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9   A Systematic Review Exploring the Reflective Accounts of Applied Sport

10   Psychology Practitioners

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26   **Abstract**

27   This systematic review explores the reflective accounts of applied sport psychology

28   practitioners. The aim of this review was to synthesize the reflective accounts of applied sport

29   psychology practitioners and highlight common themes that provide focus to their reflective

30   practice. The insight into current progress on reflective content in applied sport psychology

31   provides a foundation to build on as we continue to understand this topic. Following a

32   systematic search of the literature, a total of 73 studies were included within the review,

33   which were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Analysis of the reflective accounts

34   resulted in the creation of nine higher-order themes: *Process and Purpose of Reflective*

35   *Practice*; *Ethical Practice; Supporting Person and Performer; Practitioner Individuation;*

36   *Relationships with Clients; Cultural Awareness; Competence-Related Angst; Support of*

37   *Practitioner Development;* and *Evaluating Practitioner Effectiveness*. The review includes

38   recommendations for future research, such as the use of narrative analysis to provide further

39   insight into applied practitioners' experiences. We also provide practical implications, which

40   are tailored to match the specific demands of practitioners at different stages of development

41   and include increased engagement in critical reflection for trainee practitioners and engaging

42   with 'critical friends' to facilitate the process of meta-reflection for newly qualified

43   practitioners.

44   *Keywords:* reflective practice, practitioner development, applied sport psychology, self-

45   awareness, philosophy of practice

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52   Sport psychology practitioners function in complex and changing environments (Cruickshank

53   et al., 2018). To maintain effectiveness, practitioners must continually learn from real-life

54   practice environments (Keegan, 2016). In the applied sports literature, there is consistent

55   identification of reflective practice as a contributor to competent practitioners who are

56   prepared to address the ambiguous challenges of sport psychology practice (e.g., Knowles et

57   al., 2012; Martindale & Collins, 2012). While there is, an increasing presence of literature

58   focusing on reflection in sport psychology practice, Huntley et al. (2014) summarised that

59   there was limited depth of understanding on reflection (i.e., what it is and how to engage in

60   it), and encouraged assimilating what practitioner-focused content we have already published

61   as a discipline. The invitation to review accounts within the field of sport psychology practice

62   to understand the content and process of practitioner reflection is one we accept and address

63   in this research.

64   To guide our review, we adopted the following understanding of reflective practice

65   because it captures both the nature of the activity and its translation into professional practice:

66   A purposeful and complex process that facilitates the examination of experience by

67   questioning the whole self and our agency within the context of practice. This

68   examination transforms experience into learning, which helps us to access, make

69   sense of, and develop our knowledge-in-action to better understand and/or improve

70   practice and the situation in which it occurs (Knowles et al., 2014, p. 10).

71   This definition is explicit about examining the whole self within the context of practice to

72   achieve a deeper meaning and understanding of who we are and how we influence sport

73   psychology service delivery.

74   Sport psychology practitioners are the instruments of service delivery, which means

75   that it is difficult to separate the person from the process of service delivery (McEwan et al.,

76   2019; Tod et al., 2017; Wadsworth et al., 2021). In recognising the integration of the personal

77   and professional, Knowles et al. (2014) encourage reflection as a means by which

78   practitioners can develop self-awareness (e.g., of their biases in the context of the

79   professional environment). Developing high levels of self-awareness (understanding who you

80   are, what you do, and why you do what you do) supported by the use of reflective practice

81   can be a fundamental part of forming a professional identity (McEwan et al., 2019).

82   Practitioners who reflect consistently and develop self-awareness of their own tendencies

83   may enhance authenticity and ensure congruent practice (Lindsay et al., 2007).

84   Practitioners can better understand their core values and beliefs and how they

85   influence the service provision process through self-awareness (Poczwardowski, 2017).

86   Moreover, these personal core values and beliefs, which are stable across time and context,

87   influence both practitioner philosophy and the theoretical paradigm the practitioner chooses

88   to apply. It has been asserted that a practitioner's philosophy and theoretical paradigm

89   combine to influence the expectations that both the practitioner and client have regarding the

90   service provision experience (Keegan, 2016). In essence, the skill of reflective practice

91   influences every facet of applied sport psychology (e.g., ethical standards, philosophical

92   approach).

93   Synthesising and analysing practitioner accounts of reflective practice will allow us to

94   draw knowledge together in one place. Reflecting on a synthesis of the reflective accounts of

95   applied sport psychology practitioners may encourage meta-reflection. For example, in

96   reference to reflecting on how personal qualities (e.g., humility; Chandler et al., 2014)

97   contribute towards applied practice, the practitioner performing meta-reflection is asking

98   'how do I reflect on my personal qualities and their influence on practice?' Examining *what*

99   (personal and professional issues) and *how* (levels of reflection; noticing, making meaning;

100   see Moon, 1999) other practitioners reflect can encourage meta-reflection. Readers can

101   reflect on the published accounts in respect of their own level of development. For example,

102   practitioners early in their careers might reflect on some of the experiences of perceived

103   pressured in service delivery by reading Tonn and Harmison, (2004) and Wadsworth et al.

104   (2018). Reading and asking reflective questions, such as 'how do I reflect on the issue I am

105   currently learning about?' can provide practitioners with information to influence their

106   professional growth. For example, reflecting on accounts of philosophy of practice (e.g.,

107   Lindsay, 2017; Tod, 2014) can aid the reader to articulate their own professional philosophy.

108   Published accounts of reflective practice present opportunities to examine what others reflect

109   on (and how). Meta-reflection, like reflection can also allow individuals to better understand

110   themselves (Fletcher & Maher, 2013) within their context and so provides applied

111   practitioners with an opportunity to generate practice-based knowledge (Cropley et al., 2010).

112   Although reflective articles have been a feature of sport psychology literature

113   throughout its history, there has been no attempt to assimilate the collective published

114   practitioners' accounts. A systematic review process would allow us to meet the call from

115   Huntley et al. (2014) to 'take stock as a field' (p. 876) to understand better the concept of

116   reflective practice. We intend to achieve this, by addressing the question; what do applied

117   sport psychology practitioners choose to reflect on? The specific aim of this review is to

118   synthesize the reflective accounts of applied sport psychology practitioners and highlight

119   common themes that provide focus to their reflective practice. By achieving this aim, we will

120   provide an insight into current progress on reflective content in applied sport psychology.

121   This work will provide a foundation to build on as we continue to understand this topic. The

122   review will provide practical suggestions and opportunities for meta-reflection on themes. To

123   address the aim of the research, we conducted a thematic content analysis of the data (Braun

124   et al., 2016), to describe, identify, and interpret the themes and patterns within the data.

