

COMMENTARY

“It’s Psychology Jim, but Not as We Know It!”: The Changing Face
of Applied Sport Psychology

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The field of applied sport psychology (ASP) has developed substantially in recent decades, and there exist a multitude of views regarding how contemporary practices can be best defined and conceptualized. In this article, we reflect on these developments and draw from a growing body of literature on professional development in an attempt to provide clarity on the expanding roles and responsibilities of the ASP practitioner. In doing so, we acknowledge the recent diversification of ASP practices, with an emphasis on competencies relating to working with more diverse performance populations (e.g., in business, military, health care, education, and the performing arts), engaging in organizational psychological practices, positive youth development, promoting life skills, and mental health and counseling support provisions. Furthermore, we offer suggestions for the future of ASP education and training, in an effort to contribute to the profession’s continued journey toward maturation. This includes discussion surrounding the possible implementation of multisupervisory pathways, extended placement opportunities, and engagement in posttraining practices within specialist performance domains, in an effort to aid the development of more diverse competencies that reflect the multiplicity of current practice.

Keywords: sport psychology, performance psychology, professional competence, professional development, training

The field of applied sport psychology (ASP) is an emerging profession characterized by continual change and evolution. ASP was once considered a subdiscipline of kinesiology (Vealey, 2006) and a tool for the amelioration of psychological dysfunction among athletic pop-

ulations (Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966). Nevertheless, contemporary ASP practice is increasingly characterized by a spectrum of clientele, roles, services, and competencies. Indeed, scholars have attested to an “increasing appetite” for sport psychology services outside the confines of traditional athletic support provision (Barker, Neil, & Fletcher, 2016, p. 3). Moreover, scholars have also pointed to a movement toward working with more diverse performance populations (e.g., in business, military, health care, education, and performing arts; Barker et al., 2016), active engagement in organizational psychological practices (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff, 2017), fostering of positive youth development (PYD; Holt & Neely, 2011), promotion of life skills (Gould & Carson,

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2008), and mental health support provisions (Roberts, Faull, & Tod, 2016). Acknowledgment of the recent diversification of ASP provision has been further evidenced by Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of the American Psychological Association, who advocated that sport psychology should be conceptualized as a subdiscipline of performance psychology, that is, a domain of study and practice concerned with the identification, development, and execution of skills and abilities required to achieve excellence within a series of diverse performance domains (Portenga, Aoyagi, Balague, Cohen, & Harmison, 2011). Although the inclusion of performance psychology within professional titles is yet to be fully embraced by all regulatory and organizing bodies, there is a body of evidence to support the view that sport psychology as we know it is changing. Consequently, we find ourselves at a crossroads within our profession, one which hints toward a changing expertise of the sport psychologist and a need for a reassessment of key professional competencies, which may be reflective of new trends within contemporary applied practice.

Given these apparent developments in ASP, the aim of this article is to chart the changes within applied practice and identify implications for the future of our profession. Specifically, we (a) take a historical perspective to illustrate the change in the representation/description in the professional practice literature of what applied sport psychologists do and what the profession comprises, (b) discuss examples from applied practitioners' own professional experiences of the roles/challenges applied sport psychologists presently encounter in the profession, (c) consider the ability of current ASP training and practice guidelines to cater for this role change, and (d) offer recommendations for the future training and supervision to better prepare and inform applied sport psychologists wishing to undertake work of this nature.

By taking stock of emergent scholarship in the areas of professional development and training, professional identity and competence expansion, it is hoped this commentary will help facilitate an enhanced understanding and awareness among applied sport psychologists and organising bodies alike, regarding the changing

nature of our profession. We also hope to chart changes in applied practice to more accurately depict the work we do and provide a vision for future ASP development that will enable the profession to flourish.

Historical Perspectives on ASP

Although historical perspectives on sport psychology can be traced back to the scientific practices of the 19th century (cf. Terry, 2011), the birth of applied practice is largely attributed to several pioneering laboratories. In 1920, Carl Diem founded the world's first sport psychology laboratory at the Deutsche Sporthochschule in Berlin. Two further labs were established in 1925: one by A. Z. Puni at the Institute of Physical Culture in Leningrad and the other by Coleman Griffith at the University of Illinois, where he published the first sport psychology book titled *The Psychology of Coaching* in 1926. Of these pioneers, it is Griffith that is most commonly credited as the forefather of our profession. Griffith was an American psychologist who emphasized the need for greater integration of research and practice of psychological principles within the sport domain (Gould & Pick, 1995). Before the Griffith era, sport psychology was commonly dismissed by scholars as something of a trivial pursuit, yet by the 1930s, increasing interest in the application of psychological principles within sport settings enabled the field to begin to gain credibility as a domain of scientific study (Gould & Pick, 1995).

