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Uncommon Sports Psychology:

A Qualitative Study of The Process of Utilizing Family Therapy
Theory and Techniques With An Athletic Team
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(Abstract)

Coaches and athletes utilize sports psychology as a part of training and preparation for competition. A linear individualistic epistemology is generally subscribed to by sports psychologists. This study investigated a new way of working with athletic teams, from a systems perspective. The researcher consulted with a university athletic team utilizing family systems therapy theory and techniques. This "uncommon sports psychology" approach was studied using qualitative methodology. A detailed case study, including rationale for interventions, was reported and may serve as an example to systems therapists who want to consult with athletic teams. At the end of the consultation sessions, a focus group eliciting the participants' perceptions of the consultation process. Finally, recurrent themes and patterns which emerged throughout the consultation process were discussed. Discussion of the methodology and implications for future research and clinical work were also included.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Athletes and coaches utilize sports psychology as a part of training and preparation for competition. Some aspects of sports psychology are integrated into most athletes' performance preparation. Given the frequency of sports psychology use among athletes, it is not surprising that the field has developed into a separate and distinct discipline from its root science, psychology. The sports psychology field is devoted to the mental part of sports and is well accepted and respected among coaches and athletes.

A common sports psychology goal is to work with athletes in the area of gaining a mental edge in an effort to be more competitive. The most common referral by a coach, athlete or team to a sports psychologist involves the quest for increased sports performance (Butt, 1987). Sports Psychologists offer a variety of useful techniques to athletes to attain these goals. These techniques include psychocybernetics (Maltz, 1966), visual motor behavioral rehearsal (Suinn, 1980a), positive thinking (Beck 1967; Ellis, 1973), competitive training (Bandura, 1977; Butt, 1979, 1987), meditation (Gallwey, 1974; Benson & Klipper, 1976), relaxation (Bell, 1983; Suinn, 1980b; Nideffer, 1981), affective control (Martens, 1971, 1977), biofeedback

(Nideffer, 1981; Schultz & Luthe, 1959), and various cognitive behavioral techniques (Rushall & Siedentop, 1972).

Although sports psychology is a valuable and important part of athletic training, it subscribes to a linear individualistic or cause-effect epistemology. Missing from the sports psychology literature are techniques which address the team as a whole and the interactions of team members. This study described a new way of working with athletes which addressed the team as a system. Humans do what they do in connection with what goes on around them, not as social isolates (Furman & Ahola, 1988). Athletes' performance is affected by many factors including interactions with teammates, coaches, the sport organization (e.g., college, managers, athletic directors), and factors in their personal lives. Although minds and systems are not directly controlled, they do not operate in a social vacuum, impervious to changes in the environment. This social view lends itself to working with athletes using family therapy systems theory and family therapy techniques.

Applying systems principles to organizations other than clinical families is popular in the literature and is common in clinical practice (Imber-Black, 1988; Wynne, 1986). Systemic family therapy techniques or systems consultations have been applied to areas such as development of organizations (Brandon, 1983; Daft, 1989; Katz & Kahn

1978; Pondy & Mitroff, 1978), businesses (Nielson & Shandler, 1985), firms (Blount, 1985), and the workplace in general (Druckman & Swets, 1988; Weisbord, 1988). Mental health agencies have extended the systems approach from working with families to in-agency personnel, program management, and community relations (Woodruff & Engle, 1985). School systems (Plas, 1986) and prison systems (Romig & Gruenke, 1989) have benefitted from family systems therapy on two levels, therapy with the families and individuals in those systems and consultation with the organization as a whole.

Thus, family therapy models are often used as the basis for systems consultation and to teach others how to implement change in a system. For example, strategic therapy theory (DeShazer, 1985; Haley, 1976; Madanes, 1981) has been utilized to describe change in the Indian Independent Movement led by Mohandas K. Gandhi (Allen, 1987). Strategic therapy theory has also been used as a teaching model for parent training (Efron, 1986; Schindler & Protinsky, 1990). These extensions of family therapy techniques are becoming more popular. Lynn Hoffman (1981) compares family dynamics to those of organizations in Foundations of Family Therapy. She wrote that families and organizations are fundamentally similar and approaches to the family are compatible to working with small and large organizations. Overall, family

systems therapy theories and techniques are widely accepted as being able to lend themselves to intervention within systems other than families. Therefore, family therapists, with a systems orientation, can intervene with many organizations. This study described the process of intervening in yet another organization, an athletic team.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the process of working with a team utilizing family therapy systems theory and techniques. This description includes four consultation sessions in the form of a case study. The athletes' and coaches' perspectives about the consultation process were elicited from a focus group and are reported as part of the description. Supervision sessions were held between consultation sessions in an effort to gain the perspective of another trained systems professional and to collaborate when choosing models and techniques for intervention.

Treating and viewing teams interactionally from a systems perspective using family therapy techniques offer athletes an alternative approach to sports psychology. This study adds to the existing sports psychology literature by addressing the athletic team as a system. It also adds to the existing family therapy literature by presenting another

organization to consult with using family systems principles.

Prior Sports Consultation

The author has been consulting with athletic teams using family systems principles for over two years. Much has been learned in consultation sessions with these teams. Previous learning determined many of the specifics of this study. This section will briefly outline some of what has been learned and how it applies to this study.

Previous sessions conducted with a University swim team involved the swimmers, but not the coaching staff. The head coach was not interested in participating in the consultation sessions, yet was committed to his team's continued involvement. The swimmers actively problem solved many issues, yet they did not have the opportunity to share or work with their coach toward change. This process increased the rigidity of boundaries, already in existence, between the coach and swimmers.

Thus, it would appear that setting an early precedent that both the players and coaches will be involved in sessions is essential. Once the mind set of "it's for the team, not the coaches" is accepted, it is difficult to elicit coaches' participation in sessions. In later consultation with other teams, coaches were involved at some

level and invited to do so early on. This involvement seemed to open communication between players and coaches as well as to demonstrate a commitment by the coach to problem solving with the team. Therefore, in this study, the team and coaches were involved from the start.

In working with a University tennis team, mandatory attendance was not enforced. Therefore, as the season went on, only the second string or less experienced athletes were attending consultation sessions. This divided the team into two camps, the ones who attended and the ones who didn't. The ones who attended reported feeling more cohesion with each other than with the players who were not coming to consultation. Although this division of experienced and less experienced players already existed on this team, the sessions further punctuated the division instead of working toward cohesion of the entire team. Since working with the tennis team, mandatory attendance has been the norm with all other teams in consultation. This requirement seems acceptable to players who view consultation as another mandatory practice. Working with the entire system is a more productive method of consultation (Weisbord, 1987). Therefore, in this study mandatory attendance was enforced by the coach in the same way that practice is required.

Consultation with a University diving team began late in their season. The coach was uncomfortable when heated

subjects were brought up or disagreements were discussed. The next day or week they were often competing in an important meet or tournament, and the coach was not willing to risk conflict. The following season we began consultation early on. The sessions became more open and participants were willing to take risks and be honest with each other. Therefore, in this study consultation began early in the team's season.

Consultation with a University basketball team taught the consultant a great deal about which family therapy models and frameworks seem to fit this type of consultation. Viewing the basketball team from a structural perspective was helpful in assessing boundaries. During the first few sessions, the boundary was rigid between the coach and the players. The communication was not open; the team rules and goals were set by the coach without collaboration with the players. The players reported feeling like they were not on the same "team" with the coach. Strategic (Haley, 1976) interventions and Milan (Penn, 1982) interviewing were used to work toward healthier boundaries.

The following season, the coach and players appeared to have a less rigid boundary with more open communication and collaborative goal setting. Assessing the boundaries of a team was useful in planning interventions and strategies for change. Overall, teams seemed to respond well to

interventions that were from the various strategic and systemic models. Therefore, models utilized in this study included Structural (Minuchin, 1982) and Strategic (Haley, 1976).

During previous consultation sessions with various sports teams, a few athletes requested individual counseling. Those athletes were referred to on-campus counseling services. Participants in this study who requested individual counseling, were also referred to on-campus counseling services. It is important for the consultant to refer these individuals, rather than serving as their therapist, to avoid conflict of interest. For example, an athlete may discuss an issue with the therapist that he/she does not want to discuss during consultation sessions. If the consultant is also the therapist there is a risk of the therapist/consultant mistakenly bringing up the therapeutic issue during a consultation session. This would be a breach of confidentiality. Therefore, all requests for individual counseling were referred.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study was to address problems which are common to athletes and athletic teams and to provide an avenue for resolution and increased team cohesion. Issues brought to previous consultation sessions

as well as to individual clinical sessions with athletes over the past two years included: eating disorders, mental blocks to performance, fear or loss of confidence, academic problems, suicidal thoughts, racial unrest, coalitions on teams and family of origin issues. Many times coaches respond to their players' issues by saying, "Leave your problems off the court [field, or out of the pool]". However, these problems are not separate from the athlete. These problems need to be addressed so that the athletes can perform to their best ability, on and off the field. Addressing these issues during consultation with the team and coaches seems to bond the team and enables them to utilize each other for support.

Team consultation sessions can help enrich relationships between players and build team cohesion. Players are often competing not only with other teams but with each other for positions and playing time, even scholarship money. These situations in themselves can contribute to conflict. Having an opportunity to discuss issues relevant to the system during consultation sessions can assist in the resolution of many of these issues among players.

Athletes and coaches are under a considerable amount of stress and pressure to perform. College athletes in particular are in a situation where this kind of pressure

can feel unmanageable. College athletes are often recruited from various parts of the country, given sizable scholarships and are expected to perform in a way which is beneficial to the team. These athletes move from their parents' home into the athletic dorm. Curfew times, practice schedules, game schedules (which includes considerable traveling) are determined for the athlete upon arrival. The athlete is subject to frequent drug testing, required to follow particular nutritional and dietary guidelines, and handle the stressors of being a student athlete, maintaining a grade level that is acceptable to continue playing on the team. Working with athletes through consultation may offer an avenue to reduce stress, build team cohesion and trust, and integrate new players into the demanding schedule of a student athlete.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The field of sports psychology has long addressed the mental aspects of sports performance. Missing from the sports psychology literature is a family systems perspective for working with athletes. This study viewed the sports team as an organization and utilized family therapy systems theory and techniques to consult with an athletic team. Therefore, the most relevant literature to review is family therapy models commonly used in systems consultation with organizations. First a review of specific relevant family therapy models is discussed. Systems consultation applied to organizations, other than families and the limited literature which has addressed the athletic team from a systems perspective are also discussed.

Family Therapy Models

Although many family therapy models and techniques have been utilized in consultation, a few are more prevalent in the consultation literature than others. Plas (1986) suggests strategic storytelling, prescriptions and rituals as core models and interventions for consultation. Consultation with organizations often includes assessment of the structure. Mapping the boundaries and hierarchy of the

system makes Structural therapy theory a useful model for conceptualizing the system and intervening in it (Daft, 1989). The following section briefly discusses the theoretical foundations of the two family therapy models common to systems consultation with organizations and used in this study.

Structural Family Therapy

Structural family therapy (SFT) offers therapists a clear framework which brings order and meaning to family transactions by conceptualizing families as having an underlying organization. According to SFT, families have consistent, repetitive, organized and predictable modes of behavior which manifest this underlying structural organization. Consequently, SFT offers the therapist an overall plan or map for viewing the family. Without a map, therapists often get lost in the details of family discussions. This map or blueprint helps the therapist analyze the process of family interactions (Nichols, 1984).

Four constructs that are the essential components of structural family therapy theory include: structure, subsystems, boundaries, and power (Aponde & VanDeusen, 1981). Family structure is manifested by the organized pattern in which family members interact. As patterns are repeated, they generate a set of covert rules which

subsequently govern transactions in the family, determining how, when and to whom a family member will relate. A basic premise of structural therapy is that changing these sequences or patterns may or may not change the underlying structure, but altering the basic structure will have a ripple effect on all family transactions (Minuchin, 1976).

Families are divided into subsystems of members who join together to perform various functions. Every individual, dyad or large group make up subsystems. These subsystems are determined by generation, gender or common interests. Some groupings are obvious, such as parents or siblings. Others maybe covert coalitions such as a mother and her oldest son forming a tightly bounded subsystem which excludes others. Every family member plays many roles in several subgroups, the possibility of subgroupings is endless (Piercy & Sprenkle, 1986).

Individuals, subsystems and whole families have interpersonal boundaries. These boundaries are invisible barriers which surround individuals and subsystems, regulating the amount of contact with others. Boundaries have two functions. First, they serve to protect the separateness and autonomy of the family and its subsystems. For example, children going to bed one hour before their parents protects the parents alone time and the boundary between themselves and their children. Similarly, families

with small children require a boundary to provide protection and nurturance for them until they are mature enough to handle the stimuli from the outside world.

A second function of boundaries includes allowing the development of individuals and subsystems. Subsystems which are not adequately protected by boundaries limit the development of interpersonal skills achievable by individuals in these subsystems. For example, if parents always interrupt sibling arguments, the children will not learn to deal with conflicts they encounter with their peers (Minuchin, 1982).

Interpersonal boundaries vary from rigid to diffuse. Rigid boundaries are overly restrictive and permit little contact with outside systems or subsystems with each other. This rigidity results in disengagement. Disengagement occurs when individuals or subsystems are isolated and autonomous. This process permits independence, growth, and mastery yet limits warmth, affection, and nurturance. Enmeshed subsystems, which result from diffuse boundaries, offer a heightened sense of mutual support; yet, this is at the expense of the individual's independence and autonomy. A clear boundary, as opposed to rigid or diffused, is a permeable one. Communication is open, information flows freely from member to member. Family members are neither overly involved (enmeshed) with one another or under

involved (disengaged). Couples must establish a clear boundary with one another, their parents, in-laws and their children. A clear parental boundary has a hierarchical structure. The parents exercise a position of leadership and are in charge of their children yet are nurturing and have open lines of communication with them.

Power has been defined as "the relative influence of each family member on the outcome of an activity" (Aponte, 1976a p. 434). Power is determined by the way family members combine and informs us about who will prevail if members disagree. The interaction of one or more members determines the outcome of a transaction. A mother may only have power over her children if her husband cooperates, and the children are responsive to her power. In addition, power is relative to the context. A father's influence on his son's behavior may be effective at home, yet ineffective outside the home.

Structural family therapists believe that problems are maintained by dysfunctional family structures. Therefore, therapy is directed at altering family structure so that families can solve their own problems. The goal of structural therapy is to release families from rigid and habitual transactions, creating the opportunity for new structures to emerge and change to occur (Minuchin, 1976). The structural therapist joins with the family in order to

help them change their structure. By altering boundaries and realigning subsystems, the therapist changes the behavior and experience of each of the family members.

Strategic Family Therapy

Strategic therapy (ST) takes a circular view of problem-maintenance and a strategically planned orientation to change. Therapists are interested more in actual change than in understanding it (Nichols, 1984). Their work is generally concerned with observing and changing sequences of behavior rather than with developing new theories of family functioning. Etiology of problems is less important than what maintains them. Regardless of how problems get started, most psychological problems persist only if they are maintained by current patterns of behavior. Strategic therapist attempt to discover and alter problem-maintaining behaviors through direct or paradoxical interventions (Haley 1976; Madanes, 1981).

Although there are several camps of strategic therapy, this study will utilize the strategic approach of Jay Haley. Haley was instrumental in the development of structural family therapy. Consequently his brand of strategic therapy holds true to many of SFT's underlying principles (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981). These principles include the parental subsystem being in charge of the children and the division

of power in the family. While strategic therapies are concerned with symptom removal, Haley is equally concerned with structure, hierarchy, and power. He is alone among strategic theorists in suggesting that changing the structure of the family system is as important as symptom removal (Haley, 1976).

Haley sees normal families as having an organized hierarchy in accordance with generations. From this structural point of view, he maintains that normal families respect generational boundaries and avoid covert, cross-generational coalitions (Haley, 1976). Malfunctioning hierarchies in which an individual is embedded are related to the level of functioning that person can achieve. In normal families, the hierarchy and structure are in line with cultural practices.

Couples struggle with issues of power and organizing hierarchy. Power refers not only to dominating the other but also comforting, taking care of and taking responsibility for the spouse (Madanes, 1981). Couples divide power in different ways. One may make all the decisions concerning the home and children, while the other is in charge of decisions concerning money. Symptoms such as depression, alcoholism, fears, anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints are conceptualized as ways of balancing power in a relationship. Being depressed and unable to function puts

the functioning partner in charge. This gives them power by default. Yet, the depressed spouse also has power. If they remain depressed they can take on less responsibility.

Symptoms themselves can be metaphors for the way a couple deals with the other types of interaction in various areas of their lives. For example, a wife who spends compulsively maybe expressing her anger that her husband works so much, earning money. The couple may discuss the symptom instead of other issues that they cannot resolve. The system of interaction around the symptom is an analogy for other systems of interaction between the couple (Nicholos, 1984).

Symptoms are often metaphorical for what is happening in the family. In many cases strategic interventions are designed to address the metaphorical meaning (Madanes, 1981). In the above example, a therapist may assign the husband to work more hours to earn more money to support his wife's need to spend. This paradoxical intervention would be designed to get the husband to work less and spend more time at home in an effort to defy the therapist's suggestion or control his wife. He will, however, be fulfilling the wife's underlying need to be with him more.

Planning strategies to solve client's problems and setting clear goals to work toward them are among the therapists responsibilities. These goals primarily include

resolving the presenting problem or symptom. When Haley works toward change with families he considers the families' developmental processes as a framework for explaining their symptomology. Dysfunctional families develop problems because they are unable to adjust to transitions which occur within the family lifecycle (Haley, 1976). Families can become stuck at particular points in their development. The way the family attempts to adapt, reacting to the crisis stage, is reflective of the family's level of health. In other words, a healthy family is able to make transitions. Marriage, having children and the time when a young person leaves home (Haley, 1980) are vulnerable times for families. Concern with the life cycle of the family is a hallmark of the Haley strategic approach. Treatment is designed to help families past crises and on to the next stage of development.

Family Systems Consultation With Organizations

When systems principles are applied to organizations other than families, it is often referred to as systems consultation. The concept of "systems consultation" is used to refer to the application of systems concepts and principles with organizations other than families. These organizations include: medical programs, the courts, businesses and community networks. Because of the systems

perspective held by family therapists, they can bring special skills to consultation in multiple contexts.

Due to the stigma of therapy and the role of the therapist, an alternative way of thinking, another language, was needed when intervening in organizations. The concept of consultation fulfilled that need. Although this term has been available for many years, it now has a more central place in the thinking and vocabulary of helping professionals. Systems consultation provides a strategic and appropriate framework for identifying problems and considering options for change in organizations other than families (Wynn, McDaniel, and Weber 1986).

However, there is confusion regarding the definition of the term consultation (Hart, 1982). Kurpius and Robinson (1978) concurred that, "Many writers view the consultant as a collaborator who forms egalitarian relationships with the consultees to bring about change. In this collegial relationship, there is a joint diagnosis with emphasis on the consultees finding their own solution to their problems. The consultant serves as catalyst or facilitator for the problem solving process" (p. 322).

Systems consultation is based on identifying problems and generating options for change within an organization. Advantages to the concept of systems consultation, versus therapy, according to Wynne (1986) are as follows:

1) In systems consultation the problem is not prejudged.

Therapist and patient roles imply a problem or involve a disorder that needs to be corrected. Consultation, however, is open to exploration of problems and addresses who is able and willing to take responsibility for action and change.

2) The consultant can take a meta position from which systemic relationships and patterns can be assessed. Wynne

asserts that roles, such as therapist, place the professional more fully and immediately within the therapeutic system. Therefore, expectations and constraints requiring "curative" action are assumed. Starting as an observer, in the role of consultant, allows more freedom to assess relationships and interactions. A consultant can better step back and view the problem in the context of larger systems.

3) Consultation facilitates the reframing of problems. The

technique of reframing is widely utilized by family therapists as a central feature of treatment. The label "therapist" can restrain the professional and constrict the range of options for reframing a problem in terms that may not actually call for action.

4) Consultation can give emphasis to health, strength and positive resources. A consultant can more naturally focus

attention on strengths and healthy resources that a system has; whereas, a therapist, by definition, is looking for

problems and solutions. The consultant is in a better position to conceptualize problems in a more positive way than a therapist.

5) Collaborative relationships between consultant and consultee can be readily established. Role relationships such as therapist-patient, supervisor-supervisee, teacher-student and administrator-employee inherently put one participant in a one-up position and the other in a one-down. Consultation maximizes opportunities for the roles to be more collaborative.

6) A consultant role provides a base for flexible shifts to alternative professional roles. A therapist role is difficult to move in and out of. However, the role of a consultant is not a fixed or permanent form of professional functioning. It is self defined and offers the professional movement into other roles.

While many family therapy assessments and interventions are useful when consulting with larger systems, certain differences between family members and members of an organization must be kept in mind (Imber-Black, 1988). Families have a shared intergenerational history and probably a shared future while organizational systems often do not. Turnover in organizations is often high and changes in leadership are frequent, while membership in family is more permanent and leadership is less flexible. Wynn (1986)

wrote, "Families are permanent relationships, and organizations are temporary arrangements" (p.424). The membership in an organization is a function of task. Each member can be replaced by another individual who is more competent to support the organizational task or mission. A family task is less operationally defined and may change over time. Both families and organizations are hierarchical in nature. The family is hierarchical along generational lines, whereas the organization is hierarchical along lines of organizational authority. Despite clear differences between families and organizations, family systems interventions are accepted as a useful way to intervene with organizational systems (Imber-Black, 1988; Wynne, 1986).

In working with organizations, Plas (1986) states that it is important to recognize larger systems which influence the "focus" system, the system you are immediately consulting with. The most important larger system to the focus system is usually the next larger system in which the focus group shares resources. For example, in a school system the classroom, as focus group, shares resources with the school. The school, as focus group, shares resources with the school district. Such a district may include many schools which share resources with the state. An athletic team shares resources such as scholarship money, practice facilities and publicity funds with the athletic department.

Plas (1986) suggests finding out during the early stages of consultation who the most influential larger systems are. This gives the consultant information about the ability to change certain aspects of concern to the focus group that may be controlled by a larger organization.

Larger influencing systems, in families, tend to be similar. They are influenced by family of origin, schools, welfare systems, neighborhoods, etc. However, each new consultation experience will be different. The larger system influencing an organization will be less clearly defined and different for each consultation. Defining the structure of larger influencing systems is an important part of the initial investigation. Plas (1986) suggests confining interventions to the focus group, yet being aware of possible ripple effects into the larger system that might occur. Consultation should include identifying influential larger groups in the problem identification or exploration stage of consultation.

Weisbord (1987), in his writing on consultation with business organizations, states the importance of getting the system together. He says, "People need shared perceptions to make their contributions. That means getting together to live the open system "(p.273). This must happen in order to help all members agree upon the organization's purpose and task in consultation. Members of a system need their own

and a shared experience. To have members invested in change and improvement in a system they need, at minimum, to show up. Weisbord gives four practical guidelines for consultation with organizations: assess the potential for action, get the whole system in the room, focus on the future and identify structured tasks that people can do for them selves. He sees investment in the organization as important for change. This investment is, at minimum, demonstrated by attending the consultation sessions. In this study participation was mandatory for the athletes and was enforced by the coach.

Family Systems Theory and Techniques With Athletic Teams

The sports psychology literature does not include working with athletes from a systemic perspective. This literature is based on working with individuals not relationships, working from a linear or cause-effect epistemology versus a nonlinear or circular epistemology and on assessing the individual's physical and psychological makeup versus individual traits seen as reflective of the system. Fostering team closeness and building team cohesion is one of the most researched topics in the sports psychology literature (Oglesby & Hill, 1990). However, this research addressed working with individuals on teams, seeing the sum of the parts as equal to the whole. Working with a

team from a systems perspective implies that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. To date, the sports psychology literature does not address the athlete from a family systems perspective.

