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25 **Abstract**

26 *Objective:* The purpose of this research was to gain an insight into UK trainee sport
27 psychologists' (TSP) and experienced sport psychologists' (ESP) perspectives of their
28 professional development by drawing on a counsellor development framework (Rønnestad &
29 Skovholt, 2012) .

30 *Design:* A longitudinal qualitative design using semi-structured interviews (Study I) and a
31 multi-interview qualitative design (Study II).

32 *Methods:* Nine UK TSPs enrolled on the British Psychological Society (BPS), Stage 2
33 Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) participated in Study I. TSPs
34 participated in three individual interviews regarding their professional development during
35 the first 2 years of training. Five UK BPS-chartered ESPs with a minimum of 15 years
36 consulting experience participated in Study II. ESPs took part in two separate interviews
37 regarding their professional development. Study I themes were developed using an abductive
38 thematic content analysis to interpret TSPs' perspectives about their development. We
39 examined Study II data through the lens of the themes generated from Study I.

40 *Results:* Participants' development reflected factors that underlie the process of individuation,
41 such as personal interactions with peers and a broadening of influences outside of training
42 (e.g., personal therapy, life experiences). Participants perceived professional development in
43 sport psychology as intermittent and cyclical due to their varied work responsibilities.

44 *Conclusion:* Individuation represents a dynamic ongoing process where practitioners attempt
45 to understand better, who they are and the influence they have on service delivery.

46 Individuation can be a deliberate process that can assist practitioners in realising professional
47 satisfaction and meaning.

48 **Keywords:** training; professional development; individuation; service delivery

74 models (e.g., counsellor development theory) in different types of helping professionals and
75 in different settings (Watkins & Edward, 1995).

76 Drawing on counsellor development theory, Tod, Andersen, and Marchant (2009)
77 found parallels between sport psychology and counselling trainees' early service delivery
78 experiences. Specifically, sport trainees initially approached service delivery from a problem-
79 solving stance. With increased experience over time, sport trainees, like counselling trainees
80 focused on developing relationships with clients and becoming increasingly flexible with
81 interventions. To extend research beyond the formal training years, Tod and Bond (2010)
82 demonstrated through a longitudinal case study, that early career sport psychologists (2-5
83 years post-training) might experience similar development to counsellors at the same phase.
84 For example, Anna, their participant, experienced increased congruence between her
85 philosophy and her service delivery practices in the initial years after her postgraduate
86 training. Further, Anna reported decreased anxiety and increased confidence as she gained
87 competence, which echoes counsellor development at the same stage. Similar to Tod et al.
88 (2009), parallels emerged between Anna's story and Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2012)
89 counsellor development framework.

90 A body of research exists that examines the early development of sport psychologists
91 (Fogaca, Zizzi, & Andersen, 2018; Johnson & Andersen, 2019). Although sport psychologist
92 development is not limited to the training years (Lindsay, 2017), there remains little empirical
93 research on experienced people, such as those in the experienced professional phase. To build
94 further knowledge of sport psychologist development, it may be useful to examine and
95 compare the ways practitioners at trainee and experienced career phases grow professionally.
96 Research examining how people mature during and after training could help others reflect on
97 and plan their developmental pathway. In particular, individuals may reflect on how
98 information sources assist or hinder their current service delivery. The present study builds on

99 previous research by comparing data from trainee sport psychologists (TSPs) on the current
100 UK training programme with data from experienced sport psychologists (ESPs). This
101 approach aims to examine professional development over the career spectrum.

102 The results of the present study will have beneficial applied implications. For
103 example, trainees may be engaging in practices that experienced people may also consider
104 adopting, and vice-versa. The aim of the current research was to examine professional
105 development at multiple career phases. To achieve this aim, we interviewed TSPs multiple
106 times during their training (Study I) and followed this with a multiple-interview approach
107 with ESPs (Study II).

108 **Methods Study I**

109 **Philosophical Assumptions**

110 In reflection on our aim to understand individual's perspectives on their development,
111 we situated this research within an interpretive paradigm (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). We
112 approached this research with the aim of illuminating individual's experiences to understand
113 what they meant for professional development. This methodological perspective allowed us
114 to capture the sensitivities and nuances of the personal developmental experiences. Informed
115 by ontological relativism (a belief that there are multiple realities) and epistemological
116 constructionism (knowledge is constructed), there is no separation between the knower and
117 the known. The researchers facilitated a dynamic co-construction of meaning with
118 participants (Smith, Caddick, & Williams, 2015). This meant that we, the researchers acted as
119 reflexive 'instruments' to build knowledge with the participants.

120 **Participants**

121 The first author obtained approval of the research protocol via a local institution
122 ethics committee. All participants read an information sheet regarding the study's purposes,

123 benefits, risks, and safeguards and signed an informed consent form prior to their
124 involvement in the study.

125 Nine UK trainee sport psychologists (TSPs; 2 women, 7 men), with ages ranging at
126 the beginning of training from 24 to 30 years (mean age 25 years) volunteered to participate
127 after an email invitation was sent to professional networks (i.e., professional practice groups).
128 TSPs had enrolled on the Stage 2 Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) –
129 the supervised practice-based training programme provided by the British Psychological
130 Society (BPS) equivalent to doctoral level training. To enrol on the Qualification, participants
131 had already achieved bachelors in psychology or sport science and master's degrees in sport
132 psychology.

133 TSPs' training consisted of independent supervised experience to develop both
134 research and practice competencies with the support of a privately organised supervisor who
135 was a BPS chartered psychologist registered with the Health and Care Professions Council
136 (HCPC). Trainees were engaged in a minimum of 2-years full-time supervised practice.

137 **Procedures**

138 The first author arranged interviews with participants via a method (e.g., Skype or
139 telephone) and setting (e.g., cafe) convenient to them. The first author conducted three
140 individual interviews with each TSP during the first 2 years of training. Participants' first
141 interview occurred within a month of them beginning Stage 2. The second round of
142 interviews occurred as closely as possible to the month after trainees had completed their first
143 year of training. The final interviews took place when TSPs were within one month of
144 completion of Stage 2.

