The Identity of the Sport Psychology Profession: A Multinational Perspective

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Abstract

Objective. To ensure public safety, duty of care, and professional advancement, there is a need for scholars to explore factors that impact the professional experiences of sport psychology professionals (SPPs). One such factor is professional identity, which has been shown to positively contribute to an enhanced sense of legitimacy of the profession in the eye of the public and sport stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, sport scientists, administrators) and to positively impact the experience and effectiveness of practitioners. Yet, little research has directly examined the construct of professional identity within sport psychology, with this oversight posing a risk to the future of the profession.

Design. This interview-based study was situated within critical realism. We conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to explore the understanding and perceptions and experiences of the professional identity among SPPs.

Methods. Following theoretical criterion-based sampling, we interviewed 33 expert (n = 13), experienced (n = 12), and early career (n = 8) SPPs regarding their views on PI. The nationalities of these SPPs (male n = 16; female n = 17) represented sixteen different countries on four different continents.

Results. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis and showed a relatively shared meaning of professional identity which unfolded across the career span. Moreover, the professionals in this study seemed to identify their pride for and their knowledge of the profession as key factors in the development of their PI. Furthermore, they identified how their professional role, expertise, and interactions with other professionals within the field played an important role in sustaining a professional identity.

Conclusion. We interpreted the interview data as supporting the importance of professional identity for SPPs and consider the contribution of this within a developmental framework for effective practice.

Keywords: Effective practice, Professional training, Professional development, Professional formation.

The Identity of the Sport Psychology Profession: A Multinational Perspective

In the past few decades, the field of sport psychology has gained greater prominence within both the sport science and psychology fields, as well as in the media and society (Kornspan & Quartiroli, 2019). These developments have occurred in parallel with a growth in individuals becoming sport psychology practitioners (SPPs[1]; Cremades et al., 2014) and the emergence of a plethora of education and training pathways for credentialization via accreditation, qualification and licensure. In turn, scholars have begun to advocate on issues relating to SPP training and development, as well as professional services, competence, and professionalization (e.g., Fletcher & Maher, 2014; McEwan et al., 2019; McDougall et al., 2015; Portenga et al., 2016; Sly et al., 2020; Tod et al., 2017). Nevertheless, despite this growth and scholarly attention to the profession and to its professionals, Tod (2017) argued that the existing literature may offer the misconception of sport psychology as a clearly defined profession. Instead, Wagstaff and Quartiroli (2020) recently argued that the wide range of professional qualifications, titles, backgrounds, and educational and training pathways of those who identify as SPPs actually reflects a relatively obscure professional profile.

The wide variety of professional requirements, training, profiles, credentials across countries, and organizations as well as the legal, social, political, and contextual issues of the world of sport, may be confusing for both SPPs and the public (Quartiroli et al., 2014; Sly et al., 2020). For example, the lack of multinational alignment on the regulation of titles to be used by SPPs or the training necessary to become an SPP and deliver certain services, has resulted in a field characterized by a very different pool of professionals delivering a very wide range of services from mental health support to performance enhancement (Quartiroli et al., 2014). This lack of clarity may also inhibit the regulation of service provision and leave the profession vulnerable to unethical, unprofessional, and ineffective service delivery (Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020).

[1] While we acknowledge that the terminology for professionals differs around the world due to different personal preferences, as well as legal and professional requirements, in this manuscript use the term "sport psychology professionals" to refer all professionals engaging in sport psychology work, both applied and scholarly.

Cognizant of these risks and keen to address this lack of clarity, scholars have begun to investigate the professional characteristics and qualities of effective SPPs from the perspectives of coaches, athletes and support staff (e.g., Woolway & Harwood, 2018) and SPPs (e.g., Cropley et al., 2010). Researchers have also started to explore the process of professional growth and maturation of SPPs (e.g., McEwan et al., 2019; Tod et al., 2020), their journey through training and learning (e.g., Quartiroli et al., 2021), and the development of their professional philosophy (e.g., Poczwardowski et al., 2014) and a long-lasting career (e.g., Hings et al., 2019; Quartiroli et al., 2019). Despite these advances, one topic that has yet to receive attention is the professional identity of SPPs (see Tod et al., 2017).

While a clear definition of professional identity within psychological professions has not yet been established, there have been a few efforts to define this construct in the counseling psychology literature (Mellin et al., 2011; Woo et al., 2017). Based on this body of work, professional identity might be formatively described as an understanding and integration of generally agreed upon professional philosophies and scope of practice that is consistent with a counselor's personal values and beliefs and evolves across one's career (Brott & Myers, 1999; Moore-Pruitt, 1994; Puglia, 2008; Woo et al., 2014)

To date, only a few scholars have explicitly referred to professional identity in the sport psychology context (Portenga et al., 2016; Tod et al., 2020; Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020), with some calling for the development of a core identity and sense of purpose among SPPs (Portenga et al., 2016), while others have highlighted the importance of the exploration of professional identity both for the field (Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020) and individual SPPs (Tod et al., 2020). This emerging work on professional identity and the factors that impact it is salient given the potential for this work to positively contribute to the successful growth of an ethical and effective profession (Tod et al., 2020; Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020). Nevertheless, the extant references to professional identity within the sport context are limited to brief asides in papers on other topics and calls for future scholarly attention. Indeed, there are numerous potential lines of inquiry relevant to professional identity in the sport psychology context, such as the exploration of an individual's

own professional identity and the identity of the field. It is on the former that we focus on in this manuscript.

That the construct of professional identity remains undefined and poorly understood in the sport psychology context makes it difficult to incorporate this, arguably foundational issue, into the training and development of SPPs. Perhaps the closest work to draw from on professional identity in this context is the work by Woo et al. (2014) on this construct in the counseling profession. Woo et al. concluded that the absence of a clear professional identity may lessen the ability of professionals to provide acceptable standards of ethical care and establish the profession among more recognized professions. Indeed, this risk might equally be observed within the sport psychology field, where licensed psychologists without specialization in sport psychology, may be preferred to those with sport psychology training due to the more established nature of licensed psychology pathways and titles (Sly et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in line with Woo et al. (2014; 2016), our pursuit of a professional identity is not an attempt to 'standardize' the profession and thereby impede SPPs to cultivate their own professional identity. Instead, our aim is to develop a clear professional identity that enables professionals to flourish, while remaining connected to a generally shared constellation of professional attributes, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999).

In a first step toward definitional and conceptual clarity regarding a sport psychology professional identity (SPPI), scholars have recently completed a systematic review of the existing sport psychology literature [blinded authors]. In this review, [blinded authors] identified four main themes: (a) formation of SPPI, (b) embodying SPPI, (c) challenges regarding the formation and embodiment of a SPPI, and (d) supporting influences during the formation and embodiment of a SPPI. While the formation of this SPPI was instigated during an individual's education and training, it was refined through one's exploration of their purpose and role within the profession. Further, [blinded authors] observed how the embodiment of this SPPI was influenced by SPPs' immersion in the profession and self-awareness, and in turn, shapes one's philosophical orientation, model of practice, sense of authenticity and congruence. [Blinded authors] also reported prominent SPPI supporting factors including professional relationships and engagement in self-

reflection, and prominent hindering factors including professional anxiety and self-doubt, job demands, multiple identities, and professional naïve expectations. While this work collated sporadic and tangential references to SPPI in the extant literature, it also further highlighted the lack of a coherent SPPI construct or understanding of SPPs' experiences of this. As such, the aim of this study was to explore how SPPs describe their SPPI as well as their perceptions and experiences of this construct.

