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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to explore how sport medicine and science practitioners manage their emotions through emotional labor when engaging in professional practice in elite sport. To address the research aim a semi-structured interview design was adopted. Specifically, eighteen professional sport medicine and science staff provided interviews. The sample comprised sport and exercise psychologists ($n = 6$), strength and conditioning coaches ($n = 5$), physiotherapists ($n = 5$), one sports doctor and one generic sport scientist. Following a process of thematic analysis, the results were organized into the following overarching themes: (a) factors influencing emotional labor enactment, (b) emotional labor enactment and, (c) professional and personal outcomes. The findings provide a novel contribution to understanding the professional demands faced by practitioners, and are discussed in relation to the development of professional competencies and the welfare and performance of sport medics and scientists.

Keywords: emotion, emotional displays, emotion regulation, well-being, professions, professional development

Emotional labor and professional practice in sports medicine and science

The pursuit of athletic excellence in high performance sport is increasingly informed by innovative medical, scientific, and technological advances driven by the expertise of sports medics and scientists (SMSs) (Wagstaff, Gilmore & Thelwell, 2015), who are relied upon to improve and optimize athlete performance. The persistent demands for performance success, the obligation to interact with various stakeholders, the need to work as part of a multi-disciplinary sports medicine and science team, and the emotionality of the elite performance context has arguably increased SMSs necessity to perform emotional labor. The term emotional labor has been recently defined as, “emotion regulation performed in response to job-based emotional requirements in order to produce emotion toward – and to evoke emotion from – another person to achieve organizational goals” (Grandey, Diefendorff & Rupp, 2013, p. 18; see also Hochschild, 1983). Previous research has demonstrated how individuals are required to enact emotional labor as part of their role in sport, including athletes (e.g., Tamminen & Crocker, 2013), coaches (e.g., Nelson et al, 2013), personal trainers (e.g., George, 2008), and performance directors (e.g., Wagstaff, Fletcher & Hanton, 2012). Nevertheless, to date there has been no research into the role of emotional labor in SMS professionals.

Professional practice in sport

Given the salient role that SMS play in sport organizations (Reid, Stewart & Thorne, 2004), the aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which SMSs’ are required to engage in emotional labor and to examine the implications of our findings here for professional practice in the elite sport environment. Within this study, the term “professional practice” refers to the development of students, trainees, and qualified practitioners in the educational or work context in accordance with training guidelines set down by relevant professional or accrediting bodies (e.g., Anderson, Knowles & Gilbourne, 2004). Indeed, although professional practice guidelines are typically characterized by theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are underpinned by evidence based practice to be deemed “competent” in each professional domain, recent research

68 has highlighted the need to devote attention to the interpersonal and relational skills required for
69 SMS's to be effective in their role (Tod, Marchant, & Andersen, 2007). Specifically, Tod et al.
70 (2007) found displays of empathy were perceived as critical to effective practice when
71 interacting with athletes. Moreover, practitioners have reported difficulties when attempting to
72 transfer theoretical knowledge to emotion-laden situations in applied practice across one-to-one
73 and team settings, and when travelling to unfamiliar locations (see Tonn & Harmison, 2004).
74 Similarly, practice reflections of physiotherapists portray the range of positive and negative
75 emotions felt, concealed, and expressed with clients as part of their professional demands
76 (Foster & Sayers, 2012). In the SMS domain, the salience of organizational change such as a
77 change in management have been reported to increase emotional labor requirements of SMS's
78 which might lead to higher incidence of burnout (Wagstaff et al., 2015). Therefore, emotional
79 labor might have far reaching positive consequences for professional practice when working
80 with stakeholders in sport, which previous findings have yet to detail.

81 **Emotional labor in sport**

82 Sociological studies exploring sport-specific cultural norms have provided insight into
83 the emotional display requirements athletes and coaches face (Gallmeier, 1987; Galvan &
84 Ward, 1998). For example, Gallmeier found emotional display requirements and emotional
85 expressiveness changed before, during, and after professional hockey games for the athletes and
86 head coach. A further observation was that the head coach and players were expected to display
87 a calm and business-like demeanor before matches. In contrast, during the game the head coach
88 and players were expected to display intense, positive emotions to maximize team performance.
89 Interestingly, there is also evidence from interpersonal perceptions literature to indicate the
90 value of emotional expressiveness on sport performance. Manley, Greenlees, Thelwell, Filby,
91 and Smith (2008) found facial expressions, body language and gestures to be important cues for
92 athletes when forming impressions of their coach. These findings indicate that when coaches'
93 express emotions in adherence to emotional display requirements during competitive matches,