145 **Interview guides.** We based the semi-structured interview guides on Rønnestad and
146 Skovholt's (2012) counsellor development framework and topics included: current client
147 interactions, developmental influences, service delivery emotions, preferred methods of

148 learning about service delivery, conceptual ideas applied, and ways of measuring
149 effectiveness (the interview guide is available from the first author on request). In subsequent
150 interviews, participants discussed their development on each of these topics. To help with
151 *reflexive elaboration* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) regarding each participant's development,
152 both the first author and the participants prepared for each subsequent interview by revisiting
153 the transcript from the previous interview. The first author used the opening conversation in
154 subsequent interviews to co-construct the participant's story of their previous change and
155 development from the transcript.

156 **Data Analysis and Presentation**

157 The analytical procedure involved concurrent deductive and inductive thematic
158 analysis to move between theoretical explanations and participant's stories. Sparkes and
159 Smith (2014) refer to this combination of deduction and induction as abductive reasoning
160 (see also Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek, & Ng, 2012). The researchers followed such a procedure
161 because the aims of this study were to understand how TSPs develop (inductive) and to use a
162 guiding framework (deductive). The guiding counsellor development framework provided
163 concepts that could help to understand the nuances of sport psychologist development. The
164 framework provided a general sense of reference to broad concepts of professional
165 development.

166 We followed the guidelines for thematic content analysis provided by Braun and
167 Clarke (2013). Analysis began with the first author transcribing the interviews verbatim and
168 then repeatedly reading the transcripts whilst listening to the digital recordings of the
169 interviews to ensure transcription accuracy and immersion in the data. During this step, the
170 first author highlighted excerpts on the transcript where participants were discussing ideas
171 related to change and development on broad categories (e.g., emotions) from the counsellor
172 development framework (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012). Next, the first author placed the

173 highlighted excerpts of raw data into a matrix containing the categories (e.g., client
174 interactions, developmental influences, emotions, methods of learning, conceptual ideas
175 applied, and ways of measuring effectiveness). Analysing the data under each category then
176 allowed us to develop raw themes based on the participant's stories and in reference to the
177 framework. The categories covered broad parameters (e.g., sources of learning) and served as
178 a starting point for organising the data. Deductively categorising the raw themes in this way
179 provided a structure to organize the flow of data (i.e., 27 interviews) and provided a visual
180 representation that assisted identification of themes when viewing the changes participants
181 experienced from year-to-year. As stated, we purposefully referred to a framework in our
182 analysis of the TSPs' experiences, because it could provide insight into sport psychologist's
183 professional journeys. We found themes through analysis of the data contained within the
184 broad categories. The co-authors discussed themes, compared, and contrasted them with
185 existing and new data in an alternating cycle of induction and deduction. This process
186 allowed us to merge themes across categories to form three overarching themes that
187 described participant's development. In the final steps, we reviewed our themes in light of the
188 counsellor development framework, participants' responses, and audience review (described
189 below).

190 **Research Credibility**

191 Based on a relativist approach, first, we examined our values (e.g., reality is multiple
192 and knowledge is subjective). Second, we identified credibility principles reflective of our
193 values based on Sparkes and Smith (2014). Third, we designed the study to ensure we
194 adhered to the credibility principles. Regarding our values, we aimed to: (a) build an
195 understanding of each participant's developmental journey, as expressed in the interviews;
196 (b) demonstrate to participants that we cared about them; (c) uncover the perspectives we
197 brought to the study; (d) capture participants' perspectives on their professional development;

198 (e) provide accounts of career development that would advance knowledge; and (f) provide
199 information that is meaningful to trainees and practitioners. Based on our values, and from a
200 relativist position (see Smith & McGannon, 2018), we built rich rigor, credibility, sincerity,
201 resonance, and significant contribution into our research process. To ensure we applied these
202 principles we: (a) created data sets that followed participants throughout their training and
203 development journeys, (b) built trust and rapport with each participant, (c) immersed
204 ourselves in the participants' professional networks, (d) employed principles of triangulation
205 including analyst triangulation and member reflections, (e) used critical friends to encourage
206 self-reflexivity, (f) presented and discussed our results within the sport psychology field
207 (audience review) and, (g) provided implications for sport psychologist training and
208 development.

209 **Results**

210 We distilled three main themes from the interview transcripts regarding trainees'
211 development. First, TSPs' development reflected the process of individuation. Individuation
212 involves testing and negotiating a fit between the practitioner (e.g., theoretical orientation,
213 service delivery style) and the environment (Tod et al., 2017). Second, as TSPs matured,
214 sources influencing development broadened and included events outside of the training
215 programme. Third, participants characterised their professional development as intermittent
216 and cyclical.

217 **Professional Development Reflected the Ongoing Process of Individuation**

218 TSPs demonstrated the beginning of their professional individuation. Individuation
219 meant TSPs showed signs of acting in accordance with their self-perceptions. Finding their
220 own service delivery style could provoke anxiety in the trainees, as they did not know if their
221 way of working could help their clients. Working with clients and evaluating the results with
222 their supervisors helped reduce anxiety. Discussions with peers around the selection of

223 methods and underlying theoretical schools of thought also helped reduce TSPs' anxiety.
224 Peer discussion was useful because it enhanced TSPs' understanding about how they wanted
225 to work with clients. Understanding their own individual service delivery style led TSPs to
226 experiment with different methods and approaches to find those most compatible. The search
227 for compatibility is an example of the process of individuation.

228 TSP4 explained, "Professional philosophy can feel like an ill-fitting suit, but it's only
229 worn for a certain amount of time." The trainee recognised that finding a suitable fit between
230 his own worldview and a theoretical school of thought involved experimentation. Some
231 theoretical orientations resonated and were easily personalised in service delivery and others
232 did not fit as comfortably. The individuation process was characterised by the journey to
233 finding a personalised method of working.

