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 A systematic review of professional identity in sport psychology

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Article

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5   **A Systematic Review of Professional Identity in Sport Psychology**

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9   Alessandro Quartiroli*

10   University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

11   University of Portsmouth

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13   Christopher R. D. Wagstaff

14   Daniel R. F. Martin

15   University of Portsmouth

16

17   David Tod

18   Liverpool John Moores University

19

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22   *Corresponding Author: Alessandro Quartiroli, Psychology Department, University of Wisconsin – La

23   Crosse, La Crosse, Wisconsin, WI, USA. Email: aquartiroli@uwlax.edu

24   **Abstract**

25   The establishment of a strong professional identity (PI) among sport psychology practitioners

26   (SPPs) has the potential to increase the likelihood of individual ethical working, awareness of professional

27   roles, and ultimately, support of a more effective and lasting career. Nevertheless, there is currently no

28   global consensus regarding a definition of sport psychology professional identity, which is imperative for

29   ongoing advances in professional formation, training and practice. In this study, we conducted a

30   systematic review of literature with the aim of developing an understanding of existing sport psychology

31   professional identity knowledge. Following the PRISMA guidelines, we initially identified 4,393 research

32   records, which we screened and assessed for eligibility reducing the sample of articles fitting our inclusion

33   criteria to 25 manuscripts. We analyzed these articles by engaging in an inductive thematic analysis aimed

34   at identifying patterns within the data and forming an organized, rich, and detailed description of the data.

35   This analysis led to the development of four main themes: Formation of Professional Identity; Embodying

36   Professional Identity; Influences on Professional Identity, and Challenges to Professional Identity. These

37   data are discussed in terms of their implications for professional bodies and educational programs and

38   their contribution to potential future research.

39   *Keywords*: Effective practice, Professional training, Professional development, Professional

40   formation.

41   **Professional Identity in Sport Psychology: A Qualitative Review of the Literature**

42   Since the 1890s, the field of sport psychology (SP) has gained increasing levels of visibility within

43   the scholarly and professional communities of sport and exercise science and psychology; as well as in the

44   media and in society (Kornspan & Quartiroli, 2017). Initially, this field developed as a sub discipline of sport

45   and exercise science, but more recently sport psychology has experienced a shift toward a greater presence of

46   psychological knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and perspectives (Tod et al., 2014). Associated with these

47   developments, scholars have noted the growing number of professionals around the globe start engaging in

48   applied SP practitioners, leading many educational and training pathways to focus on credentialization via

49   accreditation, qualification and licensure (e.g., Cremades et al., 2014; Sly et al., 2019).

50   While much of the early SP professional development research reflected a primary focus on

51   psychological phenomena in sport (Terry et al., 2021), more recently, SP professional literature better

52   represented scholarly work focused on the interventions used by sport psychology practitioners and the

53   psychological concepts that inform such delivery tools (Tod et al., 2017). Despite growing attention being

54   devoted to the profession, Tod (2017) argued that the existing scholarly literature focused on sport

55   psychology practitioners (SPPs) may provide the superficial idea of a clear profession, wherein practitioners

56   offering applied psychology services introduce themselves using a variety of titles and credentials; presenting

57   widely diverse educational and professional backgrounds. This range of professional qualification, titles,

58   background, educational and training paths, may be the by-product not just of the variety of labels used to

59   define the science and study of thoughts and behavior underlying human performance (e.g., exercise, sport,

60   dance, music), but also to the complexity characterizing the legal, social, political, and contextual issues

61   characterizing the world of sport (Cremades et al., 2014). This wide variety of professional requirements and

62   training across countries, industries, and organizations can lead to professional confusion and lack of

63   regulation in service provision, whether in sport or in other performance areas, which could lead to unethical,

64   unprofessional, an ineffective service delivery.

65   The exploration of the characteristics of professionals delivering sport psychology services has a

66   long history (e.g., Orlick & Partington, 1987), with researchers delineating the characteristics and

67   qualities of an effective sport psychology practitioner from the perspectives of coaches, athletes and

68   support staff (e.g., Chandler et al., 2014) as well as from the perspective of practitioners themselves

69   (e.g., Cropley et al., 2010). Further, researchers have explored the career maturation process of SPPs

70   with regards to changes in service delivery (e.g., McEwan et al., 2019; Tod et al., 2011), their

71   engagement in learning activities facilitating professional growth (e.g., Hutter et al., 2017; Stambulova

72   & Johnson, 2010), their professional philosophy and orientation (e.g., Collins et al., 2013;

73   Poczwardowski et al., 2014) as well as the positive and effective long lasting career (e.g., Hings et al.,

74   2019; Quartiroli et al., 2019a). While this body of work has helped to advance the identification of

75   professional characteristics, as well as development and training knowledge, one topic that has received

76   little research attention is that professional identity of these SPPs (Tod et al., 2017). Professional identity

77   (PI) refers to practitioners' understanding of their roles, group memberships, and specific characteristics

78   as sport psychologists, and is a cognitive structure helping them to successfully negotiate environmental

79   demands to carve out a career in the profession (Tod et al., 2020). Further, drawing on postmodern and

80   poststructuralist thought, professional identity is a social construction (Brunner, 2004; Burke & Stets,

81   2009) that evolves across the career lifespan. Researchers in sport and exercise psychology may have

82   not examined professional identity much because of the diverse backgrounds, training, education, and

83   professional credentials that exist among practitioners. Despite various professional credentials,

84   backgrounds, education, training and development pathways, and discipline specialisms around the

85   world (cf. Cremades et al., 2014) and the decades-long debate about the nature of the profession (cf.

