Working with Religious and Spiritual Athletes:

Ethical Considerations for Sport Psychologists

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Abstract

With a growing number of sport performers revealing their religious and spiritual beliefs, it is becoming increasingly important for sport psychologists to recognize and appreciate the values (and value systems) to which such beliefs are attached. Using the RRICC model (Plante, 2007) as a framework for discussion, and through the lens of cultural praxis, the purpose of this article is to highlight ethical issues for sport psychologists when working with religious and spiritual athletes. The RRICC model addresses the ethical principles of respect, responsibility, integrity, competence, and concern. It is hoped that a discussion of these guidelines will help sport psychologists better navigate the often challenging landscape of working with athletes whose everyday lives and identities are grounded in religious and spiritual association.

Keywords: applied sport psychology, cultural praxis, ethics, religion, spirituality.

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> Just before walking over [to the Olympic final], Coach pulled me aside and we prayed together as we had done since I was in college. I had heard other athletes ask God to let them win, which I thought was ridiculous. Coach, however, simply asked God to keep me healthy and, if it was His will, to allow me to run at my best. 'God blessed me with his talent,' I thought as the prayer ended. 'His job is done, and it's up to me and me alone to win this race (Johnson, 2011, p. 17).

Comments such as the above by Michael Johnson, four-time Olympic champion, highlight the importance of religious and spiritual beliefs for many sport performers. These beliefs are also reflected in the existence of organizations, such as The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Muslim Women's Sport Foundation, and the Centre for Sport and Jewish Life. In addition to such anecdotal observations, there is growing evidence in the sport psychology literature indicating the relevance of religious and spiritual values for a variety of elite athletes (e.g., Balague, 1999; Howe & Parker, 2014; Storch, Kolsky, Silvestri, & Storch, 2001; Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, & Templin, 2000). In a study investigating the salient psychosocial characteristics of Olympic track and field athletes, Vernacchia et al. (2000) found that religious and spiritual factors often played an important part in the athletes' sport careers. Specifically, these beliefs helped athletes react positively to occurrences such as injury and personal problems, and provided a deep meaning to their successes and failures.

Although a number of prominent psychology scholars, such as William James, Carl Jung, and Gordon Allport, were keenly interested in the relationship between psychology, religion, and spirituality (e.g., Allport, 1950; James, 1890, 1902; Jung, 1938), most professional and scientific psychologists during the past century has avoided the connection between these areas of inquiry (Plante, 2007). The recognition of religion and spirituality as

topics requiring psychological attention has emerged predominantly towards the latter end of the 20th century in line with the focus towards positive psychology (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). The aim of this paradigm shift has been "to …catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Accordingly, this movement has embraced religion and spirituality and has used rigorous scientific methods, such as double-blind randomized controlled trials, to examine the influence of such factors on health and well-being (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). For example, within the general psychology literature, it has been found that religion and spirituality may protect individuals from the stressors that they encounter, that is, they can provide people with greater psychological resilience in the face of negative life events (e.g., Peres, Moreira-Almedia, Nasello & Koenig, 2007). Given that religion and spirituality are important for the welfare of numerous individuals, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that there are relatively few studies within the sport psychology literature that directly examine the association between religion, spirituality, and well-being in sport performers. In one such study, Storch et al. (2003) found that internal commitment to personal religious and spiritual beliefs was inversely associated with substance use in intercollegiate athletes. However, due to the correlational nature of the data, the authors could only speculate that some athletes may have turned to their religious and spiritual values to cope with a variety of stressors, such as injury and academic hardship.

