



## Exploring the Contribution of Personal Qualities to the Personal and Professional Development of Trainee Sport Psychology Practitioners' Within the Individuation Process

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- A) conception and design of the study
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### Abstract

Since the person behind the practitioner has been recognised as a core foundation of professional practice in sport psychology, research attention has diffused to focus on navigating the 'rocky road' towards individuation. As such, this study extended the literature by illuminating the importance of developing personal qualities during the embryonic stages of supervised experience (SE) in sport psychology to help support the individuation process occurring throughout the training journey. Specifically, the aim of the current study was to explore the contribution of personal qualities to the personal and professional development of trainee sport psychology practitioners, within the individuation process. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with probationary sport and exercise scientists (psychology) working in a range of elite and professional sports (i.e., premier league football, rugby league, golf, gymnastics, swimming, and several other Olympic sports). The interview schedule was refined following a pilot study. Interview transcripts were content analysed and trustworthiness criteria applied. Interpretative phenomenological analysis identified three main superordinate themes, labelled 'self-development of personal qualities', 'facilitators of supervisee individuation', and 'initial consulting experiences of practitioners'. This study extends the literature by illuminating the importance of developing personal qualities during the embryonic stages of SE to help support the individuation process occurring throughout the training journey, thus better preparing sport psychologist's for self-governed practice once accredited. Considerations are given in relation to how sport psychology education and training programmes could aid the individuation process via the development of personal qualities.

**Keywords:** Personal qualities, individuation, professional effectiveness

### Introduction

Within the counselling literature, debate perfused regarding key factors influencing the therapeutic process such as the person behind the therapist and theoretical orientation and training (Ciorbea & Nedelcea, 2012; Heinenon et al., 2012). Consequently, the development of the person within the counselling profession is recognised as an essential aim during training so that the 'self' can be used effectively during therapy (Länge, 2003). This position is echoed by Cain (2007), who illuminates the importance of a practitioner using oneself as a therapeutic tool to foster a relational atmosphere that facilitates a client's ability to learn from both personal and professional

experiences. However, this requires rigorous self-examination on the therapist's behalf to become aware of their personal qualities.

Corey (2009) considers the personal qualities of a therapist to play a significant role in the development of effective therapeutic relationships and dictate the quality of therapeutic outcomes. Considering the similarities between the counselling and sport psychology professions (Katz & Hemmings, 2009), such discussions have also diffused into the sport psychology literature with suggestions that personal quality awareness amongst sport psychologists contribute to their effectiveness (Chandler et al., 2016; 2014; Nesti, 2010). Indeed, since the sport psychologist has been recognised as the primary consulting 'tool' (Tod & Andersen, 2005), it appears necessary to extend the personal qualities literature. Conceptually, Chandler and colleagues (2014) propose that, in applied practice, personal qualities represent a tangible embodiment of a practitioner's core self and relates to a person's morals, values, virtues and beliefs. The significance of this tangible embodiment of beliefs is captured within the hierarchical model of professional philosophy (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004), which adopts a bottom-up approach whereby the foundation of a practitioner's personal core beliefs and values systematically informs, and is interdependently linked with, the less fundamental layers of theoretical paradigm, model of practice and consultant role, intervention goals, and intervention techniques. This position therefore reinforces the individuality of the person behind the practitioner as the core foundation of practice (Chandler et al., 2016).

Although the literature has provided some evidence regarding the characteristics of effective sport psychologists (Sharp & Hodge, 2011; Lubker et al., 2008; Orlick & Partington, 1987), only a paucity of research exists examining the personal qualities of effective sport psychologists and how they impact practice (Chandler et al., 2016; Nesti, 2010). In their study of sport physicians, Chandler and colleagues (2014) found empathy was considered a prerequisite to effective sport psychology practice and that it facilitates the relationship building process with athletes. The importance of empathy is pervasive within the counselling profession as it is identified as one of the key conditions necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change (Rogers, 1957). In addition to empathy, personal qualities such as integrity, humility, courage, resilience, and authenticity have been recognised as being of paramount importance to the effectiveness of sport psychologists (Chandler et al., 2016; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). For example, due to the day-to-day challenges associated with working in high level sport (i.e., handling sensitive information, being a part of and apart from the team) and the potential for termination of position at any time, resilience has been recommended as an important personal quality for sport psychologists to possess (Chandler et al., 2016). Similarly, Friesen and Orlick (2010) acknowledged the benefits of knowing and accepting thyself as a human-being and bringing this 'real' self into professional practice. For Friesen and Orlick (2010), when operating authentically with clients, practitioners are liberated and free to express who they are which helps elicit a degree of humility within the practitioner and serves to enhance the therapeutic relationship.