86   Kornspan & Quartiroli, 2019), in recent years a renewed effort has been dedicated to identifying and

87   raising awareness of a shared PI for the SP profession. To date, only a few studies have explicitly

88   addressed SPPs' PI (see Portenga et al., 2017; Tod et al., 2017; Williams & Andersen, 2012). For

89   example, Portenga and colleagues (2017) attempted to define sport and performance psychology to

90   create a core identity and sense of purpose among SPPs. Elsewhere, scholars (Tod et al., 2020; Wagstaff

91   & Quartiroli, 2020) have argued that the future of the SP profession depends on professionals clearly

92   defining an identity for this profession. Despite these initial forays into the exploration of PI, this

93   construct remains undefined and unconceptualized within SP. Nevertheless, PI has received some

94   attention from scholars in other disciplines of psychology. For example, within counselling psychology

95   and the counsellor education literature, scholars have aimed to define what PI is and how it develops

96   among professionals (e.g., McLaughlin& Boettcher, 2009; Woo et al., 2014). In addition, in an attempt

97   to support the development of the profession (Woo et al., 2014), scholars have also stressed the

98   importance for trainees to develop a clear sense of identity prior to the completion of their graduate training

99   programs (Hieber et al., 1992) and to explore how they identify with the profession (Gibson et al., 2010).

100   Woo et al. (2014) concluded that the absence of a clear PI may lessen the ability of professionals to

101   provide acceptable standards of ethical care. A clear PI has also been identified as a way to establish the

102   profession alongside established professions (Woo et al., 2014), which might also be observed within

103   the SP field regarding credentialing pathways (cf. Sly et al., 2019).

104   **Review aims**

105   Although different in their professional training and scope of practice, counselling and sport

106   psychology professions also have several similarities including, but not limited to, commonality regarding

107   phases of professional development (Tod, 2007). While some aspects of transference from one discipline

108   of psychology might be possible, it would appear important to explore the PI of the SP profession to

109   develop a distinct understanding of PI among SPPs. To the authors' best knowledge, no previous review

110   of the literature focused on PI exists within the SP literature. Therefore, our aim was to systematically

111   explore the current status of the SP literature and inductively understand how scholars have empirically

112   approached PI. In doing so, we aim to provide a foundation for empirical work on PI in SPPs. The value

113   of this work lies in the importance of providing clarity to the public and to those we serve about the

114   factors encompassed within the professional identity of SPPs, supporting training programs and

115   educational pathway development and design, and informing professional credentialization. In turn, such

116   clarity will enhance the ability of SPPs to provide acceptable standards of ethical care and help to establish

117   and situate the sport psychology profession alongside other more established professions (cf. Woo et al.,

118   2014).

119   **Methods**

120   **Protocol**

121   Throughout this systematic review we conformed to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic

122   Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al. 2015; see Figure 1).

123   *[Figure 1 near here]*

124   **Eligibility criteria**

125   The criteria to include manuscripts in this systematic review were defined in accordance with the

126   Cochrane guidelines for conducting systematic reviews (Higgins et al., 2019). The criteria for inclusion

127   and exclusion were decided a priori and following the initial selection process of studies, three authors

128   (AU1, AU2 and AU3) independently completed the eligibility assessment by screening the titles and

129   abstracts. To be eligible, manuscripts had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) Language –

130   published in English, (2) Population – accredited/qualified or in training to become accredited/certified

131   SPPs, (3) Variables – focused on professional identity of SPPs, (4) Publication type – peer reviewed

132   articles, thesis and dissertations, (5) Design – qualitative, quantitative and mixed method experimental

133   designs were considered.

134   **Literature search strategy and information sources**

135   Several strategies were used to identify peer reviewed published studies to be included in the

136   review: (a) an online search of computerized databases such as Academic Search Ultimate, E-Journals,

137   Psychology of Behavioral Sciences, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Open dissertation, Google Scholar,

138   SportDiscus, PubMed and Web of science, (b) manual searching of discipline-specific journals, and (d) a

139   manual review of reference lists of included studies for potentially relevant articles that could have been

140   missed during the database search. The phrases used for the database search were: *Ethical considerations,*

141   *Sport psychologist, Sport psychology, Sport psychology practitioner, Sport psychology, Professional,*

142   *Consultant, Mental performance coach, Mental performance trainer, Mental coach, Performance coach,*

143   *Performance psychologist, Mental trainer, Identity, Professional (Profession*), Development (Develop*),*

144   *Maturity, Philosophy (Philosoph*), Professional Orientation, Values, Attitude, Professional Attitude,*

145   *Attitude toward the profession, Professional Values, Knowledge, Knowledge of the profession,*

146   *Professional knowledge, Professional role, Professional clarity, Professional activities, Professional*

147   *behav*, Professional behave*, Professional practice, Service delivery, Ethics, Ethical consideration.*

148   **Study selection**

149   All empirical research articles, theses, and dissertations focused on the variable of interest and

150   written in English were included in the search. When the title and abstract of an article did not provide

151   enough information to assess its relevance to the review, the complete article was obtained and read, to

152   ensure that the paper met the primary inclusion criteria. Papers that did not empirically investigate

153   variables relating to the PI of SPPs or did not include qualified/accredited SPPs within their sample were

154   excluded from consideration in the review. Letters to the editor, commentaries, reflections, conference

155   abstracts and literature reviews were excluded as not assessable and/or critically appraisable. Most studies

156   excluded from the review based on the appraisal of titles and abstracts (n = 3,709). A series of manuscripts

157   were excluded based on the population of interest ($n = 21$), the language of the manuscript ($n = 2$), the

158   main variable of interest ($n = 85$), the type of publication ($n = 11$), and other criteria ($n = 25$).

159   **Quality assessment**

160   We assessed qualitative reporting standards (see Table 1) using the tool developed by Lorenc et

161   al. (2014; see also Hawker et al., 2002). This assessment process was based on nine questions aimed at

162   assessing the relevance, appropriateness, rigor, and quality of the different aspects of each manuscript:

163   (1) abstract and title, (2) Introduction and aims, (3) methods and data, (4) sampling, (5) Data analysis,

164   (6) Ethics and bias, (7) Results, (8) Transferability and generalizability, and (9) Implication and

165   usefulness. All manuscripts were scored from 1 (very poor) to 4 (very good) using a 4-point scale,

166   leading to a potential score range of 9-36 points. In line with the Lorenc et al., each numerical

167   manuscript score was then categorized as (A) high quality (scores between 30-36 points), (B) medium

168   quality (24-29 points), or (C) low quality (9-24 points).