Although work in this area is not as extensive in the field of sport psychology as it is in the general psychology literature, research exploring the experiences of ultra-marathoners (Acevedo, Dzewaltowski, Gill, & Noble, 1992), college athletes (Dillon & Tait, 2000; Storch et al., 2001, 2003), Olympians (Vernacchia et al., 2000), and Paralympians (Howe & Parker, 2014) has highlighted the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of a wide variety of athletes. These beliefs have become commonplace in the world of sport, with many

athletes utilizing religious and spiritual practices, especially prayer, as a coping mechanism and performance enhancement technique (see, e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007; Maranise, 2013; Park, 2000; Watson & Czech, 2005). A number of applied sport psychologists have also emphasized the importance of the religious and spiritual dimension when working with athletes (e.g., Balague, 1999; Gamble, Hill, & Parker, 2013; Ravizza, 2002; Watson & Czech, 2005; Watson & Nesti, 2005). In a review of the role of religion and spirituality in sport psychology consulting, Watson and Nesti (2005) addressed four main issues: (a) reconciling religion and spirituality into current athlete-centered models; (b) integrating religion and spirituality into mental skills training; (c) the relationship between religion, spirituality, and positive psychological states, such as flow and peak experiences; and (d) the utility of religion and spirituality in sport psychology counselling. More recently, Gamble et al. (2013) explored the role and impact of sport psychologists and sport chaplains within a selection of English Premiership soccer clubs. They found that sport psychologists predominantly focused on performance enhancement whereas the sport chaplains primarily offered spiritual care, with both contributing to the pastoral needs of players. The impact of both disciplines within Premiership soccer remained restricted due to a number of barriers. Interestingly, to achieve greater impact within this context, Gamble et al. suggested that "future research is warranted to explore the potential of a collaborative partnership between the sport psychologist and chaplain, and how they could work more effectively with significant others (i.e., coaches and managers) to provide support to their athletes" (p. 261).

Although further work is required before religion and spirituality is integrated into service delivery (Crust, 2006), sport psychologists clearly need to be aware of the associated values and beliefs of athletes. Drawing on 25 years of practitioner experience with elite sport performers, Balague (1999) stated that "spirituality or religion is often a big part of many athletes' lives" (p. 91) and asserted that if sport psychology interventions do not consider

athletes' religious and spiritual worldviews "…the likely outcome is not only that the intervention will not work, but that we lose the trust of athletes by showing that we do not understand something that is at the core of their identities and values" (p. 92). To illustrate, Balague suggested that some forms of positive self-talk may not be appropriate for religious and spiritual athletes since it may sound like bragging and conflict with principles of humility.

Moreover, during the last decade or two, there has been an increased awareness of cultural diversity in sport and calls for culturally informed sport psychology research and practice (e.g., Hanrahan, 2010, 2011; Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009; Schinke & Moore, 2011; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). At the heart of this emerging area of cultural sport psychology (CSP) is the notion of cultural praxis. Cultural praxis, introduced in sport psychology by Ryba and Wright (2005, 2010), is "a critical discourse" and "an attempt to broaden the epistemological spectrum of theory and practice in the field" (2010, p. 3). This approach challenges culture-blind theories, research, and practice, and moves the sport psychology field from decontextualized knowledge to a new way of thinking about athletes as constituted by various discourses and identities (Ryba et al., 2013). A number of sport psychology researchers have put forward various ethical considerations in relation to culture and diversity, particularly religion and spirituality. These include: multicultural competence (Ryba et al., 2013), training and education (Watson & Nesti, 2005), referral systems (Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001), and professional boundaries (Watson & Czech, 2005). Despite acknowledging these ethical issues, over the last decade, when working with athletes of religious and spiritual persuasion, scholars have yet to systematically explore this pertinent area of enquiry. This is in contrast to other fields of psychology, especially psychotherapy, which have countless texts and articles dedicated to ethical considerations when working with such clients (see, e.g., Barnett & Johnson, 2011; Gonsiorek, Richards, Pargament, & McMinn, 2009; Plante, 2007; Yarhouse & VanOrman,

1999).

Plante (2007) employed the RRICC model to highlight ethical issues with religion, spirituality, and psychotherapy integration, an approach that is readily applicable to ethical codes across the world. It was developed to highlight the primary values supported in all ethics codes associated with various mental health professions in the United States and abroad (Plante, 2004). RRICC stands for the values of respect, responsibility, integrity, competence, and concern, with the model acting as an easy-to-use framework to highlight the values outlined in the British Psychological Society's (BPS, 2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (hereinafter referred to as *Ethics Code*). Using the components of the RRICC as a framework for discussion, and through the lens of cultural praxis, the purpose of this article is to explore the ethical issues arising when working with athletes who profess religious and spiritual allegiance. In view of our country of residence and due to the similarity in ethical principles to the RRICC model, the focus on the psychologist's code from BPS's (2009) *Ethics Code* will be used as a point of reference.

