The Rocky Road to Individuation: Sport Psychologists' Perspectives on Professional Development

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

Conclusion: Individuation represents a dynamic ongoing process where practitioners attempt to understand better, who they are and the influence they have on service delivery. Individuation can be a deliberate process that can assist practitioners in realising professional satisfaction and meaning.

Keywords: training; professional development; individuation; service delivery

The Rocky Road to Individuation: Sport Psychologists' Perspectives on Professional Development

Despite the growing status of sport psychology, the study of interventions has been favoured over the study of sport psychologists (Tod, 2017). The people (i.e., the sport psychologists), however, employing those interventions are central to effective practice, and research focused on them can contribute to helping current and prospective sport psychologists develop the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required to meet their clients' needs (Tod, Hutter, & Eubank, 2017).

In the related discipline of counselling, it is suggested that the counsellor explains more variance in therapeutic processes and outcomes than the intervention that is employed (Wampold & Imel, 2015). In counselling, a body of research exists to suggest that professional development (e.g., training) influences counsellor's characteristics (e.g., attitudes and values) and these in turn influence client outcomes (Carlsson, 2012; Carlsson, Norberg, Schubert, & Sandell, 2011). Currently, limited research exists about sport psychologist development, although there is scope to advance knowledge by drawing on research in counselling.

In recent times, researchers have used existing theory in counselling to synthesise knowledge on sport psychologist development (e.g., Owton, Bond, & Tod, 2014). In particular, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2012) describe the evolution of therapists' development across the entire career spectrum. This framework comprises broad qualitative themes (e.g., professional development is lifelong) describing the nature and process of change across the career span. Although counsellors have unique contextual knowledge, the themes summarised in the model speak to the universal aspects of development in the allied helping professions (including sport psychology). Researchers in counselling have advocated that a complete picture of practitioner development could be obtained by investigating proposed

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

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

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

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

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

Methods Study I

Philosophical Assumptions

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

Participants

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

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

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

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

Procedures

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

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

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

Data Analysis and Presentation

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

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

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

Research Credibility

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

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

Results

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

Professional Development Reflected the Ongoing Process of Individuation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sources of Influence on Development

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Winning Doesn't happen in a Straight Line": Professional Development can be Intermittent and Cyclical

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

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

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

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

TSP1 further expanded on why the experience was useful:

> … the experience was absolutely amazing … I've gained in confidence through gaining in competence… it allowed me to develop a rapport, a sound relationship with the players … to know them as people and not just athletes. Learning to put time into developing those relationships is maybe one of the competencies … [She developed]

TSPs recognised repeated periods of perceived enhanced service delivery competence when they engaged in concentrated work at training camps and international tournaments. The number and type of opportunities for delivery of sport psychology services (e.g., being available to the team at any time of day and sharing accommodation with them) allowed TSPs to engage in increased service delivery.

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

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

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

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

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

Inter-study Transition

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

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

Methods Study II

Participants

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

Procedures

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

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

same as for Study I. (The interview guide is available from the principle author on request.) For each topic, we asked the ESPs a series of questions to help them reflect on the changes they experienced over their careers. For example, we asked participants "How did you assess your practice early on? And now?"

The aim of Interview 2 was to explore in further depth why changes described in Interview I had occurred. Interview I was transcribed and analysed (i.e., excerpts were highlighted on the transcript that related to change and development) by the first author to generate topics for interview II with a specific focus on areas that seemed meaningful (e.g., people or events that appeared to catalyse change for the participant). For example, "You mentioned interacting differently with your peers during the last interview; can you tell me about why peer interaction changed?" Finally, to allow participants to summarise their own development, the interview concluded with a broad question: "Thinking about your development, how are you different from when you started your career?"

Data analysis, presentation and research credibility. We used the same procedures in Study I and II for data analysis, presentation, and research credibility. After placing highlighted excerpts relating to change and development from Study II into a matrix containing broad categories (e.g., sources of influence), we looked for themes within the categories (e.g., how sources of influence changed) and compared themes emerging from Study I with the data from Study II. This matrix allowed us to explore if there was evidence of the processes of development we saw in the TSP sample in the ESP sample. We allowed new themes to emerge by being open to the ESPs' experiences.

Results

The results of Study II demonstrate how practitioners continue to change post-training. We found evidence of the themes and subthemes from Study I and a new subtheme that reflects ESPs' perspective on the influence of critical life experiences. We discuss each

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

Professional Development Reflected the Ongoing Process of Individuation

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

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

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

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

> it does become more collaborative and that worked with my professional philosophy of empowering … this suited my understanding of human behaviour and how people change …

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

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

Sources of Influence on Development

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Winning Doesn't Happen in a Straight Line": Professional development can be Intermittent and Cyclical

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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