234 Trainees were found to draw from experience (e.g., as an athlete), in addition to
235 external sources of knowledge (e.g., supervisors and textbooks). Personalising external
236 knowledge was a complex process that could produce anxiety. TSPs did not know if their
237 interpretation and application of psychology knowledge could help their clients.
238 Consequently, TSPs typically learned models they could quickly master and feel confident in
239 to provide a service to their clients. For example, TSP10 described his practice in Year 1 as:

240 ... it falls into that CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy], medical diagnosis model, so
241 'oh you are a bit worried at the start [of a race], let's give you a routine to do'. I think
242 it's that insecurity thing like the literature says, you don't trust your own inabilities ...
243 being unconfident and inexperienced, I would just go with it [book or manual] word-
244 for-word and if you make mistakes, you learn from it that way.

245 In the later phases of training, TSP10 had moved away from a CBT approach stating,
246 "I get bored of mental skills, reading it, the application of it ... the research behind it is so
247 boring and basic and I think 'am I missing something here?' I find it dull." He later discussed

248 an existential approach where he had been able to validate his own experiences of anxiety.
249 This change in orientation allowed him to approach service delivery more authentically than
250 previously when he had used a mental skills approach, by acting in accordance with his own
251 thoughts and feelings, “I mean everything ... in life, in sport is about finding meaning.”

252 Anxiety around choosing methods and theories to work with also led TSPs to their
253 peers. TSPs did not train together in a cohort with regular peer contact but recognised that to
254 understand their developing philosophies they had to arrange peer-to-peer contact. TSP7
255 described why:

256 It's about getting to cognitive dissonance isn't it? It's about getting to that point where
257 you challenge what you're doing, and you're gonna change your practice as a result of
258 that [peer] discussion. I think it's useful to bounce ideas off people, 'oh I've tried this
259 and what about you,' and one of the most interesting discussions I ever had with
260 people is about their philosophical approach - where they're sitting [theoretically] and
261 what they're doing.

262 Peer consultation helped TSPs to gain feedback on how they were approaching
263 service delivery and weigh up alternative theoretical orientations. TSPs' experiences with
264 clients helped them to learn about how the theory worked in practice and what it felt like to
265 apply theory. By the end of training, TSPs could recognise how the theories and methods
266 they worked with during training interacted with both their worldview and the work
267 environment. TSP1 reflected:

268 I've changed from when I first started when I would say I'm definitely CBT...as
269 times have changed I still value the principles of CBT but a lot more humanistic ... a
270 lot of the athletes [I have worked with], although they were elite, international
271 athletes, they also had to uphold full-time jobs...so I had to remember that the
272 individuals I am working with are not just athletes - they're also people.

273 TSP1 found that the athletes she worked with made her appreciate a person-centred
274 approach as her discussions with them often involved how the individuals balanced different
275 parts of their lives. As they developed more experience, TSPs could reflect on how they had
276 changed. TSP2 stated:

277 ... compared to early on in my training I say a lot less in sessions than I used to ...
278 that has to do with being more confident and relaxed in myself ... previously I felt I
279 had to be saying something ... I was the sport psychologist, the person they would
280 come to for a service, whereas now I'm more confident in my ability to not have to do
281 that and I can let them lead without feeling that they might be perceiving me not to be
282 doing my job ...

283 The journey to find a person-theory fit was evolving during training. Examples of
284 individuation included TSPs' change in working style and theoretical orientation. Various
285 sources, such as peers, clients, and supervisors influenced the dynamic process of
286 individuation. We discuss these sources in the next theme.

287 **Sources of Influence on Development**

288 Sources influencing TSPs were both internal (e.g., supervisors,) and external (e.g.,
289 personal therapists) to the field of sport psychology. Early in their training experiences, TSPs
290 discussed knowledge sources from within the field of sport psychology: supervisors, other
291 TSPs, and sport psychology literature. As training progressed, there was convergence among
292 participants in wanting to observe what practitioners (e.g., therapists) external to the field of
293 sport psychology had to offer.

294 TSPs referred to self-selected sources external to training to fulfil their learning
295 requirements. For example, with minimal opportunity to observe her supervisor, TSP11
296 found models outside of sport psychology to help her understand how theory could work in
297 practice:

298 My whole thing for the last 9-10 months is 'how do you do this?' All the case studies I
299 read say 'applied CBT or applied this and that' but it's like 'what did you talk about, or
300 how did you phrase things, or what was challenging?' ... I need to ... actually go to
301 the people who are applying this and getting results and have got a lot more hours in it
302 than I do ...'

303 In the above example, TSP11 found working with a counsellor external to sport
304 psychology fulfilled her need to understand how other practitioners used CBT. She further
305 applied her learning strategy by engaging with psychodynamic personal therapy and shared
306 an example of a personal-professional overlapping issue she discussed:

307 I started going to counselling and with a psychodynamic counsellor, and the reason is
308 I'd read about transference and countertransference, and it's all about ... how the
309 athlete transfers to you, but I thought it was likely for you to transfer onto the athlete
310 ... because we've all been athletes and I suppose I haven't achieved what I wanted to
311 achieve in my sport and I am still striving for that and I want to make sure ... that I
312 am not throwing those expectations at them [clients] and I can think about it
313 consciously, but am I doing it subconsciously ...?

314 As a trainee, TSP11 had a limited cognitive map to guide her on complex relationship
315 issues. Personal therapy, although not mandatory for Stage 2 trainees, was a place where she
316 could learn about how to approach complex issues in service delivery (e.g., by observing the
317 therapist) and explore the personal meaning to her (e.g., understanding how her own
318 ambitions may affect her relationships with clients).

319 Other TSPs also engaged in therapy to examine personal-professional topics as TSP7
320 disclosed, "... friends and family are incredibly important in shaping who you are, so they
321 will influence the kind of practice that you do. I got married 18 months ago, that had a huge
322 effect on my life and therefore, my practice ..." TSP7 explained that getting married was a

323 catalyst for going to personal therapy. He assessed, “it allowed me to spend time thinking
324 about my personality and how that is going to impact the relationship that you have with
325 other people including clients.”

