivided in a number of ways. As an amalgam of psychology and sport sciences, in this chapter, and indeed throughout this Handbook, the focus is on ways that sport psychology addresses sport performance and the psychological (cognitive, affective, and behavioral), interpersonal, and systemic elements that contribute to excellent sport performance. As this chapter explores more fully, it can be debated whether sport psychology is the basis for performance psychology or whether it should be subsumed within a broader category of performance psychology.

The Roots of Performance Psychology

Three general sources inform the overall field of performance psychology: applied sport psychology, psychotherapy, and consultation and coaching. Each offers a somewhat different framework, with distinct bases of history, knowledge, practice, application, and assumptions. Applied sport psychology contributes a long-established and well-defined field of quantitative and qualitative research with regard to one specific domain: performance excellence in athletes. Systems of psychotherapy, especially those that emphasize practical, present-focused, active, and affirmative treatment, have direct relevance to performance. Consultation and coaching emphasize the contextual and systemic knowledge that form a vital complement—or antidote—to the sometimes intra-individual focus of psychotherapy.

In general, each of the four principal performance domains draws from slightly different elements of these roots. Professionals working with athletes primarily make use of sport psychology research, some of which comes from concepts and research in the general field of psychology. Those working with business leaders in executive coaching often look to an equally long and separate tradition of research and practice emanating from industrial-organizational consulting. Performing arts consultation (see Nordin-Bates, 2012, Chapter 5, this volume) derives from a mix of applied sport psychology, psychotherapy, and performing arts medicine. Performance psychology with professionals in high-risk professions has thus far been derivative, although the bulk of available information appears to come from applied sport psychology.

Applied Sport Psychology

Psychological historian E.G. Boring identified Coleman Griffith as one of a select number of individuals with the potential to influence the entire field
of psychology (Boring, 1950). A psychologist active during the 1920s and 1930s, Griffith conducted laboratory and field research with athletes while at the University of Illinois and subsequently as a performance consultant. Griffith can be considered the consummate (pre-Boulder) scientist-practitioner, setting the standard for integrating laboratory findings with practical application to real-world situations (Carron, 1993; Gould & Pick, 1995; Singer, 1989). In spite of Boring’s prediction, it would be another 30 or more years until practitioners once again began assisting athletes regarding the psychology of their performance.

The academic discipline of sport psychology has until recent years been of little interest to psychologists (Brewer & Van Raalte, 2002; Murphy, 1995; Petrie & Diehl, 1995). Despite its name, sport psychology research was located within university departments of physical education; its application by psychologists to athletes’ performance only began to be used systematically in the 1960s, with an initial clinical focus on personality variables and the psychological management of the elite athlete (e.g., Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966).

The public became more aware of sport psychology during the 1984 Olympic Games, when televised coverage included several features on the mental aspects of sport. This same period saw the development of applied sport psychology organizations, relevant journals, and graduate programs—the latter still within sport sciences departments (Williams & Krane, 1997; Smith & Christensen, 1995; see also Kornspan, 2012, Chapter 1, this volume).

As key peak performance skills were identified, efforts in the field immediately focused on how best to facilitate these abilities (known as psychological skills training [PST] or mental skills training [MST]). Rapidly, a set of cognitive-behavioral intervention techniques became the typical methods used with competitive athletes (see meta-analyses and reviews by Greenspan & Feltz, 1989; Meyers, Whelan, & Murphy, 1995). This PST “canon” (Andersen, 2000) focuses on the psychological processes that govern performance, such as arousal management, concentration and attention, motor control and rehearsal, goals, and motivation, and these topics are addressed in Part Two of this Handbook. Applied research examining interventions designed to change performance has been augmented by research in the neurosciences concerning the brain mechanisms that underlie performance (e.g., Decety, 1996; Jeannerod, 1997).

### Psychotherapy

With some notable exceptions, the techniques of much of applied performance psychology are consonant with a number of current methods of psychotherapy practice. Contemporary psychotherapy often attends to individuals’ interests in and ability to grow and change, to solve problems, and to become increasingly effective. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and solution-focused methods in psychology seem to provide a particularly good “fit” with performance consultation. Cognitive-behavioral methods offer relevant tools that have regularly been applied in working with athletes. “These PST interventions come directly from CBT…and have been modified to address sport performance issues” (Andersen, 2009, p. 12). Solution-focused techniques (De Shazer, 1985; O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989) share with performance consultation an emphasis on present behavior and practical solutions to problems.

More recently, researchers and practitioners have been adapting mindfulness, acceptance, and positive psychology in their work with performers (Gardner & Moore, 2007; Park-Perin, 2010). These techniques focus in particular on the present and can assist performers in such essential performance methods as nonjudgmental attention and concentration. Positive psychology, focusing on “what works, what is right, and what is improving” (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216), was developed by Martin Seligman and others (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) in large part as an antidote to a disease- or pathology-focused understanding of human beings. Interestingly, this approach has also long been championed by sport psychologists working on performance enhancement:

> In most cases, psychologists are helping unhappy, dysfunctional people to be normal. That is not what we’re trying to accomplish at all. The people I work with want to be the best.  
> *(Bob Rotella, quoted in Newburg, 1992, pp. 16–17)*

The problem is that over time psychology has become the study of abnormal human behavior. That’s clearly not what a sport psychologist does. What is so attractive about sport psychology is that we’re not dealing with people who have psychological difficulties. We’re dealing with generally healthy people….

> *(Linda Bunker, quoted in Newburg, 1992, p. 17)*

These theoretical perspectives and their accompanying methodologies, techniques, and exercises
have immediate applicability to performance psychology in their directed attention to the constructive elements within individuals and situations (Meyers et al., 1995; Murphy, 1995). Clinical and counseling psychologists, proficient in various methods of psychotherapy, use their knowledge, training, and experience in mechanisms of change to help athletes and other performers with performance issues. Within the domain of sport psychology in particular, various educators and practitioners have engaged over many years in lively debate on the validity of a psychotherapeutic as compared with an enhancement perspective; that is, healing or amelioration versus education and skill development (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). In the final analysis, performance psychology is probably evolving toward a field that requires either a breadth of knowledge from multiple domains or a team of experts with diverse proficiencies who can work together to support high-level performance. An educational and strength-based perspective may be most effective and useful for the majority of performance interventions. A lack of grounding in theories and practice in counseling and psychotherapy may become a limiting factor in some situations, however, especially those in which psychological barriers limit performance (Aoyagi, Portenga, Poczwardowski, Cohen, & Statler, in press; see also Chapters 28 to 34 of this volume). Practitioners from noncounseling backgrounds may lack the sequenced training of counseling skills and supervised practice that would effectively prepare them for a range of clientele and situations. Also, without a broader background and perspective, sport science–trained practitioners may be somewhat hampered in their capacity to generalize performance psychology theory and techniques to other domains. On the other hand, those unfamiliar with motor skill development, physiology, biomechanics, and peak performance may be limited in truly helping performers achieve their personal best. This may be especially true for the most elite performers: Competing at a world-class level means a full integration of mental and physical skills (see Côté & Abernathy, 2012, Chapter 23, this volume, and Harwood, Douglas, & Minniti, 2012, Chapter 25, this volume).

Division 47 of the American Psychological Association (APA) developed the Proficiency in Sport Psychology (Public description of sport psychology, n.d.) to underscore the specialized, sport-specific knowledge that psychologists need, beyond that necessary for licensure.