Definitions

Although the terms religion and spirituality have often been used interchangeably, researchers have attempted to define both constructs (e.g., Hill et al., 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2008; Hyman & Handal, 2006). Hyman and Handal (2006) explored the concepts of religion and spirituality by asking religious professionals (Catholic priests, Protestant ministers, Islamic imams, and Jewish rabbis) to define the two terms. To summarize these findings, religion was considered to be something which is concerned with external and objective organizational practices about a higher power that one performs in a group setting, whereas spirituality was defined as internal, subjective, and divine experience. Hill et al. (2000) defined spirituality as "the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred" (p. 66). According to Hill et al. (2000), religion may also include a

search for non-sacred goals (e.g., identity, belongingness, or wellness) with the sacred search process receiving validation and support from an identifiable group of people. As such, religion is often viewed as occurring within a formally structured religious institution such as a church, synagogue, or mosque, whereas spirituality is often characterized by more experiential dynamics associated with personal meaning (Hill et al., 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2008). The scope of the present article prevents us from fully examining and elaborating on the varied definitions of these two terms. Thus, and in line with the broader special issue, we take a more overarching approach by describing issues of religion and spirituality collectively to facilitate a wide range of interpretations.

Using the RRICC Model to Highlight Ethical Issues When Working with Religious and Spiritual Athletes

When Plante (2007) used the RRICC approach, he explored in turn the principles of respect, responsibility, integrity, competence, and concern to highlight the ethical issues requiring consideration with religion, spirituality, and psychotherapy integration. Specifically, he noted that psychologists needed to: (a) *respect* the beliefs and values associated with religion and spirituality, (b) have a *responsibility* to be aware and thoughtful of how religion and spirituality impacts others, (c) act with *integrity* in terms of being honest about their skills as professionals, (d) provide *competent* professional services by integrating religion and spirituality into their professional psychology work, and (e) show *concern* for the wellbeing and welfare of others. Plante continued by identifying and discussing four ethical dilemmas relating to the issues of respect (viz. religious and spiritual bias), integrity (viz. blurred boundaries and dual relationships), competence (viz. assuming expertise in a faith tradition), and concern (viz. destructive religious beliefs and behaviors). In the following section, we will explore the application of the RRICC model, through the lens of cultural praxis, when working with religious and spiritual athletes.

Respect

The *Ethics Code* states that "psychologists should respect individual, cultural and role differences, including…religion" (p. 10). One of the main tensions in fulfilling this principle involves the issue of informed consent, an area that has had relatively little formal examination within the sport psychology literature (cf. Moore, 2003). As Fisher and Oransky (2008) stated, informed consent is integral to the formation of the service delivery relationship and is best conceptualized not as a singular event but as an ongoing process. This collaborative practice should provide athletes with information that they would generally find relevant to deciding if they want to participate in the professional relationship. In the context of the present discussion, informed consent would help athletes of religious and spiritual persuasion better appreciate what they are moving towards and the end goal of the meeting. In turn, this would enable these athletes to collaborate on selecting appropriate interventions to meet that goal, and provide them with the opportunity to refuse consent to interventions that do not fit with their value system (cf. Yarhouse & VanOrman, 1999). Based on collaboration and negotiation, sport psychologists who encounter religious concerns or issues during intake should discuss with athletes their approach to service delivery, their levels of comfort and expertise in addressing religious and spiritual issues, how the psychologist's and athlete's religious and spiritual beliefs may impact the goals and process of service delivery, and what options and alternatives exist that may be appropriate for the athlete based on the information shared (cf. Barnett & Johnson, 2011). Of course, not all of these elements will be relevant in each situation; as the relationship unfolds over time, in line with cultural praxis, sport psychologists must decide, in alliance with athletes, which aspects to address in partnership to foster capacity.