326 Engagement with personal therapy helped TSPs to learn about the helping process
327 both from the perspective as a client and as a student of the helping process. These two
328 perspectives crossed over when TSPs were in service delivery. TSP7 stated, “... to think
329 about what is it they’re [therapist] trying to get me to do right now ... I do that in the middle
330 of practice now: I’ll ... think ‘what does she [client] currently think I’m trying to do?’ ... like
331 meta-cognition.” TSPs chose to engage in personal therapy and found it provided an
332 environment to raise self-awareness. Further, TSPs discussed transferring this introspection
333 into their own work with clients.

334 In summary, TSPs’ sources of influence were initially exclusively within the field of
335 sport psychology. TSPs chose to engage with sources external to sport psychology training
336 (e.g., nonmandatory therapy) to fulfil their learning needs. Personal therapy provided a
337 learning environment where TSPs could experience how they and clients may react
338 emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally.

339 **“Winning Doesn’t happen in a Straight Line”: Professional Development can be**
340 **Intermittent and Cyclical**

341 Participants generally experienced professional development as cycles of concentrated
342 experiences punctuating by the demands from their other work activities. Professional
343 development could feel intermittent, because TSPs could not always practice full-time due to
344 limited service delivery opportunities. At times, TSPs accessed concentrated periods of
345 service delivery that created a sense of rapid growth. TSP7 likened his experience of training
346 as a sport psychologist to the career of an athlete: “... winning doesn’t happen in a straight
347 line, and I don’t think any of these things [professional development] happen in a straight

348 line...” TSPs noted that the amount of practice fluctuated during training and this could affect
349 the development of their skills and knowledge. Subthemes that represent the ebb and flow of
350 training included concentrated service delivery and competing demands.

351 *Concentrated service delivery.* TSPs’ training journeys were characterised by
352 intermittent opportunities to engage in concentrated periods of applied practice. Concentrated
353 periods of practice were different to normal work because they involved greater immersion
354 in, and increased opportunities for service delivery (e.g., at training camps). Following these
355 experiences, TSPs described an intense change process. For example, participants described
356 an increased sense of challenge and mastery whilst supporting a squad at an international
357 tournament for a week, because of the situations that emerged where their skills were
358 required. TSP11 shared, “I brought a team away with me to the Italian Open. I did that on my
359 own, so that was a learning curve. It has thrown up loads of different scenarios, like ethical
360 dilemmas.” She was involved in a road accident with the young athletes she was responsible
361 for (as a staff member), and had her driving license confiscated by local police, she
362 explained: “...when the accident happened, the girls were so upset, and trying to comfort
363 them, but then not being a mother role.... Like, can you hug them or not?” This experience
364 had increased her understanding of boundaries within her role. TSP1 also reflected on
365 concentrated service delivery at an international tournament:

366 I started working with the senior women’s national team, I was taken to Canada with
367 them for 3 weeks for the World Cup ... it was much more serious working with senior
368 athletes ... yeah challenging in the sense that, for 3 weeks I never felt that I was able
369 to switch off from being the sport psychologist ... every waking hour, I had to be in
370 that role because I was working with coaches, players and other support staff...

371 TSP1 further expanded on why the experience was useful:

372 ... the experience was absolutely amazing ... I've gained in confidence through
373 gaining in competence... it allowed me to develop a rapport, a sound relationship with
374 the players ... to know them as people and not just athletes. Learning to put time into
375 developing those relationships is maybe one of the competencies ... [She developed]
376 TSPs recognised repeated periods of perceived enhanced service delivery competence
377 when they engaged in concentrated work at training camps and international tournaments.
378 The number and type of opportunities for delivery of sport psychology services (e.g., being
379 available to the team at any time of day and sharing accommodation with them) allowed
380 TSPs to engage in increased service delivery.

381 ***Competing demands.*** TSPs often completed their training programmes alongside a
382 job unrelated to sport psychology (e.g., insurance sales person). TSP5 described the
383 difficulties this posed: "... working outside academia, I had to do a lot of extra work looking
384 for clients. I was previously doing a full-time job then using all of my evenings and weekends
385 to do Stage 2. That's very tiring." He further elaborated what this meant to him: "For
386 assessment one, I took a week off work. That was five days out of my 25 days annual leave.
387 Consistent cycle: when I had time off, I was using it on Stage 2." TSP5 highlighted some of
388 the demands UK TSPs faced in completing their award: "... it shows that motivation and
389 desire to do it [training] that maybe sport psychology trainees have that bit extra because
390 they're not full-time, or the opportunities aren't already existent for them".

391 To cope with the competing demands, most of the TSPs responded by moving into
392 full-time work or study in sport psychology by the final year of training. This allowed them
393 to align their work and practice. Half of the TSP cohort left paid employment to begin
394 doctoral studies in sport psychology during training. TSP6 identified the relationship between
395 education and training:

396 I think that focus on research and critical evaluation [in studying for a PhD] has
397 benefited my applied work because I've been more careful in choosing theories that I
398 apply. I've noticed evidence-based practice has become a stronger value that I've
399 began to hold.

400 Often TSPs aligned their PhD research topic with client groups they had chosen to
401 work with during training, further demonstrating professional individuation. For example,
402 TSP8 had developed his working knowledge and methods in sport psychology support for
403 elite youth athletes. He began a PhD in youth development in his final year of training.

404 In summary, concentrated service delivery (e.g., support at international tournaments)
405 and the competing demands of training and work meant that professional development could
406 feel intermittent. Participants made deliberate choices to improve their training and career
407 prospects by moving into research positions in sport psychology to align their work and
408 practice.

409 **Inter-study Transition**

410 Study I demonstrated some of the ways trainees changed as they gained experience,
411 and the influences on those changes. TSPs' development reflected the process of
412 individuation (i.e., change in working style and theoretical orientation). Personal interactions
413 with clients, peers, and supervisors, and a broadening of influences outside of training
414 influenced individuation. Participants perceived professional development as intermittent and
415 cyclical due to their varied work responsibilities.