169   *[Table 1 near here]*

170   To promote good practice, we also completed a review of the included manuscripts using the

171   qualitative Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

172   (CASP) UK, n.d.). In Table 2 we indicate whether papers met individual CASP criteria. While most of

173   the included manuscripts meet most of CASP criteria, several issues were detected. For example,

174   authors provided a description of the appropriateness of their participants for the study in only 42% of

175   the included papers and in only 17% was there a clear description of the recruitment process. Another

176   issue we identified was that in less than half the included studies (42%), did authors critically examine

177   their own role, potential bias and influence during the formulation of the research questions or provide

178   descriptions of how the project was explained to the participants.

179   *[Table 2 near here]*

Data extraction and synthesis

181   A qualitative synthesis was deemed the most appropriate method of assessment given that the

182   modest number of studies ($n = 24$) which met the inclusion criteria were qualitative in design. The 24

183   articles were subjected to a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) with the aim of analyzing and reporting

184   patterns within the data (Braun et al., 2016) and to form an organized and detailed description of them

185   (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The RTA approach was deemed most appropriate as it provides great

186   theoretical and paradigmatic flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In the current study, the flexibility,

187   alongside the time effective processes of RTA in comparison to other qualitative analysis tools (e.g.,

188   grounded theory, Braun & Clarke, 2021) were the two primary reasons why the RTA framework was

189   employed to extract and analyze data. Following familiarization with the content of the manuscripts,

190   potentially interesting features of the data were extracted to generate codes from the dataset. After

191   reviewing the codes, grouping data into further themes, a thematic map was developed to be able to

192   explore the alignment of themes and sub-themes. Finally, after further refinement of each theme, clear

193   definitions and labels were created, and specific and compelling extracts were selected to relate the

194   analysis back to the research questions and sport psychology literature.

195   Certain measures and processes were established in order to facilitate and ensure a rigorous

196   analysis process. To best mitigate the effects of our backgrounds, biases and research intentions as

197   authors in the analysis process, we, the first three authors, engaged in ongoing reflective exercises as a

198   group and individuals, throughout the analysis process. Herein, we acted as critical friends (Smith &

199   McGannon, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018) to one another throughout the analysis process. We encouraged

200   each other to openly challenge our preconceived notions of professional identity and our biases toward

201   the research area as well acknowledge any existing formal hierarchies among us and the impact of these

202   factors upon our analysis of data and final development of themes. Moreover, we also engaged in a

203   series of additional processes to ensure the credibility and rigor of our review methodology. Specifically,

204   we completed an assessment of qualitative reporting standards according to the guidelines developed by

205   Lorenc et al. (2014) and a review of the included manuscripts using the qualitative CASP checklist

206   (CASP) UK, n.d.).

207   *[Table 3 near here]*

208   **Results**

209   The analysis of these studies led us to construe four main themes and a total of 18 related sub-

210   themes. The main themes were: The formation of a Professional Identity; Embodying a Professional

211   Identity; Influences on Professional Identity, and Challenges to Professional Identity. These themes are

212   presented following a chronological narrative (see Table 4).

213   *[Table 4 near here]*

214   **Theme 1 - Formation of Professional Identity**

215   The first theme relates the development of the PI of a practitioner and includes four sub-themes:

216   (a) Training and educational pathways, (b) Developing competence and Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

217   (KSAs) for practice, (c) Developing the role and purpose of a SPPs, and (d) The 'self' as a performer.

218   ***Training and educational pathways***

219   Scholars concerned with the professional development of SPPs have indicated the influence of

220   both training pathways and continuing education on the formation of their PI (Cropley et al., 2010;

221   McCormick & Meijen, 2015; McEwan et al., 2019; Ploszay, 2003; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011;

222   Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod et al., 2009; Winter & Collins 2015). Based on our analysis it is possible to

223   delineate how the educational and training journey of each practitioner represents the starting point for

224   their exploration of their PI. It appears that practitioners see their training journey as the beginning of

225   their professional development since it is during this process that they must typically explore and

226   develop their professional philosophy and implementation style (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

227   The influence of such training pathways on identity extended and changed throughout the practitioner's

228   career (Ploszay, 2003), with the experience of learning not occurring within a linear manner (McEwan et

229   al., 2019). One of the key characteristics of this process was the SPPs' need to learn from their own

230   practice through reflection and their supervisors' guidance (Cropley et al., 2010; Tod et al., 2009; Tod &

231   Bond, 2010). Further, a theory-centric educational approach appeared at times to be inadequate to equip

232   SPPs with the skills required to successfully navigate the challenges of their profession (McCormick &

233   Meijen, 2015; Winter & Collins, 2015).

234   *Developing competence and KSAs*

235   Our analysis led us to identify the development of competence and KSAs relevant to the

236   profession as one aspect of developing a PI (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; Cropley et al., 2007; 2010; Friesen

237   & Orlick, 2010; Hutter et al., 2017; Lindsay, 2007; McCormick & Meijen, 2015; McDougall et al.,2015;

238   McEwan et al., 2019; Pack et al., 2014; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011, Stambulova & Johnson,

239   2010; Tod & Bond, 2010, Tod et al., 2009).

240   Cropley et al. (2010) and Pack et al. (2014) distinguished between SPP competence and

241   theoretical knowledge, with the former reflecting the skill or ability to implement the latter ethically.