125   **Method**

126   **Developing Keywords for Electronic Search**

127   We started by first conducting a scoping review to develop key search terms that

128   would ensure a comprehensive systematic search of the relevant literature. Scoping reviews

129   are often conducted, prior to a full systematic review, to highlight key concepts underpinning

130   a specific research area (Peters et al., 2015). This scoping process involved reading seven

131   reflective articles. We identified the seven reflective articles by consulting experts in the field

132   (Pham et al., 2014) and we selected the articles because they provided an insight into the

133   experiences of practitioners at different stages of development. We did not conduct this

134   scoping review with the intention of capturing all relevant literature, but instead, to create the

135   key search terms for the subsequent systematic review search (Pham et al., 2014). The lead

136   author read the seven articles (Cecil, 2012; Collins et al., 2013; Cox et al., 2016; Haberl &

137   McCann, 2012; Tod et al., 2015; Williams & Anderson, 2012; Woodcock et al., 2008) and

138   highlighted key words through a method similar to that of content analysis (quantifying the

139   presence of certain words, terms, or themes in qualitative data; Neuendorf, 2016). The lead

140   author combined the most common key words to create the search terms (*Adaptability*,

141   *Anxiety*, *Relationships*, *Identity*, *Reflection*, *Philosophy*, *Supervision*, *Education*,

142   *Development*), which we then used to develop the search strategy discussed below.

143   **Formal Search**

144   We conducted the initial search in October 2018, which included: (a) an online search

145   of the following electronic databases: *Web of Science; SPORTDiscus; PsychINFO;*

146   *PsychARTICLES; Open Grey;* and *Scopus* using the following search terms: *Sport Psychol**

147   AND (*Adaptability* OR *Anxiety* OR *Relationships* OR *Identity* OR *Reflection* OR *Philosophy*)

148   AND (*Supervision* OR *Education* OR *Development*); (b) a journal table of content search,

149   which explored all of the titles and abstracts of all volumes in the following journals: *The*

150   *Sport Psychologist; Journal of Applied Sport Psychology; Journal of Applied Sport*

151   *Psychology in Action; International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology; International*

152   *Journal of Sport Psychology; Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology; Journal of Clinical*

153   *Sport Psychology; Psychology of Sport and Exercise; Sport and Exercise Psychology*

154   *Review;* and *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology;* and *(*c) a forwards and

155   backwards search of all retrieved articles, which involved exploring the reference lists of all

156   original articles found and searching for all papers that had cited the original paper found. We

157   conducted two additional table-of-contents searches in October 2019 and February 2021 to

158   ensure any reflective accounts published since the initial search were included in the analysis.

159   Our search of the electronic databases yielded 1,305 hits and, after removing

160   duplicates and cross-referencing with the forward and backwards searches, a total of 995

161   potential articles remained (see PRISMA diagram in Figure 1). We then screened the final

162   995 articles against the inclusion criteria, which were that the paper must be: (a) a reflective

163   account that focused on the applied experiences of sport psychology practitioners; (b)

164   qualitative; (c) of any year; (d) English language; and (e) published. This inclusion criteria

165   ensured we collated articles together that would allow us to meet the specific aim of the

166   review. Following this initial screening process, we excluded 925 of the 995 articles; leaving

167   a total of 70 articles that met the inclusion criteria required for the systematic review. We

168   excluded a further three articles when conducting the full-text eligibility criterion, because

169   they were not reflective accounts of applied sport psychology practice. Two of these articles

170   focused on the supervisory experience, and one focused on the process of reflective practice

171   itself, rather than the applied experiences of sport practitioners directly. The final pool of

172   articles included 67 reflective accounts of applied practitioners' service-delivery experiences.

173   The additional table of content searches conducted in October 2019 and February 2021, led to

174   the addition of a further six reflective articles: bringing the total to 73 reflective accounts.

175   **Data Extraction**

176   We extracted, stored, read, and re-read the remaining 73 articles to ensure we could

177   conduct the data extraction and data analysis processes on two levels. The lead author first

178   extracted and recorded the: authors' name(s); date of publication; gender; experience level;

179   topic of reflection; sport; country; and the theory underpinning the reflective account. The

180   lead author then read the reflective accounts again to conduct the thematic content analysis.

181   During both stages, we recorded the experience level of the authors to identify themes that

182   were representative of the differing developmental stages of the applied practitioners. *Trainee*

183   *practitioners* were identified as those individuals who had not yet achieved accreditation

184   through their respective professional body. *Newly qualified practitioners* were those

185   individuals who had achieved accredited status less than five years prior to writing the article.

186   *Experienced practitioners* were identified as individuals with five or more years' experience

187   at the point the reflective account was written (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Wadsworth et

188   al., 2021).

189   **Analysis of the Practitioners' Reflections**

190   **Philosophical Approach.** In relation to our aim to synthesize the reflective accounts

191   of applied sport psychology practitioners we situated this systematic review in an interpretive

192   paradigm (Sparkes & Smith, 2013), informed by ontological relativism (the view that reality

193   is subjective to each individual; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and epistemological constructivism

194   (knowledge is constructed; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Adopting this ontological and

195   epistemological stance allowed us to explore, and understand, the meaning each sport

196   psychology practitioner ascribed to their applied experiences (Cohen & Manion, 1994;

197   Creswell, 2003; 2009). For example, conducting a thematic content analysis (Braun et al.,

198   2016) on the articles allowed us to understand how the participants perceived, and made

199   sense of, these experiences through exploring the topics they chose to reflect on.

200   Furthermore, conducting thematic content analysis (Braun et al., 2016) on reflective accounts

201   of applied practice ensured we were able to discover an aspect of each practitioners' view of

202   reality, through gaining an understanding of their background, beliefs, and experiences

203   (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Adopting this approach to data analysis across all 73

204   reflective accounts allowed us to collate common experiences of applied practitioners and

205   gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Morehouse, 2011) by uncovering both

206   individual and collective experiences (Cohen et al., 2007).

207   **Analysis Procedure.** The procedure we used during the data analysis phase of this

208   systematic review followed Braun et al's. (2016) thematic content analysis. We used thematic

209   content analysis as a method of data analysis to better understand the experiences of applied

210   practitioners (Cohen & Manion, 1994), by focusing on the aspects of the practitioners'

211   experiences which we felt were meaningful to discuss (Creswell, 2003). Thematic content

212   analysis also allowed us to identify and create patterns of meaning across the data set. The

213   creation of patterns provided us with the opportunity to gain an insight into the shared

214   experiences of applied sport psychology practitioners and meet the specific research aim of

215   the review (Braun et al., 2015).

