

## Practitioners' use of motivational interviewing in sport: A qualitative enquiry

MACK, Rory, BRECKON, Jeff <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4911-9814>>, BUTT, Joanne <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0477-894X>> and MAYNARD, Ian <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2010-5072>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/27466/>

---

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

### Published version

MACK, Rory, BRECKON, Jeff, BUTT, Joanne and MAYNARD, Ian (2021). Practitioners' use of motivational interviewing in sport: A qualitative enquiry. *The Sport Psychologist*, 35 (1), 72-82.

---

### Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

1 Practitioners' use of motivational interviewing in sport: A qualitative enquiry

2

3 Submission date: 21/11/2019

4 Resubmission date: 01/07/2020

5 Resubmission date: 04/08/2020

6 Final submission date: 21/08/2020

7

8

9 Please review under Professional Practice

10

**Abstract**

11 The purpose of this study was to explore the use of motivational interviewing (MI) in  
12 sport contexts by experts in that approach. Specifically, to understand which aspects  
13 of the MI approach are deemed valuable for working in sport, and begin to  
14 understand how these aspects are best applied. Nine practitioners participated in  
15 semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis identified themes related to core  
16 and sub-components of MI (e.g., relational spirit, technical microskills, applied tools  
17 and the MI communication styles continuum). Additional themes relate to integrating  
18 MI with other interventions, challenges of working with athletes (e.g., mandated  
19 attendance, ambivalence about change) and unique aspects of working in sport  
20 contexts (e.g., frequency, duration and location of contact points). Participants also  
21 outlined essential ingredients for an MI training curriculum for practitioners in sport.  
22 This counseling approach appears to have valuable relational and technical  
23 components to facilitate the building of the therapeutic alliance, enhance athlete  
24 readiness for change, and support delivery of action-orientated interventions in  
25 applied sport psychology.

26 Key words: *motivational interviewing; applied sport psychology; therapeutic*  
27 *alliance; ambivalence; integration*

## 28 Introduction

29 The relationship between sport psychology practitioners and their athlete  
30 clients is consistently recognised as very important for the outcomes of sport  
31 psychology consultancy, (e.g., Andersen & Speed, 2010; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish,  
32 1999; Sharp, Hodge, & Danish, 2015). Nevertheless, what is required in the  
33 discipline is greater clarity on how to cultivate and maintain these working alliances,  
34 beyond broad descriptions of rapport building and verbal and non-verbal  
35 communication. In this regard, repeated recommendations have been made for sport  
36 psychology to learn from wider disciplines within psychology (Andersen & Speed,  
37 2010; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999), with limited sources delineating specific  
38 relational and technical communication skills for sport psychologists (e.g., Katz &  
39 Hemmings, 2009; Longstaff & Gervis, 2016; Murphy & Murphy, 2010; Watson,  
40 Hilliard, & Way, 2017).

41 One approach which seeks to maximise the working alliance, and is starting  
42 to receive attention in applied sport psychology (Mack, Breckon, Butt, & Maynard,  
43 2017; Mack, Breckon, O'Halloran, & Butt, 2019; Turner et al., 2019, Wood, Mack, &  
44 Turner, 2020), is motivational interviewing (MI; Miller & Rollnick, 2013). MI is a  
45 counseling therapy which was founded on the principles of client-centred  
46 psychotherapy of Carl Rogers (1959), yet is different to traditional Rogerian  
47 counseling, in that it is intentionally directional (Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick,  
48 2005). Guided by its underlying 'spirit', MI primarily facilitates the building of an  
49 interpersonal relationship between practitioner and client, and aims to resolve  
50 ambivalence towards behavioral change. Initially applied as a pre-treatment to  
51 action-orientated intervention work on substance addictions (Miller, 1983), MI was  
52 conceived not from testing empirically-driven hypotheses, but phenomenologically

53 from intuitive clinical practice, as an alternative to the more confrontational styles of  
54 therapy which were prominent at the time (Miller & Rose, 2009).

55 Breckon (2015) offers an extensive description of the core elements of MI: the  
56 relational component (spirit) which consists of partnership, acceptance, compassion  
57 and evocation; the technical component (microskills) which mobilises the spirit,  
58 known by the acronym OARS - open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections,  
59 summaries; the four+ processes (engaging, focussing, evoking, planning,  
60 maintaining) within which the relational and technical components are actualized;  
61 and the language of behavior change (change talk, sustain talk).

62 Psychotherapy research has repeatedly concluded that therapists who form  
63 stronger alliances with their patients show better treatment outcomes than therapists  
64 who form weaker alliances (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2007; Horvath & Symonds, 1991;  
65 Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Wilmots, Midgley, Thackeray, Reynolds, & Loades,  
66 2019). MI acknowledges conceptual differences between relational and technical  
67 components, and offers a philosophy of professional relationship development and  
68 maintenance, and techniques to achieve those aims, in keeping with working alliance  
69 theory (see Hatcher & Barends, 2006). Many of the therapist attributes and  
70 techniques associated with strong alliances reported by Ackerman and Hilsenroth  
71 (e.g., exploring, reflecting, providing accurate interpretations, and affirming; 2003)  
72 can be found within the MI approach (e.g., Miller & Moyers, 2015, Table 1, p. 408;  
73 Miller & Rollnick, 2013), not least the value of empathy and engagement with clients  
74 (Miller & Rose, 2009). Similar attributes and techniques have been repeatedly  
75 outlined as ideal for sport psychology practitioners (e.g., Sharp, Hodge, & Danish,  
76 2015). What appears to be sparse in applied sport psychology literature is not the  
77 importance of demonstrating engagement, forming working alliances and

78 communicating effectively with athletes (e.g., Sharp & Hodge, 2015), but explanation  
79 of the fundamental processes or mechanics of achieving these things, i.e., the *how*  
80 of alliance building and intervention delivery. This is a gap that MI can fill potentially,  
81 particularly for students and neophyte practitioners in sport and exercise psychology.  
82 One further contribution that MI may make to applied sport psychology could be a  
83 framework to underpin the action-orientated approaches, such as cognitive-  
84 behavioral therapies and strategies, which are dominant in the discipline. This  
85 integration was, in fact, the purpose of MI upon its conception, with the MI spirit  
86 (ways of *being*) supporting the techniques (ways of *doing*) of other approaches  
87 (Miller & Rose, 2009). An MI-CBT integration is becoming understood in other areas  
88 of psychology (e.g., Naar & Safren, 2017), and this is perhaps where sport  
89 psychology could seek guidance on how to effectively integrate these complimentary  
90 approaches on a common factors, assimilative or theoretical level, as opposed to  
91 eclectically combining tools and techniques from multiple approaches with little  
92 regard for their underpinning theories (Norcross, Karpiak, & Lister, 2005).

93 Mack and colleagues (2017) identified a limited use and understanding of  
94 core elements of MI by applied sport psychologists, but a significant role for MI in  
95 sport psychologists' work - including the use of MI as a stand-alone or an integration  
96 with other approaches. Subsequently, Mack et al. (2019) shared a single session  
97 case study outlining the use of MI with one professional athlete. Therefore, the aims  
98 of the current study were to provide an in-depth exploration of which components of  
99 the MI approach underpin expert practitioners' work in sport, and to begin the  
100 process of understanding the application of these components, for example to  
101 enhance verbal communication, facilitate alliance formation and maintenance,

102 increase athlete readiness for intervention, or in conjunction with other  
103 psychotherapeutic approaches.