94 this is associated with desired effects such as positive psychological states and match-winning
95 performance. Further, an interview study examining stress in the coach-athlete relationship
96 found athletes could perceive when their coaches were under strain through facial expressions
97 and verbal tone. This implies that coaches need to mask their negative emotions through
98 emotional labor, and the effort associated with displaying desired emotions to athletes might
99 lead to the detriment of coaches' general well-being and effectiveness (Thelwell, Wagstaff,
100 Rayner, Chapman, & Barker, 2017). Subsequent work has extended these findings to the sport
101 and physical activity domain (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). Conceptualizing emotional labor as
102 a psychosocial and performative process, Tamminen et al (2017) found the socio-cultural
103 contexts that sports athletes, coaches, and trainers operate in dictate the degree to which
104 emotional expressiveness is appropriate. Such elements of professional practice could be
105 critically reflected on and developed as interpersonal skills by trainees and practitioner SMSs.

106 In recent years, emotional labor has become a variable of interest to coaching science
107 scholars (see, e.g., Larner, Wagstaff, Thelwell, & Corbett, 2017; Lee & Chelladurai, 2016; Lee,
108 Chelladurai & Kim, 2015; Nelson et al., 2013). Revealing the emotionality of professional
109 practice in football coaching, Nelson et al. (2013) illustrated how a coach expressed and
110 concealed his true emotions to achieve desired ends. Despite feelings of inauthenticity, the need
111 to exude desirable emotions in front of athletes to drive performance was prioritized. A
112 quantitative program of research by Lee and colleagues (2015; 2016) found surface acting
113 predicted increased psychological costs such as emotional exhaustion, emotional dissonance,
114 and feelings inauthenticity. This implies that the increased emotional effort needed to surface
115 act (i.e., suppressing felt emotions) can lead to negative mental health outcomes in coaches. In a
116 recent multilevel questionnaire study examining emotional labor in sport organizations, athletes
117 and coaches who demonstrated high levels of surface acting were more likely to perceive the
118 frequency of organizational stressors encountered as negative, and therefore suffer burnout

119 (Larner et al., 2017). These findings demonstrate links between emotional labor and both
120 positive or negative personal and professional outcomes for sports coaches.

121 Overall, the research above provides a valuable insight into the potential salience of
122 emotional labor in sport. Nevertheless, no research has explored the emotional labor process in
123 SMS professions. Such a dearth seems curious given the emotive nature of elite sport and
124 pivotal role of support staff for the performance and wellbeing of athletes and teams in elite
125 sport. What remains unclear is the nature of emotional display requirements, emotion
126 regulation, and emotion expressiveness for SMSs in elite sport, and the influence of such
127 demands on practitioners. Therefore, this study presents a novel investigation of emotional
128 labor in SMS professionals. The findings of such explorations have the potential to
129 contextualize the work of SMS professionals in elite sport, and potentially inform education and
130 training, professional guidelines, codes of conduct, and governance regarding how practitioners
131 are expected to act when working in elite sport. To this end, the following research questions
132 guided the study: (a) to what extent do SMS professionals feel they enact emotional labor? (b)
133 what factors influence the enactment of emotional labor? (c) in what ways do SMS practitioners
134 enact emotional labor with athletes and members of multi-disciplinary teams, and (d) how does
135 emotional labor impact professional practice in SMSs?

136 **Method**

137 **Design**

138 This investigation was underpinned by philosophical assumptions of ontological
139 relativism (i.e., reality is multiple, created, and mind dependent) and epistemological
140 interpretivism (i.e., knowledge is subjective and shaped by lived experience). Specifically, a
141 qualitative design was implemented to address the research questions. Semi-structured
142 interviews were chosen to address the research questions to allow adequate collection of
143 information about the topic of interest while giving participants a degree of flexibility to expand
144 on their thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding pertinent issues (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

145 The authors engaged in abductive reasoning, which involved “dialectical movement between
146 everyday meanings and theoretical explanations” (Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek, & Ng, 2012, p. 85),
147 which were then applied to the data. Such a procedure was followed because the aims of the
148 study were to establish whether and how emotional labor was constituted in SMS (deductive)
149 and to understand the impact of emotional labor in professional practice (inductive).

150 **Participants**

151 Participants were recruited via purposive snowball sampling. The sampling criteria
152 included participants who were fully qualified and professionally accredited practitioners, and
153 were actively practicing in the United Kingdom at national sport level. Therefore, research
154 participants were accredited by one or more of the following national governing or regulatory
155 bodies; the General Medical Council (GMC), the Health Care and Professions Council (HCPC),
156 the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES), the British Psychological
157 Society (BPS), the Chartered Society for Physiotherapists (CSP), or the United Kingdom Strength
158 and Conditioning Association (UKSCA).