During the field's formative years, a number of associations and societies were founded around the world that provided an early forum for siloed scholars and practitioners to meet. For instance, the International Society of Sport Psychology (1965), the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (1967), and the European Federation of Sport Psychology (1969) were all fundamental to early professional development in this domain. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1980s that substantial interest in the practical application of sport psychology emerged.

During the 1980s, an increasing number of organizations, including the U.S. Olympic Committee, began employing applied sport psychologists in an attempt to facilitate the system-

atic implementation of psychological skills training (PST) in athlete populations (Landers, 1983; Silva, 2001). Despite this use of sport psychology, there were evident tensions surrounding presumed divergent backgrounds of practitioners trained in the disciplines of psychology (clinical and problem-oriented) and kinesiology (performance-oriented; Aoyagi, Portenga, Poczwadowski, Cohen, & Statler, 2012; Ryba & Wright, 2005). As such, societies, including the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (1984) and the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP, 1986), were inaugurated in an attempt to facilitate scientific advancements and establish clear criteria relating to effective applied practice and professional accountability.

During the early 1990s, applied practice remained largely associated with the implementation of psychological skills and coping strategies for use within training and competition (Landers, 1983; Vealey, 1988). Several prominent practitioners during this era (Bull, 1995; Ravizza, 1990) also conceptualized their role in relation to dealing with performance and personal issues, through the utilization of PST interventions, and in some way reinforcing the perception that applied sport psychologists are “shrinks” (Bastos, Corredeira, Probst, & Fonseca, 2014; van Raalte, Brewer, Matheson, & Brewer, 1996). Despite a principal focus on PST and the cognitive determinants of athletic performance, this era also represented a period of significant epistemological diversification, whereby an enhanced understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of the athletic experience would prove beneficial for shaping the identity of ASP practice (Vealey, 2006).

By the late 1990s, through widespread dissemination of knowledge through publications such as *The Sport Psychologist* (1987) and the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (1989), it became evident that applied sport psychologists had begun to diversify their competencies beyond the application of PST. For example, Hardy, Jones, and Gould (1996) acknowledged that athletic performance was increasingly influenced by the complex organizational environment in which athletes operate. In addition, as part of a U.S. Olympic Committee-funded program of research exploring athletes and coaches' perceptions of factors affecting Olympic performance, Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf,

Medbery, and Peterson (1999) noted that peak performance was “a complex and delicate process” (p. 371), influenced by a range of social and organizational factors, which had seemingly remained underexplored within applied research and practice.

At the turn of the 21st century, concerns surrounding the absence of systematic educational outreach programs and job market opportunities were considered to be a significant threat in relation to the future growth and development of the sport psychology profession (Silva, Conroy, & Zizzi, 1999). Consequently, organizing bodies such as the AASP stated their intention to move beyond the domain of sport performance and, in sync with Seligman's (1998) positive psychology agenda, sought to promote a psychology of excellence, from which the principles of peak performance could be applied to nonathlete populations (Gould, 2002). In one of the two dedicated special issues of the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* examining the psychology of excellence, Gould (2002) emphasized the need for greater diversification of sport psychology principles within wider performance domains, to further develop the applied field. In turn, this resulted in greater theoretical dissection of the practices exhibited within the domains of business (Ievleva & Terry, 2008; Jones, 2002), performing arts (Hays, 2002), and the military (Ward et al., 2008), whereby sport psychology principles were highlighted as having a strong degree of transferability across these diverse performance domains.

Justification for the utilization of sport psychology principles within other performance contexts was further strengthened through the identification of inherent associations between the psychological characteristics of elite athletes (e.g., attentional control and emotional regulation) and performers within other domains such as medicine, the military, and music (Fiore & Salas, 2008; Pecun, Collins, & MacNamara, 2016). Similarly, within the domain of business, the application of ASP practices was believed to present great promise in relation to the development of psychological attributes such as mental toughness, motivation, and cohesion within the workplace (Jones, 2002; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). In addition, as well as being highlighted as a resource to aid the amelioration of workplace stress and burnout

(Gordon, 2007), scholars also posited that the application of mental skills commonly used within athletic settings (e.g., positive self-talk, imagery, and emotional control) could be effectively used within corporate settings, to enhance the working practices of managers, leaders, and work teams (Foster, 2002). More recently, the *Journal of Change Management* published a two-part special issue dedicated to “using sport and performance psychology in the management of change (see Barker et al., 2016).”