Consultation and Coaching

The roots of consultation and coaching lie in such diverse areas of theory and practice as industrial-organizational psychology, family and systems psychology, and community psychology. All focus in one way or another on the recognition that individuals do not operate in isolation and that there is a powerful interaction between the person and his or her environment. This systemic perspective informs such issues as gaining access or “entry” into a system, formal and informal power, strategic interventions, role function, situational determinants, a focus on solutions to current issues, and a collaborative perspective (Kampa-Kokesch & Kilburg, 2001; Newman, Robinson-Kurpius, & Fuqua, 2002; Sarason, 1967; Wynne, McDaniel, & Weber, 1986). Industrial-organizational psychology, with its roots in organizational theory, human motivation, learning theory, and problem identification and analysis, can provide a strong initial base for coaching (Caironi, 2002).

An athletic coach—or for that matter, an acting coach—works with the performer to build or strengthen already existing skills. The term “coach” (derived from the sport setting, activities, and relationship) thus implies that, although the coach trains, directs, and assists, it is the performer who undertakes the action.

Certain techniques, such as reframing, active listening, empathy, and a focus on solutions, are the province of both coaching and psychotherapy. Coaching has been described as differentiated from psychotherapy in that the focus is on building on a person’s strengths, resources, and passions to actualize growth and potential rather than on treating psychopathology (Dean, 2001; Harris, 2002; Levinson, 1996).

Work between an athlete and sport psychologist is usually described as “consultation”—perhaps to differentiate the role and activity from athletic coaching. In the business context, however, “coaching” is the more common term (Jones, 2002). Coaching has been described as linking “industrial-organizational skills with counseling skills” (Dingfelder, 2006). “Goal-oriented and collaborative” (Foster, 1996), the goal of executive coaching is to assist executives in improving overall performance, with a consequent improvement in the performance of the larger organization (Kilburg, 1996). Typically, an outside consultant is hired by a business organization to meet at regular intervals with a company executive to “improve the executive’s managerial skills, correct serious performance problems, or
facilitate long-term development” (Witherspoon & White, 1996, p. 125).

The Relationship Between Performance Psychology and Sport Psychology

As indicated in the preceding section, some elements of performance psychology derive from sport psychology. In turn, sport psychology has evolved out of various avenues of knowledge. Differing Venn diagrams can illustrate the complex interrelations between performance psychology and sport psychology: Varying size circles overlap in some instances, whereas, in other cases, the circles are nested. I will approach an analysis of the connection between the two fields in the following ways: psychology dominant, with sport psychology a subset; sport psychology as dominant in relation to performance psychology; a disconnect between sport psychology and other areas of performance psychology; or, in occasional instances, an active rejection of sport psychology within performance psychology.

Sport Psychology Informed by Mainstream Psychology

Although the academic and research housing of sport psychology has often been within university sport science departments, much of the practice of sport psychology derives from other areas in human performance. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the “final common path” of cognitive-behavioral theory and techniques, as applied both in clinical contexts and in the development of PST with athletes. The work of Lazarus (e.g., Lazarus, 1991, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), for example, has informed much of the research and practice regarding stress and stress coping among athletes.

The research and analyses of goal setting effects in enhancing performance in organizational and industrial settings forms another example (e.g., Locke & Latham, 1990). Burton's application of these findings to the sports arena, and others' subsequent work in the area (e.g., Burton, Naylor, & Holliday, 2001), has offered a rich stream of research and practice. Despite its promise for sport, however, it has been noted that goal setting in the world of work is more effective in enhancing performance than in the sports domain (Burton, Naylor, & Holliday, 2001).

A number of other psychological theories and research applications were initially directed to the broader context of psychology and subsequently applied to the sports context. Disparate examples would include educational research regarding achievement motivation in school children (e.g., Dweck, 1999) that has been applied to sports (Duda & Hall, 2001); research dating back to mid-20th century industrial-organizational psychology on leadership and team cohesion (e.g., Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; Sherif & Sherif, 1969) with direct application to sport psychology (Paskevich, Estabrooks, Brawley, & Carron, 2001); the general work on the theory of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) that has been specifically applied to understanding peak performance in sport (Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008); or research and theory concerning talent development and expertise in sport and other domains (Ericsson, 1996).

Sport Psychology Informs Performance Psychology

As indicated earlier, sport psychology is one of the fundamental strands in the development of performance psychology. Framing their research as a measure of the consonance of sport psychology in relation to other performance domains (performing arts, business, and high-risk professions), Hays and Brown (2004) found many areas of similarity. As a female musician who was an avid golf player commented, “I am finding it really fascinating to see the parallels between athletic performance and what musicians do. We both have to practice skills until things become automatic; then we have to get out of our own way to show them to others” (p. 3).

Many business executives experience a face-valid connection between focus on athletic peak performance and that within business (Jones, 2002; McCann, 2009; Strauss, 2001; see also Jones, 2012, Chapter 4, this volume).

Interestingly, the “aha!” of connection has at times been appreciated by someone in another area of performance and then thrust on the sport psychology professional. Graham Jones, for example, a university academic who conducted research and consulted with elite athletes, was approached by a senior executive in a large business firm. The executive wanted to make use of Jones’ knowledge of high-level performance. “This was a very responsive environment ready to experiment with many of the key principles of elite sport performance, and the important factor was that the majority of the key principles seemed to apply well to the business environment” (Jones, 2002, p. 269).

Jones noted a variety of parallels between sports and business: organizational constraints, stress resulting from the high visibility and public nature of performance...
outcomes, transformational leadership, and the importance of team functioning. Similarly, a number of well-known sport psychologists have adapted their research and practice to the world of business. Robert Nideffer, for instance, widened his research and procedures regarding concentration and attention from the initial sports application (1970s) to evaluation methods within military and business settings (1990 and subsequently) (EPS history, n.d).

Parallel interests in the psychology of excellence in sports and in business in the 1980s and 1990s, and anecdotal reports of the connections and similarities between successful leadership in sports and the business world, resulted in a proliferation of popular books and motivational speeches by big-name sport coaches (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). A preliminary investigation, comparing sport and business leaders’ perceptions of critical aspects of organizational effectiveness in regard to group dynamics, suggested a close, although not exact, relationship between perceived characteristics of success in the worlds of business and sport (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002).

Sport psychology techniques are being applied in ever-broadening areas of performance, such as work with public safety officers and those in other high-risk professions (Le Scanff & Taugis, 2002; Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002; Seligman & Matthews, 2011). A French sport psychologist, for example, was approached by that country’s police Special Forces to design a stress management program. The organization turned to the sport psychologist specifically because the focus of mental skills training was on performance improvement, education, and behavioral control rather than recovery from psychopathology (Le Scanff & Taugis, 2002).

Performing artists have made use of applied sport psychology to some degree. The unanticipated transition from sport psychology consulting to business coaching is paralleled in published reports by some sport psychology practitioners who were approached by musicians for performance enhancement training (e.g., Emmons & Thomas, 1998; Greene, 2001). As sports medicine informed performing arts medicine, so sport psychology has informed performing arts psychology. Although artistic performance evaluation tends to be more subjective than objective, both sport and the performing arts “involve socially evaluated performances of motor skills” (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002, p. 315). Drawing on the literature in sport psychology, Hays (2002) suggested that performing arts psychology could benefit from research and practice, particularly with regard to performance enhancement, developmental issues, injury and retirement, and eating disorders (see also Nordin-Bates, 2012, Chapter 5, this volume).