#### 104 **Method**

##### 105 **Participants and sampling**

106 Nine practitioners took part in data collection. To qualify for inclusion,  
107 participants were required to have extensive knowledge of, and experience in  
108 applying MI, and be doing so in a sporting context. The Motivational Interviewing  
109 Network of Trainers (MINT; [www.motivationalinterviewing.org](http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org)) provides training  
110 internationally for practitioners wishing to become trainers in MI, and determines the  
111 content and curriculum for MI training globally. MINT has a rigorous application  
112 process for new members, and membership of MINT was therefore used as an  
113 indication of knowledge and experience in MI, and was deemed essential for  
114 inclusion in this study.

115 A purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of 16 MI practitioners known within the  
116 research team's network, and thought to be using MI in a sporting context, were  
117 contacted via email to participate voluntarily in this study. Further, four practitioners  
118 responded to a public message broadcast on the MINT eForum (self-recruited  
119 sampling; Gomm, 2008) and six practitioners were recommended to the primary  
120 researcher by practitioners from the initial round of sampling (snowball sampling;  
121 Patton, 2002). This represents an exhaustive initial sample, on a global scale, of  
122 practitioners thought to be applying MI in a sporting context. Of these 26  
123 practitioners, 17 were eliminated due to failing to satisfy inclusion criteria, or being  
124 unresponsive to repeated requests to participate. This gave a final sample size of  
125 nine participants, based around the world (two in Australia; five in the U.S.A.; two in  
126 mainland Europe). Participants came from a range of educational and training

127 backgrounds, including clinical psychology (n=1), health psychology (n=1), sport  
128 psychology (n=3), counseling (n=2) and sport coaching (n=2). All participants were  
129 members of chartered societies and governing bodies of their relevant fields (e.g.,  
130 Australian Psychological Society; Southern Association for Counselor Education and  
131 Supervision; National Association of Social Workers). Finally, all participants were  
132 applying MI in a sporting context, in roles such as head coach, sport psychologist,  
133 addictions counselor, and MI trainer. The sample comprised of seven males and two  
134 females, aged between 32 and 53 years ( $41.2 \pm 6$  years). Participants had between  
135 4 and 23 years of experience ( $13.2 \pm 6.9$  years) in their respective fields. Finally,  
136 participants were working with a range of athletes, including amateur (e.g., club, high  
137 school), college (e.g., National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)), professional  
138 (e.g., National Football League (NFL); Major League Baseball (MLB); Australian  
139 Football League (AFL)), and Olympic level.

#### 140 **Procedure**

141 Those recruited were sent participant information, participant consent forms  
142 and a demographics questionnaire prior to their interviews. Voluntary, written,  
143 informed consent was received from all participants. Ethical approval was provided  
144 by the governing institution of the research team (HWB-2016-17-S&E-13, Sheffield  
145 Hallam University). Data were collected in the form of semi-structured qualitative  
146 interviews, which were conducted by the principal researcher. The semi-structured  
147 nature of the interviews permitted the interviewer to deviate from the interview guide,  
148 to explore novel concepts as and when they arose (Patton, 2002). Interviews were  
149 conducted using internet-based conferencing software (Zoom; <https://zoom.us/>), as  
150 this was a sample of international participants. All interviews were audio recorded on  
151 a manual Dictaphone. Audio recordings were then transcribed (converted to written



152 form) verbatim, which initiates immersion in, familiarity with and reflection on the  
153 collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2019), and can mark the beginning of the data  
154 analysis process (Emerson & Frosch, 2004).

### 155 **Interview guide**

156 The interview guide was designed deductively, in that it was informed by  
157 existing MI theory, but with flexibility to ask spontaneous, probing questions. Each  
158 member of the research team contributed to the development of the final interview  
159 guide. Questions in the interview guide focused on key aspects of the application of  
160 MI, including the application and relevance (to sport contexts) of MI spirit, MI  
161 technical skills, MI processes, eliciting change talk, managing ambivalence and  
162 discord, and integrating MI with other approaches.

### 163 **Data analysis**

164 As latter participant interviews were being conducted, and former interviews  
165 were being transcribed verbatim from audio recordings, the primary researcher  
166 began to suspect that data saturation (e.g., Saunders et al., 2018) had been reached.  
167 This was due to a repetition of responses given by participants in earlier interviews.  
168 Therefore, additional participants were not initially sought prior to commencement of  
169 data analysis. This impression of data saturation was strengthened as interview  
170 transcription was completed, and after performing several initial sweeps of the  
171 transcriptions to become familiar with the data, though without being pre-emptive  
172 regarding what would eventually constitute themes (Saunders et al., 2018). Data  
173 saturation was subsequently discussed and agreed upon within the research team  
174 as data analysis progressed.

175 In order to gain a clear understanding of how MI is being applied in sport, a  
176 deductive to inductive thematic analysis of the data was conducted in two phases

177 (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019) by the primary researcher. In line with  
178 the deductively-designed, a priori interview questions determined by broad MI core  
179 components and language (e.g., Miller & Rollnick, 2013) an initial deductive sweep  
180 of the data was performed. The purpose of this was to identify responses related to  
181 the MI core components of spirit (e.g., partnership, empathy), microskills (e.g.,  
182 reflections, affirmations), four+ processes (e.g., engaging, focussing) and language  
183 of change (e.g., change talk, sustain talk). In the second phase, transcripts were  
184 analysed inductively to identify, analyse and report novel themes from the data  
185 (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) which did not fall immediately within the MI  
186 core components, such as communication styles and traps to avoid, and applied  
187 tools of MI.

188         The primary researcher extracted codes consisting of discrete, original  
189 participant responses from interview transcripts, and grouped codes of similar  
190 meaning to create sub-themes, using spreadsheet software (Microsoft Excel). A  
191 similar process was executed on a sample of interview transcripts by other members  
192 of the research team. Sub-themes were discussed, discrepancies were addressed  
193 and codes were re-grouped within the research team, until consensus was reached  
194 that the shared meaning of codes within each sub-theme was consistent, and had  
195 been labelled appropriately (Braun & Clarke, 2019). A similar process took place to  
196 group sub-themes in order to construct themes, and to label themes in ways which  
197 both accurately captured theme content and would be most meaningful for the  
198 reader. The research team included two practitioners who are trained in MI, and two  
199 who are not, whose analysis of interview transcripts was therefore not lead by prior  
200 MI knowledge. This assisted with reducing researcher bias in the data analysis.

201 Throughout the analysis, MI-specific language has been used where possible  
202 to label themes and subthemes, to maintain clarity and consistency with existing MI  
203 literature, and the MI practitioner training process. Novel themes which were  
204 constructed were labelled accordingly with new terminology. In keeping with previous  
205 articles (e.g., Sharp, Hodge, & Danish, 2019) themes and sub-themes are presented  
206 briefly in Tables 1-4, in conjunction with thick descriptive quotes from participants to  
207 provide detail and context for the reader. Quotes were chosen based on how  
208 accurately they captured the shared meaning of the theme or sub-theme they  
209 represent, and those which would provide the most meaning, context and clarity for  
210 the reader. Consideration was given to the eight criteria for excellence in qualitative  
211 research (worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant  
212 contribution, ethics, meaningful coherence) in the design, implementation, analysis  
213 and reporting of this research (Tracy, 2010). To give one example of this, to  
214 represent the perspectives and contributions of the entire sample, quotations from all  
215 nine participants, rather than a select few individuals, were chosen to add detail and  
216 context to the themes for the reader (multivocality, contained within credibility; Tracy,  
217 2010). Participants have been identified with a label in accordance with their  
218 professional role (e.g., Psychologist 1).

