

FINAL ACCEPTED VERSION:

Thelwell, R.C., Wood, J., Harwood, C., Woolway, T., & van Raalte, J. (2017). The role, benefits, and selection of sport psychology consultants: Perceptions of coaches and parents. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*.

doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.12.001

Accepted on: 1st December 2017

Running Head: The role, benefits and selection

The role, benefits and selection of sport psychology consultants: Perceptions of youth-sport coaches
and parents

Revision submitted: November 2017

Abstract

Objectives: With practitioners needing to be 'more things to more people', it is essential to understand third-party consumer perceptions of the role and benefits of sport psychology consultants (SPC), and the characteristics that may influence such services being sought.

Design: A qualitative thematic analysis approach was used in Study 1 and a cross-sectional conjoint analysis approach was employed in Study 2.

Methods: In Study 1, 22 participants (11 youth-sport coaches, 11 parents) took part in semi-structured interviews to investigate, a) understanding the SPC role, b) the benefits of seeking the services of an SPC, and, c) the salient characteristics of an SPC that would influence judgments on preference and likelihood to seek consultant services on behalf of their athlete/child. In Study 2, a total of 115 participants (51 youth-sport coaches, 64 parents) rated 32 practitioner profiles generated from Study 1, with a conjoint analysis employed to determine the relative importance of SPC characteristics.

Results: SPCs were viewed by youth-sport coaches and parents as practitioners who can help athletes enhance their performance and well-being, which would be of benefit to athletes. The SPC attribute most important to coaches and parents was interpersonal skills, with a preferred SPC profile also including a high level of experience and training, and a known reputation.

Conclusions: SPCs are viewed by youth-sport coaches and parents as experts regarding performance enhancement and well-being. SPCs with strong interpersonal skills, extensive experience and training, and a known reputation are preferred by coaches and parents. Findings reinforce the importance of educating those responsible for the ongoing development of athletes to the role and benefits of SPCs, and for SPC training to ensure that interpersonal skills development opportunities are available.

Key words: applied sport psychology, consultant roles, consumer preference, professional training

1 The role, benefits and selection of sport psychology consultants: Perceptions of youth-sport coaches
2 and parents

3 With the increased focus on quality assurance procedures associated with the practice of
4 sport and exercise psychology consultants (SPC), researchers have attempted to gain a more
5 detailed insight to: a) the development of appropriate training and supervision programmes for
6 SPCs (Eubank, 2016), b) characteristics associated with effective practitioners (Lovell, Parker,
7 Brady, Cotterill, & Howatson, 2011), and, c) the processes associated with gaining entry to consult
8 with clients (Hamberger & Iso-Ahola, 2006). Researchers have also explored the selection of SPCs
9 (Morris, Alfermann, Lintunen, & Hall, 2003) and marketing of SPCs to potential client groups
10 (Woolway & Harwood, 2015). Additional research that explores perceptions of SPCs from the point
11 of view of coaches, and in particular, youth-sport coaches and parents may be valuable.

12 Following initial qualitative work, researchers have empirically examined the perceived
13 characteristics of effective SPCs (e.g., Lubker, Watson, Visek, & Geer, 2005) with Lubker, Visek,
14 Watson, and Singpurwalla, (2012) using conjoint analysis to determine the relative importance of
15 the characteristics of effective SPCs in relation to each other. In attempting to understand why
16 ‘potential clients’ make one choice over another, sport psychologist profiles from combinations of
17 eight attributes (gender, race, interpersonal skills, body build, attire, athletic background,
18 professional status, sport knowledge) were combined to create ‘sport psychologist profiles’ with the
19 results from the 464 college athletes suggesting professional status to be the most influential
20 attribute (23%), followed jointly by athletic background and interpersonal skills (14%), then sport
21 knowledge and attire (12%). With regard to professional titles, Van Raalte, Brewer, Matheson, and
22 Brewer (1996) found that the professional title ‘sport psychologist’ was perceived as a non-sport
23 profession. Apparently, the term “sport” had little impact on modifying perceptions of the title
24 ‘sport psychologist’ as a psychological one, although it should be noted that Maniar, Curry,
25 Sommers-Flanagan, and Walsh (2001) found the inclusion of the term ‘sport’ in the title ‘sport
26 psychologist’ enhanced individual’s willingness to access services. Further exploration of the

1 effects of SPC credentials by Lubker et al. (2012) indicated SPCs described as having an advanced
2 degree as being preferred to those without any credentials.

3 To combine the analysis of credentials and titles whilst also investigating whether education
4 about the use of titles and associated credentials impacts consumer attitudes and preferences for
5 consultants, Woolway and Harwood (2015) examined perceptions of three professional titles (sport
6 psychologist, life coach, and neuro-linguistic programming), a range of other practitioner
7 characteristics, and the extent to which a brief intervention impacted these preferences. Such titles,
8 whilst reflecting clear differences in terms of training and accreditation requirements, are frequently
9 sought after within the sporting domain. Having been asked to provide preferences of the three
10 professions, the athlete participants were then provided with short educational vignettes designed to
11 enhance understanding to what the professions were, and the training requirements for each. Using
12 conjoint analysis to assess the relative importance of practitioner attributes pre- and post-
13 intervention, interpersonal skills emerged as the most important attribute prior to intervention,
14 irrespective of professional title. However, post-intervention an increased salience in professional
15 title was reported. Collectively, the findings reinforce the importance for SPCs, and the broader
16 applied sport psychology community to educate consumers with the requisite information to their
17 education, training, credentials and roles to ensure they are approached by those seeking sport
18 psychology support, as opposed to alternative professions that may be less appropriate.

19 Although the literature presented thus far has contributed a great deal to consumer
20 perceptions of SPC effectiveness, it is reasonable to assume that the information does not fully
21 reflect the way athletes engage in consultation with SPCs. This is despite such interest dating back
22 to the 1990s where, upon the emergence of sport psychology services, Taylor (1994) provided
23 insightful commentary to the ethical issues associated to the use of the term 'sport psychologist',
24 and offered guidance to how practitioners should operate within their competence boundaries. As
25 such, it is reasonable to suggest that the reality for many athletes is that the selection of an SPC is
26 influenced by other gatekeepers who operate within the sporting environment and at a youth level;

1 coaches and parents. Such a view reinforces recent suggestions that parent and coach behaviours
2 influence, for example, athlete decision-making and motivational orientation within youth-sport
3 contexts (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavellee, 2014; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017).