242   Specifically, consultant effectiveness was also delineated as a SPPs' ability to apply and adapt their

243   knowledge to a specific practice context and client (Pack et al., 2014). Elsewhere, scholars described

244   how the primary opportunities for experimentation and reflection exist within SPP's interactions with

245   their clients (Cropley et al., 2007; Tod & Bond, 2010). Much of this process occurs within the training

246   phases of a SPP's career (Hutter et al., 2017; Stambulova & Johnson, 2010, Tod et al., 2009), unfolding

247   through a process of trial-and-error learning whereby a SPP progresses toward an understanding of what

248   works for them (Lindsey et al., 2007; Tod & Bond, 2010). Through an experiential approach to

249   competency development, SPPs can use their service delivery experiences and subsequent reflections to

250   develop a range of KSAs to be used across several dynamic contexts (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; Friesen &

251   Orlick, 2010; McDougall et al., 2015). As a result, SPPs can enhance their confidence and identity as

252   competent caregivers (McEwan et al., 2019) and in doing so better recognize their limitations in applied

253   settings (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011).

254   *Defining the role and purpose of a SPP*

255   In addition to the development of competence and KSAs, the provision of a clear definition

256   concerning a SPP's role and purpose is facilitative to the formation of a PI (Cropley et al., 2010; Lindsay

257   et al., 2007; Pack et al., 2014; Simons & Andersen, 1995; Tod et al., 2009). While several scholars

258   debated the mechanisms of effective SP service delivery (Cropley et al., 2010; Simons & Andersen,

259   1995), limited attention has been put on developing a clear understanding of the purpose that a SPP

260   serves. Through the reporting of SPP reflections and critical discussions of the profession, Lindsay et al.

261   (2007) and Pack et al. (2014), highlighted the importance of identifying and exploring the fundamental

262   core of SPPs work. These authors have explored questions such as "Who am I doing this for?" (Pack et

263   al., 2014, p. 16) and considered how SPPs may reflect upon the most important aspects of their work and

264   interactions with their clients (Lindsay et al. 2007). Finally, from the perspectives of experienced SPPs,

265   Simons and Andersen (1995) summarized that the awareness of professional boundaries served to

266   reinforce a SPPs' understanding of their purpose within applied settings.

267   ***The 'self' as a performer***

268   Across several publications, scholars have drawn attention to the importance of SPPs viewing

269   themselves as performers (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Ploszay, 2003; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011;

270   Williams & Andersen, 2012; Woodcock et al., 2008). To elaborate, Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011)

271   noted that the delivery of SP services is a challenge in itself and can be viewed as performance. Scholars

272   also discussed how SPPs work across various contexts with many different clients, all whilst occupying

273   a myriad of roles (Williams & Andersen, 2012), which led experienced SPPs to feel like "more than a

274   technician" (p. 522) within their role, identifying that "everything but pathology" (p. 522) was a topic of

275   consultation (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). In facilitating SPP performance across a wide

276   spectrum of service delivery contexts, Friesen & Orlick (2010) discussed the importance of a wide

277   knowledge base and the flexibility to articulate several psychological approaches, as being key to

278   optimal SPP performance. Elsewhere, it has been highlighted how the interpretation of athlete feedback

279   can affect levels of anxiety and confidence for the novice practitioner (Woodcock et al., 2008). As a

280   performer, an SPP needs to be in control of these affective states in front of clients and to manage them

281   to assure their effectiveness (Poczwardowski, 2019). Similarly, Ploszay (2003) argued that the SPP's

282   performance, often measured in outcomes, is the key to gaining and retaining clientele. SPPs are

283   required to deliver effective and competent services to clients in the face of a changing service delivery

284   landscape while continuing to meet their clients' needs (Poczwardowski, 2019; Wagstaff & Quartiroli,

285   2020). By identifying themselves as a performer, SPPs may better sustain their performances through

286   the implementation of similar psychological techniques used with clients.

287   **Critical Summary.** These results are interpreted to align with the recent commentaries focused

288   on PI within the SP context (e.g., Tod et al., 2020; Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020). The development of

289   key KSAs related to service delivery may help to formulate PI, particularly in trainees, whose

290   professional development is influenced by their learning experiences in applied contexts (Tod & Bond,

291   2010; Hutter et al., 2017). While scholars have identified several competencies by which practitioner

292   effectiveness can be measured (Cropley et al., 2010, Tod et al., 2020), as the profession continues to

293   diversify and the contexts in which SPPs operate expand (see Sly et al., 2019; Wagstaff & Quartiroli,

294   2020), so have the competencies by which SPPs might be measured. Therefore, while the development

295   of SPP competence may form part of the formation of PI; there are still advances to be made by

296   conceptualizing and operationalizing a shared PI (Portenga et al., 2017). Such advances may emerge

297   from a better delineation of SPPs' roles and the necessary competencies they should possess (Portenga

298   et al., 2017; Wagstaff & Quartiroli., 2020). It seems paramount that SPPs and those who they serve

299   develop a better understanding of 'what' services a SPP can provide, 'why' they may be of benefit, and

300   'how' particular KSAs are used to assure their ethical and competent provision (Poczwardowski et al.,

301   2011; Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020; Tod et al., 2020). This theme also shows the importance for SPPs to

302   identify themselves as 'performers' (Poczwardowski, 2019), focusing on their ability to effectively

303   support those who they serve while taking care of themselves (Quartiroli et al., 2019b).

304   **Theme 2. Embodying Professional Identity**

305   The second theme developed within this analysis relates to the ways in which a SPPI may be

306   'lived' and includes four sub-themes: (a) Immersion in the profession, (b) Demonstrating self-

307   awareness, (c) Authenticity and congruence between philosophy and practice (d) Developing and

308   maintaining a clear model of practice.

309   *Immersion in the profession*

310   Practitioners have described that by being immersive and purposefully active within the

311   profession they can better embody their PI (Champ et al., 2020; McEwan et al., 2019; Ploszay, 2003;

312   Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2020). Indeed, this immersion was reported to

313   occur through two mechanisms: enjoyment and critical moments. Enjoyment and satisfaction were

314   derived from SPPs roles when they were able to operate competently as practitioners within

315   environments that supported their values and service delivery styles (McEwan et al., 2019; Ploszay,

316   2003; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). This identification was clear for one participant in Ploszay's

317   (2003) study who said "it's something I have never gotten tired of doing. It's been something that I have

318   really loved. I guess that's why I have stayed intimately involved for this long" (p. 65). Similarly,

319   Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) described how consultants reported immersion in the profession,

320   often through full involvement with their clients, as a source of satisfaction with their profession role.