216   During Phase One the lead author immersed himself within the data set by reading

217   and re-reading the 73 reflective accounts (consisting of 821 pages) and highlighting any areas

218   of interest in relation to the research aim. During Phase Two, the lead author built upon these

219   areas of interest by creating raw codes. After reading and re-reading the 73 articles, the lead

220   author identified and created 438 raw codes. We approached these phases with a semantic

221   focus (coding the explicitly stated ideas and experiences of the practitioners; Braun et al.,

222   2016). During Phase Three we combined these 438 raw codes into 110 unique codes by

223   'tagging' raw codes, with the same or similar meaning, and grouping them together in an

224   excel document. For example, the raw codes; *working with coaches to have more of an*

225   *impact with players*, *working through the coaches is essential to successful service delivery,*

226   and *building effective relationships with coaches* were combined to create the unique code

227   *working with, and through, coaches to support the athlete.* We also marked each code to

228   denote the experience level of the practitioner. We grouped unique codes, representing

229   similar ideas, to create lower-order themes. We combined the 110 unique codes to create 28

230   lower-order themes. For example, we combined *working with, and through, coaches to*

231   *support the athletes, delivering and disseminating to key stakeholders, and communication*

232   *and collaboration with support staff* to create the lower-order theme *working with support*

233   *staff.* During Phase Four we focused on reviewing the lower-order themes in relation to the

234   overall purpose of the research (what were the collective experiences of applied sport

235   psychology practitioners?). Throughout Phase Five we focused on re-assessing the names of

236   the lower-order themes and highlighting the essence or unique aspect of each theme. We did

237   this to ensure each theme was distinct from the next, but also to understand, and better

238   capture, the interconnectedness of all the themes in relation to the overall experiences of the

239   practitioners (Braun et al., 2016). Hence, this phase allowed us to move beyond simply

240   describing individual ideas and provided us with the opportunity to present the collective

241   experiences of the practitioners in line with our research aim and our ontological and

242   epistemological stance. In Phase Six, we grouped the lower-order themes together to create

243   nine higher-order themes that were representative of the experiences of applied sport

244   psychology practitioners. For example, we combined the six lower-order themes:

245   *understanding the demands of elite sport; immersion (and integration) into the environment;*

246   *informal work with athletes; understanding the culture; working with support staff;* and *lack*

247   *of contact time with athletes* to create the higher-order theme *Cultural Awareness*. We used a

248   'thematic map' (in the form of a table; consisting of unique codes, lower-order themes, and

249   higher-order themes) to help us with this process (see Table 1.).

250   *Insert Table 1. here*

251   **Data Representation.** Once we had created the higher-order themes, we focused on

252   identifying the themes that represented the unique experiences of practitioners in a particular

253   stage of development. For example, the theme *Competence-Related Angst*, better represented

254   the experiences of trainee or early career practitioners. Presenting the themes in this way

255   helped us identify specific experiences associated with the different development stages.

256   **Results**

257   Following the thematic content analysis of the 73 articles; we created 28 lower-order

258   themes, which we combined to create nine higher-order themes (see Table 1.). We present an

259   overview of the themes below, focusing on the meaning of each theme and which group

260   (trainee, newly qualified, or experienced) generally reflected upon this area. We have

261   presented the higher-order themes in the order below to support our earlier conceptualisation

262   of reflective practice (starting with the examination of the whole self and moving towards an

263   understanding of how the self interacts with the context; Knowles et al., 2014).

264   **Process and Purpose of Reflective Practice.** Trainee practitioners wrote 19 (26%) of

265   the reflective accounts, ten (14%) were written by newly qualified practitioners, and 44

266   (60%) were written by experienced practitioners. Authors reflected on a variety of different

267   topics, such as: providing one-to-one support; developing a life skills programme; working

268   with young athletes; and attending major international competitions. 18 (22%) of the articles

269   explicitly mentioned the use of a reflective model to structure their reflective accounts. The

270   higher-order theme itself was made up on three lower-order themes; *developing self-*

271   *awareness and self-knowledge*, *learning is a continuous process*, and *creating an awareness*

272   *of transference and countertransference,* which were underpinned by 12 unique codes.

273   Applied practitioners stated that they engaged in reflective practice for different reasons, such

274   as: increasing self-awareness (Woodcock et al., 2008); enhancing and maintaining

275   development (Tod, 2014); and directing attention towards the practitioner-client relationship

276   (Tod, 2007).

277   ***Developing Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge***. A consistent feature, usually

278   presented at the start of the reflective accounts, was a focus on the self and the importance of

279   understanding core values and beliefs (Cox et al., 2016). Applied practitioners discussed

280   engaging in reflective practice to gain a better insight into who they were as both people and

281   practitioners (Cecil, 2014). We theorised that engaging in reflective practice for this purpose

282   provided the practitioners with the opportunity to develop a professional identity; grounded in

283   their own values and beliefs (Cox et al., 2016; Williams & Anderson, 2012). Moreover, this

284   increased self-knowledge and self-awareness allowed applied practitioners to navigate and

285   overcome the many barriers of delivering sport psychology support in elite environments

286   (Ross, 2015).

287   ***Learning is a Continuous Process.*** There was also a consistent focus on the links

288   between reflection and continual development as a practitioner (Gordon, 2014). Experienced

289   practitioners in particular focused on the importance of reflective practice in viewing learning

290   and development as a continuous, constant, and on-going process (Fifer et al., 2008; Giges,

291   2014). We speculated that practitioners used reflective practice to assess their own

292   developmental needs, ensuring they engaged in purposeful and meaningful continued

293   professional development (CPD) opportunities (Carr, 2007).

294   ***Creating an Awareness of Transference and Countertransference.*** We also

295   speculated that reflective practice allowed practitioners to become more aware of how their

296   own motivations and needs might be influencing the relationship developed with the client

297   (Tod, 2008). Applied practitioners reflected on their need to 'protect' their clients (Lindsay &

298   Thomas, 2014; Wadsworth et al., 2019), becoming more aware of the power dynamic

299   between themselves and their clients (Tod, 2007), and how this understanding made them

300   more conscious of potential transference and countertransference (Anderson, 2014; Tod,

301   2007).

302   **Ethical Practice.** Ethical practice was a central feature of the reflective accounts and

303   explicitly mentioned by applied practitioners as a fundamental component to successful

304   service-delivery (Moyle, 2015). This higher-order theme was made up of three lower-order

305   themes; *ethical dilemmas are challenging and uncomfortable, negotiating with the media and*

306   *self-promotion*, and *staying humble*, which were underpinned by 12 unique codes.

307   ***Ethical Dilemmas are Challenging and Uncomfortable.*** Applied practitioners,

308   working in a sporting context (regardless of experience level), faced an abundance of ethical

309   challenges, which in most cases were successfully navigated. However, these ethical

310   dilemmas provoked emotive reactions in the practitioners and reinforced that ethical practice

311   should be considered as an essential and foundational component of successful applied

312   practice (Keegan, 2016). A variety of reoccurring ethical challenges were discussed in the

313   reflective articles, such as: 'blurred boundaries' with clients (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014)

314   (such as questioning whether or not the relationship with the client was professional or

315   personal; Collins et al., 2013)); referring clients when their needs fell outside of the

316   practitioners' scope of practice (Drew & Morris, 2020; Wadsworth et al., 2020); and

317   travelling with teams (Haberl & Peterson, 2006) (leading to unexpected and unpredictable

318   situations; Collins & Cruickshank, 2015). At a broader level, experienced practitioners in

319   particular discussed their experiences of key stakeholders misunderstanding the discipline of

320   sport psychology as a whole and how these misconceptions meant practitioners needed to

321   have a greater awareness of how to act ethically with key stakeholders (Carr, 2007).