In addition to the increased diversification of ASP practices, the turn of the 21st century also marked a growing appreciation for the role of organizational psychology, a domain of study that integrates research foundations in social psychology and organizational behavior, to address the emotional and motivational aspects of organizational life and promote practices that contribute to performer productivity, satisfaction, and well-being (Wagstaff, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). In recognition of the ever-changing landscape within sport, the role of organizational influences was becoming increasingly noted within postmillennium research and practice. For example, Woodman and Hardy (2001) highlighted a multitude of organizational issues (e.g., finances, team atmosphere, and coaching styles) that were found to impact elite athletes in the buildup to major competition. Jones (2002) later reflected on the substantial organizational issues faced as a practitioner, and Fletcher and Hanton (2003) subsequently reported a growing number of performers seeking the aid of applied sport psychologists in an attempt to cope with these organizational demands.

Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) later reviewed six lines of enquiry relating to organizational psychology in elite sport and proposed that acknowledgment of various cultural and climatic factors within the sporting environment was required to better inform the quality of ASP practice. These sentiments were also echoed by Fletcher and Arnold (2011) who proposed that applied sport psychologists should develop knowledge of organizational practices to provide more efficacious support to both athletes and management staff, specifically in relation to helping them deal with demands that extend beyond athletic performance (e.g., positively influencing cultural and managerial practices).

More recently, researchers have conducted applied research to better understand the orga-

nizational factors promoting optimal functioning within elite sport landscapes (Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012). This research agenda has been labeled positive organizational psychology in sport (Wagstaff et al., 2012). In concordance with the positive organizational psychology in sport agenda, Wagstaff and colleagues (2012) concluded that theory and practice within elite sport contexts offered great promise in relation to promoting optimal functioning and greater psychological capital. Wagstaff and Lerner (2015) extended these sentiments and outlined how applied sport psychologists’ knowledge of four core dimensions of organizational practice—emotions and attitudes in sport organizations, stress and well-being in sport organizations, behaviors in sport organizations, and environments in sport organizations—could help enhance the quality of work life of those who operate within this domain. Collectively, the emerging research and practice of organizational psychology in sport has highlighted the value of applied sport psychologists working to promote well-being and functioning at various levels of the structures within sport organizations.

Current Perspectives on ASP

As we reflect on the current state of ASP practice, we find a profession in which the sport psychologist is regarded as not only a facilitator of performance enhancement and custodian of performer well-being but also an architect of cultural excellence (Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank, 2014). With growing requests for applied sport psychologists to advise on elite sport cultures (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018) and climates (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), as well as other diverse performance domains (e.g., military, performing arts, high-risk occupations; Portenga, Aoyagi, & Cohen, 2017), the creation and sustainment of a high-performance culture has now come to be regarded as a key function of ASP practice (Henriksen, 2015; McDougall, Nesti, Richardson, & Littlewood, 2017). As such, the work of the modern sport psychologist has become increasingly dependent on both the procurement of cultural and sociopolitical skills and knowledge of organizational psychology practices associated with topics such as attitudes, fairness, motivation, stress, and leader-

ship (Cruickshank & Collins, 2015; Eubank et al., 2014; Wagstaff, 2017).

The scope of current practices requires applied sport psychologists to adopt a more flexible and free-ranging role, whereby microlevel PST provision might be complemented by engagement in macrolevel performance and organizational and management practices (Collins & Cruickshank, 2015). This macrolevel support also necessitates active engagement in a multitude of working alliances with various organizational stakeholders (e.g., performance directors, coaches, administrators, and support staff), who operate across various levels of a high-performance organization (McDougall, Nesti, & Richardson, 2015).

Eubank and colleagues (2014) suggested that satisfactory fulfillment of this wider social provision requires the adoption of roles similar to that of human resources managers and occupational psychologists, in an effort to improve communication, reduce conflict, and promote a culturally congruent view of performance excellence. Consequently, applied sport psychologists must quickly establish a cultural appreciation of the complex social hierarchies, micropolitical structures, and cultural dynamics that exist within various levels of a high-performance landscape (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; McDougall et al., 2015; Mellalieu, 2016; Nesti, 2016).

