

## **Beyond Psychopathology: An Alternative to the Medical Model in Sport**

Abstract: The purpose of this presentation is to offer an alternative perspective to the medical model, which traditionally involves diagnostic categories, psychopathology, and treatment of disorders. The advantages and disadvantages of diagnostic labeling will be described, and another approach to understanding problems will be offered. The overlapping boundaries of treatment and education will be discussed, along with the implications for the therapist and the educator. After some general introductory comments, specific illustrations from my own sport consulting practice will be presented, with discussion about the interventions used and possible alternative choices. Questions will be raised about the issues discussed, and answers will be sought from the participants, in addition to those presented.

### Basic Principles

1. The presence of a particular skill in a practitioner does not determine how or when to use it. Knowing how to do something doesn't mean that's what's indicated.
2. The presence of a diagnosis in an athlete also does not determine the appropriate interventions. As clinicians, we are accustomed to making a diagnosis and prescribing treatment. In sport performance work, it may be possible to address the problem directly without treating the diagnosis.

### Diagnostic labels

Advantages: to help us decide treatments, communicate with other professionals, be alert to issues beneath the surface, protect ourselves legally, and obtain insurance payments.

Disadvantages: shifts the focus from the person to the pathology. Diagnostic label comes to define the person – “He/she is a (diagnostic label,)” - rather than seeing the person separate from the label. It also shifts the emphasis from the person's strengths to the person's weaknesses. Imagine a DSM of “Psychological Health, Growth and Well-Being.”

### An alternative to the psychopathology perspective in sport

- Medical Model involves sickness and disease and requires treatment.
- Growth and Development Model involves learning and teaching – helping people learn new patterns of thinking and behaving – education or treatment?

### How can we understand without using diagnostic labels?

- a. What are the person's patterns of thinking?
- b. How does the person deal with their emotions?
- c. Which of their behaviors cause them difficulty?
- d. What is the person's level of self-awareness?
- e. What is the person's view of themselves?
- f. How does the person experience others?
- g. Is this specific situation part of a general pattern?
- h. What seems like a good entry point for intervention?

### Examples from athletes - meaningful and lasting change

- 800 meter runner –shame at being passed led to dropping out of races
- Mile runner – intense anxiety on re-entry to competition after a year
- Golf player – throwing golf balls into the woods and breaking golf clubs
- Badminton player – Looking good more important than playing well