322   ***Negotiating with the Media and Self-Promotion.*** Newly qualified practitioners

323   focused on the desire to build credibility (Lindsay & Thomas, 2014), while being cautious of

324   the ethical challenges' media involvement could create (Haberl & Peterson, 2006).

325   Practitioners discussed how media involvement presented direct challenges to confidentiality,

326   which would inevitably be damaging to the practitioner-client relationship (Haberl &

327   Peterson, 2006). Practitioners discussed the need to establish clear expectations before

328   engaging with the media (Lindsay & Thomas, 2014) and how topics needed to be addressed

329   broadly rather than on an individual basis (Carr, 2007) to avoid further challenges to

330   confidentiality. In addition, newly qualified practitioners discussed experiencing conflict

331   between the need to promote their services (and gain clients) and the lack of confidence they

332   had to sell their services (Collins & McCann, 2015) and negotiate fees (Howells, 2017) while

333   not making false claims about competency (Fifer et al., 2008).

334   *Staying Humble.* Staying humble was discussed as another aspect of sound ethical

335   practice. Applied practitioners highlighted the importance of not taking credit for the

336   successes of athletes (Halliwell, 1990) and how taking credit for athletes' victories could

337   directly challenge a practitioners' integrity and be viewed as a weakness (Gilbourne &

338   Richardson, 2006). The reflective accounts also discussed how effective applied practitioners

339   have the ability to 'blend in' and conduct work in the background without the need or want

340   for attention or accolades (Gordon, 2014).

341   **Supporting Person and Performer**. After reading and re-reading the reflective

342   accounts, we theorised that there were noticeable differences between earlier reflective

343   accounts (published in 1980/90s), and more recent reflective accounts, when discussing

344   support offered to clients. This higher-order theme was made up of three lower-order themes;

345   *delivering mental skills training for performance enhancement, providing holistic support*,

346   and *being client-led*, which were underpinned by 11 unique codes.

347   *Delivering Mental Skills Training for Performance Enhancement.* Reflections from

348   experienced practitioners (published in the 1980/90s) did recognise non-sporting challenges

349   (Dorfman, 1990; Orlick, 1989), but mostly focused on the use of mental skills training to

350   improve performance (Halliwell, 1990; Loehr, 1990). Experienced practitioners, within their

351   reflective accounts, focused on portraying themselves as 'experts' through delivery of mental

352   skills training to clients (Tod, 2008). More recently, mental skills training has been applied in

353   closed-skill sports to simulate competitive environments (Hung et al., 2008). However, this

354   performance-only focus, portrayed in the earlier accounts, has been criticised for limiting the

355   field (Anderson, 2014) and has been described as 'insufficient' (Neff, 1990) and 'inadequate'

356   (Collins et al., 2013) when dealing with the broader challenges often discussed by elite

357   athletes.

358   ***Providing Holistic Support.*** More recent reflective accounts have begun to highlight

359   the importance of holistic support (Evans & Slater, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2007; McArdle &

360   Barker, 2016). More specifically, these accounts have attempted to understand, and

361   demonstrate the importance of, the person behind the athlete (Evans & Slater, 2014;

362   Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Lindsay et al., 2007), as well as the link between

363   performance and well-being (Johnson, 2017; Mellalieu, 2017). We theorised that this was a

364   prominent feature of the trainee and newly qualified practitioners' recent accounts of applied

365   practice (Collins et al., 2013; Mărgărit, 2013; McGregor & Winter, 2017; Woodcock et al.,

366   2008). These practitioners chose to discuss the importance of understanding the person

367   (within their social context; Woodcock et al., 2008) and how the support offered by sport

368   psychology practitioners should be more 'lifestyle' based (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006)

369   with a focus on the broader challenges that an individual engaging in elite sport may

370   experience alongside more traditional performance-based challenges (Moyle, 2015). During

371   our analysis, we developed the idea that there was a significant shift in the reflective

372   accounts, with time, from performance focused interventions to more counselling-based

373   approaches in support of the whole person (Pepitas, 2014).

374   ***Being Client-Led.*** Our theory of a shift, from performance-based interventions to

375   person-based interventions, was further reinforced when applied practitioners began

376   discussing their movement away from problem-focused approaches and towards a more

377   person-focused approach. Through our analysis, we speculated that this shift occurred as

378   practitioners began to gain more experience (Jackson, 2006). Furthermore, trainee

379   practitioners discussed lacking the confidence to deliver an athlete-led approach (Cropley et

380   al., 2007). However, when trainee practitioners did provide their clients with more

381   ownership, they discussed gaining more 'buy-in' from the athletes (Rowley et al., 2012).

382   Applied practitioners also highlighted the importance of facilitating the client to find their

383   own solution (Lindsay et al., 2017).

384   **Practitioner Individuation.** Through our analysis, we developed the theory that

385   practitioners, at different stages of development, were at differing stages of the practitioner

386   individuation journey (the alignment between a practitioners' core values, beliefs, and

387   behaviour, and the context (role) they choose to engage in, over time; McEwan et al., 2019).

388   This higher-order theme was made up of five lower-order themes; *a philosophy of practice*

389   *changes with time and experience*, *developing a practitioner identity, demonstrating*

390   *authenticity (and experiencing congruence), adopting multiple roles,* and *practitioner self-*

391   *care,* which were underpinned by 20 unique codes.

392   ***A Philosophy of Practice Changes with Time and Experience.*** When reading the

393   reflective accounts, we speculated that much of the work conducted by trainee practitioners

394   was not underpinned by a specific philosophical framework (Collins & McCann, 2015) or

395   was an imitation of a 'simple' model of practice (Lindsay, 2017), which occurred due to a

396   lack of connection between the trainees' values and their behaviours. The newly qualified

397   practitioners' accounts were markedly different from the trainees' accounts in this regard.

398   The newly qualified practitioners reflected on the importance of knowing their underpinning

399   philosophy (McGregor & Winter, 2017) and their practice being underpinned by theory

400   (Henrikson, 2015; Timson, 2006). The experienced practitioners were able to discuss their

401   philosophy of practice in relation to their context, which centred around how elite sporting

402   environments can often put practitioners under pressure to flex and change their approach

403   (Larsen 2017a).