321   Finally, McEwan et al. (2019) observed that concentrated periods of practice (e.g., training camps)

322   provide opportunities to experience greater immersion in and increased opportunities for service

323   delivery. Other scholars have described how critical moments served as professional experiences which

324   occurred as a result of immersion in applied practice (Wadsworth et al., 2020; Champ et al., 2020). Such

325   moments provided opportunities for SPPs to challenge their standing assumptions and beliefs, leading

326   them to shape a more congruent and aligned PI that is a reflective of their lived experiences.

327   ***Demonstrating self-awareness***

328   Numerous scholars have reported how exhibiting self-awareness was salient for SPPs in

329   embracing their PI (Collins et al., 2013; Cropley et al., 2007; Cropley et al., 2010; Friesen & Orlick,

330   2010; McCormick & Meijen, 2015; McDougall et al., 2015; Pack et al., 2014; Simons & Andersen,

331   1995; Wadsworth et al., 2020). SPPs reported that increases in their self-awareness allowed them to

332   have a better understanding of what was required of them to enhance their relationships with clients and

333   the effectiveness of their applied practices (Cropley et al., 2007; Simons & Andersen, 1995). Based on

334   these observations, two main ways to develop self-awareness were identified: reflective practice and

335   exposure to various environments. Primarily, SPPs attributed increases in their self-awareness to their

336   engagement in reflective practice (Collins et al., 2013; Cropley et al., 2010; McCormick & Meijen,

337   2015; Pack et al., 2014;), within which SPPs reported developing an increased appreciation of their own

338   thoughts, feeling and shortcomings, affording them clarity of their strengths and weaknesses as

339   practitioners. Similarly, elaborating on the reflections of experienced SPPs, McDougall et al. (2015)

340   reported the benefits that an exposure to various sporting environments had on the development of

341   practitioner self-awareness. Importantly, both of these mechanisms for developing self-awareness

342   require deliberate action from the practitioner and are not achieved passively.

343   ***Congruence between philosophy and practice***

344   In addition to demonstrating self-awareness, our results also highlight the importance for SPPs to

345   work toward congruence between their philosophical beliefs and their service delivery practices (Collins

346   et al., 2013; Cropley et al., 2007; 2010; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2007; McCormack et al.,

347   2015; McCormick & Meijen 2015; McDougall et al., 2015; Pack et al. 2014; Poczwardowski &

348   Sherman, 2011; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod et al., 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2020). Exploring SPPs'

349   professional philosophy, Friesen and Orlick (2010) noted the perceived value of SPPs representing

350   themselves authentically in providing holistic services. Indeed, when authentic with their clients SPPs

351   are liberated to share their true thoughts and opinions ethically while also eliciting a sense of humility

352   which helps in connecting with clients (McCormick & Meijen, 2015). Further, McDougall et al. (2015)

353   described how practitioner's congruence was not stable, but rather constantly evolving and influenced

354   by both internal and external factors, especially for trainees, whose development of a philosophy-

355   practice congruence has been presented as an ongoing journey (Lindsay et al., 2007; Tod & Bond, 2010;

356   Tod et al., 2011). The participants in Poczwardowski and Sherman's (2011) interview study highlighted

357   the pivotal importance of a clear professional philosophy, describing it as the most important aspect of

358   their practice and underpinning everything they do. Yet, SPPs must consistently and intentionally reflect

359   on their assumptions to become aware of their values and beliefs (Cropley et al., 2007; Cropley et al.,

360   2010; McCormack et al., 2015; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2020). In doing so

361   practitioners are better able to align their philosophical beliefs and service delivery styles in pursuit of an

362   authentic way of being.

363   *A clear model of practice*

364   From our analysis, developing and maintaining a model of practice can support SPPs to embody

365   a PI (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2007; McCormack et al., 2015; McCormick & Meijen,

366   2015; McDougall et al., 2015; Simons & Andersen, 1995; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod et al., 2009; 2011).

367   Scholars highlighted how the evolution of a clear model of practice is a process starting and primarily

368   attended to early on in SPPs' careers (Simons & Andersen, 1995; Tod et al, 2009; 2011). Simons and

369   Andersen (1995) described how a SPP may implement their reflections and service delivery experiences

370   to guide the development of a model of practice which suits their values and beliefs. This development

371   was exemplified by McCormack & Meijen (2015) who demonstrated the need for SPPs to regularly

372   revisit their practice model and processes of practice through critical reflection and evaluation. Finally, a

373 clear model of practice will be rooted in a clear set of values and beliefs from which a SPP can flexibly

374 develop interventions that will ethically and competently meet each client's need (Tod & Bond, 2010).

375 **Critical summary**. Our second theme reflects an internal focus on how SPPs may maintain their

376 PI. This includes working toward congruence between practitioner philosophy and service delivery

377 practices (Lindsay et al., 2007) and demonstrating self-awareness with regards to one's values, beliefs

378 and practices as a SPP (Friesen & Orlick, 2010) within a clear model of practice (McCormick et al.,

379 2015). These notions are also well documented within the counselling psychology, where scholars have

380 identified that one aspect of successful professional development comes from congruence between a

381 practitioners personal and professional values (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Moreover, counselling

382 scholars have identified that engagement behaviors can serve to make a practitioner feel involved within

383 a profession and facilitate a sense of professionalism (Woo et al., 2014).

384 Sport psychology scholars have described a process of individuation as a dynamic and continual

385 process by which SPPs develop their PI (Champ et al., 2020; McEwan et al, 2019; Tod, 2017; Tod et al.,

386 2020). Based on this process, an individual's PI is founded in the personalization of one's service-

387 delivery experiences and aligned with professional values and beliefs (McEwan et al., 2019).