ASP practitioner accounts of engagement in these macrolevel processes are, at best, underreported and equivocal. As such, recent practitioner reflections that illuminate various cultural and climatic issues (McDougall et al., 2015) have substantial value. In support of this view, Schinke and Hackfort (2016) have recently drawn from the experiences of established practitioners in an attempt to illuminate the service delivery challenges in elite sport settings. Nesti (2016) also drew on his extensive experiences working in Premier League football to highlight key considerations surrounding the management of issues such as poor internal communication, interdepartmental conflict, and role ambiguity. The salience of wider stakeholder support provisions was also attested to by Mellalieu (2016), who emphasized the importance of working in collaboration with various support staff, in an attempt to identify and help remedy role-specific stressors.

With the growing medicalization and scientization of elite sport (Stewart & Smith, 2008), scholarship continues to acknowledge the importance of applied sport psychologists being able to operate effectively as part of a multidisciplinary team (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Part of this multidisciplinary provision requires applied sport psychologists to establish ongoing working alliances with various sports medicine and science staff (e.g., strength and conditioning practitioners, nutritionists, and physicians) in an effort to protect performer well-being and promote a synergistic view of athletic excellence (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Mellalieu, 2016). Furthermore, although the importance of effective multidisciplinary science and medicine support teams has been acknowledged and sought for some time (Reid, Stewart, & Thorne, 2004), more recent scholarship proposes that applied sport psychologists may be best positioned to ensure the continued positive functioning of these multidisciplinary teams, through a knowledge of group dynamics and personnel-related organizational demands (Chandler, Eubank, Nesti, Tod, & Cable, 2016).

To further illustrate the evolving nature of ASP practice, Terry and Si (2015) reviewed a body of literature that underlines the diverse challenges associated with ASP support in the context of Olympic performance. Reflecting on his experiences of providing support to the Danish Olympic Sailing Team, Henriksen (2015) proposed that the challenges of service delivery are often accentuated by a multitude of unplanned events that exist beyond the scope of traditional ASP provision. This includes helping athletes to address family issues, media scrutiny, and other private concerns that may be regarded as superfluous to athlete performance. Collins and Cruickshank (2015) attested to similar experiences and proposed that ASP support should extend toward helping athletes in coping with the multitude of organizational stressors they may encounter in the buildup to Olympic-level competition. This includes the utilization of contingency planning strategies that seek to address issues pertaining to travel, accommodation, clothing, and finance. This is a view further shared by Schinke, Stambulova, Trepanier, and Oghene (2015), who, in providing support to the Canadian Olympic Boxing Team, suggested that the transition from training to com-

petition is a process that requires athlete acclimatization to the complexities of major game contexts (e.g., tournament fatigue, rooming, international village, and audience considerations). As such, within the context of contemporary practices, it is important that applied sport psychologists familiarize themselves with these multifaceted demands, in an effort to obtain a clear view of the contextual demands and organizational stressors associated with elite-level performance. By doing so, they may find themselves better positioned to facilitate more efficacious support, through client education and the use of contingency planning strategies.

When operating within high-level performance environments, applied sport psychologists must remain cognizant of the barriers they may face when attempting to integrate themselves within an organization. For example, Nesti (2016) recalled the “often-experienced skepticism” surrounding ASP practices within sport. Elsewhere, Gardner (2016) noted the possibility of organizational resistance, should sport psychologists fail to effectively establish their roles and responsibilities within an organization. Moreover, neophyte practitioners appear to be inadequately prepared for the requirements of these wider provisions, with Larsen (2017) recently reflecting that the practical challenges associated with attempting to integrate oneself successfully into an elite sport organization were like “bringing a knife to a gunfight” (p. 7), with a knife representing the practitioner’s knowledge and experience and the gun representing the strong, ruthless and volatile nature of elite sport and its demands. As such, when attempting to gain trust and develop credibility, applied sport psychologists must acknowledge, assimilate, and ultimately influence the dynamic organizational culture that exists within this domain (Mellalieu, 2017; Nesti, 2016).

We believe that issues relating to congruence and assimilation present a key consideration for modern sport psychologists, particularly in relation to how their own practices may align with established cultural norms and expectations. Drawing on previous empirical perspectives, Schinke and Hackfort (2016) recommended that applied sport psychologists align themselves with the culture they are trying to influence or risk extinction. Yet, in an environment often dictated by a ruthless pursuit of excellence (cf.

McDougall et al., 2015), such alignment can prove professionally and ethically problematic. McDougall and colleagues (2015) conducted a series of interviews with established practitioners and highlighted the tensions between the organization and the psychologist, particularly when required to conduct practices that are aligned with the expectations of the organization but not necessarily to their values as a practitioner. Consequently, applied sport psychologists must at times resist cultural assimilation, despite the risk of team alienation and possible employment termination (Gilmore, Wagstaff, & Smith, 2018; McDougall et al., 2015).