4 On this point, researchers have examined the perception held of SPCs by coaches, and their
5 intentions to use such services. For example, in their survey of NCAA Division 1 coaches,
6 Wrisberg, Loberg, Simpson, Withycombe, and Reed (2010) reported most coaches as willing to
7 encourage their athletes to seek support from an SPC. However, although coaches favoured the role
8 of an SPC to be full-time, less than half of those sampled supported the view that SPCs should be
9 present in training and competition environments. Further to this, Zakrajsek and colleagues have
10 completed a programme of work examining the perceptions, preferred use, and perceived benefits
11 of SPCs from the perspective of NCAA Division 1 coaches and athletic trainers. In their initial
12 work, Zakrajsek, Martin, and Zizzi, (2011) reported high school football coaches who were
13 confident in, and open to engaging with the outcomes of working with an SPC, to be more likely to
14 consider recommending the use of an SPC. Elaborating on this further, Zakrajsek, Steinfelt, Bodey,
15 Martin, and Zizzi (2013) examined NCAA Division 1 coaches' perceptions and use of SPC services
16 with key outcomes focusing on the importance of the SPC and coach to be on the 'same page', and
17 the degree to which the SPC can meet the coach expectations; who they are (e.g., experience), what
18 they do (e.g., provide value), and how they do it (e.g., accessibility). In the first of two studies
19 involving NCAA Division 1 Athletic Trainers, Zakrajsek, Fisher, and Martin (2016) reported an
20 inability of more than 50% to describe sport psychology, with those who could, perceiving it as a
21 mental tool primarily focused on performance enhancement. In a final study, Zakrejssek, Martin, and
22 Wrisberg (2016) reported athletic trainers with positive experiences of working with SPCs to be
23 more likely to seek the services of such individuals to assist with the injury-rehabilitation process,
24 and view the benefits of SPCs in a more favourable light. What is obvious from the aforementioned
25 studies is the focus on coach perceptions of SPCs and the absence of parental experiences and
26 perceptions of SPCs, despite their key role in youth-sport.

1 academy level) or national governing body (e.g., youth national structure). Participants were only
2 eligible for participation in the study if they had no previous experience of using SPC services.

3 **Data Collection**

4 **Interview guide.** An interview guide was developed by members of the research team who
5 held more than 75 years of combined experience and were Health and Care Professions Council
6 Registered Sport and Exercise Psychologists and/or British Association of Sport and Exercise
7 Science Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientists and/or Association for Applied Sport Psychology
8 Certified Consultants. The interview guide was developed following a review of the literature that
9 examined consumer preferences of SPCs, knowledge of SPCs, and SPC attributes. The guide was
10 initially pilot tested with two individuals (1 youth-sport coach and 1 parent) who met the criteria for
11 full study involvement prior to the data collection period commencing. The pilot interviews enabled
12 minor amendments to the clarity of some questions to be made and demonstrated the need for
13 inclusion of further elaboration and clarification probes.

14 The final interview guide consisted of three sections: the role of SPCs (e.g., “what is your
15 understanding to the role of a sport psychologist?”), perceptions of how an SPC would benefit their
16 athlete/child (e.g., “how would a sport psychologist help your athlete/child?”), and, characteristics
17 that influence the selection of an SPC (e.g., “what are the characteristics you would expect an SPC
18 to possess for you to approve their work with your athlete/child?”). A social validation process was
19 also employed to check the interview process with regard to whether participants felt they could tell
20 their story fully, whether their responses were influenced, and to ensure that opportunities to
21 provide comments or suggestions about the procedure and format were available.

22 **Procedure.** Following an initial recruitment campaign where sporting organizations known
23 to the first two researchers were contacted, subsequent snowballing recruitment took place where
24 potential participants were asked to contact one of the research team to confirm their interest.
25 Having had the study purposes explained, all participants volunteered their consent prior to taking
26 part. The research was undertaken according to the ethical guidelines of the lead author’s

1 institution, from which ethical clearance was received. Prior to each interview, participants were
2 provided with an information sheet outlining the general areas for discussion. All interviews were
3 face-to-face and conducted by the same researcher who had received training in qualitative
4 techniques. Despite the semi-structured interview format enabling a certain element of structure to
5 each interview, the ordering of questions and subsequent exploration varied depending on
6 participant responses. To supplement the ‘fixed’ questions across the interviews, probe (“please can
7 you elaborate on [the issue]?”) and elaboration (“could you explain [the issue] in more detail
8 please?”) questions were employed to facilitate the flow of the interviews. At the conclusion of
9 each section of the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked if all appropriate responses
10 had been discussed and explored in their entirety. Interviews lasted 48 - 73 min (*M* coach length =
11 58.32, *SD* = 9.44; *M* parent length = 52.24, *SD* = 7.91), were recorded digitally, and yielded a total
12 of 138 pages (coach = 71; parents = 67) of single-spaced text having been transcribed verbatim.

13 **Data Analysis**

14 In keeping with the post-positivist approach to the data collection and adhering to previous
15 literature (e.g., Schinke, McGannon, Batocchio, & Wells, 2013), we employed the six steps
16 proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to conduct an interpretive thematic analysis. To commence
17 the process, data were transcribed verbatim prior to the first and second authors reading, and re-
18 reading transcripts to familiarize themselves with the content. At this point, a reflective segment
19 was utilized to record initial impressions and note similarities and differences. This was especially
20 important given that the coach and parent data were analysed separately, and only combined for the
21 purposes of reporting. The second stage required the identification of key features in a systematic
22 manner using codes across each data set. Completion of this enabled the third stage to take place
23 where two authors met and discussed their preliminary codes and collated interpretations into
24 further themes. The fourth stage was where the coded data were developed into a thematic map,
25 where the two authors considered the alignment of themes and sub-themes. Across stages two to
26 four, the researchers used an iterative process to place the raw data themes in lower, then higher

1 order themes that were organised into general dimensions. To refine each theme, the fifth stage
2 enabled the development of clear definitions to be derived for each label. In keeping with the
3 purposes of thematic analysis, the final step afforded the opportunity for selected data extracts to be
4 collated for presentation. Throughout the process, the two authors tried to ensure that they were
5 being reflexive and interactive with the data, and using the recommendations forwarded by Smith
6 and McGannon (2017) they worked as critical friends in a reflexive manner. In the latter stages of
7 the data analysis the themes were deductively placed into *post hoc* general dimensions, based on the
8 emerging themes prior to the third author becoming involved to ensure that appropriate member
9 reflections on the data had taken place between the first and second authors.

10 **Results**

11 The results derived from the data analysis procedures represent the interview responses from
12 the coach and parent populations. For both populations, the raw data themes were organized into
13 lower, and then higher order categories prior to being placed within the three key dimensions of the
14 research foci: a) the role of practitioner psychologists; b) views to how working with an SPC would
15 benefit their athlete/child; and c) characteristics that influence the selection of a practitioner. For
16 purposes of brevity, the data are presented via verbatim quotations with the specific data being
17 presented for the three study aims in figures 1-3.

18 **The role of SPCs**

19 For coaches, a total of 68 raw themes were inductively placed into 15 lower order themes
20 and 3 higher order themes (practitioner role, delivery mode, availability). For parents, the 54 raw
21 data themes were placed into 14 lower order themes prior to being placed into the same higher order
22 themes to those identified for the coach data.

23 One common perceived practitioner role discussed by coaches and parents related to ‘athlete
24 performance’ with specific raw data themes relating to athletes being able to fulfil their potential,
25 gain confidence, and manage pressure during performance. Specifically, one coach illustrated the
26 role of an SPC as helping athletes to be more successful:

1 “I suppose the key role is to help them improve their performance to be, well,
2 more successful. I want them to support [the athletes] and help them deal with
3 the pressures. We get them in to help with getting them better and to be more
4 aware to what they have to face in [sport]...they need to skills to be successful
5 when it really matters”.