Performance Psychology Disconnected from Sport Psychology: Other Sources of Information and Knowledge

The well-established field of industrial-organizational psychology and/or business management, with its own traditions and literature, exists entirely separate from sport psychology. The website for the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology (SIOP) notes that “Industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology is the scientific study of the workplace. Rigor and methods of psychology are applied to issues of critical relevance to business, including talent management, coaching, assessment, selection, training, organizational development, performance, and work-life balance” (What is I-O?, n.d.) The website further indicates that industrial-organizational psychology is directed toward “the application of psychology to all types of organizations providing goods or services, such as manufacturing concerns, commercial enterprises, labor unions or trade associations, and public agencies.”

Even though sport psychologists have become involved in business coaching, whether through their own interest and instigation or on invitation from people in the business world, it is important to recognize the prior legitimacy, research base, and separate field of industrial-organizational psychology. Not to learn from this field is somewhat equivalent to practitioners who become engaged in working with athletes without knowing about the field of sport psychology.

Although public safety and health-related high-risk professions are age-old, the systematic provision of psychological services to these professionals has occurred fairly recently (Scalora, 2009). Much of the research that informs such work comes from applied psychology, psychology and the law, and the literature on occupational stress. A proficiency in Police Psychology within APA, for example, was approved in 2008. This domain consists of “the application of the science and profession of psychology in four primary domains of practice: assessment, clinical intervention, operational support, and organizational consulting” (Public description of police psychology, n.d.).
**Sport Psychology Eschewed by Performance Psychology**

Are there domains of performance psychology in which the two Venn circles (performance psychology and sport psychology) are not only entirely disconnected but actively separate, in which the sport psychology paradigm does not work? In my experience, some performing artists intentionally reject information that might be useful to their domain if they see it as derived from sport psychology.

Performing artists may perceive sport psychology as irrelevant at best, or antithetical at worst, if they do not understand the commonalities. Further, for some performing artists, the sport domain is a direct competitor, whether for visibility, glamor, prestige, recognition—or financial support (Hernandez, Russo, & Schneider, 2009). Performing artists may, additionally, assume that there are fundamental differences between the arts and sports in regard to values, systems, and goals. They may view sport as, in essence, focused on competition and the dichotomy of winning or losing, while seeing the arts as centered on aesthetics and beauty. That both performance processes share similarities may clash with the worldview of these artists (Hays, 2002).

To some degree, this separation can be overcome by careful attention to the language and culture of performing artists. The popular phrase “mental toughness,” for example, has been well-researched in sport psychology (e.g., Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock, 2009a,b; Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007). In teasing out the elements of mental toughness, Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton characterize top-level sport as consisting of “a demand to excel at optimal levels while performing under conditions that are considered extremely demanding” (2007, p. 243). Many in business or high-risk professions can easily adapt this concept and related research to their domains, even if mental toughness is “one of the most used but least understood terms” (Jones et al., 2007, p. 244). Performing artists may be less willing to strive for “mental toughness” but much more willing to accept a comparable term, such as “resilience,” a mainstay of positive psychology (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001).

This cautionary note should be taken as just that: a caution. It can serve as a reminder that consultants need to maintain “contextual intelligence” (Brown, Gould, & Foster, 2005) in working within different performance domains. Among others who have embraced the connection between sports and the performing arts, for example, double bass player Barry Green joined with Timothy Gallwey to extrapolate the “inner game” principles from sport to instrumental music (Green & Gallwey, 1986).

**Critical Issues in the Psychology of Performance**

Do the various performance domains I have discussed share similar critical processes regarding the psychology of performance? Or, are there significant differences that require further study? By “comparing,” that is, comparing and contrasting, it becomes possible to understand more about performance in general, as well as the similarities and differences between particular performance domains.

Because elite sport performance is public, popular, and universal, with outcomes that have both intrinsic and extrinsic consequences, “sport provides the ideal laboratory for examining the stress response and its effects” (Jones, 2002, p. 271). At the same time, direct applications to other performance domains may require careful examination. For example, although considerable research has been conducted regarding coping in sport, a qualitative comparison of athletes’ and performing artists’ coping strategies concluded that coping taxonomies are probably oversimplified: “Sport psychology consultants delivering performance-enhancement services to nonathletic performers should consider domain-specific examinations of the performance demands, language, and other attributes of respective subcultures” (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002, p. 326).

The key issues that will be discussed here include standards and excellence, competition, emotion, temporal factors, audience, pressure, performance consequences, and performers’ developmental trajectory. A number of these issues are examined in greater depth in subsequent chapters of this Handbook.

**High Standards and Excellence**

One of the defining characteristics of performance, as has been noted, is the development and maintenance of high standards, with a focus on excellence.

*A perfect 10! Go for the gold! You’re on! Break a leg! Have a good one! No mistakes! [sic] Such demands set the stage for a perfect performance. For dancers, musicians, and actors, meeting exceptionally high standards is a way of life. For elite athletes and surgeons performing life-threatening operations, 

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flawless, human-powered precision is expected; perfection is the goal. (Mainwaring, 2009, p. 139)

Considerable research and theoretical framing underlies concepts of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, applied to sports and the performing arts (e.g., Flett & Hewitt, 2005; Gould, Diefenbach, & Moffet, 2002; Hamilton, 2008). Mainwaring suggested that the term “performance perfection” be used to denote “the aspiration for perfection in a particular domain of functioning” (Mainwaring, 2009, p. 142). In his own research and in his review of research in this field, Stoeber (2012, Chapter 15, this volume) has partially resolved the perfectionism dilemma by differentiating two main dimensions of perfectionism—perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. In general, Stoeber finds that studies indicate that perfectionistic strivings are positively associated with performance; perfectionistic concerns are not consistently negatively associated with performance. The research is complex, however, and further information regarding the interrelationship of performance and perfectionism is available in Chapter 15, Perfectionism and Performance.

Often internally fueled but with external expectations, the primary psychological issue for performers involves a sustained drive toward perfection. How does the performer maintain that energy without becoming beset by maladaptive perfectionist characteristics? Expectation of the self does not stand alone. It is linked to individual characteristics, whether those be personality traits or performance states. It is also dependent on the systemic factors or milieu in which performance is conducted.

Various studies have pointed to the interaction between ego orientation and perfectionism. To the extent that one is predisposed to seek external validation rather than growth, there are threats to self-worth and a greater likelihood of anxiety, depression, or generally poor functioning (Duda & Hall, 2001).

To some degree, domains with long performance traditions may accentuate the external demand for perfection; classical ballet offers a particularly rich example of this set of beliefs and practices (Hamilton, 1997). Cultural changes also influence performers’ and audiences’ expectations: running or swimming records that are routinely broken add pressure to the performer; musical recordings (comprising carefully spliced snippets from hours of performance recording, designed to obtain a “perfect” sound) lead both performer and audience to expect that live performance should be equally flawless (Hays & Brown, 2004).

These challenges are difficult to resolve. Writing of sports, Botterill suggested that “excellence should be the goal; perfection by definition is impossible” (2005, p. 39). Striving toward excellence, that is, adaptive achievement, involves persistence even in the face of mistakes or perceived failures (Duda & Hall, 2001).

A perfectionistic equestrian, learning to manage her unrealistic self-expectations, reflected on a recent event in which she had participated in a horse show. “It’s a great goal to strive for,” she commented, speaking of her expectations about her performance, “but I shouldn’t set it as a standard.”

A high-stakes world of high-risk professions would seem to demand an expectation of perfection. Intriguingly, and perhaps because of a cultural recognition that perfection is not possible for human beings engaged in challenging activities, the potential for “medical errors” is recognized and tracked. Similarly, it is noteworthy that for 20 years, the Army’s recruiting slogan was not “Be all that anyone could possibly be” but rather, “Be all you can be.”