Nesti (2016) proposed that although applied sport psychologists should be part of the culture, they must also be apart from it, ensuring that one’s support remains congruent with one’s personal beliefs, values, and wider professional philosophy. Moreover, although engagement in broader organizational operations now reflects a key ASP function, applied sport psychologists must also ensure that the pursuit of cultural and performance excellence is not achieved at the expense of professional ethics and performer well-being.

When attempting to facilitate best care to athletic populations, recent ASP scholarship has increasingly advocated the importance of adopting a more holistic view of support provision (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Gamble, Hill, & Parker, 2013). In addition to highlighting the importance of applied sport psychologists obtaining an understanding of individual differences such as sexuality, gender identity, and spirituality (Gamble et al., 2013), scholars have also noted the increased utilization of ASP provision as a vehicle for the promotion of positive youth development (PYD) (Holt & Neely, 2011). Within the extant literature, PYD is regarded as a strength-based approach, which focuses on the ways in which children and adolescents may accrue experiences that promote optimal psychosocial development and positive systematic change (Holt & Neely, 2011; Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005). In addition to providing continued opportunities for psychological, social, and intellectual growth (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005), PYD has been shown to aid in the facilitation of a series of life skills (Hermens, Super, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2017). Within the context of current research and prac-

tice, life skills represent a collection of personal assets, characteristics, and skills that can be developed and transferred from sport to non-sport settings (Gould & Carson, 2008). For example, through participation in sport-related activity, children and adolescents are provided with opportunities to develop a multitude of skills in the areas of communication, stress management, leadership, and moral development (Gould & Carson, 2008). Consequently, the emergence of life skills programs such as Going for the Goal (Danish et al., 1992) and Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002) provided a promising avenue for extended holistic ASP support provisions. Nevertheless, life skills education is still regarded as a relatively nascent domain of ASP practice (Fortin-Guichard, Boudreault, Gagnon, & Trottier, 2018). Therefore, continued exploration and practitioner-led accounts of how applied sport psychologists help facilitate the development of life skills both directly (e.g., through consultancy) and indirectly (e.g., through coach and stakeholder awareness and education) may be warranted, in an effort to promote future best practice within this domain.

As well as the promotion of life skills, applied sport psychologists must also understand how the sociocontextual characteristics of a specific sports environment may negatively impact the mental health of athletes who perform within it (Roberts et al., 2016). Although the prevalence of mental health issues in sport remains subject to contention (Uphill, Sly, & Swain, 2016), there exists a growing evidence base to suggest that high-level sporting participation does indeed put individuals at risk of developing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Hughes & Leavey, 2012), eating disorders (Martinsen & Sundgot-Borgen, 2013), and substance abuse (Reardon & Creado, 2014). Consequently, applied sport psychologists who desire to work with high-performing athlete populations must develop competencies aligned with the identification, diagnosis, prevention, and support of mental health issues.

Currently, societies (e.g., AASP; British Psychological Society [BPS]) advise that practitioners develop a reliable support network consisting of clinically trained professionals who may be called upon regarding issues of referral. Nevertheless, Roberts et al. (2016) recently high-

lighted the “blurred lines” associated with practices that involve providing support to athletic populations experiencing mental health issues. Although clinical referral may represent an idealized resource for applied sport psychologists to use, the authors are quick to highlight that, on occasion, circumstances may necessitate applied sport psychologists’ roles and responsibilities akin to those of a clinical psychologist. To elaborate, Roberts et al. proposed that fear of stigmatization, cost of private counseling, and National Health Service waiting lists may leave applied sport psychologists in a precarious position, by which they may feel professionally and ethically obliged to support the athlete until a more appropriate form of care can be facilitated. The authors concluded by advising applied sport psychologists to engage in a continuous process of education and training, in an attempt to acquire appropriate clinical competencies (cf. Aoyagi et al., 2012).

Although performance enhancement continues to be regarded as a salient component of ASP provision (Brown & Fletcher, 2017), the development of psychotherapy, counseling, and mental health-related competencies remains a central topic of discussion within contemporary scholarship (Sebbens, Hassmén, Crisp, & Wensley, 2016; Watson, Way, & Hilliard, 2017). Currently, organising bodies such as AASP and APA have a large number of clinically-trained members, and there are many jobs in intercollegiate sport that combine clinical and performance enhancement responsibilities. For example, the recent and rapid expansion of the “Big Sky” group in the United States, highlights the important role psychologists can play in providing mental health and psychological care support provisions to high-level and elite athletic programs. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the attainment of a fully developed clinical skillset may be unrealistic when one considers the current purview of most ASP training pathways.