6 A further perceived practitioner role raised by coaches and parents was the contribution
7 made to athlete development and well-being. Along with ‘helping athletes understand the demands
8 of elite sport’, and ‘contribute to holistic development’ one interesting theme emerging from the
9 parents was to do with guidance on alternative careers. This is detailed in the following quote:

10 “I get that there are performance benefits and all of that but the reality is that so
11 few of them will make it, they have to have other options. I guess that I hope that
12 they will give [child] information on what else is out there, what else they can
13 do. They develop all these skills so hopefully they realize that they may not get
14 there and that they may have to think about other jobs in the future. Even if they
15 do make it, it won’t see them through to when they’re much older so they will
16 have to have something to support them when they finish playing”.

17 Another coach referred to the benefits of the support that practitioners afford them (e.g.,
18 feedback on communication methods), both coaches and parents acknowledged the need for
19 practitioners to ‘support other groups’. In fact, both groups commented on the importance of
20 parental education with one theme cited by parents referring to the education that they receive to
21 how they communicate with their children:

22 “There are times when I feel quite lonely as a parent. We take them around and
23 watch them but it is hard to know what to say...they get back in the car and it’s
24 like, silent, coz I am unsure what to say. There are times when I could do with
25 knowing what the best thing to say is? How can I support them when they have
26 had a [poor performance], or what has [coach] said to them?”

1 The second higher order theme reflecting the perceived roles of a practitioner reflected the
2 mode of delivery with coaches and parents suggesting support to be via individual, group, and
3 practical formats. This very point is captured by one of the coaches who commented “to be honest, I
4 want [SPC] to be effective, I don’t mind how they work with [athletes] as long as they can link it
5 with what I do with them”. One of the interesting themes reflected the importance for SPC services
6 to be delivered within the training environment rather than just limited to the ‘classroom’.

7 “There is certainly a need to meet with [athletes] and talk things through and at
8 times, do the workshops to get key messages across but the best work, I think, is
9 for them to come into [training environment] and to integrate their messages into
10 the actual training. The [athletes] don’t always get the transfer bit, the skills into
11 practice, so to have [practitioner] involved and actually leading the session is
12 crucial. For me, if they can’t do it then they can’t really be effective”.

13 The final higher order theme reflected data that emerged in relation to availability. There
14 were contrasting views to when, and where practitioners should be available but the consistent
15 theme was that the practitioners should be available when the athlete requires them. As an
16 advancement of this, there were also suggestions to the importance of remote electronic support
17 with Skype and email as commented on by one of the parents:

18 “They [the child] know when things aren’t right and they don’t always need me
19 or [coach] to say they need some help. I am happy that they can contact them in
20 their own time and do Skype or something, they all have the phones and tablets
21 so it isn’t strange for them...we know who they are working with so it is fine
22 and [the sporting organization] are happy for it”.

23 **Benefits of working with an SPC**

24 A total of 68 raw data themes were reported by coaches and placed into 14 lower order
25 themes prior to the two higher order themes labelled ‘enhanced psychological strength’ and ‘elite
26 standard awareness’. For parents, the analysis resulted in the accrual of 57 raw data themes prior to

1 13 lower order themes, and then the same higher order themes as the coach data. One of the most
2 consistent themes across the coach and parent participants reflected the beneficial influence that
3 SPCs have towards enhancing athlete confidence, and more specifically to instilling a positive
4 attitude. This issue is captured in the following extract from one of the coaches:

5 “They [the athletes] have so much to deal with and one mistake can be it, it can
6 all just fall apart. I mean they have to be positive, they know they are gonna
7 make mistakes coz that’s the job we’re are preparing them for. I mean at the end
8 of the day, we try and prepare kids to play international sport, play sport in front
9 of thousands of people. So yeah, they’ve gotta be positive and have the right
10 attitude to deal with it all, and that’s the stuff outside of [sport] too. I think a key
11 job of the [SPC] is to help them learn how to deal with that stuff, to build the
12 skills, and to make sure that they have confidence all the time, or know where to
13 get it from”.

14 A further benefit to athletes working with SPCs reported by coaches and parents was the
15 perceived development of athlete toughness and resilience. Themes reflecting the ability to cope
16 with the wide-ranging sporting demands, managing performance downturns, and coping with
17 pressure were cited across coach and parent groups. Parents also noted the need for athletes to cope
18 with parental support.

19 “Sometimes they go out there looking really timid, almost afraid of failure. The
20 [SPC] can help them sort that and understand how to recover from the setbacks.
21 They [child/ren] talk about not wanting to let us down and all that but so long as
22 they do their best they won’t. I feel [child] has to get over what they think we
23 are thinking as we are really proud of them and [child] needs to toughen up and
24 not worry about us. Hopefully they [SPC] can help them get that tough edge
25 where they don’t feel any pressure from us. We’ve had our turn and it’s our

1 choice to support [child] now. If it doesn't work out they just have to know that
2 we support them and they have done all they can".

3 Two further interesting themes regarding enhanced psychological strength emerged from the
4 parent data sets within the 'enhanced self-awareness' and 'understanding of others' lower order
5 themes. First, it was the view of many parents that SPCs could help their children with trying to
6 separate their sport from home life. In fact, one parent commented:

7 "They need to leave it behind, leave it at the door, they bring their anger,
8 frustration and all that home with them and it can be a nightmare when they
9 walk in, they need help to see how they behave and treat us sometimes...the
10 [SPC] can help them channel it, leave it behind, help them with understanding
11 the separation between home and sport. Don't get me wrong, I know they are
12 annoyed but they need to learn to manage it".

13 A related theme referred to how the SPC was perceived to be able to enhance understanding of
14 sibling relationships and the below was raised by one of the parents:

15 "My lot [children] are ultra-competitive and although they get on, it is a
16 competition and I just wish that sometimes they could help each other. But then
17 I know some others [families] and they have one who is totally non-sporty and
18 they just don't have anything to do together. I think they [SPC] can help with
19 getting them to chill out a bit when they are together, they must use up so much
20 energy when they go on together and sometimes just talking and helping each
21 other, but someone else telling them to do it would help".

22 The second higher order theme emerging from the perceived benefits associated with working
23 with an SPC reflected an enhanced awareness of the standards needed to be able to develop to the
24 elite level. One intriguing theme was mentioned by coaches and related to organizational
25 expectations, and more specifically, to where the athlete sits within the organization as suggested in
26 the following:

1 “It’s tough, there is a load of competition and we only sign a few every year to
2 turn pro. They have to understand where they [child] sit within the bigger
3 framework and what they have to do to progress...we tell them that all the time
4 but having someone else give the same message, just a different voice can have
5 just as much impact on them”.

6 A final theme, mentioned by both coaches and parents reflected the importance of the athletes
7 having the awareness to make the most of their opportunities and trying to develop themselves at all
8 times. One parent explains the benefit that an SPC can have in this regard in the following:

9 “We want them to give it a good go, to see how far they can push themselves
10 and the [practitioner] can help with the motivating bit to keep them working.
11 They have great opportunities here, all the support they could want and good
12 examples of people who have been in their position and made it so they need to
13 push themselves all the way”.