The family therapy literature includes one study which addresses working with an athletic team from a systems perspective. That study is the preliminary work for this dissertation (Schindler, Washle, & Protinsky, 1990). The feasibility of utilizing family systems therapy with sports teams was addressed in that paper. The basketball team, which served as participants in this dissertation, also participated in that preliminary study. The basketball team was seen for ten sessions in 1988 and 1989. Those sessions took place in the players' locker room and lasted one hour. Five sessions per season included the players and coaches. Three sessions included the coaches and players while two sessions per season were devoted to the coaches only.

Throughout these sessions interventions such as Milan circular questioning (Tomm, 1988), strategic reframing / rituals, and making the covert overt (Haley, 1976) were utilized. The team seemed to respond well to these and other systemic and strategic interventions and followed through with homework assignments. Missing from this preliminary study was a description of the process of systems consultation, what is happening in the consultation

room; and the rationale for interventions. The preliminary study also did not include feedback from the participants involved. Their perceptions of the process were not elicited. This dissertation fills in those missing aspects in an effort to expand both the sports psychology and the family therapy literature.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the process of consulting with an athletic team utilizing family systems therapy theories and family therapy techniques. This description is reported in the form of a case study. An additional objective was to explore the participants' perspectives on the consultation process. This was done by conducting a focus group with the participants after the last consultation session. A final objective of this study was to report recurrent themes which emerged from the consultation sessions and focus group. This chapter includes a description of the participants, data collection procedures and data analysis for the study.

Participants

The participants of this study included 15 players from a university women's basketball team, their head coach and three assistant coaches. Some members of this team participated in previous consultation sessions throughout two prior basketball seasons (Schindler, Washle, & Protinsky, 1990). The goals of that previous work included: determining if a consultant could utilize family therapy techniques with an athletic team, if this team and coaches

would be responsive and open to the consultation process and to explore the use of various family therapy models. The team was open and responsive to the consultant and worked through several team conflicts. Due to the positive response by the team to the consultation process, it was determined that this might be a viable means of working with sports teams.

Each season new players are recruited and graduating players leave the basketball team. Therefore, the season in which this study took place included four freshmen players not previously exposed to systems consultation sessions. There was also a change in one assistant coach position. One of the assistant coaches left last year and was not replaced. Thus, the process of joining (Minuchin & Fishman, 1982) had taken place with most of the players and coaches prior to the first session.

An additional participant was the consultant to the team. In the role of participant observer (Kurz, 1988), she facilitated the consultation sessions and reported observations. These observations included team interactions, change and responses to interventions. The consultant met with an AAMFT (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy) approved supervisor between each session to plan interventions. The supervisor was not a participant in the consultation process, yet viewed

videotapes of sessions and gave feedback to the consultant in an effort to collaborate when planning interventions.

Data Collection Procedures

The team described above was seen for four systems consultation sessions. Many of the brief family therapy models suggest working with families in under ten sessions (Fisch, Weakland & Segal 1982; Haley 1973). The consultation sessions began five weeks prior to the team's first game, pre-season.

Wynne (1986) suggests that from 12-250 participants can be involved in consultation sessions versus 3-10 typically present in family therapy. He further suggests that consultation take place outside the participants' usual territory and that the number of sessions be fewer than in brief family therapy, typically 10 sessions or less (also see Plas, 1986). In this study the team met weekly in a classroom on campus for four weeks, following both of Wynne's consultation suggestions.

The basketball players in this study had a hectic practice and academic schedule. Therefore, the consultant prearranged the date and time of each consultation session to accommodate the participants. The first session included all the players and coaches. Session two included the players only. Session three involved the coaches only.

Session four included the players only. This format allowed the executive subsystem (the coaches) and the team subsystem (the players) to have time with and without each other during sessions. Minuchin (1982) recommends seeing the whole family as well as allowing each subsystem time alone to work with the therapist/consultant. This is congruent with Wynne's (1986) writing on consultation. He suggests working with subsystems during some sessions as an effective way of consulting with an organization. Also, previous consultation work by the consultant with sports teams revealed that this was a useful way to work with teams.

Each of the four consultation sessions was videotaped. The tapes were then reviewed by the consultant. These tapes assisted in collecting qualitative descriptive data to be reported in the case study of the results section. Each session description included rationale for interventions and the team's response to them. Spradley (1980) suggests writing notes immediately following interaction with the group under study. Therefore, the consultant wrote descriptions and observations following each session with the basketball team. These descriptions were expanded upon and also included in the case study. Videotape of the session were viewed several times and served as the basis for describing the sessions.

Videotaping is frequently used in supervision to plan

interventions for up-coming therapy sessions (Kaslow 1986). During this study, weekly, one hour supervision sessions, using the videotapes, were used to assess the team's needs. The supervisor viewed the consultation tapes before each supervision session. The supervisor then collaborated with the consultant to plan interventions. These interventions were based on the consultant's and the supervisor's observations of the team. Interventions were not specifically designed. The supervisor and the consultant would track the behavioral sequence of the presenting problem, yet the exact intervention to interrupt the sequence emerged during each consultation session. These interventions were based on what was happening in session, what seemed the most appropriate task given the in-session information and activities (see results section, page 39).

The week following the final consultation session, an interviewer conducted a focus group with the players and coaches. The purpose of the focus group was to elicit the players' and coaches' perspectives of the consultation process and to note changes they may have noticed (Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Wills, 1974). These two principal avenues for collecting qualitative data, participant observations reported in case study form and a focus group (Kurz 1983; Morgan & Spanish 1984), were utilized to describe the process of working systemically with this team. The

following section will describe more specifically how these data were collected as well as a rationale for choosing these methods.

Participant Observation

Recent critiques of family therapy efficacy research (Hoffman, 1981; Kneeney & Morris, 1985; and Steier, 1985) have called for changes in methodology. Family therapy researchers and theoreticians have argued for the need to adopt an "observer in the system" perspective with regard to research and therapy. The need to emphasize the process of therapy by means of self interpretations and observations is best addressed through this qualitative methodology of participant observation (Joanning, Newfield, and Quinn, 1987).

Participant observation is the most frequently encountered type of qualitative research and has its root in anthropological studies in which the investigator spends time with the participants. The extent of direct involvement will vary depending on the nature of the research (Mathews & Paradise, 1988). Participant observation has been used to address such questions as what happens between a teacher and the students, therapist and client or between family members.

Participant observation is a useful technique when

description of a process is the research goal (Kurz, 1984). This approach offers a unique opportunity for investigating the counselor-client relationship, the counselor's techniques and the process of change with a particular client on a session by session basis (Mathews & Paradise, 1988). This nonexperimental descriptive research is undertaken when descriptions and explanations, rather than predictions based on cause and effect, are sought and when the emphasis is on process rather than outcome (Merriam, 1988). The goals of this study fit with this methodology. From the perspective of participant observer, the researcher can best describe the events and process which take place.

Kurz (1983) describes participant observation as being especially useful when the researcher is interested in eliciting the perspectives of group members. The participant observer is seen as the data collection instrument (Strauss, 1987), in this case the consultant. In addition to observing others, the role of the participant observer allows the researchers to use their own experiences when describing the process. As they watch their own reactions they gain a better idea of how others in the setting may be feeling. This perspective is the value of being a participant as well as an "observer" (Kurz, 1988). Interpretation of how others may be feeling based on self

reaction is an important springboard to focus groups which elicit the participants perceptions of the process.

LaRossa (1984) wrote in his preface to Family Case Studies, "As a teacher I knew that any learning device that operated on a visceral level and that encouraged people to see the forest, as well as the trees, was obviously powerful". His full descriptions of family processes such as transition to parenthood, leaving the nest and therapeutic change are parallel to the purpose of this study.

Focus Groups

A focus group (Axelrod, 1976; Morgan & Spanish 1984) was also utilized in this study. Focus groups were introduced into the field of marketing research shortly after world war II as part of motivation research (Smith, 1954). As a qualitative method for gathering data, this type of group interview brings together several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher. Utilizing focus groups as an adjunct to participant observation (Brecker & Geer 1957) is suggested in the qualitative methodology literature. Focus groups usually follow participant observation and are useful for comparison between one's observations and what participants describe as their experience (Morgan & Spanish 1984; Brecker and Geer

1957). A focus group with the players and coaches was conducted after the consultation process to ascertain the participants' views of the consultation sessions.

The major advantage of focus groups is that they offer the chance to observe participants engaging in interaction that is concentrated on attitudes and experiences which are of interest to the researcher. In addition, Wells (1974) writes, "group interview respondents stimulate one another. One respondent's remarks may lead another to pursue a line of thinking he would not have followed in an individual interview. A bold respondent may encourage a less outgoing one to voice feelings and opinions that he never would have revealed had someone else not had the courage to express them first" (p. 3).

Collecting information about how the team and coaches experienced the process of consultation allowed the investigator to compare her own perceptions with that of the participants. Information gathered in the focus group allowed the consultant to determine how her interventions were perceived and what importance they had on the clients' functioning. More specifically, the consultant learned what the clients thought, felt and did in response to interventions, if they responded at all (Joanning, Newfield & Quinn 1987).

Fern (1982) suggested that there is nothing sacred or

even correct about the current way of conducting a focus group in terms of number of participants, moderated or not and structured or unstructured. Interviewing can involve informal conversations with participants, a somewhat structured set of interview guides or a highly structured set of questions (Kurz, 1983). The focus group questions for this study followed the guidelines suggested by The Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, JSST, (Roberts, 1987). These guidelines were published to elicit clients' perceptions of therapy. Two additional questions were added to the original guidelines which were specific to this study (Appendix II). However, this was only a guide to generate conversation. The interviewer probed in areas he, the players or the coaches wanted to discuss, as long as it continued to meet the goals of the focus group. The duration of the focus group was the same as consultation sessions, one hour.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was an ongoing process which began with the first consultation session. Each session was videotaped and reviewed by the researcher. After reviewing each tape, a description of the process was written. The tapes served as the raw data for this study. Relevant parts of the tapes were directly transcribed. This transcription

included quotes and observations. Irrelevant material including long descriptions of specific basketball plays or details of past basketball games was not transcribed from the tape.

The analysis of the data was an attempt to describe the consultation process and report the perspectives of the individuals involved, via the focus group. In addition to rich descriptions, case study and focus group the consultant identified recurrent themes which emerged from the sessions and the focus group. The manner in which these themes were identified is discussed in chapter 4, page 145. These themes were generated from the data rather than manipulated to fit previously designed categories (Spradley, 1980). For this reason, the researcher remained open to alternative ways of viewing the data depending on what the data provided (Strauss, 1987). Therefore, data analysis was an interpretive process involving the generation of themes from in-session observations and information from the focus group (Marshall & Rossman, 1988). Appendix III presents an overview of the methods which guided this study.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this dissertation was to describe an "uncommon" means of Sports Psychology: consulting with athletic teams using family therapy systems theory and techniques. There were three objectives to this study. The first was to give a rich description of the process of consulting with an athletic team. This description includes interventions utilized with this team and the rationale for using specific techniques from family systems therapy. This descriptive case study can serve as a guideline or example to family therapists or sports psychologists interested in consulting with athletic teams.

Secondly, a focus group was conducted to elicit the perceptions and experiences of the participants, the players and the coaches concerning the consultation process. The participants' feedback offers further evidence, beyond the case study, of the usefulness of family systems consultation with athletic teams. Lastly, recurrent themes and patterns that emerged throughout the four consultation sessions and the focus group are reported. The players' and coaches' names have been changed throughout the results section to protect their confidentiality.

Case Study

This section describes four consultation sessions with a university women's basketball team and its coaches. These four sessions, totalling five hours, included pre-season problems and interventions. This allowed problem identification, interventions and resolutions to be described for a specific time period, pre-season.

Throughout these sessions, interactions and interventions based on two family therapy models were described. In other words, the sessions were described through the lens of structural and strategic family therapy models. These therapy models are described in the Review of the Literature section, page 11. Most of the identified problems were identified as structural issues and maladaptive sequence of behaviors. The solutions to these problems included strategic tasks and structural reorganization. Therefore, structural and strategic models seemed appropriate given the nature of the identified problems and the solutions utilized.

SESSION 1

Seating

Fourteen players from the women's basketball team, the head coach and the three assistant coaches arrived on time for the first consultation session. One player, a freshman,

was missing due to illness. It is best to see the whole group for the first session. Seeing all members initially allows the identified problem and the social situation that is maintaining it to be assessed more quickly (Haley, 1988).

Often where members sit in a session indicates their affiliations. This is a soft indicator, one which should be accepted only as a first impression to be investigated. These soft data can give the consultant a tentative map of who is close to whom, and what affiliations, coalitions, subsystems and over-involved dyads or triads are present (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981). I had arranged twenty chairs in a semicircle. This arrangement of chairs was to facilitate optimal video tape production based on where the cameras were permanently located.

When the team and coaches entered the room, Laura, the head coach, chose to sit immediately to my left. Margie, the number one assistant coach, sat next to the head coach. The number three assistant coach, Connie, sat on the other side of me. Three of the four coaches seemed to form a subsystem by sitting close to the facilitator. The coaches were the executive subsystem in the organization's hierarchy (Minuchin, 1981). Therefore, they predictably sat nearest to me since I was in charge of the session. Jill, the number two assistant coach, sat across from me and the other coaches. She appeared to be a part of the players'

subsystem given the distance between where she was sitting and where the other coaches were sitting. A hierarchy line is a representation of power in the group. The two generations, coaches and players, seemed for the most part to have a clear hierarchy line reflected in the seating choices.

Of the other four subsystems I noticed in the seating arrangement, the first consisted of four starters sitting next to each other: Chris, Marie, Katy, and Barbara. These four were sitting directly to the left of the coaches and me. The starters may have seen themselves as next to the coaches in the hierarchal line indicated by their place in the semicircle, right next to the coaches. In the next subsystem, Elizabeth and Cathy were seated next to Connie, the number three assistant coach, but further from Laura, the head coach. Elizabeth, a part time starter, and Cathy, who rarely got playing time, were both seniors. Their lack of playing time may have explained why they sat further from Laura, perhaps indicating a lower position in the hierarchy. However, the fact that they were seniors may have given them seniority among the players; they sat nearer to the coaches than the freshmen did.

The three freshmen, Ellen, Jodi and Jan were sitting next to each other directly across from the coaches, forming the third subsystem. They may have seen themselves as last

in the hierarchy, sitting the farthest from the coaches. Jane, a sophomore, sat at the very end of the semicircle with the only empty chair between her and her teammates (no one was to either side of her). Jane may have seen herself as outside of the group forming her own subsystem.

The remaining four players seemed to sit at random between these subsystems. However, it may have only appeared this way since I did not know the organizational structure and dynamics as yet. In addition, if I knew the game of basketball better and was familiar with the position each player held, perhaps I would have seen subsystems based on the players' positions. (See Appendix IV, Seating)

Social stage

Once everyone was seated, the team chit-chatted among themselves for about five minutes. I was anxious to get the session started so I got the group's attention by introducing myself to the new players. This began the social stage of consultation in which the members were greeted and made to feel comfortable. To establish credibility, I explained that this was my third season working with the team.

I welcomed everyone and gave a brief description of my professional background in psychology, marriage and family therapy and my work with athletes. While introducing

myself, to facilitate further joining, I indicated that I had not been a college athlete and did not fully understand all that goes along with that role. Minuchin and Fishman (1981) suggest taking the one-down position as a therapeutic joining maneuver: "Joining is the glue which holds the therapeutic system together" (p. 32). Therefore, this was an important first step in the consultation process.

During the social stage of the first interview, it is important to allow each member to introduce herself so that it is clear everyone is involved and important (Haley, 1976). The new players introduced themselves to me. They said the team viewed consultation as a component of the season. They had heard about the sessions when they were recruited. This may have explained why they seemed so comfortable with the consultation process. I asked the players who had participated in team sessions with me in the past to reintroduce themselves.

Defining the consultation process

The mood of the group seemed happy and relaxed. I tried to match their mood by relaxing and joking with them. I perceived that the joining process had carried over from past seasons in which I had worked with this team. To capitalize on this prior joining, I gave the players a chance to talk about how these sessions had been for them in

the past. I asked the players who had previously participated in these consultation sessions to give the new players an idea of what they thought the sessions were about.

Katy, a senior, said, "I see it as bringing the team together closer. Instead of complaining to each other, we come here, sit down as a group, explain our feelings and everybody shares how they feel. Problems get solved and people get their emotions out. We solve problems as a team instead of going from one person to the next person to the next and dividing the team. I usually feel better about myself after each one."

Julie, a junior, added, "It is not all negative either. We focus on what the team does good in practice. Sometimes nobody says nothing about it 'till we get here."

Claudia, a junior, stated, "You get to learn something about your teammates besides knowing them on the court, especially if you don't hang around them all the time outside of basketball."

The players seemed to agree with these descriptions of what consultation was about for them. In general, it is best to ask each member to express their opinion when asking a question (Haley, 1976). However, with a group of this size, if I saw general agreement (e.g. heads nodding, facial expression showing agreement) among the team, I did not ask

each individual member to respond.

It is interesting to note that the initial spokesperson for the team was a starting senior, Katy. She seemed to have a high position in the organization's hierarchy indicated by her seat next to the head coach and acting as the players' initial spokesperson. The players' other spokespersons were juniors who may also have had hierarchal power based on their years on the team. Assessing spokespersons in terms of power is suggested by Haley (1988). However, he recommends keeping observations to yourself so not to encourage the group to conceal issues.

Problem stage

Having moved through the social stage of the session, introductions, joining, and establishing what these meetings were about, I moved on to the problem stage of the session. In the problem stage, members begin to identify problems and the session is seen as purposeful (Haley, 1976). I asked a few questions to help open the discussion and identify conflicts that the players or coaches wanted to discuss. I asked the players, "What do you think your coaches think of you as a team?"

Debby immediately said, "Inexperienced and complaining."

Katy responded, "The coaches have confidence in us."

They are trying something new with us as players and want to build on our abilities."

Claudia added, "They see us as a challenge, to work with us and pull on our talents. They [the coaches] want to disprove the media." The media had labeled this team as inexperienced due to the fact that they were missing experienced players from the previous year's team. The team graduated four starting seniors from last year's team. These graduated seniors were leaders both on and off the court.

Katy said, "The coaches are more dedicated to us this year as a team. We know the game, but don't have the minutes on the court behind us." The team seemed to agree with these perceptions.

I then reworded the question and asked, "What do the coaches think of you as a player?" I looked at the floor so not to point anyone out. The team laughed, and no one was willing to answer. Many of them singled out Jane, the sophomore sitting somewhat outside of the semicircle. Teasing and encouraging Jane, they said, "Go on, you start." Jane was quiet and unwilling to take the challenge from her teammates to answer the question.

Katy, a guard, again broke the silence: "The coaches expect a lot out of the guards this year for leadership. Everything will come down to the guards, and everything will

be on them. More pressure is on the guards."

I noticed it was difficult for the players to see themselves as individuals. Katy's response was about her own pressure as a guard, but her answer still evaluated a subsystem, the guards. Structural therapy is concerned with people talking to each other and not through the facilitator (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981). Rather than responding to Katy's sense of pressure as a guard or the team's assessment of themselves, I gave the coaches an opportunity to respond to the player's perceptions of what they thought the coaches thought of them.

Debby, anxious to hear what the coaches had to say, said, "Don't hold back."

Laura, the head coach, said, "The team is very accurate. In the last several years of working with you [the consultant], we have become more open with each other. We are more aware of where the players are coming from, and they know where we are coming from."

She pointed out that it was ironic that no one would answer how the coaches saw the players as individuals. The players would only answer how the team was seen. Laura encouraged the players to see themselves as individuals on the team. She said, "You need to realize that the team is made up of individuals, the assessment of the team is based on you as individuals. Don't underestimate your own

abilities, you are a part of the whole."

This information seemed important to the players. They were quiet, mostly looking down at the floor or at each other in a proud way.

Jill, the assistant coach who was sitting among the players, addressed Katy's comment about the pressure felt by the guards. "We do expect more stability out of the guards because we have more guards with more experience. It's nice to be able to look to them. However, we have a lot of talent among the forwards. You all can shoot the ball as well as Sally [a graduated forward from last year's team] ever did or ever will. The talent is here. We just need to get them used to playing night in and night out."

Her comment revealed yet another subsystem, the forwards. Jill took the opportunity to try to alleviate the pressure felt by this year's guards who were being compared to last year's more experienced players. She did this by relating that this year's guards were able to shoot as well, if not better, than a star player from last year's team.

Because last year's team seemed to be on the players' minds, I asked them to describe the pressure of living up to last year's legacy.

Debby said, "I have always been in Sally's shadow, [Debby played the same position that Sally played over the previous three years], but I see that as a challenge now

that she's gone."

Katy stated, "It is better this year. Everyone is more or less equal. I don't see us relying on one or two people to carry us. We are more of a team. No one is leaning on anyone or relying on someone else to do it. We all have to work hard."

The team nodded in agreement. This team's team concept may explain their tendency to focus less on themselves as individuals and more on the team and subsystems.

In an effort to give the coaches a chance to respond to the other side of my original question I asked them, "How would the team describe you as coaches?"

Margie, the top assistant, immediately said, "They would say I've been pretty bitchy this Fall. It was a tough fall for me. I've been away for a week and the whole way back I kept saying to myself 'don't be negative, be more supportive.' Then when I got back, I was really disappointed. Nothing was like I thought it was going to be as far as conditioning. Everyone was out of shape. I didn't enjoy being bitchy, it was tough. I don't like to do that." Margie's openness to the players demonstrated a clear boundary between subsystems, an open flow of communication.

Laura, the head coach, interjected, "They are just not

used to you being like that. I was always the quick tempered person, and Margie has been calm and supportive for three years. They have never seen her get this mad before. In the past, Margie has been the buffer to the 'Big Cheese' [everyone laughed]." Laura was known as "the Big Cheese" on this team.

Interactional stage

Now that the group had identified two problems, Margie's "bitching" behavior and the team being out of shape, disagreement among subsystems began. This process identified that we were now in the interactional stage of the session (Haley, 1988).

Complementary roles of the coaches

Margie's changed role on the team was not unusual as understood by structural family systems theory. When one member changes her role, such as Laura becoming less tempered, then another member will often, to balance the system, become more tempered. Therefore, the system of interaction remains unchanged. There is still one tempered coach and one less tempered coach. Minuchin (1981) describes this as complementarity. He writes, "The actions and transactions of a necessary movement in the choreography of a ballet. The movement of the whole needs four

[referring to his case example] constrained dancers" (p. 192).

To investigate my observation about the complementarity of the two coaches, I asked the team, "Has Margie in the past been the buffer to the 'Big Cheese' and is she now tougher on you than Laura?"

Before the team could answer, Margie added, "It is hard for me to say it is o.k. if they don't work hard. They seem so lazy this year, always complaining. I don't expect great things. I just expect them to go to class, pass, show up for practice, and work hard. I can't say you did a good job if I thought you were being lazy. The four seniors from last year worked very hard. That's why they were good."

The intensity between subsystems had risen. The team was listening carefully and seemed to squirm in their chairs, looking uncomfortable with Margie's message. However, the more responsive and involved the listeners are the more the problem is in a crisis stage. When a problem is in a crisis stage, it is easier to resolve (Haley, 1988). To facilitate problem solving, I reframed Margie's statement to the team. Reframing allows the group to re-experience a statement, symptom or problem in a new way (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981). "Margie seems frustrated with her role, which is to help you be your best, and frustrated with herself, not focusing on the positive. She must really be

invested in all of you." My reframe here was intended to interpret Margie's message in a less negative way. I believe this helped the players understand her frustration and feel less attacked by her.

Elizabeth, a senior, responded to Margie, "This fall has been the hardest conditioning of all the years I've played. I hate to run as much as anyone, but practice has been easier since I'm in better shape."