In an effort to bridge the gap between clinical and traditional ASP practices, Eubank (2016) suggested that applied sport psychologists should look toward the attainment of competencies that enable them to adopt a “counseling middle ground,” whereby they are able to help provide support to athletic populations through the display of effective listening and empathic skills (e.g., the display of unconditional positive

regard and nonjudgment), commonly associated with practices within counseling psychology. Although we acknowledge that the development of counseling-based competencies has been readily advocated in both research (Roberts et al., 2016) and organizing body training legislation (Katz & Hemmings, 2009), it is important to consider the ways in which applied sport psychologists are looking toward developing these competencies within the remit of current practices. Eubank (2016) suggested one possible avenue related to the adoption of a “system approach” (Rotheram, Maynard, & Rogers, 2016), whereby applied sport psychologists are provided with opportunities to work in collaboration with a clinical psychologist, in an attempt to develop first-hand experience of initiating, monitoring, and evaluating support provisions to athlete populations experiencing mental health issues.

Through engagement in this collaborative process, applied sport psychologists may be able to obtain competencies relating not only to the possible treatment of mental health issues but also key client-facing counseling skills that would be conducive toward ensuring positive therapeutic outcomes. Conversely, in accordance with existing professional practicing guidelines (e.g., American Psychological Association, BPS), applied sport psychologists should always operate within their boundaries of competence. The question, however, of whether this competence should extend to more clinical-based provisions remains one of contention. Therefore, although some scholars may advocate engagement in practices that may be conducive toward the attainment of clinical competencies, others urge caution. For example, Shearer, Mellalieu, and Shearer (2011) suggested that although knowledge of clinical disorders may be advantageous in the treatment of subclinical performance issues experienced by athletes with psychological disorders, the actual treatment of clinical issues should be the responsibility of those who have been sufficiently trained (i.e., clinical psychologists). Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge that collaboration between sport and clinical psychologists may be a key toward facilitating the highest levels of client support. As such, both parties should ensure that they clearly understand their respective roles in the therapeutic process and ensure there is congruence between their overarching philo-

sophy of practice and approach toward client support (Shearer et al., 2011).

Current Training and Certification Standards

Given the increasing diversification of ASP practice, Aoyagi and colleagues (2012) postulated that the future of the applied profession would be dependent on the successful acquisition of a series of key competencies. These included competence in (a) the psychology of performance, (b) mental health counseling, (c) consulting psychology, and (d) a performance specialty domain (e.g., sport, performing arts, business, high-risk occupations; p. 36). In recognition of these competencies and the broad expanse of ASP roles and responsibilities highlighted within this review, it appears that the current scope of ASP now far exceeds traditional PST practices.

As alluded to previously, applied sport psychologists are now required to operate across levels of an organizational structure with multiple stakeholders and support athletes in matters often unrelated to sport performance (e.g., personal and clinical issues). In addition, applied sport psychologists are now commonly requested to work with performers in nonsport domains (e.g., military, medicine, and performing arts) and engage in more holistic support provisions (e.g., life skills and mental health). Consequently, professional bodies might question the extent to which applied sport psychologists exhibit the necessary competencies required to deliver these services. For example, within existing organizing body legislation (e.g., American Psychological Association, AASP, BPS), explicit reference to the development of broader competencies highlighted within this commentary has remained largely absent from the trainee literature, thus further perpetuating confusion surrounding the true nature of ASP practice. As such, criticism has been directed toward current training and development documentation, with scholars advocating a need to better regulate ASP activities that may be conducive to not only ongoing ASP development but also the professional integrity of the applied field (Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Portega et al., 2017; Winter & Collins, 2016).

Recommendations for Future Training and Practice

From the perspective of trainees, procedures are required that reflect the multiplicity of current practice to ensure that service delivery competence can be attained. Jooste, Kruger, Steyn, and Edwards (2016) proposed that competence in ASP relates to “a candidate’s overall capability to perform critical work-tasks in a defined setting” (p. 2). Accordingly, in light of the apparent contextual divergence of current ASP practices, a trainee’s capability to perform these tasks may be increasingly dependent on exposure to a variety of performance settings (e.g., sport, military, and performing arts) that reflect the expansion of ASP provision.

