“It’s psychology Jim, but not as we know it!”: The changing face of applied sport psychology practice

Abstract

Applied sport psychology 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 paper, 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 applied sport psychology practitioner. In so doing, we acknowledge the recent diversification of applied sport psychology practices, with an emphasis on competencies relating to: working with more diverse performance populations (e.g., in business, military, healthcare, education, and the performing arts); engaging in organizational psychological practices; positive youth development; promoting life skills; and mental health and counselling support provisions. Further, we offer suggestions for the future of applied sport psychology education and training, in an effort to contribute to the profession’s continued journey toward maturation. This includes discussion surrounding the possible implementation of multi-supervisory pathways, extended placement opportunities and engagement in post training practices within specialist performance domains, in an effort to aid the development of more diverse competencies which reflect the multiplicity of current practice.
“It’s psychology Jim, but not as we know it!”: The changing face of applied sport psychology practice

The field of applied sport psychology (ASP), is an emerging profession, characterized by continual change and evolution. ASP was once considered a sub-discipline of kinesiology (see Vealey, 2006) and a tool for the amelioration of psychological dysfunction amongst athletic populations (see 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 (e.g., 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, healthcare, education, and performing arts; Barker et al., 2016); integration of organizational psychological practices (e.g., Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff, 2017); fostering positive youth development (e.g., Holt & Nelly, 2011); promotion of life skills (Gould & Carlson, 2008); and mental health support (e.g., 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 sub-discipline 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). While 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
towards 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 paper is to chart the changes within applied practice and identify implications for the future of our profession. Specifically, we: (1) take a historical perspective to illustrate the change in the representation/description in the professional practice literature of what ASPs do, and what the profession comprises; (2) discuss examples from applied practitioners’ own professional experiences of the roles/challenges ASPs presently encounter in the profession; (3) consider the ability of current ASP training and practice guidelines to cater for this role change; and, (4) offer recommendations for the future training and supervision to better prepare and inform ASP’s 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 paper will help facilitate an enhanced understanding and awareness among ASPs 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**

While 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 perhaps the work of Griffith that is most commonly regarded 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). Prior to 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 which provided an early forum for siloed scholars and practitioners to meet. For instance, the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP, 1965), the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA, 1967), and the European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC, 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 1980’s, an increasing number of organizations, including the U.S. Olympic Committee, began employing ASPs in an attempt to facilitate the systematic implementation of 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 orientated; Aoyagi, Portenga, Poczwardowski, Cohen, & Statler, 2012; Ryba & Wright, 2005). As such, societies including the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES, 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 (e.g., Ravizza, 1990; Bull, 1995) 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 ASPs are ‘shrinks’ (see Van Raalte, Brewer, Matheson, & Brewer, 1996; Bastos, Corredeira, Probst, & Fonseca, 2014). 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 (TSP, 1987) and the Journal of Applied Sport Psychology (JASP, 1989), it became evident that ASPs 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 USOC 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 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 non-athlete populations (Gould, 2002). In one of the two dedicated special issues of JASP examining the psychology of excellence, Gould (2002) emphasized the need for greater diversification of sport psychology principles within wider performance domains, in order 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
149 military and music (e.g., Fiore & Salas, 2008; Pecen, 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). Additionally, 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 employed within athletic settings (e.g., positive self-talk, imagery and emotional control) could be effectively utilized 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, Neil, & Fletcher, 2016).

In addition to the increased diversification of ASP practices, the turn of the 21st Century also marked a growing appreciation for the role organizational psychology; a domain of study which integrates research foundations in social psychology and organizational behavior, to address the emotional and motivational aspects of organizational life and promote practices which contribute to performer productivity, satisfaction and wellbeing (Wagstaff, 2017). In recognition of the ever-changing landscape within sport, the role of organizational influences were becoming increasingly noted within post millennium 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 upon elite athletes in the build up 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 ASPs in an effort to cope with these organizational demands.
Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) 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 ASPs should develop knowledge of organizational practices in order to provide more efficacious support to both athletes and management staff, in relation to helping them deal with demands which extend beyond athletic performance (e.g., positively influencing cultural and managerial practices).