159 The sample comprised eighteen active sports medicine and science practitioners (15 male,
160 3 female) including six sport and exercise psychologists, five strength and conditioning coaches,
161 five physiotherapists, one sports doctor, and one generic sports scientist. The decision to include
162 various SMS roles in this study was guided by Lerner et al. (2017) to achieve a varied sample to
163 provide insight into emotional phenomena. The hard-to-reach nature of the target population, the
164 lack of sampling frame, and the gender imbalance of SMSs in elite sport (e.g., Bekker & Blake,
165 2016) resulted in a sample that is predominantly male. All participants, either in the past or at
166 present, practiced within a range of individual (e.g., golf, swimming, triathlon) and team based
167 (e.g., football, rugby, cricket) national and international level sports in the United Kingdom.
168 Demographic information such as names and locations were edited and pseudonyms used to
169 depersonalize participant quotations. The number of years of experience for each participant is
170 also displayed in ranges to protect anonymity (see Table 1).

171 **Data collection**

172 Following institutional ethical approval, interviewees were recruited through initial email
173 contact with SMS employed by national sports institutes or listed on publicly accessible registers
174 (e.g. Football Medicine Register). The email included a participant information sheet detailing
175 their ethical rights and what their involvement in the study would include, and an informed
176 consent form. Those practitioners who indicated an interest were contacted to arrange an
177 interview. All participants provided written informed consent prior to the interview. The
178 interviews lasted on average for 63 minutes and were conducted with each participant on a one-
179 to-one basis. Interviews were conducted by the first author either face-to-face ($n = 8$, mean
180 duration 64 minutes), online using Skype video calls ($n = 6$, mean duration 69 minutes), or over
181 the telephone ($n = 4$, mean duration 60 minutes). Seventeen interviews were audio recorded and
182 handwritten notes were made concurrently. One interviewee declined to be audio recorded but
183 consented to the use of their data from the researcher's handwritten notes.

184 **Interview guide.** An interview guide with three sections was developed; the interview
185 structure and questions drew on the research questions and the trifocal theory of emotional labor
186 (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), addressing emotional display requirements, emotion regulation, and
187 emotion performance aspects of emotional labor. Open ended questions were used and pertinent
188 avenues of conversation deemed important to the research questions were probed. The interview
189 guide is available online as supplementary material to the manuscript. One pilot interview was
190 conducted with a sport and exercise scientist and the data is included in this paper.

191 **Data analysis**

192 In keeping with the aims of the study and its interpretivist epistemology, the data were
193 analyzed through interpretive thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). This analysis
194 method was chosen because of its potential to provide insight into people's experiences, as well
195 as any aligned factors or processes that might influence a given phenomenon (Braun et al.,
196 2016). The research team engaged in the six-step analytical process outlined by Braun et al.

197 (2016). First, the data were transcribed verbatim, which produced 516 pages of double-spaced
198 typed text. The first and second authors then read and re-read the transcripts to familiarize
199 themselves with the content. Second, the data were coded in a systematic manner using general
200 labels across the dataset. Memos and codes were handwritten on the transcripts and transferred
201 to a master codebook that included 70 codes. Throughout this process, the first two authors
202 engaged in analytical conversations, looking for concepts that contributed to the research
203 questions. Third, and incorporating stages three to five of the analysis, the codes were
204 developed and organized into themes. For example, codes relating to self-awareness, reflection,
205 and flexibility in emotional labor approach were amalgamated in to the experience theme.
206 Overarching themes representing the subthemes and the interconnectedness of each theme were
207 developed. The themes were reviewed and refined by the research team by creating and
208 progressively altering a thematic map, as well as renaming and defining the themes. The final
209 step of writing up was aided by further analysis in response to peer review comments of an
210 earlier version of the paper, and were integral to the creative analytical process.

211 Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a checklist to promote robust research procedures
212 from start to finish. Following this approach, the research team maintained an audit trail of the
213 transcripts, coding, and analysis phases of the analysis (i.e., paper trail and member checking of
214 the research materials). In alignment with our ontological and epistemological position we also
215 sought to engage with the interpretative potential of the qualitative approach when making
216 sense of the data (Cassidy, 2016). We strove to be reflexive and interactive with one another
217 throughout the analysis phase, attempting to acknowledge and explore the complex nature of
218 elite sport organizations, and the practitioners that operate within them.