404   *Developing a Practitioner Identity.* While experiencing challenges in an applied

405   context (such as, attending major international tournaments - Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014),

406   trainee practitioners reflected on the difficulty they had in separating their personal and

407   professional selves (Collins et al., 2013; Haberl & Peterson, 2006; Williams & Anderson,

408   2012) and portrayed a 'blurred identity' (Cox et al., 2016). Alternatively, the experienced

409   practitioners discussed becoming more relaxed around their clients and not feeling the need

410   to separate their personal and professional selves (Andersen, 2014; Tod, 2014). We

411   developed the idea that this lack of separation between personal and professional selves, with

412   time, and more exposure to applied experiences, allows practitioners to develop a clear and

413   authentic professional identity (Lindsay, 2017; Moran, 2014).

414   *Demonstrating Authenticity (and Experiencing Congruence).* Without a clear

415   professional identity, the trainee practitioners inevitably began to experience inauthenticity

416   and incongruence (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014; Haberl & Peterson, 2006; Holt & Strean,

417   2001; Lindsay et al., 2007; Mărgărit, 2013). In response to these feelings of incongruence, the

418   trainee and newly qualified practitioners chose to discuss the process of becoming more

419   authentic and honest (Lindsay et al., 2007), which helped them: build relationships with

420   clients (Haberl & Peterson, 2006); avoid conflict and unethical behaviour (Jones et al., 2007);

421   become more comfortable in elite environments (Chrsitensen & Aoyagi, 2014); and 'sell'

422   themselves as practitioners (Holt & Strean, 2001). The experienced practitioners, who already

423   felt a sense of congruence, simply described the importance of being genuine (Fifer et al.,

424   2008) and not hiding parts of themselves in a professional context (Tod, 2008).

425   *Adopting Multiple Roles.* Trainee and newly qualified practitioners consistently

426   reflected upon 'wearing many hats' or adopting multiple roles within an applied setting

427   (Collins et al., 2013; McGregor & Winter, 2017; Timson, 2006; Williams & Andersen,

428   2012). Applied practitioners experienced multiple and conflicting roles (such as being both

429   the coach and the sport psychology practitioner; Neff, 1990), which were viewed positively

430   (removing the sense of being an 'outsider'; Jones et al., 2007), but also caused confusion in

431   relation to role clarity (Tonn & Harmison, 2004) and presented logistical challenges (Katz,

432   2006; Rhodius, 2006). Establishing role clarity was integral in avoiding issues of

433   confidentiality with clients (Haberl & Peterson, 2006), but establishing role clarity was

434   challenged when trying to find a balance between offering one-to-one support to athletes and

435   working with staff in a more organisational capacity (Timson, 2006).

436   *Practitioner Self-Care.* In response to some of the challenges discussed above,

437   practitioners reflected on the concept of 'self-care' (Moyle, 2015; Symes, 2014) as being a

438   vital component to successful practitioner development and in finding an optimal work-life

439   balance (Halliwell, 1990). Challenges to this work-life balance were experienced when:

440   travelling to major competitions (Haberl & Peterson, 2006); feeling the need to be available

441   on a 24-hour basis (Males, 2006); and combining an academic and practical career (Cox

442   2014). We speculated that this lack of balance (often resulting in lack of time to sleep and

443   exercise; Haberl & Peterson, 2006) made it difficult for practitioners to find 'down-time'

444   (Males, 2006) and had emotional and psychological implications, such as, increased stress

445   and pressure (Jones et al., 2007).

446   **Relationships with Clients**. The importance of the relationship developed between

447   the sport psychology practitioner and the client is well established in the literature (Sharp et

448   al., 2015). Developing a relationship with the client was consistently discussed as a key

449   component of successful applied service delivery (Andersen, 2014). This higher-order theme

450   was made up of two lower-order themes; *caring for the client* and *conducting a thorough*

451   *needs analysis*, which were underpinned by 9 unique codes.

452   ***Caring for the Client.*** Applied practitioners discussed the importance of developing

453   trust (Botterill, 1990) and caring for their clients (Dorfman, 1990). Practitioners reflected on

454   how they attempted to build relationships with their clients, which included: through use of

455   humour (Holt & Strean, 2001); through the use of technology (Jackson, 2006); by engaging

456   informally with clients (McGregor & Winter, 2017); and by travelling to away fixtures with

457   the squad (Tonn & Harmison, 2004). Integrating within the environment (Haberl & Peterson,

458   2006), understanding the culture (Stambulova & Schinke, 2017), and building relationships

459   with coaches (Cecil, 2014) allowed practitioners to create 'buy-in' with their athletes

460   (Cotterill, 2017). However, this process took time (Hung et al., 2008) and over time the

461   relationships practitioners were able to build with their clients changed and became more

462   meaningful (Tod, 2008).

463   ***Conducting a Thorough Needs Analysis.*** Conducting a thorough needs analysis was

464   an essential component of the reflective accounts; allowing practitioners to understand the

465   unique needs of their clients (Bull, 1995; Fifer et al., 2008; Mărgărit, 2013). Practitioners

466   discussed the importance of triangulation when conducting a needs analysis (McArdle &

467   Barker, 2016) and used a variety of methods to achieve this, such as:

468   psychological/psychometric tests (Loehr, 1990); interviews (Hung et al., 2008); observation

469   (McGregor & Winter, 2017); and informal chats (Fifer et al., 2008). Taking the time to

470   conduct a comprehensive needs analysis ensured practitioners were able to create a shared

471   working goal with their client (Tod, 2008), which allowed them to: tailor the support to the

472   needs of their clients (Evans & Slater, 2014); adapt to changing circumstances (McArdle &

473   Barker, 2016); understand individual differences within a team (Cropley et al., 2007); and

474   deliver age-appropriate interventions (Barker et al., 2011).

475   **Cultural Awareness**. Awareness of the culture was a consistent feature discussed by

476   the experienced practitioners. Trainee practitioners did highlight the importance of immersing

477   themselves within the environment, with the primary focus being on proving their worth

478   (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014), but struggled to achieve this (Howells, 2017; Rowley et al.,

479   2012). We theorised that the experienced practitioners were able to work successfully within

480   the culture of professional sport (in comparison to the trainee and newly qualified

481   practitioners) because of their high levels of self-awareness (Poczwardowski, 2017). This

482   self-awareness allowed the experienced practitioners to explore, and better understand, how

483   their professional selves fitted into the context in which they were situated (Stambulova &

484   Schinke, 2017), allowing them to deliver effective and culturally sensitive interventions

485   (Larsen, 2017a), and reinforcing that they were further along the practitioner individuation

486   process (McEwan et al., 2019). This higher-order theme was made up of six lower-order

487   themes; *understanding the demands of elite sport, understanding the culture, immersion (and*

488   *integration) within the environment, lack of contact time with athletes, informal work with*

489   *athletes,* and *working with support staff,* which were underpinned by 17 unique codes.