Unfortunately, it is acknowledged within the literature that neophyte sport psychology practitioners may initially lack an explicit awareness of their personal qualities, stemming from education's emphasis on traditional cognitive-behavioural methods (Rowley, Earle, & Gilbourne, 2012). For instance, in a longitudinal study Tod and Bond (2010) revealed how one neophyte practitioner, 'Anna', initially approached service-delivery from a prescriptive mental skills approach as a result of her educational experiences. Over time, however, Anna's theoretical orientation and self-awareness broadened, and she began practicing in a manner that was congruent with her professional philosophy. This bears resemblance to the individuation process outlined by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) in their counsellor development framework. Individuation represents a dynamic process in which practitioners aim to achieve a level of coherence between the practitioner (i.e., the values, beliefs, personal qualities) and professional identity (i.e., theoretical orientation, service-delivery style) (McEwan, Tod, & Eubank, 2019). Tod, Hutter and Eubank (2017) describe individuation as a process whereby a practitioner negotiates a 'fit' between who they are and the environment they are working within. The authors also recognize how people and environments can change, and individuation is therefore "a dynamic ongoing process as practitioners strive to achieve professional satisfaction and meaning" (Tod et al., 2017, p. 135). This notion of achieving a 'fit' is similar to that of congruence, which has been discussed to some extent within the sport psychology literature, and extensively so in counselling psychology literature. Therefore, to achieve this 'fit', sport psychologists will be required to navigate the rocky road to individuation and authenticity as part of their developmental journey. It would therefore appear beneficial to consider how practitioners' personal qualities and self-awareness can facilitate the individuation process.

Although the literature is replete with research examining the early development of neophyte sport psychologists (Johnson & Andersen, 2019; Martin, Winter, & Holder, 2017; Collins, Evan-Jones, & O'Connor, 2013), no study to date, to the authors knowledge, has examined the personal qualities of trainees and how they are developed throughout the early stages of their training journey. This study builds on previous research in this area and provides

valuable insight into the development of trainee sport psychology practitioners. The aim of the current study was to explore the contribution of personal qualities to the personal and professional development of trainee sport psychology practitioners, within the individuation process.

## Method

### Philosophical underpinnings

The current study employed an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to explore the development of neophyte sport psychology practitioners' personal qualities during SE from the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES). IPA provides an inductive and experiential approach to research (Smith, 2004), and has its philosophical underpinnings embedded within phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). In this study, IPA was selected as it is "...especially useful when one is concerned with complexity, process or novelty" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.53). Likewise, due to the inductive nature of IPA (Smith, 2004), it was purported to provide a more nuanced account of neophytes training journeys. As such, researcher reflexivity was considered an essential aspect of the research since the researcher was involved throughout the whole research process (Smith et al., 2013).

### Participants

Smith and Shinebourne (2012) contend that IPA studies typically benefit from an intensive focus on a small number of participants. As such, a sample of seven probationary sport and exercise scientists (six females and one male), who were currently undertaking BASES SE (psychology) were purposively sampled and provided their informed consent for participation in the study. Participants worked within a range of elite sports (e.g., Premier League football, Premiership rugby, PGA golf, and several other Olympic sports). All participants had completed a Master's level degree in sport psychology and some ( $n=3$ ) were doctoral students at different stages in their study. To ensure that the research questions were relevant, participants must have been registered on to BASES SE for a minimum of six months.

### Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to refine the interview process (Malmqvist et al., 2019), improve researcher confidence (McLeod, 2011), and enhance the credibility of the study (Padgett, 2008). Two medical students were selected for pilot due to the challenges associated with recruiting BASES supervisees and based on the assertion that the medical and sport psychology professions share parallels with one another (Chandler et al., 2014). Feedback from pilot interviews resulted in alterations to extend the interview time from 60 to 90 minutes and to rephrase certain questions for clarity.

### Instrument

Qualitative face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to provide an interpretive insight into neophyte practitioners' experiences of BASES SE. The interview schedule was developed following discussions with research team, the primary authors BASES supervisor, piloting and reviews of previous sport psychologist effectiveness and personal qualities literature (Chandler et al., 2014; Orlick & Partington, 1987), with content adapted to address the aim of the study. The interview schedule ensured that the same systematic and comprehensive lines of inquiry were followed for each participant interviewed. A copy of the interview schedule can be accessed in the supplementary material.

### Procedure

Following ethical approval, potential participants were contacted via email from BASES for interested participants and subsequently, by the primary researcher. Snowball sampling techniques were also employed due to the challenges associated with recruitment (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). The seven participants were interviewed in person or via Skype at a location and time that was suitable to them. Each participant was provided with the interview schedule and participant information sheet in advance, which detailed the interview questions and procedure and informed them that the data would be kept confidential, and of their right to withdraw. Once the interviews were complete, participants were provided with an opportunity to ask questions, debriefed, and thanked for their time. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes.

### Data analysis

Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, reviewed for grammatical accuracy, and re-read for familiarity by the primary author. Transcripts yielded 114 pages of 1.5 spaced interview data. The data was then analysed using IPA which included the following elements: (a) transfer from what is unique to a participant to what is collective among the participants, (b) description of the experience which is subsequently followed by an interpretation of the experience, (c) commitment to understanding the participant's perspective, and (d) psychological emphasis on personal meaning-making within a specific context (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). As such, the current study adopted Smith and colleagues' (2009) 7-stage data analysis guidelines to aid the IPA process. Stage 1 required the first author to become immersed in the original data through reading and re-reading each transcript and then making initial notes, thoughts and comments as per stage 2. These notes allowed the first author to identify key phrases and insight relevant to the research question, thus allowing for chunks of data to be grouped based on similarities (stage 3). For example, data regarding the importance of personal qualities for practitioner effectiveness were grouped, as was data related to personal qualities and how awareness of these can support the individuation process. Connections were then made between these emergent themes (stage 4) and key themes began to form. Throughout this process, a focus on the individual nature of each practitioner's experience was maintained as per stages 5 and 6, through the selection of extracts that represented unique applied experiences as shared within interviews. For example, whilst all practitioners referred to personal qualities and their development, their individuation processes were unique, and their practice environments varied. Deeper interpretation of data (stage 7) is represented within the results and subsequent discussion of data. Any disagreements were resolved via discussion within the study team until a collective consensus could be achieved and, when necessary, audiotapes were listened to again for clarity. A final rereading of all transcripts was performed to ensure all identified themes were grounded in the data.

### Researcher trustworthiness

Several trustworthiness methods were employed to ensure an accurate and rigorous representation of the data (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Firstly, member checking (Birt et al., 2016) was implemented whereby each transcript was sent verbatim, via email, to the respective participant for verification that the content could be analysed and discussed, and with the option of editing or deleting content. All seven participants responded confirming the accuracy of their transcripts. Secondly, analyst triangulation was achieved through frequent meetings between the authors at various stages of data analysis to discuss the findings. This provided a broader perspective from which to develop interpretations of the data and enabled common themes to be established and discussed (Campbell et al., 2013). Thirdly, consistent with the recommendations made by Sparkes (1998), extensive quotations from the participants were included in the results section for readers to deduce for themselves the accuracy and trustworthiness of conclusions. Finally, considering that the lead author was immersed throughout the whole research process as the primary data collection and analysis instrument (Smith et al., 2009), a reflexive journal was kept to record the nature and origin of possible emergent interpretations (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

## Results

Based on analysis of transcripts, data representation was orientated around three key superordinate themes. The first key theme emerged around the self-development of personal qualities. The second examined the facilitators of supervisee individuation whilst the third theme explored the initial consulting experiences of supervisees.