Methods

Research Philosophy

Given our aim to understand SPPs' perceptions and experiences of professional identity, we situated the project within critical realism, which acts as a bridge between realism and social constructivism by understanding phenomena through three stratified domains of reality: the real, the actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar, 2008; Danermark et al., 2019). The real domain represents the inaccessible mind-independent reality which in our study consists in the SPPI and is characterized by the causal mechanisms that influence the social world when observed but which can never be fully observed or understood as they exist outside of our awareness (Bhaskar, 2008). When these mechanisms shift into the actual domain, and become events, they may be experienced, but only if observed (Bhaskar, 2008). Lastly, the empirical domain is where the perceived experiences of an event occur. We aimed to use SPPs' perceptions and experiences occurring within the empirical domain to infer a reality of SPPI within the real domain. As such, experiences are considered perceived because the true nature of a reality remains inaccessible (Danermark et al., 2019).

Two additional tenets of critical realism involve epistemic fallacies and generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2008). Epistemic fallacies occur when reality is reduced to what is known or observed, such as limiting the reality of a SPPI exclusively to the participant SPPs' perceived experiences of this construct (Bhaskar, 2008). We also recognized that the information the participants shared during the interviews and our subsequent interpretation of this was informed by our backgrounds and our stories. Further, this information and interpretation may or may not be an accurate representation of reality in its entirety, and

therefore, it needs to be viewed as fallible and open to (re)interpretation and expansion. The second important tenet of critical realism involves the incorporation of generative mechanisms that move beyond the description of events towards the possible causes of these events (Bhaskar, 2008, Danermark et al., 2019). Given the complexity of speculating on the cause of an event (e.g., an event may only occur during the interaction of many contextual factors), causal explanations always remain subject to interpretation. Throughout this manuscript, we draw on previous research to speculate as to possible generative mechanisms that may have led to development and implementation of the participants' description of their SPPI experiences. Nevertheless, an exhaustive exploration of the generative mechanisms behind SPPI is beyond the scope of this research and this work is primarily located within the empirical domain of reality, collecting knowledge from SPPs with experiences of SPPI as rooted in the context of their professional career.

Participants

We followed a theoretically led purposive sample to recruit 33 SPPs (16 males and 17 females) ranging between 40 and 70 years of age ($M_{yearsofage}$ = 40.13, *SD* = 10.11). These practitioners averaged 13.16 years (*SD* = 9.94) of practice and mainly held doctoral degrees (*n* = 26) in sport (*n* = 16), clinical/counseling (*n* = 4), sport sciences (*n* = 3), and other psychology sub-disciplines (*n* = 3). The remaining participants held postgraduate (*n* = 3) and masters (*n* = 4) degrees in SP. These SPPs described themselves as working mainly in applied (*n* = 15) or academic (n = 10) settings, dedicating more than half of their professional time respectively to applied or academic practice, with the remaining eight dividing their practice equally between the two settings (see Table 1). Nevertheless, all participants reported engaging in service delivery for an average of between 10 to 15 hours a week.

It was the belief of the authors that the elements of a SPPI can only be understood through the perceptions and experiences of those immersed in the field. We prioritized the recruitment of a globally representative sample of practitioners actively involved in sport psychology practice across the educational, applied, and research landscape. We deliberately chose to recruit participants working within a variety of

settings to best represent the sport psychology professional discipline. While SPPs across the world engage in full time applied practice, many SPPs professionals engage in different professional roles, most commonly through the combination of academic and applied practice. For example, in a recent study supported by the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, 30% of the 626 professionals surveyed indicated that they worked predominantly in an academic setting while also engaging in applied practice (Vosloo et al., 2020).

In recruiting the participants for this study, we paid particular attention to their geographical location and linguistic roots, which led us to identify practitioners located in 15 countries and five different continents (see Table 1). In seeking a multinational representative sample, we sought to overcome a common limitation of sport psychology professional practice literature, which has been predominantly limited to the experience of English-speaking SPPs from North America, the United Kingdom, or Australia. For this reason, we purposefully recruited SPPs to represent diverse countries of origin and native languages, reflected by 17 Anglophone and 16 non-Anglophone professionals. We recognize that individual cultural backgrounds as well as the differences in the state of the profession across countries may play a role in the worldviews of each participant and in the way they may conceptualize and experience professional identity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that our goal in recruiting this multinational sample was to draw on a variety of perspectives that might enrich the data, rather than engage in an exploration of how specific cultural and professional backgrounds played a role in the individual SPPs' conceptualization and experience of their professional identity.

Finally, we were deliberate in recruiting practitioners at different stages of their professional development. Drawing from counselor developmental theory (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013, see also Tod et al., 2011), we recruited seven SPP early career professionals with between zero to five years of practice experience (M = 1.87; SD = 0.83), 12 experienced SPPs with between six to 15 years of experience (M = 10.45; SD = 2.54), and expert SPPs with 16 or more years of experience (M = 22.07; SD = 7.88). The existing counseling psychology literature highlights how professional identity develops throughout the career

of the professionals (Brott & Myers, 1999; Moore-Pruitt, 1994; Puglia, 2008; Woo et al., 2014; 2017). Accordingly, we deemed it important recruit professionals at different stages of their professional development. This choice was not aimed to comparing and contrasting the conceptualization and experience of professional identity across SPPs in different development phases, but instead to enrich the results of the study also from a developmental perspective. All participants were initially identified with a pseudonym (e.g., Mikom) and all identifying information (e.g., national origin) were eliminated.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Institution Review Board committee at the first author's university, the first author contacted potential participants with an introductory email describing the main scope of the study and inclusion criteria. Once agreement was reached with each participant, [Author 1] arranged interviews times with participants. Participants were recruited following a theory-led purposive sampling alluded to in the previous section. We then completed a secondary recruitment process using a purposive snowball sampling strategy (Handcock & Gile, 2011). SPPs were identified based on their experience of writing in journals and presenting at conferences about scholarly and applied work and the sample size meets the recommendation of a sample of 30 or more interviews for studies entirely based on thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017).

Critical realism is methodologically plural, where methods are both selected and used depending on the research aims (Danermark et al., 2019; Lusted, 2018). Understanding that a common SPPI is inherently a social phenomenon, we used semi-structured interviews as a means of fostering the sharing of SPPs' perceived experiences in relation to the SPPI. Semi-structured interviews enabled us to ask open but specific questions, while also enabling the SPPs to freely engage in the conversation, sharing any of their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings as they deemed them relevant to the conversation. As the conversations unfolded, the semi-structured interviews permitted us to also ask impromptu questions and generate novel insights about the topic of interest (Smith, 2019). The authors collaboratively developed the interview guide, informed by

the systematic review by [blinded authors]. [Author 1] piloted the guide with two SPPs (excluded from the analysis) with feedback leading to semantic changes to improve the flow of questions.