## 219 **Results**

220 Participants highlighted numerous aspects of the MI approach which feature  
221 prominently in their applied work in sport, including the four core components of MI,  
222 the applied tools of MI, sharing information and expertise with athletes in an MI-  
223 consistent manner, relational and technical traps to avoid, and the MI verbal  
224 communication styles continuum. Participants also described their consideration of  
225 structure and processes of integrating MI with other approaches or interventions, and

226 several aspects of the MI approach which are relevant to working with athletes in  
227 brief contact, or as a team. A number of challenges associated with working in sport  
228 settings, and unique aspects of the sport environment, which give rise to  
229 opportunities for implementing the MI approach, were also described. Finally,  
230 participants shared insights on what are considered to be essential ingredients and  
231 structure of MI training for sport psychologists.

### 232 **Core components of MI (Table 1)**

233 All nine participants commented on the four core components of MI (spirit;  
234 technical skills; four processes; language of change; see Table 1), indicating that  
235 these are paramount in their work with athletes, and felt these would be relevant  
236 regardless of the context of their work. A summary of these can be seen in Table 1.  
237 All participants indicated that the spirit of MI was essential to their work with athletes,  
238 was something which drew them to the MI approach and something upon which they  
239 placed great value. For example, Psychologist 2 said, "I use a lot of MI with athletes,  
240 but one thing I always, always use is the spirit. To me, that's the most critical  
241 component."

242 Participants spoke of the importance of each of the technical skills, primarily complex  
243 reflections and affirmations:

244 *I think what the MI training did for me was really help me sharpen my use of*  
245 *reflections, in particular complex reflections. I've really noticed a difference*  
246 *when I've been working with clients in terms of how much quicker it is to*  
247 *engage with the client now, and how we're getting better results than I was*  
248 *previously. [Psychologist 2]*

249 Psychologist 1 described affirmations as "something that is specific and that you're  
250 observing that's positive about an internal quality that they have." All participants

251 reported their use of the original four processes model (engage, focus, evoke, plan)  
252 and several spoke of a phase of maintenance or troubleshooting, which has been  
253 proposed elsewhere for addition to the original model as a fifth process (maintain),  
254 known as the four+ processes (Breckon, 2015). Participants were asked to elaborate  
255 on how they specifically apply these processes with athletes. Two points in particular  
256 were clear and recurring; firstly, that engaging is something which is ever-present,  
257 regardless of the stage in the relationship or the intervention. And secondly, that the  
258 processes do not take place in a linear, stepwise manner, but rather in a fluid,  
259 flexible, non-linear manner:

260 *Let's say suddenly the athlete comes up with some kind of sustain talk that*  
261 *gives us a hint that maybe we are too far now in the process, do we really*  
262 *have the right focus here, since here comes a lot of sustain talk? Should we*  
263 *proceed to help this person resolve ambivalence, or should we maybe take it*  
264 *a bit slower and just do a big mapping of the athlete's whole situation and see*  
265 *what's the most important focus right now? Maybe we were a bit too quick*  
266 *when we tried to move further on... it's not a step by step process.*

267 [Psychologist 4]

268 Regarding the language of change, participants referred specifically to change talk  
269 (athlete language in favour of behavior change), sustain talk (athlete language  
270 against behavior change), ambivalence (athlete language which indicates mixed  
271 feelings about behavior change) and resistance (athlete language which indicates a  
272 lack of readiness for behavior change). All participants stated that they are  
273 constantly listening to the language being used by their athletes regarding behavior  
274 change, and become more attuned to this the more they practise MI. Participants are  
275 consciously trying to evoke change talk from their athletes, as well as trying to

276 reinforce it upon hearing it. Several participants indicated that they are deliberate  
277 and selective in their responses to athlete sustain talk, opting to stay strengths-  
278 orientated and frame their responses in a way that will evoke change talk rather than  
279 reinforce sustain talk. It was acknowledged that change talk in particular tends to  
280 come primarily in the form of 'preparatory' language:

281 *The form that I hear the most in terms of change talk is usually more of that*  
282 *preparatory change talk, that desire to change, or 'I need to change' or 'I*  
283 *should change', 'I should study more at night', 'I know I shouldn't be partying',*  
284 *'I know I should go talk to the trainer about this injury', it's a lot of that.*

285 [Counselor 1]

286 Participants generally stated that their work with athletes is primarily about applying  
287 MI in sport as they would in other settings, as opposed to a sport-specific version of  
288 MI being required. For example, Coach 2 would ask themselves, "how effective is  
289 this, how can I use MI, the techniques or the spirit, how can MI help this conversation,  
290 this coaching session be better?" Nevertheless, participants indicated that an  
291 intimate understanding of elite sport environments and challenges is essential, as  
292 well as athlete cultures, norms, pressures, risks and rewards. It was felt that  
293 adaptations to the MI approach may have to be made in order to fit with these, and  
294 opportunities to apply MI in sport settings may have to be actively sought. Another  
295 participant described MI as "home base", and stated, "...if I'm confused at where we  
296 are, or where we're going, I always just go back to MI" [Counselor 2]. To that end,  
297 participants commented further on how MI enhances their work in sport settings,  
298 including applied tools, sharing information and expertise, traps to avoid, challenges  
299 of working with athletes, unique aspects of the sport context, brief MI interactions,

300 the communication styles continuum, using MI with teams, integrating MI with sport  
301 interventions, and MI training.

### 302 **MI Applied tools (Table 2)**

303 Participants referred to several tools from the MI approach, the most common  
304 of which were scaling rulers, agenda setting, and elicit-provide (with permission) -  
305 elicit (E-P-E; see discussion for description).

306 *I think that [collaborative agenda setting] does a couple of really useful*  
307 *things... you're getting a sense of what is most important for the athlete, and*  
308 *often we make assumptions about 'ah yes they'd like to work on this first', or*  
309 *'this is most important', but by agenda setting, we're essentially asking them*  
310 *'ok what's most important for you right now?', and they're then giving us that*  
311 *feedback which is really valuable. [Psychologist 2]*

### 312 **MI-consistent sharing information and expertise (Table 2)**

313 Participants reflected that the E-P-E format is a valuable and efficient tool for  
314 sharing key information with athletes in a respectful and collaborative manner, and  
315 that it can be used in conjunction with more instructional or educational approaches,  
316 to share information in an MI-adherent manner:

317 *I think that it's much more effective if you offer it in that MI-consistent way, that*  
318 *E-P-E, asking what they know about imagery, cognitive rehearsal, asking if*  
319 *they've used it before and getting some input about that. Then saying 'would*  
320 *you like to hear more about it' if they don't have much knowledge about it and*  
321 *how it can work, then asking if it would be useful for them and in what way.*  
322 *When you do that, you get greater buy-in. [Psychologist 2]*

**323 Relational and technical traps to avoid (Table 2)**

324 Participants spoke of 'traps to avoid' from the MI approach, including the  
325 'expert trap' (and associated 'righting reflex') and the 'premature focus trap'.  
326 One participant gave a specific example of conflicting feelings and concerns  
327 between them and an athlete who was playing through a potentially career-ending  
328 injury, and highlights how priorities can be completely different between stakeholders.  
329 This example contains the expert trap and righting reflex, sustain talk, acceptance  
330 and equipoise (Miller & Rollnick, 2013):