388 Throughout the individuation process (Tod, 2017; McEwan et al., 2019), a SPP might begin to

389 understand their philosophical viewpoints as they begin to reflect on their service delivery experiences

390 and better understand the values and beliefs they hold regarding their practice. Subsequently, through a

391 deliberate process of sensemaking, SPPs typically begin to articulate their PI as a result of alignment

392 between their philosophical beliefs and service delivery styles. Finally, through the process of

393 individuation, SPPs develop a self-awareness regarding the strengths associated with their PI, as well as

394 the limitations by which they are constrained (Tod, 2017). It follows that this development of

395 competence and identity as non-linear and intermittent in nature (McEwan et al., 2019). To summarize,

396 this theme encapsulates the ways in which SPPs reportedly embrace and maintain their PI. As identified,

397   the processes of forming and embodying a PI are not linear with SPPs encountering supporting and

398   inhibiting factors throughout their careers.

399   **Theme 3. Supporting influences during the formation and embodiment of a Professional Identity**

400   The third theme relates to the influences which support PI and includes 4 sub-themes: (a) Peer

401   support, (b) Supervisor support, (c) Lessons learned from other professionals, and (d) Reflection.

402   *Peer support*

403   The presence of positive and adequate peer support can facilitate the SPPs' PI formation and

404   embodiment (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; Cropley et al., 2010; McCormack et al., 2015; McCormick &

405   Meijen, 2015; Pack et al., 2014; Stambulova & Johnson, 2010; Tod & Bond, 2010). Following the

406   cessation of their formal training, and throughout their professional development SPPs used peer support

407   to continue challenging their own assumptions, share experiences (McCormick & Meijen, 2015;

408   Stambulova & Johnson, 2010; Tod & Bond, 2010) and process their emotional responses to challenging

409   applied experiences (Pack et al., 2014). SPPs also spoke to the importance of using different peer

410   support groups to cultivate a variety of perspectives to facilitate reflective practices (Cropley et al. 2010)

411   and assist with emotional support and service delivery issues (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015). The value of peer

412   support has been highlighted across SPPs' development, with experienced practitioners highlighting the

413   importance of formal (e.g., counselling, formal peer groups) and informal (e.g., family, friends, informal

414   peer groups) peer support toward their formation and embodiment of PI (McCormack et al., 2015).

415   *Supervisor support*

416   As with other disciplines of psychology, the importance of ongoing supervision is apparent

417   across the professional formulation and identity literature (Cropley et al., 2010; Hutter et al., 2017;

418   McCormack et al., 2015; McCormick & Meijen, 2015; Tod et al., 2009; Tod et al., 2011; Woodcock et

419   al., 2008). Tod et al. (2011, p. 105) noted that "supervision gives you the insight into how to learn stuff

420   from clients because it gives you the necessary self-evaluation, and also evaluation of skills and

421   questions and so forth". Supervisor support was also reported as a valuable space in which to discuss

422   casework or co-formulate intervention ideas (Tod et al., 2009; McCormack et al., 2015) as well as

423   receive feedback (Woodcock et al., 2008), which can allow SPPs to become self-aware of their strengths

424   and limitations as professionals. Elsewhere, Hutter et al. (2017) illustrated the contribution of

425   supervision when discussing treatment plans, role confusion, ambiguity, and boundary issues. Other

426   scholars have reported supervisors' support to be useful for embedding reflective and critical practices

427   within a professional framework (Cropley et al., 2010) and providing SPPs with a "central anchor point"

428   (McCormick et al., 2015, p. 5) from which they can explore their philosophical assumptions, service

429   delivery styles and personal values.

430   *Lessons learned from other professions*

431   The value of learning from other psychology disciplines was evident across several SPPs'

432   reflections (Cropley et al., 2007; McCormick & Meijen, 2015; McEwan et al., 2019; Tod & Bond, 2010;

433   Tod et al., 2009; Tod et al., 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2020). Scholars have described how SPPs refer to

434   conferences, professional development opportunities and specialized literature from other psychology

435   disciplines to foster their awareness of existing gaps in their theoretical knowledge and applied skills

436   (McCormick & Meijen, 2015; Tod & Bond, 2010). Indeed, Cropley et al. (2007) reported that drawing

437   on paradigms and perspectives from other psychology disciplines were perceived by practitioners to be

438   useful for understanding their philosophical orientation and beliefs. Moreover, professionals have noted

439   how engaging in personal therapy allowed them to gain an appreciation for the 'other side' of service

440   delivery, leading them to reflect on and implement new knowledge into their service delivery (Tod et al.,

441   2009; 2011). Similarly, SPPs spoke of the influence that other helping professionals (e.g., clinical

442   psychologists) and major events in their lives have in shaping them as a person and a practitioner

443   (McEwan et al., 2019; Wadsworth et al., 2020).

444   *Reflection*

445   Scholars highlighted the reflective practice as fundamental to developing their PI (Collins et al.,

446   2013; Cropley et al., 2007; 2010; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Hutter et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2007).

447   McCormack & Meijen, 2015; Pack et al., 2014; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Tod et al., 2009;

448   Woodcock et al., 2008). Cropley et al. (2010) noted how reflective practice assists SPPs in appreciating

449   the nuances and complexities of their work, particularly the grey areas of service delivery. Other

450   scholars indicated how reflecting on their professional development can assist SPPs to identify their

451   values (Collins et al., 2013; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Tod et al., 2009; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011)

452   as well as the philosophical beliefs and world views which underpin their practice (e.g., McCormick &

453   Meijen, 2015; Lindsay et al., 2007). Finally, through reflection, SPPs can also become more aware of

454   how to articulate their philosophical views and develop a model of practice that is authentic (Cropley,

455   2007; Hutter et al., 2017; Pack et al., 2014).