The interview guide did not introduce an a priori working definition of professional identity, instead we invited the participants to describe their own definition and share experiences of their professional identity across their career. Questions were developed to gain insight into the SPPs' perceived experience of SPPI (e.g., "What is professional identity to you?"), their perceived experiences of the main components encompassing it (e.g., "Could you describe what would you identify as the main components of sport psychology professional identity?"), and the development of SPPI throughout their professional journey (e.g., "How has professional identity and/or its components changed throughout your career?"). Finally, participants were invited to offer any final thoughts (i.e., "Given everything we talked about, what is the most important take away messages for SPPs?").

[Author 1] conducted all 33 interviews, for a total of 30 hours and 8 minutes, lasting an average of 56 minutes. The interviews were all conducted using Skype (2014 Microsoft), digitally recorded using Ecamm (2014 Ecamm network, LLC), and transcribed in full, producing 502 pages of transcripts. The single interviewer approach allowed us to engage in the interview process consistently while also noting the uniqueness of the knowledge shared by individual participants. Engaging in internet-based interviews permitted us to interview SPPs from around the world, who would have otherwise been unreachable without extensive travel.

Data analysis

A reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) was performed on the data by implementing the guidance of Braun et al. (2019). This method was used to deliver a descriptive and interpretive conceptualization of the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In line with Braun et al.'s (2019) suggested process for reflexive thematic analysis, [Author 1] and [Author 2] read and re-read the transcripts making casual observational notes which we then synthesized into ideas related to our research focus. Once familiarized

with the data, we engaged in an iterative, yet systematic, paper-and-pencil coding process to create meaningful labels attached to specific segments of the dataset relevant to the research question. This process enabled us to collaboratively compile a list of codes that highlighted similarities, patterns, and, concurrently, the diversity of the dataset segments. Guided by our research question, we began to inductively construct themes reflecting on which segments were (or not) relevant and what was important to communicate about them, to ensure that themes told a coherent and relevant story about the data. This step was followed by a process of combining, clustering, and collapsing codes into bigger or more meaningful patterns, striving to identify a clear concept that underpinned each theme shared across all the encompassed codes. Once this theme-creation process was complete, we started revising each theme individually, questioning if they worked well and provided a distinctive and meaningful story in relation to the research question. Throughout this process, we returned to and re-immersed ourselves in the data to rethink, reorganize, and remodel the themes. Finally, we concluded this process by defining and naming the finalized themes. Writing and presenting the data was integral to the creative analytical process (Braun et al., 2019).

Quality and Rigor

In light of the methodological plurality of critical realism, judging the quality of a research project depends on the methodological choices used to inform the research project (Danermark et al., 2019). We employed three main quality approaches in relation to the context of our study: reflectivity, critical friends, and authentic data presentation.

First, we recognize that our backgrounds, commitments, and philosophical assumptions may have influenced the collection, analysis, interpretation, and summary of the data and attempt to reflect and demonstrate how these characteristics and preconceptions may have influenced the research project. These reflections persisted throughout the project and helped us become aware of how our backgrounds, motivations for the study, preconceptions on the topic, and thoughts influenced the research process. One major motivation for the study was that we, as scholars and practitioners, value SPPI as an integral aspect of

our professional careers and have actively engaged in a variety of efforts to explore this construct within the field. We found ourselves relating to a variety of aspects of the perceived experiences shared by the participants. For this reason, we strived to ensure that the codes and themes we constructed were empirically supported by the data and not speculated from our own perceived experiences and positive views related to the importance of SPPI as part of an SPPs' professional development and practice.

To better contextualize this work and demonstrate to the reader how we may have influenced the research project, we briefly outline our backgrounds. Our team is composed of the two of us, [Author #1] and [Author #2] from two different countries, both mid-career, white male SPPs. Our research team was assembled based on our areas of expertise, research interest, and experiences. We aimed to develop a range of viewpoints as wide as possible. I, [Name author 1], am an early mid-career researcher mainly studying professional development from a multinational and cultural perspective. I have conceptualized the current study and led all phases from data collection to the manuscript write-up. Originally from [country] I currently work in [country] in a predominantly academic role member with some pro-bono applied practice to the local community. From [country], where I currently work, I [Name author 2], share my professional time between my academic role and my work as a practitioner in high performance sport. Our expertise in professional development is rooted in our roles as mentors, practitioners and as scholars, and we work closely together in the development and training of doctoral and master's level SPPs. Our engagement with data analysis started with an acknowledgment of our experiences as researchers in professional training, development, and practice. We, [Name author 3] and [Name author 4], are doctoral students and trainee practitioners with a research interest in professional training, development, and practice. We have been involved in the latest phase of the study to provide feedback on the results as well as to help with the write-up of the results and discussion sections of the manuscript. Our backgrounds played a role in the way we conceptualized and carried on this study. For example, our focus on professional development and SPPI for this study may have led us during the data collection phase to not explore sufficiently in-depth factors related to the drawbacks of

having (or not) a clear conceptualization of SPPI or the challenges and difficulties related to its development and instead led us to mainly focus our attention on the factors supporting SPPI. Further, our training, practice, and scholarship focused on professional development may have played a role in the way we engage with the information provided by the participants. For example, reflecting on our results it is evident our developmental perspective, as well as our holistic and reflective approach to practice that expands beyond the realm of traditionally defined competence and prioritizes who the practitioner is over what they do, comes through in the data presented.

Second, recognizing that our theoretical lenses and subjectivities have contributed to our analysis of the data (Danermark et al., 2019), we interacted with each other as critical friends to challenge the construction of each theme, and to introduce alternative perspectives for how the results may be interpreted (Smith & McGannon, 2018). We engaged in a reciprocal checking process, respectfully challenging each other's perspectives and offering alternative interpretations, also frequently returning to the raw data to ensure that our viewpoints were empirically supported. We, [Name author 1] and [Name author 2], recognize how our training experiences and practice approaches differ. Throughout the analytical process these differences led us to interpret the participants' shared experiences in different – and at times discordant – ways. These disagreements were handled by *sharing* our independent reflections on the data, *questioning* the other about the reasons for their interpretation, and *offering* each other the opportunity to advocate for their view of the data. Respectfully engaging in this process, not only permitted us to enrich our interpretation and understanding of the data by *hearing* each other's perspective, but also enabled us to merge our different views toward a commonly shared interpretation or – at times – by generating completely new interpretation of the data. Finally, when we invited [Name author 3] and [Name author 4] to join the project and asked them as their first task to engage with both the raw data and the results of our analysis to provide their interpretation and critical feedback. Once [Name author 3] and [Name author 4] felt comfortable with their review, we met as a team and discussed their perspectives. The nature of the relationship (Authors 1 and 2

supervise Authors 3 and 4) led to the need to acknowledge the existence of a power differential and to set the ground rules and safeguards to develop some security. We hoped this would enable all authors to engage in the feedback process safely, openly, and genuinely. This analytical process, the feedback provided by [Name author 3] and [Name author 4] led to a reorganization of the thematic structure. Finally, since the participants' perceived experiences were interpreted and represented by the researchers (Danermarck et al., 2019), we hoped to maintain the complexity and nuances described by the participants. We aimed to achieve this goal by preserving contextual examples from the participants' descriptions and ensuring multivocality.