331 *I had this gut feeling of 'oh my gosh, I just want this guy to get an MRI, I want*  
332 *this guy to get healthy so he can dominate at the next level' but he really felt*  
333 *so much like 'if I go through this and tell my coach that I'm hurt, I'm losing*  
334 *eligibility, I'm afraid I'm going to miss out on being drafted, if I rehab I may not*  
335 *get the velocity on my fastball that I had before', so it's hard for me in those*  
336 *instances when I feel like 'I know what's best for you', and I need to leave that*  
337 *feeling at the door and be willing to sit with that sustain talk, sit with some of*  
338 *that resistance to change, and honour it some, rather than push and go*  
339 *'you've really got to get this fixed, you need to figure this out, you need to be*  
340 *honest with your coach' because I'm not in his shoes, I'm so removed from*  
341 *being there. [Counselor 1]*

342 Participants also described differences between praising (i.e., attaching value or  
343 making judgements about behavioral or performance outcomes) and affirming (i.e.,  
344 enhancing self-efficacy, self-exploration and autonomy), and spoke generally of  
345 always striving to affirm rather than praise. Nevertheless, one participant explained  
346 being conscious of using both praise and affirmation in their role as a coach:



347 *I use praise as a coach, and I think most coaches do, 'nice hitting, nice job*  
 348 *there', but one thing that motivational interviewing has caused me to do is ask*  
 349 *a question like 'how do you think that went?' and I go into MI from there, so an*  
 350 *affirmation that I'll give them would be along the lines of 'you're thinking about*  
 351 *this more deeply' or 'you're taking this more seriously'... [Coach 2]*

### 352 **MI communication styles continuum (Table 2)**

353 Two participants, both of whom are coaches, commented on the directing-  
 354 guiding-following continuum of communication, and how they attempt to stay mostly  
 355 in the guiding style. The first of these participants acknowledged that this is openly  
 356 discussed between coaches during their coaching sessions:

357 *I think it's important to have a guiding style, like 95% of the time... And I talk to*  
 358 *my colleagues about this as well, 'we have to be more guiding now', 'now is*  
 359 *time to be more directive'. Often if we have been directive we have to go*  
 360 *quickly back to the guiding style. [Coach 1]*

361 The other participant acknowledged that there are times when they have to be  
 362 directive in their role, but limit this to when necessary, and described a conscious  
 363 process of "slipping in and out" of the MI approach [Coach 2].

### 364 **Brief contact MI interactions (Table 2)**

365 The unique settings and circumstances of sport contexts (see Table 3) give  
 366 rise to conversations which participants stated could last as little as 30 seconds. This  
 367 has led participants to recognise the need to be able to interact with athletes in a  
 368 carefully considered way in these very brief moments:

369 *Sometimes these conversations are two minutes long, but starting with that*  
 370 *open-ended question, 'what were you thinking here, what was the plan?', or if*  
 371 *I go out to the mound with a pitcher who is struggling, it's really trying to*

372 *understand better, instead of saying 'this is what you need to do, here's what*  
373 *you should be doing'. [Coach 2]*

#### 374 **Using MI with teams (Table 2)**

375 Several participants acknowledged that this was perhaps an area to which  
376 they should give more consideration. Nevertheless, two participants were able to  
377 give specific examples of their use of MI with teams. Psychologist 5 spoke in detail of  
378 their use of MI during team sessions, for example a session to resolve conflict  
379 between players and a coach:

380 *... this team meeting, I spent 90% of it reflecting back to them. A lot of it was,*  
381 *'so you don't feel like the coach is listening to you; it's frustrating that he's not*  
382 *asking you all what you think and just telling you what to do; so he's frustrating*  
383 *you because he's moving you to new positions and he's not telling you why',*  
384 *those kinds of things. And it built engagement like I haven't seen.*

385 [Psychologist 5]

#### 386 **Integrating MI with other interventions in sport (Table 2)**

387 The suitability of MI for integrating with other approaches or interventions in  
388 sport was highlighted by all participants, who felt that as a minimum, the spirit, the  
389 technical skills and listening for change talk would probably be relevant in any  
390 circumstance:

391 *I haven't really come across any mainstream approach that's incompatible*  
392 *with motivational interviewing. People can find some way to weave it in there*  
393 *in some form or fashion. [Psychologist 3]*

394 When it comes to the process of integrating MI into one's applied work, what appears  
395 to be essential is having an in-depth understanding of the different approaches being  
396 integrated:

397 *No matter what intervention style I'm doing, I always have motivational*  
398 *interviewing running in the background, and I was trained in person-centred*  
399 *therapy and existential psychotherapy and then moved into the more CBT-ish*  
400 *kind of stuff, and it [MI] just fits really well. [Psychologist 3]*

401 This participant also spoke of two options for integrating MI with an approach like  
402 CBT or interpersonal therapy, either as preparation for another intervention, or  
403 applied extemporarily when faced with, for example, ambivalence:

404 *One is you just kind of do it as a precursor to CBT and then the other one is*  
405 *you look at the common elements and you blend them together and I think*  
406 *you could take a utilitarian approach. [Psychologist 3]*

407 Three participants shared more details of how they would integrate MI with another  
408 approach for the duration of an intervention. Psychologist 2 described a framework  
409 for underpinning action-orientated intervention work such as cognitive-behavioral  
410 strategies:

411 *I see MI as the kind of framework for working with the athlete, and then*  
412 *cognitive behavioral strategies might be some of the tools that you use within*  
413 *that framework, so your mindset of working with the athlete is very much*  
414 *about the spirit of MI, you're using some of the techniques of MI and so forth,*  
415 *and then you're using the CB strategies, and you're delivering them within that*  
416 *framework. [Psychologist 2]*

417 Psychologist 4 described how their work was 'topped and tailed' with more MI-  
418 specific work, and how MI was used to support a middle phase of intervention  
419 delivery:

420 *... I think I always start from MI in my approach, to explore the situation and*  
421 *the goal and so on... Then I'm combining my work with strategies from*

422 *cognitive behavioral coaching, for example using mindfulness... MI is always*  
 423 *helpful to strengthen the readiness and to strengthen the feeling of how*  
 424 *important this is, and to strengthen confidence also... I always have a follow-*  
 425 *up session two or three months after the last session, and in that follow-up*  
 426 *session of course a lot of MI is the focus. [Psychologist 4]*

427 Counselor 2 indicated both an MI-intensive period at commencement of the  
 428 relationship, and the ever-present nature of MI in their work:

429 *I tend to be heavy on MI in the beginning, because I think the spirit is what*  
 430 *really creates the most fruitful relationship... after five or six sessions, we're*  
 431 *moving into mindfulness strategies or CBT, or for some a lot of traumatic*  
 432 *experiences come up, so we'll move into strategies to work through that. [MI]*  
 433 *is always interwoven, especially if emotions get high and an athlete needs a*  
 434 *break, I'll go right back to just basic reflections, that's 'home base'. [Counselor*  
 435 *2]*

### 436 **Challenges of working with athletes (Table 3)**

437 Several participants spoke of the challenges of working with athletes,  
 438 including mandated attendance, coaches wanting to know the content of sessions,  
 439 stigma attached to mental health and psychology, athletes not being used to  
 440 answering questions or having opinions, and athletes being mistrusting of 'outsiders'.  
 441 The MI core components of spirit and technical skills were repeatedly highlighted as  
 442 primary strategies in overcoming many of these challenges.