Katy stated, "It has been hard watching Margie change this year, Margie used to be Margie, fun, nice. She had to change because of the team. We need to give more effort and not complain so much." The team seemed to agree.

Elizabeth added, "Coach [Laura] still has a temper, but it is surprising, I'm shocked that she doesn't get mad as much".

Laura, stated, "I do know that as a staff we were disappointed in how out of shape the players came back after the summer, we were hurt by that. I think they have worked harder after seeing the frustration in Margie. It seems it takes someone to be the three faces of eve [looking at Margie]." Her statement and gesture again put Margie in the role of the more tempered coach.

Jill, an assistant coach, added that she "noticed how well the players had done in practice today." Jill often followed up Laura's or Margie's negative statements with a

compliment to the players. She had perhaps taken on Margie's old role: nice, fun, and positive, further facilitating the coaches complementary roles.

Elizabeth, addressing Margie, said, "I have improved as a result of the hard conditioning, but I'm more motivated by positive. I'm just not inspired by negative and yelling."

Margie again said, "It is hard to be positive when I see the team not being in good shape. This is a business, and it is your job to be in good condition."

Marie, Julie, Debby and Cathy admitted being in better shape this year than last year at this time due to the strenuous conditioning. They also admitted starting this season out of shape.

During the above discussion between the players and coaches, I played a passive role in an effort to allow direct communication to occur. It is important to know when to step back and allow members to experience direct communication (Minuchin, 1981). By pulling back during this portion of the session, I was able to give the group the time they needed to hear the shared frustration they had during conditioning.

Change

The interview and the way it is done can bring about change as a first step. It seemed that change began to

occur when several players expressed an understanding of why Margie was so tough on them. There was admission by the players of coming into the pre-season out of shape and complaining frequently. Margie felt heard by the team and agreed she needed to be more positive: "You all have strengths and weaknesses. I need to focus on both to help you become better players." The team seemed able to accept the executive hierarchy positions held by the coaches, yet could openly communicate an alternative way the coaches could approach them, being more positive. The direct communication between the two subsystems, players and coaches, was a beginning in solving their problems.

The frustration of Jane

At this point in the session, Laura began to focus on another frustration / identified problem. She looked at Jane, the sophomore who was sitting somewhat outside the semi-circle, and asked in a frustrated tone, "Were you mad the other day when Barbara tried to get you to run by yelling at you on the track."

Jane responded, "Nothing gets me to run, I've told you all that. You all [coaches] are on our butts all year long to run. I hate to run. It just makes me so mad that I have to run so much [Folding her arms]."

Margie responded, "As mad as you get at us, is as mad

as we get [Looking at me]. It is so obvious when Jane is being lazy that it gets the teams attention , it is difficult to ignore."

Jane said, "I just can't make those mile times."

Laura said, "What motivates Jane is the team cheering her on." The team disagreed saying that they cheer her on during each drill and during running exercises, but that she just seems to slow down more.

Laura went on to say, "Actually, I am sick of hearing the team beg Jane in practice to do what she is supposed to, 'come on Jane you can do it'. Others are busting their fannies and no one says a word to them. All the focus stays on Jane. She has natural talent, endless potential."

It appeared that the coaches and players had been paying so much attention to Jane that often they would discount or not notice other players' efforts. The team seemed frustrated by Jane's unmotivated attitude and their inability to motivate her, even by cheering. Jane had the attention of everyone. The team and coaches were trying to explain the importance of conditioning and practicing. It was apparent by the seating arrangement, no one on either side of Jane, the frustrated looks, the coaches' tones of voice and the energy that everyone was putting into motivating Jane that she was a symptom bearer, an identified problem, on this team.

It is not unusual for a family or group to focus on one person as the problem. A consultant's job is to think of the problem in terms of more than one person. This is best done by looking at the total situation and tracking the sequence in which the behavior occurred. However, it is important not to minimize the problem child / player. Haley (1988) wrote, "Therapy is most effective if the focus is kept on the symptom and the problem person. A clear focus must be kept on the problem so that relationships can be changed using that problem, or person, as a lever" (p.40).

The coalition with Jane

Jane seemed to be in a coalition with the coaches. This coalition was across generational lines. In other words, Jane was being treated special, different by the coaches. In fact, the coaches were encouraging the players to also treat Jane special by cheering her on. Haley (1987) recommends, as an important goal in changing a sequence of behavior, to prevent coalitions across generational lines. By generation Haley means a different order in the power hierarchy. Coaches and players represent two different generations. If one member of a generation forms a coalition with a member of another generation, the organization is malfunctioning. My goal was to help Jane return to the players' subsystem and break up the coalition

between the coaches and Jane.

The players and coaches seemed to have given power to Jane by begging her to function in practice. They needed her talent on the team to win. However, if she withheld her talent, she had control or power over their begging / cheering behavior. Power is defined by Aponte (1976a p.434) as "the relative influence of each family member on the outcome of an activity" (p. 434). On a team, it is not surprising that the best players, those who can influence winning, seem to hold more power than less talented players.

This generally corresponds with being a senior because of the additional experience they possess. However, in Jane's case she was a sophomore identified as a potential star player; yet, she was not motivated to become one. Jane was in an inferior position in relation to the other members of the group who took care of her, but she was in a superior position by not improving under their care. The therapeutic techniques to address this issue are directed at challenging the heart of the dysfunctional structure, the organization of the symptom (Minuchin, 1981).

Jane again said, "I just can't make those mile times."

The coaches explained to the players, but mainly addressing Jane, that over the years the rules had changed. What was expected was that all players achieve a set mile time. With the new change, players were only expected to

improve their mile time, not run a specific time.

Margie, who looked frustrated, said, "I only expect you to take one second off your time each time you run, one second."

Barbara, a senior said, "The coaches don't think we are failures. Some of you before you ever get on the track say to yourselves 'I can't do it, I can't do it'. You make yourself a failure before you even go out there. You can do anything if you put your mind to it. You all spend so much time complaining."

Jane responded, "I know I can't do it."

Barbara frustrated added, "See, right there you're doing it."

Margie again tried to encourage Jane: "Can't do what? I'm not asking you to run a 6.30 mile or 6.40 mile. I'm asking you to try to run one second faster when you go out each day. We don't want you to feel like failures by timing everything. We have long gotten away from that. We just want consistent effort." The intensity had risen even more as all members became frustrated.

An important sequence of behavior

The team and coaches were displaying the sequence of behavior that probably occurred in practice. Jane seemed unmotivated to try, which led the coaches to try to

encourage her. The team also tried to encourage Jane, and she remained unmotivated. All became frustrated as a result. In addition, the coaches focused on Jane's "can't" attitude instead of Barbara's encouraging attitude. Again, Margie was focusing on only negative behavior. A family or group can not tell the therapist about their sequence of behavior because they usually do not know what it is. The therapist's job is to track the sequence and develop a task to interrupt it, therefore, bringing about change (Haley 1988).

Margie looked at Jane and said, "It's my job as a coach to help you achieve things you didn't think you could. But, if you always say, 'I can't run', 'I can't sit down', 'I can't do this and that', I can't as a coach say that's O.K."

Laura said, "Jane, we are the only ones in your life that have challenged you to be better. Your high school coach had an All American on his hands and didn't know it. He let you dictate what you did in practice everyday. Now you're here, and we are demanding you to be better, to be an All American, and you don't want the challenge."

Debby said, "I have something I have to say. I am so irritated with Jane for having all this talent and not using it. I work so hard, and I can never be as good as she is. To see her just sit their and not try harder when I'm working."

I asked Debby, "Are you one of the people the coach described as a cheer leading squad for Jane?"

She replied, "Yes, I think so." The others laughed and said, "We all are."

Task assignment

I complimented the players on their ability to cheer each other on, and, then, I assigned a task to the team. The goal of the task was to interrupt the sequence of behavior I had observed. I challenged the team to back off from Jane, to let Jane make decisions on her own and to let her decide how far she needed to push herself.

I said, "Do you think you as players can back down as Jane's cheerleading squad so she can become a regular member of the team, not the special member, and not a member outside of the circle [casually referring to the seating arrangement]? Can she receive positive encouragement when she does something positive and constructive criticism when she doesn't? Can we treat her just like other members of the team? Perhaps if she is treated like a regular member, she can become one." With that, Lee Ann patted the empty chair next to Jane, seemingly to say, come on over join the team.

Debby said, "It is so hard to not cheer when you see she is not trying, and we get so frustrated."

Cathy, a senior added, "I guess the coaches feel about us sometimes the way we feel about Jane when we are trying to cheer her on."

I again asked the team if they could focus on their own improvement and stop cheerleading for Jane for one week in an effort to let her join the team.

Marie said, "If we stop cheering, she'll stop trying".

The team all laughed and said, "We're cheering, and she's still not trying." The players agreed to try this for one week. Jane sat back in her chair in a relaxed way.

The team seemed willing to do the task for one week. However, the coaches seemed to be concerned about participating in the task. After a few minutes of silence, Claudia related that Jane got playing time even without giving any effort and that others worked hard every day and "don't get a chance for a bucket."

Laura responded, "Then why are you cheering her on? You should be mad at her and mad at us [the coaches]."

Elizabeth said, "If we show that we are mad, she might quit the team."

Moving the team towards a commitment to do the task, I asked, "Who is willing to do the task for one week." The team and coaches all raised their hands, except Laura. This identified who was not willing to follow the directive.

Julie, still concerned about negative outcomes of the

task, interjected, "As long as we don't get punished for not cheering, or don't all have to run if Jane doesn't make her time."

Elizabeth, also concerned about this, asked, "You [the coaches] won't get mad if we don't cheerlead for Jane?" The players all laughed as if the covert rule, the team must cheer for Jane to avoid getting in trouble, had just been exposed. This part of the sequence was an important one. If the team does not cheer, they may be reprimanded by the coaches. This further indicates a coalition between the coaches and Jane. When the team is not successful at motivating Jane and she runs slowly, the team also has to run. Margie nodded that it was O.K. not to cheer, and she agreed they would not have to run if Jane was the only one not improving her time.

Jane added, "I hate having to make everyone run."

I said, "Jane, what I think the team is saying is welcome to the team as a regular member." Again, Lee Ann patted the empty chair.

The head coach's hesitancy to do the task

Laura, who had indicated non-commitment to the task, said, "It is so hard to ignore. I don't know if I'm willing. I'll have to sleep on it." Laura was perhaps the most invested in motivating Jane. Winning is the main

criterion of a coach's success, and Jane had the ability to contribute to Laura's winning record. This may be the reason Laura and the assistant coaches had formed a coalition with Jane.

As players left the session, Laura remained seated, postured as if she wanted to talk to me. The assistant coaches saw that Laura was not leaving so they sat back down. Laura again expressed her frustration with Jane and the difficulty she, as the coach, had backing off of her. Laura, under stress to win, was having difficulty considering trying a new response.

Laura began to think of alternatives, "Maybe I need to just remove her from the drill and ask her to just step out."

I responded, "So in other words, she would have consequences like any other member of the team, and in turn, will need to begin to function like one."

Laura nodded in agreement and reflected on that day's practice: "Today one of our new freshmen was out in front of the other players in a race and no one was cheering for her, including me. We were all focused on Jane, who was last."

Margie replied, "Jane gets more attention for stinking then the ones who really try and are doing well."

Laura responded, "I don't know what to do except throw her out of the gym. I'm serious, I've come close to telling

her that. I just kept saying to her 'you're stinking up the gym, you're in that lazy frame and you're mad.' Then I brought her in and made her look at a tape, and I just told her 'you don't exhibit any of the characteristics that you need to'."

Here Laura was conveying what had been tried before. This was important for her to look at before she was willing to try something different. Haley (1987), as part of the task assignment, suggests that the therapist ask the family / group what has been tried before to solve the problem. This helps the family see all the failed attempts and makes the task appear to be a last hope. If members perceive the task as a last hope, they will be more willing to try it. Also when assigning a task, Haley (1987) states the therapist must give, not suggest, the task. Therefore, I continued to encourage Laura to try the task for one week.

Margie seeming less frustrated said, "I'd rather play Debby who doesn't have as much talent [as Jane], but gives us the effort everyday. If I were on this team and all I heard was 'Jane, Jane, Jane', even though it is negative I'd think 'Well, shit, I'm doing my job'. I get caught thinking that not being negative is a positive. I told one of them once, 'I'm not yelling at you, that should be a positive'. That's not true, and they just don't think that."

I agreed adding, "A positive is a positive and a

negative is a negative." I stressed how much their, the coaches', approval obviously means to the team and encouraged them to give their approval more often.

The head coaches agreement to do the task

The coaches, as a staff, seemed to realize that Jane's unmotivated behavior had been the focus of their attention. This had been frustrating for them and the team. The coaches, including Laura, agreed to do something different, to back off, for one week. The first game was five weeks away, therefore, Laura may have been more willing to try something new with Jane. If the task made things worse, as she may have feared, there was still time to continue to work through the problem. This session lasted a total of two hours. It is not unusual for the first session to last longer than subsequent sessions since this is often when problems are identified. Haley (1988) recommends allowing this to happen and then structuring the following sessions to last about one hour.

Summary

In this first session, four problems were identified: Jane's coalition with the coaches, the players' frequent complaining during practice, the coaches' lack of positive communication and the coaches' complementary roles.

Minuchin (1981) suggests selecting a focus or theme for each session and screening out the many areas which, though interesting, do not contribute to resolving the problems or meeting the therapeutic goals related to the identified problems.

Therefore, in each subsequent session I focused on an identified problem. I focused on the players' frequent complaining behavior in session two, when I met with the players only. I addressed the lack of positive communication with the players and the complementary roles of the coaches in session three, when I met with the coaches only. Session four, with the players only, was spent continuing to problem solve the players' complaining and their reported lack of self-confidence.

Session 2

Seating

All 15 players on the basketball team were present at this session. As previously arranged, the coaches were asked not to attend. Dividing the group into subsystems for some of the consultation sessions allows subsystems time alone with the facilitator (Minuchin, 1982; Wynn, 1986).

The previous week, during the first session, Jane sat somewhat separate from the team. She was the only player who was seated with no one to either side of her. A missing

player's empty chair was to her left, and the end of the semicircle was to her right. Jane's separateness from the team was evidenced by the previous week's seating arrangement and the special attention she received as reported by the team. For session two, to see if the seating pattern would repeat itself, I put an extra chair in the semicircle. However, several players, including Jane, chose different seats. The new seating arrangement was soft data that change had occurred on the team (Minuchin, 1982).

Katy sat directly to my left, Barbara next to her and then Elizabeth. All three of these players started in games the previous season. On the other side of me sat Marie, a sophomore, and Chris, a junior. Both of these players also started games the previous season. During this week's session, the seats on either side of the consultant, who was seen as the leader, were occupied by the executive subsystem among the players, the starters and/or the seniors. Haley believes (1987), that every group must deal with the issue of organizing in a hierarchy, and rules must be worked out about who is primary in status and power and who is secondary. It seemed the starters and seniors had more power/status than the other players. This seemed apparent given the seating arrangement they chose and their willingness to speak out in sessions.

Directly across and furthest from me, sat the four

freshmen, all of whom were expected to play very little during the season. The freshmen players seemed to form another subsystem based on being new to the team. They may have held a lower place in the team's hierarchy evidenced by their distance from me. In between the freshmen and the three starting players to my left sat Cathy and Julie, two players which were expected to play very little during the upcoming season. To the right of Chris sat Jane, then Lee Ann, then the empty chair, then Debby and Claudia. Jane, during this session, was not sitting at the end of the semicircle with an empty chair between her and the rest of the players, as she had in the previous session. This may have indicated that she had become more a part of the team. Throughout most of the session, Debby sat with her leg up on the empty seat, seemingly closing the gap between her and the other players. The four players that Jane was sitting among may have formed another subsystem. However, I did not recognize it based on what I knew about the team. (See Appendix IV, Seating)

Task report

I began the session by introducing myself to Heather. She was the freshman who was missing during the previous session due to illness. I welcomed her and briefly summarized how the players had described these meetings from

the last session. I encouraged her to join in as she felt comfortable.

In order to keep sessions that follow the initial interview focused on the identified problems, Haley (1988) suggests beginning each session by asking for a task report, how the homework was carried out by the group. Therefore, I said, "I want to begin by asking who was able to follow through with the homework assignment or the task in terms of Jane. Can someone tell me what happened."

The players laughed, indicating that something had happened involving their interactions with Jane.

Katy said to Jane, "I didn't cheer for you."

Elizabeth said, "I didn't either."

Cathy, however, responded, "I cheered for you Jane."

To determine which players followed through with the task, I asked, "So, who was able to cheer for Jane no more than any other player?" The whole team raised their hands, except Cathy.

Cathy replied, "Cause I'm always back there with her."

I did not address Cathy's reasons for not doing the task. However, later in the session, it became apparent that Cathy felt devalued as a player. Therefore, she may have identified with Jane's feelings of being an outsider on this team and was unable to stop treating Jane as special or different from the other players.

Establishing that the team, except Cathy, was able to interact differently with Jane, I asked if the coaches had reacted differently.

Debby said, "The coaches didn't say a word to her [Jane]." She then looked to Jane for confirmation.

Jane said, "Every time I ran around the track Margie [an assistant coach] would do this." She turned her head away from the group demonstrating how Margie had responded to her. Everyone laughed as Jane made fun of Margie's reaction.

Looking at Jane I asked, "How was that for you. Was it better or was it worse?"

Jane responded, "It was better. I didn't have to hear my name all the time 'Jane, Jane, Jane.'"

When behavior change in a group happens rapidly, it is best for the consultant to act surprised at the change, or to prescribe not changing too fast. This often will counteract returning to old patterns of behavior (Haley, 1988).

Therefore, I said in a surprised tone, "I'm surprised. To be really honest with you, I thought the team was going to say 'we felt like we had to keep cheering.' But you all sound like you backed off and so did the coaches. That's good stuff, that's surprising." Jane smiled and tapped her feet on the floor.

I didn't want to leave Jane and the team defining Jane's behavior as negative. Therefore, I reframed or gave Jane positive feedback about her behavior. A consultant often suggests that the person's inner strength and fortitude led to the behavior change. Reframing symptoms positively may operate to stimulate therapeutic modifications of the behavior. The consultant's feedback can motivate clients to behave differently (Seltzer, 1986). Therefore, I said, "You know Jane, I don't perceive you as lazy or unmotivated. I just see you as taking care of yourself, protecting yourself, and knowing what your limits are. That's a real strength. It looks like the team wants you to be a regular member of this team."

Continuation of the task

To see if the team was willing to continue to back off from Jane, I asked, "I know we said we would do this for just a while, but would you like to continue?"

Debby said, "Definitely."

Barbara replied, "You mean not cheer for her?"

To specifically define what the new behavior would be, I asked, "How would you describe what cheering regular is?"

Katy said, "If we are doing a drill and she's the one with the ball, if she does something good, say 'good job' and if she wasn't where she was supposed to be, then tell

her."

I added, "Just like a regular member of the team, no special treatment."

Again, I looked to the team to see if they were willing to continue this. "So does everyone feel comfortable with continuing this past this week?" Everyone nodded, including Jane.

Being specific in assigning a task or giving a directive is critical (Haley 1988). Katy was instrumental in describing how the team could treat Jane like a regular member of the team. Her specific comments, using an example familiar to the team, seemed to facilitate their understanding. It was apparent that Jane and the other players were ready to change their interactions with each other.

Complaining; The behavioral sequence and the task to interrupt it

Believing the "Jane issue" had been resolved, I moved on to another identified problem, the players' frequent complaining. In bringing up this problem, I described the behavioral sequence I had observed based on the discussion from the previous session. The players complain, the coaches perceive them as lazy or having a bad attitude due to the complaining. Therefore, the coaches criticize them.

In turn, the players feel badly about themselves, the players complain more, and the sequence continues. My goal was to help the players recognize this sequence, give a task to interrupt the sequence and enact the task in the session. These goals are congruent with Haley's (1987), directive approach to therapy.

I normalized the problem in an effort to help the players see the behavior, frequent complaining, as normal. Normalizing is often the first step before prescribing the symptom (Minuchin, 1981). Symptom prescription is a strategic intervention which involves encouraging or instructing someone, or a group, to maintain their symptomatic behavior or a variation of it. Practicing the undesired behavior is regarded as the means toward altering or eliminating that behavior. The underlying message of the directive is that symptoms can be removed by being intentionally adhered to, or that through consciously willing problematic behaviors thought to be involuntary, their control will eventually be delivered into the client's or group's hands (Seltzer, 1986). Therefore, I gave a rationalization for the symptom prescription and asked the players to complain in a different way than what they were used to.

I said, "Another thing that I wanted to talk about was the coaches perceiving your complaining as lazy. Several of

you brought up concerns about frequent complaining. You're being asked to work very hard, and this is difficult. Because you're feeling more open with your coaches, you're complaining not just among yourselves, but you're complaining out loud, which is a normal thing. Is there anyone here who doesn't complain to their parents about curfew or homework? Several of you last week said they [the coaches] are not focusing on your positives, on what you're doing right. I think they are focusing on the complaining. So when the complaining happens the coaches are negative toward you, and you get down on yourselves and complain more." At this point the players were nodding their heads and seemed to be really listening.

I then prescribed the symptom, "To ask you to quit complaining would be crazy. I think you need to complain at a specific time, let's say for five minutes in the locker room just before practice, just among yourselves, even if you don't feel like complaining. Even if you just want to complain that you have to complain, do it for five minutes [The team laughed a little]. Is there someone on this team that could lead the complaining sessions?"

Several of them said, "Cathy."

Cathy replied, "I ain't gonna do it." The team jokingly volunteered Cathy because she was a frequent complainer.

Katy said, "Can I ask what that [the complaining task] will do?"

I explained, "I think it will help to not bring it [the complaining] on the court".

Katy responded, "I agree with you that when people complain in practice the coaches just see that [the complaining]. I try to go around and tell everyone to just laugh it off. Don't complain about it. Just do it and act like you're having a good time. Then she'll [Laura] let you off. If you start complaining with a grimmest face and bitch about it or get real upset, she'll just keep on yelling at you. But I don't know if we went into the locker room and sat there complaining for five minutes what that would do."

Resistance to do the task

Here a member of the team, Katy, confirmed the sequence I had observed. She also described several attempts she had made at interrupting it. Haley (1988) states that it is critical to find out what has already been attempted to solve a problem before giving a task. This exhaustive list of what's been tried prepares the group to try something new, the task. However, I made several mistakes when assigning the task. I did not involve the players enough in listing what had been tried before, although Katy

spontaneously listed her attempts. Another mistake I made was that I gave the task too soon. I failed to give the players time to discuss the sequence, that I had just described, before I assigned the task. Realizing the mistakes I'd made, evidenced by Katy's response, I continued to discuss the task.

I said to the players, "I agree with what Katy is saying. She sees the coaches focusing on the complaining and being negative. You may have to help the coaches focus on the positive." I joined with Katy, agreeing with her comments, because it was important that she accepted the task. Her seat beside me, as well as the team looking to her as their spokesperson, signified she had a place high in the hierarchy and held power on the team. Her acceptance of the task was critical in getting the team to follow through with it. Also, by putting the players in the position of helping the coaches focus on the positive, I had hoped they would see the sequence as normal for both them and the coaches and avoid putting blame on the coaches.

Katy replied, "But instead of complaining on and off the court I think we just need to get it off the court, and I think everyone does their fair complaining off the court. If you think we need a complaining session we'll have it, but we are doing it already anyway."

To draw a distinction I added "so the difference might

be that you do [complain] it at a specific time."

Continued hesitancy to do the task

Katy seemed afraid that the complaining would get worse if the team did the task. When people are asked to continue the behavior seen as problematic (symptom prescription), they are often hesitant. Minuchin (1981) suggests that messages and directives be repeated many times in different ways throughout a session in order to induce cooperation. Therefore, I continued to reassign the task.