456   **Critical summary.** Tod et al. (2020) presented three resources from which SPPs can grow their

457   PI: relationships, reading and writing, specifically highlighting the value of relationships with peers,

458   supervisors and clients in helping a SPP to reflect on their developmental journey. It is important to

459   reinforce the importance of peers' and supervisors' support for SPP's professional development and the

460   development of PI. Of particular importance is the provision of safe environments, which SPPs may use

461   to reflect on their development with the guidance of supervisors and through experience sharing with

462   peers (McCormick & Meijen, 2015; Pack et al., 2014). In their systematic review, Woo et al. (2017)

463   identified how counselling supervisors contributed to the development of their supervisees' PI by

464   conveying their own PI as a position from which to start. It is also important that SPPs do not limit their

465   sources of support and reflection exclusively to the SP community and literature, and instead they find

466   support and sources for self-reflection from other helping professionals and within other disciplines. In

467   sum, this theme showcases the main influences reported to support the formation and maintenance of a

468   SPPI. While such influences enhance the SPPI development process, many others inhibit this.

469   **Theme 4. Challenges regarding the formation and embodiment of a Professional Identity**

470   The fourth theme we developed focuses on the challenges to the formation and embodiment of

471   PI and includes 4 sub-themes: (a) Anxiety and self-doubt, (b) Demands of the profession, (c)

472   Experiencing multiple identities, and (d) Having naïve expectations of the profession.

473   *Anxiety and self-doubts*

474   As in other disciplines of psychology, SPPs encounter challenges to their PI due to anxiety and

475   self-doubt regarding their effectiveness and competence as practitioners (Collins et al. 2013; Cropley et

476   al., 2007; Lindsay et al., 2007; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod et al., 2009; 2011; Williams & Andersen, 2012;

477   Wadsworth et al., 2020; Woodcock et al., 2008). Often these challenges are manifest in self-critical

478   questioning and uncertainty regarding 'getting it right' and replicating 'clean' textbook-style service

479   provision (Tod et al., 2009; 2011; Tod & Bond, 2010; Wadsworth et al., 2020). Indeed, through frequent

480   negative self-talk and doubt during applied practice (Williams & Andersen, 2012), SPPs often question

481   their ability and service delivery style (Lindsay et al., 2007). Scholars have reported how SPPs create

482   self-doubt by focusing on the weaknesses of their practice and limited consideration of their strengths

483   which may provide them with confidence in their abilities (Collins et al., 2013; Woodcock et al., 2008).

484   Indeed, SPPs often reported experiencing anxieties regarding client expectations and self-doubt

485   associated with being unable to meet such expectations (Cropley et al., 2007).

486   *Demands of the profession*

487   SPPs face challenges to their PI due to the professional contexts in which they work (Arnold &

488   Sarkar, 2015; Champ et al., 2020; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; McDougall et al., 2015; Pack et al., 2014;

489   Ploszay, 2003; Simons & Andersen, 1995; Tod & Bond 2010; Tod et al., 2009; 2011). Some SPPs have

490   described how the unconventional nature of the working conditions and settings in which they practice

491   and the associated demands represent a major challenge to their professional journey (Tod & Bond,

492   2010; Tod et al., 2011; McDougall et al., 2015). Moreover, the contextual constraints SPPs often face in

493   their practice seem to compromise their ability to provide effective and competent services, and in turn,

494   also lead many to experience self-doubt about their own professional role (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015;

495   Simons & Andersen, 1995). Some of these demands were rooted in a perceived need to quickly and

496   consistently meet stakeholders' expectations and the associated emotional burden of this labor, which

497   can make the practice a lonely pursuit (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Pack et al., 2014; Ploszay, 2003).

498   Champ et al. (2020) described the negative impact of working as the only female in a male dominated

499   environment, leading her to "questioning every aspect of my identity" (Champ et al., 2020, p. 9).

500   Finally, infrequent work and the value stakeholders have for the profession lead to financial threat for

501   some SPPs, with some questioning the feasibility of their professional journey (Tod et al., 2009).

502   *Experiencing multiple identities*

503   Within the practice environment, SPPs are often required to "muck in" and assume roles that are

504   seemingly very different to what one might expect is the traditional work of a psychologist, leading

505   them to experience multiple identities (Champ et al., 2020; Friesen and Orlick, 2010; McCormack et al.,

506   2015; Williams & Andersen, 2012). The varied roles assumed by practitioners often lead to a blurring of

507   the boundaries of SPPs practices, which is particularly prevalent during extensive periods of service

508   delivery, such as competition, where the boundaries of the client-practitioner relationship are challenged

509   (Williams & Andersen, 2012). The adoption of multiple identities can also lead to a sense of inauthentic

510   and misaligned service delivery and the creation of context-driven personas, not reflecting the values

511   and beliefs of the SPP (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Champ et al. (2020) discussed how a desire to 'survive'

512   within the sport as a female SPP in a male dominated context, led her to cultivate a version of herself to

513   better align with the masculine identity of the environment, thus posing a challenge to the development

514   of an authentic and aligned PI.

515   *A naïve view of the profession*

516   The SPPs' pre-determined expectations of service delivery and their professional role presented

517   another challenge to PI (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; McCormick & Meijen, 2015; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod

518   et al., 2009). SPPs described how their perceptions of 'good' SPP were characterized by fast results and

519   led them to seek immediate solutions (Tod et al., 2009) or quick fixes (Tod & Bond, 2011; McCormick

520   & Meijen, 2015) for their clients. Scholars have also shown how SPPs are challenged by their need to

521   prove their own professional worth and to embrace a 'rigid' – assumed to be effective – approach to

522   service delivery (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015). SPPs also discussed how their desire to provide competent

523   and comprehensive services, combined with a pre-conceptualized view of what a SPP is and does, often

524   lead them to only engage in material that fit their preconceived notions of service delivery (McCormick

525   & Meijen, 2015; Tod et al., 2009).

526   **Critical summary.** The SPPs' experience of unique professional challenges and demands

527   associated with the profession are well documented. Scholars have described the challenges associated

528   with the uniqueness of the profession (e.g., Collins et al., 2013; Ploszay, 2003; Stapleton et al., 2010),

529   and how they can lead SPPs to experience emotional labor trying to fit within professional environments

530   that do not always allow a full genuine expression of their own emotions (Hings et al., 2017). The

531   prominent challenges to the formation and embodiment of a PI relate to issues of anxiety and self-doubt

532   regarding SPPs' competencies, which are often rooted in a rigid view of what a SPP *is*, *should be*, and

533   *does* (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015) and the way one *must* implement their services (Tod & Bond, 2010).