The mental skills particularly applicable to standards and expectations may include:

- Recognition and appreciation for achievement strivings that motivate the performer toward excellence
- Recognition that focusing on perfection may in fact subvert excellent performance
- Understanding the historical, institutional, and systemic forces that set expectations of perfection
- Regulation of arousal levels in order to be able to manage appropriate cognitions, affect, and behavior
- Effective goal setting and evaluation
- Ultimately, creating a balance of thoughts, feelings, goals, and expectations so that the performer can perform at an optimal, rather than “perfect” level

**Competition**

Competition is one of the hallmarks of performance. It is important, however, to distinguish between competitive situations and competitive motivation. Sports, for example, is in many ways defined by the competitiveness of the event, whether that be competing against the clock (striving for a
particular time), competing against a standard (ranking), or contending against a competitor directly for a win. Other performance domains are often rife with competitive events and fierce competition, yet in these other arenas, “winning” is generally seen as a means to an end, rather than the end in and of itself. Musicians audition for orchestral positions; actors audition for parts in a play; law school students strive for clerkships. Achieving that coveted spot then allows the “winner” to perform; it is not the ultimate performance itself.

Primarily, competition is viewed as rivalry against another, a strong desire to win. This immediately implicates motivation and achievement. “Competition can trigger the drive to excel, to be our best, but it can also make us afraid, envious, and self-centered. It can push us to achieve more than we thought possible, but it also can make us fearful that we will lose what we have” (Balague, 2009, p. 163).

Although the term “competition” immediately suggests contention and triumph over another, in fact the word itself derives from Latin, and means “to come together,” or “to strive together.” Viewed from this perspective, competition becomes an enabling force that encourages drive, focus, and achievement.

The business world is rife with competition; one of the striking and complicating characteristics of competition within business is the rapid pace of change (Hays & Brown, 2004). Recently, the increased salience of electronic communications has, for example, meant that business professionals have extended their work day well into the night and weekend, in order to “stay competitive.” The continuous interruptions of e-mails, tweets, and other forms of social media may feel necessary, but at the same time disruptive and unproductive. How does an individual business executive adapt to these changes? What pressures and demands are exerted? How does this shift in work–life balance affect the person’s family relationships? Does this person respond to these changes with interest and excitement or dread and foot-dragging?

Competition within the high-risk domains may be more varied, subtle, and indirect. Competition to get into medical school is often fierce; once in, competition between students continues, whether for prize placements or specialty training. Medicine is hierarchical. Likewise, the armed services and public safety systems operate within hierarchical structures, ones that imply and sustain competition.

Whereas competition is understood within business or sports to be one of the defining features, for the performing arts, “the competitive milieu…is sometimes unrecognized, overlooked, or minimized” (Hays & Brown, 2004, p. 58). The milieu and expectation, nonetheless, involve competition. There are labeled hierarchies and, often, auditions at every level of skill and competence. Acknowledging the amount of performance anxiety that is endemic to auditions, a jury panelist at the famous music school commented: “I hate audition time at Juilliard. The whole building shakes” (Kogan, 1989, p. 14).

Goal orientation has been identified as a key aspect of the motivational factors involved in competition. (For more on this subject, see Weiss, Kipp, & Bolter, 2012, Chapter 24, this volume.) “Task orientation is self-referenced; the focus is on mastery, and success is viewed as resulting from the exertion of effort. In contrast, ego orientation anchors performance in relation to others” (Balague, 2009, p. 163). Both motivational climate (the performance environment) and personality predispositions (achievement goal orientations), as well as their interaction, are relevant to determining attitudes and goals in competition.

Considerable research, particularly in sport, has examined the relative value of task and ego orientation both with regard to the achievement of success and the avoidance of failure. High ego orientation increases confidence, satisfaction, and energy when a performer is doing well. If other performers are perceived to be doing better, however, ego orientation can threaten the performer’s sense of self-worth. Because of the other-focused nature of this type of motivation, protection of the sense of self becomes more central. An athlete high in ego orientation facing defeat may choose to invest less effort in order to avoid looking incompetent, a process known as tanking (Harwood, 2005).

A balance of both high task and high ego orientation may best serve an athlete in competition. The athlete maintains a fierce desire to win, at the same time sustaining effort and persistence, even if the situation becomes challenging. A high-task/high-ego motivated self-statement might be: “It’s about performing to the best of your ability, being competitive and hungry, and learning about why you might have won or lost on that particular day” (Harwood, 2005, p. 30).

This perspective, one that values the optimal qualities of both types of orientation, can serve as a model not only for sport but for other performance domains. Since Western society in general and
performance situations in particular tend to emphasize ego orientation, it is often useful for those around the performer, and the performer him- or herself, to attend to and reinforce those aspects that are most task-oriented. Particularly relevant mental skills may include:

- Awareness of one's personal tendency toward ego or task orientation
- Maintaining a daily or weekly achievement log, focused on goal setting in relation to process or performance, rather than outcome, goals
- Post-competition analysis, focusing in particular on questions "that relate to technical, physical, tactical, or mental skills" (Harwood, 2005, p. 35); this can apply to coaches, teachers, and parents, as well as performers themselves

**The Role of Emotion in Performance**

The topic of emotion, as a concept in psychology as well as sport psychology, has had a checkered existence. At different moments in history, its importance has been valued and denigrated, equally. Cognitive processes at times have been dominant or at the forefront. The current wave sees attention to emotion as not only pertinent but critical (Algoe & Fredrickson, 2011). Although each of these might be considered “performance” opportunities, soldier “performance” as defined in the present chapter refers more to the specifics of battle. It is here that emotional regulation becomes especially relevant. The interaction of personal style, comfort with emotional expression, and the demands of the particular domain will all influence the emotion that becomes projected at this moment. For example, a professional sniper recognized that, although he was an “emotional” person, he tended to perform in role better when he focused on a variety of mental tasks and distanced himself emotionally from the situation. He knew that he functioned optimally, in role, when he was able to “kind of stand outside of the emotional sphere” (Hays & Brown, 2004, p. 179).

In some areas of performance, then, emotion regulation means maintaining control over either awareness or expression of emotion, whether during or outside of performance. (For further discussion of emotion regulation, see Jones, 2012, Chapter 8, this volume.) In general, traditionally “macho” areas of performance, whether military or contact sports, tend to see emotion as something to be ignored or suppressed. Performers may be reluctant or actually resistant to paying attention to emotion, assuming that it will imply weakness or vulnerability. “A business executive is more likely to admit to a bad decision than to a bad temper” (McCann, 2009, p. 37). For some, emotional expression may become a deliberate (even if unconscious) decision to express an acceptable rather than unacceptable emotion. Anger may be seen as an “acceptable” emotion. Smashing one’s racket or throwing one’s golf club may help an athlete feel strong—and (temporarily, at least) able to bypass the primary emotion of large. One component that is included recognizes “emotional fitness” and “emotional resilience” as teachable skills, akin to cognitive or physical fitness (Algoe & Fredrickson, 2011). “Basic training” is designed to assist soldiers in recognizing that emotions are ubiquitous; soldiers learn the full emotional spectrum, in order to increase their functional and adaptive use of emotion. Based on research developed by Fredrickson and colleagues over the past decade, the “broaden-and-build” theory posits the importance of a range of positive emotions to individual and group functioning, general well-being, and the development of resilience.