To help the players experience the assignment in a different way, I delivered a metaphor. A metaphor is a statement about one thing that resembles something else. Haley (1988) often utilizes metaphor as a way to help people see their behaviors differently. I said, "To not complain when things are tough is like trying to keep the lid on a steamer. I think complaining daily at a specific time will let steam out of the pot without getting you in trouble with the coaches. In fact, I think it's important that you vent what you're feeling, let off steam."

Julie said, "I'm here for my education. If I had money, I wouldn't be here. Sometimes I wonder, all this pain." The team seemed to be lightening up a little, nodding and joking with each other and agreeing that several of them dread the pain of workouts.

Elizabeth tried to draw a distinction between now and how it would be later in the season. She said, "Well right now it's just terrible, but it's different once you start playing. It is always hard at the beginning of the season. It will get better."

Debby added, "It's more than basketball, like knowing Lee Ann." Lee Ann was sitting next to Debby.

Julie said, "It can be a lot of fun sometimes. There's just certain days that you can't do nothing about."

Acceptance of the task

The goal of the assigned task was to have the players begin to complain less. It seemed that the team had begun to do just that during this session. Many of them, once given permission to complain, in fact prescribed to complain, began to sound more positive and focus on the good parts about playing basketball.

Katy said, "Yes we need to let off steam, but we need to focus on what we have to be thankful for."

Marie quickly responded, "That's what she's [referring to me] saying. To just do it and get it out of the way and have the rest of the day to look at the positive things."

Katy replied, "O.k., when are we going to do that?" Marie, also having a superior hierarchal position on the team because she was a starter, seemed to influence Katy's

acceptance of the task. Minuchin (1981), suggests utilizing those who have power when assigning a task in order to get other members invested in trying it.

Following practice, the players lift weights, receive treatment for injuries, and generally go their separate ways. Therefore, they decided to get together immediately after each practice in the locker room to complain for five minutes.

I told them the task would work best if someone would be in charge of the complaining sessions. I stated, "The leader gets you together to complain. Is there anyone who would like to lead these complaining sessions?" Elizabeth, a senior, waved her hand to volunteer and agreed to be in charge.

Cathy's sadness / the need to complain

The team was joking about being assigned to complain. However, Cathy who was looking upset, said, "I know I can use some of that time to complain. I have a lot to bitch about right now [she was tearful]. She [Laura, the head coach] has always told me that I don't play because I can't make my mile. If she would have told me my freshman year that I sucked, I would have transferred."

The mood of the session became serious. Cathy was crying and took a deep breath, putting her hands up in front

of her as if she couldn't talk about it anymore. Everyone was silent for a few moments, than Cathy continued, "I always feel like it's on me, on my shoulders, and there's nothing I can do to change it. I can't imagine not having anybody here as friends, but I'm not very happy right now."

Julie related to Cathy's situation and said, "The coach told me I wasn't playing because I was overweight or couldn't dribble. She told me so many times I was this close to starting." The team laughed at how Julie told her story. Cathy and Julie were expected to play the least of all the returning non-freshmen players.

Cathy's changed attitude over the years

Cathy, unable to joke with the players, said, "I even asked her about it last year. I said, 'Marie and Jane haven't made their mile' [these two players often start in games]; and she said, 'they are better ball players than you.' I just feel like I've wasted, I have nothing to show for my basketball career."

Katy seeing Cathy's pain said, "Since I've been here, I've watched you [Cathy] improve tremendously; and from last year to this year, you have improved so much. You have a different attitude."

I asked the players how Cathy's attitude had changed.

Lee Ann responded, "She use to sulk, complain even

more, but now she doesn't nearly as much."

Julie added, "She would get knocked down, and the tears would fall." Everyone, including Cathy, laughed at these descriptions of her.

Elizabeth looked at Cathy and said, "You can't take what she [Laura] says. She told me I'm not a starting player." Elizabeth had started a few games the previous season.

Knowing that every player on this team was a star player and captain on their high school team, I said to Cathy, "It must feel pretty bad to have been a star player and captain before you came here and then wait for that moment to reoccur. It's your senior year, and it's not happening for you." Cathy put her head down.

I asked if anyone else was feeling like Cathy. No one seemed to share the deep hurt that she was feeling from not getting playing time, not getting positives from the coaches and not feeling successful. I asked what the team usually did when they knew Cathy felt this way.

Katy, looking frustrated, said, "Honestly, I used to encourage her, but than I got so sick of hearing it [complaining] over and over that I stopped. Now I'm back encouraging her because she has a new attitude; she bitches less."

Barbara agreed with Katy, "I stopped for awhile too,

but I'm back encouraging her cause of her new attitude."

Cathy responded, "When I look at the other side, maybe I was put here for a reason. We are all here for a reason. Even though I don't play, I've learned a lot. I hope to be a coach someday."

Associating Cathy's changed attitude to the assigned task

Cathy's new attitude of complaining less seemed to have a positive effect on the team. They encouraged her more and felt more positive toward her as a result. I pointed this out to the team and related it back to the complaining task they had agreed to do: "So Cathy complaining less helped you [the players] have a more positive attitude toward her and encourage her more. Perhaps the coaches, as they see you [the players] complaining less will encourage you more and have a more positive attitude toward you."

Agreeing with the need for encouragement, Cathy responded, "It's just I have no confidence in myself. Like the other day I was running 20 lines and Margie said, 'good job', and it was so helpful. I just tried that much harder. You just don't know how it is. I'm from a little town, and when I go home the sports editor asks, 'how much did you get to play', and I'll say, 'fifteen.' He'll say, 'fifteen games that's good', and I'll say, 'no, fifteen minutes.'

I'm the first division one athlete out of my high school. My hometown expects a lot out of me."

I said to Cathy, "You're not just feeling pressure to start, but you're feeling pressure to be a lot of things to your hometown and a lot of things to yourself."

Katy said, "She needs to quit worrying about what everyone else thinks and be proud of what she has accomplished." The group was silent for a few moments.

Summary

I concluded the session by moving the conversation back toward the complaining task. "When you lead the complaining session [addressing Elizabeth], make sure you hear from Cathy and everyone else at that time. Sounds like there is a lot to complain about."

Marie said to Cathy, "You can't have it all [referring to the complaining time]." The team laughed.

In general, the players seemed to have low confidence in themselves. In the upcoming session with the coaches, I addressed how their increase in positive feedback to the players may contribute to increased confidence among the players. If the complaining continued on the court, it seemed the players would continue to receive negative feedback from the coaches, which in return could lead to lower confidence and more complaining. Therefore, I

continued to address these issues in subsequent sessions.

Session 3

Seating

All four coaches from the basketball team were present at this session. As previously arranged, the players were asked not to attend. This allowed me to interact with the coaches' subsystem. I arranged five chairs for our meeting. Laura, the head coach, sat next to me. The other three coaches sat according to hierarchy: Margie sat next to Laura, then Jill, and then Connie. As the coaches chose their seats, Connie told them about the day's practice. She had facilitated practice alone because the other coaches were interviewing a recruit. (See Appendix IV, Seating)

Change concerning Jane

Connie excitedly said, "Jane was right behind Cathy the whole way. She ran her first two 400's in 1.40 and 1.45."

Laura said, "I can't believe she ran a 1.45."

Connie continued, "She ended up running a 7.57 mile, right under eight. That's the fastest she has ever run."

Laura said, "Yeah, 8.13 was her fastest last year."

Connie added, "They were really pushing."

The casual conversation between the coaches indicated there had been a change in Jane's motivation. Apparently,

she had been trying harder and had run her fastest time.

Laura looked at me and said, "Jane just doesn't know how good she could be if she worked at it. She's always real negative about herself, down on herself."

Task report concerning Jane

Assessing change in the coaches' interactions with Jane was my first goal of the session. Laura's statement about Jane gave me an opening to obtain a task report concerning this change.

I asked the coaches, "Have you noticed any changes in Jane since our first meeting, since we began the task [backing off, not treating Jane special]."

Laura replied, "Yeah, we had her in our office one night for about an hour. She did another dumb thing that I had to yell at her for. Basically, I just spelled out to her, 'you will not play in this type of shape.'"

Jill added, "and that scares her."

Laura continued, "She doesn't want to spend four years on the bench."

Looking at Connie, I said, "I heard you say Jane ran her best time. Did the team and you back off treating her special, yelling and cheering all the time?" All the coaches nodded their heads indicating there had been change.

Laura said, "Every now and then they'll [the players]

yell at her."

Margie interrupted, "Yeah, but not like it used to be, not anything like it used to be. She works harder now."

Laura said, "It's all helped [the changes in interacting with Jane], every bit of it is helping. I told her [Jane], 'I don't even yell at you any more', and she said, 'I like it that way.' I mean I talk to her. I don't ignore her."

The coaches had begun to treat Jane like the other players: if she wasn't in shape or not trying, she wouldn't play. This may have removed Jane from the coalition she was in with the coaches and placed her back into the players' subsystem. As she began to be treated like a regular member of the team, Jane appeared to function like one and seemed to be working for playing time.

The need to use more positive communication

It seemed the problem involving Jane had been resolved. Therefore, I addressed my second goal of the session: to encourage the coaches, mainly Laura and Margie, to give the players more positive feedback. In sessions one and two, a concern of the players was receiving negative communication. This negative communication may have contributed to the players' lack of confidence. The use of positive communication by coaches can facilitate the

increase in self-esteem among players (Bell, 1983; Nideffer, 1981; Suinn, 1980a). Therefore, in this session I encouraged the coaches to use positive communication.

Complementarity of roles among the coaches

Addressing the coaches' complementary roles was congruent with the goal of increasing the coaches' use of positive communication with the players. Throughout session one, Connie had not spoken a word. Jill, who spoke very little, mostly spoke to the players in a positive manner. Margie, however, admitted her tendency to be overly negative and was described by Laura as "Three faces of Eve." Laura, who was known to have a temper, seemed to use mainly negative communication. Therefore, Jill and Connie were functioning as the good / positive coaches, while Laura and Margie were functioning as the bad / negative coaches. My goal was to encourage the four coaches to actualize both parts of themselves: to use positive communication and to give constructive criticism when needed. According to Minuchin (1981), when individuals function freely, not solely within the constraints of how the others in the system are functioning, they are more fully functioning.

Introducing the problem

I joined with the coaches from a one-down position,

admitting that I did not understand the stress of coaching (Minuchin, 1981), and began to work toward my session goals. I said, "I know backing off of a potential star player [Jane] isn't easy. You have all done a really good job, and it sounds like Jane's motivation has improved. I don't want to pretend like I have any idea how much pressure there is on you as a coach, win/loss, recruiting, but what I've noticed this year is that your job seems like it is harder. Harder in the sense that well, Margie even said it at our first meeting, you didn't really have to yell at or try to motivate Sally, Ann, or Chris [three starters from the previous year]."

Margie interrupted, "Or Patty [a fourth starter from the previous year]."

I continued, "Considering that was basically the starting line up, you didn't have to be, well, you used the term [looking at Laura], 'Three faces of Eve', as you described Margie [during the first meeting]. You didn't have to do that. You have a different team, so you have had to be different coaches."

Margie added, "Yeah, because Sally, Ann, Chris, and Patty could lead. They could motivate themselves and the team."

Minuchin (1981) writes that normalizing the behavior or the problem is important before suggesting the individual

change it. It is important to describe the behavior as a normal reaction to what is going on. Normalizing is the first step toward suggesting change. As I pointed out to Margie her increase in negative feedback, I was careful to attribute her behavior to the change in the team.

The coaches began to discuss individual players on the team, including their strengths and weaknesses. They concluded by agreeing that overall low confidence was a problem on the team. The general expectation that the team would not win as many games this year, partly due to the players' lack of experience, along with the consistent negative communication received from the coaches, may have all contributed to the players' lack of confidence.

I agreed with the coaches that the players lacked confidence. I said, "As a team I think they are more down on themselves. I think they have less self-confidence in general [compared to the previous year's team]."

Laura said, "Yeah, I don't think they know who they are yet. The way we describe Ann and Sally [from the previous year's team] is that they were very confident people, but I don't know if you could say that about most of our kids this year [the coaches refer to the players as kids]. The only person off the court who I think knows who they are is Katy."

Positive communication to increase the players' confidence

To encourage the coaches to consider being more positive and to help increase the players' confidence, I said, "In terms of coaching, I don't think this team allows you to actualize all of yourself. Last year's team allowed you to actualize the fun part of yourself, the playful side. There were leaders/motivators among the players. You didn't always have to be the responsible one. You're actualizing the more negative side of yourselves this year [mainly addressing Margie and Laura], and I hear players being more down on themselves. You have to be the kind of coach based on the kind of team that you've got [normalizing the behavior]. My concern is that if you get pushed into being one kind of coach [negative], based on the team, you're not actualizing your whole self. I think you lose power, and they [the players] don't listen as much, and they don't take what you're saying as seriously."

According to Gurman and Kniskern (1981), when treating families or groups strategically, it is common to reframe their behaviors as having a positive motive. This is primarily because blaming or criticizing tends to mobilize resistance. Therefore, the reframes I used to avoid resistance and emphasize more positive communication were the phrase, "Not actualizing all parts of yourself", and

the idea of responding to this year's team.

The gains of using more positive communication

Minuchin (1981) has written in addition to reframing behaviors, it is important that individuals or groups believe that they have something to gain by changing their behaviors. Having the players listen more to the coaches, to take the coaches more seriously and to help increase the players confidence were the gains I discussed with the coaches.

Laura agreed she was losing impact with the team. She said, "Yeah, like yesterday at the beginning of practice they were sluggish again and again and again. Usually when practice is that bad, we just stop and say, 'get on the line', and have them run. Yesterday I stopped them and told them I wasn't going to make them do that [run]. I just tried to talk to them rationally. I tried more of a pep talk rather than just running. I said, 'Don't ask us to come to the gym unless you show up. You're pissing me off, and I'm pissing you off and we're stuck on this line again' [referring to the running line]." Laura seemed to perceive the above "pep talk" as rational, more positive than running. It appeared to me, however, that she was unwittingly yelling at the team even though she was trying to be less punitive by not making them run.

Margie interrupted, "Yelling has become talking, and they get down on themselves."

According to Haley (1988), metaphors, a common strategic technique, should formally parallel the problem and allow the problem to be reexperienced in a new way. Beginning to introduce the idea of complementary roles, I used a metaphor. I said, "In families often one parent ends up doing the yelling while the other ends up quiet or doing all the praising. Have you noticed that among yourselves?"

Denial of complementary roles

Laura did not perceive the coaches functioning within complementary roles. She said, "No, that has been pretty good. We share the wealth. We all do the yelling a little bit. I'm the type that's going to fly off the handle. She [referring to Margie] is going to have a slow burn. Jill is more pragmatic, and Connie doesn't say much. She's 'the people person' on the staff." I asked, "So you don't feel yourselves being split?"

Laura answered, "Not yet."

Laura had defined the coaches as having complementary roles, while at the same time denying it. According to Laura's description, she and Margie were in the having-a-temper role, while Jill and Shelley were not. However, to avoid provoking resistance, I did not pursue this further at

this time.

Suggesting the need for change

I shifted my focus from complementary roles to the need for more positive communication. However, I held back assigning a specific task designed to work toward change. I said, "I think that when you have a case of having to be motivating all the time one of two things tends to happen: splitting, but it doesn't sound like that has happened, or the whole parent/coach is not actualized. You can never be as effective when you're only actualizing one side of yourself. I'd like to try something to actualize all parts of each of you being a coach. This team seems to have low self-esteem, and they're just getting more down on themselves. We need a change from yelling. Yelling has become talking."

Laura stated, "Some [players] are just motivated by getting playing time, like Jan. She's going to play enough that she's gonna get strokes from playing. She's going to get enough positive communication from playing ball games."

Jill disagreed with Laura and said, "She [Jan] needs more [positives]."

Laura added, "She'll survive. What scares me is the depth [substitute players who come off the bench to relieve starters]. All the depth is weak, low in confidence kids."

Margie, who seemed frustrated, said, "You're only talking about four or five kids that have confidence. We have 15 on the team." Laura did not seem completely convinced that positive communication or confidence building needed to come from the coaches.

I said, "That's what I'm seeing. You have four or five players with confidence, players that feel good about themselves. However, I mean everyone needs positive strokes. The team's depth is down on themselves, doubting themselves."

Margie agreed, "It all started this Fall. They have been in a lot of trouble [with the coaches] since they first got here."

Laura admitted being unsure of how to increase their [the players'] confidence. She said, "I don't know how to help them."

Connie, looking concerned, said, "We have so many players with no confidence. They have nothing to base anything positive on. They have never played [freshmen] or they're in the older classes, but never got off the bench much."

Margie added, "Yeah, and they have been in the dog house since they got here." The coaches seemed frustrated with the lack of confidence the players had, yet they seemed to understand why the team felt down on themselves.

Laura said, "We need to get these kids feeling more confident before we start into games. Your confidence can't come from a 40 minute ball game. There is too many losses and too many wins to where you'll be up and down. The consistency has to come from within." It seemed that Laura was aware of the importance of confidence in playing well.

Change in Margie's use of positive communication

Margie said, "Since we met I have tried to make an effort to not be as negative. To try and be more positive. Like I'll try to get to a certain kid each day. That was good to hear them when we met the first time [session one]." Margie seemed aware of the importance of coaches giving positive communication and had begun to use more of it since the first meeting.

I asked Margie, "How is that [focusing on a certain kid] for you when you try to focus on saying something positive to a kid?"

She replied, "I think it works. It makes me more aware of it [being negative]. Sometimes I'm negative. I mean, I don't rip on a kid, or be real mean to them, but what I say may come out negative. They may think it's a negative, but I'm not trying to be negative. I'm just trying to tell them [constructive criticism]."

I said, "So, as a coach it is hard to constantly focus

on the positives when sometimes you need to point out mistakes. With the ones who are doing their job, there is probably even a tendency to fly in the middle [not noticing positives or negatives]."

Laura agreed, "That's true. I haven't talked to Lee Ann very much this year in practice. She does her job."

Margie added, "I swore after our first meeting I wouldn't pay much attention to Jane in a negative way and tried to pick out kids like a Katy, or Jan, who work, and say something. I get locked in to not paying attention because they do fine. I don't have to worry about them. Well, I still need to worry about them. It is hard, there are so many of them."

Laura added, "Yeah, eventually playing time will get in there. You hardly notice the bench, but you may need them."

Margie said, "I think they [the players] dwell on how much they get yelled at. They have a lot of self pity if they get yelled at. If you yell at Elizabeth, she will talk to herself for fifteen minutes afterwards. Cathy is that way too. So for the next 10 or 15 minutes they are like this [putting her hands over her eyes]. They can't see anything else."

Task assignment

Laura and the other coaches seemed ready to accept a

task designed to help them work toward changing the current pattern of interaction with the team. I assigned a common strategic task, odd and even days, designed for changing behavior (Bergman, 1983; Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, 1978). This task is often used to help people practice new patterns of behavior on odd days and on even days continue their old pattern of behavior. Behaving differently on alternate days allows people an opportunity to try new ways of interacting, while only partially giving up their old patterns of interaction. This is particularly useful if the consultant anticipates resistance to change.

My goal was to have the coaches alternate between two behaviors: giving positive feedback and correcting mistakes. In other words, two coaches on even days were to focus on the positive aspects of the players while the other two coaches corrected mistakes. On the odd days, the coaches were to alternate their behavior. It was my hope that the task would increase Laura and Margie's use of positive communication while encouraging Connie and Jill to correct mistakes. In addition, the coaches would be more fully functioning, and this might contribute to increasing the players' self-esteem.

Introducing the task, I said, "I think to just say, 'well then we just need to be more positive,' would be crazy. You can't just ignore what is in front of you, if

something needs correcting. For that reason, I think a task would be helpful. Like you [Margie] gave yourself a task to pick out one kid a day [to notice their positives]. This task is like that. On odd days, two of you focus more on the positives, noticing good things, building self-confidence, saying the things you know they need to hear. On the even days, you notice mistakes and correct them. It will help you actualize your whole self and help the kids hear both sides [positive and correction]. This is very useful in terms of motivating and confidence building. It is no secret that when you get down on yourself your performance shows it. If two of you are pointing out the positives, you will not send them [the players] out [on the court] dwelling on mistakes. It is a way to give you permission to actualize both parts of yourself without expecting that to happen spontaneously."

Margie added, "Yeah, Cathy comes up to me after every practice and says to me, 'did you think I did a little bit better?' She's asking me to say it everyday."

I added, "She needs you to say it."

Margie continued, "Yeah, she's asking me to say it. I told her, 'you're going to make mistakes, it's o.k. to make mistakes, just recover.' She isn't as negative about herself as she was two weeks ago."

Wrapping the session up, I said, "What do you think

about trying an odd/even situation?"

Laura said, "I don't have a problem with it. I don't know if I can remember which days to be positive during the course of a practice." It appeared that it would be hardest for Laura to follow through with the task.

Margie added, "I know I'll just correct, correct, correct, because it is so obvious what's in front of me [the players making mistakes]. It's what's there, and it's the natural thing to correct what's going on in front of you. It is easy to go the whole two hours and never say, 'that was good' or 'that was good.' I think this will help me."

Realization of complementarity of roles

Connie, realizing she is already positive most of the time, began to expose the complementary roles the coaches seemed to be functioning within. She said, "See, I feel like that's the only thing I ever did [notice positives]. I mean, sometimes I may pull them aside and say a little something, but most of the time I'm the one who's always encouraging. If I say much of anything out loud, it is usually encouraging."

Laura added, "So you wouldn't feel real good about chewing somebody out." Laura seemed to be identifying correcting mistakes as chewing someone out.

I said, "It might be important for Connie to actualize both parts of herself [Margie was nodding her head in agreement, and everyone began to laugh at how different this would be for Connie]. She might feel like she can do that more, criticize, if she knows that the encouragement is being taken care of."

Laura added, "It's hard for her. I understand her role because she's the fourth person out there [last in the coaches hierarchy]."

Jill added, "Well I think it will be good because by doing odd/even she'll [Connie] have a day when she can notice the positive things; like when she has the guards by herself and she needs to critique, she can say 'your doing this wrong.'"

Connie said, "I think of things, but I'll tell Coach [Laura]." Everybody's teeth would fall out if I started talking [everyone laughed]."

I said, "This will help you actualize both parts of yourselves as coaches because even the positives won't be as meaningful if that's all they hear. So by you doing odd/even, it will give you [Connie] permission to be more critical, in an encouraging way. Yet, the next day you can notice what's going on that's right. It may be a way for you to blossom as a coach."

Connie agreed, "Yeah, I might pull someone aside, but

mostly all they hear from me is positives."

Feeling that Jill was in a role similar to Connie's, I asked, "Who is most positive next to you, out of the coaches?"

Laura said, "Probably Jill."

Connie continued, "Yeah, Jill has never really yelled at anyone."

Jill added, "Well, one thing I heard when I was just getting into coaching was criticize all you want, but always compliment before you criticize because then people will listen. What I try to do is, 'that was a nice shot to the basket, but try to do this before you do that.'"

An exposed interactional rule

Minuchin (1981) writes that when an interactional rule which governs people's behavior is exposed, often there is an increase in awareness among the group about themselves. Seeing the complementary roles of the coaches (an interactional rule that may have contributed to their behavior), I tried to normalize what had become obvious.

I said, "Well, it would make sense that you two [Laura and Margie], being the two first in line [of the coaches' hierarchy], would be more the heavy, and you two [Jill and Connie] would be more positive being the next two in line. I think it would be really important not only for them [the

players], but for you as coaches, to begin to see all parts of yourselves. It would free you up and give you some freedom as a coach." I had delivered this same message several times, yet the coaches seemed to need to continue to discuss it. Minuchin (1981) writes that it is important to repeat your therapeutic message as a means of raising intensity. This allows people to acknowledge the message as important.

Commenting on what I had just said, the assistant coaches began teasing Laura who earlier that week had walked from one end of the court to the other because, according to Margie, "she was so frustrated that Lee Ann couldn't get a pick" [a basketball term meaning blocking an opposing team's player].