Related to the use of informed consent, sport psychologists should explore some of the concerns that athletes of religious and spiritual persuasion may have with regards to how

they think their values and beliefs will be viewed during service delivery (cf. Gonsiorek et al., 2009; Yarhouse & VanOrman, 1999). Of particular concern to religious and spiritual clients is whether nonreligious psychologists will ignore religious or spiritual concerns or assume they are *merely* psychological and not a valid epistemology (Worthington & Scott, 1983). According to Worthington and Scott (1983), religious and spiritual clients also express concern that nonreligious psychologists will assume that the religious and spiritual client shares broadly accepted cultural values (e.g., premarital sex) or suggest interventions that the individual feels are contrary to his or her values. Accordingly, it is essential that sport psychologists suspend preconceptions about the religious and spiritual beliefs of athletes and demonstrate an appropriate level of respect for such issues avoiding discrimination or bias by being self-aware and reflective.

In the context of cultural praxis, the notion of reflexivity relates to issues of the self and identity of the practitioner (cf. McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Schinke, McGannon, Parham, and Lane, 2012). Through reflexive acknowledgement of their own backgrounds, practitioners can become more aware of the different ways their own self-related views and cultural identities influence the service delivery process and sport context (Hanrahan, 2011; Parham, 2005; Schinke et al., 2012). McGannon and Johnson (2009), for example, suggested that a Caucasian sport psychologist working with minority athletes might ask the following: In what ways do my social class produce particular power hierarchies? Toward what end do those power hierarchies structure my interactions with, and interpretations of, the athletes? How do these same issues structure how the athletes respond in the service delivery context? In a confessional tale, Schinke et al. (2012) told a story of an Aboriginal athlete that one of the authors was working with. The athlete was highly spiritual, used sacred medicine each day, prayed to his God, and he communicated in a manner that differed from the other team athletes. The individual was extremely quiet and the coaching staff believed that because of

this, he was disengaged from his team. By not being culturally reflexive in service delivery, the consultant might have interpreted the athlete's behaviour as distancing himself and not being "a team player" if the practitioner took for granted the important behaviours of individuals within sport teams. Through the lens of cultural reflexivity what is revealed is that the individual has different values because the discourse within which he frames himself is different from the dominant perspective that his staff and teammates use. Thus, his "distancing" when interpreted through the discourse(s) of his culture might not be seen as disengagement but rather of reflection and introspection.

Furthermore, sport psychologists need to appreciate that predicting an athlete's values and beliefs from denominational affiliation may be impossible given the diversity within a faith tradition. In the context of cultural praxis, sport psychologists should avoid sensitive stereotyping whereby the knowledge of cultural differences brings about a stereotypical interpretation of an individual's behaviour (cf. Andersen, 1993). The goal of becoming culturally sensitive is to be able to work competently with clients from various cultures while remaining aware of individual differences (Hanrahan & Schinke, 2011; Parham, 2005). Accordingly, to earn the respect of religious and spiritual sport performers, it is particularly important for sport psychologists to recognize the individuality of such athletes, that is, acknowledging that an athlete might be quite different from other members of their faith tradition. Likewise, the sport psychologist must also recognize his or her individuality and various cultural identities in relation to the athlete since self-reflexivity of one's own values and beliefs about others can impact the practitioner's interactions with the athlete in both positive and negative ways (Schinke et al., 2012).

Responsibility

In the *Ethics code,* there is an emphasis on psychologists' valuing their responsibility to clients, including the need to consult with, or refer to, other professionals if it is in the best

interest of the client. To enhance service delivery within sport psychology, one recommendation by Andersen et al. (2001) was "to cultivate a rich referral network of nutritionists, physical therapists … and religious or pastoral care givers" (p. 17). Gonsiorek et al. (2009) provided several scenarios where psychologists should seek referral or consultation with pastoral professionals (see, for a review, Gonsiorek et al., 2009). A number of these situations are particularly relevant to sport psychologists, including when they are unsure if a person's religious and spiritual beliefs are healthy and/or unhealthy, and when an individual expresses feelings of guilt that seem to originate from perceived infringement of religious and spiritual values. With regard to referring athletes to others, it is important to realize that value conflicts will inevitably arise between a sport psychologist and an athlete. The challenge for sport psychologists "is to recognize when their values and those of their clients conflict to such an extent that they are ethically obligated to assess their ability to function professionally" (Yarhouse & VanOrman, 1999, p. 559).