416 While Study I findings generate knowledge about TSP practitioner development,
417 Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2012) framework describes development at all career phases (e.g.,
418 novice to senior practitioner). To complement the data provided by the trainees and extend
419 knowledge across the entire career lifespan, we interviewed experienced practitioners
420 multiple times to explore their perspectives on professional development.

421 **Methods Study II**

422 **Participants**

423 The first author obtained approval of the research protocol via an institution ethics
424 committee. All participants read an information sheet detailing the study's purposes, benefits,
425 risks, and safeguards and signed an informed consent form prior to their involvement in the
426 study. Five UK-trained experienced sport psychologists (1 woman, 4 men), with ages ranging
427 from 36 to 57 years (mean age 47 years) volunteered to participate in the study. Participants
428 applied a range of theoretical approaches (existential, cognitive-behavioural, and person-
429 centred). The first author purposively sampled participants through her professional network
430 using the following inclusion criteria. Participants: (a) had to have had a minimum of 15
431 years client consulting experience (15 years is defined as the experienced professional career
432 phase by Rønnestad & Skovholt [2012]); (b) had to be trained and currently practising in the
433 UK; and (c) had to be BPS-chartered and HCPC-registered Sport Psychologists.
434 Practitioners' consulting experience ranged from 15-25 years. ESPs worked primarily in
435 university settings in lecturing, research, and leadership capacities. Each participant worked
436 at a different university. Participants' consulting experiences were with private (e.g.,
437 professional clubs) and public sports organisations (e.g., national governing bodies) and/or
438 individual athletes (1-2 days per week).

439 **Procedures**

440 The first author interviewed each ESP on two separate occasions with approximately
441 2 months between interviews. Interviews were conducted via a method (e.g., Skype) and
442 setting (e.g., their workplace) chosen by participants.

443 **Interview guides.** Data collection and analysis of TSP interviews were almost
444 complete when the interviews with ESPs began. Interview 1 with ESPs took a broad,
445 historical perspective charting the 15+ years of their development. Question topics were the

471 theme with representative ESP quotations under the thematic subheading with the aim of
472 giving insight into participant's perspectives. In the final section, the discussion, we discuss
473 how themes compared for all participants across both studies and how the research advances
474 understanding of principles guiding development towards expertise.

475 **Professional Development Reflected the Ongoing Process of Individuation**

476 TSPs were exploring theoretical orientations for service delivery whereas ESPs had
477 established their professional philosophies. ESP4 articulated how service delivery felt at the
478 experienced professional phase, "... the work should be an extension of the natural you, but
479 the natural you should equally be informed of what's gone before ..." ESP1 built further on
480 the idea of work as a natural extension of the person in sharing:

481 I could be with people and be relatively relaxed in their company without feeling like
482 'now counselling or sport psychology support has started and now I'm a different
483 person', I didn't feel the need to change ... you are the same person, ... I just don't
484 see the distinction between work personally or professionally.

485 In this quotation, ESP1 described a personal and professional hybrid of himself,
486 which further suggests the individuation process. ESPs embodied their professional
487 philosophy to the extent that they thought and acted in this frame of mind. For example,
488 ESP5 explained,

489 ... the more I read about the cognitive behavioural environment, the more it made
490 sense to me and fitted with my way of working and my character as well ... so the
491 scientific approach, developing a hypothetical mind-set, forming hypotheses and
492 testing whether that was correct, continually adding data to the picture and working
493 with the client in what you call collaborative empiricism, so together you ... solve the
494 issues, ... I liked the idea that to begin with in a cognitive-behavioural way of
495 working the consultant does tend to be more directive, but as the relationship develops

496 it does become more collaborative and that worked with my professional philosophy
497 of empowering ... this suited my understanding of human behaviour and how people
498 change ...

499 Finding a suitable person-theory fit was one contributor to the individuation process.
500 Choosing clients and environments to work in that were compatible with ESPs' personalities
501 and worldviews was a second contributor. Clients and work environments reflected ESPs
502 self-perceptions, just as professional philosophy was an extension of ESPs. For example,
503 ESP5 recognised a shift in her personal values after experiencing health problems with her
504 child. She explained how personal change affected her client choices, "... my motivations
505 have shifted in recent years towards working with individuals who are performing jobs which
506 have obvious societal benefit, so working with medical professionals I'm almost more
507 motivated to do that now than I am with an athlete ...” She realigned her service delivery to
508 work with people beyond sport, which allowed her to find enhanced congruence between her
509 own values and the work environment.

510 ESP3 recognised how his personal characteristics reflected the occupational
511 environment he chose to work in: "... my consultancy in psychology has almost exclusively
512 been with elite performers, that probably says something about me and something about
513 them.” ESP3 had been a professional athlete, and now provided sport psychology support to
514 professional athletes. Elite performance was a territory he was familiar with and people in
515 this domain matched his inner drive to “self-actualise around targets”. He described high
516 achievement motivation and enjoyed working in environments where others matched this
517 drive. In summary, ESPs recognised the role of the self in service delivery choices including
518 professional philosophy, client selection and work environments. Interpersonal relationships
519 (discussed in the next theme) influenced the ESPs' ability to recognise the role of the self in
520 service delivery.

521 Sources of Influence on Development

522 ESPs had internalised many external sources of knowledge (e.g., theoretical approach,
523 supervisor) from training and practice. ESP4 captured how internalised knowledge worked in
524 his applied practice “ ... everything that I’ve ever covered [in training] ... will somehow
525 inform what I say, my understanding of what they [client] say, and it does inform in a unique
526 way each time...” ESP4 recognised that learning from the duration of his career could inform
527 his service delivery from moment-to-moment. ESPs also found that their supervisors (even
528 though they were not physically present throughout their careers) continued to influence them
529 after training as an internalised source. ESP2 recalled a negative effect of this function:
530 “...you get these moments of clarity where you think ‘that’s not me speaking, that’s not what
531 I’d say; I have to find my own way of saying this.’” Participants recognised integrating
532 aspects of their supervisor’s character and practice into their own approaches. ESPs
533 demonstrated individuating by finding their own way of delivering sport psychology services.