443 *I have found that I have to lay a lot more groundwork in terms of establishing*  
 444 *rapport and trust with athletes than I do with most of my other clients... they're*  
 445 *so consumed with their responsibilities to the team that I'm like an outsider... it*  
 446 *takes time to inspire trust. [Counselor 2]*

**447 Unique aspects of the sport context (Table 3)**

448 Several participants acknowledged that interactions in sport take place in  
449 settings which are very different to other contexts (e.g., healthcare), including locker  
450 rooms, training grounds, gyms and corridors. Additionally, participants acknowledged  
451 that contact with athletes can occur with reduced frequency and significantly reduced  
452 duration compared with other settings. Examples of these include half time, time-  
453 outs and in-game situations, such as visiting a pitcher's mound during a baseball  
454 game. Psychologist 4 labelled these conversations as "MI on the go". Participant 9  
455 highlighted how most MI work takes place 'out of the moment', for example treatment  
456 for alcohol addiction, but working in sport can involve working 'in the moment', in  
457 situations which have literally just taken place, referred to here as 'hot' issues:

458 *... in baseball we're doing it often right in the moment... sometimes it's not*  
459 *even after, it's in the midst of it, if it's a pitcher and I've visited the mound to*  
460 *talk to him and he's struggling through something, and you're right in the*  
461 *middle of it... we use this metaphor it's 'hot', it's a hot issue and they're feeling*  
462 *it. [Coach 2]*

**463 MI training for sport psychologists (Table 4)**

464 Participants cited several aspects of the approach as being essential for  
465 training curricula for practitioners. Firstly, there was consensus from all participants  
466 that the MI core components and their constituent parts were paramount, and would  
467 need to be covered and understood in depth. Auxiliary components of the approach  
468 which were mentioned include the righting reflex, elicit-provide-elicited, demonstrating  
469 accurate empathy, maintaining practitioner equipoise (consciously deciding not to  
470 use professional expertise to influence an athlete's decision in a direction the  
471 practitioner views as optimal), and how to integrate MI with other strategies.

472 Practitioners indicated that this should be achieved through a combination of  
473 context-specific methods, including experiential exercises, case studies, and video  
474 samples. Further, Psychologist 2 commented on the sequence of training in MI and  
475 other more action-orientated approaches, which potentially has implications for  
476 training pathways:

477 *And then once you have that pure understanding of how this framework [MI]*  
478 *might work, then it'd be introducing the cognitive behavioral strategies,*  
479 *because I think if you do them first, I think that people would often just jump*  
480 *into suggesting those, and not within the framework. So my preference*  
481 *would be to build the MI before the [CB] strategies. [Psychologist 2]*

## 482 **Discussion**

483 The purpose of the current study was to explore the components of MI which  
484 expert practitioners are applying in sport contexts, and begin to describe the  
485 application of these with athletes. Findings revealed ways in which MI can enhance  
486 the work of practitioners working in different roles in sport (e.g., psychologist,  
487 counselor, coach). Participants have confirmed that the four core components of MI  
488 (spirit; technical skills; four processes; language of change) are as pertinent to  
489 working in sport as they are to working in any other setting, something which has  
490 been questioned in previous research (Mack et al., 2017). Significant overlap can be  
491 seen between sub-components of the MI spirit (see Table 1) and components of the  
492 'real relationship' in sport psychology as outlined by Longstaff and Gervis (2016),  
493 indicating that MI is one way for students, neophyte and established practitioners to  
494 develop and maintain these relational aspects of their practice.

495 The MI technical skills mobilise this spirit, helping practitioners to build  
496 engagement and demonstrate empathy (which are key predictors to success in

497 talking therapies; Miller & Rose, 2009), by showing that the practitioner is listening to  
498 what the athlete is saying, doing their best to understand the athlete's perspective,  
499 and prompting a raised consciousness of the actual words they are using, their  
500 meaning and the potential directions of the conversation. In psychotherapy, empathy  
501 is consistently shown to be correlated with client satisfaction and compliance with  
502 treatment, and positive outcomes of treatment, and this was recently shown also to  
503 be the case for athletic trainers working with NCAA athletes (David & Larson, 2018).  
504 Sub-components of the MI technical skills (Table 1) are clearly linked with 'general  
505 counseling skills' for developing relationships with athletes identified by Longstaff  
506 and Gervis (2016). The MI four processes can provide practitioners with a conscious  
507 structure for everything from a single consultancy or coaching session to long-term,  
508 ongoing support, as has previously been suggested (Mack et al., 2019). It was also  
509 highlighted that practitioners are considering a period of maintenance following the  
510 action/intervention phase, which may constitute a fifth process (maintenance and  
511 managing relapse) as proposed by Breckon (2015), and it may benefit practitioners  
512 in sport to be cognizant of maintenance and lapse response when implementing  
513 psychological interventions.

514 Practitioners spoke of constantly listening for opportunities to evoke,  
515 acknowledge or strengthen change talk from their athletes, to increase momentum  
516 towards change. The finding that athletes' change talk is usually preparatory (client  
517 language which expresses perceived desire, ability, reasons or need for behavior  
518 change) rather than mobilizing (client speech which indicates intention, obligation or  
519 steps taken to change behavior; Miller & Rollnick, 2013) shows support for previous  
520 findings on a lack of athlete readiness for change (Massey, Gnacinski, & Meyer,  
521 2015) and that athlete resistance is a crucial but neglected aspect of sport

522 psychology consultancy which should be receiving greater attention (Gardner, 2017).  
523 Barriers to 'gaining entry' to athletes and teams were identified a number of years  
524 ago (Ravizza, 1988), and today there are still factors which can influence an athlete's  
525 attitudes and openness to engaging with sport psychology (e.g., gender, previous  
526 experience, stigma tolerance - see Martin, Zakrajsek, and Wrisberg (2012) for a  
527 summary). Taken together, these findings indicate that sport psychology  
528 practitioners need to be prepared to work with athletes who present initially as  
529 ambivalent or discordant, and to work with this as it arises, responding to sustain talk  
530 and ambivalence in a non-confrontational way (Apodaca et al., 2016). This has  
531 previously been identified as something which is perhaps missing in applied sport  
532 psychology in the UK (Mack et al., 2017), and may begin with a recognition that  
533 sustain talk and ambivalence towards change are naturally-occurring aspects of the  
534 change process (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Miller & Rose, 2009). Athlete reluctance to  
535 engage with sport psychology support has been acknowledged for at least 30 years  
536 (e.g., Orlick, 1989), and yet strategies for overcoming this are yet to be widely  
537 acknowledged and implemented within the discipline. The initial assumption can  
538 often be that the 'blame' for a lack of engagement or motivation lies with the athlete  
539 (Gardner, 2017), and practitioners are instead encouraged to examine their own  
540 approach and behaviors to determine if they might be contributing to athlete  
541 resistance (Tod, Hardy, Lavallee, Eubank, & Ronkainen, 2019). Such self-  
542 examination was described in a recent case study regarding an MI-rational emotive  
543 behavior therapy (REBT) intervention with an athlete (Wood et al., 2020). Athlete  
544 ambivalence and scepticism about sport psychology support arose after several  
545 consultancy sessions, when the practitioner introduced the REBT phase of work  
546 before client allegiance (Tod et al., 2019) had been achieved. Relational and



547 technical aspects of MI, combined with the practitioner's awareness of their role in  
548 inducing athlete resistance, proved effective for addressing these issues, and  
549 progressing the athlete to the point of readiness for intervention work. It has recently  
550 been suggested that strategies for working with athlete resistance should be factored  
551 into intervention guidelines (Latinjak, Hernando-Gimeno, Lorigo-Méndez, & Hardy,  
552 2019), which presents on way in which MI may support intervention delivery.