### Self-development of personal qualities

The supervisees acknowledged the value of developing their personal qualities if they are to be effective during service-delivery. The importance of personal qualities is reflected in the following excerpt: *"I think personal qualities are needed for all disciplines in a way, but I think it is different for sport psychology...because you are the instrument in terms of your personal qualities"*. This quote from supervisee six illuminates how supervisees, even early in their careers, recognise that who they are as a person plays a central role in their effectiveness, particularly within sport psychology. In doing so, this highlights the importance of the individuation process as supervisees learn to negotiate the 'fit' between themselves and their environment. Indeed, one part of negotiating this 'fit' is being self-aware and acting in congruence with one's personal qualities whilst remaining cognisant of what works

within the environment they are operating in. The supervisees described the importance of being yourself during service-delivery:

*“I think it is important that you find your own being...who I am as a sport psychologist will differ from who you are as a sport psychologist, and we are our own people, and we can't all be robots and be the same people because that is not going to work.”*

This quote from supervisee four highlights the importance of individuality and the need for supervisees to discover the essence of who they are. This position was echoed by supervisees throughout, for example by supervisee five who stated *“I think when you are working with people then you need to be yourself and I think that is how you build rapport naturally.”* Such quotes highlight the benefits of practitioners practicing authentically and using oneself as an instrument to establish ‘real’ connections with athletes. The supervisees also suggested that the individuation process, specifically involving their development of self-awareness and personal qualities, is important in learning when to challenge others and address conflict. This assertion is best reflected in the following by trainee seven:

*“I think that security in myself...before I would have been so keen to impress and so keen to need to prove myself...I would have done everything I can to protect myself...whereas yesterday empathy came into it because I thought wow he is in a really difficult position ...he has thrown me under the bus and that is not like him and he probably didn't mean to so what can I do to help him rather than just be a bit shit back to him.”*

Trainees also identified a desire to take responsibility for their self-development and what is ‘right’ over what is expedient. This was best reflected in the following extracts from two supervisees:

*“You can't measure psychology and the impact of it, and you are actually thinking am I doing anything here am I progressing the club or progressing the player and I think you have got to one, believe in yourself and to have flexibility”* (supervisee 3)

*“The ability to understand that you are not always going to know everything about every sport and it's kind of ok to say that I don't understand that much about the sport, but I understand what I am talking about psychology wise so maybe we can work together and learn from each other? So, I think honesty is important”* (supervisee 5)

These quotes from participants highlight the importance of the individuation process whereby supervisees endeavour to find a personalised method of working that reflects where they are at in their developmental journey (McEwan et al., 2019). For example, being comfortable to admit a lack of knowledge in a sport or on a topic requires honesty, authenticity and courage, and these quotes therefore reinforce the importance of personal quality awareness in facilitating a supervisee's journey towards individuation. Trainees also identified the importance of knowing how and when to apply these personal qualities in the ‘real world’ in terms of being *“ready to be challenged”* and dealing with the unexpected:

*“I ended up walking around the training ground with him for a couple of hours at least and we spoke about a million different things that I never ever would have expected and none of that was based on theory, all of that was just based on what came to my mind.”*

This excerpt from supervisee seven suggests that whilst acquiring a comprehensive knowledge base is of importance to applied practitioners, this is not always sufficient in practice; and practitioners also need to rely on their personal qualities to communicate sensitively with athletes. Similarly, these excerpts highlight supervisees' commitment towards remaining authentic during service-delivery and thus implicates personal quality awareness as contributing to individuation.