534 Like TSPs, peers were still a source of influence for ESPs but peer support was
535 characterised by long-term relationships with one or two particular colleagues. For example,
536 ESP2 shared, “I’ve got [colleague’s name]. ... he’s a better practitioner than me his
537 insight is disarming ... , it’s like ‘how’ve you done that?’ ... I get a lot from informal
538 conversations with [colleague’s name]... we’ve worked together for a long time and it’s
539 implicit.” ESPs found professional nurturing and social support from their peers. ESP5
540 further asserted the importance of peers, but also described a difference in the way she used
541 peer support. She stated, “... at those early stages of development, ... peers are your support
542 system ... as you develop it becomes peer supervision, so 'can I just check my thinking with
543 you?’ so more checking...” Peers from within the sport psychology field were a source of
544 influence for exploring decision-making. ESPs also referred to sources of influence from
545 outside of sport psychology. EPSs cited critical friends who also worked as helping

546 professionals (e.g., doctors, clinical psychologists) as current sources of influence. For
547 example, ESP2 stated, "... there are a couple of Dads from the playground ... they are very
548 experienced psychotherapists ... they are so disarming in their humanity, I learn a lot from
549 [them]. I just have very casual conversations and it turns into something substantive."
550 Participants found that conversations with people who worked in other helping professions
551 were useful to current issues they were working with in service delivery.

552 **Critical life events.** Whereas TSPs used therapy to expand their personal knowledge,
553 ESPs discussed extracting meaning from critical life events to influence their professional
554 practice. As part of the continuing individuation process, ESPs reflected on how critical
555 events interacted with their approach to sport psychology practice. For example, ESP2
556 shared:

557 ... you have moments in your life like your partner getting diagnosed with breast
558 cancer ... I think I listened better. I was so angry with myself for all of that [her
559 illness]; ... I can't take it away, I am relying on lots of other people ... that was
560 recognition that I didn't know what that was like ... and so I now have some empathy,
561 for example, for someone who gets sick with nerves before performance and thinks
562 completely out of control - what do they want from me? They want reassurance, they
563 want me to listen - this is what these people [medics] are doing to me ...

564 ESP2 further shared his observations that his wife's suffering had reconfirmed his
565 beliefs about post-trauma growth and the influence this had on his work with athletes facing
566 difficulty:

567 You see that [suffering] with sports performers ... and you say 'you are going through
568 a shit time at the moment; you are injured, or struggling to get selected ... if I could
569 give you a psychological aspirin right now, one bit of me would want to just to take

570 all of that away, but I am not going to because this is an opportunity to become bullet-
571 proof.’

572 Life events were critical because they had expanded ESPs’ understanding of human
573 functioning. Critical life events also influenced the types of clients ESPs chose to work with
574 by forcing them to consider their identity. For example, ESP5 shared:

575 ... one of my children was diagnosed with a medical condition and that changed my
576 perspective on what is important ... sport isn’t necessarily what it is all about. ...
577 there might be other ways in which we [sport psychologists] can contribute to the
578 bigger picture [society].

579 ESP5 had delivered performance psychology services in forensic science as, in her
580 view, this contributed to “the greater good” as the work could be “of huge benefit to society.”
581 She was describing how a critical life event had influenced her selection of clients to better
582 reflect her values (i.e., that performance psychology could help people beyond sport and in
583 particular, people who helped society).

584 In summary, experiences like those described by ESPs were critical because they
585 threatened ESPs’ self-perceptions. ESPs were forced to address their professional identities
586 by changing something about themselves (i.e., their approach to service delivery or their job).

587 **“Winning Doesn’t Happen in a Straight Line”:** Professional development can be
588 **Intermittent and Cyclical**

589 Similar to TSPs, ESPs conducted their service delivery in sport psychology on an *ad*
590 *hoc* basis. ESPs’ dual-roles (i.e., teaching and research) in academic settings could lead to a
591 sense of variable professional development because of competing work demands.

592 Concentrated periods of work assisted ESPs’ sense of professional development.

593 **Concentrated service delivery.** ESPs described perceptions of enhanced competence
594 through concentrated periods of work with clients. ESP3 shared:

595 ... going to the Commonwealth Games for a month ... it would probably equate to 2-
596 3 years of work where you are seeing someone for an hour a week ... it was an
597 intensive phase of work which meant that your experience grew in terms of the
598 number of interactions

599 Periods of concentrated service delivery such as providing sport psychology at a
600 major event occurred in cycles throughout ESPs' careers. The sense of rapid professional
601 growth was a result of the full-time nature of work leading up to and at major events. For
602 example, ESP5 explained: "... volume can be helpful to build up that bank of experience ...
603 it helps ... to form pattern recognition because the more experiences you have to draw on, the
604 more elaborate your mental models can be about how things operate ..."

605 Participants recognised that accruing experiences intensely over a short duration
606 surpassed the level of development they could achieve in their everyday dual-role as an
607 academic and practitioner. Like the TSPs in Study I, ESPs perceived professional
608 development as intermittent due to cycles of concentrated service delivery being an
609 adjunctive component of their work activities.

610 **Competing demands.** Although ESPs' role overlapped (e.g., lecturing and
611 researching in sport psychology) they recognised the need to engage continuously with
612 service delivery to maintain their practitioner skills. ESP2 stated, "I still have so many hours
613 to log in comparison to medics or clinicians - they are doing this all the time. I'm aware that I
614 get rusty. I need to be practicing..." Similarly, ESP5 confirmed, "I have always maintained
615 an amount of practice, and that is really important because we are practising psychologists
616 ..." A dual-role between academia and applied practice allowed the "eggs to be spread across
617 the baskets" (ESP1). In other words, these ESPs received job security from an academic role,
618 and could engage in cycles of applied work to maintain their practitioner skills. ESPs

619 operated in dual-roles due to perceived limited full-time opportunities to practice sport
620 psychology.