Currently, within clinical and counseling psychology pathways, trainees are provided with placement opportunities that are reflective of the context-specific demands of their chosen profession. Yet, in ASP, long-term and experience-rich opportunities are seldom afforded to trainees, resulting in calls for extended networking and supervisory provision that may enable prospective professionals to obtain a greater breadth of applied experiences (McEwan & Tod, 2015) and support greater professional quality of life for applied practitioners (cf. Quartiroli, Wagstaff, & Etzel, 2019). Further, Marsh, Fritze, and Shapiro (2017) promoted the use of multiple supervisor pathways throughout the training process, stating that multiple supervisors can enable those in training to obtain numerous perspectives on ASP. The introduction of such a pathway could enable trainees to benefit from the theoretical and experiential expertise of a number of seasoned professionals, who in turn may possess a number of idiosyncratic consulting styles and domain-specific skills (e.g., nonsport-related performance enhancement or counseling skills expertise). These idiosyncrasies may also extend to each supervisor’s approach to consultancy (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, and humanistic), thereby enabling trainees to make more informed decisions regarding their own therapeutic preferences.

In their exploration of the issues affecting future certification standards in ASP, Watson and Portenga (2014) posited that “the profession of sport psychology is often viewed to be only as strong as the services that are provided

by its practitioners” (p. 262). As such, governing bodies are duty-bound to ensure they develop practitioners who possess the necessary service delivery competence to deliver services that reflect the continued evolution of the applied field. As noted previously, a key constituent of this enduring developmental process is the supervisor. Therefore, in addition to the evolution of neophyte training procedures, the future credibility of the ASP profession may well depend on safeguarding the quality and content of supervisory provisions.

We concur with Aoyagi et al.’s (2012) proposed reconceptualization of ASP competencies and have noted in our own respective practice that trainees have a need to extend their expertise (e.g., mental health provision and multicultural practices; cf. Foltz et al., 2015). Although we acknowledge and appreciate the academic credentials of those in supervisory positions, we also feel it pertinent to question the contextual intelligences of those offering such provision. Specifically, current organizing body legislation seemingly equates one’s capacity to supervise as a result of time spent in the profession. For example, current BPS guidelines stipulate that for one to become a supervisor, an individual must obtain 2 years of professional experience following their Health Care Professions Council registration. Although this period of professional practice may seem a reliable indicator of an individual’s readiness and capability to supervise, one could argue that professional development is by no means a linear process, and as such, we must look toward breadth as well as depth of experience as a measure of one’s competence to supervise. In line with this assumption, it has recently been suggested that supervision should be considered a specific competency within ASP, and in attempting to develop this competence, the profession should acknowledge practices currently used within other mainstream psychology disciplines, specifically the introduction of metasupervision provisions (Marsh et al., 2017).

Within the context of ASP, metasupervision is regarded as “supervision of supervision” (Barney, Andersen, & Riggs, 1996, p. 208). The service itself acts as a quality control mechanism, in which experienced supervisors guide and support neophyte supervisors through the dynamic processes underpinning effective practice (Andersen, Barney, & Waterson, 2016). In

a similar vein to the proposed trainee supervision pathway, the implementation of a hierarchical supervisory system, whereby less experienced supervisors can call upon the support of more established professionals, particularly when faced with situations or challenges outside their realm of professional expertise (e.g., work within a specific performance domain) could prove beneficial. By doing so, aspiring supervisors can acquire more robust context-specific competencies, which in turn will enable them to be better equipped to deal with the diverse challenges faced by this current generation of neophyte practitioners.

Although the possible implementation of extended supervisory processes represents a promising avenue of future exploration, we must also consider the practicality of such an approach. For example, [Winter and Collins \(2016\)](#) have recently acknowledged that the field of ASP is continually growing. As such, in attempting to acquire multiple competencies, applied sport psychologists may sacrifice opportunities for specialization in favor of opportunities for more diverse applied experiences. Indeed, efforts to acquire an array of competencies in different domains could potentially dilute the quality of ASP practice. Consequently, we urge caution before readily adopting an approach to ASP training and education that promotes the acquisition of multiple performance psychology-informed competencies and reiterate our recommendation to expand service delivery competencies, supervisory provisions, and contextual expertise to satisfy the idiosyncratic needs of those we provide support to. Should we rely too heavily on the use of “off the shelf” interventions that are not tailored for the respective performance domain and client needs, we will ultimately fail both client and practitioner and hinder the credibility of our profession.