### **Facilitators of supervisee individuation**

The supervisees recognised a variety of key elements such as reflective practice, peer support, life experience, and the role of the supervisor as facilitating supervisee growth and thus their individuation process. Supervisees emphasised the value of reflective practice:

*“Even just the process of reflecting on what you have learnt is helping you develop in itself but having that structure and having a more formal way of doing it definitely helps...it actually helps you realise which qualities are important and which are going to help you, and then you can sort of develop those and try and shape your experiences to help those.”*

This extract from trainee one suggests that supervisees recognise the formalised structure of reflective practice as a professional tool to aid their development. Specifically, this quote highlights the role of reflection in facilitating the relationship between personal qualities and experiences, and the confidence this engenders within supervisees as a consequence of increased self-awareness. Peer interaction was another component acknowledged to facilitate individuation:

*“I think that my supervisor has only ever really been my support and actually I think I need more than that...I need other peers to help me learn about new stuff that I haven't heard of. When other people say something, you really listen to it and think actually that is a good point and I do need to be more empathetic”* (supervisee 2)

This excerpt from supervisee two highlights the importance of developing a community of practice throughout one's professional journey and demonstrates the contribution of peers in supporting development in ways different to that of supervisors. Peers are presented as an important source of support; interactions between trainee practitioners can promote personal quality awareness by encouraging a supervisee to direct their attention introspectively toward the qualities that require development. The supervisees further identified the role of life experience in their personal development, which ultimately informs their individuation as a practitioner:

*“I think it is something to do with your upbringing, because I don't think you are being true to yourself or you are not being authentic if you are not being yourself in sport...I think outside of sport some bad things happen and it helps you become more resilient for life in sport, and it helps you become more aware in terms of what you are doing, and your personal qualities in terms of how you are doing it, and how you treat others with respect, and I think that they all influence you as a person.”*

This quote from supervisee six suggests that supervisees' personal and professional selves are intertwined and symbiotic, with each influencing the other's development. Supervisees should be cognisant of their personal life experiences and understand how these may develop their personal qualities, which in turn can facilitate individuation as a practitioner. Specifically, it could be construed that personal life experiences help shape individuals and that supervisees should remain true to their 'real' self during professional practice. It is evident that a relationship exists between personal life experience, personal qualities, and individuation and as such, reflective practice offers neophyte practitioners the opportunity to develop self-awareness through consideration of life experiences and how they have impacted them as a person and therefore as a practitioner. One supervisee also acknowledged the importance of their supervisor in supporting their development of personal qualities and facilitating the individuation process:

*“I was lucky...[my supervisor] picked [personal qualities] up so they have always kind of driven that so in my reflections they were always picking up...strengths or your qualities but I am lucky in that reflection is their thing so they know the kind of questions to ask.”*

Supervisee three elaborated on this when highlighting that receiving positive feedback from their supervisor gives them “confidence to be more courageous”, especially given the self-doubt that developing practitioners may experience. These findings highlight the role of a supervisor in supporting a trainee practitioner's reflective process by encouraging them to consider personal qualities. Through their questioning and feedback, a supervisor can ensure their supervisee considers not only the external (what they do in practice), but on the internal (the aspects of self that inform practice). Supervisees also provided recommendations to further support their development in a more formalised way. Supervisee six captured this well:

*“I know on the competency profile there are personal qualities such as building relationships and understanding different environments, but I don't actually think that they emphasise it enough and I think if they had a competency as like personal qualities of a practitioner or being yourself as a practitioner then that would really hammer it home and get more people focusing on it.”*

Findings overall suggested that supervisees benefitted from a focus on developing personal qualities during their supervised experience, and therefore it appears that a formal requirement to consider this as part of a competency profile would be welcomed.

### **Initial consulting experiences**

The supervisees in the study offered an interesting insight into their initial consulting experiences and the vulnerabilities they encountered as a result of traditional, theory-driven educational practices:

*“At the start I stuck with mental skills because it’s what I knew... I think that I am in a place now where I know that I don’t want to do all of the mental skills stuff, but because my education has all been mental skills with a little bit of ‘oh here is these other philosophies and theories’ and it is like oh that is really cool but how?...They are so [significant] how do I know where to start? And how do you apply them?...There is so much out there, and I think I really struggled.”*

This quote from supervisee four highlights the initial lack of preparedness that neophytes can experience during the embryonic stages of professional practice due to a lack of exposure to professional philosophy. This supervisee appeared unsure how to develop a professional philosophy and put it into practice, which is now impacting them negatively as they seek to shift their approach. Supervisee six elaborated on this with regards to personal qualities specifically:

*“[At University] you are told all this theory of one-to-one support, and you are supposed to show care, and empathy but I think actually when you sit down you are thinking oh my god what am I going to say now? What am I going to say? And you are just sat there, and everyone is expecting you to be an expert, but you don’t know.”*

It appears that whilst supervisees may be aware of the importance of personal qualities, such as empathy as highlighted in this example, their understanding of what such qualities ‘look like’ in practice may be lacking. During the early stages of a practitioner’s development, they may not yet have had the opportunity to develop their personal qualities or understanding of their influence on practice. As a result, trainee practitioners may experience a feeling of incongruence and a lack of coherency between their personal and professional selves, preventing individuation. However, supervisees offered examples of how experience helped them to overcome the uncertainty and discomfort associated with incongruence:

*“I definitely feel much more confident in my own abilities and my own beliefs...so what I feel is right and my philosophy...I definitely feel much more confident to stick by those...initially you are just desperate to be involved in anything you can in order to get more applied experience whereas now...I would feel a lot happier saying you know what, I don’t agree with the things that are going on and I don’t think that this one is for me.”*

This quote from trainee four demonstrates how personal qualities such as authenticity, courage, and integrity have evolved for this supervisee and influenced their practice choices. It captures the dynamic process considered representative of individuation as a trainee practitioner negotiates when appraising who they are and whether they ‘fit’ the environments that they are employed to work in. As such, these findings would appear to suggest that personal quality awareness is integral to the individuation process with regards to finding a comfort within oneself as a person and as a practitioner, which was further emphasized by supervisee one:

*“When I started, I was like ‘oh I need to look like I know what I am doing’... can’t be like ‘oh no I don’t know your sport!’ But then as you move through... now I would be quite happy to say... actually I don’t know anything about the sport specifically but I have done a bit of research myself, and I would like to learn from you...I would feel more confident doing that now rather than what I did at the beginning”*

This excerpt suggests that over time, supervisees will become more comfortable with accepting what they do not know and take responsibility for seeking learning experiences to address this. This extract also illustrates this supervisee’s development towards a more authentic and secure self, who is humble enough to acknowledge where they can develop and honest in sharing this with others. It therefore appears imperative that experience be actively reflected upon to promote self-awareness, and therefore understood as significantly influencing individuation through personal quality development.

## Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore the contribution of personal qualities to the personal and professional development of trainee sport psychology practitioners, within the individuation process. This study has extended the literature by illuminating the importance of developing personal qualities during the embryonic stages of SE to help support the individuation process occurring throughout the training journey (Tod et al., 2017). Indeed, supervisees valued personal qualities, and having an awareness of these, as being paramount in helping them to provide effective sport psychology support by enabling oneself to be used as an instrument of practice within the

consulting process. This position resonates with the extant literature which emphasises the person behind the practitioner as the core foundation of practice (Lindsay et al., 2007; Chandler et al., 2014; Tod et al., 2017).

The supervisees frequently discussed the challenges associated with being both authentic and adaptable within professional environments. Specifically, supervisees acknowledged the difficult balance between ‘fitting in’ and expressing one’s ‘real self’ during professional practice, which reflects the individuation process described by Tod et al. (2017). For the supervisees in this study, part of negotiating this fit necessitated a developing awareness of how they wanted to practice and an associated comfort in saying ‘no’ when necessary. This highlights the importance of developing personal qualities such as authenticity and courage and represents a tangible example of why these are important in applied practice. Chandler and colleagues (2016) support this assertion and argue that it is important for sport psychology practitioners to be highly self-aware of their personal qualities and how they interact within the professional sport environment, particularly when managing conflict and opposition to one’s work. Furthermore, Orlick and Partington (1987) contend that practitioners must consider the impact of both their personal characteristics and the unique sporting environment they are working within if they are to be truly effective. In reflecting on their applied experiences, the practitioners in the current study could provide examples of how the ‘self’ in context became increasingly important to their work, for example in realising the importance of one’s professional philosophy, or when managing the difficulty of demonstrating tangible outcomes resulting from their applied endeavours. As Chandler, Steptoe and Eubank (2020) highlight, a ‘good day at the office’ for a sport psychologist will likely reflect both meeting their role requirements and their personal feelings on impact and effectiveness, despite these potentially being at odds with one another. Practitioners must work to remain congruent, whilst also ‘fitting’ with their environment, and have the “competence and confidence to willingly, pragmatically, and with legitimacy “flex” (not break) their philosophical position” (Chandler et al., 2020, p. 243). Combined with the results of the current study, such literature emphasises the challenging nature of practitioner individuation, and together provide valuable insight into its significance for effective applied practice.