Training in emotional fitness for soldiers appears designed in particular to assist soldiers in the management of emotion in their everyday life both within their unit and in their family relationships (Algoe & Fredrickson, 2011). Although each of these might be considered “performance” opportunities, soldier “performance” as defined in the present chapter refers more to the specifics of battle. It is here that emotional regulation becomes especially relevant. The interaction of personal style, comfort with emotional expression, and the demands of the particular domain will all influence the emotion that becomes projected at this moment. For example, a professional sniper recognized that, although he was an “emotional” person, he tended to perform in role better when he focused on a variety of mental tasks and distanced himself emotionally from the situation. He knew that he functioned optimally, in role, when he was able to “kind of stand outside of the emotional sphere” (Hays & Brown, 2004, p. 179).

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embarrassment over a poor play (Balague, 2009; Greenberg, 2002).

Similarly, in police work, “emotions are carefully separated from operational thinking…. Work performance is privileged, and affective maturity is left behind” (Le Scanff & Taugis, 2002, p. 331). The professional, physical, and psychological costs of this stance, however, can mean decreased professional efficiency, increased stress, poorer coping mechanisms, and distance from self-understanding and from emotionally engaged relationships (Le Scanff & Taugis, 2002).

Some performance domains, in contrast, are defined in part by the deliberate use of emotion and emotional expression. Method acting is perhaps the quintessential embodiment of this perspective. A trial lawyer, “playing to the audience” (i.e., the jury) may perform in as theatrical a fashion as a professional actor. Actors describe a flat, emotionally disengaged performance as one that has been “phoned in” (Hays & Brown, 2004). “The artist’s emotional self-expression must evoke the kind of emotional response in the audience that convinces it of the performer’s authentic artistic talent” (Kogan, 2002, p. 4).

One approach to integrating an understanding of emotions into performance consulting is resonance theory. This paradigm, and the resonance performance model heuristic, is based on an assumption that expert performers in all fields seek resonance, “a seamless fit between how they want to feel (internal) each day and the environment (external) in which they live” (Newburg et al., 2002, p. 252). The model has been applied to athletes, performing artists, business people, and those in medicine. Awareness of the “positive lived feelings,” and the intention to elicit these feelings, gives performers the opportunity to manage potentially negative emotional responses to their striving. Performers then can engage in emotional reappraisal and self-regulation. Newburg and colleagues would describe this as “revisiting the dream” (Newburg et al., 2002). Within Resonance Theory, shifting from “what do I have to do today?” to “how do I want to feel today?” can allow an ongoing awareness and intentionality to performers’ cognitions and actions.

Understanding the expression of the interrelationship between affect, cognition, and behavior in a particular domain is often key. As was noted regarding competition, contextual intelligence should guide the consultant. In the business world, “A consultant who describes EI as a means of enhancing productivity is much more likely to achieve behavior change than a consultant who frames some of the same issues as happiness, balance, or emotional well-being” (McCann, 2009, p. 37). In other domains, the opposite presentation would be experienced as authentic: Achieving balance, rather than producing more widgets, could well be a desired outcome.

The role of emotion in performance, then, varies from one domain to another and needs to take individual differences into account as well. Some of the relevant mental skills with regard to emotion in performance may include:

- Differentiation between felt emotion and its expression in the particular performance domain
- Language that conveys the value and utility of emotional knowledge within that domain
- Recognition that emotional awareness and expression can be taught, practiced, and used
- Individualized appreciation for the type and amount of emotional awareness and expression for optimal performance functioning (Hanin, 1999)

**The Temporal Dimension**

Delivering one’s skill at a particular moment in time, being “on,” is one of the central characteristics of performance. It is one of the elements that differentiates performance from practice (which could, at least hypothetically, occur at any time). It is the moment, whether the 21 seconds of hurdling or the 6 hours of neurosurgery, when all of one’s mental skills need to be fully available. Extended focus, in the present, is particularly critical during performance. As a pianist noted:

> When you practice, you’re always editing and you’re always thinking backward, you’re always evaluating. If you play a phrase, you stop and think back: “What can I fix, what would be better there?” But if you do that while you’re performing, then at the moment that you’re thinking backward you’re not thinking about the music that you’re playing at the moment. (Hays & Brown, 2004, p. 184)

The multidimensional construct of attention includes three elements: selective attention, actively divided attention, and concentration, deliberately investing “mental effort in information that seems most important at any given time” (Moran, 2010, p. 501). Robert Nideffer developed a model that looked at situational characteristics for performance and personal preference regarding attention. He suggested that attentional focus varies along two orthogonal dimensions: breadth (narrow or broad)
and direction (internal or external). According to this model, different performance activities require differing attentional foci, and performers vary in their preferred attentional focus (Nideffer & Sharpe, 1978).

Because the temporal dimension defines the moment of performance, and because focused attention is so critical, the development of a “pre-performance routine” is a standard element of PST training. Changes to the performance time frame can be especially challenging. An outdoor event may be delayed by weather conditions; technical problems may beset the most seemingly performance-ready venue. Delays happen. Optimal performance preparation takes into account the potential for shifts of time and timing.

A collegiate gymnast who trained to be a member of Cirque du Soleil noted the temporal difference between the two roles: “The biggest difference is you know how to get up for the NCAAs and Big Tens, but [in] Cirque… you have to be at a peak performance 10 shows per week, 300 shows per year. You can’t have an off-night, because that may be the only night somebody comes to see the show. It requires a different type of sports psychology” (Gerstner, 2010).

The relevant mental skills and processes related to attention, concentration, and the temporal dimensions of performance are discussed in detail in Moran (2012), Chapter 6, this volume, and Masters (2012), Chapter 7, this volume.

**Audience**

Within some domains, the people who observe and engage with the performer form a central, defining feature of that performance. Within other domains, spectators are at most implied. “Although the audience may be an important or even (financially) necessary element of sport performance, a sense of connection with the spectators is not essential to the activity itself. In contrast, one of the central purposes of the performing arts is presentation to an audience—that is, sharing one’s art with others” (Hays, 2002, pp. 300–301).

Even for the same person using some of the same skills, yet in a different milieu or domain, “audience” can have very different meaning. This is vividly illustrated by the gymnast-turned-Cirque performer: “He never saw himself as a theatric performer though. McCarthy knew how to perform as a gymnast, playing to the judges and nobody else. Now, he’s learning how to express himself as a character, such as an insect, animal or a mythical creature, to judging strangers in an audience” (Gerstner, 2010).

For a business executive, audience may comprise a “360” dimension. The executive is being watched and judged directly by supervisors, boards of directors, peers, and “reports.” At a more abstract level, shareholders or customers become the implied audience, the ones to whom the performer feels accountable. A trial lawyer will definitely have an audience: Most directly, the lawyer will address the jury. At the same time, the lawyer will also be playing to the judge, opposing counsel, spectators, and journalists as well.

Issues of audience engagement and interaction are intricately tied in with levels of arousal and perfectionism. Playing in front of a large crowd, in front of a hostile crowd, or in front of an audience for the first time, can all greatly increase arousal and anxiety. Thinking about being observed and judged can trigger concerns about being perfect and increase internal monitoring of mistakes. In order to deal with unwanted and interfering negative emotions and cognitions, performers often need to have self-talk and other CBT strategies readily at hand. Some critically important mental skills will include:

- Arousal management strategies that can be used during performance
- Methods for focus, concentration, and refocus
- Relevant self-talk strategies that, adapted to the individual, the environment, and the demands of the domain, make constructive use of the performer’s awareness of audience or assist the performer in minimizing focus on audience

**Pressure**

Perhaps above all, the multiple elements of optimal performance involve the experience of pressure. No other factor appears to be as universally identified among performers and observers as contributing to poor performance than this culminating sense of pressure that can interfere with well-learned performance. The performer must have enough confidence—or enough capacity to act “as if”—to be able to manage that pressure. The interaction of confidence, mental toughness, and competence all can directly impact the performer’s response to pressure.