490   ***Understanding the Demands of Elite Sport.*** Applied practitioners discussed the

491   importance of understanding the demands of the sport in which they were situated. The

492   reflective accounts of experienced practitioners (particularly those published in the 1980/90s)

493   emphasised that experience of the sport, as either a player or coach, was viewed as vital to

494   successful service delivery (Bull, 1995; Loehr, 1990; Orlick, 1989). This past experience of

495   the sport allowed the practitioners to integrate into the environment (Botterill, 1990) and gain

496   'buy-in' from their clients (Tod, 2008). Applied practitioners who had no prior history of

497   playing or coaching the sport highlighted the importance of understanding the sport (Fifer et

498   al., 2008), especially in relation to the psychological demands it placed on athletes (Harwood,

499   2008; Hung et al., 2008). Having knowledge of the sport and the psychological demands

500   allowed applied practitioners to locate themselves as an 'insider' (Mellalieu, 2017) and gain

501   credibility and trust (Holt & Strean, 2001).

502   ***Understanding the Culture.*** In addition to understanding the demands of the sport,

503   experienced practitioners also discussed the importance of understanding the culture in which

504   they were situated (Lindsay, 2017; Pattison & McInerney, 2016; Tod, 2014). This was

505   particularly important in cultures that were considered to be unpredictable (Collins &

506   Cruickshank, 2015), such as professional football (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006), where

507   staffs' jobs were perhaps most at risk (Larsen, 2017a) and where the masculine culture might

508   prevent clients from showing weakness (Tod, 2008). Furthermore, understanding that

509   athletes' identities were rooted in their context allowed practitioners to design and deliver

510   interventions that were sensitive to the needs of the individual and the organisation

511   (Stambulova & Schinke, 2017).

512   ***Immersion (and Integration) within the Environment.*** Applied practitioners

513   (regardless of experience level) highlighted the importance of immersing themselves within

514   the environment (Barker et al., 2011; Cox, 2014, Harwood, 2008). Not integrating and

515   embedding themselves into the environment made it more difficult to get engagement from

516   clients (Rowley et al., 2012). Practitioners spoke of taking part in social activities with

517   players and staff (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014) and travelling to away games (Tonn &

518   Harmison, 2004) as ways to improve relationships (Haberl & Peterson, 2006) and increase

519   voluntary engagement from athletes (Rowley et al., 2012).

520   ***Lack of Contact Time with Athletes.*** Applied practitioners struggled to gain access to

521   athletes (Rhodius, 2006) and found themselves unable to create enough time to engage with

522   their clients (Cox, 2014; McGregor & Winter, 2017) and build effective relationships

523   (Timson, 2006). Gaining access to the athletes was made even more of a challenge during

524   major competitions (Jackson, 2006) and in sports where the athletes' schedules were too busy

525   for any meaningful, prolonged, or proactive engagement (Rowley et al., 2012).

526   *Informal work with Athletes.* Perhaps as a direct result of this lack of contact time

527   with athletes, applied practitioners consistently discussed the importance of conducting

528   informal work with their clients (Halliwell, 1990). This informal work allowed the

529   practitioners to build relationships with the athletes (McGregor & Winter, 2017), providing

530   the foundation for the potential of more structured work (Haberl & Peterson, 2006).

531   Practitioners achieved this by making themselves 'visible' (Mellalieu, 2017) and by being

532   'present and available' (Tonn & Harmison, 2004) within their respective environments.

533   *Working with Support Staff.* Working with, and through, support staff was another

534   way applied practitioners attempted to overcome their lack of contact time with athletes and

535   influence the culture. Identifying, and building relationships with, key cultural influencers

536   (Larsen, 2017b; Mellalieu, 2017) was almost exclusively mentioned by experienced

537   practitioners as a way of: further integrating as a member of the support staff (Bull, 1995);

538   reinforcing their 'presence' (Males, 2006); earning trust and respect (Fifer et al., 2008); and

539   creating 'buy-in' to support the implementation of the psychology programme (Cotterill,

540   2017). This provided the experienced practitioners with the opportunity to impact the athletes

541   indirectly by working with the coaches (Cotterill, 2012; Loehr, 1990), but also ensured that

542   psychological support and provision was extended to the staff (Bull, 1995) and delivered to

543   key stakeholders within the environment (Neff, 1990). Delivering a psychology programme

544   to athletes and staff allowed the experienced practitioners to positively contribute towards the

545   team culture (Moyle, 2015) and the culture of the organisation as a whole (Stambulova &

546   Schinke, 2017) and increased their overall effectiveness as applied practitioners (Cecil, 2014;

547   Cotterill, 2012; Mellalieu, 2017).

548   **Competence-Related Angst.** Competence-related angst was a consistent feature

549   discussed by trainee and newly qualified practitioners in their reflective accounts. Their early

550   applied experiences focused on feelings of self-doubt (Collins & McCann, 2015),

551   apprehension (Katz, 2006), and pressure (Moyle, 2015). This higher-order theme was made

552   up of two lower-order themes; *self-doubt and anxiety prior to, and during, consultancy*

553   *experience* and *pressure at large tournaments and events*, which were underpinned by 12

554   unique codes.

555   ***Self-Doubt and Anxiety prior to, and during, Consultancy Experiences.*** Anxiety and

556   self-doubt were a consistent feature of the trainee and newly qualified practitioners' reflective

557   accounts. Their applied experiences were accompanied by anxiety, self-doubt, and

558   uncertainty immediately prior to, and during, applied practice (Barker et al., 2011; Cropley et

559   al., 2007; Woodcock et al., 2018). This competence-related angst was associated with

560   concerns of incompetence (Lindsay, 2017) and the need to demonstrate competence to

561   significant others (Giges, 2014). We speculated that for the early career practitioners,

562   engaging in reflective practice helped them understand that anxiety did not necessarily equate

563   to incompetence (Woodcock et al., 2008). The experienced practitioners were able to

564   highlight that anxiety was a consistent feature of service-delivery and something that

565   practitioners needed to accept (Tod, 2014). However, despite understanding that anxiety and

566   self-doubt would inevitably accompany initial applied experiences, the trainee and newly

567   qualified practitioners consistently discussed feelings of fraudulence earlier in their careers

568   (Colins et al., 2013; Lindsay & Thomas, 2014; Williams & Anderson, 2012), which led to

569   further feelings of helplessness (Rhodius, 2006), isolation (Lindsay et al., 2007), and the

570   overwhelming feeling of being 'thrown in at the deep end' (Collins et al., 2013).