The neophyte practitioners involved in this study also provided valuable insight into how their personal qualities developed as a function of training experiences. Participants demonstrated an awareness of their qualities aligned to their stage of development, acknowledging, for example, an increased humility and integrity in being willing to do the ‘right thing’ rather than what could be considered self-serving. The development of personal qualities throughout the training process can be understood in relation to Rønnestad and Skovholt’s (2013) counsellor development framework, which has been previously employed within the sport psychology trainee development literature (McEwan et al., 2019), and may contribute to the understanding of practitioner development in the sport domain (Tod & Bond, 2010). According to Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013), practitioners advance through six phases: 1) layhelper phase, 2) beginning student phase, 3) advanced student phase, 4) novice professional phase, 5) experienced professional phase, and 6) senior professional phase. In this case, it could be interpreted that the transition between the beginning student and advanced student phases bear resemblance to the SE process. For instance, the beginning student phase is characterised as an exciting yet intensely challenging phase in which neophytes are consumed with anxiety and doubt whether they have the personal qualities, resources, or ability to bridge the theory-practice gap. This was reflected in the current study whereby supervisees acknowledged during their initial consulting experiences that they were inundated with anxiety and self-doubt, lacked awareness of their personal qualities and did not yet fully understand how these qualities may impact on their effective practice. At this stage in their development, it would be appropriate to assume that supervisees may not have had sufficient opportunity in the form of applied experiences to develop an awareness of their personal qualities or how these interacted with their applied environments. Indeed, the participants highlighted the benefit of increasing the focus on personal qualities within the training process.

Additionally, during their early development as practitioners, it could be construed that trainees exhibit “a rigid adherence to taught rules” (Eraut, 1994, p.124), which may be informed by what students will typically be taught on educational programmes within the discipline, namely a cognitive-behavioural approach to sport psychology (Holt & Streat, 2001). This was implicated within the present study; supervisees reported focusing solely on mental skills training despite the incongruence they were experiencing resulting from their lack of authenticity during service-delivery. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) support this position and suggest that students often suppress their beliefs about helping in favour of ways that seem more professional, and therefore operate in rigid and inflexible ways. Tod and Lavalley (2011) also argue that current sport psychology training provision may not permit neophytes to develop necessary relationship building skills (i.e., empathy) to provide athlete-centred services. The current study extends this understanding by highlighting that there are additional aspects of applied practice that training may not

adequately prepare neophytes for, such as developing and implementing their professional philosophy or how and when to say 'no'. Therefore, an increased emphasis on self, and one's beliefs, values, and personal qualities, would be beneficial during supervisee training and support the individuation process, thus better preparing them for self-governed practice once accredited.

Based on the findings from this study, it appears pertinent to offer some practical implications for the profession with regards to the education and training of sport psychology practitioners. Specifically, the supervisees acknowledged that their personal qualities and professional knowledge operate symbiotically in professional practice and that a deficiency in either would negatively impact upon the effectiveness of one's practice. Ladany (2007) supports this position and advocates for training programs to promote both the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and skills and opportunities for personal development. Therefore, perhaps future discussions should emerge within training programs as to how they are fostering these personal qualities amongst supervisees and preparing them for the arduous nature of professional sport (Nesti, 2004). In addition, given the similarities to the counselling psychology profession (Katz & Hemmings, 2009), sport psychology training pathways could learn from their training pathways which focus on the evolution of practitioners across the entire development process in relation to both self and contextual knowledge (McEwan et al., 2019; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). In doing so, this may permit supervisees to learn about both their 'self' and their 'self in context', understand how they relate to others (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010), and become more cognisant of how their personal qualities are integral to the individuation process and professional effectiveness (Tod et al., 2017).