In the context of cultural praxis, when working with athletes concerning religious and spiritual issues, collaboration may not only take place with religious and spiritual professionals but also with individuals who are knowledgeable about certain philosophies and relevant community opportunities. Openness and space for these different forms of support will be of great assistance in helping athletes to access the resources of their religious and spiritual beliefs and promote the client's cultural safety. In terms of working with religious and spiritual professionals, Gamble et al. (2013) found that sport chaplains facilitated spiritual care in the context of English professional soccer. Self-reflexivity in this context appeared to play an important role in the service delivery process, with the chaplains maintaining openness to variation of values and experiences. To illustrate, the chaplains provided spiritual care for all faiths and were not restricted to those beliefs that were similar to their own. Examples were cited of providing care for Muslim, Jewish, and Rastafarian

players, and for one sport chaplain this even involved conversations regarding the wider aspects of spiritual life including séances and mediums. In line with cultural praxis, there was a variety of ways in which the sport chaplains facilitated such spiritual care. Examples ranged from responding to the everyday spiritual needs of the people around the club environment (e.g., purchasing bibles, providing bible studies and daily devotionals, and seeking out places to worship), to more formal situations such as presiding over child baptisms and memorial services. When collaboration with religious or spiritual personnel may not be relevant or needed, then referral to an appropriately trained professional may be more appropriate (cf. American Psychological Association, 2003). This may be the case when an athlete is keen to explore certain philosophies, such as Buddhism (see, e.g., Andersen & Mannion, 2011; Thompson & Andersen, 2012; Zizzi & Andersen, 2010). In terms of the role communities play in athletes' religious and spiritual identities, psychologists should consider harnessing relevant community resources available to athletes. Within the CSP literature, researchers and practitioners have found this to be important in the context of working with Canadian Aboriginal athletes (see, e.g., Schinke et al., 2007), and providing support to Indigenous athletes from New Zealand (see Hodge, Sharp, & Heke, 2011).

Integrity

Watson and Czech (2005) noted that "when dealing with religious athletes, another important consideration for the sport psychology consultant is the question of professional boundaries" (p. 30). Although this issue has already been examined in the sport psychology literature (see Moore, 2003), it is of particular relevance here since the distinction between the psychological, religious, and spiritual is often blurred (Pargament, 2007). In the context of English soccer, Gamble et al. (2013) observed that "significant overlap" (p. 249) existed in the roles of the sport psychologists and sport chaplains. Sport psychologists should use informed consent effectively to address this problem by facilitating an open and transparent

understanding of their professional roles within the sport environment. It is likely that this will be based around enhancing performance and/or the well-being of athletes, depending on the philosophical orientation of the sport psychologist. These roles are in contrast to religious and spiritual professionals who predominantly provide religious and spiritual care (Gamble et al., 2013; Gonsiorek et al., 2009).

Another boundary that is important to attend to is that of self-disclosure (cf. Barnett & Johnson, 2011). The appropriate and judicious use of self-disclosure can be a therapeutically powerful intervention that is very meaningful to clients. Yet self-disclosure motivated by the practitioner's own needs to share personal information, to connect or be intimate with a client, or that is not motivated by the client's needs, can be potentially harmful (Barnett, 1998). In the context of cultural praxis, self-reflexivity may be a useful tool for ensuring cultural safety (cf. McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Schinke et al., 2012). When working with individuals concerning religious and spiritual issues, cultural reflexivity may help determine whether sharing one's religious and spiritual beliefs is suitable. More broadly, the practice of self-reflexivity in this context may result in practitioners engaging in practices that recognize power structures, which in turn, may empower sport psychologists and/or athletes (cf. Schinke et al., 2012). By being self-reflexive, practitioners can become more aware of how their own taken for granted biases and cultural identities affect athletes in relation to the categories to which they belong, and can therefore begin to attend to power issues (cf. McGannon & Johnson, 2009).