14 **Characteristics influencing the selection of an SPC**

15 A total of 64 raw data themes emerged from the coach data that were then placed into 21
16 lower order themes prior to six higher order themes (reputation, qualification, knowledge,
17 experience, interpersonal skills, service nature). Parent responses yielded 49 raw data themes that
18 were placed into 19 lower order themes prior to sharing the same higher order themes. Within the
19 reputation higher order theme, although several consistent responses across the coach and parent
20 participants were cited (e.g., recommendations), there were some contrasting views. For example,
21 parents cited advertising as being a key characteristic, whereas coaches appeared to use their
22 perceived knowledge of SPCs to influence the reputational judgment made. The responses in
23 relation to qualifications were of interest in that coaches appeared to demonstrate knowledge of the
24 importance of professional accreditation when selecting a practitioner, a perception that did not
25 appear to be held, or at least mentioned, by parents.

1 Further to the reputational and qualification based characteristics, parents and coaches
2 reported 'knowledge' and specifically 'sporting knowledge' and 'population knowledge' as key
3 selection criteria. As such, within the population knowledge lower order theme, data referring to the
4 SPCs ability to communicate with the population in question was raised. Although there were no
5 suggestions to how this would be assessed, one parent made the following assertion:

6 "One of the things I'd look for is how they get things over, these kids are
7 switched on and they'll suss you out pretty quick. They need to know how to get
8 things across, use the right language and make things exciting. If I were a
9 [athlete] then I wouldn't want to sit around, I'd want to know why it will help
10 and what it will do".

11 Closely aligned to having the requisite knowledge is the requirement to have experience.
12 There were several data themes emerging to the differing levels of experience that coaches and
13 parents would seek in an SPC. These included whether they had performance experience and
14 coaching/parental experience. Amongst the more consistent themes was the extent of SPC
15 experience expected. For example, one of the coaches commented "they have to be experienced...if
16 I'm bringing them in I can't have people who have little or no experience, these [athletes] are the
17 future and they have to have the right support". Supporting this stance were many parental
18 comments with the following being of relevance, "I would want them to be pretty well experienced,
19 my [child] deserves someone who can give them the right support and has been around a while to
20 pass the information on".

21 Coaches and parents alike referred to the importance of interpersonal skills on several
22 occasions with references made to communication, interpersonal style, and observable presentation.
23 The most commonly cited themes were associated with interpersonal style and the need to be
24 approachable, personable, able to listen, trustworthy, timely, and respected. For parents, a key
25 interpersonal skill was in relation to communication, and more specifically to whether they
26 themselves would feel comfortable in the practitioner's company.

1 “If I couldn’t work with them or feel comfortable with them then I won’t have
2 them, I need to know that I am ok with who [child] is working with. Even though
3 I know where they are and what they are doing, I kinda want to sit in the first
4 session, or at least part of it to see what they are like”.

5 A final theme worth noting referred to service nature, with one of the key higher order
6 themes being the cost associated with the support. Although both coaches and parents referred to
7 value for money, for coaches, many of the costs would be absorbed within their organization
8 budgets. For parents, they would be more likely, although not always, to meet the costs of
9 employing an SPC, although they were not fully able to articulate what costs they deemed
10 appropriate:

11 “A key thing is how much they cost, is it worth it, what are they going to give
12 for it, how do we know whether it is a good cost? I know you can’t always tell
13 how things will work out but you’ve gotta think of the value for money. Some
14 people we know get it as part of the club but there are times when that isn’t
15 working and we go elsewhere”.

16 **Discussion – Study 1**

17 The aim of this study was to examine youth-sport coach, and parental understanding of the
18 role of an SPC, the benefits of seeking the services of an SPC for their athlete/child, and the salient
19 characteristics of an SPC that would influence judgements on preference and likelihood to seek
20 SPC services for their athlete/child. To accomplish this goal a series of semi-structured interviews
21 were conducted with youth-sport coaches and parents of team and individual sport athletes, with
22 data analysed in accord with the principles of thematic analysis.

23 With reference to how youth-sport coaches and parents understand the role of an SPC, there
24 are consistencies across the groups’ perceptions of the SPC role, and there are several stark
25 contrasts. Both coaches and parents reported that they perceived SPCs to have an influence on
26 athlete performance, as well as the enhancement of psychological strength, and enhanced awareness

1 of elite standard expectations. However, when viewing the raw data themes, it was interesting to see
2 the extent to which parents perceived a key role of the SPC to be associated with athlete
3 development and well-being. This is not to say that coaches were not of the opinion that SPCs
4 should be utilized for broader development purposes, more a case that they were more focused on
5 the performance benefits that they anticipated would be realized following work with an SPC. A
6 further key observation is the extent to which coaches perceive the role of an SPC being to assist
7 them; both in terms of direct support, and for the coaches' continued development. In support of
8 recent commentaries (e.g., McCarthy & Giges, 2017; Rynne, Mallett, & Rabjohns, 2017) coaches
9 certainly perceive themselves as performers in their own right, and as such, see the SPC as a vehicle
10 to influence their performance capability. Parents also perceived the SPC role to include coach
11 support, as well as to develop parental knowledge of sport psychology (Harwood & Knight, 2015).
12 Finally, in addition to some of the more outcome-focused roles, there were a number of key process
13 expectations that coaches, and parents held of SPCs. For example, there was a common perception
14 across both groups that the SPC should deliver services in varying formats and be easily available
15 to athletes. In fact, for the latter point, the availability of e-support was reinforced suggesting that,
16 perhaps, with ever-evolving social media usage, alternative formats of support require development
17 and training (Heaney, 2013).

18 The results of this research have important implications for the field of sport psychology.
19 Given the lack of clear understanding to the roles of SPCs, it could be valuable for individuals and
20 organizations to disseminate more widely and clearly the benefits of SPCs and to further manage
21 the expectations held by potential consumers, especially those with limited experience of utilizing
22 such services. Of course, this has to an extent been encouraged in previous work (e.g., Woolway &
23 Harwood, 2015) but consideration to how SPCs are perceived by alternative gatekeepers such as
24 parents and coaches appears necessary. When considering SPC training, findings associated with
25 modes of delivery (e.g., individual, group, practical) and availability appear to warrant attention
26 given that many training routes appear to solely focus on individual support. Training on how best

1 to consult with both individuals and groups (be they athletes, coaches, parents, significant others)
2 seems necessary, as does increasing awareness of how best to consult within practical settings (e.g.,
3 Ponnusamy & Grove, 2014) and when using alternative approaches such as social media (Cotterill
4 & Symes, 2014). Given that the data were generated by potential consumers, those delivering the
5 services must be cognizant of the consumer demands.

6 Turning attention to the characteristics associated with influencing youth-sport coach and
7 parent judgments on preference and likelihood to seek SPC services, themes similar to those
8 reported in athlete studies emerged (e.g., interpersonal skills; Woolway & Harwood, 2015), with the
9 exception of physical (e.g., build, weight) and uncontrollable (e.g., race, gender) characteristics.
10 However, some similarities to findings reported in previous coach-focused studies, and in particular
11 that by Zakrajsek et al. (2013) where coaches expressed preferences to experience, desirable
12 characteristics, and, style of communication of the SPC. Such findings reinforce some of the current
13 findings given that for the population sampled, personal-focused characteristics appeared to hold
14 greater value. Further to this, themes relating to availability of the SPC not previously mentioned in
15 athlete studies (e.g., cost, willingness to travel) emerged as well as differences across the coach and
16 parent populations within themes. One key example was reported within the interpersonal skills
17 theme where parents would judge their selection of an SPC based on how they would feel in their
18 company; a characteristic or criteria not reported by coaches.