553 Participants commented on many other aspects of the MI approach beyond  
554 the four core components. The need to share information or advice in an MI-  
555 consistent way (viewing the athlete as resourceful and knowledgeable; being mindful  
556 of collaborating and supporting athlete autonomy) was highlighted repeatedly, with a  
557 need to avoid the 'expert trap' and its inherent 'righting reflex' essential to forming  
558 successful relationships. One tool for doing so which was often mentioned was the  
559 elicit-provide-elicited (E-P-E) framework, which facilitates practitioners in gathering  
560 information held by the athlete on a certain topic, then gaining permission to fill any  
561 gaps in this knowledge, and finally checking with the athlete so see how they  
562 understand this new knowledge, and what they might do with it (Miller & Rollnick,  
563 2013). The E-P-E framework has previously been approximated in applied sport  
564 psychology literature; Petitpas et al. (1999) discuss the need for psychologists to  
565 collaboratively solve problems with their athletes, by first taking time to understand  
566 the athlete's issues, and then checking to see firstly whether the athlete will accept  
567 information from the practitioner, and secondly if the athlete understands this  
568 information once it is provided. Sachs (1999) extends this idea by suggesting an  
569 additional step which takes into account the athlete's ideas for what might work for  
570 them, or even strategies which they have previously (perhaps unsuccessfully)

571 attempted. The EPE framework can add value to sport psychology consultancy,  
572 when applied in a skilled, considered manner.

573         The differences between praising and affirming (practitioner statements which  
574 value a client positive attribute or behavior, and build self-efficacy; Miller & Rollnick,  
575 2013) were discussed. Participants stated that where possible they seek to affirm  
576 rather than praise, but occasionally (particularly in the role of a coach), there is a  
577 need to step away from this MI-adherent strategy and offer praise which may help to  
578 teach or reinforce the performance of a skill, or congratulate an athlete on their  
579 performance. This ability to consciously 'slip in and out of' the MI approach also  
580 appears relevant to the 'directing-guiding-following' continuum of communication  
581 styles (Rollnick, Miller, & Butler, 2008), which was cited here as giving participants a  
582 consciousness of which style they were adopting, and their reasons for this, and  
583 helped them determine when it was appropriate to switch from the coach or expert-  
584 like style of directing back to the MI-consistent style of guiding. Being conscious of  
585 affirming rather than praising, and of the flow of communication styles within a  
586 conversation, appears beneficial for practitioners and has recently been further  
587 supported elsewhere (Wood et al., 2020).

588         Participants' comments on integrating MI with other approaches have  
589 significant implications for applied practice in sport psychology. It was stated that at  
590 the very least, the MI spirit, technical skills and an awareness of athlete change talk  
591 are valuable in any circumstance and regardless of other approaches being used.  
592 This indicates that training in MI is a route to developing and maintaining one's  
593 professional philosophy, communication strategies and self-reflection in striving to  
594 cultivate meaningful professional relationships with athletes, and generate  
595 momentum towards athlete behavioral change. It is likely for this reason that MI was

596 described by participants in this study as 'home base'. It is noteworthy that all nine  
597 participants spoke of having at least one other approach that they applied regularly  
598 in their work with athletes, so MI was by no means regarded as a universal remedy  
599 (cf. Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

600         Several ways of integrating MI with other approaches were indicated,  
601 including: a precursor to an intervention deemed appropriate for the athlete's issues  
602 or concerns; a strategy for working with ambivalence or discord, should these arise;  
603 or a framework which can be used to underpin and facilitate the delivery of an  
604 intervention or ongoing support from beginning to end. Regarding the latter, this is  
605 likely a period of MI-intensive work at commencement of the relationship, followed by  
606 delivery of the appropriate action-orientated intervention supported with relevant core  
607 components from MI, and concluded with a second period of MI-intensive work for  
608 review, maintenance, or possibly to assist reassessment and reformulation  
609 processes. This comprehensive knowledge of the MI approach, and conscious  
610 consideration of the steps for integrating MI into applied sport psychology with other  
611 relevant and compatible approaches, represents a level of integration at least akin to  
612 'assimilative integration', potentially even 'theoretical integration'. This is a step up  
613 from 'technical eclecticism' (Norcross, Karpiak, & Lister, 2005), or a 'cherry picking'  
614 or "scattergun" (Cecil & Barker, 2016, p. 63) approach, which has been proscribed  
615 by the British Psychological Society as an unsuitable approach for trainee  
616 practitioners (BPS, 2018). These deeper levels of integration can only be achieved  
617 through greater understanding of the theories, common factors and techniques of  
618 multiple approaches (Boswell, 2016), and are perhaps what practitioners in applied  
619 sport psychology should be striving for. Research has already begun to describe

620 such integrations of MI with different cognitive behavioral therapies in applied sport  
621 psychology (e.g., Turner et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2020).

622 Practitioners highlighted aspects of the sport context which create challenges  
623 when working with athletes (Table 3). Several of these were in keeping with  
624 previously identified factors which may prevent athletes from taking up or engaging  
625 fully in sport psychology support (e.g., Mack et al., 2019; Martin, Zakrajsek, &  
626 Wrisberg, 2012). MI appears to have several valuable tenets to assist practitioners in  
627 navigating these challenges. The dynamic and unpredictable nature of consultancy  
628 in the sport context also appears to create some unusual opportunities for contact  
629 with athletes, often outside pre-set appointment times and in non-clinical locations  
630 which would be typical of other contexts where MI has traditionally been applied.  
631 These contact points can also be extremely brief, perhaps a passing conversation in  
632 a corridor or changing room, and even in-game situations lasting as little as 30-60  
633 seconds, when issues are 'hot' and performance may or may not be going according  
634 to plan. This is absolutely the briefest of brief contact consultancy, and participants  
635 were adamant that MI has a role here, by being conscious of embodying elements of  
636 the MI spirit (e.g., evocation) and focusing on the MI communication microskills (e.g.,  
637 asking, reflecting, affirming).

### 638 **Implications for training in MI**

639 Participants indicated aspects of the MI approach which would be essential  
640 for a training curriculum for practitioners working in sport settings (Table 4). The  
641 general consensus that practitioners are applying MI in the context of sport, as  
642 opposed to a sport-specific version of MI, indicates that a grounding in broad MI  
643 theory and training (i.e., Tables 1 and 2) is a suitable initiation for any practitioner  
644 wishing to add MI to their applied work in sport. It was proposed by one participant

645 that students of sport psychology should be taught an approach like MI, with  
646 relational and technical aspects to form the therapeutic alliance, *before* action-  
647 orientated interventions. This could minimise the risk of neophyte practitioners  
648 prematurely applying the only intervention strategies they have learned so far,  
649 regardless of athlete resources or readiness and without developing a sound alliance,  
650 assessment and formulation (e.g., Cecil & Barker, 2016). This is perhaps something  
651 for professional bodies, universities and supervisors of trainees to consider.

### 652 **Implications for future research**

653 The training of practitioners in the MI approach opens avenues of possible  
654 further research. It is of course important to investigate the impact of this training on  
655 their applied practice, in terms of MI-consistency, professional relationship  
656 development (from both practitioner and athlete perspectives), and impact on  
657 desired outcomes, such as intervention goals and sport performance. But, only once  
658 competence and consistency in applying the MI approach has been achieved,  
659 reported and evidenced, can its impact in sport be truly measured. Such an  
660 investigation would likely further inform best practice guidelines, help to identify  
661 sport-specific adaptations of the approach (e.g., MI with teams; brief-contact MI with  
662 athletes), and contribute to the development of a model for integrating MI with other  
663 interventions in sport.

### 664 **Strengths and limitations**

665 Several sampling methods were employed to ensure the search for  
666 participants for this study was as exhaustive as possible, producing a global sample  
667 of practitioners who are a) working regularly in sport with amateur, international and  
668 professional athletes, and b) proficient in the MI approach, as indicated by their  
669 membership of MINT. The research team has attempted to show rather than tell



695 to develop their professional philosophies, sharpen relational and communication  
696 skills for building and maintaining working alliances, and enhancing their self-  
697 reflection.