Consideration should also be given to how we define and measure competence within ASP practice. For example, [Collins, Burke, Martindale, and Cruickshank \(2015\)](#) recently proposed a departure from competency-based approaches in ASP, suggesting that the acquisition of competencies does not necessarily equate to competence, and instead, we must seek to develop “expertise,” that is, expertise should be obtained via a process by which prospective sport psychology professionals are able to develop both

the theoretical and tacit knowledge required to deal with complex and often unpredictable performance environments. Conversely, [Fletcher and Maher \(2013\)](#) highlighted that the role of the ASP is one that necessitates active engagement in a process of lifelong learning. As such, we as a profession must first and foremost work toward the development of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors (obtained through education via theory, case study use and activities such as role-play and experiential learning) that enable the acquisition of contextual intelligence or practical knowledge required to satisfy minimum threshold competencies (in accordance to organizing body training legislation) and demonstrate applied sport psychologists’ ability to engage in effective, ethical, and safe practice. From here, we must acknowledge that competence is a continuum, and as such, opportunities to develop more functional and robust competencies must be afforded to licensed applied sport psychologists as well as those undertaking the accreditation process ([Fletcher & Maher, 2013](#)).

Given the diverse facets of ASP practice highlighted in this commentary, we call for professional bodies and societies to continue to regularly revisit and update competency frameworks to ensure they best reflect the increasingly diverse nature of current practice. In line with this recommendation, the [AASP \(2017\)](#) recently announced a new professional credential and certification mark in the form of a Certified Mental Performance Consultant accreditation pathway. The creation of this new title and pathway was the result of a job task analysis conducted by the AASP, whereby evidence-based accounts of ASP practices were obtained in an effort to identify the salient knowledge, skills, and work activities that embody the diverse nature of contemporary ASP provision. Although the merit of this emergent Certified Mental Performance Consultant pathway is yet to be fully examined, the accreditation itself does highlight a series of competencies that are akin to those mentioned throughout this commentary (e.g., working with nonsport populations and addressing issues that extend beyond athletic performance).

In addition to advocacy for updated competency profiles, we also recommend the need for increased opportunities for specialization, fol-

lowing the attainment of baseline competencies. More specifically, we believe it would be advantageous for applied sport psychologists to seek opportunities to develop competence in specialist domains. Depending on each applied sport psychologist's preference and personal philosophy of practice (e.g., performance enhancement or counseling-oriented), this may include seeking supervision and placement opportunities within nonsport domains, engaging in professional development activities that enable the acquisition of a human resources and/or organizational and occupational psychology skill set, proactively engaging in government and community-based programs to help facilitate PYD and key life skills, and collaborating with clinical professionals to develop competence in mental health support and counseling psychology.

Concluding Remarks

In this commentary, we have charted changes within ASP practice, highlighted the multitude of roles and responsibilities adopted by contemporary applied sport psychologists, and identified implications for the future of the applied profession. In doing so, we have made recommendations and expressed views on the changing landscape of ASP scholarship. In sum, it is evident that sport psychology as we know it is indeed changing, and it is crucial that professional bodies and societies acknowledge these changes and proactively update competency profiles, education and training pathways, and recommended curricula to ensure they best reflect the nature of current service provision. In attempting to dissect the complex nature of this provision, we are reminded that as psychologists we often create individualized models of our world (maps) that inform the nature of our professional practices. Nevertheless, "the map is not the territory" (Korzybski, 1933, p. 58), and scholars must acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of modern-day ASP provision (territory) through active engagement in activities that promote a collaborative understanding of contemporary practices.

Although the emergent literature offers illumination of the challenges associated with ASP, we must now provide pathways for continued professional maturation and evolution. This may include an increased emphasis on evi-

dence-based accounts of ASP experiences. Not only would these accounts help provide a greater sense of clarity in regard to challenges associated with modern practice, but these may also prove beneficial in helping to develop new certification standards and competency profiles that are required to help facilitate the development of truly well-rounded practitioners (Poczwadowski, 2017; Portenga et al., 2017). Furthermore, in recognition of the continued evolution of ASP practice, it may be beneficial for other key organizing bodies to engage in job task analysis procedures, in an effort to create a more coherent picture of what characterizes and delimits ASP in the modern era. By doing so, we may find ourselves in a position by which we may be able to establish a clearer professional identity; one that not only reflects the diverse nature of contemporary practice but also enables the facilitation of positive holistic performance and well-being provisions at an individual, team, and organizational level.

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