621 Although ESPs spent “less time on the job”, (ESP5) they recognised the benefits of
622 having a dual-role. ESP5 evaluated:

623 ... it forces you to keep in with what's current in psychological science, to keep up to
624 speed with what is best practice, what is the current evidence ... because one thing
625 about performance is that everyone wants the edge, so ‘how else can I ... get another
626 gain,’ because if you keep doing the same old, you are going to get the same old ...

627 Similarly, ESP4 recognised that he maintained himself as the instrument of service
628 delivery by working in what he termed “a hybrid role”:

629 ... without maintaining the development of me through academic engagement, I think
630 I might have run dry and not be as good at what I do. ... you don't have to be attached
631 to a university but it helps ... where you're detached to some degree from the normal
632 rhythm of life and ... at least it is a space where you can go and contemplate, where
633 you can think, where you can read, where you can talk to other people without an
634 immediate answer being necessary because you're not living primarily in that world
635 [sport].

636 In summary, across the two studies applied sport psychology was a supplementary
637 portion of participants' careers. As applied sport psychology was not participants' primary
638 focus, they perceived professional development as intermittent. Participants believed their
639 diverse work activities in academic settings contributed to their applied practice.

640 **Discussion**

641 The two studies extend the literature by demonstrating the dynamic nature of the
642 individuation process across the career span. In these studies, individuation was a process
643 where individuals developed their service delivery styles by personalising theories and

644 methods learned from self-selected sources of influence. Interpreted as a whole, results from
645 our multi-study research suggest that individuation is a fluid process that is continually
646 contributing to practitioner's identities based upon their personal and professional
647 experiences.

648 Given previous work has focused largely on trainees *or* experienced practitioners
649 (e.g., Simons & Andersen, 1995; Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2009), the results from the
650 current study complement existing research exploring how people mature during and after
651 training in the same study. By examining development in TSPs and ESPs, the current
652 research extends the existing professional development literature (e.g., Hutter, Oldenhof-
653 Veldman, Pijpers, & Oudejans, 2017) by documenting the principles guiding career
654 development towards expertise (e.g., the ongoing deliberate nature of individuation) across
655 the career span. To summarise a main finding on the differences in focus on individuation,
656 TSPs adjusted themselves to the job of sport psychology, whereas ESPs adjusted the job to
657 themselves.

658 Our findings demonstrate how the individuation process works in TSPs and ESPs.
659 The individuation process reflects practitioners developing service delivery styles reflective
660 of their personalities and the theoretical orientations resonating with their worldviews. They
661 are also making choices about what jobs they want to have and what clients they wish to
662 serve (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012; Tod, 2017). Existing research demonstrates the initial
663 steps novice professionals have taken along the individuation process (e.g., Lindsay,
664 Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard, 2007). For example, Hutter et al. (2017) found that TSPs
665 personalised methods and techniques taught in classes. In Study I, TSPs felt anxious about
666 personalising and applying psychological knowledge. TSPs took steps to resolve their anxiety
667 through interpersonal contact (e.g., peer relationships), which gave them confidence to
668 experiment and progress in individuation. Findings from Study I demonstrate the active role

669 TSPs take in self-selecting sources and activities to contribute deliberately to their
670 individuation. Personal development peer networks embedded in training programmes may
671 be of benefit to facilitate trainees' and neophyte practitioners' personal and professional
672 growth. Such a network could create opportunities for individuals at the early stages of their
673 career to learn about themselves and themselves in relation to others (McEwan & Tod, 2015).

674 Individuation emerged through inter – and intra – personal reflections. Interpersonal
675 relationships with peers, clients, and therapists were examples of people who helped TSPs to
676 understand and shape their service delivery. For example, TSPs engaged with personal
677 therapy as an additional training exercise. Therapy influenced theoretical individuation as
678 TSPs reflected on the parallel processes that were occurring (e.g., TSPs were thinking about
679 how they experienced empathy from their therapist and how they might apply those
680 reflections to their service delivery practices). TSPs in Study I who participated in their own
681 personal therapy reported parallel processes between their TSP/therapist dyad and what
682 happened in their TSP/client dyad. There is scope to investigate further the parallel processes
683 phenomenon in sport psychology. For example, research on parallel processes in clinical
684 supervision found that the more facilitative the supervisor's interpersonal style, the less
685 domineering and controlling the trainee was in how they related to their clients (Bernard &
686 Goodyear, 2009). Future research may examine how trainees use parallel processes from both
687 personal therapy and supervision in service delivery with clients. Finally, practitioners at all
688 levels may wish to consider how therapy can assist the interaction of personal and
689 professional experiences for their ongoing professional functioning. For example, personal
690 therapy may provide a place for practitioners to examine the influence of life events (e.g.,
691 personal trauma, family crises) on work role and theoretical orientation. Practitioners may
692 also use therapy to identify one's own nontherapeutic characteristics and to remedy blind
693 spots.

694 Our findings demonstrate that for continued professional development, participants
695 included sources of influence external to sport psychology. Individuals were filtering sources
696 of influence dependent on their current needs. For example, early in training TSPs engaged in
697 personal therapy for pedagogical reasons (i.e., modelling of how to be a psychologist). Later
698 in training, TSPs explored more complex issues of personal development (e.g., transference)
699 than previously worked on with their therapists. People who could help them to cope with
700 their current challenges also influenced ESPs (e.g., friends who were psychotherapists). Tod
701 et al. (2011) found that post-training, individuals chose sources from general psychology
702 because their work involved issues other than performance enhancement. Our work
703 demonstrates that *during* training, TSPs were selecting sources of influence external to
704 training to understand concepts beyond performance enhancement (e.g., acceptance), and to
705 assist with integrating life experiences into their approach to service delivery (e.g., marriage).
706 This development may reflect the formation of an autonomous therapeutic identity. Further,
707 the preference for nondiscipline sources of knowledge (e.g., film, politics) may increase
708 further with professional experience (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012).