698

**References**

699 Ackerman, S. J., &amp; Hilsenroth, M. J. (2003). A review of therapist characteristics and

700 techniques positively impacting the therapeutic alliance. *Clinical Psychology*701 *Review, 23*, 1–33.

702 Andersen, M. B., &amp; Speed, H. D. (2010). Therapeutic relationships in applied sport

703 psychology. In S. J. Hanrahan & M. B. Andersen (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of*704 *Applied Sport Psychology* (pp. 3–11). London: Routledge.705 <http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203851043.ch1>

706 Apodaca, T. R., Jackson, K. M., Borsari, B., Magill, M., Longabaugh, R., Mastroleo,

707 N. R., &amp; Barnett, N. P. (2016). Which individual therapist behaviors elicit client

708 change talk and sustain talk in motivational interviewing? *Journal of Substance*709 *Abuse Treatment, 61*, 60–65. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2015.09.001>

710 Baldwin, S. A., Wampold, B. E., &amp; Imel, Z. E. (2007). Untangling the alliance-

711 outcome correlation: Exploring the relative importance of therapist and patient

712 variability in the alliance. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75*(6),713 842–852. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.75.6.842>

714 Bien, T. H., Miller, W. R., &amp; Tonigan, J. S. (1993). Brief interventions for alcohol

715 problems: a review. *Addiction, 88*, 315–336. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360->716 [0443.1993.tb00820.x](http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.1993.tb00820.x)

717 Bordin, E. S. (1979). The generalizability of the psychoanalytic concept of the

718 working alliance. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 16*(3),

719 252–260.



- 720 Boswell, J. F. (2016). A perspective on integrative psychotherapy training. *The*  
721 *Integrative Therapist*, 2(2), 5–6.
- 722 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative*  
723 *Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.  
724 <http://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- 725 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative*  
726 *Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597.  
727 <http://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- 728 Breckon, J. D. (2015). Motivational interviewing, exercise, and nutrition counseling.  
729 In M. B. Andersen & S. J. Hanrahan (Eds.), *Doing Exercise Psychology* (pp. 75–  
730 100). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- 731 British Psychological Society. (2018). Qualification in sport and exercise psychology  
732 (stage 2) candidate handbook. Retrieved from  
733 [https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Qualifications/Sport and](https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Qualifications/Sport%20and%20Exercise/QSEP%20Stage%202%20Candidate%20Handbook%20Jan%202018.pdf)  
734 [Exercise/QSEP %28Stage 2%29 Candidate Handbook Jan 2018.pdf](https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Qualifications/Sport and Exercise/QSEP %28Stage 2%29 Candidate Handbook Jan 2018.pdf)
- 735 Cecil, S., & Barker, J. (2016). Special issue: Professional training in sport and  
736 exercise psychology. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, 12(2), 62–63.
- 737 David, S., & Larson, M. (2018). Athletes' perception of athletic trainer empathy: How  
738 important is it? *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation*, 27(1), 8–15.  
739 <http://doi.org/10.1123/jsr.2016-0085>
- 740 Emerson, P., & Frosch, S. (2004). *Critical narrative analysis in psychology: A guide*  
741 *to practice*. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

- 742 Gardner, F. L. (2017). Overcoming resistance from clients and stakeholders. In R.  
743 Schinke & D. Hackfort (Eds.), *Psychology in Professional Sports and the*  
744 *Performing Arts* (pp. 38–50). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.
- 745 Giges, B., & Petitpas, A. (2000). Brief contact interventions. *The Sport Psychologist*,  
746 *14*, 176–187.
- 747 Gomm, R. (2008). *Social research methodology: A critical introduction*. Macmillan  
748 International Higher Education.
- 749 Hatcher, R. L., & Barends, A. W. (2006). How a return to theory could help alliance  
750 research. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, *43*(3), 292–299.  
751 <http://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.43.3.292>
- 752 Horvath, A. O., & Symonds, B. D. (1991). Relationship between working alliance and  
753 outcome in psychotherapy: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*,  
754 *38*, 139–149.
- 755 Katz, J., & Hemmings, B. (2009). *Counselling Skills Handbook For The Sport*  
756 *Psychologist*. The British Psychological Society.
- 757 Latinjak, A. T., Hernando-Gimeno, C., Lorigo-Méndez, L., & Hardy, J. (2019).  
758 Endorsement and constructive criticism of an innovative online reflexive self-talk  
759 intervention. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*(1819).  
760 <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01819>
- 761 Longstaff, F., & Gervis, M. (2016). The use of counseling principles and skills to  
762 develop practitioner-athlete relationships by practitioners who provide sport  
763 psychology support. *The Sport Psychologist*, *30*(3), 276–289.  
764 <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2015-0029>

- 765 Mack, R., Breckon, J., Butt, J., & Maynard, I. (2017). Exploring the Understanding  
766 and Application of Motivational Interviewing in Applied Sport Psychology. *The*  
767 *Sport Psychologist*, (31), 396–409. <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2016-0125>
- 768 Mack, R. J., Breckon, J. D., O'Halloran, P. D., & Butt, J. (2019). Enhancing athlete  
769 engagement in sport psychology interventions using motivational interviewing: A  
770 case study. *The Sport Psychologist*, 33(2), 159–168.  
771 <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2018-0053>
- 772 Markland, D., Ryan, R. M., Tobin, V. J., & Rollnick, S. (2005). Motivational  
773 interviewing and self-determination theory. *Journal of Social and Clinical*  
774 *Psychology*, 24(6), 811–831.
- 775 Martin, D. J., Garske, J. P., & Davis, M. K. (2000). Relation of the therapeutic  
776 alliance with outcome and other variables: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of*  
777 *Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 68(3), 438–450.
- 778 Martin, S. B., Zakrajsek, R. A., & Wrisberg, C. A. (2012). Attitudes toward sport  
779 psychology and seeking assistance: Key factors and a proposed model. In C. D.  
780 Logan & M. I. Hodges (Eds.), *Psychology of Attitudes* (pp. 1–33). Hauppauge, NY:  
781 Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- 782 Massey, W. V., Gnacinski, S. L., & Meyer, B. B. (2015). Psychological skills training  
783 in ncaa division i athletics: Are athletes ready for change? *Journal of Clinical*  
784 *Sport Psychology*, 9(4), 317–334. <http://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.2014-0042>
- 785 Miller, W. R. (1983). Motivational interviewing with problem drinkers. *Behavioural*  
786 *Psychotherapy*, 11(2), 147–172. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0141347300006583>

- 787 Miller, W. R., & Moyers, T. B. (2006). Eight stages in learning motivational  
788 interviewing. *Journal of Teaching in the Addictions*, 5(1), 3–17.  
789 <http://doi.org/10.1300/J188v05n01>
- 790 Miller, W. R., & Moyers, T. B. (2015). The forest and the trees: Relational and  
791 specific factors in addiction treatment. *Addiction*, 110(3), 401–413.  
792 <http://doi.org/10.1111/add.12693>
- 793 Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for*  
794 *change*. London, England: Guilford Press.
- 795 Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*.  
796 London, England: Guilford Press.
- 797 Miller, W. R., & Rose, G. S. (2009). Toward a theory of motivational interviewing.  
798 *American Psychologist*, 64(6), 527–537. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0016830>
- 799 Miller, W. R., & Sanchez, V. C. (1993). Motivating young adults for treatment and  
800 lifestyle change. In G. S. Howard & P. E. Nathan (Eds.), *Alcohol use and misuse*  
801 *by young adults* (pp. 55–81). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- 802 Murphy, S. M., & Murphy, A. J. (2010). Attending and listening. In J. Hanrahan & M.  
803 B. Andersen (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology* (pp. 12–  
804 20). Oxford: Routledge.
- 805 Naar, S., & Safren, S. A. (2017). *Motivational interviewing and CBT: Combining*  
806 *strategies for maximum effectiveness*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- 807 Naar-King, S., Earnshaw, P., & Breckon, J. (2013). Toward a universal maintenance  
808 intervention: Integrating cognitive-behavioral treatment with motivational