19 Despite the advances in knowledge made from the data presented in study 1 using a
20 qualitative thematic analysis approach, the overarching research aim was to elicit gatekeeper
21 perceptions of SPCs. To achieve this, the intention of Study 2 was to employ a quantitative conjoint
22 analysis to examine the salient SPC characteristics identified from Study 1, and to identify the
23 relative value related to aspects of the descriptions. The purpose of the data being to increase
24 awareness to the characteristics that SPCs may wish to develop to be more marketable to varying
25 audiences who may seek their services (e.g., youth-sport coaches, parents) and to ultimately
26 enhance their effectiveness as an SPC. In doing so, the authors acknowledge the tension that exists

1 when using mixed-methods (cf. Sparkes, 2015) but progressed via the adoption of a pragmatic
2 stance to address the research question at a different level that in this case, required a shift from
3 epistemological purity (see McGannon & Schweinbenz, 2011 for a full review).

4 **Study 2 - Method**

5 **Participants**

6 A total of 115 participants (youth-sport coaches: $N = 51$; parents: $N = 64$) with either
7 athletes or children currently involved in sport took part in the study. The coaches (male = 40,
8 female = 11; M age = 37.32, $SD = 12.33$) represented a range of competitive levels, including;
9 voluntary (foundation/grassroots; $N = 25$), county/regional ($N = 14$), or professional/governing
10 body (academy/youth national; $N = 12$). Similarly, parents (male = 24, female = 40; M age = 46.51,
11 $SD = 5.55$) reported that their child participated at a foundation/grassroots ($N = 16$), county/regional
12 ($N = 34$), or professional/governing body (academy/youth national; $N = 14$) level. Participants were
13 only eligible for participation in the study if they had no previous exposure to SPCs.

14 **Instrumentation**

15 **Demographic Measures.** Participants were first asked to complete items relating to their
16 gender, age and their status as either a coach or a parent. Those identifying as a parent were asked
17 to respond in relation to their child's level of competition (e.g. grassroots, county/regional, or
18 professional/governing body) and age. Coach participants completed items relating to the level at
19 which they coach (e.g. volunteer, county/regional, or professional/governing body) and the age of
20 the athletes with which they work.

21 **SPC Profiles.** The selected attributes for the study were generated within study 1 of this
22 two-part study, and resulted in five characteristics to be investigated. These were (a) experience and
23 training, defined as the volume of experience held by the SPC and indicated by their qualification or
24 training status; (b) interpersonal skills, defined as the ability of the SPC to use his or her personality
25 to develop a positive working relationship with athletes; (c) consultant reputation, defined as the
26 extent to which the perceived effectiveness of the SPC is known; (d) consultancy focus, defined as

1 the SPCs primary focus of their work; and (e) service nature, defined as the method by which the
2 SPC is employed¹.

3 The aim of a conjoint analysis is to determine the most preferred levels of each variable that
4 is investigated, therefore the following levels were selected for use in this study: a) experience and
5 training (high or low), b) interpersonal skills (high or low), c) reputation (high or low), d)
6 consultancy focus (performance or well-being), and e) service nature (independent or
7 organizational). This technique asks respondents to make choices by trading off features against
8 each other meaning that choices are made in the same fashion as the consumer presumably does.
9 Conjoint analysis allows the researcher to determine both the relative importance and the most
10 preferred level of each attribute, is more robust than previously employed rank order techniques,
11 and can then be used to predict individuals' future decisions. In keeping with the expectations for an
12 effective conjoint analysis (Woolway & Harwood, 2015), the attributes were deemed to be
13 independent of each other, thus limiting the potential for them to overlap and be 'double-counted',
14 and the statements were deemed appropriate given their concise meaning. As such, a full-profile
15 method was utilized for this study with the combination of all variables and levels resulted in 32
16 SPC profiles that formed the instrumentation for this study. Participants were asked to rate their
17 preference for each of the profiles on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*Very low preference*) to 10
18 (*Very high preference*). Presenting participants with 32 profiles in one form has the potential to add
19 complexity and overwhelm individuals; profiles were divided into and presented as four equal
20 sections of eight profiles each.

21 **Procedure**

22 Having received ethical clearance from the lead author's institution, participant information
23 and guidance, demographic questions, and the practitioner profiles were entered into
24 SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). Participants were recruited via a combination of

¹ Information is available on request from the lead author in the form of supplementary figures relating to the information presented to participants about the five characteristics.

1 approaches that included: contacts of the research team, social media, snowballing. Once they
2 volunteered their consent to take part, participants completed the demographic questions relating to
3 age, gender, and coach/parent level. Next, each SPC attribute was defined (e.g., experience and
4 training) alongside the choice of levels (e.g., high/low). Participants were then asked to rate their
5 preference for each of the 32 practitioner profiles on an 11-point scale.

6 **Data Analysis**

7 Data were downloaded into SPSS 23.0.0 and checked for any missing or incorrect responses
8 prior to a conjoint analysis being conducted on individuals' rating data. Conjoint analysis produces
9 utility (part-worth) scores and relative importance scores. Utilities (part-worth) provide a
10 quantitative representation of the preference for each level of an attribute, and are expressed in a
11 common unit, allowing for the addition of scores to produce the total utility of any given
12 combination. Following the conjoint analysis, Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) were
13 conducted to analyze the subgroup differences in terms of gender (male/female), and level of
14 competition (coaches; volunteer/ county/ professional; parents; grassroots/ county/ professional).

15 **Results**

16 Conjoint analysis indicated that the most preferred SPC was one who had high levels of
17 experience and training, high interpersonal skills, whose reputation was known, a consultancy focus
18 on performance, and who worked independently of an organization. The relative importance ratings
19 indicate that interpersonal skills (42%) carried the most influence over participants' judgements,
20 followed by experience and training (28%), reputation (13%), consultancy focus (9%), and service
21 nature (8%).

22 Post-hoc MANOVA were conducted on the resulting utility (part-worth) scores to determine
23 if there were any differences between subgroups in relation to their status as a coach or parent, their
24 gender, and the level at which they coach/their child competes. Coach respondents rated SPCs with
25 high experience and training significantly ($p < .01$) higher than the parent sample (1.395 vs. 0.950;
26 respectively). An additional significant ($p < .01$) finding between the two groups occurred in the

1 consultancy focus attribute where coaches preferred an SPC who focused on performance, whereas
2 parents preferred a focus on well-being (0.175 vs. -0.113; respectively). This latter finding was
3 again evident between male and female participants. The male sample significantly ($p < 0.05$)
4 preferred an SPC who focused on performance, with the female group preferring one who focused
5 on well-being (0.148 vs -0.148 respectively for performance). These groups significantly ($p < .05$)
6 differed on their ratings for the consultants' service nature with male respondents preferring an SPC
7 who worked within an organization. The female sample preferred an SPC to work individually for
8 an organization (0.048 vs -0.092 respectively for organizational service nature).