Jill said, "She [Lee Ann] got confused."

Laura yelled, "Confused!"

Jill continued, "She got confused, and you were yelling at her because she couldn't understand it and that made her more flustered. There is a certain degree of nervousness that comes from having you [Laura, the head coach] yell." Laura bent over looking at the floor frustrated, and Jill looked angry. I did not comment on the spontaneous enactment of their complementary roles because everyone seemed aware of it.

I interjected, "There is a certain degree of confidence

when it is Laura saying 'You got it. God, that looks good'."

Jill added, "It means more from her. It does!"

I continued, "At the same time I think they need to hear all things [positives and negatives] from all coaches."

Specifics of the task

We then decided on the specifics of the task based on which two coaches were at which end of the court together most often. It was decided that Margie and Connie, working at separate ends of the court, would be positive on the even days of the week and correct mistakes on the odd days. Laura and Jill, who normally worked at separate ends of the court, would be positive on the odd days of the week and correct mistakes on the even days. The coaches were to begin the task during the next day's practice and continue it for two weeks.

Task report

I was not scheduled to see the coaches alone again until after the regular season began. Therefore, one week after this session, session three, was over I called the coaches' office for a task report. Margie was the only coach in the office when I called. Therefore, I obtained the task report from her. She stated that the coaches had

followed through with the task that week. She also reported that she had been more positive, even when it was not her day to be so. According to Margie, Jill and Connie were able to actualize both sides of themselves, correcting mistakes, as well as being positive. She stated that, "Overall the coaching staff was working hard to be more encouraging."

Margie did not specifically mention Laura. Therefore, I asked if Laura had participated in the task. Margie replied, "She is under a lot of pressure." This could be due to the regular season beginning in two weeks. Not wanting to put Margie in the position of reporting Laura's possible non-compliance, I did not continue to ask her about Laura's behavior. Instead I complimented the coaches' overall change. I emphasized the strength of the coaches' ability to change and actualize additional parts of themselves.

Session 4

Seating

Session four, the last pre-season session, included the players only. As in previous sessions, the players' executive subsystem sat to my immediate right and left. Katy sat on my right, then Barbara and Elizabeth. On my left side sat the senior and/or starter subsystem: Marie,

Chris and Claudia. Between this subsystem and the freshmen subsystem sat Julie, a sophomore. Directly across from me, as in previous sessions, sat the freshmen: Jodi, Heather, Jan and Ellen. Debby, Jane and Lee Ann sat to the right of the senior and/or starter subsystem. These three players either started some games or were the first substitutes off the bench. Next, and at the end of the semicircle sat Cathy, a senior who was expected to play very little. (See Appendix IV, Seating)

Task report

According to Haley (1988), after giving a task, a task report should be elicited in the session which follows the task assignment session. Therefore, I asked, "I haven't seen you all for a couple of weeks, and I want to follow up on the task. How did that go, the complaining time?"

The players in general seemed quiet and in a down mood. Everyone was silent for a few moments. Chris finally answered my question concerning the task. "It went a couple of days. It is hard to get everyone together."

Since the group had only partially completed the task, which they were asked to do every day for two weeks, it was necessary to explore why they did not follow through with it and investigate differences they may have noticed between the times they did complete the task and the times they did

not. Not following through with a task should not be excused easily. However, the consultant should consider the reasons the group may not have followed through (Haley, 1988).

I asked, "Which days did it happen [the task]?"

Chris said, "The first three practices after we met."

I asked, "What happened those first three days?"

Marie said, "We complained."

I asked, "Did Elizabeth [who volunteered to lead the sessions] bring you all together?"

Elizabeth said, "Yeah, we said a lot the first day and then it dwindled down. We just kept saying the same thing over and over. I think that's why we stopped doing it."

I asked, "Did you notice any differences on or off the court in the three days you did the assignment compared to the days that you did not do the assignment?"

Katy said, "I noticed people were more conscious about complaining during practice. They would start to say something and then, 'no I'm not going to complain.' We all thought it, but didn't say it out loud. "

To clarify when it was that they were "more conscious of complaining," I asked, "During those three days or over all?"

Katy said, "Over all."

Assessing benefits of the task

Although the players had not fully completed the task, they did seem to have benefitted from it. They became more conscious of the frequent complaining and, therefore, complained less. To see if the task had interrupted their complaining sequence and if as a result of this interruption positive feedback from the coaches had increased, I asked, "Did you notice a difference in the coaches when they heard you complain less?" Several players shook their heads and said, "no." They had not noticed a difference in the coaches.

Excusing the task

Once the consultant has investigated why a task was only partially fulfilled, it is important to excuse the group for not doing the task. This can be done by apologizing for assigning it too soon or for asking too much of them. This technique removes blame from the group, yet it does not imply that the task was not important (Haley, 1988). Therefore, I said, "Maybe I asked you to do something more than you can do right now. Maybe you still need to be complaining on and off the court. Maybe I asked you to do it too fast or it was too hard to get the team together. I was afraid the coaches would see the complaining as--"

Marie interrupted me and said, "A bad attitude." They all laughed as if "bad attitude" was a common phrase during practice, something said often to the players.

I continued, "Yeah, a bad attitude and when they [the coaches] think you have this kind of attitude, it seems they think of you as lazy or not trying and tend to be more negative. So I wanted to get the complaining off the court, not off your minds, so they [the coaches] could see you differently."

Players' lack of confidence / the head coach's negative communication

Katy said, "I think we have done a much better job of not complaining. I think what they [the coaches] see now is everyone getting mad and upset. More anger at ourselves. Like I might get mad at myself, and they see that as a bad attitude. We really can't help it. They [the coaches] are so negative toward us. None of us have self confidence. I haven't heard one positive comment for weeks."

This was disturbing information, given the strategic task I had given the coaches last week. I had asked the coaches to give positive feedback on the even days and to criticize on the odd days. This task was assigned to all four coaches in a way that would allow two coaches to be more positive and two to be correcting mistakes during each

practice.

Jan agreeing with Katy said, "I keep getting the attitude half way through practice of why try because nothing I do, nothing we do is right."

Katy added, "If I pass to the post, I get yelled at. If I don't pass to the post, I get yelled at. I mean it, every little thing."

Jan said, "Even if you walk off the court wrong, you get yelled at."

Lee Ann said, "Yeah, like she [Laura] made us watch this video, and she picked out everything that was wrong."

Elizabeth said, "I think they were mad about the game." The team had lost a pre-season game a few days before.

Katy added, "Yeah they said we didn't do anything good, not anything. She [Laura] said how pathetic we were. We can't get up and down the floor. Then they gave us a sheet to mark down what we thought we did positive. I didn't put anything down because they already said we didn't do anything good."

Assessing change in the coaches' use of positive communication

I felt concerned about these comments which indicated that the coaching staff had not increased their focus on the players' positives. However, the sheets used to self-

evaluate the players' positives may have been an attempt by the coaches to be more positive. I asked, "So if you're not hearing positives from the coaches where are you hearing positives from?"

Katy said, "Margie, Jill and Connie [the three assistant coaches] say some positive things. I've noticed a big change in Margie. I mean they help you out. They talk to you. They don't gripe at you. [She then threw her arms in the air] 'See you didn't make that pass.' That would be coach [Laura]. Jill or the other coaches would say, 'All you needed to do is take one more step' or show you."

Marie added, "They help you, not yell at you."

To clarify I asked, "So when Laura says something, it feels negative. Yet with Margie, Jill and Connie you hear some positives or get some help?"

Debby said, "Yeah, they [the three assistant coaches] don't yell, they talk to us." The players nodded in agreement.

It seemed that the players, after all, did see change in the assistant coaches, but not in Laura [the head coach]. The three assistant coaches seemed to be helping the players correct mistakes and were giving positive feedback more often. This was important information, given the complementary roles the coaches were in. For example, the players' comments indicated that Margie had become more

positive and that Jill and Connie were able to point out mistakes and give advice. This change may evidence that the assistant coaches were actualizing both parts of themselves, the positive and negative, as prescribed. Laura, however, may have felt under too much stress to change at this time.

Spontaneous enactment of the task

The team continued to complain about particular drills or comments the coaches had made to them. They were more engaged in the conversation. They had become much more involved in the session. Minuchin (1981) writes, "Enactment is a technique by which the therapist asks the family to dance in his presence" (p. 79). I didn't request that the players enact the complaining task, yet that was what they were doing in front of me. Therefore, I commented to them about their enactment of the task, and the positive effect it seemed to have on them. "This is great. It sounds to me like you really need to say this stuff out loud to each other. How does this feel right now to just bitch?"

Marie said, "Great."

Jan agreed, "It feels good."

Chris said, "That's all I've done on the phone to my parents since I got down here. They are tired of it."

Jan said, "My parents said to not run up the phone bill to call and bitch about the same thing each time, practice

and getting yelled at."

I asked, "So if you can't complain on the court in front of the coaches, or on the phone to your parents, how is this right now just among yourselves."

Katy said, "It really helps a lot to know everyone is feeling the same. It is not one person singled out. It is everyone. We just somehow have to learn how to deal with it."

I said, "I don't want to push you into doing the complaining task, but it seems if this is helping--"

Katy interrupted, "It helps to bitch to you. We all know what we are bitching about to each other."

Jan said, "Yeah, this feels different."

Elizabeth said, "Yeah we just went around [when they did the complaining task], and everyone had to say what they had to complain about."

Jan added, "Yeah, I was afraid the coaches would hear us in the locker room." The players seemed to agree.

This information helped me to understand why the players did not continue the task. They believed it was more beneficial if an outsider were present, and they were fearful of being overheard by the coaches. Yet they seemed to recognize how helpful the task was. They became more "alive" in the session and reported that they complained less "overall" during the past two weeks having only done

the task three times.

Suggesting communication between Laura and the players

I was concerned about the players' lack of confidence. They attributed their low confidence to negative feedback from Laura, the head coach. Concerned about their negative feelings toward Laura, I suggested directly communicating their feelings to her. Minuchin (1981) sees direct communication between subsystems as an effective way to decrease conflict. Therefore, I asked, "Have any of you been able to bring up to Laura how you feel about not getting enough positives? What if you were to talk about it with her in here, with me? You have a long season ahead of you, and this is just the very beginning. It sounds like you really need some positives. You need to feel good about yourselves, confident."

Katy said, "No, because she would bring it back to us. Besides we already tried that the first session."

Jan added, "She would say we didn't deserve to have anything positive."

The team seemed to agree that they had brought this up over the years with Laura and that it hadn't helped the situation. She had not changed. Given their efforts to communicate with Laura and my efforts to encourage her to be more positive, I decided it was time to try something

different. Instead of working toward changing Laura, the team needed to focus on their own positives so they could feel good about themselves, without her approval.

Before introducing this change in focus, I investigated their past team experiences to see if this was a common problem between players and coaches.

I asked, "How is this team different from teams you have been on before?"

Katy said, "Lower self-confidence."

Chris added, "Just seem to be down on ourselves as a team."

Marie said, "Last year we were expected to have a good season. This year no one knows. The yelling is affecting us more this year. We are unsure of ourselves." The players were in agreement.

Confidence without positive communication from the head coach

Lack of confidence did seem to be a bigger problem than in past seasons. The team was lacking confidence and perceived that Laura could change that for them. Minuchin (1981) states, "People come to therapy because their reality, as they have constructed it, is unworkable" (p. 71). Therefore, to change the way the players perceive reality required development of a new way of interacting

with Laura. The players reality was that Laura needed to change; she had to give the team positive feedback so they could in turn feel good about themselves. A new reality would have been for the players to feel good about themselves without positive feedback from Laura. One way to assist the players in experiencing themselves and Laura differently was to emphasize their strengths in suggesting a new reality (Minuchin, 1981).

I suggested, "You might not get it [positives] from Laura. You may need to get it from each other and from Margie, Connie and Jill. How can you get through the season feeling good about yourselves? You have a lot of reasons to feel really good about yourselves." Minuchin (1981) states, "The therapist confirms people, emphasizing their strengths, and thus becomes a significant source of self-esteem to them" (p. 163).

Looking for other resources to help the players gain self-esteem I asked, "How is the team about giving each other positives?"

Jan said, "Barbara helped me out the other day when we were working out. We help each other out in that way, like if we are doing something wrong."

Katy added, "We let each other know when we did a good job."

I asked, "So if you're hearing positives from the three

assistant coaches and you're hearing it from each other, it sounds like the one person who you're not hearing it from right now is Laura. Has she got so much power that your self-esteem is--"

Jan interrupted, "I'm scared to death of her."

I continued, "So it's pretty powerful when she doesn't say something positive. [I began to suggest a new reality: believing in yourself without Laura's praise or approval.] Let's imagine that she doesn't make a change. That she doesn't become more positive. How can you as a player believe in yourself, have confidence? How can you get that without getting it from Laura? How can you get it from within, from the team or the other coaches? I'm afraid if you're depending on one source [Laura] which it [confidence] may not come from, it will be a long season of feeling down on yourselves." Everyone was silent for a few moments.

Katy, anxious for the team to have confidence in themselves said, "You have to depend on yourself. I mean we wouldn't have gotten a scholarship if we weren't any good. We wouldn't have been asked to come here. We wouldn't be on this team. We all know what our abilities are, and we just need to go out and play our best and quit being down on ourselves."

The gains of being confident from within

To motivate someone to do something or consider a new reality, they must see some gain in it for them. Therefore, it is critical for them to see what they will achieve for themselves individually and for the team, (Haley, 1988). Katy may have believed she and the team had a great deal to gain on and off the court by increasing their confidence.

To encourage the players to realize their strengths and to be confident, I gave an indirect suggestion. Indirect suggestion is a hypnotic intervention commonly used in Strategic Therapy. Open-ended suggestion, a type of indirect suggestion, does not directly suggest what the group should do, but suggests that they will experience some change and that their own inner resources will produce the change. The expectancy of the consultant, using words like "when," influences the effectiveness of the indirect suggestion (Lankton and Lankton, 1983). Therefore, I gave the players an indirect suggestion including what I expected they would notice and encouraged them to tap their own resources for confidence. "When will you start to tap that part of you that knows you're good, good enough to be here, in this division, on this team? When will you notice grabbing onto that part of yourself?"

Katy added, "We just gotta learn how to deal with coach. When she is yelling at you, let it go and just

forget about it."

Elizabeth said, "It is hard for some people because we don't know some of who is going to start. If you already know your role on the team, there is not as much to be afraid of. She [Laura] is the one who will make that decision." Elizabeth is often second off the bench. Therefore, her need to please Laura, in order to get playing time or to start, was strong.

Wanting to encourage Elizabeth to question her reality of where confidence comes from, I asked, "So, those who know they will start will feel more confident because they are not dependent on pleasing her?"

Katy replied, "You can't depend on her [Laura] for your confidence whether you're a starter or not."

Who is confident

I used a metaphor to emphasize Katy's point. "So, sure it feels different to get an "A" than a "B" in school, to get recognition, but if getting the "A" is the only way to feel confident and you can't always get the "A", where does that leave you? Can people who are not starters and don't get a lot of playing time be self-confident and feel good about themselves?"

Ellen, a freshman, spoke up for the first time, "Yeah, Coach and I had this big talk, and she told me exactly what

my role was. I know exactly what she wants from me, and it is not playing time. But I feel good about myself."

I asked, "Is there anyone else like Ellen?"

Heather, another freshman, spoke up, "I feel like Ellen. I'm just glad to be on the team." I wondered if it was easier to be confident being a freshmen player. No one really expects freshmen to get playing time. Perhaps the pressure is less.

However, Claudia, a senior spoke up indicating this was not the case. "It took me a while but I assessed my strengths and weaknesses. My junior year I decided to just do what I knew I could do and not let her [Laura] bring me down. I mean I would like to start. I would like to play. I'd like to contribute to a win to get respect, but I'm not letting it get me. In high school I got a lot of praise even though I made mistakes. You just gotta quit looking for that [praise] here."

I said, "So, it is going to be harder to become self-confident on this team because that praise is not there, at least not from the head coach. But you still need to feel confident, good about yourselves. [I looked at Cathy] Last session you talked about having a different attitude. Something must have happened to you from your freshmen year, feeling so fragile and needing Laura's approval, to knowing you're good and just going out there to do your best."

Cathy looked proud. She had an attitude change throughout her previous three seasons, complaining less. Yet she, as in the previous session, proclaimed she had no confidence. Here I gave her an indirect suggestion that she was confident.

Elizabeth said, "When she [Laura] kicked Cathy out of practice the other day, I expected to find her [Cathy] crying in the locker room. Instead, she was in there reading Sports Illustrated." The team laughed and acknowledged Cathy's change in attitude.

I asked, "So what is the difference between the ones of you who feel like you have it inside and do not have to have, although you would like to have, Laura's praise?"

Debby answered, "I think it has to do with if she [Laura] knows it gets to you [the yelling]. I mean she rarely bothers me because she knows I'm confident. I don't let it get me. If I let her bother me I'd be gone by now."

Self-confidence and fun

Several players expressed more confidence during session four than in the other two sessions. To further emphasize the importance of confidence, I asked them about the "fun" element of the game. Taking a one-down position, indicating my lack of understanding of the game, I asked, "I realize this is a job that you get paid for, but, well,

maybe I'm wrong, but isn't this supposed to be fun?"

Several of them laughing said, "Fun, fun?"

Marie added, "Can you define fun?"

Chris added, "Basketball used to be fun."

I stated, "Perhaps the reason why you got into all this [involved in basketball] will emerge for you again when you feel better about yourselves [another indirect suggestion]."

Julie said, "I have so much fun playing when I don't feel bad about myself. Like when I broke through that fast break, she [Laura] didn't say anything, but I knew I did good." The others seemed to agree.

The boundary between Laura and some of the players seemed enmeshed in that they depended on her praise for their self-confidence. When two subsystems are enmeshed, it often affects the individual's independence and autonomy (Minuchin, 1981). The players were overly dependent on Laura for self-confidence. To create clearer boundary around the players' subsystem, separating them more from the coaches, I suggested that they generate self-confidence instead of looking to Laura for it. This could help create a clearer boundary and increase the players sense of autonomy. I again used indirect suggestions.

I said, "It seems important, in fact critical, to let your confidence come forth without waiting for Laura to praise you. The mood of the team will change. You soon

will notice your confidence coming forth. I think soon you will begin to notice these changes."

Elizabeth said, "It is my last year. I don't want to go through it feeling like this."

Katy said, "We need to play for the team and not for the coaches. Like we say 'pride inside.'" This is a statement that the team shouts before games to get motivated.

Marie added, "We don't have pride inside."

Noticing change when the players focus on their strengths

I commented, "When you're in here I can see you shift. At the beginning of this session, when nobody would say anything, people were down. People don't even feel like what they have to say is very important. But when you start focusing on your positives and feel good about yourselves, you're leaning forward, I'm leaning forward. I find myself more excited to be in here with you. Your voice tones even change. Somehow you need to take that with you, the way you feel when you're fired up about yourself, each other. There is a noticeable change in you when you feel and remember what is good about you."

Katy said, "It will make us stronger."

Claudia added, "We have that power."

Again giving an indirect suggestion I continued, "What I expect is that you're going to begin to notice changes in yourself. I think you're going to notice something shifting inside of you and on the team as the season goes on. I think that "the pride is inside" is an important statement. To feel like the pride is inside, it is in this team, it is not about trying to get Laura to feel proud of you."

Marie joking said, "The pride's in Laura." Everyone laughed. Claudia again said, "We have that power."

Metaphor: "We Got The Power"

I restated Claudia's statement using a rap song popular with the NBA (National Basketball Association) during the time of this study: "We Got The Power." I said, "You do have it inside of you. It is not as if it is something to find or get. You are powerful right now and you're a powerful team." Again I was emphasizing their strengths. At this point, "We Got The Power", became a metaphor for the team being self-confident. A metaphor is a statement about one thing that represents something else (Haley, 1988).

Elizabeth added, "We are the ones who are powerful, we're out there on the floor."

Katy added, "Look at Margie, don't look at Coach [Laura]. Concentrate on each other when you're down."

I ended by saying, "When you see somebody getting down

this week, remind them they have the power within."

Katy, joking about the song, began to sing it, "We Got The Power." This led the players to enthusiastically make the hand signal from the "We Got The Power" video. This signal indicates power and confidence within.

The team, at this point, began to joke about a signal we had developed as a team two years prior (Schindler-Zimmerman, Washle, and Protinsky, 1990). The current "We Got The Power" metaphor and hand signal may have assisted in giving this team a unique sign separating them from previous years' teams. I asked, "Can you guys try to keep that in your mind, the feeling of being powerful and remind each other of that in the coming week?"

Marie teased as if this would be a difficult task. "We'll try."

Excusing one task and assigning another

Haley (1988) ascribes that it is best to officially excuse one task, which was incomplete, before giving another. I teased back with Marie, "Yeah like you tried the task [from session two]." They all laughed. I then praised them for knowing they needed to focus on their positives and not complaining, "To be honest with you I really think it was good that you didn't do that [the task]. It sounds like in a lot of ways you needed to back off of that [the task]"

and start focusing on your positives."

Katy, seeing this as a good excuse why the task was incomplete, said, "That's why we did it." Everyone laughed again. The mood of the team was considerably different than from the beginning of the session. The players were upbeat and cheerful and seemed to feel good about themselves.

Follow up from Laura

This session was on a Sunday evening. The following Wednesday evening at 10:30 p.m. I received a call at home from Laura [the head coach]. She asked me what I had "hit the players with. This week has been our best practices all year. The players seem to have a total attitude change. What happened in the session with you? They all keep talking about power something." I told her that I thought they were beginning to "hit themselves [to use her words] with confidence." I encouraged her to "hit them with praise to keep it going." She seemed excited, proud of them. Again, I encouraged her to share her proud feelings with the players.

Summary

The team's first regular season game was two weeks after session four, the last of four pre-season sessions. The focus group took place one week after session four.

This allowed the four sessions and the teams perceptions about the pre-season consultation sessions to conclude before the regular season started, after which new issues would probably emerge such as wins/loses and who starts and who does not. The consultant continued to work with this team throughout the rest of their season.

Focus Group

Following the fourth consultation session, a focus group was conducted to elicit feedback from the players and coaches concerning the process. The structural boundary (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981) between the team and coaches appeared to be a clear one. The lines of communication seemed open yet the hierarchy was in place. The team and coaches were able to talk freely in the same room even when they did not agree on the issue being discussed. Therefore, it seemed more beneficial to have the entire group involved in one focus group.

I did not facilitate the focus group meeting. Having an individual other than the consultant facilitate the focus group allows participants more freedom to discuss their likes and dislikes concerning the consultation process (Axelrod, 1976: Fern, 1882)). The focus group questions (Appendix II) served as a guideline for eliciting the participants' experiences and perceptions of the

consultation process.

The focus group began with the facilitator, James, introducing himself and explaining the purpose of the focus group. "The purpose of meeting tonight is for me to throw some questions out and let you all respond to them. It is like an interview, but it is not a situation where I'm going to go around and ask everyone to speak. Just talk if you want to and share what you have to say. This is not an evaluation of Toni. It is your assessment of the process of meetings with her this year."

Focus Group Questions / Responses

Question one: What were the most useful parts of these meetings, both in and out of session?

Katy, who had been a part of these consultation sessions for three seasons, asked, "You mean this year?"

James clarified, "Some of you have been doing this for awhile, but I'd like you to mostly focus on this year."

Katy, who acted as the players' main spokesperson in the focus group as well as in past sessions, said, "The most successful meeting was the last one [session four]. We all sat here and got everything out that was bothering us. We just came in and bitched. We got it out in the open and everyone understood, and we went on."

Lee Ann said, "I agree. We come here, like Katy said,

get everything out in the open, we don't let it go on and end up on the court. Things are usually pretty much settled by the time we get on the court, and we don't have to worry about it there." Several players nodded their heads in agreement.