Results and Discussion

The following results are constructed to represent the factors characterizing SPPI as perceived by 33 SPPs from 15 different countries at different stages of their professional development. The results have been organized into seven themes: (a) Knowledge of the profession; (b) Who I am & what I do; (c) Professional landscape; (d) Professional community; (e) Professional practice; (f) Sentiments toward the profession, and (g) Giving back to the profession. Table 2 offers a summary of the themes constructed throughout the analytical process.

Knowledge of the Profession

Exploring the development of their SPPI, participants stressed the importance of understanding and "knowing" the professional field as pivotal to the development of a positive SPPI. For example, **Viridiana (Europe)** noted how "the identity of the profession is formed by the knowledge you have on the complexity of your profession." Clarifying this knowledge of the profession was also noted by participants as important regarding the general public, who may see sport psychology as focused exclusively on performance enhancement. Unfortunately, a lack of clarity about the what SPP is continues to exist among professionals (see Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020), and this was reinforced by the participants in this study who offered several different presentations of the profession. To elaborate, in describing the profession, some participants focused on approaches, others on theoretical frameworks, others on the type of services provided, and some

linked to the context of practice. The complexity of the profession and how this lack of clarity has impacted SPPI was expressed by **François (Europe)** who stated that, "the confusion that the field has been dealing with for so many years is also maybe a reason why it's so hard to have a professional identity". He continued:

> Sports psychology touches so many areas that it becomes sometimes tough to just define it…it's a very broad field and people are interested in many things, the ones who are serving one area or just doing research in one area, I think this is easy for them to define a professional identity because that's the only thing they do... it's narrowed enough and they can really specify what it is…but I think for people who are doing different kinds of stuff it's a bit more difficult.

The SPPs in this study highlighted the importance of developing a generally shared understanding of sport psychology as a priority for the future of the field, which is a sentiment regularly observed within the existing literature (Cropley et al., 2010; Lindsay et al., 2007; Portenga et al., 2016). As **Haruto (N. America)** noted, "[A] big part of my professional identity was based on how I understood the field and how I made sense of it." For the participants, the absence of a clear, shared knowledge of the profession represented a challenge to their development of SPPI. In turn, the absence of a clearly defined professional identity contributes to the lack of public awareness about the profession and perpetuates current misperceptions as to the role and potential value of our profession. Such issues, and the nascency of the sport psychology profession relative to other helping professions, may also lead clients to seek assistance from practitioners from more established or recognizable professions, such as counseling or clinical psychology (Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020; Woo et al., 2014). Ultimately, without a clear understanding of one's professional field, it is difficult for an individual to develop their own professional identity. Such observations echo criticisms of current training and development (e.g., Portenga et al., 2016; Wagstaff & Hays, 2019) wherein scholars have advocated for a need to better align and regulate SPP activities that may be conducive to not only ongoing development but also the professional integrity of the applied field (Winter & Collins, 2016).

Who I am and What I do

The participants in this study also talked about themselves as individuals and how that relates to the work they engage in. They described how the ability to delineate 'who I am' and 'what I do' as an SPP requires clarity of one's values and beliefs that underpin one's own practices. **Ferko (Europe)** stated, "My values guide my practice. My values, which I'm able to articulate and hopefully defend, give me the reasons why I do what I do." The SPPs also highlighted the importance of congruence between their philosophical beliefs and their service delivery practices, and how this congruence was rooted the development of their SPPI. In addition to this congruence between values, beliefes and practice, the participants highlighted how their SPPI develops also as a function of their personal identity. Specifically, they stressed the importance of *complementarity*, *reciprocity*, and *distinction* between their personal and professional identities. For example, **Aegeus (Europe)** noted that "it's more healthy to keep those professional and personal identities separate… although it's very difficult to detach that [professional identity] from one's personal identity." On a different note, **Haruto (N. America)** described how "to me, they're complimentary, they're mutually codependent and very well integrated," and continues "I feel like being a better sports psychologist makes me a better parent and being a better parent makes me a better sports psychologist." Further, **Luciana (Middle East)** described the importance of the alignment between the two identities.

> My professional identity has a lot to do with who I am, you know. It is important to me that the work I do and the way I do it, fits who I am…I do also pay very much attention not to always be a psychologist in my personal life, and instead I try to keep the sport psychologist me, separate from me the person. I guess, it helps me to be real in my practice and real in my life, but it took a while to get here.

This quotation demonstrates how congruence between one's personal and professional identity among SPPs helped the participant to authentically engage in service delivery and how such congruence was the

byproduct of one's professional development (Tod, 2007). Yet, despite noting the value of alignment and congruence, SPPs in this study also stressed the importance of distinguishing between these identities and how they learned the value of this distinction through their professional development.

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of congruence between one's beliefs and behaviors (Lindsay et al., 2007; McDougall et al., 2015; Wadsworth et al., 2021), which is achieved through self-awareness of the extent to which one's core values and beliefs align with one's service delivery (Lindsay et al., 2007; Tod, 2007). Indeed, other scholars have focused on the importance of self-awareness for promoting authentic, ethical, and competent services (Collins et al., 2013; McDougall et al., 2015). It follows that practitioners who do not have a clear sense of who they are and what they do, in terms of congruence, complementarity, reciprocity, and distinction, may hinder their own ability to authentically engage in their service delivery (cf. Friesen & Orlick, 2010).

Scholars have also indicated that it can take time for practitioners to develop congruence between their professional roles and their personalities (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Tod, 2007). This was also reflected in these SPPs' responses, wherein there was a perception of the relationship between personal and professional identities evolving over time. For example, **Mikom (Europe)** described how:

> over time, I was learning that that way of practice was not actually very effective with all of the clients… I was totally forgetting the process component, which, I suppose, is where my PhD and my own experiences then started to come into play.

One's developing professional identity may also intersect with other identities individuals hold. For example, considering her racial, religious, and professional identity, **Shira (N. America)** shared how she "started to look at how they intersected, all of them", also describing the complementarity and congruence between her cultural and professional identities:

> I think using my cultural identity and being very intentional in including that as a part of my professional identity is the biggest way things have shifted over the years as it relates to who I am as a person and how that influences who I am as a professional.

This quotation reflects considerations of intersectionality, which refers to the critical acknowledgment that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, and age do not operate in isolation, but rather, reciprocally shape complex social inequalities (Collins, 2015; Krane & Waldron, 2020). This intersectional awareness among these SPPs could be interpreted to show that identity cannot be reduced to a single-axis static category, and instead may benefit from being conceptualized within a matrix-style framework (Nash, 2008; Krane & Waldron, 2020; Schinke et al., 2019).