For sport psychologists who are active in a faith tradition, it is important for them *not* to assume that personal religious and spiritual affiliation makes them an expert in all areas of theology (cf. Plante, 2007). An ethical dilemma may arise if an athlete is aware of a sport psychologist's religious and spiritual membership and seeks religious and spiritual guidance in an area outside his or her expertise and training. A sport psychologist may unconsciously

assume the role of a pastoral counselor in this situation but this would be inappropriate and unethical. Another ethical dilemma to consider is if a sport psychologist works in rural areas and other small or isolated settings (cf. Schank & Skovholt, 2006). Members of the community may seek them out for religious or spiritual support because of their interactions in the community (see Hodge et al., 2011; Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011; Schinke et al., 2007). In the context of providing support to Canadian Aboriginal athletes, Schinke et al. (2007) noted that the question of how strategies are developed and integrated should reflect the preferences of the athlete in relation to his or her cultural identity. When discussing implications for cultural praxis, the authors concluded that "to discern the best practice mental and spiritual strategies for Canadian Aboriginal elite athletes requires an awareness of who the athlete is (family and community of origin included) and who he or she is becoming" (p. 163). This research highlights the importance of working with and for the community, and letting their needs and wants drive the service delivery process. However, working in this type of setting can create the possibility of interacting with individuals professionally as well as personally in the respective community. Thus, being knowledgeable about boundary issues, understanding how to establish clear and effective boundaries with clients, and knowing how to effectively manage multiple cultural identities are all essential for ethical practice and for clients' well-being.

Competence

An important issue to consider, in light of the present article and the broader special issue, is the development of cultural competence in sport psychology practitioners (see Hanrahan, 2010; Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke, Hanrahan, & Catina, 2009; Schinke & Moore, 2011). Cultural competence is defined as "a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies . . . that reflect how cultural and socio-political influences shape individuals' worldview and health related behaviours, and how such factors interact at multiple levels of

psychological practice" (Comas-Diaz, 2011 as cited in Schinke & Moore, 2011, p. 288). Ryba et al. (2013) identified three main areas of cultural competence for sport psychology practitioners (viz. cultural awareness and reflexivity, culturally competent communication, culturally competent interventions) and these will be discussed below in more detail in the context of working with religious and spiritual athletes.

Although the notion of cultural awareness and reflexivity has already been discussed in relation to the ethical principles of respect and integrity, this area is equally relevant to developing cultural competence. Two recommendations by Schinke and Moore (2011) were to "formally gain knowledge of cultures and cultural differences" and "maintain a commitment to staying abreast of the evolving literature . . . in this area" (p. 288). As part of the ethical principle of competence, the *Ethics Code* affirms that psychologists should "engage in continued professional development [and] remain abreast of…scientific [and] ethical…innovations germane to their professional activities" (p. 16). A relevant matter associated with this guideline is the training that psychologists receive (cf. Gamble et al., 2013). Aspects of religion and spirituality seem to be absent across many psychology training programmes in North America (see, for a review, Hage, 2006), and to the best of our knowledge, this appears to be similar for BPS qualifications in sport (and exercise) psychology in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, Etzel, Watson, and Zizzi (2004) found that members of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) who came from a sport science background were more likely to believe that working with people from diverse backgrounds without multicultural training was ethical, compared to those who were educated in mainstream psychology. This finding is important given that many individuals have trained to become sport psychologists via sport science qualifications. Although it may be unrealistic to devise a separate course on religion and spirituality, it may be feasible for all sport psychology training programmes to incorporate content related to religious and spiritual

diversity into existing modules (e.g., ethics and individual differences). In addition, it may be useful to add articles on religion and spirituality to reading lists for ongoing discussion throughout training. As a caveat to these approaches, it is worth noting that, within clinical psychology, a belief-practice discrepancy seems to exist in addressing religious and spiritual issues and, thus, "developing religious and spiritual . . . competence may be more of a function of personally valuing this domain, rather than an externally imposed framework of formal training" (Frazier & Hansen, 2009, p. 86). Further research is needed to explore sport psychologists' knowledge of their athletes' religious and spiritual beliefs and to examine this notion of a belief-practice discrepancy.