Question two: What do you think were the least useful parts of these meetings both in and out of session?

Katy said, "Our homework assignment. After practice to stay for five minutes [the complaining task]."

Debby added, "Yeah, to complain on our own."

Katy, explaining to James said, "She [the consultant] gave us something to do every day after practice, but it was hard to get everyone together, and when we did, it just didn't work."

Jill, an assistant coach added, "Yeah, they don't have much time after practice. The time may have been a constraint."

Katy said, "Yeah, and it was also that everyone felt the same, and we were just saying the same things over and over. It just wasn't effective."

James said, "So I hear you saying that the sheer effort of trying to coordinate so many of you after practice was hard, and you didn't feel like it was useful because you didn't have someone new there to share your perspective

with. Anything else that wasn't useful?" The team, with no further response to this question, remained silent.

Therefore, James went on to question three.

Question three: If you could change anything about the meetings, what would it be and how would you change it?

There was a long silence, then Claudia said, "I like the format the way it is. I mean, we really don't know when we come in here what to expect or anything. Toni brings in a subject that she wants to discuss, she asks how we feel about it and from there we usually come up with a subject or something we need to talk about."

Katy said, "I didn't like the first meeting. It wasn't because the coaches were here, I just felt like we were on two different teams."

Julie said, "Yeah, like what do the coaches say when they have their meetings." Everyone laughed at her curiosity. "I mean not everything, but something. Toni never says what their [the coaches'] attitude toward this is. I don't know if she tells them what our [the players'] attitude is."

James said, "So sometimes you end up meeting separately, and you wonder what they talked about."

Jill said, "I'm curious to know what you all do. Sometimes I can pick up on little things, like after the

meeting you [looking at Katy] said was a particularly good one [session four]. I noticed everyone doing something together in practice, but I didn't know what it was. Whatever it was it has seemed to really help." The team started to laugh and do the hand signal for "We Got The Power." Having something that was their own, the power sign, seemed to have pulled them closer together as a team.

James said, "I'm hearing a mix of things. When you're together, but you feel like you're on opposite sides, that doesn't feel good. But if you're apart and you feel disconnected from what everybody is doing, that doesn't feel good either."

Katy interrupted, "It is not as productive when the coaches are in here. When they're in here, we don't say as much. I think it is good to have separate meetings, but [laughing] Toni should tell us what they [the coaches] say."

Laura said, "That's part of the trust element. We don't ever ask, and Toni doesn't ever tell us what you do in here. You have to have trust."

Julie, looking at Laura said, "Yeah, but as far as we know your attitude might still be the same as when we first got here."

Laura said, "And what was that?"

Julie said, "Like in the first meeting when everybody was like, you know [referring to the disappointment the

coaches felt with the team]. But I think things have changed."

Katy, looked at Laura and said, "We know that we have changed, but we don't know what your attitude is." The players seemed to be asking Laura and the other coaches how they felt about them as a team given that they, the players, had a change in attitude.

Jill said, "You mean when we said you weren't working hard enough, and that you needed to turn it up a notch, and you did turn it up a notch. But we never really said, 'yeah you have, or no you haven't.'" The players shook their heads in agreement.

Jill said, "I see what you mean."

Several of the players not content with just being understood, said, "Well, tell us [referring to telling them that the coaches had noticed the players had turned it up a notch]." Yet none of the coaches took the opportunity to discuss how they felt toward the players and whether their feelings toward them were different from the first session. This could have been due to the coaches' wanting to comply with this session functioning as a as a focus group and not as a consultation session.

For a few moments there was an uncomfortable silence among the players as they waited for the assurance they had just asked Laura for. James broke the silence when he

asked, "So separate meetings are useful, maybe even necessary, but you would like some kind of a bridge between the two groups [coaches and players meetings]?" The team seemed to agree with James's assessment of their responses. Therefore, James continued on to question four.

Question four: If you think about the whole process that you have been through, these meetings, and you could identify a point where things started to change, what would that point be and when did it occur? What was going on that you think contributed to change for you?

Katy said, "After the last meeting [session four] that we had."

Claudia said, "I think everybody agrees. Everybody stepped up after the last meeting. They [the players] assumed that this [being confident] was what they needed to do. Practice flowed a lot better."

Katy added, "I think we all came together."

James said, "What do you think contributed to that? What was it about meeting this past time?"

Katy said, "We got out what was really bothering us and learned how to deal with it better. We learned how to help each other out, to deal with it better."

Lee Ann looked at Katy and said, "You're doing good

[openly acknowledging her as being the players' spokesperson].

Claudia said, "It's like it's not a problem anymore. It's not on everyone's mind anymore."

Katy said, "We are so much more positive. We have a new attitude."

Claudia added, "We are more of a group instead of 15 individuals."

Jan said, "We all seem in much better moods in practice."

Katy, who may have been referring to the "steamer" metaphor from session two said, "We were like a pressure cooker."

James added, "So some kind of pressure was relieved." The players seemed to agree.

He then asked, "So was there something about coming here to do that or would you have done it somewhere else?"

Claudia said, "No, we wouldn't have done it somewhere else. We would have exploded. I don't think we would have gotten as much done in practice if we hadn't have done that."

Lee Ann added, "Yeah, it is easier to get something settled by talking to Toni. She is not part of the team. We are all feeling the same, and everybody is saying the same thing. I don't think something like, say a team

meeting in our locker room would. It is not the same. We don't get anything accomplished. It is different when you're talking to somebody that is outside."

Katy said, "We come up with answers when we talk with someone from outside. When it is just the team, it's just questions."

James said, "So there is something different in coming here with a focus, and a purpose, and talking to somebody who has a role that is different than anyone else on the team. Somehow that helps you do something different than you would have done somewhere else." Everyone nodded and agreed with his summary.

He continued, "Was there anything difficult about talking to Toni, someone who is not a part of the team."

Many of the players said, "no".

Katy added, "It's easier that way."

Question five: What would you recommend to other teams and consultants who are working with problems or issues similar to what you worked on in these meetings?

Laura said, "Hire Toni." The team laughed.

Katy said, "Do it the same."

Lee Ann said, "It would depend on the problem that the team has. Like our problems may be different than other teams' problems. That would decide which way the meetings

are going to go."

James said, "So did you see yourselves or Toni changing something to fit your problems?"

Lee Ann continued, "Yeah, like that homework assignment [she could have been referring to the complaining task or the power sign task]. That was something to help one of our problems out."

Laura said, "There is a lot of honesty in these meetings. I don't think you can just look at this year, it is hard to separate. There has been a lot of trust that has built up. There is a trust that these guys have for her [referring to the consultant]. It shows in the honesty of the sessions. Without the honesty it is not worth having."

James added, "So trust is an important part of the process." The team agreed.

Laura continued, "Yeah, they know she [the consultant] has their best interest at heart. She cares how the coaches feel, but that's not going to govern what she is going to do with the team, and it's the same when she meets with us. We're all straightforward and honest with everybody, and I think our kids respond to that."

Katy added, "She always has something planned. You can tell she has thought about what we said or what's going on with us. She has something set, and we take it from there."

Question six: What was most important in the consultation process in terms of your relationship to Toni?

Claudia said, "Knowing she was outside the group."

Katy said, "She is like a friend we can trust."

James said, "So the trusting relationship between you and Toni facilitates the whole process." "So it would be important for teams to find someone they could trust no matter what their problems were." The team agreed with James's summary.

Question seven: What were your overall perceptions and feelings about these meetings?

Lee Ann said, "I think we accomplished a lot. I thought they were really helpful."

Jan said, "I think in a way, they are almost necessary. Things just build up."

Cathy said, "It feels good knowing that your teammates are behind you. The one time that we met, I knew that everyone was, well, I felt so supported [referring to session two when she had shared her struggles with not getting playing time with her teammates]."

Katy said, "It has helped our team. We all get along well. We don't have conflicts with team members."

Question eight: How were these meetings similar or different from sports psychology experiences you have had in the past?

Claudia said, "I never had any."

Margie said, "We have done some mental imagery. But the kids fell asleep most of the time. You close your eyes and listen to a tape, and they would all fall asleep. That was real effective." Everyone laughed.

Margie continued, "I think they need to communicate. When we met it was obvious that was a big problem [referring to session one]."

James said, "So what you see as important is not necessarily what is going on inside each individual, but what is going on between the group."

Margie, agreeing, said, "Yeah, I may walk around with an idea of what things should be like, and if it is different for them [she threw her hands up], it's not going to work. You need to bounce ideas back and forth."

General comments

Laura said, "I think as coaches, we can tell as the year goes on how productive these meetings are. I think this year we waited too long to meet. We could have used meetings during the fall conditioning period. [This season was the earliest we had met in the three seasons I worked

with the team. However, the pre-season conflicts were high during conditioning.] As coaches, you can just watch it, for lack of a better word, the bond that develops. It is real hard to separate practice 'cause you will have a certain amount of natural bonding from that, but these sessions, well, you can see as the year goes on. This [the sessions] stops cliques from developing. They come in here and get out whatever they get out and don't take it to each other. A lot of times on teams these guys [pointing to one side of the room] never intermingle with these guys [pointing to the other side]. So from a coaching standpoint, it helps a lot. It gets them to know each other a little better."

A player's question

Katy asked a question of her own, "How about the coaches' meetings, how does it help you guys?" The focus group questions were intended to elicit how the coaches and the players perceived the meetings from both of their perspectives. However, most of the coaches and players responses indicated how consultation had helped the players. Therefore, Katy was interested in how the consultation sessions had helped the coaches. She was helpful in eliciting the coaches responses concerning how consultation had affected them.

Laura said, "It is probably not much different. She [the consultant] doesn't say specific things."

Margie said, "She doesn't say what is going on specific with you, but will give a general consensus of what she thinks." The team, teasing, said, "o-o-oh!", as if they had discovered that the consultant gave the coaches information about them.

Margie clarified, "She didn't tell us anything that we didn't already know. Nothing we didn't find out in the first meeting when we were here all together, which was the one that most of us didn't like. But I thought it was good 'cause you knew how we felt, and we knew how you felt. It wasn't pretty, but at least we all knew [Margie laughed]."

Laura said, "Toni guides us in a direction she thinks we need to go."

Margie added, "She doesn't tell you what you're supposed to do or how you're suppose to feel. It helps just to talk with her and then she gives you an avenue to work toward. She listens and absorbs it, and funnels and channels it so it's productive. A bitching session wouldn't be productive if at the end, or in the middle, she didn't help you go a certain way with it, or make it productive. That is what she did with us, same thing."

Summary by the head coach

Laura said, "I feel bad for the teams that don't use this because I think they are making a grave mistake. There are several women's teams right now that go around in a circle. If they had some direction, someone to guide them, they would be a lot better off. I don't know about guys' teams. I think guys are a lot different. They more naturally leave it off the court. They can get on a court and swear and punch each other and walk off the court and leave it there. Women, by nature, take it with them. They take everything very personal. If you yell at someone or lose your temper on the court, they don't leave it there. They take it back to the dorm or their apartments." Laura may have been referring to her own struggles of being negative with or yelling at the players and it affecting their confidence. The players, as she was aware, took comments personally and felt angry and frustrated as a result.

Laura continued, "So I don't know about men's teams that much, but I know lots of women's teams that come to mind that this could make a big difference for. It has been very valuable for us, and it has helped this team come together. It can give you an edge on the court. Everyone has to trust each other to win a ball game. You can't win with cliques and mistrust. You might win a few, but it will

get ya."

Summary of the focus group

Following the fourth consultation session, a focus group was conducted to elicit feedback from the players and coaches. The focus group questions (Appendix II) served as a guideline for eliciting the participants experiences and perceptions of the consultation process. Participant feedback indicated that, overall, systems consultation was helpful to this athletic team. The following is a summary of the specific suggestions and comments which emerged during the focus group.

The team reported that consultation helped to keep conflict off the court by giving the team a constructive environment to let off steam and resolve their problems. After identifying specific problems, the consultant would bring these issues up in session and often assigned a task designed to facilitate problem resolution. While the team believed that many of these tasks were useful, the complaining task, which required the players to meet on their own, outside of consultation, was seen by the players as ineffective. The team reported that they benefitted more by having an outsider facilitate this task, as apposed to complaining among themselves.

The players and coaches seemed to have liked and

approved of the consultation format used in this study. They agreed that meeting separately, players only or coaches only, was more comfortable, productive and beneficial than when they meet together as they did in session one. However, the players and coaches reported that having a common link, the consultant, between the two groups was necessary and beneficial.

The players and coaches believed that trusting the consultant was a crucial component for successful consultation. Trusting that the consultant would not divulge specific information concerning each subsystem to the other subsystem, seemed essential. The team seemed to feel free to communicate openly and honestly. They all agreed that without honesty and trust these consultation sessions would be ineffective.

The players agreed that the last meeting, session four, was the most beneficial. They identified session four as a point of change for them. They believed that many of the pre-season issues were resolved at that time. They believed this added to team cohesiveness and helped the players focus on playing basketball when on the court, verses thinking about issues of conflict.

Overall, the team believed these sessions were helpful, possibly even "necessary." The players and coaches agreed that in order for consultation sessions to be effective, the

consultant must be someone "outside of the group", someone who does not have a role on the team. The players reported they felt closer as a team when problems had been resolved. The coaches saw consultation as a means of developing stronger bonds between team members and at the same time a way of avoiding cliques.

Themes

Recurrent themes that emerged throughout the four consultation sessions and the focus group are discussed in this section. The supporting data for these themes are predominantly quotes from the team or consultant (participant observer) and observations made throughout the consultation process by the consultant. The five themes which seemed to be the most prevalent were 1) Structure: Hierarchy, Individuality, and Last Year's Legacy; 2) Negative Communication and Lack of Confidence; 3) Complementarity of the Coaches; 4) Emerging of Tasks; and 5) The Team's Openness in Consultation.

The themes and supporting data were chosen in the following way. The consultant and one other person separately read the case study including the focus group discussion and summary. They both recorded the themes they saw as continuously emerging from their reading. Both readers chose four of the same themes. The fifth theme,

"Structure: Hierarchy, Individuality, and Last Year's Legacy," was developed based on several sub-themes both readers recognized.

After the five themes were identified, the two readers separately highlighted supporting data for each theme in a different color. In other words, two copies of the case study and focus group were highlighted in five colors. Each color represented a theme. Each highlighted piece of supporting data was then cut and collated by color. The themes in this section are followed by the supporting data based on the collated material.

Theme I Structure: Hierarchy, Team, and Last Year's Legacy

Throughout the consultation process, the hierarchial structure of the team was consistently manifested in several ways. For example, the seats chosen by the players and coaches in each session were representative of who held higher and lower hierarchial positions on the team. The hierarchy seemed to be based on several factors such as players' years of experience, talent and class, and rank within the coaching staff. The team's spokespersons were another representation of the team's hierarchy. The starters and upper classmen spoke up during sessions significantly more than the other players. Furthermore, the head coach and the top assistant coach spoke up considerably

more than the other two assistant coaches.

The players tended to organize themselves as a whole, rather than as individuals. In other words, this team's "team" concept was part of the way they structured themselves. The previous year's team graduated several star players; therefore, this year's team needed to pull together as a team, not having the same caliber of star players. In fact, the star players from the previous year seemed to form a subsystem whose legacy was still present in the organization.

Hierarchy

Where members sit in a session can indicate their affiliations. This is a soft indicator, one which should be accepted only as a first impression to be investigated. This soft data can offer a tentative map of who is close to whom, and what the affiliations, coalitions, and subsystems are (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981). The players' hierarchy seemed to be based on who the starters were and the years of experience the players had on the team. Two ways in which this hierarchial structure was evident were the seating arrangements and the team's spokespersons during sessions.

When the entire team was present, the starters and/or seniors would sit to the left of the coaches and

myself. The starters may have seen themselves as next to the coaches in the hierarchal line indicated by their place right next to the coaches.

Receiving less playing time, the part time starters seemed to hold a lower place in the hierarchy than the starters, indicated by their seats which were generally farther from the coaches than the starters.

The freshman sat the farthest from the coaches, perhaps indicating their low position in the hierarchy, having the least power.

During sessions with the players, the seats on either side of the consultant, seen as the leader, were occupied by the executive subsystem among the players, the starters and/or seniors.

This hierarchy of who was primary in status and who was secondary and so on was apparent in who acted as predominant spokespersons for the team. Assessing spokespersons in terms of power and hierarchy is suggested by Haley (1988).

The main spokesperson for the players was Katy, a starting senior who was considered to be the most

valuable player. She seemed to have a high position in the organization's hierarchy indicated by both her seating choices and her role as the players' spokesperson.

During the focus group Katy's spokesperson role was made overt. "Your doing good [referring to Katy answering most of the questions]." (Lee Ann)

The starting and/or senior players also spoke for the team during sessions, but less frequently than Katy.

The four freshman spoke very little throughout the entire consultation process. In fact, two of them said nothing at all. They seemed involved and interested, yet looked to those with superior higher hierarchial positions to speak for the team.

Further indication of the players' hierarchy was evidenced when there was resistance to accept an assigned task. Minuchin (1981) suggests utilizing those who have power when assigning a task to overcome resistance. The consultant would turn to someone on the team with power to influence the others. For example, when assigning the complaining task it seemed important to join with Katy. If

she accepted the task, the players would follow her lead. Marie, also having a high position on the team as a starter but not a senior, helped to influence Katy to try the complaining task. It seemed that once a player who held a high position in the organization accepted a task, the other players would comply.

Katy, resistant to the task, said, "Yes we need to let off steam, but we need to focus on what we have to be thankful for."

Marie quickly responded, "That's what she's [referring to me] saying, `just do it and get it out of the way and have the rest of the day to look at the positive things.'"

Katy, no longer resistant, replied, "O.K., when are we going to do that."

The coaches had their own hierarchial rank. This rank seemed to contribute to their complementarity of roles (see "Complementary Roles of the Coaches" theme, page 161).

"It's hard for her [Connie]. I understand her role because she's the fourth person out there [last in the

coaches' hierarchy]." (Laura)

"Well it would make sense that you two [Laura and Margie], being the two first in line [in the coaches' hierarchy], would be more the heavy, and you two [Jill and Connie] would be more positive being the next two in line." The coaches agreed with this assessment.
(Consultant)

The coaches' hierarchy was further evidenced in their seating choices.

During the coaches' session, Laura, the head coach, sat next to me. The other three coaches sat according to hierarchy: Margie sat next to Laura, then Jill and then Connie.

In the session that included the entire team, Laura sat immediately to my left. Margie sat next to the head coach, and Connie sat on the other side of me. The coaches were the executive subsystem in the organization's hierarchy. Therefore, predictably, they sat near the facilitator.

Team

The team seemed to organize itself into subsystems rather than focusing on individuals. In other words, this team had a "team" identity. This "team" concept may have explained their tendency to focus less on themselves as individuals and more on the team and subsystems.

I asked, "What do the coaches think of you as a player?"

Katy, a guard, said, "The coaches expect a lot out of the guards this year."

I noticed it was difficult for the players to see themselves as individuals separate from the team. Katy's response was about her own pressure as a guard, but her answer still indicated a subsystem, the guards, not individuality.

"We are more of a group instead of 15 individuals."
(Claudia)

"It is better this year. Everyone is more or less equal. I don't see us relying on one or two people to carry us. We are more of a team. No one is leaning

on anyone or relying on someone else to do it. We all have to work hard." (Katy)

Last year's legacy

Members from the previous year's team seemed to form a subsystem of their own. The players and coaches compared this year's team to the legacy of the previous year's team.

"Last year we were expected to have a good season. This year no one knows." (Marie)

Laura, the head coach, said, "...the way we describe Ann and Sally [from the previous year's team] is that they were very confident people, but I don't know if you could say that about most of our kids [the players] this year. The only person off the court who I think knows who they are is Katy."

The consultant was proposing that the coaches "didn't really have to yell at or try to motivate Sally, Ann, or Chris [three starters from the previous year]--."

"--Or Patty [a fourth starter from last year]. Sally, Ann, Becky and Patty could lead. They could motivate themselves and the team." (Margie, the number one

assistant coach)

"It is hard for me to say it is o.k. if they [this year's players] don't work hard. They seem so lazy this year, always complaining. I don't expect great things, I just expect them to go to class, pass, show up for practice and work hard. I can't say you did a good job if I thought you were being lazy. The four seniors from last year worked very hard. That's why they were good." (Margie)

The comparisons with the previous year's team were often presented in a way that put this year's team down. However, sometimes these comparisons to last year's team seemed to motivate the players.

"I have always been in Sally's shadow, but I see that as a challenge now that she's gone." Debby played the same position as Sally did the previous three years.

"You all can shoot the ball as well as Sally ever did or ever will. The talent is here. We just need to get them [the players] used to playing night in and night out." (Jill, an assistant coach)

Theme II Negative Communication and Lack of Confidence

There was concern, throughout consultation, about the head coach's use of negative communication. The players reported that her "yelling" at them promoted their lack of confidence. It seemed that communication of any kind from the head coach had a greater influence on the players' self-confidence than communication from the assistant coaches. This was consistent with the hierarchial structure of the coaching staff; the opinions of those higher in rank seemed to carry more weight. A strategic intervention was assigned to reduce the negative communication, "yelling", and to increase the use of positive communication, encouraging statements. Increasing the use of positive communication could facilitate self-confidence among the players, which often leads to improved performance (Bell, 1983; Nideffer, 1981; Suinn, 1980a). In turn, improved performance could lead to an increase in positive communication from the head coach.

Negative communication

A theme of Negative communication or "yelling," and the players "being in trouble" with the coaches was consistent throughout consultation. The players and coaches seemed aware of this theme.

"It all started this Fall. They [the players] have been in a lot of trouble [with the coaches] since they first got here." (Margie)

"They have been in the dog house since they got here."
(Margie)

"If I pass to the post, I get yelled at. If I don't pass to the post, I get yelled at." (Katy)

"Even if you walk off the court wrong, you get yelled at." (Jan)

"Yeah, they said we didn't do anything good, not anything. She [Laura] said how pathetic we were. We can't get up and down the floor. Then they gave us a sheet to mark down what we thought we did positive. I didn't put anything down because they already said we didn't do anything good." (Katy)

When trying to motivate the players, Margie and Laura unwittingly did not use positive communication or encouraging statements.

"I don't know what to do except throw her [Jane] out of

the gym. I'm serious, I've come close to telling her that. I just kept saying to her, 'you're stinking up the gym, you're in that lazy frame and you're mad'."

(Laura)

"Yeah, we had her [Jane] in our office one night for about an hour. She did another dumb thing that I had to yell at her for. Basically I just spelled out to her, 'you will not play in this type of shape'."

(Laura)

"I get caught thinking that not being negative is a positive. I told one of them once, 'I'm not yelling at you, that should be a positive'." (Margie)

"Yelling has become talking, and they get down on themselves." (Margie)

Negative communication by the head coach seemed to carry more weight than when the other coaches criticized the players. Therefore, even if the other coaches offered positive or encouraging statements, Laura's negativism still seemed overwhelming to the players.

"She [Lee Ann] got confused." (Jill)

"Confused!" (Laura)

"She got confused, and you were yelling at her because she couldn't understand it and that made her more flustered. There is a certain degree of nervousness that comes from having you [Laura] yell." (Jill)

"So If you're hearing positives from the three assistant coaches and you're hearing it from each other, it sounds like the one person who you're not hearing it from right now is Laura. Has she got so much power that your self-esteem is--" (the consultant)

"I'm scared to death of her." (Jan interrupted)

"So it's pretty powerful when she doesn't say something positive?" The players agreed. (the consultant)

Early in consultation, Margie realized she was perceived by the players as being negative. Because of this realization, she was able to change, to be more positive in her coaching style.