More recently, researchers have conducted applied research to better understand the organizational factors promoting optimal functioning within elite sport landscapes (e.g., Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012). This research agenda has been labelled positive organizational psychology in sport (POPS; Wagstaff et al., 2012). In concordance with the POPS 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 Larner (2015) extended these sentiments and outlined how ASPs knowledge of four core dimensions of organizational practice; emotions and attitudes in sport organizations, stress and wellbeing in sport organizations, behaviours 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 ASPs working to promote well-being and functioning at various levels of the structures within sports 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 an architect of cultural excellence (Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank, 2014). With growing requests for ASPs to advise on elite sport 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 socio-political skills and knowledge of organizational psychology practices associated with topics such as attitudes, fairness, motivation, stress and leadership (Eubank et al., 2014; Cruickshank & Collins, 2015; Wagstaff, 2017).

The scope of current practices requires ASPs to adopt a more flexible and free ranging role, whereby micro-level PST provision might be complemented by engagement in macro-level performance, organizational and management practices (Collins & Cruickshank, 2015). This macro-level 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 et al., 2015). Eubank and colleagues (2014) suggested satisfactory fulfilment 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, ASPs must quickly establish a cultural appreciation of the complex social hierarchies, micro-political structures and cultural dynamics which 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 macro-level 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 noted 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. Additionally, with the growing medicalization and scientization of elite sport (Stewart & Smith, 2008), scholarship continues to acknowledge the importance of ASPs being able to operate effectively as part of a multidisciplinary team (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Part of this multidisciplinary provision requires ASPs to establish ongoing working alliances with various sports medicine and science staff (e.g., S&C practitioners, nutritionists and physicians) in an effort to protect performer wellbeing and promote a synergistic view of athletic excellence (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Mellalieu, 2016). Furthermore, while the importance of effective multidisciplinary science and medicine support teams have been acknowledged and sought for some time (see Reid, Stewart, & Thorne, 2004), more recent scholarship proposes ASPs 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 (see, Chandler, Eubank, Nesti, Tod, & Cable, 2016).

To further illustrate the evolving nature of ASP practice, Terry and Si (2015) reviewed a body of literature which 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 which exist beyond the scope of traditional ASP provision. This includes helping athletes to address family issues, media scrutiny and other private concerns which may be regarded as superfluous to athlete performance. Collins and Cruickshank (2015) noted similar experiences and proposed that ASP support should extend toward helping athletes in coping with the multitude organizational stressors they may encounter in the build up 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 competition is a process which 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 ASPs familiarize themselves with these multifaceted demands, in order 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, ASPs 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 scepticism” surrounding ASP practices within sport. Elsewhere, Gardner (2016) noted the possibility of organizational resistance, should the sport psychologist fail to effectively establish their roles and responsibilities within an organization. Moreover neophyte practitioners appear to be
inadequately prepared for the requirements of this wider provisions, with Larsen (2017) recently reflecting that the practical challenges associated with attempting to integrate oneself successfully into an elite sport organization was 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 often volatile nature of elite sport and its demands. As such, when attempting to gain trust and develop credibility, ASPs must acknowledge, assimilate and ultimately influence the dynamic organizational culture that exists within this domain (Mellalieu, 2017; Nesti, 2016).

We believe issues relating to congruence and assimilation present a key consideration for the modern sport psychologist, particularly in relation to how their own practices may align with established cultural norms and expectations. Drawing on previous empirical perspectives, Schinke (2016) recommended that ASPs 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 organization and psychologist, particularly when required to conduct practices which are aligned with the expectations of the organization but not necessarily to their values as a practitioner. Consequently, ASPs must at times resist cultural assimilation, despite the risk of team alienation and possible employment termination (Gilmore, Wagstaff, & Smith, 2017; McDougall et al., 2015). Nesti (2016) proposed that while ASPs 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, ASPs must also ensure
the pursuit of cultural and performance excellence is not achieved at the expense of professional ethics and performer wellbeing.