- 809 interviewing for maintenance of behavior change. *Journal of Cognitive*  
810 *Psychotherapy*, 27(2), 126–137.
- 811 Norcross, J. C., Karpiake, C. P., & Lister, K. M. (2005). What's an integrationist? A  
812 study of self-identified integrative and (occasionally) eclectic psychologists.  
813 *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61(12), 1587–1594.  
814 <http://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20203>
- 815 Orlick, T. (1989). Reflections on sportpsych consulting with individual and team sport  
816 athletes at summer and winter Olympic Games. *The Sport Psychologist*, 3, 358–  
817 365. <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.3.4.358>
- 818 Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (2nd ed.). London:  
819 Sage.
- 820 Petitpas, A. J., Giges, B., & Danish, S. J. (1999). The sport psychologist-athlete  
821 relationship: Implications for training. *The Sport Psychologist*, 13(3), 344–357.  
822 <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.13.3.344>
- 823 Pitt, T., Thomas, O., Lindsay, P., Hanton, S., & Bawden, M. (2015). Doing sport  
824 psychology briefly? A critical review of single session therapeutic approaches  
825 and their relevance to sport psychology. *International Review of Sport and*  
826 *Exercise Psychology*, 8(1), 125–155.  
827 <http://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2015.1027719>
- 828 Ravizza, K. (1988). Gaining entry with athletic personnel for season-long consulting.  
829 *The Sport Psychologist*, 2, 243–254. <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2.3.243>
- 830 Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal  
831 relationships, as developed in the client-centered framework client-centered

832 framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A Study of a Science. Study 1, Volume*  
833 *3: Formulations of the Person and the Social Context* (pp. 184–256). New York,  
834 NY: McGraw-Hill.

835 Rollnick, S., Miller, W. R., & Butler, C. C. (2008). *Motivational interviewing in health*  
836 *care: Helping patients change behavior*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

837 Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., ... Jinks,  
838 C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and  
839 operationalization. *Quality and Quantity, 52*, 1893–1907.

840 <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>

841 Sharp, L.-A., Hodge, K., & Danish, S. (2015). Ultimately it comes down to the  
842 relationship: Experienced consultants views of effective sport psychology  
843 consulting. *The Sport Psychologist, 29*(4), 358–370.

844 <http://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2014-0130>

845 Sharp, L.-A., Hodge, K., & Danish, S. (2019). “I wouldn’t want to operate without it”:  
846 The ethical challenges faced by experienced sport psychology consultant’s and  
847 their engagement with supervision. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.

848 <http://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2019.1646838>

849 Tod, D., Hardy, J., Lavalley, D., Eubank, M., & Ronkainen, N. (2019). Practitioners’  
850 narratives regarding active ingredients in service delivery: Collaboration-based  
851 problem solving. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 43*, 350–358.

852 <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.04.009>

- 853 Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative  
854 research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851.  
855 <http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- 856 Turner, M. J., Aspin, G., Didymus, F. F., Mack, R., Olusoga, P., Wood, A. G., &  
857 Bennett, R. (2019). One case, four approaches - The application of  
858 psychotherapeutic approaches in sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*.
- 859 Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic  
860 analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing &*  
861 *Health Sciences*, 15(3), 398–405. <http://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048>
- 862 Wagner, C. C., & Ingersoll, K. S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing in groups*. New  
863 York, NY: Guilford Press.
- 864 Watson, J., Hilliard, R., & Way, W. (2017). Counseling and communication skills in  
865 sport and performance psychology. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of*  
866 *Psychology*, 1–23. <http://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.140>
- 867 Wilmots, E., Midgley, N., Thackeray, L., Reynolds, S., & Loades, M. (2019). The  
868 therapeutic relationship in cognitive behaviour therapy with depressed  
869 adolescents: A qualitative study of good-outcome cases. *Psychology and*  
870 *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*.  
871 <http://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12232>
- 872 Wood, A. G., Mack, R. J., & Turner, M. J. (2020). Developing self-determined  
873 motivation and performance with an elite athlete: Integrating motivational  
874 interviewing with rational emotive behavior therapy. *Journal of Rational-Emotive*  
875 *& Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-020-00351-6>

876

**Table Titles**

877 **Table 1**

878 *Core Components and Sub-Components of MI Being Applied in Sport*

879 **Table 2**

880 *Auxiliary Aspects of MI Being Applied in Sport*

881 **Table 3**

882 *Sport Context Which Enables Opportunities for the Application of MI*

883 **Table 4**

884 *Essential Ingredients for MI Training in Sport Context*



885 **Table 1**

886 *Core Components and Sub-Components of MI Being Applied in Sport*

Core Components of MI	Sub-components
Spirit	Partnership Build athlete autonomy Acceptance Unconditional regard Evocation Compassion Accurate empathy Equipoise
Microskills	Open Questions Affirmations Reflections (simple and complex) Summarising
Language of change	Preparatory change talk Mobilising change talk Sustain talk
Four+ Processes	Engage Focus Evoke Plan Maintain

887

888

889 **Table 2**

890 *Auxiliary Aspects of MI Being Applied in Sport*

Theme	Sub-themes
MI applied tools	Elicit-Provide-Elicit Agenda mapping Values sort Scaling rulers (importance; confidence; readiness) Goal setting
MI-consistent sharing information and expertise	Consider the therapeutic alliance Dialogue not monologue Collaboration Athlete autonomy Athlete as expert MI-adherent
Relational and technical traps to avoid	Elicit-Provide-Elicit Expert trap Righting reflex Premature focus trap Affirming not praising
MI communication styles continuum	Directing Guiding Following
Brief contact MI interactions	MI spirit is essential MI is adaptable to brief contact Short, intentional interactions Moment-to-moment scenarios Know when to direct/instruct
Using MI with teams	MI processes Reflections 'Global' affirmations Accurate empathy
Integrating MI with other interventions in sport	Spirit Microskills Change talk 'Home base' Precursor Common factors Underpinning framework Follow-up Cognitive behavioral strategies

891

892

893 **Table 3**

894 *Sport Context Which Enables Opportunities for the Application of MI*

Theme	Sub-themes
Challenges of working with athletes	Mandated attendance Confidentiality Stigma towards psychology support Heteronomy (athletes are unaccustomed to being asked for their opinions/answers) Athlete mistrust of 'outsiders' 'Quick fix' mentality within sport Performance-driven environment Deficit view of athlete issues Practitioner equipoise towards athlete change Managing discord in the relationship Athlete ambivalence towards change
Unique aspects of sport context	Reduced frequency of contact Limited duration of contact Non-clinical locations 'In the moment' contact 'Hot' issues

895

896

897 **Table 4**

898 *Essential Ingredients for MI Training in Sport Context*

Theme	Sub-themes
MI training content	Core components of MI Traps to avoid Elicit-Provide-Elicit Accurate empathy Equipoise MI integration with other approaches Sport culture, norms, pressures
MI training design	Multi-method Experiential Sport-specific materials

899