Competence is one of the central underlying elements of performance. It is only gained through knowledge and the accretion of experience. It is fundamental to a secure sense of confidence. In a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with
high-level performers in various domains, the one necessary mental skill that all performers endorsed was “confidence” (Hays & Brown, 2004). These performers invariably defined confidence as a product of both thorough preparation and cumulative experience.

This personal confidence bears close connection to a number of other theoretical frames, in particular, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), mental toughness, and resilience. When Australian football coaches conceptualized mental toughness, the first-ranked construct was “self-belief” (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2008).

When performers high in ego orientation are not succeeding, they tend to focus on avoiding the demonstration of lack of competence; they work hard to avoid being wrong (Skaalvik, 1997). In and of itself, this self-protective shift adds pressure to the performer; it moves the performer’s focus away from the goal of ultimate competence and does not give the performer information that will help the person refocus.

Situations that are likely to require high levels of mental toughness include preparation for training and competition, repeated failure, both personal and professional challenges, peer and social pressures, internal and external pressures, and the management of injury (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2008). The key mental toughness characteristics include self-belief, work ethic, personal values, self-motivation, a tough attitude, concentration and focus, reticence, capacity to handle pressure, emotional intelligence, sport intelligence, and physical toughness (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2008; see Jones, 2012). As was noted earlier, it is possible that many if not all of these characteristics could be identified among performers in other domains, if some relabeling were considered.

In general, at the time of performance, focusing on one’s experience of pressure is likely to interfere with the performance itself. The key issues, thus, will be ways in which self-confidence can be sustained and task focus enhanced. In order to manage and counteract the experience of pressure, the full panoply of mental skills may be relevant:

- The experience of performance pressure arises from many sources and is to some extent domain-specific. Awareness and identification of that experience is necessary in order to select the appropriate response(s). A general schematic assesses the perceived demands and supports, the level of uncertainty, and the importance of the outcome. In general, performers will do best by decreasing the perceived demand, increasing perceived supports, handling uncertainty, and managing the perceived importance of the outcome (McGrath, 1970; Weinberg & Gould, 2011).
  - Self-regulatory methods are critical. For any one individual, a specific combination of PST is likely to be most effective, e.g., arousal management (via diaphragmatic breathing or progressive muscle relaxation), cognitive restructuring (positive self-talk, counteracting, reframing), imagery, and an effective pre-performance plan.
  - Methods for responding to affective as well as cognitive activation will be critical.

Performance Consequences

Expectations concerning performance, to some degree, affect performance itself. Performance is stressful in part because it does not exist only for its autotelic properties, the intrinsic pleasure of doing the particular activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The consequences to the performer’s actions are, in fact, part of what defines performance.

The effect of consequence in relation to performance is particularly relevant in high-risk occupations: consequences may be a matter, literally, of life or death, whether in relation to oneself or others. A surgeon’s knowledge, abilities, and skills must come together from the initial slice through the last stitch. Military personnel decisions may affect the lives of their platoon as well as of civilians or military, whether allies or enemies.

When contrasted with these absolutes, the performance consequences for an actor flubbing a line or a swimmer 1/10th of a second slow would seem to diminish in importance. But if it’s a command performance, or if it’s the Olympics, those consequences have great significance both in and of themselves and potentially in regard to that performer’s professional future as well. The Bone Cage by Angie Abdou (2007) offers a detailed fictional account of process and outcome for Olympic-level contenders in swimming and wrestling.

In the business world, although financial loss may loom as a very large and real threat, often it is the potential loss of prestige among others and self-esteem within oneself that becomes threatened by inferior performance (Balague, 2009).

These demands are external; they are the outcome against which performance is judged. In some domains, performance outcome is (to some degree)
linear: A successful business transaction may well augur promotion. In the performing arts, on the other hand, a successful “gig” often stands alone rather than being predictive of future roles or recognition (Kogan, 2002).

The relevant mental skills with regard to consequences may include:

- Attention to the ways in which the performer handles judgment about proficiency
- Cognitive control
- Structured opportunities for deliberate reflection
- Appropriate goal setting and evaluation

**Pacings: Performance Development, Challenges, and Career Completion**

For people whose sense of self is closely, if not inextricably, connected to their professional identity, a number of issues are tied to their performance trajectory. Here, I will look briefly at beginnings: performance development; middle challenges, such as injury, illness, and burnout; and endings, that is, performance limits. Part Four of this volume expands in much greater detail on issues of performance development and career limits.

The various elements that form the arc of a performer’s career are interrelated. As Kierkegard noted, life must be lived forward but can only be understood backward.

**FAMILY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXPERTISE**

The performer’s family of origin may have a marked influence on the entrance and development of the performer into his or her profession. The intra-individual differences that comprise personality are shaped—and equally, shape—those around them. This developmental trajectory is most visible for those whose performance careers begin in early childhood or adolescence. A gymnast who begins her performance life at 6 and ends it on graduation from high school or college will be different from a pianist whose career also begins at 6 but ends in his 70s. In turn, these will differ from a surgeon whose career begins, develops, and continues in adulthood.

Research with children, parents, and coaches has resulted in a three-stage model of talent development in regard to athletes, tied closely to the family and the demands of the sport: the sampling years (ages 6–13), specializing years (13–15), and investment years (15 and up) (Côté, 1999; see also Côté & Abernethy, 2012, Chapter 23, this volume). Family support for professional development involves various costs, including time, psychic energy, and actual finances. This in turn can be strongly influenced by socioeconomic status.

Although Côté’s work has been specific to athletes, it has applicability to other areas of performance, perhaps most obviously for performing artists whose physical activity requires early learning (e.g., ballet; Hamilton, 1997) or musical specialization, such as the violin or piano (Davidson, Howe, Moore, & Sloboda, 1996). Even if not tied to specific ages, the construct sequence of sampling, specializing, and investment offers a broad perspective that can be applied to professional development in any area of performance.

**OVERUSE AND BURNOUT**

Burnout, classically including symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or devaluation, and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982; see also Goodger & Jones, 2012, Chapter 30, this volume), has been posited as occurring in various areas of performance.

This framework may apply particularly in relation to those in professions, such as business and some high-risk professions, that have some longevity. At the same time, early sport specialization—and presumably, early specialization in other performance areas—can result in early burnout (Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996a,b). Especially in areas of performance involving physical activity, overtraining or overuse may become interpreted as burnout (Peterson, 2009).

Not surprisingly, burnout is also intimately interrelated with injury and illness. A track-and-field athlete returned to training after injury had forced her to discontinue the prior season. Her new coach, eager to train her for optimal performance in the new season, relentlessly increased training. Because he was concerned that the athlete would not be fully prepared without an uncompromising practice routine, he was loath to recognize symptoms of overtraining: her tiredness, sleep problems, irritability, and sense that her body just could not respond. At a meeting between the athlete, coach, and sports medicine physician, the coach relented and the athlete became a more effective advocate for her own recovery.

**INJURY, ILLNESS, AND CAREER COMPLETION**

Career limits, whether internally or externally imposed, are important aspects of performance.
Many sports have physical limitations; the wear and tear on the body mean that, for the most part, athletes will need to develop subsequent careers. Dancers experience medical issues and career limits similar to athletes; for other performing artists, however, age and physical limits may be less determinative (Hamilton, 1997; Mainwaring, Krasnow, & Kerr, 2001; Sataloff, Brandonbrener, & Lederman, 2010).