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 ASPs 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). As well as providing continued opportunities, for psychological, social and intellectual growth (Fraser-Thomas Côté & Deakin, 2005), PYD also 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 practice, life skills represent a collection of personal assets, characteristics and skills which can 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 & Carlson, 2008). Consequently, the emergence of life skill programmes such as Going for the Goal (GOAL; Danish et al., 1992) and Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER; Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002) providing 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-
Therefore, continued exploration and practitioner led accounts of how ASPs 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, ASPs must also understand how the socio-contextual characteristics of specific sports environment may negatively impact the mental health of athletes who perform within it (e.g., Roberts, Faull, & Tod, 2016). While 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 (e.g., Hughes & Leavey, 2012), eating disorders (e.g., Martinsen & Sundgot-Borgen, 2013), and substance abuse (e.g., Reardon & Creado, 2014). Consequently, ASPs 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, 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, Faull and Todd (2016) recently highlighted the “blurred lines” associated with practices which involve providing support to athletic populations experiencing mental health issues. Whilst, clinical referral may represent an idealised resource for ASPs to utilize, the authors are quick to highlight that on occasion, circumstances may necessitate ASP roles and responsibilities akin to those of a clinical psychologist. To elaborate, Roberts et al. proposed that fear of stigmatization, cost of private counselling and NHS waiting lists may leave ASPs 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 ASPs to engage in a
continuous process of education and training, in an attempt to acquire appropriate clinical
competencies (cf. Aoyagi et al., 2012).

Whilst performance enhancement continues to be regarded as a salient component of
ASP provision (see Brown & Fletcher, 2017), the development of psychotherapy, counselling
and mental health related competencies remains a central topic of discussion within
contemporary scholarship (e.g., Sebbings, Hassmen, Crisp, & Wensley, 2016; Watson, Way,
& Hilliard, 2017). Currently, organising bodies such 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 ASPs should look toward the attainment of competencies which enable
them to adopt a “counselling 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 non-judgement), commonly associated with
practices within counselling psychology. Whilst we acknowledge the development of
counselling-based competencies have been readily advocated in both research (e.g., Roberts et al., 2016) and organizing body training legislation (e.g., Katz & Hemmings, 2009), it is important to consider the ways in which ASPs are looking toward developing these competencies within the remit of current practices. Eubank (2016) suggested one possible avenue as the adoption of a “system approach” (cf. Rotheram, Maynard, & Rogers, 2016), whereby ASPs are provided with opportunities to work in collaboration with a clinical psychologist, 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, ASPs may be able to obtain competencies relating to not only the possible treatment of mental health issues, but also key client facing counselling skills that would be conducive toward ensuring positive therapeutic outcomes. Conversely, in accordance with existing professional practicing guidelines (e.g., APA, British Psychological Society; BPS) ASPs 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, whilst some scholars may advocate engagement in practices which may be conducive toward the attainment of clinical competencies, others urge caution. For example, Shearer, Mellalieu and Shearer (2011) suggested that whilst 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 psychologist may be key toward facilitating the highest levels of client support. As such, both parties should ensure they clearly understand their respective roles in the therapeutic process and ensure there is congruence between their overarching philosophy of practice and approach toward client support (Shearer et al., 2011).

Current Training and Certification Standards

Given the increasing diversification of ASP practices, 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 counselling; (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, ASPs 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). Additionally, ASPs are now commonly requested to work with performers in non-sport 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 ASPs exhibit the necessary competencies required to deliver these services. For example, within existing organising body legislation (e.g., APA, AASP, BPS), explicit reference to the development of broader competencies highlighted within this review, 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 not only be conducive to ongoing ASP development but also the professional
integrity of the applied field (see Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Portenga et al., 2017; Winter &
Collins, 2016).