534   Among trainee SPPs, service-delivery anxiety emanates from high levels of cognitive activity

535   experienced early in their career and can be disruptive to internal processes (Tod, 2017). It is noteworthy

536   that scholars across the psychology disciplines have often described such feelings as a part of

537   practitioner development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Tod, 2007). These challenging experiences not

538   only limit the formation and embodiment of the PI, but may jeopardize SPPs' entire professional

539   experience (Quartiroli et al., 2019a) and self-care (Quartiroli et al., 2019b). While these experiences do

540   not necessarily lead to practitioner impairment they serve as valuable warnings (Barnett et al., 2007).

Conclusion

542   In this review we aimed to examine and qualitatively analyze the available literature on PI. Until

543   recently (see Eubank et al., 2021), professional identity was a construct that had received only sporadic

544   and superficial attention within a siloed body of wide-ranging and disparate work. Hence, the integration

545   of these lines of work here has allowed us to develop a rich understanding of the extant literature

546   relevant to PI which will provide a foundation for future research and practice. Indeed, one of the salient

547   observations emanating from this review is the existence of a diverse body of scholarly work bringing to

548   life a range of different elements encompassed in the PI construct. Nevertheless, these elements hitherto

549   collectively lacked conceptual connection or coherent integration among regarding a unifying SPPI.

550   Such processes have already been explored by the counselling profession and unfolded with the premise

551   of a "unity through diversity" (Woo et al., 2014, p. 2).

552   With this systematic review we have identified and connected disparate lines of research from

553   which scholars might develop a conceptual framework, definition, and characterization of SPPI.

554   Importantly, in this review, we have been able to highlight the strong connections between factors

555   underlying the identity of professionals, which in turn, has been noted as being fundamental to both

556   educational pathways and applied practice (Tod et al., 2017). Concurrently, we have highlighted how

557   some of the challenges highlighted in the literature as obstacles to the "how to" of the profession also

558   appear to limit SPPs' ability to explore and define their own PI. Our synthesis of the available research

559   on PI characterization, formation and maintenance significantly advances knowledge in this area, and

560   yet, to further support the future of the profession and clearly delineate of work of SPPs, in addition to

561   this first description of the factors encompassed within the professional identity of SPPs, ongoing work

562   is needed toward the development of a commonly shared definition of a SPPI (Wagstaff & Quartiroli,

563   2020). This line of work can have a substantial impact on the future development of professionals and

564   educational pathways. Sport psychologists are performers in their own right (Poczwardoski, 2019), and

565   hence, it is important to understand what the profession *is*, who SPPs *are* as professionals, and *how they*

566   *fit* within the profession, to perform at their best. With this systematic review, we have provided an

567   initial integration of PI-relevant literature, which will be a fundamental cornerstone to support such

568   development of professionals as well as theoretical frameworks within this area.

569   **Applied Implications**

570   Despite the nascent stage of this research, several prospective training and development

571   opportunities exist. To elaborate, SP professional societies might develop and disseminate resources for

572   professionals that develop an awareness of PI and offer opportunities for trainee and early career

573   professionals to build a professional network by connecting them with other professionals and use this

574   network to facilitate reflection on their professional identity with others. This might serve to provide

575   support during an individual's professional formation while also connecting them to a network of fellow

576   practitioners who are also developing their own PI. In time, this network will develop and foster a

577   shared understanding of the profession. Further, membership to a professional society may allow for a

578   greater sense of professionalism and allegiance to the profession, offering greater opportunities to be

579   immersive in professional behaviors such as networking, continuing education, and mentoring.

580   The present study highlights the importance of professionalized education and training programs

581   for supporting trainees and early career SPPs given the early formation of their own SPPI. To elaborate,

582   structured professional pathways to practice that offer a critical stimulation and ultimately a greater

583   understanding of one's SPPI will enable early career SPPs to better situate themselves professionally

584   among peers and other healthcare professionals. Hence, the professionalization of education and training

585   programs may help SPPs to develop their own SPPI, and in turn, understanding of their professional

586   roles regarding 'what' services they can provide, 'why' they may be of benefit, and 'how' particular

587   knowledge, skills, and abilities might promote ethical and competent practice. These programs may also

588   support SPPs to identify their values and beliefs and the likelihood of congruence of their personal and

589   professional self via engagement with peers, supervisors, and professional organizations. As part of this

590   developmental process, supervisors may be able to support their students' and trainees' development by

591   sharing their own SPPI and developmental experiences. Finally, such programs might support early

592   career SPPs to remain open to and accepting of experiences of anxiety and self-doubt that typically

593   characterizes the nascent SPPs' professional journey. By better preparing and supporting neophyte SPPs

594   to meaningfully "sit with" these experiences, encouraging them to engaging with the body of literature

595   detailing personal reflections on such experiences, and sharing personal experiences, we might better

596   support early career SPPs with a foundation to develop their own sense of self in the profession.

597   While the themes developed here will help scholars to take stock of the existing knowledge

598   regarding practitioners' PI, several opportunities exist to expand this knowledge through programs of

599   research. For example, it would be valuable for researchers to explore how practitioners develop,

600   sustain, and experience their PI over the course of their careers and whether there are common

601   milestones or narratives shared during this formation. Researchers might also adapt and better integrate

602   knowledge from other psychology disciplines relating to PI (e.g., Woo et al., 2014) when developing

603   SPP resources.

604   In this review we provide a sense of the developmental nature of SPPI while also illuminating

605   how PI is grounded in the competencies needed to practice, the development of philosophical beliefs and

606   values as well as experiences through involvement in the profession. Concurrently, we have highlighted

607   how some of the developmental challenges highlighted in the literature as obstacles to service delivery

608   may also limit the ability of the SPPs to explore and define their own PI.

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