9 After analyzing participant data by the level at which they coach/their child competes, one
10 significant difference ($p < .05$) was evident. Volunteer coaches rated SPCs whose reputation was
11 known significantly higher than county/regional level coaches (0.619 vs 0.179 respectively). No
12 significant differences existed between other groups ($p < 0.05$).

13 Discussion – Study 2

14 The present study was designed to enhance understanding of youth-sport coach and parent
15 preferences for SPC attributes with specific respect to sport psychology services. Interpersonal
16 skills were identified as the most preferred SPC attribute, followed by experience and training,
17 reputation, consultancy focus, and service nature. Such an outcome highlights the importance of
18 interpersonal skills within the SPC domain and reflects the perceptions of others who seek, and
19 experience successful support in alternative counselling-based professions (Pope, 1996). The
20 combination of interpersonal skills and experience and training collectively accounted for more
21 than 70% of the influence on consumer preferences across all participant groups in the study. The
22 consistency, and degree to which importance was placed upon interpersonal skills unequivocally
23 strengthen the recent calls for the development of this key personal competency within professional
24 training programs (see Harwood, 2016).

25 Although professional titles were not explicitly referred to, participants were seemingly able
26 to acknowledge the importance of training routes and experience. However, it would be

1 irresponsible to assume that all participants were aware to what the appropriate training routes are
2 to protected titles, and that potential service consumers are educated about the role, benefits, and
3 preferred characteristics of SPCs. Organizations with a responsibility for the governance of sport
4 psychology qualifications may benefit the field by providing appropriate information for *potential*
5 service users to enhance confidence regarding the profession. This is especially the case given the
6 upsurge in competing professions (e.g., life skills coaching) where individuals may be unaware of
7 the nuances between the varying professions that offer psychology-oriented services in the sporting
8 arena (Nasar & Devlin, 2011). In fact, this very point reflects some interesting work in the field of
9 late where greater awareness, both within, and external to the profession, is advocated to what the
10 role of an SPC is (see Winter & Collins, 2015a), and more poignantly to the importance of ensuring
11 that the approaches advocated and utilized within the profession have a sound evidence-based
12 underpinning (e.g., Winter & Collins, 2015b). Excellent examples of this are the recent studies that
13 have examined the development, and usage of observation within applied sport psychology from
14 the perspective of experienced and trainee practitioners (e.g., Holder & Winter, 2017; Martin,
15 Winter, & Holder in press). To expand, observation has long been used as an assessment,
16 evaluation, and monitoring strategy by SPCs despite there being a lack of research, and subsequent
17 guidance for training programs specific to the sport psychology domain. This commentary clearly
18 indicates that SPCs, be they trainees, or fully qualified, require a broad knowledge base, an
19 expansive skillset and varying experiences to be able to respond to the increasing demands that
20 sporting organizations and contexts place upon them. As SPCs are being challenged to be “more
21 things to more people” it becomes essential for professional development and training systems to
22 provide an appropriate quality assured, and well-regulated system of training.

23 **General Discussion**

24 The purpose of this research was to explore youth-sport coach and parent perceptions of
25 SPCs. To that end, Study 1 employed a qualitative thematic analysis where coaches and parents
26 reported a common perception of SPCs in that they have an influence on athletic performance,

1 psychological strength development, and greater awareness to expectations associated with the elite
2 standard. Although a performance focus was evident, further examination of the data suggested
3 parental perceptions of SPCs to be more focused towards general athlete development and well-
4 being. Study 2 built on the findings of Study 1 using a quantitative conjoint analysis to determine
5 the relative importance of the SPC characteristics with the findings of the work highlighting the
6 demand for SPCs with effective and high level interpersonal skills.

7 With the overall findings in mind, it would be appropriate to suggest that when neophytes
8 enter qualification pathways, a rigid appraisal of their interpersonal skills is conducted to establish
9 the extent to which they need to focus on developing such qualities early in the training process.
10 The same, of course, could also be levelled at more experienced SPCs who engage in continual
11 reflection of their consulting effectiveness and engagement with client groups. Acknowledging the
12 broader issues associated with training programs and more specifically, competency development,
13 organizations responsible for the development and provision of training routes may wish to utilize a
14 model akin to that advocated by Miller (1990) for healthcare professions, to enable SPCs to
15 progress from novice, to expert, in terms of knowledge application (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003).
16 Specifically, competence development progresses via the possession of knowledge (know), the
17 interpretation of, and being able to apply the knowledge (know-how), demonstrating the application
18 of knowledge (shows how), and finally applying the knowledge in 'real-world' (does). Within the
19 context of interpersonal skill development, many neophytes are likely to enter a training programme
20 with a knowledge to what the essential interpersonal skills are for working with a client (i.e., know),
21 yet be unaware, or would not have been asked to consider, how the skills might be employed, for
22 example, with a client in a high-performance environment when they are performing poorly (i.e.,
23 know-how). Undoubtedly, the key implication here is for professional associations responsible for
24 developing training routes (and post-accreditation development) to mandate specific skills training
25 as part of their qualifications given that such skills are now consistently being identified as preferred

1 characteristics by those either seeking the services of an SPC for themselves, or for those for whom
2 they are responsible.

3 The nuanced findings around consultancy focus also bear some thought with respect to how
4 practitioners, both neophyte and experienced, may tailor their rapport building with parents and
5 coaches. Whilst youth-sport coaches preferred a performance enhancement focus, parents ascribed
6 greater importance to services favouring the well-being and personal development of their child.
7 This was also the case for females in the sample, the majority of whom were mothers (i.e., as
8 opposed to coaches). Although this factor was of less relative importance to other characteristics, it
9 offers implications not only for the ways that practitioners present themselves in general, but also
10 how they navigate potential philosophical differences between mothers and fathers in the family
11 dynamic. Indeed, a limitation of the current study is that it investigated those gatekeepers who may
12 be prospective consumers as opposed to those who have had extensive experience with sport
13 psychology consultants. Given the lack of experience with SPCs, it is fair to assume that detailed
14 perceptions to the role, and benefits of such individuals held by the participants could be limited.
15 However, given the richness of data that emerged from the interviews, coupled with the support for
16 themes presented in previous work and the emergence of new insights, the limitation may not be as
17 dramatic as initially thought. Future work to compare data to individuals with more extensive
18 experience with SPCs would certainly provide clarity here. Notwithstanding this, a further area for
19 work would be to understand the hiring experiences and decisions of those managerial staff with
20 direct organizational responsibility for employing sport psychologists (Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell,
21 Gilmore, & Anderson, 2017; Lerner, Wagstaff, Thelwell, & Corbett, 2017). This current work
22 could also be intimately extended to in-depth reflections of practitioners who have been hired by
23 parents, aligned with reflections of parents who have employed practitioners to work with their
24 child. Such research may also scrutinize views around independent versus organizationally-
25 employed practitioners as females (the majority of whom were parents) favoured an independent
26 consultant over one provided through an organization.