571   ***Pressure at Large Tournaments and Events.*** Attending major events, such as the

572   Olympic games, intensified the pressure and doubts of the trainee and newly qualified

573   practitioners (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014; Henrikson, 2015; Moyle, 2015), which

574   contributed to further feelings of fraudulence during the service provision process (Collins et

575   al., 2013; Williams & Anderson, 2012). For the early career practitioners, the invitation to

576   attend a major event, and travel with the team, provided them with the sense that they had

577   'made it' (Colins et al., 2013). However, supporting athletes in the build-up to these

578   competitions, and attendance at the events themselves, also significantly increased the

579   pressure these practitioners experienced (Brooks, 2007; Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014;

580   Timson, 2006). Practitioners highlighted the need to deliver 'when it mattered' (Henrikson,

581   2015), but also reflected on their inability to stay calm and focused (Henrikson, 2015) and the

582   increasing sense of doubt they experienced in relation to their own knowledge and

583   competence (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014).

584   **Support of Practitioner Development.** Support was discussed by all practitioners,

585   regardless of experience level, but was particularly emphasised in the trainee and newly

586   qualified practitioners' reflective accounts. This higher-order theme was made up of two

587   lower-order themes; *peer support* and *supervisor support*, which were underpinned by 8

588   unique codes.

589   *Peer Support.* Trainee and newly qualified practitioners highlighted the importance of

590   sharing their experiences with empathetic peers (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014; Timson,

591   2006), as well as the importance of creating genuine connections with 'critical friends'

592   (Moran, 2014) who would offer personal and professional support (Carr, 2007) and

593   encourage continuous engagement in reflective practice (Barker et al., 2011). Engaging with

594   'critical friends' (Mellalieu, 2017) was viewed as particularly beneficial by the practitioners

595   who had the opportunity to seek support from other individuals working in a similar

596   environment to themselves (Cotterill, 2012). Engaging with peer support was viewed as

597   essential to the on-going development of practitioners, regardless of experience level (Barker

598   et al., 2011; Carr, 2007), but was particularly important for the trainee practitioners in

599   overcoming their anxiety and self-doubt (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014).

600   *Supervisor Support.* Trainee and newly qualified practitioners also highlighted the

601   integral roles their supervisors had in their on-going development (Carr, 2007). Trainee

602   practitioners focused on developing effective relationships with their supervisors (Cropley et

603   al., 2007) and placed high amounts of importance of this relationship (Jones et al., 2007),

604   which had the potential to increase their anxiety further, because of the trainees' need to

605   portray competence to their supervisors (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014). However, the trainee

606   practitioners mostly discussed the importance of their supervisors in overcoming this anxiety

607   and self-doubt associated with initial service-delivery experiences (Tonn & Harmison, 2004).

608   **Evaluating Practitioner Effectiveness**. Evaluation of effectiveness was a feature of

609   the reflective accounts regardless of the practitioners' experience level. However, we

610   theorised that practitioners at different stages of development reflected differently on how

611   (and in some cases why) they evaluated their practice. This higher-order theme was made up

612   of two lower-order themes; *proving your worth as an applied practitioner,* which was

613   discussed by trainee and newly qualified practitioners, and *judging the effectiveness of*

614   *interventions,* which was discussed by newly qualified and experienced practitioners.

615   Collectively, these lower-order themes were underpinned by 8 unique codes.

616   ***Proving your Worth as an Applied Practitioner.*** Within their reflective accounts,

617   trainee practitioners focused on the need to make a difference (Woodcock et al., 2008) and

618   the pressure to provide a solution (Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Wadsworth, 2019). As discussed

619   earlier, this was usually because the trainee practitioners wanted to demonstrate their worth

620   (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014) and to overcome the anxieties associated with their early

621   applied experiences (Collins et al., 2013). Newly qualified practitioners also had an

622   awareness (similar to the trainees) that, because of the unpredictable nature of elite sport,

623   their job was always at risk and evaluation was difficult (Larsen 2017a). Newly qualified

624   practitioners focused on the need to 'fix' problems and be the 'perfect' psychologist

625   (Williams & Anderson, 2012). Similarly, the trainee practitioners discussed their eagerness to

626   apply theoretical content and 'change the world' (Mărgărit, 2013).

627   ***Judging the Effectiveness of Interventions.*** Newly qualified practitioners

628   acknowledged the difficulties of evaluating their own practice (Henriksen, 2015) and used a

629   variety of methods in an attempt to achieve this (quantitative; Hung et al., 2008, qualitative;

630   Larsen, 2017b, and based on theoretically informed practice; Howells, 2017). Experienced

631   practitioners judged the quality of their service delivery based on the feedback gained from

632   their clients (the nature and quality of the relationship and their engagement with the process;

633   Bull, 1995; Neff, 1990; Tod, 2008) and also discussed the need to add value (Gordon, 2014),

634   especially when working as part of a multi-disciplinary team (Larsen, 2017b). However,

635   experienced practitioners did express concerns about not having anything 'tangible' to offer

636   (Tod, 2007), as well as the challenges of measuring 'impact' (Gordon, 2014).

637   **Summary.** In summary, the trainee practitioners reflected on: their attempts to

638   integrate within sporting environments (primarily as a way of proving their worth as applied

639   practitioners; Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014); adopting multiple roles within these

640   environments (Collins et al., 2013); experiencing inauthenticity and incongruence (Holt &

641   Strean, 2001), and feelings of self-doubt and pressure (Woodcock et al., 2008). Newly

642   qualified practitioners also reflected on their experiences of self-doubt; related to their

643   perceived level of competence (Cropley et al., 2007), but in contrast to the trainee

644   practitioners, also chose to reflect on: their lack of contact time with athletes (Rowley et al.,

645   2012); the importance of practitioner self-care (Jackson, 2006); conflicts between self-

646   promotion and sound ethical practice (Lindsay & Thomas, 2014); and becoming more aware

647   of the connection between their beliefs and their applied approach (McGregor & Winter,

648   2017). The experienced practitioners were able to reflect on themselves (developing a

649   congruent professional identity; Andersen, 2014), but also chose to discuss how they as

650   individuals were able to effectively integrate within the culture in which they were situated to

651   support the needs of both individuals and organisations (Brooks, 2007; Fifer et al., 2008; Tod,

652   2014).

653   **Discussion**

654   The research team synthesized the reflective accounts of applied sport psychology

655   practitioners with the aim of highlighting common themes that provide focus to applied

656   practitioners' reflective practice. By achieving this aim, we offer readers an insight into

657   current progress on reflective content in applied sport psychology. The results add to existing

658   knowledge in two distinct, but interconnecting ways. By synthesizing the reflective accounts,

659   we are able to highlight what applied sport psychology practitioners, at different stages of

660   development, chose to reflect on based on their own experiences, challenges, and

661   developmental journeys. Furthermore, through this synthesis, we have been able to collate

662   the reflective accounts of applied practitioners in one place, which allows us to make

663   practical implications and offers readers the opportunity to engage in meta-reflection on the

664   themes presented.