709 Intra-personal reflections on life experiences (e.g., the terminal illness of a partner)
710 influenced participants' identities and their approaches to service delivery. Continuous
711 reflection, especially on challenges, is required for lifelong learning and development
712 (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012). The notion of a practitioner's own life as a source of data for
713 practice is an established phenomenon in counselling (e.g., Goldfried, 2001). In a review
714 article, Poczwardowski (2017) acknowledged the dynamic blend between personal material
715 (e.g., health issues) and daily functioning as a sport psychologist. Findings from Study II
716 provide empirical evidence from ESPs on how personal material affected professional
717 functioning.

718 Our results demonstrate that TSPs were deliberately attempting to understand how
719 their personal changes affected their professional functioning. Previous work has stated that
720 TSPs' capacities for the integration of personal and professional identities increases post-
721 training (Tod et al., 2009), as they are less controlled by external standards (McEwan & Tod,
722 2015; Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2011; Tod & Bond, 2010). Our results suggest that TSPs
723 are making deliberate attempts to individuate during training (e.g., TSP7 trying to understand
724 how marriage may affect him by seeking personal therapy).

725 There is scope to evidence further the integration between personal and professional
726 development in sport psychologists. In a review of literature on the professional practice of
727 sport psychologists dating back over 30 years, Fortin-Guichard, Boudreault, Gagnon, and
728 Trotter (2018) reported the most frequently studied topics as: what sport psychologists know
729 (e.g., cognitive behavioural approach) and what they do (e.g., teaching life skills to athletes).
730 Tod et al. (2017) define effective practitioners by what they know, what they can do, and who
731 they are as individuals. The recognition of the role of the self in sport psychology service
732 delivery has been limited to nontheoretical accounts (e.g., McCarthy & Jones, 2013), making
733 it difficult to extrapolate results broadly due to the lack of guiding frameworks or
734 trustworthiness checks associated with qualitative research. Life histories could advance
735 present findings, by providing further insights into the processes that contribute to
736 individuation (e.g., experiences, events).

737 Our analyses conceptualised professional growth as characterised by intermittent
738 cycles with reoccurring themes (e.g., concentrated service delivery and an enhanced sense of
739 competence). Sport psychologists' development may reflect that of athletes where progress is
740 characterised as cyclical involving both regressive and further progressive patterns because
741 opportunities for full-time employment in sport psychology are limited (Fitzpatrick, Monda,
742 & Wooding, 2016). In another UK study, Champ (2017) compared her career development as

743 a sport psychologist to the rocky road (Collins & MacNamara, 2012) of an athletic career.
744 Both athletes and sport psychologists operate in competitive, performance-focused
745 environments where the culture of these environments (e.g., short-term, athlete-performance
746 based contracts) may reflect the cycles of development detectable in practitioners' career
747 journeys. Future research could examine the reciprocal relationship between practitioners and
748 their environments as part of the individuation process. For example, ESPs changed the way
749 they operated at work due to events in their personal lives and individual changes may also be
750 experienced as a function of their work environment. Challenging environments (e.g., elite
751 sport), may require practitioners to work in a particular way to achieve standards
752 (McDougall, Nesti, & Richardson, 2015).

753 This research has contributed to an understanding of how and why UK sport
754 psychologists develop across two career phases. Further examination of TSPs as they move
755 into the novice professional phase (2-5 years post-training) may expand the current research
756 by helping to identify development challenges and patterns that can inform training.
757 Comparing results from a UK study with Tod et al.'s (2011) work in an Australian context
758 may also demonstrate the generalisability of findings (i.e. people training in different contexts
759 experience similar development). If practitioners from different cultures and contexts find the
760 current research to be meaningful (credibility principle f above) then the findings may be
761 transferable (Smith, 2018).

762 From an applied perspective, our findings may be generalizable to practitioners by
763 considering how they deliberately engage or assist in the ongoing developmental task of
764 individuation. To assist individuation, trainees may consider engaging in personal therapy
765 with an explicit focus on the 'inside out' (e.g., natural attributes and limits, life experiences).
766 This ongoing exercise (e.g., recognising biases, prejudices) could lead to a fuller knowledge
767 of oneself and help TSPs find coherence between their characteristics, theoretical, and

768 technical aspects of service delivery. With peers and supervisors, trainees may find it a useful
769 exercise to share their core values and beliefs and how this underpins their service delivery.
770 Practitioners of all experience levels could discuss how beliefs about their own characteristics
771 might encourage them to work in a certain way because that is how they view themselves. An
772 ongoing topic of discussion between supervisors and trainees could then be how internal
773 factors are influencing external methods (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012). Experiencing an
774 open and honest attitude during supervision may lead to a parallel process (e.g., where
775 trainees explore personal qualities with their clients without the need to change them but to
776 recognise them as the basis for development).

777 Practitioners may consider how their current life roles (e.g., family) and experiences
778 (e.g., aging) form part of their identity. Similar to TSPs in Study I, practitioners may consider
779 how changing roles (e.g., becoming a spouse, or moving from athlete to practitioner)
780 influences identity and service delivery. Developing a greater sense of one's own identity is
781 part of the developmental process (Kaslow & Rice, 1985). Trainees may engage with the
782 individuation process by choosing experiences that complement who they are rather than just
783 doing what is required. Supervisors may help trainees feel successful through the
784 acknowledgement of the trainee's individual identity and individualised training.

785 There is little research on the individuation process at different career phases in sport
786 psychologists. Findings in this paper contribute to understanding the person behind the
787 practice by suggesting that the individuation process can be a deliberate endeavour influenced
788 by discipline and nondiscipline specific influences. The process is also characterised by
789 intermittent development and cycles of reoccurring themes (e.g., concentrated serviced
790 delivery and an enhanced sense of competence). Our results may be guiding for practitioners
791 at all career phases by drawing their attention to the influences on the optimisation of the self
792 in service delivery.

793

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