Professional Landscape

Continuing in their description of SPPI, participants in this study stressed the importance of their professional landscape, highlighting how the professional and cultural environment characterizing their professional practice as well as the processes associated with developing themselves as practitioners and to earn formal qualification play an important role in developing as well as living their own SPPI.

Organizational Environment

Zaafira (N. America) described how SPPI depends on "our governing body, which kind of dictates what it [sport psychology] looks like," an idea supported by **Olivia (N. America)** who said that "my professional identity has been shaped by the [organization's name]." **Marco (S. America)** strengthened this idea by saying "Well, going to [conference], for example, is a complete way to foster a lot of my identity as a sports psychologist," which was supported by **Haruto (N. America)** describing how "going to [conference] and seeing happy, engaged, fulfilled, active people, all the people that I want to surround myself are in the profession, so definitely plays a role" in sustaining SPPI.

It is possible to draw links from this theme and the growing body of research on organizational sport psychology (Wagstaff, 2016; 2019). To elaborate, in a commentary on organizational sport psychology,

Wagstaff (2019) noted, “It is abundantly clear that sport organizations must better protect their charges and undertake regular systematic monitoring of cultural and climatic environments within sport” (p. 135). Similarly, organizational sport psychologists have called on societies to advocate against questionable employment practices and job precarity, which may go some way to supporting the development of enabling organizational environments where individuals can develop a positive SPPI. Beyond the organizational sport psychology domain, McEwan et al. (2019) noted that when SPPs practice authentically, they are better able to find a professional environment that better aligns with their core values and beliefs.

Cultural Environment

The wider cultural environment was also cited by the SPPs in relation to the impact of their organizations on sustaining their SPPI. SPPs explored how they related to professional and cultural contexts in specific organizations as well as in the wider society and how not feeling represented within these spaces, negatively impacted their SPPI. SPPs characterized the field as primarily dominated by white men, which limited their sense of belonging to specific organization and to the profession, which challenged their professional identity, as clearly presented by **Shira (N. America)**:

> When I initially entered into the world of sports psychology, I had a big question mark regarding where I fit within the field because when I entered, it appeared to be a field primarily dominated by white men, so as a [racial identity] female, I kind of questioned where I fit… I really didn't know what being in this field would actually look like, for someone who identified like me.

These words are supportive of discussion of the pervasiveness of Whiteness and masculinity within the applied sport psychology context that has been re-emphasized in recent literature. Researchers have previously contended that most SPPs are working within a mainly White professional framework and are a relatively homogenous group in that they are mostly White, heterosexual, and able-bodied (McCarver et al., 2019; Ryba et al., 2013). Having a predominately homogeneous White population of SPPs may represent a challenge to the development of a culturally grounded and sensitive sport

psychology field, profession, and community (Quartiroli et al., 2021). Moreover, such homogeneous landscape and correspondent cultural environment in the profession when not deliberately and effectively addressed and discussed, may lead to preserving and promoting the power and privilege of SPPs who identify as White (Blodgett et al., 2014; Butryn, 2002) while marginalizing and hurting those identifying as belonging to minority identities. For example, Hyman et al. (2021) outlined how the lack of representation within the sport and performance psychology field has affected the lived experiences of Black female SPPs and shaped their SPPI. Additional testimonies provide evidence that microaggressions and stereotyping are experienced by African American (Carter & Davila, 2017) and Asian (Yu et al., 2016) SPPs. Hyman et al. (2021) highlighted the inextricable link between the personal and professional identities, and it is possible to speculate that when one's personal identity is not taken in consideration, marginalized or disregarded, personally (e.g., micro aggression) or systematically (e.g., unaddressed homogeneity among professionals), it may also negatively impact their own SPPI.

Training and Qualifications

These participants also recognized the importance of qualifications and credentials, their reliance on professional bodies to regulate and accredit the profession, and how this process influenced their SPPI. For example, **José (Europe)** indicated how "In [country], unfortunately there is no specific educational training to become a sports psychologist… so probably also for this reason the identity as a sports psychologist is not well defined, because there is no clear profession." Yet, some participants also felt that "the nitty-gritty of this whole qualification, accreditation, registration" (**Alejandra, Europe**) had led to the process of becoming accredited being overly bureaucratic, and a hindrance to their investment in this aspect of their SPPI. SPPs from countries where there is more than one route to accreditation, stressed how this resulted in a sense of complexity, comparison and ranking between the pathways, and the potential for perceived inferiority if they did not belong to the better-established governing body as described by **Emma (Europe)**:

> People often ask me are you [organization 1] or [organization 2]? It's often said in a way of if you're [organization 2], you're like a second-class citizen…there have been times when I've been made to feel inferior because I'm not [organization 1], so therefore, I'm not [accreditation].

While regulatory bodies aim to offer professional training frameworks to ensure the quality and professionalism of their accredited members, they only outline the minimum qualifications, education, and experiences needed for ethical and competent practice without providing an exhaustive preparation for future professionals (Aoyagi et al., 2012). Another aspect these SPPs described as detrimental to their SPPI is the lack of international agreement of the formal requirements of SPPs (Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020), as described by **Alejandra (Europe)** saying, "I don't fit anywhere, because some type of studies were recognized in one country, but they're not recognized in another. So, that definitely hindered my professional identity." In line with the detriments described by participants regarding limited international agreement on the requirements to practice and the globalization of the field, it is worth noting that SPPs increasingly migrate to train and gain employment. In a recent exploration of SPPs' experiences of transnational migration Quartiroli, Vosloo, Anderson et al. (2021) noted that the process of repatriation helped them grow personally and professionally yet this process was more challenging than the SPPs had expected. The participants' stories also highlighted systematic barriers that professional organizations could address to facilitate the transnational experience of practitioners, and which might also benefit those seeking credentialization via non-traditional means and training routes.

Professional Community

In describing the factors contributing to the development and implementation of their SPPI, the SPPs in this study stressed the importance of the professional community surrounding them. Specifically, they seem to refer to their *Professional Relationships and Network* of peers, colleagues, and supervisors as well as the community of practice they engage in when working in *Collaboration in a multidisciplinary team.*

Professional Relationships and Network

The participants described how their relationships with their peers, colleagues, and supervisors across the span of their careers played an important role in the formation of their SPPI. They talked about how they learned from hearing about others' successes and failures, gained advice on achieving a work-life balance, and watched authenticity and integrity being role modelled. They also described the feeling of connectedness and affirmation they experienced through interacting with others in the same profession. **Zaafira (N. America)** encapsulated this:

> Having really good mentors has definitely led to that [SPPI]. I've been really fortunate to have mentors who I feel like have really changed me as a professional… a big piece of my professional identity is wrapped up in the people who have taught me what's important, and how to do good work.

A quotation from **Ferko (Europe)** expands on the importance of relationships beyond mentorship and supervision dynamics and including relationships with clients, colleagues and stakeholders:

> I get my professional identity from the notion of developing and sustaining positive relationships. My professional identity is not defined by me alone, it's defined by my interaction with others. I worked a lot in East Africa and there's a great Swahili word story it's called 'mimi ni kwa sababu yako' means 'I am because of you'. My professional identity is defined by the nature and the quality of the relationship I have with the people I work with.