There may be more similarity between than within performance domains. In some ways, the defining feature centers on the physical limits of the human body. For example, ballet has been called “the butterfly profession” (Kaye, 1998, p. AR1), in recognition of the way in which typically, by around age 30, a dancer will need to develop another career, whether within the field (e.g., as a teacher) or entirely outside of it. Similarly, gymnasts’ careers end early.

On the other hand, athletes in some sports can extend their sports careers for many years. Shooting is a sport that sees Olympians in their 50s. Likewise, musicians’ careers extend through a long life; opera singers’ voices only mature in their late 20s. Soprano Sondra Radvanovsky had been singing professionally for 20 years before she felt prepared to take on the lead role in Verdi’s Aida. “It’s not an easy feat, so I waited until I was ready. As you age, you have greater stamina and can push your voice more” (The mega-soprano, 2010, p. 50). Famed cellist Pablo Casals performed well into his 70s and conducted other musicians in his 90s. For most business executives and high-risk performers in non–physically demanding roles, age means advancement and further career development (for a discussion of the role of age-related processes on performance, see Young & Medic, 2012, Chapter 26, this volume).

Illness or injury (see Heil & Podlog, 2012, Chapter 32, this volume) may sideline a performer or put that person’s career on hold for some period of time. Although considerable research on the psychological aspects of injury and retirement has been conducted regarding athletes, the subject is only beginning to be addressed among performing artists (Hays, 2002). Dedicated performers who work in a group environment (e.g., team or company) will often feel a sense of separation, isolation, guilt, or ostracism when sidelined with injury or illness (Hays & Brown, 2004; Peterson, 2009).

Whether injury does or does not end the performing career, in those professions in which the performer’s life has been consumed by this domain, especially from a young age, issues of identity foreclosure may need to be addressed (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Similarly, deselection may disrupt or end a performer’s career path (Brown & Potrac, 2009).

In the management of burnout, overtraining syndrome, or illness or injury, effective methods of recovery can be critically important. Additionally, effective methods of recovery are crucial, ultimately, to the prevention of those aspects that limit the performer’s optimal functioning. A model of systematic recovery, developed in relation to upper echelon executives, is applicable to all areas of performance that involve high levels of unremitting stress (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001).

Thus far, this chapter has considered definitions of performance psychology and sport psychology, the development of these fields, and a variety of critical issues that influence performance across all domains. Because these fields are above all interactive, it is critical to address the other side of the equation: not just the performer but also the consultant who works with the performer. What training is necessary for consultants? How are they perceived and experienced by performers? These two issues are addressed next.

**Sport and Performance Psychology Consultants**

**Preparation and Application**

In the same way that one would examine the question of knowledge, skill, and abilities among performers, especially within emergent fields of practice, it is important to consider these issues among practitioners (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Aoyagi et al., in press; Brown, 2009). By analogy with the field of nuclear physics, one can consider the “half-life” of knowledge and skill: In 1972, Dubin suggested that the half-life of the doctoral degree in psychology was about 10–12 years. Given the rapid pace of knowledge development and dissemination over the subsequent 40 years, professional obsolescence, or the half-life of a professional’s knowledge, may now be considerably shorter (Wise, 2010), especially in new and emerging fields (Neimeyer & Taylor, 2011). This suggests the necessity of ongoing learning, particularly as sport and performance psychology develops.

**TRAINING**

Within the larger field of sport and performance psychology consulting, the overall picture includes a mixture of both formal and informal knowledge and skill. Among the formal elements are those...
developed during academic degree preparation and subsequent structured training. Informal preparation may include performance experience, informal training opportunities, and pertinent formative life experiences (Hays & Brown, 2004).

The field of sport psychology is in some ways separate from the other areas of performance psychology, since graduate programs, standards, and criteria have been developed with regard to competent practice (Association for Applied Sport Psychology, n.d.; Sachs, Burke, & Schweighardt, 2011; American Psychological Association [APA], 2002; Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, n.d.; APA, n.d.). At the same time, the integration of sport and exercise psychology into graduate training in mental health practice is still markedly limited (Pasquariello, 2011). Practitioners interested in sport psychology should at the very least be cognizant of the resources and expectations concerning the practice of sport psychology.

Executive coaching has become very big business: It is estimated that companies spend around $1 billion each year, worldwide, on executive coaches (Dingfelder, 2006). The field, however, is only marginally regulated, with a nearly chaotic mix of charlatans, undertrained professionals, and skilled coaches vying for coveted and lucrative positions.

Practitioners interested in coaching in business settings may come to that work through a variety of training methods; for example, through general training as a psychology practitioner, sport psychology grounding with further applications in the business world, training in consulting psychology or industrial-organizational psychology (see O’Roark, Lloyd, & Cooper, 2005), or coach training (e.g., International Coaching Federation, n.d.). Any of these routes may be supplemental to one’s initial training and practice.

Consulting work with performing artists and high-risk professionals is still in its nascent stages and, as a result, training to work with these types of performers may be more idiosyncratic. It is likely to rely on practitioner interest or expertise in the domain in question, along with informal training subsequent to professional training. This route will seem familiar to those who conducted performance enhancement work with athletes in the early years of the development of applied sport psychology.

Especially within an emergent area of practice, informal preparation takes on more significance (Belar et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2005; Glueckauf, Pickett, Keterson, Loomis, & Rozenisky, 2003; Hays & Brown, 2004). Relevant reading, observation, or direct experience in the domain may all become a central part of one’s additional learning. Interacting with others, whether through being coached, mentored, or supervised, allows further individualized learning and application.

Ongoing informal learning often occurs through the development of a network of colleagues. These colleagues can serve as sounding board, resource, or means of peer review when the consultant encounters challenging situations.

Interest in a domain, although important, does not in and of itself suffice for adequate training or self-labeling. Professional arrogance, ignorance, or hubris at times stands in the way of further specialized training (Hays & Brown, 2004). Charles Brown (personal communication, February 28, 2011), for example, has commented on not knowing what he didn’t know until he obtained sport psychology training, subsequent to his formal training in counseling and family systems work.

ROLE

As previously noted, sport and performance psychology can be defined by both process and outcome, the development and execution of knowledge, skills, and abilities (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). Aoyagi and Portenga differentiate between the activity of performance enhancement and the particular population with whom it is applied. These authors further contend that doing psychotherapy with an athlete is not sport psychology, as it “does not directly improve people’s ability to perform a desired skill” (2010, p. 254). It is worth noting that others, however, would consider this definition more arbitrary than either performers want or need, or practitioners deliver.

It is also important to reflect on the distinction between generalist and specialist. In some ways, it can be argued that a performance psychologist can provide performance enhancement services regardless of performance domain. A more nuanced perspective suggests that contextual intelligence will be critically important to effective service delivery (Aoyagi et al., 2012; Hays & Brown, 2004).

Performance psychologists practice in a number of different settings and take on a variety of roles. Services typically range from educational to clinical to systems consultation—and with all points in between. Depending on the domain, performance consultants may work within university counseling centers, be employed by organizations on a contractual basis, teach classes or workshops, offer consultation in a private practice office, or go on the road,
whether literally or figuratively (i.e., electronically) (Brown, 2009).