**Recommendations for Future Training and Practice**

From the perspective of trainees, procedures are required which reflect the
multiplicity of current practice to ensure that service delivery competence can be attained.

Jooste, Kruger, Steyn and Edwards (2016) proposed 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) which reflect the
expansion of ASP provision.

Currently, within clinical and counselling psychology pathways, trainees are provided
with placement opportunities which 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
which may enable prospective professionals to obtain a greater breadth of applied
experiences (McEwan & Tod, 2015). 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., non-sport related
performance enhancement or counselling skills expertise). These idiosyncrasies may also extend to each supervisor’s approaches to consultancy (e.g., cognitive, behavioural and humanistic) therefore allowing trainees to develop deeper insights and 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 which 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 legalisation seemingly equate 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 two years professional experience following their Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration. Whilst 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 on one’s competence to supervise.

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 employed within other psychology disciplines, specifically, the introduction of meta-supervision provisions (Marsh et al., 2017). Within the context of ASP, meta-supervision 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 may call upon the support of more established professionals, particularly when faced with situations or challenges which may be outside their realm of professional expertise (e.g. work within a specific performance domain). 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.

While 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, ASPs may sacrifice opportunities for specialisation in favour 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 which promotes the
acquisition of multiple performance psychology informed competencies and reiterate our recommendation to expand service delivery competencies, supervisory provisions and contextual expertise in order 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 the client, 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 which necessitates active engagement in a process of lifelong learning. As such, we as a profession must first and foremost work towards the development of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours (obtained through education via theory and case study use and activities such role play and experiential learning) which enable the acquisition of contextual intelligence or practical knowledge required to satisfy minimum threshold competencies (in accordance to organizing body training legislation) and demonstrate ASPs 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 ASPs as well as those undertaking the accreditation process (Fletcher & Maher, 2013).
Given the diverse facets of ASP practice highlighted in this review, 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, AASP (2017) recently announced a new professional credential and certification mark in the form of a Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) accreditation pathway. The creation of this new title and pathway were the result of a Job Task Analysis (JTA) conducted by 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. While the merit of this emergent CMPC pathway is yet to be fully examined, the accreditation itself does highlight a series of competencies which are akin to those mentioned throughout this review (e.g., working with non-sport populations and addressing issues which extend beyond athletic performance).

In addition to advocacy for updated competency profiles, we also recommend the need for increased opportunities for specialization, following the attainment of baseline competencies. More specifically, we believe it would be advantageous for ASPs to seek opportunities to develop competence in specialist domains. Depending on each ASPs preference and personal philosophy of practice (e.g., performance enhancement or counselling orientated) this may include: seeking supervision and placement opportunities within non-sport domains; engaging in professional development activities which enable the acquisition of a human resources and or organizational and occupational psychology skillset; proactively engaging in government and community based programmes to help facilitate positive youth development and key life skills; and, collaborating with clinical professionals to develop competence in mental health support and counselling psychology.

**Concluding Remarks**
In this paper, we have charted changes within ASP practice, highlighted the multitude of roles and responsibilities adopted by contemporary ASPs and identified implications for the future of the applied profession. In doing so, we have made recommendations and the 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) which 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 which promote a collaborative understanding of contemporary practices.

While 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 evidence-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, it may also prove beneficial in helping to develop new certification standards and competency profiles which are required to help facilitate the development of truly well-rounded practitioners (Portenga et al., 2017; Poczwardowski, 2017). Furthermore, in recognition of the continued evolution of ASP practice, it may be beneficial for other key organising bodies to engage in JTA procedures, in an effort to create a more coherent picture of what characterises and delimits ASP in the modern era. By doing so, we may find ourselves in a position by which we may be able establish a clearer professional identity; one which not only reflects the diverse nature of contemporary practice
but also enables the facilitation of positive holistic performance and wellbeing provisions at an individual, team and organizational level.
References