Data from the current study also highlighted supervisors as key in supporting a trainee's individuation process. The trainees suggested that a supervisor who challenges them to consider their personal qualities and how these impact on applied practice is of significant value to their development and provides a safe and supportive space within which to (constructively) question their 'self' in practice. Chandler and McEwan (2019) have presented several ways in which a supervisor can support a trainee through their developmental journey, for example by encouraging them to reflect on who they are and their motivations for applied practice. In doing so, the supervisory relationship can act as a 'prototype' for guiding the supervisee's future client relationships and their understanding of self in relation to others. Given the position that current training may not provide trainees with the necessary opportunities to develop important client-centred skills (Tod & Lavalley, 2011), this represents one way in which the trainee can be prepared for practice in line with current participants' perspectives. The supervision environment is also important in the supervisee feeling that they can safely express themselves as a person whilst the supervisor also promotes a focus on the contextual aspects of applied sport psychology practice (Chandler & McEwan, 2019). This represents a tangible suggestion for how the supervisor can support a trainee's individuation process, and the current study emphasises the need for a focus on personal qualities within this supervision.

It is also important, however, that trainees have the opportunity to learn from a variety of sources in addition to their supervisor, and participants from the current study emphasised the importance of their own reflective practice, and support from peers, in their development. For example, supervisees highlighted reflective practice as a professional tool that supports one's journey of self-discovery and personal quality awareness, by exploring one's upbringing and challenges experienced in one's personal life. McEwan et al. (2019) support this assertion and purport that reflections on critical life events may aid the individuation process and subsequently one's professional practice. Supervisees also recognised the importance of developing a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and how peers can contribute, for example, through discussions that offer 'food for thought' and stimulate self-reflection. Owton and colleagues (2014) support this position and revealed that the applied experiences of one trainee may act as a catalyst that stimulates awareness in other trainees regarding professional challenges that they are likely to encounter. Of utmost importance, is that applied practitioners can develop an understanding of their effectiveness and make use of a variety of sources to inform this, especially given the notion of the practitioner as the tool (Tod & Andersen, 2005). This can be a challenge for less experienced practitioners, yet utilising supervisors, peers and in particular reflective practice to consider one's personal qualities and how they interact with working environments are key recommendations to support a practitioner's development and what effectiveness looks like for them (Chandler et al., 2020). This exposure to professional others may also help mitigate against creating 'mini-me' supervisors which is paramount when considering that the individuation process is about one's individual identity. Therefore, exposing oneself to a variety of others with different ideas is important to understand what does and does not work for supervisees. Tod and colleagues (2017) support this position and suggest that knowing who we are *not*, is just as helpful as knowing who we are.

## Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to explore the contribution of personal qualities to the personal and professional development of trainee sport psychology practitioners, within the individuation process. This study adds to the relatively limited literature in sport psychology development literature pertaining to the individuation process and acknowledges the importance of developing the personal qualities of neophytes to support this process. These findings also support and extend previous counselling and sport psychology literature, and implore the development of both the trainee as a person and also as a professional in order to be truly effective. Likewise, this study identified a number of key methods to facilitate personal quality awareness which may further aid the individuation process. However, due to the small number of participants recruited the findings may not be fully representative of the UK sport psychology supervisees and should be interpreted with caution. Further, these findings are specific to supervisees registered onto BASES SE and future research could explore these findings from the perspective of other training routes (i.e., British Psychological Society) to help enrich the personal qualities and individuation literature. Additionally, a longitudinal study comprising the length of SE would appear to be beneficial in elucidating our understanding of how personal qualities are developed and how this impacts the individuation process. In summary, the findings from this study have illuminated the importance of developing personal qualities during the embryonic stages of SE to help support the individuation process and ultimately, professional effectiveness.

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