"They [the players] would say I've been pretty bitchy this Fall. It was a tough Fall for me. I've been away

for a week, and the whole way back I kept saying to myself, 'don't be negative, be more supportive.' Then when I got back, I was really disappointed. Nothing was like I thought it was going to be as far as conditioning. Everyone was out of shape. I didn't enjoy being bitchy, it was tough. I don't like to do that." (Margie)

"It is hard to be positive when I see the team not being in good shape. This is a business, and it is your job to be in good condition." (Margie)

"Since we met, I have tried to make an effort to not be as negative, to try and be more positive. Like, I'll try to get to a certain kid each day. That was good to hear them when we met the first time." (Margie)

"I think it works [referring to trying to "get to a certain kid each day"]. It makes me more aware of it [being negative]. Sometimes I'm negative, I mean I don't rip on a kid, or be real mean to them, but what I say may come out negative. I'm just trying to tell them [constructive criticism]." (Margie)

"You all have strengths and weaknesses. I need to focus on both to help you become better players."

(Margie)

Lack of confidence

The team's lack of self-confidence was evident throughout consultation. They attributed their lack of confidence to the negative communication or lack of encouragement from the coaches, in particular the head coach.

"They [the coaches] are so negative toward us. None of us have self-confidence. I haven't heard one positive comment for weeks." (Katy)

The consultant asked, "How is this team different from teams you have been on before?"

"Lower self-confidence." (Katy)

"I keep getting the attitude half way through practice of why try because nothing I do, nothing we do is right." (Jan)

"The yelling is affecting us more this year. We are

unsure of ourselves." (Marie)

"Just seem to be down on ourselves as a team." (Chris)

"It's just I have no confidence in myself. Like the other day, I was running 20 lines and Margie said, 'good job', and it was so helpful. I just tried that much harder." (Cathy)

"I have improved as a result of the hard conditioning, but I'm more motivated by positive. I'm just not inspired by negative and yelling." (Elizabeth)

The coaches were aware of and concerned about the lack of confidence among the players.

"Yeah, Cathy comes up to me after every practice and says to me, 'did you think I did a little bit better?' She's asking me to say it everyday." (Margie)

"...the way we describe Ann and Sally [from the previous year's team] is that they were very confident people, but I don't know if you could say that about most of our kids this year..." (Laura)

"We need to get these kids feeling more confident before we start into games." (Laura)

As of session four, the head coach was still primarily using negative communication, yet the team reported a change in Margie's behavior and the coaches' overall complementary roles.

"So when Laura says something it feels negative. Yet with Margie, Jill and Connie, you hear some positives or get some help?" (Consultant)

"Yeah, they [the three assistant coaches] don't yell. They talk to us." The players nodded in agreement. (Debby)

Theme III Complementary Roles of the Coaches

It is common for families and groups to function according to complementary roles. However, if individuals are functioning within the constraint of their role, they are not fully functioning (Minuchin, 1981). They are not actualizing their whole selves. The coaches' functioning according to their complementary roles was a theme throughout consultation. The head coach, as discussed in the Negative Communication theme (p. 154), was often

critical of the players. Two of the assistant coaches were as positive as the head coach was negative; they seemed to be functioning within roles which prohibited them from correcting the players' mistakes.

Therefore, the assistant coaches would mostly encourage the players with positive communication, while the head coach would mostly utilize negative communication. The number one assistant coach seemed to be functioning much like the head coach, consistently using negative communication. However, during the consultation process, as described in the case study, she began utilizing a more encouraging coaching style. A consultation goal was to move all four coaches toward actualizing the correcting and encouraging parts of themselves, therefore, eliminating the complementary roles.

The players noticed Margie, the number one assistant coach, being more negative this year than in past years. They perceived her as functioning similarly to the head coach, yelling and being negative. Margie's increase in negative behavior could have contributed to Laura's not "getting mad as much" this year, given role complementarity.

"Coach [Laura] still has a temper, but it is surprising, I'm shocked that she doesn't get mad as much." (Elizabeth)

"It has been hard watching Margie change this year. Margie used to be 'Margie', fun, nice." (Katy)

"They [the players] are just not used to you [Margie] being like that. I was always the quick tempered person, and Margie has been calm and supportive for three years. They have never seen her get this mad before. In the past, Margie has been the buffer to the 'Big Cheese'[everyone laughed]. Laura is known as "the Big Cheese" on this team. I think they have worked harder after seeing the frustration in Margie. It seems it takes someone to be the 'Three faces of Eve'." (Laura)

Connie and Jill, the junior assistant coaches, seemed to be more positive and did not correct the players' mistakes as often as Laura and Margie. In other words, the system was balanced and complementary. Furthermore, Laura and Margie did most of the talking for the coaching staff in sessions and in practice.

Throughout session one, Connie did not say a word. Jill, who spoke very little, mostly pointed out the players' positive attributes, particularly if Margie or Laura had just said something negative. Margie and

Laura seemed to use mostly negative communication.

Jill said that she "noticed how well the players had done in practice today." Jill often followed up Laura's or Margie's negative statements with a compliment to the players. She had perhaps taken on Margie's old role; "nice, fun" and positive, further facilitating the coaches' complementary roles.

Initially, Laura was resistant to seeing the complementary roles of the coaches. However, she still described herself and her assistant coaches in a manner which defined them as functioning within the constraints of these roles.

Referring to whether two coaches tended to be "the heavy" and two tended to be the buffer Laura said, "No, that has been pretty good. We share the wealth. We all do the yelling a little bit. I'm the type that's going to fly off the handle. She [referring to Margie] is going to have a slow burn. Jill is more pragmatic, and Connie doesn't say much. She's the 'people person' on the staff'." In Laura's description, she and Margie were in the 'having-a-temper' role, and Jill and Connie were not.

During session three, when the complementary roles became overt, Connie said, "I think of things [players' mistakes], but I'll tell Coach [Laura]. Everybody's teeth would fall out if I started talking. See, I feel like that's the only thing I ever did [referring to her only being positive]. I mean, sometimes I may pull them [the players] aside and say a little something, but most of the time I'm the one who's always encouraging. If I say much of anything out loud, it is usually encouraging."

Connie, realizing that Jill is also always positive and unable to correct mistakes, said, "Jill has never really yelled at anyone."

Theme IV The Emerging of Tasks

Strategic therapists often assign strategic tasks to families or groups to remove symptoms, interrupt behavioral sequences and solve problems (Haley, 1988). Simply adhering to the strategic model of therapy does not mean strategic tasks will be utilized. However, in this study tasks were assigned in every session. The problems that emerged and the participants' openness to trying tasks may have contributed to the consultant's frequent assigning of tasks.

Task emergence may have had to do with the team's need

to resolve problems quickly since the season was starting soon. Tasks are a way to work toward symptom removal quickly. As athletes, the participants were used to following directives in practice and game situations. Also the coaches were used to using strategies to solve problems on the court. Therefore, assigning tasks to the participants seemed congruent with their roles as athletes and coaches. The four tasks assigned were: backing off, symptom prescription (complaining task), odd and even days (coaches complementarity) and use of metaphor to bring fourth confidence (We Got The Power).

Backing off

Backing off was a task assigned to help the team discontinue pushing an unmotivated player to perform. The task was intended to break up the coalition that Jane, the unmotivated player, had with the coaches. If one member of a generation forms a coalition with a member of another generation, the organization is malfunctioning (Haley, 1988). My goal was to return the player, Jane, to the players' subsystem and discontinue the coalition between the coaches and Jane.

Jane lacked the motivation to improve. However, the coaches saw her as a star player; the coaches treated her differently than the other players because of the potential

they saw in her. In fact, the coaches had encouraged the other players to treat Jane special by cheering for her, even when she exhibited a lack of motivation. Laura was perhaps the most invested in motivating Jane. Winning is an important criterion when evaluating a head coach's success, and Jane was seen as having the ability to contribute to Laura's winning percentage. This may be the reason Laura and the assistant coaches formed a coalition with her.

The players and coaches would frequently "beg" Jane to function productively in practice. The team in general was frustrated with Jane's unmotivated behavior.

"I only expect you [Jane] to take one second off your time each time you run [one mile], one second!"

(Margie)

Jane responded, "I know I can't do it!"

Barbara, frustrated with Jane, said, "See, right there, you're doing it [not trying]."

"I have something I have to say. I am so irritated with Jane for having all this talent and not using it. I work so hard, and I can never be as good as she is.

To see her just sit there and not try harder when I'm working." (Debby)

The coalition between the coaches and Jane seemed to contribute to having different rules apply to Jane then to most other players.

"She [Laura] has always told me that I don't play because I can't make my mile. If she would have told me my freshman year that I sucked, I would have transferred. I even asked her about it last year. I said, 'Marie and Jane haven't made their mile' [these two players often start in games], and she [Laura] said, 'they are better ball players than you.' I just feel like I've wasted, I have nothing to show for my basketball career." (Cathy)

Claudia said that Jane got playing time even without giving any effort and that others worked hard every day and "don't get a chance for a bucket [didn't get playing time]."

Laura responded to Claudia, "Then why are you cheering her on? You should be mad at her and mad at us [the coaches]."

Even the coaches were aware of the special attention everyone was giving Jane.

Today one of our new freshmen was out in front of the other players in a race, and no one was cheering for her, including me. We were all focused on Jane, who was last." (Laura)

"Jane gets more attention for stinking than the ones [players] who really try and are doing well." (Margie)

"I'd rather play Debby who doesn't have as much talent [as Jane], but gives us the effort everyday. If I were on this team and all I heard was 'Jane, Jane, Jane', even though it is negative, I'd think, 'well shit, I'm doing my job'." (Margie)

"Actually, I am sick of hearing the team beg Jane in practice to do what she is suppose to, 'come on Jane, you can do it'. Others are busting their fannies, and no one says a word to them. All the focus stays on Jane. She has natural talent, endless potential."
(Laura)

"It is so hard to not cheer when you see she is not

trying, and we get so frustrated." (Debby)

"What motivates Jane is the team cheering her on."

(Laura) The team disagreed with Laura, relating that they cheer Jane on during each drill and running exercises, but that she just seems to slow down more.

Jane's being outside of the players' subsystem was evident by the seat she chose in the first session.

Jane sat at the very end of the semicircle with the only empty chair between her and her teammates. No one was to either side of her. Jane may have seen herself as outside of the group.

The consultant assigned a backing off task to interrupt the sequence of behavior which was frustrating the team, including Jane. The players were encouraged by the coaches to cheer for Jane, to motivate her. As a result, Jane seemed to just slow down more. Therefore, the other players and the coaches became more frustrated and would try again to motivate Jane.

The coaches, knowing Jane could be a star player, spent time trying to motivate her during practice. They allowed her playing time even if she did not function in practice in

the same manner which earned other players starting positions. Therefore, the coaches were making different rules for Jane than for the other players, thus forming a coalition with her. The backing off task was intended to interrupt this behavior sequence and break up the coaches' coalition with Jane.

When assigning the task, the consultant said "Do you think you as players can back down as Jane's cheerleading squad so she can become a regular member of the team, not the special member, and not a member outside of the circle [casually referring to the seating arrangement]? Can she receive positive encouragement when she does something positive and constructive criticism when she doesn't?" While I was assigning the task, Lee Ann patted the empty chair next to Jane, seeming to say come on over and join the team.

The players were concerned about possible negative outcomes from the coaching staff resulting from this task.

"As long as we don't get punished for not cheering, or don't all have to run if Jane doesn't make her time." Under this condition, Julie agreed to do the task.

"You [the coaches] won't get mad if we don't cheerlead for Jane?" (Elizabeth) The covert rule, the team must cheer for Jane to avoid getting in trouble, had been exposed.

"If we stop cheering, she'll stop trying." (Marie)
The team all laughed and said, "We're cheering, and she's still not trying." The players agreed to try this task for one week. Jane sat back in her chair in a relaxed way.

The team followed through with the task. Both the players and coaches were able to back off Jane. Her motivation seemed to improve.

"I didn't cheer for you [Jane]." (Katy)

"I didn't either." (Elizabeth)

"The coaches didn't say a word to her [Jane]." (Debby)

"Every time I ran around the track, Margie would do this [She turned her head away from the group to demonstrate how Margie had responded to her]." (Jane)

I asked, "How was that for you Jane [being treated like any other member of the team]? Was it better or worse?" Jane responded, "It was better. I didn't have to hear my name all the time, 'Jane, Jane, Jane'."

"Every now and then they'll [the players] yell at her [Jane]." (Laura)

Margie interrupted, "Yeah, but not like it used to be, not anything like it used to be. She works harder now."

"It's all helped [the changes in interacting with Jane], every bit of it is helping. I told her [Jane] 'I don't even yell at you any more', and she said, 'I like it that way.' I mean, I talk to her. I don't ignore her." (Laura)

Jane's improved motivation seemed evident not only in the team's task report, but also in her performance during practice.

"She [Jane] ended up running a 7.57 mile, right under eight. That's the fastest she has ever run." (Connie)

Further indicating Jane's return to the players' subsystem and her withdrawal from the coaches' coalition was her changed seating arrangement in the second session.

During the second session, Jane chose not to sit alone at the end of the semicircle as she had in the previous session. This may have indicated that she had become more a part of the players' subsystem.

The coaches had begun to treat Jane like the other players. If she wasn't in shape or didn't try, she wouldn't play. This may have removed Jane from the coalition she had with the coaches and placed her back into the players' subsystem. As she began to be treated like a regular member of the team, Jane appeared to function like one and began working harder for playing time and a starting position.

Symptom prescription (complaining)

The players seemed to complain frequently to the coaches. They appeared to be trying to have a good attitude, yet would find themselves complaining.

"I'm here for my education. If I had money, I wouldn't be here. Sometimes I wonder, all this pain." (Julie)

"Well right now it's just terrible, but it's different once you start playing [regular season games]. It is always hard at the beginning of the season. It will get better." (Mary Jill)

"The coaches don't think we are failures. Some of you before you ever get on the track say to yourselves, 'I can't do it, I can't do it.' You make yourself a failure before you even go out there. You can do anything if you put your mind to it. You all spend so much time complaining." (Barbara)

I noticed that when the players complained, the coaches perceived them as being lazy or having a bad attitude. It appeared that when the coaches criticized the players, the players would feel badly about themselves and in turn would complain more. Thus forming a continual sequence of behaviors: the players complained, the coaches criticized them and the sequence continued.

"Several of you [players] last week said they [the coaches] are not focusing on your positives, on what you're doing right. I think they are focusing on the complaining. So when the complaining happens, the coaches are negative toward you and you get down on

yourselves and complain more." (Consultant)

"I agree with you that when people complain in practice, the coaches just see that [the complaining]. I try to go around and tell everyone to just laugh it off. Don't complain about it. Just do it and act like you're having a good time. Then she'll [Laura] let you off. If you start complaining with a grimmest face and bitch about it or get real upset, she'll just keep on yelling at you." (Katy)

To reverse this behavioral sequence, a symptom prescription task was assigned. Symptom prescription is a strategic intervention which involves encouraging or instructing someone, or a group, to maintain their symptomatic behavior. The underlying message of the directive is that symptoms can be removed by being intentionally adhered to, or that through consciously willing problematic behaviors thought to be involuntary, their control will eventually be delivered into the client's or group's hands (Haley, 1988).

Seltzer (1986) writes, "The therapeutic double bind regularly associated with symptom prescription is perceived as resulting from the therapist's maneuvering of clients into a position that prompts them, whether they comply with

the paradoxical directive or not, to abandon their symptomatic behavior. For if they comply with the therapist's injunction to act symptomatically, they can no longer deny responsibility for 'non-voluntary' behavior" (p. 131). If the clients resist the therapist's directive and discontinue their symptom, in this case the player's frequent complaining, they also must admit their ability to change their behavior.

"I think you need to complain at a specific time. Let's say for five minutes in the locker room, just before practice, just among yourselves, even if you don't feel like complaining. Even if you just want to complain that you have to complain, do it for five minutes." (Consultant)

The players were initially apprehensive about trying the task. However, their attitude change toward a player who had begun to complain less over the years, was helpful in demonstrating the task's objective and possible positive outcomes.

"She [Cathy] use to sulk, complain even more, but now she doesn't nearly as much." (Lee Ann)

"She would get knocked down, and the tears would fall."

(Julie)

"Honestly, I used to encourage her, but then I got so sick of hearing it [complaining] over and over that I stopped. Now I'm back encouraging her because she has a new attitude." (Katy)

"I stopped for a while too, but I'm back encouraging her because of her new attitude." (Barbara)

"So Cathy complaining less helped you [the players] have a more positive attitude toward her and encourage her more. Perhaps, the coaches as they see you complaining less will encourage you more and have a more positive attitude toward you." (Consultant)

The players agreed to complain among themselves in their locker room for five minutes after each practice. However, the follow up task report indicated that the players had not completely followed through with the task.

"It went a couple of days. It is hard to get everyone together." (Chris)

"Yeah, we said a lot the first day and then it dwindled down. We just kept saying the same thing over and over. I think that's why we stopped doing it."

(Elizabeth)

"Yeah, we just went around [when they did the complaining task], and everyone had to say what they had to complain about." (Elizabeth)

"I was afraid the coaches would hear us in the locker room." (Jan)

"Everyone felt the same, and we were just saying the same things over and over. It just wasn't effective. It was hard to get everyone together, and when we did, it just didn't work." (Katy)

This information helped the consultant to understand why the players did not complete the task: the players believed it was more beneficial if an outsider was present, and they were fearful of being overheard by the coaches. Although the team did not completely follow through with the complaining task, they did seem to benefit some from it. They reported complaining less, having done the task three times.

"I think we have done a much better job of not complaining." (Katy)

"I noticed people were more conscious about complaining during practice. They would start to say something and then 'no I'm not going to complain.' We all thought it, but didn't say it out loud." (Katy)

The players seemed to be more "alive" in a session which allowed them time to complain openly. Many of them, once given permission to complain, in fact prescribed to complain, began to sound more positive. They focused more on the good aspects of playing basketball.

"It's more than basketball, like knowing Lee Ann."
(Debby)

"It can be a lot of fun [playing basketball] sometimes. There's just certain days that you can't do nothing about." (Julie)

Odd and even days (complementarity)

It seemed apparent that Margie and Laura were functioning as the "heavy" coaches, frequently using negative statements. Where as Jill and Connie were limiting

their comments to positive statements (See Complementarity theme, page 161).

"I know I'll just correct, correct, correct, because it is so obvious what's in front of me [the players making mistakes]. It's what's there, and it's the natural thing to correct what's going on in front of you. It is easy to go the whole two hours and never say, 'that was good or that was good.'" (Margie)

"I think of things [corrections for player's mistakes], but I'll tell Coach [Laura]. Everybody's teeth would fall out if I started talking. See, I feel like that's [referring to being positive] the only thing I ever did. I mean sometimes I may pull them [the players] aside and say a little something, but I'm the one whose always encouraging." (Connie)

"Jill has never really yelled at anyone." (Connie)

In order to help the coaches actualize both positive and corrective coaching styles, a task was assigned. A common strategic task, odd and even days, was designed for changing behavior (Bergman, 1983; Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, 1978). This task is often used to help

people practice new patterns of behavior on odd days and on even days continue their old pattern of behavior. Behaving differently on alternate days allows people an opportunity to try new ways of interacting, while only partially giving up their old patterns of interaction. This is particularly useful if a consultant anticipates resistance to change.

My goal was to have the coaches alternate between two behaviors: giving positive feedback and correcting mistakes. In other words, two coaches on even days were to focus on the positive aspects of the players while the other two coaches corrected mistakes. On the odd days, the coaches were to alternate their behavior. It was my hope that the task would increase Laura and Margie's use of positive communication while encouraging Connie and Jill to become more comfortable correcting mistakes. In addition, the coaches could be more fully functioning and might contribute to increasing the players confidence.

The players reported that they noticed a change in that Margie was more positive, and Jill and Connie were able to correct mistakes. However, it appeared Laura had not changed noticeably.

"Margie, Jill, and Connie say some positive things.

I've noticed a big change in Margie. I mean, they help you out. They talk to you. They don't gripe at you.

[Katy then threw her arms up in the air] `See you didn't make that pass', that would be Coach [Laura]. Jill or the other coaches would say, `All you needed to do is take one more step', or show you." (Katy)

"They [the assistant coaches] help you, not yell at you." (Marie)

A follow up task report was acquired over the phone from Margie. According to Margie, Jill and Connie were able to actualize both sides of themselves, correcting mistakes, as well as being positive.

"Overall the coaching staff was working hard to be more encouraging." (Margie)

Margie did not specifically mention Laura in her task report. Therefore, I asked if Laura had participated in the task. Margie replied, "She is under a lot of pressure" [games would begin in two weeks].

Not wanting to put Margie in the position of reporting Laura's possible non-compliance, I did not continue to ask her about Laura's behavior. Instead, I complimented the coaches' overall change. I emphasized

the strength of the coaches' change and their ability to actualize both parts of themselves. The three assistant coaches seemed to be helping the players correct mistakes and were giving positive feedback more often.

Metaphor: "We Got The Power"

The players seemed enmeshed with the head coach. The boundary between Laura and some of the players was diffused in that they depended on her encouragement for confidence in themselves. When two subsystems are enmeshed, it often affects the individual's independence and autonomy (Minuchin, 1981). The players' dependence on Laura for self-confidence seemed to prevent them from generating their own self confidence.

Although the players seemed to have needed Laura's positive communication, it appeared that she was not giving it to them. The players' reality was that Laura needed to change. She had to give the team positive feedback so that they could in turn feel good about themselves. The goal of this session was to assist the players in feeling good about themselves, to consider a new reality without Laura's encouragement.

To encourage the players to recognize their strengths and to be confident, I gave an open-ended indirect

suggestion. An indirect suggestion is a hypnotic communication commonly used in Strategic Therapy. An open-ended suggestion, a type of indirect suggestion, does not directly state what the players should do, but suggests that they will experience some change produced by their own inner resources. In this case, the word hypnosis does not apply to a ritual but to a type of communication between people. Merely having a conversation with someone, emphasizing certain words, can induce trance (Haley, 1973). The consultant suggested that the team would notice change at some point. This suggestion can plant a seed or induce trance which suggests some change may occur.

The consultant's expectancy for change, which was evident in the communication with the team, influences the effectiveness of the indirect suggestion or the ability for change (Lankton and Lankton, 1983). Therefore, I gave the players an indirect suggestion for the change I expected they would notice: increased confidence. Words like "when" inserted into sentences obligates the listener to accept the reality of that idea in order to make sense of the rest of the sentence. The presupposition here is when change occurs versus if it occurs. (Dolan, 1985).

"When will you start to tap that part of you that knows you're good, good enough to be here, in this division,

on this team? When will you notice grabbing onto that part of yourself?" (Consultant)

"It seems important, in fact critical, to let your confidence come forth without waiting for Laura to praise you. The mood of the team will change. You soon will notice your confidence coming forth. I think soon you will begin to notice these changes."

(Consultant)

Several players began to sound more confident during this session.

"We are the ones who are powerful, we're out there on the floor." (Elizabeth)

"We just gotta learn how to deal with Coach [Laura]. When she is yelling at you, let it go, and just forget about it." (Katy)

"She [Laura] rarely bothers me because she knows I'm confident. I don't let it get me. If I let her bother me, I'd be gone by now." (Debby)

Katy, a starting senior, anxious for the players to have confidence in themselves said, "You have to depend on yourself. I mean we wouldn't have gotten a scholarship if we weren't any good. We wouldn't have been asked to come here. We wouldn't be on this team. We all know what our abilities are, and we just need to go out and play our best and quit being down on ourselves. You can't depend on her [Laura] for your confidence whether you're a starter or not."