ETHICS

Successful professionalization of a field is defined in part by the presence of an ethics code (Whelan, Meyers, & Elkins, 2002). One of the initial tasks following the founding of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (now the Association of Applied Sport Psychology; AASP) was the development of a code of ethics for the practice of sport psychology (Ethics code, n.d.). Similarly, the International Coaching Federation has developed an ethics code (International Coach Federation, ICF Code of Ethics, n.d.). Psychologist members of the APA maintain an obligation to understand and abide by that organization’s ethics code (APA, 2002).

Ethics can be understood as encompassing more than just the application of a specific code. Ethics includes both responsiveness to specific documents and a “continuing process of attending to one’s knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices” (Hays, 2006, p. 224). This latter, “positive ethics,” emphasizes the practitioner’s full ethical or moral development (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). A number of ethical issues in sport and performance psychology are especially relevant, including competence, multiple role relationships, confidentiality, boundaries, and self-regulation (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Hays, 2006; Stapleton, Hays, Hankes, & Parham, 2010). A more extensive discussion of issues in regard to ethics can be found in Hankes, 2012, Chapter 3, this volume.

Client Attitudes Toward Consultants in Sport and Performance Psychology

Because coaching and consultation in sport and performance psychology are interactive processes, consultants’ knowledge, training, and skills need to be matched to some degree by client interest and willingness to engage. Along with clients’ own personality and situation, their attitudes toward working with a sport or performance consultant is critical to the effective functioning of that relationship.

Historically, performers in settings that have been male-dominated and where the role of emotion is minimized during performance, such as sports, business, medicine, and the law, have been somewhat cautious about seeking performance services. The notion of working with a “shrink” seemed to indicate weakness or vulnerability (Linder, Pillow, & Reno, 1989). Practitioners can also tackle this issue from the marketing side of the field, as with the clever adage of baseball performance consultant Harvey Dorfman, who told skeptics: “I’m not a shrink; I’m a stretch” (Shapiro, 2011).

As the domain of applied sport psychology becomes better known, team consultation at both the collegiate and professional level has been increasing (Kornspan & Duve, 2006)—and increasingly well received (Wrisberg, Lobberg, Simpson, Withycombe, & Reed, 2010; Wrisberg, Simpson, Lobberg, Withycombe, & Reed, 2009). For example, collegiate coaches whose teams had met with a sport psychology consultant more than five times were likely to be supportive of further contact with sport psychology consultants. The topics in which they were interested included managing pressure, confidence development, focus, communication (coaches and teammates), and the management of emotional problems, whether collegiate, Olympian, or professional athletes. Many athletes themselves seem more comfortable today discussing their consultations with a sport or performance psychologist or consultant. In her autobiography, Monica Seles described her work with sport psychologist Jerry May after she was stabbed on court in 1993 (Seles, 1996); after winning the 2011 British Open, Darren Clarke discussed with the media his work with Bob Rotella. Perhaps because they are paying attention to this behavior as it is modeled by their sports heroes, adolescent athletes increasingly seek out sport psychology services (Hays & Lesyk, in press).

For at least the past 80 years, business leaders have encountered various types of consultants. Although executive coaching is a recent phenomenon, the legitimacy of consultation and coaching in business is well established, as compared with domains unaccustomed to consultants. Given the wide variability in skills, knowledge, and credentials of consultants and coaches in the field, however, performance coaches may encounter both more competition and more skepticism (Hays & Brown, 2004).

Partly because it is newer and still being defined, and partly because of a culture that eschews neediness, consultation to professionals in or training to be in high-risk professions may be especially
challenging. Credibility is often gained through informal knowledge, whether that is a similarity of lived experience or willingness to “hang out” and learn the culture from within (Hays & Brown, 2004). “Walkabouts” at military bases and the frontline allow soldiers to make meaningful connections with military psychologists (Moore & Reger, 2006). This tactic seems reminiscent of sport psychologists’ actions and methods at Olympic venues (Haberl & Peterson, 2006).

Since performing artists are often interested in matters of cognition and affect, one might think that entrée into consultation with performing artists would be especially easy. There are a few stumbling blocks, however. Performing artists may assume that if they were to work with a psychologist, this would mean engaging in traditional psychotherapy (i.e., that, by definition, it would be long-term, depth-focused, expensive, and therefore unaffordable; Hays, 2002). They may think that performance enhancement training would imply that their performance or ability was in some ways ineffective (Schoen & Estanol-Johnson, 2001). Different from other, seemingly more resistant, performers, those in the performing arts may need particular information and education as to the methods and usefulness of performance psychology (Hays & Brown, 2004).

Conclusion
This chapter has been designed to open the door to the central purpose of the Handbook: exploring the yin and yang of sport psychology and performance psychology. How does each inform the other? Where are the gaps? What are the differences? Does one need to be subsumed within the other?

These questions and possibilities have been raised since the late 20th century, yet it is now, in the second decade of the 21st century, that they are actively being addressed. Courses, workshops, practice, and organizations recognize these intersecting fields. Performance psychology is formally acknowledged through such mechanisms as the Journal of Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, whose inaugural issue appears in 2012. Similarly, this Handbook reflects the knowledge base necessary for initial delineation of this field. New leaders in the field call for a training model in which sport psychology is incorporated into a broader framework of performance psychology (Aoyagi et al., 2012). New answers emerge—and along with them, new questions arise.

From this overview of the psychology of performance in sport and other domains, some conclusions seem warranted:

- To the extent that performance psychology is a field in development, sport psychology has provided a model that offers strengths as well as its own challenges: a strong body of research; divergent means and entry points to practice; training models that have some inherent limitations for the full practice of sport psychology; let alone performance psychology; and unresolved tensions between the academic fields of sport sciences and psychology.
- If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail: Because it is a field unto itself, sport psychology often does not take into account other models of training and research, and other means to the practice of performance psychology.
- Performance psychology is not a unified field. Different domains of performance are at different stages of development, with regard to research, education, practice, and performers’ receptivity to practitioners.
- On the one hand, there are a number of commonalities among domains in the field of performance psychology. Researchers and practitioners should be mining those connections, similarities, and convergences. The richness and challenges of the critical issues in the psychology of performance, briefly reviewed earlier in this chapter, offer many opportunities for learning and sharing. Performance psychology will do best if it is not practiced in silos nor decimated by turf wars. This has implications for research, practice, education, and community among organizations.
- On the other hand, we should be informed by significant variations between the different domains of performance. These domains have vastly diverse histories, reasons for being, goals, and cultures. Those differences, both subtle and vast, need to be appreciated by researchers, practitioners, and educators.

Future Directions
As the practice of applied sport psychology moves into “adulthood,” its strengths and limitations have become clearer. Whether at the individual or organizational level, the value and utility of a broader perspective, focused on human performance, holds great appeal and promise.
Education is critical along a number of dimensions, particularly if viewed broadly and addressing many types of stakeholders:

- At the graduate level, programs need to be developed that enhance student learning and opportunities, rather than the piecemeal, often random, and undirected experience that students frequently encounter.
- Perhaps this systematic training will occur within sport sciences departments, perhaps in psychology. The broader focus on the psychology of performance may support more creative and interdisciplinary connection.
- As a discipline, psychology continues to need to learn about, embrace, and help define performance psychology.
- Because performance psychology is emergent, those who have already completed formal education and who approach performance psychology from within an already-established career form a distinct cohort. Their needs for further education and support should be addressed.
- Standards of competency, guidelines for practice, and ethical standards will need to be further developed.

Ironically, the public may be ready to embrace performance psychology; it is we who are professionals in the field who may need the greatest amount of education. Interpreted at an individual, organizational, systemic, and cultural level, we may best be guided by the words of the sage, Hillel, speaking to us across two millennia:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
If not now, when?

References