1 In conclusion, this two-part study contributes to the existing SPC consumer preference
2 literature in that the views of salient third parties (coaches and parents) were established to the role
3 of an SPC, the benefits that an SPC could have on their athlete/child, and the characteristics that are
4 most salient to influence judgments on preference and likelihood to seek consultant services on
5 behalf of their athlete/child. Not only do the findings from Study 1 provide useful indicators of how
6 SPCs are viewed in terms of their role and benefit to client groups, but it also enabled a more
7 detailed insight to the characteristics that key gatekeepers seek in SPCs to take place in Study 2. As
8 such, from 32 differing practitioner profiles, the study revealed that an SPC who had high
9 interpersonal skills, an elevated level of experience and training, and a known reputation to be
10 preferred by all coach and parent participants. Such findings reinforce the importance of ensuring
11 that consumers are appropriately educated on the role and benefits of SPCs, and for training
12 programmes to ensure that opportunities to demonstrate the application of interpersonal skills are
13 available. We hope that the implications of these findings assist the ongoing professional
14 development and promotion of the field of applied sport psychology.

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21 perspective. *The Sport Psychologist, 27, 258-268.*

Figure Captions

1

2 *Figure 1.* Understanding of the SPC role (a frequency analysis is provided in the first column to
3 illustrate youth-sport coach responses and in the second column for parent responses).

4 *Figure 2.* Perceived benefits of seeking the services of an SPC (a frequency analysis is provided in
5 the first column to illustrate youth-sport coach responses and in the second column for parent
6 responses).

7 *Figure 3.* Characteristics of an SPC that would influence judgment to seek services (a frequency
8 analysis is provided in the first column to illustrate youth-sport coach responses and in the second
9 column for parent responses).

10 *Figure 4.* The part-worth utility values and relative importance for parent and coach subgroups.

11 *Figure 5.* The part-worth utility values and relative importance for male and female subgroups.

8	6	Help athletes become successful		
5	2	Help athletes fulfil their potential		
5	1	Optimize athletic performance		
4	4	To enhance athlete confidence		
3	2	Develop coping mechanisms		
3	2	To develop the resilience and toughness of athletes		
3	2	To benefit recovery from setbacks		
3	3	Improve psychological aspects of performance	Athlete performance	
3	-	To ensure that athletes prepare and review performance		
2	-	Enable improved decision-making during performance		
2	2	To enhance emotion management before, during and post-performance		
2	5	To help athletes manage pressure in performance		
2	-	To assess athletes for intervention work		
1	1	To help athletes understand situations before they happen		
1	2	To help athletes set goals and know how to achieve them		
-	3	To help them address problems		
9	5	Improve athlete understanding of mental skills benefits		
9	5	Help athletes understand demands of elite sport		
5	3	Enable athletes to see the bigger picture		
4	1	To aid transition of athletes across levels		
3	-	To refer to alternative specialists when necessary		
2	2	To understand their sport in the context of other life demands	Athlete development and well-being	
2	3	To monitor athlete well-being		
-	2	Enable athletes to disclose issues		
-	3	Ensure welfare is monitored		
-	3	Provide guidance on alternative careers		
-	2	To monitor workloads and potential for burnout		
-	2	To address non-sport issues		SPC role
6	3	Help keep coaches confident and focused		
6	-	Be a point of contact for coaches		
5	-	Provide feedback on athletes in case meetings		
5	-	To help develop coach toughness and resilience		
5	-	Develop awareness to coach pressure and stress		
4	-	Develop coach preparation	Coach support	
4	2	Help coaches understand demands on athletes		
4	-	Support for organizational demands on coaches		
3	-	Review coach performance		
2	3	Observation of behaviors during training and competition		
1	-	Mediating issues		
9	-	Help coaches integrate psychology into training		
8	2	Contribute to session development		
7	-	Provide feedback to coaches on communication methods		
6	-	Help coaches reflect on delivery styles	Coach development	
6	-	Review the coaching environments		
5	3	Develop leadership skills for varying athletes		
5	-	Deliver coach-education workshops		
6	5	To provide parental sessions		
5	-	Facilitate team support meetings	Support other groups	
2	6	To raise awareness of sport psychology to parents		
-	5	Provide feedback to parents on communication methods		
5	-	Develop psychology support across the full programme	Psychology education	
5	-	Ensure a consistent psychology curriculum in the club		
11	10	Provide individual support	Individual support	
8	6	Work with individuals over a period of time		
11	5	Deliver group sessions on key themes		
11	6	Present workshops	Group/education sessions	Delivery mode
4	1	Work with sub-groups where appropriate		
7	2	Deliver the psychology in the [sporting environment]		
5	-	Lead the [practical] session with a psychology focus	Practical sessions	
3	-	Show how the psychology links with the training		
4	3	Available at all times	Regular contact	
3	1	Contact once a week		
11	8	When [athlete] requires them		
8	4	Whenever [coach] thinks that the athlete needs them	Partial contact	
-	3	Whenever [parent] thinks that the athlete needs them		
11	11	Present at training sessions		
8	4	Be around the training environment	Training	Availability
6	2	Be able to integrate with athletes during training		
10	5	Important to be present during competition, but not a distraction	Competition	
6	1	Be visible at competition so it has an impact		
11	7	Meet with [athletes / coaches / others] away from sport environment	Neutral	
4	2	Have meetings in the [club]		
9	4	Important to have their details		
4	4	Consult via Skype	E.support	
4	4	Use emails for feedback		
3	1	Use text messages and other e.formats		