The second area of cultural competence concerns communication (Ryba et al., 2013). Language is the most noticeable culturally affected component of communication (Hanrahan, 2010; Hanrahan & Schinke, 2011). In addition to obvious differences in languages (e.g., English, Hindi, Urdu), there are also communication challenges with regards to the suitability of language. Balague (1999) highlighted the issue of using appropriate language when working with athletes who profess specific religious and spiritual beliefs. For example, in Islamic cultures sport may not be an appropriate object for devotion (Terry, 2009) with the common saying of "inshallah" or "God willing" suggesting that individual athletes downplay the extent to which they determine their own performance outcomes. As a result, many traditional sport psychology interventions that promote self-talk may be in opposition to religious practices where faith is placed outside the self (Galloway, 2009). If Muslim athletes feel that they should not be taking credit for something that belongs to their God or Allah, positive affirmations could take the form of "Allah gave me the speed and strength, and I worked for His glory" instead of statements such as "I'm fast, I'm strong, I'm ready".

More broadly, culturally competent communication concerns how to reach shared meaning with clients. Ryba (2009) discussed the concept of meaningful dialogue in which

communication parties engage in the process of searching for a shareable language that transforms the information gathering dialogue into a shared experience. Through meaningful dialogues, sport psychology practitioners may facilitate communication between athletes and coaches representing different religions and spiritual beliefs (e.g., in a sport team) to help them to be more open-minded and develop a shared "cultural code" with specific cultural elements relevant to the local setting. Importantly, in light of the present article, Ryba (2009) emphasized that meaningful dialogue has an ethical aspect shifting the role of the practitioner "from being the expert who shapes minority athletes' responses to hegemonic normative system in the name of athletic success to being a co-participant in the collaborative process of learning, reflection, critical awareness, and intervention" (pp. 43-44).

The third theme related to cultural competence is the challenge of delivering evidence-based interventions that maintain respect for and consideration of cultural characteristics including religion and spirituality (Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke & Moore, 2011). Since contemporary sport psychology theories and applied research have mainly been developed in North America and Europe (Si, Duan, Li, & Jiang, 2011), practitioners should consider exploring their cultural relevance when working with clients who express religious and spiritual affiliation. To illustrate, rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT), an action-orientated approach to resolving emotional and behavioural disturbances, has been found to be particularly efficacious when appropriately sensitive towards clients religious and spiritual beliefs (e.g., Nielsen, Johnson, & Ridley, 2000). When working with Hindu athletes, for example, religion-sensitive REBT may include the development of effective scriptural counter-challenges (e.g., from the Bhagavad Gita) to irrational beliefs and values opposing Hinduism. By utilizing faith-specific scriptures with religious and spiritual athletes, the sport psychologist may not only dispute their irrational beliefs more effectively but also increase the rate at which the athlete understands and accepts a range of other techniques (cf. Neilsen

et al., 2000). Although REBT has been seldom considered within the sport psychology literature, it is worth noting that this method of service delivery appears to be fairly compatible to religious and spiritual views and can be applied to various athlete-related issues, such as avoidance motivation in sport involvement (see Ellis, 1994). As a caveat to this approach, and in the context of cultural praxis, it is worth noting that there is an assumption within REBT that, for all clients, irrational core beliefs can be altered by objective and rational negotiation and that rational cognition will positively influence emotion and behaviour. Applying these ideas to Chinese culture, Si et al. (2011) recommended that practitioners working with Chinese athletes consider the Chinese holistic thinking style and introvert emotional expression. Hence, when adapting intervention techniques, the practitioner's reflexivity should revolve around questions such as: "must the technique itself be modified or might the best modification be in the area of presentation and style of delivery?" (Schinke & Moore, 2011, p. 291).