Relationships with peers, mentors, supervisors, clients, and stakeholders represent avenues for the promotion of SPPI. The influence of these relationships in the development of SPPs has also been highlighted in the literature, although their relationship with SPPI was only alluded in some instances. For instance, mentoring experiences have been found to provide guidance, confidence, support and collaboration that help neophyte psychology practitioners orient themselves within their profession, identify personal strengths, facilitate wellbeing and empowerment as well as adherence to professional ethics (Lam & Chan, 2009). These relationships also appear to help neophyte practitioners to explore and develop their professional identities across several disciplines of psychological practice (Woo et al., 2016). Moreover, in

the extant sport psychology literature, the value of mentorship and supervision has also been shown to have an important impact on practitioner development (e.g., Fogaca et al., 2018). Scholars have also described how formal and informal peer support affords SPPs reflective spaces for SPPs to develop their values, beliefs and professional philosophies, and that many seek emotional support from peers when the formal structures of supervision are no longer available (McCormack et al., 2015; McCormick & Meijen, 2015).

Collaboration in a Multidisciplinary Team

The participants described their efforts to gauge where they belong in relation to other sport professionals and how being recognized (or not) by colleagues from related fields impacted their SPPI. To elaborate, while the participants recognized multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) as an opportunity to promote sport psychology to other sporting professionals, they also noted how their role in MDTs impacted their SPPI. For example, **Olivia (N. America)** described how:

> In the past, it was very frustrating to work with physicians because they are very self-centered… in their opinion you are just someone who talks a lot… but fortunately now this is not the case. I work in another context where sports psychology is really valued… working with the sports manager, the coaches, the physicians, but also with the physiotherapists.

For several participants, their participation in MDTs represented an opportunity for them to learn how to approach performance challenges in their context from multiple perspectives which indirectly impacted their SPPI. For example, **Martina (Oceania)** described how "being able to do good work, where it is received in the manner in which it is offered is awesome for professional identity as well as when you feel like you're a contributing member in a multidisciplinary space." These experiences seem to align with the existing literature, for instance, Chandler et al. (2014) argued that SPPs were perceived by sports physicians to be more effective when the SPP understood their role within the MDT, when they were secure in their competence, and when they demonstrated humility. Being a member of an MDT often involves contributing to a larger organization, being able to manage multiple relationships in a

context in which their role is in constant evolution (McDougall et al., 2015) and according to our participants, being able to adapt to and contribute to this context plays an important role in molding their SPPI. Such potential challenges and the need for adaptability are also resonant with practitioners' accounts of working within MDTs (Reid et al., 2004) and in response to professional challenges (Hings et al., 2018) and experiences of organizational change (Wagstaff et al., 2015, 2016).

Professional Practice

An important aspect of SPPI described by the participants in this study was their experience in service delivery practice. Specifically, in describing how their professional practice influenced their SPPI, the participants referred to *Professional Roles, Professional ethics*, *Competence and boundaries*, *Reflective practice, Meaningful work and Experience,* and *Engagement in Lifelong Learning.*

Professional Roles

While describing the factors influencing the SPPI the participants highlighted the importance that their professional role plays in the conceptualization and implementation of their SPPI. The participants spoke to the different professional spaces they occupied and how their roles played a part in the development of their SPPI. For example, **Eliyaz (East Asia)** stated:

> I think professional identity means the way that I see myself in the work that I do. For example, to me my professional identity is being a sport psychology consultant, a sport psychology researcher, a sport psychology professor. So, based on the work that I do, I kind of see myself in those roles and they are what defines my professional identity.

Similarly, **Ellen (N. America)** highlighted how the different roles they have are interconnected and inform their SPPI, "there are many researchers who don't have a lot of opportunity to practice or many practitioners who don't do much research… having those pieces both be part of what I do, and part of my professional identity is important." The presence and importance of the multiple roles that an SPP undertakes aligns with the sentiments of Poczwardowski (2019), who described SPPs variously as experts,

persons, performers, and self-regulators. In his article, Poczwardowski argued that deconstructing SPPs into these four roles allows them to reemerge as a "professional human who is more complete and truly well-rounded or in a sense, constructed anew" (p. 441). It is noteworthy that all of the participants in this study expressed how their professional roles helped foster their SPPI, and within the extant literature such roles have also been shown to influence the quality of their professional experience (Quartiroli et al., 2019).

Professional Ethics

The SPPs noted the ongoing importance of professional ethics as a core component of their SPPI and its sustainment. When asked about SPPI, **Aegeus (Europe)** responded, "the first thing that pops into my head is ethics", whereas **Viridiana (Europe)** described how, "the core component is probably linked to the ethical part of our profession… ethics is the core component of my professional identity, it is what guides me as professional." Based on these responses, it would appear that ethical practice represents a key aspect of SPPI. In locating this work within the extant literature, it is noteworthy that scholars have indicated that a professional identity based on one's values serves to enhance an SPP's ongoing awareness of and adherence to ethical guidelines (Tod et al., 2017). Our results extend this relationship by highlighting how, while SPPI can underpin ethical decision making (see Tod et al., 2017), ethical practice may also reinforce one's SPPI.

Competence and Boundaries

Linked to ethical practice, the participants also discussed the salience of developing competencies and becoming aware of professional boundaries, as well as the relationship between these elements for both the maintenance of their SPPI and the safeguarding of the profession. For example, **Marek (Europe)** stated, "I guess for me professional identity is the boundary of your profession" and continues "it [SPPI] is the skills and attributes you bring …without straining beyond what we can capably or comfortably offer." Additionally, **Aiyana (N. America)** noted, "it [SPPI] envelopes the knowledge, skill, and ability core, so that it's a bit of what I've been able to learn and who I am as a person that helps me do my job effectively and

contributes to my identity." Participants also expressed that their SPPI was maintained by credentials developed with the aim of promoting competence, as mentioned by **Mikom (Europe)**:

> The professional identity for me is about knowing that you have that knowledge, the expertise, but also that you can safeguard that with knowing that you have actually met the required level of competence to not just know about things but to be able to do things and show things and actually deliver things… professional identity is having that confidence, that you know what you're doing, and you know where you fit in, and you know what your limitations are as well.

Recently, Sly et al. (2020) argued that while practitioners should operate within the boundaries of their competence, there exists a contentious debate in the field about what these competencies should encompass. Regardless, these competencies depend on the work that each practitioner engages in and which, according to our participants, may influence and sustain their SPPI by shaping the way one identifies within the profession. While a clear understanding of the elements and characteristics of the sport psychology field and profession may facilitate the development of one's SPPI a clear awareness of the evolution of the profession is also key in the sustainment of such SPPI (Tod et al., 2017; 2020; Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020).

Reflective Practice

The participants in this study discussed the role of reflective practice in their professional and personal development and how it had influenced their SPPI over the course of their careers. To elaborate, engaging in reflection represented a positive experience for SPPs, and one that afforded them the opportunity to learn and grow within their professional practice and contributed to sustaining their SPPI. According to the participants, self-reflection plays several roles: as "a very important part of diversifying my personal and professional identities" (**Monique, Europe**), and to "keep thinking and interacting with my professional identity, keep reflecting on my practice, keep reflecting on what I do" as highlighted by **François (Europe)** who continued with reference to self-reflection:

> [It] is super important to reflect on who you are as a professional and understand your areas of competency and staying true to what's most important to you as a professional, and then once you have some ideas about this, you translate it so that people can understand your professional identity.