665   Our analysis of the reflective accounts suggests that the experiences applied

666   practitioners choose to reflect on, vary dependent on the experience level of the practitioner

667   themselves. The developmental journeys of sport psychologists have been found to be similar

668   to that of counselling psychologists (Carlsson, 2012; McEwan & Tod, 2015; Ronnestad &

669   Skovholt, 2013; Worthington, 1987) and our findings support this. For example, theories of

670   practitioner development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) suggest optimal practitioner

671   development involves the integration of the personal self with the professional self. Based on

672   the trainee practitioners' reflective accounts, we theorised, through their consistent focus on

673   anxiety, self-doubt, and feelings of inauthenticity, that these individuals had not yet

674   established a congruent philosophy of practice (Holt & Strean, 2001). The neophyte

675   practitioners were beginning to achieve higher levels of awareness and consistency between

676   their values, beliefs, and behaviour by demonstrating, and discussing, a closer connection

677   between their applied practice and relevant psychological theory (Henrikson, 2015) and by

678   reflecting on how their values aligned to their behaviours (McGregor & Winter, 2017). The

679   experienced practitioners discussed their professional identity as an alignment between

680   person and professional, which allowed them to engage freely and naturally within their

681   environment and demonstrate authenticity and congruence (Lindsay, 2017). These findings

682   are consistent with the practitioner development literature and the process of practitioner

683   individuation (McEwan et al, 2019; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Wadsworth et al., 2021).

684   By understanding *what* applied practitioners, at different stages of development,

685   choose to reflect on, we have the opportunity to offer practical implications based on

686   practitioners' unique developmental needs. For example, our analysis suggests that, as well as

687   reflecting on different topics, applied practitioners also engage in the process of reflective

688   practice at different reflective levels (Anderson et al., 2004). Knowles and Gilbourne (2010)

689   have suggested that reflective practice can occur at three distinct levels: technically (was that

690   intervention effective?); practically (am I too emotionally involved with this client?); and

691   critically (what does this experience mean in relation to the broader culture and context?).

692   While these levels should not be viewed hierarchically, based on our earlier conceptualisation

693   of reflective practice (understanding self within the context of practice; Knowles et al., 2014),

694   applied practitioners may need to reflect at all three levels to facilitate an understanding of

695   how they as individuals fit into their social and cultural context. Knowles and Gilbourne

696   (2010) suggest that engaging in reflective practice at a critical level can be particularly useful

697   for practitioners who are currently engaged in, or coming towards the end of, their formal

698   training. However, we concluded that the trainee practitioners consistently reflected at a

699   technical or practical level (usually linked to concerns about their effectiveness or

700   competency; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). To engage in reflective practice at a critical level,

701   an individual must first understand themselves (and their experiences) before they can

702   understand the significance of their experiences in relation to the wider context. Trainee

703   practitioners did not demonstrate the ability to reflect on the connection between their

704   experiences (and associated feelings) and the development of a professional identity and

705   philosophy (Collins & McCann, 2015), preventing them from situating their experiences

706   within their social and cultural context. Our review, alongside the increase in published

707   reflective accounts, could be used as a frame of reference for trainee practitioners to critically

708   reflect on, and understand, what their applied experiences might mean in relation to their

709   context and the wider discipline. For example, instead of reflecting on how feelings of self-

710   doubt potentially lead to ineffective service delivery, trainee practitioners could ask the

711   question 'what is it about this environment that is causing these feelings of pressure and

712   inauthenticity?'. Education providers (academic institutions/professional bodies, and

713   supervisors etc.) could also encourage trainee practitioners to engage in reflection as part of

714   contemplative practice, which has been shown to reduce initial consultation anxiety in

715   counselling practitioners (Cigrand, 2020) and may also reduce the sense of

716   incongruence/inauthenticity trainee practitioners experience, facilitating reflection at all three

717   reflective levels (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010).

718   Our review also provides an insight into current progress on reflective content in

719   applied sport psychology and may present practitioners with the opportunity to engage in

720   meta-reflection (reflecting on reflections). By presenting common themes and experiences of

721   applied practitioners, readers can reflect on how their own experiences match the themes

722   presented here to facilitate their on-going development as practitioners (Huntley et al., 2014).

723   This may be particularly important for the newly qualified practitioners, who have

724   successfully demonstrated that they can meet all of the competencies and expectations of

725   their respective training pathways, but still have a significant amount to learn on their

726   developmental journey to becoming experienced practitioners (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

727   Our findings suggest that newly qualified practitioners consistently reflected upon engaging

728   with 'critical friends' following accreditation. By engaging with applied practitioners at a

729   similar stage of development, newly qualified practitioners would be able to continuously

730   engage in reflective practice (and meta-reflection) to facilitate their development and their

731   transition into applied practice following supervised training.

732   We chose thematic content analysis as the method of analysis for this systematic

733   review because it provided us with a method to synthesize the reflective accounts and achieve

734   the aim of the research. We created themes from the literature, which represented the unique

735   experiences of practitioners in different stages of development. Building on this, future work

736   could adopt other forms of qualitative inquiry, such as a narrative analysis, to add extra layers

737   of understanding and interpretation to reflective accounts. For example, by focusing on how

738   applied practitioners are telling their story and representing themselves within their own

739   narrative (via narrative analysis), a more in-depth critical insight into their developmental

740   journey could be captured. Narrative analysis would allow us to shift between the narrative

741   (how is the story being told?) and the product of the story (what is being said?) to better

742   understand the reflective accounts of applied practitioners (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

743   Also, our review predominantly highlighted the reflective experiences of sport

744   psychology practitioners who are from, and work in, the Western, Educated, Industrialized,

745   Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) (Henrich, et al., 2010) societies. Critically, to fully advance

746   our knowledge base and to develop CPD and training of global value there is a need to

747   embrace diversity and inclusivity (Shore et al., 2011). By only including papers written in

748   English, the majority of the accounts were from the United Kingdom and America, reducing

749   the international scope of the research. Including cross cultural collaboration may allow a

750   larger variety of reflective accounts written in languages other than English to be included.

751   Including cross cultural research would provide even more insight into the applied

752   experiences from practitioners situated in different cultures/countries and allow the voices of

753   those sport psychologists in and from non-western societies to be heard and their

754   development charted.

755   In this systematic review we have collated, and synthesized, the reflective accounts of

756   applied sport psychology practitioners. Our findings add to existing knowledge by

757   highlighting what applied sport psychology practitioners, at different stages of development,

758   choose to reflect on from their applied experiences. Our findings demonstrate that applied

759   practitioners, at different stages of development, differ in the topics they choose to discuss

760   and how they engage in the reflective process itself. This review can be used as a frame of

761   reference to help support applied practitioners' continued development, by encouraging

762   engagement in reflective practice at all three reflective levels (technical, practical, and

763   critical) and by facilitating the process of meta-reflection. If practitioners can understand how

764   their own experiences relate to the experiences of other practitioners, they can gain further

765   insight into the meaning behind their own applied experiences and begin to situate their

766   experiences within the discipline as a whole.

767

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