When designing and implementing psychological intervention programs, practitioners should also keep in mind that an important task is to help athletes develop a deep understanding of, and active adaptation to, the relevant sociocultural system as a whole. To illustrate, and in line with the theme of religion and spirituality in the present article, Ghanaian and Nigerian sport psychologists have been exploring West African cultures in order to develop the traditional belief of juju (i.e., supernatural power or magic). The invoking of spirits through juju can be used positively to assist a person or team, or negatively to cause opponents to make mistakes (Diehl, Hegley, & Lane, 2009; Ikulayo & Semidara, 2009; 2011). Importantly, for cultural praxis, "although western sport psychology practitioners may have some constraints in working with athletes who believe in juju, it is the belief system and faith of individuals that really matters" (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011, p. 344).

Concern

Although sport psychologists have historically been concerned with performance enhancement in their work as practitioners, the shift towards positive psychology and athlete-centered models (Miller & Kerr, 2002) has encouraged practitioners to adopt a more holistic approach by addressing the athlete's overall health and well-being (cf. Gamble et al., 2013). As previously mentioned, religious and spiritual values have been found to be associated with reduced consumption of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs in intercollegiate athletes (Storch et al., 2003). At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that religious and spiritual beliefs can lead people to engage in destructive behaviours. For example, parents who possess particular religious and spiritual beliefs may deny some female athletes access to medical and educational services. Thus, although sport psychologists are required to be respectful of athletes' religious and spiritual beliefs, this deference has limitations that are imposed by the law, that is, when these beliefs result in significant physical or mental harm, abuse, or neglect (cf. Moore, 2003). Consequently, sport psychologists are forced to act when religious and spiritual beliefs put athletes' with whom they work, or others, at risk (cf. Knapp, Lemoncelli, & VandeCreek, 2010). As Plante (2007) noted, "concern for the welfare of others always trumps other ethical values" (p. 896).

Concluding Remarks

In the opening of our article, we acknowledged that religion and spirituality are important areas to consider within applied sport psychology. Yet, as noted in the introduction, and indeed the impetus for the current article is the fact that such ideas remain on the fringes of the emerging scholarship of CSP. Today's reality is that sport psychology practitioners will work with athletes from varying religious and spiritual perspectives be those athletes who hold particular religious identities (e.g., Gamble et al., 2013), or athletes with traditional spiritual beliefs (e.g., Schinke et al., 2007). In the context of cultural praxis, when working with athletes of religious and spiritual persuasion, practitioners should focus on cultural

awareness (e.g., of their own culturally constituted beliefs and values), complemented by cultural knowledge (e.g., understanding of different religious and spiritual practices), and cultural skills (e.g., cultural reflexivity, culturally informed communication, and interventions). In the future, from the vantage of applied CSP, it will not just be a matter of how practitioners adapt current mainstream interventions with individuals from various religious and spiritual practices, but also how the mainstream learn of different ways of doing things from cultures previously unrecognized within the field. Although this trajectory is currently unchartered, sport psychology practitioners who are fascinated with matters of religion and spirituality have reason to be excited.

The present article is intended to enhance practitioners' understanding and application of the RRICC model (Plante, 2007), through the lens of cultural praxis, when working with athletes of religious and spiritual persuasion. Closely monitoring ethical issues that emerge – or are likely to emerge – during the course of our professional work is critical for clients' cultural safety. It is hoped that highlighting and discussing the ethical principles of respect, responsibility, integrity, competence, and concern will help sport psychologists better navigate the often challenging terrain of religious and spiritual beliefs, and contribute to answering the question "how can ethical cultural sport psychology . . . practice within the domain of sport be undertaken?" (Ryba et al., 2013, p. 131). As a final caveat, although it is important that sport psychologists become familiar with ethical guidelines related to religion and spirituality, reading and having a cognitive understanding of religion and spirituality are only the first steps (cf. Hanrahan, 2010). For effective cultural praxis, we need to experience further religious and spiritual practices, reflect on our own, and learn to apply routinely the knowledge we have gained in the form of culturally appropriate interventions.

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