Moving from self-reflection to reflective practice, **Ferko (Europe)** highlighted the need to develop "positive strength based reflective practices" focusing on "what went well. Why did it go well? How could it go well again? How can we amplify the things that went well so that we can succeed again and again?" and how the answers to these questions can support the maintenance of a SPPI. When asked how his SPPI relates to reflective practice, **Chaoxiang (S. America)** replied, "you can either stop and say, 'Yeah, I'm a very good sports psychologist, I know everything' or you can say, 'I need to keep learning,' and that [reflective practice] runs right through that."

Most of the SPPs in this study highlighted the importance of the ability to reflect in a timely manner, to analyze and to intelligently notice lessons and ideas for fostering their SPPI. The value of reflective practice as an approach to facilitating change in SPP behaviors has been widely documented within the sport psychology literature (see Cropley et al., 2020), while the key role of reflective practice in the formation and maintenance of professional identity has also been noted in the medical education literature (Wald et al., 2015). Importantly, the present results also reveal how this self-reflective approach to practice leads to the refinement of a SPPI over the course of one's career (cf. Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020).

Meaningful Work and Experiences

The SPPs in this study articulated how the meaningfulness of their work was salient for the development of their SPPI, with participants offering examples of moments in their career that they recognized as meaningful to sustaining their SPPI. Among these experiences, the participants in this study noted receiving invitations to be a guest speaker, perceiving their work to have been impactful for the client, and recognizing that their practice had strengthened as they gained experience. As **Monique (Europe)** succinctly put it, "anything that confirms that sports psychology has been applied well in practice strengthens

my professional identity". While positive experiences have a sustaining impact, SPPs also recognized the potential impact of their negative counterparts, as described by **Aegeus (Europe)** who shared how "the work where I've been given the opportunity to be really impactful has really fostered and helped my identity, whereas situations where my ability to be impactful is limited have had a negative effect on that identity." These experiences, or critical moments (Wadsworth et al., 2021), arguably offered the SPPs in this study space to be critical of and refine their own SPPI. These experiences may also have contributed to sustaining SPPI via the alignment of one's beliefs and behaviors, the reduction of the distinction between the person and the practitioner, and the development of authentic practice (McEwan et al., 2019). As such, the deliberate reflection on critical moments within one's journey toward professional individuation, seem key to successful training and development qualifications and credentialing processes.

Engagement in Lifelong Learning

The participants in this study emphasized the continuous learning and upskilling involved in their practice, and they shared how valuable it is for them to engage in a lifelong learning experience and how this engagement influences their experience of their own SPPI. To elaborate, the participants noted the importance of embracing the idea that learning is never done and how in doing so, they were able to sustain their SPPI by renewing their understanding of the profession and its evolution as well as the engaging with new practices. This learning was emphasized by **Shira (N. America)** who, when discussing the important aspects of sustaining their SPPI, described their, "ongoing eagerness to keep learning because things constantly change. Even in being a professional I'm still a student, because I'm still learning different things as I go". Indeed, Tod et al. (2020) postulated that aspects of ongoing learning such as immersing oneself in a wide range of literature and engaging in regular writing can support SPPs in refining their professional identity through continued knowledge generation, reflection, and articulation. Similarly, in a study of lifelong learning in sport psychology, Quartiroli et al. (2021) recently highlighted its influence on the professional experience of SPPs and called on them to deliberately engage in such work. Indeed, it is possible that the

process of "ongoing information-seeking and self-reflective activities to satisfy one's personal curiosity and self-development throughout one's career" (Quartiroli et al., 2021 p. 5-6) may shape SPP's experience of their own SPPI. As noted by **Alma (Europe)**, who described elements that impact her SPPI, "if one can do a course or read a book on something that's not traditionally sports psychology that would be useful..." and thereby continue to "learn from other psychology disciplines… it's massively part of my identity."

Sentiments Toward the Profession

The SPPs in this study also shared a positive attitude toward the profession. Specifically, participants noted their sense of pride in making a difference and helping people (*Pride in the profession*) and their appreciation of their role and profession in the society (*Gratitude for professional privilege*). **Lowanna (Oceania)** described her sense of pride in and gratitude for the profession, noting "Professional identity means a lot to me. I'm very proud that I'm a sport, exercise, and performance psychologist…. proud of what my skillset and training has enabled me to do, because it's enabled me to make a difference." She added, "I just think for me it's [SPPI] also about being grateful for the kind of profession and the kind of career that sports psychology can give to you." This appreciation aligns with emerging work in which scholars have suggested that the outcomes of gratitude may be context specific, whereby gratitude within a certain domain helps cultivate satisfaction in that same domain (Gabana et al., 2017). Moreover, researchers of non-sport psychologists (see Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004) have observed career-sustaining behaviors to be associated with high satisfaction levels and contribute to a positive professional identity among practitioners.

Describing how their pride for what they do influences their SPPI, **Chaoxiang (S. America)** stated, "I feel proud of myself for what I do, of what I'm contributing to this person or to this team or to this organization. I think it's a big part of it [SPPI]". Similarly, **Shira (N. America)** expressed how their SPPI was built on the "honor and privilege to be invited into somebody's life to help them, or to try to help them". Several SPPs highlighted truly enjoying their work, a sense of fulfilment, and satisfaction in telling other

people about what they do. They noted how these feelings were important because practitioners may not be offered external validation, such as gratitude, from a client or organization; hence, understanding one's role and having pride in what one does was emphasized as valuable to developing SPPI. Interestingly, the opposite, namely, not being proud of what one does, has been associated with dissatisfaction with the profession, poor professional quality of life (Quartiroli et al., 2019), and negative outcomes for service delivery effectiveness (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010). Indeed, if a practitioner is not able to credibly experience a sense of satisfaction, pride, or belief in what they are practicing, they may struggle to assure clients. Similarly, Woo et al. (2014) argued that psychology professionals who take pride in and are satisfied with their profession are more likely to have a robust SPPI, while Remley and Herlihy (2014) also sustain that practitioners who have a strong professional identity will exhibit their professional pride by defending the profession against incorrect statements.

Giving Back to the Profession

The SPPs noted giving back to the profession through opportunities to support colleagues and the profession itself as another important element of their SPPI. Specifically, these participants described the importance to their SPPI of supporting the accreditation system, sharing knowledge and opportunities with other practitioners, teaching and supervising others, and engaging with professional organizations. **Ellen (N. America)** represented an aspect of this giving back, when saying:

> I think the things that have strengthened my professional identity are related to the teaching role because it requires being knowledgeable about the field and presenting my best self as a role model when I can and encouraging the best in my students, so as they become connected to the field, it strengthens my connection to the field.