11	8	Positive attitude	Enhanced confidence	Enhanced psychological strength
10	6	Confident thoughts and behaviors		
10	6	Positive mindset		
5	-	Confident to talk to others such as coaches / specialists		
4	2	Knowing what they have over others		
4	5	Developing a total belief in what they do		
10	6	Better ability to cope with sporting demands	Toughness and resilience	
10	1	Knowing others are competing for your place		
9	6	Managing poor performance and slumps		
9	5	Coping with pressure		
9	2	Coping with negative emotions		
5	3	Awareness to expectations of self and others		
5	1	Awareness of additional demands such as travel		
5	-	Develop skills to see things as a challenge		
4	2	Overcoming doubt and capability worry		
2	-	Enhanced awareness to performance review		
-	6	Not feeling guilt about success for parents		
-	5	Management of expectations		
8	6	Enhanced ability to focus on what is needed	Enhanced focus	
7	2	Setting realistic and appropriate goals		
5	1	Getting everything they can from themselves		
5	2	Developing concentration skills		
2	-	Shutting out the things that disrupt focus		
8	4	Developing string routines and preparation strategies	Enhanced preparation	
7	4	Knowing what their preparation is		
4	4	Not having to follow everyone else in what they do		
4	-	Developing an individualized routine		
1	-	Having flexibility in their routine		
9	6	Enhanced ability to react correctly in-performance	In-performance awareness	
7	2	Continue to focus on the right decisions		
6	2	Not getting caught up in the situation		
5	-	Critical moment awareness		
3	3	Using the key strategies during performance		
2	-	Keeping to the processes		
5	4	Understanding to the demands of an elite athlete lifestyle	Sporting toughness	
4	2	Preparation to make sacrifices		
3	-	Being prepared to do the right things all the time		
2	-	Ensuring the standards are understood and maintained		
2	3	Awareness of 'living on the line' with injuries		
4	6	Increased awareness to how and why they behave like they do	Enhanced self-awareness	
3	5	Better awareness to reactions to situations		
3	2	Better understanding to own feelings and emotions		
2	-	Knowing how they present to others		
1	-	Understanding preparedness to adhere to requirements		
-	6	To leave the sport behind at the door		
-	6	To still be a person but not lose focus		
-	7	Reinforce importance of enjoyment		
-	2	Better awareness of things outside of [sport]		
4	3	Knowing why others behave like they do	Understanding of others	
4	-	Understand why coaches talk like they do		
3	1	Awareness of opponent behaviour		
3	2	Awareness of teammates behaviour		
2	4	Understanding parental influence		
-	4	Understanding sibling relationships		
8	4	Understanding competition demands	Competition performance demands	
6	1	Awareness of 'other factors' that require management during competition		
3	2	Planning for competition eventualities		
6	4	Attitudes and expectations	Training behaviour and expectations	
5	4	Making sure that the right things are done		
5	1	Training as they want to perform		
3	-	Getting into good habits		
2	2	Understanding the importance of quality training		
-	3	Encourage appropriate behaviors and standards		
4	6	How you are perceived away from [the sport]	Non-sport awareness	
2	5	Other [non-sport] demands that are placed on athletes		
1	3	Consideration if things do not work out		
5	-	Where are [athlete] in terms of the organization	Organizational expectations	
5	-	How many others would want to [perform for] the organization		
4	-	Remembering who you are representing		
8	7	Making the most of their opportunities	Personal limits and growth potential	
7	6	Giving everything they can to develop themselves		
6	1	Not being 'lazy' and trying to see the bigger picture		
2	2	Every session is an opportunity to learn		
7	2	Understanding demands of elite sport	Professional attitude development	
3	-	Awareness to how all areas operate together		
3	-	Cannot cut corners		

4	-	Previous personal experiences as an athlete	Previous experiences with consultant	Reputation
3	-	Previous personal experiences as a coach		
2	3	Knowledge of the consultant		
-	-	Having previously employed the consultant for [child]		
3	3	Comments from other coaches who have worked with [the consultant]	Other coaches feedback	Reputation
2	3	Comments from other coaches who are aware of [the consultant's] work		
-	3	Support judgment of the coach		
4	5	Being recommended to use [the consultant]	Recommendations	Reputation
3	2	Other people's testimonies of [the consultant]		
2	3	Word of mouth		
-	4	References		
-	6	How they present themselves	Advertising	Reputation
-	2	How easy they are to find		
6	2	Must be fully qualified as a psychologist	Professional accreditation	Qualification
4	-	Need to have a psychology qualification	Postgraduate degree	
2	1	Need to be professionally accredited		
3	-	Should have a Masters degree at least	Other qualifications	
1	-	Need to have done a postgraduate degree		
2	2	Other performance-related qualifications		
5	6	Knowledge of the sport	Sporting knowledge	Knowledge
4	-	Knowing the intricacies of the sport and the organization		
4	5	Ability to put psychology speak into sport language		
3	-	Knowing how support teams operate		
3	-	Knowing the environment to work in		
3	6	Understanding the sporting demands		
3	5	Knowing the athlete demands for the sport		
2	-	Awareness to funding and general finance issues		
1	-	Understanding athlete access issues		
4	5	Knowing how to communicate with [the population] to be worked with	Population knowledge	Knowledge
2	-	Knowing the challenge that [the population] are faced with within the sport		
1	-	Knowing how [the population] are expected to fit in with others in the organization		
-	5	Understanding adolescents and relationships with parents / within families		
-	4	Understanding parental worries and concerns		
6	6	Volume of experience they have as a consultant in sport	Consultant - general	Experience
2	4	What sports they have worked in		
1	-	What groups they have worked with		
-	7	Expert in their field		
-	2	Awareness of broader psychological issues		
5	4	Whether they have worked in [the sport]	Consultant - sport	
4	-	Why they want to work in the sport	Consultant - population	
1	-	Have they just done bits and pieces or are they really experienced		
3	4	Have they worked with [the population] category before	Performance	
3	-	How will they work with [the population] if they were to be recruited		
5	4	What experience do they have as a performer in [sport]	Coach	
2	2	Have they excelled in [the sport]		
3	-	Have they coached in [the sport] before	Parent	
1	-	Potential to cross boundaries		
-	3	Are they a parent and do they know how parents think		
6	4	Non-judgemental communication	Communication	Interpersonal skills
5	3	Athlete friendly language		
4	3	Emphasis on support and performance awareness		
2	-	Understanding of appropriate language for use		
-	7	Whether I would feel happy in their company		
-	3	Not seeing us as a threat		
-	2	Open to feedback		
11	10	Approachable	Interpersonal style	Interpersonal skills
11	8	Personable		
10	6	Able to listen		
9	11	Trustworthy		
8	4	Timeliness		
8	6	Respected		
7	3	Empathetic		
7	5	Confident and assured		
5	-	Sense of humour		
4	9	Friendly		
2	2	Calm and clear		
1	2	Respectful		
1	-	Treats athletes as individuals and people, not robots		
-	3	Discretion		
5	2	Looking like part of the team	Observable presentation	
5	3	Professional appearance		
-	2	Looking like they fit in		
6	-	Preparedness to work on a contract and be available for specific sessions	Contract	Service nature
6	-	Regular contact to aid immersion into support team		
5	-	Guarantee of a certain number of hours per week, month or year	On-call	
2	6	Preparedness to be available when required as opposed to having regular contact		
3	6	Value for money	Cost	
-	2	What is the cost verses benefit?		
3	-	Willingness to travel to training and competitions	Travel	
3	-	Willingness to travel to meet athletes		
-	4	Distance to have to go to see consultant		
-	2	Preparedness to travel to us		

Attribute	Coach		Parent	
	Utilities (Part-Worth)	Relative Importance Rankings	Utilities (Part- Worth)	Relative Importance Rankings
Experience and training		33%		25%
High	1.395*		.950*	
Low	-1.395*		-.950*	
Interpersonal skills		39%		45%
High	1.605		1.835	
Low	-1.605		-1.835	
Reputation		12%		13%
Known	.445		.526	
Unknown	-.445		-.526	
Consultancy focus		7%		10%
Performance	.175*		-.113*	
Well-being	-.175*		.113*	
Service nature		9%		7%
Organization	.039		-.056	
Independent	-.039		.056	

Note. *difference: $p < .05$.

Attribute	Male		Female	
	Utilities (Part-Worth)	Relative Importance Rankings	Utilities (Part- Worth)	Relative Importance Rankings
Experience and training		32%		24%
High	1.251		1.018	
Low	-1.251		-1.018	
Interpersonal skills		40%		46%
High	1.627		1.865	
Low	-1.627		-1.865	
Reputation		13%		12%
Known	.500		.478	
Unknown	-.500		-.478	
Consultancy focus		8%		10%
Performance	.145*		-.148*	
Well-being	-.145*		.148*	
Service nature		8%		8%
Organization	.048*		-.092*	
Independent	-.048*		.092*	

Note. *difference: $p < .05$.