"When you're in here [the session], I can see you shift. At the beginning of this session, when nobody would say anything, people were down. People don't even feel like what they have to say is very important. But when you start focusing on your positives and feel good about yourselves, you're leaning forward, I'm leaning forward. I find myself more excited to be in here with you. Your voice tones even change. Somehow you need to take that with you, the way you feel when you're fired up about yourself, each other. There is a noticeable change in you when you feel and remember what is good about you." (Consultant)

In addition to using indirect suggestion for confidence building, a metaphor, "We got the power", was utilized to

further facilitate bringing forth the players' confidence. A metaphor is a statement about one thing that represents something else. It relies on the relationship of one thing to another. Haley (1988) writes, "The metaphorical way of directing someone is important because it is not always appropriate to make explicit what the therapist wants to have happen. Sometimes people are more willing to follow a directive if they do not have to concede that they have received one" (p. 72). Often clients will change in a way which the therapist wants them to. In this case the players showing increased confidence by behaving in a manner that resembles the desired change.

"We got the power" emerged as a metaphor which represented the player's self-confidence. This metaphor emerged from Elizabeth's previous statement about, "Being the ones who are powerful" and Claudia's statement, "We have that power", referring to the players' power to perform and to be confident. Behaving powerfully became the players' metaphor for behaving confidently.

Claudia's statement was restated using a rap song popular with the NBA (National Basketball Association) during the time of this study: "We Got the Power." I said, "You do have it [power] inside of you. It is not as if it is something to find or get. You are

powerful right now, and you're a powerful team."

(Consultant)

"When you see somebody getting down this week, remind them they have the power within." (Consultant)

Katy, joking about the song, began to sing, "We Got the Power." This led the players to enthusiastically make the hand signal from the "We Got the Power" video. This signal indicated to these players that they had the power and confidence within themselves. The "We Got the Power" metaphor and hand signal may have assisted in giving this team a unique sign separating them from previous years' teams.

The players and coaches noticed change in the players' attitude the week following the "We Got The Power" task assignment. This change seemed to indicate an increase in confidence and improved practice performance. During the focus group discussion, Jill, an assistant coach, referred to the change she also had noticed in the players following this task report. Again this indicated a positive change among the players.

Laura called the consultant at home. She stated that

this week was the team's best practice all year. The players seem to have a new more positive attitude.

"They all keep talking about 'power something'."

"I noticed everyone doing something together in practice, but I didn't know what it was. What ever it was, it has seemed to really help." The players started to laugh and do the hand signal for "We Got the Power". (Jill)

Also in the focus group, the players reported that the "We Got The Power" task had been the most helpful of the tasks and that it had made a difference for them.

"I think everybody agrees. Everybody stepped up after the last meeting [session four]. They [the players] assumed that this [referring to being confident] was what they needed to do. Practice flowed a lot better." (Claudia)

"I think we all came together." (Katy)

"It's like, it's not a problem anymore. It's not on everyone's mind anymore." (Claudia)

"We are so much more positive. We have a new attitude." (Katy)

"We all seem in much better moods in practice." (Jan)

Theme V The Team's Openness in Consultation

The participants throughout consultation were willing to try tasks, to share their frustrations, and they generally had open communication. This openness was not only evident when they overtly reported the usefulness of consultation, but it was also indicative in their openness with each other, their need to communicate and their willingness to work toward resolving problems. It seemed important to the team that the lines of communication were open between all members of the team.

Sub-themes related to openness are discussed below. These sub-themes are: 1) Keeping conflict off the court, 2) Sharing feelings with team member seemed to promote a feeling of support for the players, and 3) Having an outsider facilitate the process of being open and resolving problems seemed important to the team.

Openness

The lines of communication between the players and the coaches were open. The team seemed to value the increased

awareness of how the group was feeling.

"The last several years of working with you [the consultant], we have become more open with each other. We are more aware of where the players are coming from, and they know where we are coming from." (Laura)

In the focus group James asked, "So what you see as important is not necessarily what is going on inside each individual, but what is going on between the group?" The team seemed to agree.

"Yeah, I may walk around with an idea of what things should be like, and if it is different for them, [she threw her hands up] it's not going to work. You need to bounce ideas back and forth [between coaches and players]." (Margie)

Keeping it off the court

Consultation seemed to provide the team a place to vent their frustrations and feelings, as well as help prevent conflict ending up on the court. When conflicts were resolved, the team was more cohesive, they felt that they had an "edge on the court."

"We come here, like Katy said, 'get everything out in the open'. We don't let it go on and end up on the court. Things are usually pretty much settled by the time we get on the court, and we don't have to worry about it there. I think we accomplished a lot. I thought they [the consultation sessions] were really helpful." (Lee Ann)

"I think in a way, they are almost necessary. Things just build up." (Jan)

"As coaches, you can just watch it, for lack of a better word, the bond that develops." (Laura)

"This [the sessions] stops cliques from developing. They come in here and get out whatever they get out and don't take it to each other. It has been very valuable for us, and it has helped this team come together. It can give you an edge on the court. Everyone has to trust each other to win a ball game. You can't win with cliques and mistrust. You might win a few but it will get ya." (Laura)

"You get to learn something about your teammates besides knowing them on the court, especially if you

don't hang around them all the time outside of basketball." (Claudia)

"It [consultation] has helped our team. We all get along well. We don't have conflicts with team members."
(Katy)

Sharing feelings

The team was able to be vulnerable with one another. They could share their feelings with each other throughout consultation. This may have contributed to the friendships and team cohesiveness they seemed to have experienced. An example of the players' ability to be vulnerable was evident in session two.

Cathy was crying and took a deep breath, putting her hands up in front of her as if she couldn't talk about it anymore. "I always feel like it's on me, on my shoulders and there's nothing I can do to change it. I can't imagine not having anybody here as friends, but I'm not very happy right now. I'm from a little town and when I go home the sports editor asks, 'How much did you get to play', and I'll say, 'Fifteen'. He'll say, 'Fifteen games, that's good', and I'll say, 'no, fifteen minutes'. I'm the first division one athlete

out of my high school. My hometown expects a lot out of me." (Cathy)

Later, during the focus group, Cathy expressed how important sharing this issue with her teammates was. "It feels good knowing that your teammates are behind you. The one time that we met [referring to session two], I knew that everyone was, well, I felt so supported." (Cathy)

Outsider

The team reported that having an outsider facilitate meetings was important. Throughout consultation, the players and coaches would confide in the consultant. Therefore, trust in the consultant, the outsider, was seen as critical.

When asked what was important about the team's relationship to the consultant the players responded with, "Knowing she was outside the group." (Claudia)

"It helps to bitch to you [referring to the consultant]. We all know what we are bitching about to each other. We come up with answers when we talk with someone from outside. When it is just the team, it's

just questions." (Katy)

"Yeah, it is easier to get something settled. She [the consultant] is not part of the team. We are all feeling the same and everybody is saying the same thing. I don't think something like, say a team meeting in our locker room would. It is not the same. We don't get anything accomplished. It is different when you're talking to somebody that is outside." (Lee Ann)

"I see it as bringing the team together closer. Instead of complaining to each other we come here, sit down as a group, explain our feelings, and everybody shares how they feel. Problems get solved, and people get their emotions out. We solve problems as a team instead of going from one person to the next person to the next and dividing the team. I usually feel better about myself after each one [session]." (Katy)

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusion

The process of consulting with a university athletic team using family therapy systems theory and techniques was described. This chapter discusses that process and the implications for future research and consultation.

Discussion of Process

Systems consultation with organizations other than families has gained much popularity in the literature and is common in clinical practice. This study investigated another organization in which to utilize systems consultation, an athletic team. The purpose of this study was to describe the process of consulting with a university athletic team using family systems theory and techniques. This description included a detailed case study of four consultation sessions. The Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy Decade Review has called for an increase in research that is focused on process rather than outcome. This call included the importance of reporting what actually happens in session (Sprenkle, 1990). This dissertation responded to that call.

The case study was a rich description of what happened throughout the four consultation sessions, including what

interventions were used and why. This description also included a focus group interview with the team after the four consultation sessions and a discussion of five themes which emerged throughout the consultation process.

The three qualitative methodologies utilized in this study, a descriptive case study, a focus group interview and reporting recurrent themes, offered several ways to investigate the process and benefits of systems consultation with an athletic team.

The family therapy systems theories and interventions utilized throughout the four consultation sessions were from Strategic and Structural family therapy models. These models are among the most popular utilized in systems consultation with organizations. Although these models were initially chosen because of their popularity in the MFT consultation literature, there appears to be a parallel between the strategic model and athletic team strategies. This parallel makes the strategic model an appropriate framework when consulting with athletic teams.

Strategic therapists track the behavioral sequence surrounding a presenting problem. For example, in a case of domestic violence the therapist will assess the events which occurred just before and just after the violence. Similarly, coaches analyze the behavioral sequence surrounding plays. For example, when coaches and players

review game tapes, they rewind and fast forward looking at the sequence of events. Athletic teams are by nature systemic. Basketball coaches do not simply look at which player took the shot. They look at the sequence; who assisted the shot and which player got the rebound if the shot was missed.

A strategic therapist, after tracking the sequence of a symptom, often assigns a task to alter or break-up a sequence of behavior. These tasks are often complex and involve the entire group or family. Athletic teams also operate in terms of planning and strategizing plays which are complex and involve the entire team. Athletes are used to carrying out tasks or directives given by their coaches in order to complete these complex strategies meant to score and win games. These parallels between athletic team strategies and the strategic therapy model are apparent when consulting with teams.

Systems consultants when working with an athletic team, should work from a brief format, consulting for 5-10 sessions, keeping within the format of the strategic family therapy models. Traditionally, sports psychologists have become members of the team or the university athletic department they are working with. In other words, they are available to the team throughout the season for individual or team needs. They may be present at games and practices

and often travel with the team for away games. In contrast, the strategic therapist's goals are to remove symptoms or presenting problems briefly, rather than working long term with a team.

Limitations of This Research and Future Research

The design of this study was descriptive. However, the case study, focus group and themes were descriptive of the consultation process with this team only. Further descriptions of systems consultation with many other teams, characteristically like the team in this study, would be needed to generalize these results.

Although the participants agreed that the consultation meetings were useful for them, it is unknown whether or not this process would be useful for athletic teams in general, or if other teams would respond differently to the process used in this study. For instance, this study was conducted with a university athletic team. Additional research with high school and/or professional teams will be necessary to test the universality of this approach for sports teams in general. This study was conducted with a female athletic team. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate how similar and/or different male athletic teams would respond to systems consultation sessions.

Prior to this study, the consultant had worked with

this team for two full seasons. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the joining and trust building process gained in previous years from the trust exhibited during the four sessions of this study. Perhaps the players' openness and willingness to carry out assigned tasks would have been less had the consultant not had prior experience working with the team. Further research is needed to investigate athletic teams' willingness to disclose problems and work toward resolution when a consultant meets with a team for a few sessions during a given season.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not address differences which may occur for athletes in individual sports. University athletes are often participants of a sport which focuses more on the individual athlete than on the team. This is true for sports such as swimming, diving, tennis, golf and track. Research is needed to investigate differences which may occur in conducting systems consultation with these types of teams verses true team sports such as football, baseball, basketball, field hockey and volleyball. It is unknown if the process used in this study, working with team athletes, would differ when working with athletes participating in individualized sports.

A quantitative outcome study to accompany this process study is needed to investigate if and what significant

changes occurred with this team. For instance, does group cohesion increase and if so, how much? Do boundaries between subsystems become clearer? Does performance improve with systems consultation sessions? These questions are difficult to address because an athlete's or team's success due to consultation is difficult to measure. Variables such as change in the opposing team, change in the fitness of the players, change in scheduling of games, ect., are difficult to isolate. However, the answers to these questions would be important information for both the consultant and athletic teams interested in having a systems consultant work with them. Teams may want to know what benefits to expect. Further research is needed to identify specific benefits. Because variables are so difficult to isolate, we cannot draw specific conclusions from this study. It is interesting to note that the team in this study tied the school's record for most conference wins in a season. However, this may not indicate that consultation directly influenced the team's record.

Conclusion

Family systems consultation with athletic teams offers athletes an alternative to traditional sports psychology. It also offers family therapists an opportunity to utilize their systems training in consultation with another

organization. As evidenced in this study, university athletes and coaches can experience stress and communication problems. Therefore, systems consultation may serve as an avenue for stress reduction, conflict resolution and increased team cohesion.

Working alone with this team, the consultant probably missed opportunities to respond to many interaction which were going on during the consultation sessions. Therefore, it is recommend that any family systems therapist considering consulting with athletic teams team-up with a co-therapist. For large groups, such as athletic teams, it would be more beneficial to have more than one consultant. A co-therapist may significantly increase the effectiveness of the process. Acting as peer supervisors, the co-therapists could observe each others work and plan interventions together.

For the consultant, there were two particularly enriching experiences that resulted from this study. First, this study facilitated a self observation of the consultant's consultation style. Observing the therapeutic maneuvers during the sessions facilitated exploration of the consultant's strengths and weaknesses. For instance, in session two the consultant moved too quickly when assigning the "complaining task". She should have gotten a commitment from the players to try the task before assigning it.

However, a strength of the consultant seemed to be her designing of relevant tasks, given the identified problems. Therefore, the case study methodology not only met the objectives of this study, but it facilitated a clinical learning experience for the consultant.

Another enriching experience was observing how the participants of the study benefitted directly from the research. This perhaps is the most attractive aspect of qualitative research. It was clear from the focus group that consultation had been valuable to the team. In general, the participants believed the sessions were useful, and they felt positively about their experiences throughout consultation. They reported that the sessions facilitated conflict resolution, or perhaps more importantly to this team, "Things are pretty much settled by the time we get on the court, and we don't have to worry about it there."

As a participant observer, the consultant also benefitted personally. Meeting with this team was exciting and fun. The process of systems consultation with athletic teams can be enhancing for all involved. The consultant will continue to research this "uncommon" approach to sports psychology in an effort to advance the family therapy and sports psychology fields.

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APPENDIX I

Consent Form

I hereby agree to participate in four consultation sessions with my teammates and coaches and to participate in a group interview after the last session. I agree to videotaping of these sessions, and the final interview for research purposes. I understand that these tapes will be confidential, only Toni Zimmerman, her dissertation committee and cameraman will view to them. These sessions will take place at Wallace Hall.

Signature of Player or coach

Date

Thank you!

APPENDIX II

JSST Feedback from Clients
(Guidelines for Focus Group)

1. What were the most useful parts of the team consultation meetings (both in-session and out-of-session)?
2. What were the least useful parts of the consultation meetings (again both in and out-of-session)?
3. If you could change anything about the consultation process, what would it be and how would you change it?
4. What, where, and when were the parts of the consultation meetings where things started to move or shift?
5. What would you recommend to other teams and consultant who are working with problems (issues) similar to what you worked on in treatment?
6. What was most important in the consultation process in terms of your relationship to the consultant?

Additional questions added by the researcher

7. What were your overall perceptions / feelings about the consultation process?
8. How was this consultation process similar or different from sports psychology experiences you have had in the past?

APPENDIX III

METHODS OVERVIEW

Sunday Evening Sessions	Write field notes following Consultation Session	Expand Notes/ Review Video-Tapes Throughout Week	Supervision Monday
1 Players & Coaches			
2 Players			
3 Coaches			
4 Players			
5 Focus Group with Players and Coaches	_____	_____	_____

Following Four Consultation Sessions

- 1) Write case study based on four sessions.
- 2) Report focus group outcome and summarize.
- 3) Report Themes that emerge from consultation sessions and focus group.

APPENDIX IV

SESSION 1: Seating

Subsystems are represented by the team members which are grouped by singled spacing. See results section, session one (p. 40) for further explanation of these subsystems.

 Toni
 Connie Laura
 Margie

 Cathy
Elizabeth

 Chris
 Marie
 Katy
 Barbara

 Julie

Lee Ann

 Claudia

empty chair
 Jane

 Jill

 Debby

 Ellen
 Jodi
 Jan

SESSION 2: Seating

Subsystems are represented by the team members which are grouped by singled spacing. See results section, session two (p. 67) for further explanation of these subsystems.

Toni

Marie
Chris

Katy
Barbara
Elizabeth

Jane

Cathy

Lee Ann

Julie

empty chair

Debby

Jodi
Jan
Heather
Ellen

Claudia

SESSION 3: Seating

Subsystems are represented by the team members which are grouped by singled spacing. See results section, session three (p. 85) for further explanation of these subsystems.

Toni

Laura

Connie

Margie

Jill

SESSION 4: Seating

Subsystems are represented by the team members which are grouped by singled spacing. See results section, session four (p. 105) for further explanation of these subsystems.

Toni

Marie
Chris
Claudia

Katy
Barbara
Elizabeth

Debby

Julie

Jane

Jodi
Heather
Jan
Ellen

Lee Ann

Cathy

TONI MARIE ZIMMERMAN (SCHINDLER)

EDUCATION

- Ph.D., 1991, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. GPA 3.75
Major Area: Marriage and Family Therapy
Dissertation: "Uncommon Sports Psychology: A Qualitative Study of The Process of Utilizing Family Therapy Theory and Techniques With An Athletic Team"
- M.A., 1985, Radford University, Virginia. GPA 3.70
Major Area: Clinical Psychology
- B.A., 1984, Ohio University. Overall GPA 3.20
Major Area: Psychology. Major GPA 3.50
1979, University of Touraine, France

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

University Experiences

- 1991- Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Marriage Therapy Program, Colorado State University Fort Collins, Colorado
- 1991- 1991 Therapist, University Counseling Services, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia
- 1988-1991 Therapist for team and individual athletes, Athletic Department, Virginia Polytechnic Institutes and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia
- 1988-1990 Instructor, Department of Family and Child Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia
- 1988-1990 Therapist (Practicum), The Center For Family Services, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia
- 1987-1988 Instructor, Department of Human Development, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio

1984-1985 Therapist, Radford University Counseling Center,
Radford, Virginia

Clinical Experiences

- 1990-1991 Family Therapist Mount Regis Alcohol and
Drug Treatment Center, Roanoke, Virginia
- 1987-1988 Therapist Dartmouth Hospital, Dayton, Ohio
- 1986-1988 Therapist (outpatient), Good Samaritan Hospital,
Dayton, Ohio
- 1986-1987 Therapist (inpatient), Dettmer Hospital, Troy,
Ohio
- 1985-1985 Therapist (practicum), Comprehensive Family
Services, Blacksburg, Virginia

Undergraduate Experiences

- 1982-1984 Crisis Intervention and referral counselor,
Careline Crisis Intervention Center, Athens, Ohio
- 1980-1984 Ward Leader (inpatient), Athens Mental Health
Center, Athens, Ohio
- 1983-1983 Group Home Summer Leader, Dairylane Teen Group
Home, Athens, Ohio
- 1982-1982 Mental Health and Wilderness Counselor. Spectrum
Wilderness Program, 30 day Survivor Courses,
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale,
Illinois
- 1981-1981 Assistant Coordinator / Counselor, summer
program, Western Ohio Regional Alcoholism
Council, Dayton, Ohio
- 1980-1980 Medical Worker, Operation Crossroads Africa
Incorporated, Sudan, Africa

MEMBERSHIPS AND ACTIVITIES IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Activity</u>
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)	Clinical Member
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), Approved Supervisor	On Track
American Psychological Association (APA)	Member
Association for the Advancement of Applied Sports Psychology (AAASP)	Member
National Council on Family Relations (NCFR)	Member
Virginia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (VAMFT)	Member
Virginia Council on Family Relations (VCFR)	Member

SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

Published Journal Articles

- Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. and Protinsky, H. (1991). Strategic Parenting: The tactics of changing children's behavior. Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, 9, 6-13.
- Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M., Washle, E., & Protinsky, H. (1990). Strategic intervention in an athletic system. Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, 9, 75-80.
- Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (1990). I've been reframed. Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, 8, 66.
- Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M., & Waters, M. (1986). Athletic involvement and aspects of self-actualization. Journal of Sports Behavior, 9, 59-69.

Submitted Journal Articles

- Benson, M., Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. and Martin, D. (Submitted 1990 to The Journal for Marital and Family Therapy). Milan circular questioning revisited with children.

Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. and Darden, E. (Submitted 1990 to Family Process). In search of sex therapy with a systemic approach: A decade review.

Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M., Prest, L. and Sporakowski, M. (Submitted 1990 to The Clinical Supervisor). The initial supervision session checklist (ISSC): A guide for the MFT supervision process.

Book Reviews

Byer, Shainberg and Jones. Dimensions for Human Sexuality. Wm. C. Brown publisher. Reviewed chapters 1-11 for the 1990 third edition.

Byer, Shainberg and Jones. Dimensions of Human Sexuality. Wm. C. Brown publishers. Test Questions written for 1990 third edition.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (1989). What to say at half time. The Sport Strategy and Performance Report. Sept.

Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (1990). Say something old in a new way. The Sport Strategy and Performance Report Dec.

Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (1990). The use of stories and metaphors with athletes. The Sport Strategy and Performance Report. July.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Presentations Given (¹presenter)

¹Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (Sept. 12-16 1990). A qualitative research study: Systems family therapy applied to athletic systems. Association for the Advancement of Applied Sports Psychology (AAASP). San Antonio, Texas.

¹Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (June 7-9 1990). Family therapy coaching model. Second Annual Conference on Sport Psychology for Coaches. Chicago, Illinois. Voted number one presenter by participants.

¹Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M., Washle, E. & Protinsky, H. (Oct. 26- 29, 1989). Extend yourself: Bridging systems theory and sports psychology. American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) 47th Annual Conference. San Francisco, California.

¹Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. & ¹Martin, D. (Oct. 26-29, 1989). Milan circular questioning Revisited with children. American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) 47th Annual Conference. San Francisco, California.

¹Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. (April 6-8 1989). The ethical responsibility to educate athletes on the dangers of eating disorders and healthy weight management. The 14th Annual Southeastern Symposium on Family and Child Development. Knoxville, Tennessee.

Schindler-Zimmerman, T.M. & ¹Waters, M. (March 14-15 1986). Athletic involvement and self-actualization of women and men. The Third Annual Teaching and Learning About Women Conference, Roanoke College, Roanoke, Virginia.

SELECT PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS ATTENDED

Strengthening Families. The 48th Annual American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Conference. Oct. 4-7 1990. Washington, DC.

Association for the Advancement of Applied Sports Psychology. Sept.12-16 1990. San Antonio, Texas.

Building Bridges: Creating Balance. The 47th Annual American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Conference. Oct. 26-29 1989. San Francisco, California

Adult Children of Alcoholics. Sponsored by Dartmouth Hospital. March 1988. Dayton, Ohio.

Family Therapy Works. The 45th Annual American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Conference. Oct.29-Nov.1 1987. Chicago, Illinois.

Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage: An Intergenerational Perspective. James Framo Ph.D. Sponsored by the Ohio Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). April 24-25 1987. Dayton, Ohio

Creative and Powerful Techniques for Changing Couples and Families. Joel Bergman Ph.D. Sponsored by the Ohio Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (OAMFT). March 13-14 1987. Dayton, Ohio.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Excellence in Teaching (1990), Department of Family and Child Development, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Deans List Graduate (1986).
Radford University.
Radford, Virginia.

College of Arts and Sciences Deans List Graduate (1984).
Ohio University.
Athens, Ohio.

National Deans List, Sixth Annual Edition (1984).
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University**

<u>Year/Semester</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u># of Students</u>	<u>*Evaluations</u>
1990/Spring	Human Sexuality	298	3.7
1989/Fall	Human Sexuality	232	3.6
1989/Spring	Human Sexuality	276	3.5
1988/Fall	Human Sexuality	153	3.5

Antioch College

<u>Year/Quarter</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u># of Students</u>	<u>Evaluations</u>
1988/Summer	Group and Family Counseling	15	3.7
1988/Summer	Professional Dev.	12	3.6
1988/Spring	Indiv. Counseling	10	3.6
1988/Spring	Professional Dev.	11	3.5
1988/Spring	Human Dev. Principles	19	3.6
1988/Winter	Group and Family Counseling	11	3.7
1988/Winter	Professional Dev.	10	3.5
1988/Winter	Child and Adol. Dev.	15	3.6
1987/Fall	Professional Dev.	9	3.5
1987/Summer	Professional Dev.	10	3.5

* 4.0 scale

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