In articulating giving back and demonstrating respect for the field SPPs also described their love for their supervisory roles, encouraging others to follow appropriate accreditation pathways, and contributing to the maintenance of high standards in the profession. Lastly, the participants described passing on knowledge

to the field, either as research or directly to students, as one's responsibility to a SPPI. These contributions represented a way for the SPPs to "pay forward" their experiences and wisdom to the next generation and to contribute to the future of the field. Further, the notions of responsibility, reciprocity, and facilitating change highlighted by participants in this study as a means of giving back echo those from previous work. Giving back has been mentioned in previous SPP work as a way to facilitate change in the field (Whaley & Krane, 2012) as well as a way for experienced and senior SPPs to promote their own professional quality of life (Quartiroli et al., 2019). Beyond the sport psychology literature, giving back has been shown to represent a way for practitioners to bring together professional and cultural identities; for example, African American medical students (Wyatt et al., 2020) and Native American science, technology, engineering and mathematics students (Page-Reeves et al., 2019) felt giving back to their community was an important expression of their harmonious racial and professional identities.

Conclusion

In this study we aimed to develop an understanding of how SPPI is perceived and experienced by a globally representative sample of SPPs at various stages of professional development. To meet this aim, we explored the common elements underpinning the development and maintenance of these individuals' SPPI. A common perspective shared by the SPPs interviewed was that the deliberate and purposeful engagement in the profession was the foundation of their experience of SPPI. Yet, while these participants highlighted a series of common elements that contributed to the development and maintenance of their SPPI, the way they experienced these elements was nuanced. In addition to the conceptual novelty of these findings, they hold substantial applied value regarding the potential for them to inform the development of resources for professionals to reflect on their perceptions and experiences of SPPI, as a basis for a congruent, ethical, competent, and effective practice (Tod et al., 2020; Woo et al., 2014; 2016). Such resources might be integrated within educational and training or professional development programs with the goal of promoting experiential- and reflection-based learning among practitioners. In doing so,

these resources might serve as a mechanism to support individual practitioners to develop and maintain their own professional identity within a field-level SPPI. Further, integration of these resources into such programs may assist SPPs to develop their own SPPI, they may also help them better understand their professional roles regarding 'what' services they can provide, 'why' they may be of benefit, and 'how' particular knowledge, skills, and abilities might promote ethical and competent practice. Structured professional pathways to practice that offer a critical stimulation, and ultimately a greater understanding of one's SPPI, may enable early career SPPs to better situate themselves professionally among their peers and related professionals.

Despite these contributions, and considering the developmental heterogeneity of the sample, the cross-sectional research design of this study limited our ability to explore the evolution of participants' perceptions and experiences of their SPPI. Hence, further exploration of SPPI throughout an individual's career may help us to better understand the factors contributing to SPPI over time. Despite our successful recruitment of SPPs from different regions in the world and from different professional backgrounds, our efforts to recruit professionals with a heterogeneous set of intersecting identities did not materialize. While our sample was ethnically and culturally very diverse, it was also primarily racially homogeneous. It follows that it will be important for scholars interested in extending the current work to consider how cultural influences, backgrounds, and contexts may lead to different conceptualizations and/or experiences of the SPPI construct. While the heterogenous sample of this study permits us to ground our understanding of SPPI in the perspective and experiences of a globally representative sample, our methodological approach and the scope of the study preclude us from making claims about possible cultural influences on the participants' perception and experience of SPPI. Finally, this study was completed from a critical realist ontology that assumed the *existence* of a SPPI as a *reality*. Nevertheless, while the participants in this study shared their experience of their SPPI, the sport psychology literature does not yet have a clear understanding of what SPPI *is* and further work is required to address this.

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Table 1. *Participant Information*

	Participants					
	Developmental Stage	Gender	Education	Geographic Area - Practice	Qualification	Current Activity
1	Expert	F	Doctorate	Middle East	Psychology	Only Applied
2	Expert	F	Doctorate	Europe	N/A	Mainly Applied
3	Expert	F	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Mainly Academic
4	Expert	M	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Mainly Academic
5	Expert	M	Postgraduate	S. America	Psychology	Only Applied
6	Expert	M	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Mainly App.
7	Expert	F	Doctorate	Oceania	Psych & Sport	Only Applied
8	Expert	F	Doctorate	N. America	Sport	Mainly Academic
9	Expert	F	Doctorate	N. America	Sport	Acad. & App.
10	Expert	F	Doctorate	Oceania	Psych & Sport	Acad. & App.
11	Expert	M	Doctorate	Europe	Psych & Sport	Mainly Academic
12	Expert	M	Doctorate	N. America	Psych & Sport	Acad. & App.
13	Expert	M	Doctorate	Europe	N/A	Acad. & App.
14	Experienced	F	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Mainly Academic
15	Experienced	F	Masters	Europe	N/A	Only Applied
16	Experienced	F	Postgraduate	Europe	Psychology	Only Applied
17	Experienced	M	Doctorate	Middle East	Psych & Sport	Only Applied
18	Experienced	M	Master	Europe	N/A	Mainly App.
19	Experienced	M	Doctorate	Europe	Psych & Sport	Mainly App.
20	Experienced	F	Doctorate	N. America	Psych & Sport	Only Applied
21	Experienced	F	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Acad. & App.
22	Experienced	F	Masters	Europe	Sport	Only Applied
23	Experienced	M	Doctorate	Oceania	Psychology	Mainly Academic
24	Experienced	M	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Acad. & App.
25	Experienced	M	Doctorate	N. America	Psych & Sport	Acad. & App.
26	Novice	F	Postgraduate	Europe	Psych & Sport	Only Applied
27	Novice	F	Doctorate	Europe	Psychology	Mainly Academic
28	Novice	M	Doctorate	S. America	N/A	Only Applied
29	Novice	M	Doctorate	East Asia	Sport	Mainly Academic
30	Novice	F	Doctorate	N. America	Sport	Mainly Academic
31	Novice	F	Doctorate	N. America	Sport	Mainly Academic
32	Novice	M	Doctorate	Europe	Psych & Sport	Acad. & App.
33	Novice	M	Masters	N. America	Sport	Only Applied

* Participants who declared to be mainly academic are participants who spend more than 50% of their professional role working in academic settings. Participants reporting to be mainly applied are those who report to spend more than 50% of their professional role in applied settings. Those who reported to equally shared their time between academic and applied practice are identified as ‘Acad. & App’. All participants spent between 10 and 15 hours per week delivering applied services.

Table 2. *Themes*

Results	
Primary Level	Secondary Level
Knowledge of the Profession	
Who I Am & What I Do	Distinction Reciprocity Complementarity Congruence
Professional landscape	Organizational contexts and environment Cultural Environment Trainings and Qualifications
Professional Community	Professional relationships and network Collaboration in a multidisciplinary team
Professional Practice	Professional Roles Professional ethics Competence and boundaries Reflective practice Meaningful work and experiences Engagement in Lifelong Learning
Sentiment Towards the Profession	Pride in the profession and the work we do Gratitude for professional privilege
Giving Back to the Profession	Supporting accreditation system Sharing knowledge and opportunities Teaching and supervising others Engaging with professional organizations