219 As a qualitative study, universally applied criteria are inappropriate for its evaluation
220 (see Tracy, 2010) and the method we deployed here was guided by Smith and McGannon
221 (2017) to enhance the substantive contribution of the topic, the emotional and intellectual
222 impact of the topic, and the coherence with which the research questions, method, and results

223 create a meaningful picture. This involved maintenance of an audit trail incorporating both data
224 collection and theoretical matters and aimed for SMS practitioner and academic resonance (i.e.,
225 how the research relates to readers through naturalistic generalization; Smith et al., 2017;
226 Burke, 2016).

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233 how the research relates to readers through naturalistic generalization; Smith et al., 2017;
234 Burke, 2016).

235 **Results**

236 The results are presented under three overarching themes that elucidate emotional labor
237 and professional practice in SMS: (a) factors influencing emotional labor enactment, (b)
238 emotional labor enactment, and (c) professional and personal outcomes. The overarching
239 themes are presented separately for the purposes of organizing the data, yet the themes are not
240 mutually exclusive. Indeed, and as shown in Figure 1, our interpretation of these data are that
241 emotional labor and professional practice in SMS is a social, intersubjective and reflective
242 process whereby SMSs become increasingly aware of the influencing factors and outcomes of
243 their emotional labor enactment through reflection.

244 **Factors influencing emotional labor enactment**

245 The participants spoke at length of personal and situational factors that influenced how
246 they enacted emotional labor. The data suggest a range of contextually specific situations and
247 cultural or organizational expectations as well as personal characteristics that prompted this

248 behavior and the extent to which learning through reflection on past experiences of emotional
249 labor also influenced their subsequent reactions to emotional encounters.

250 **Context.** An influential factor affecting emotional labor enactment was the context or
251 situations practitioners found themselves in with stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, backroom
252 staff) and the specific context of their sport.

253 **Emotional transactions.** The participants described array of emotionally laden
254 contextual situations their work involved, from total elation, “When we won the Premiership, I
255 remember standing in Twickenham stadium looking at a group of men with tears streaming
256 down their face” (Lilly, sport and exercise psychologist), to hopeless despair, “They had lost a
257 player, a team mate, he committed suicide relatively recently” (Rory, sport and exercise
258 psychologist). On occasions, emotional contexts were complex and ambiguous. For example,
259 Jonny, a sport and exercise psychologist, recalled a distressing encounter with a professional
260 cricketer who broke down after receiving a prestigious award from his club due to the
261 emotional trauma of his wife’s post-natal condition:

262 He came onto the balcony and literally a minute later he sat down next to me and was in
263 floods of tears. His wife had just had a baby and she had post-natal depression and was
264 suicidal. You can see people looking at this individual being applauded and at that point,
265 it was the last thing that was important to him. Listening to somebody, supporting them,
266 letting them know that you are available and always be there to support them.

267 Jonny reacted to his client by quickly altering his emotional display (i.e., expressions)
268 having assumed his client would have been feeling happiness after receiving such an honor.
269 Further, Jonny pushed beyond professional remit to show that he cared for his client on a
270 personal level when they were enduring a difficult situation.

271 **Culture.** The different socio-cultural norms of each sport also influenced the emotional
272 labor enactment of SMSs when working with athletes, coaches, performance directors, and
273 SMS staff. Participants were members of, or worked on an ad hoc basis in, varying elite sport

274 organizations across the UK, all of which held divergent histories, values, and aspirations which
275 affected emotional labor enactment. Nuances in culture affected the development of implicit
276 expectations regarding acceptable emotional behaviour, including what emotions to express and
277 avoid, and whether emotions could be spoken about in general.

278 *Emotional display requirements.* Participants described unwritten and implicit
279 expectations regarding emotional displays in their respective roles within sport organizations: “I
280 do not think the emotional side is ever discussed, it is always ‘behaviour’ and what is expected
281 of you.” (Lilly). Yet, it was also clear what emotional displays were appropriate and
282 inappropriate. Regarding appropriate emotional displays, Darren, a sport and exercise
283 psychologist, summarized the implicit consensus between participants regarding professional
284 demeanor with athletes and coaches and how the emotional state of the client or immediate
285 situation influenced whether and which emotional displays were appropriate.

286 I am conscious of keeping neutral facial expressions if we are talking about something
287 negative but when there are things you want to reinforce when there are things that
288 people are getting excited about. I feel like if you reflect that back to someone then they
289 buy into your relationship much more because you come across as understanding.

290 Although all participants provided examples of appropriate and inappropriate emotional
291 displays, they also noted that the interpretation of emotional display requirements was
292 subjective and open to contestation with many ‘grey areas’. These areas were often problematic
293 requiring a combination of experience and professional judgment to decide the most appropriate
294 course of action. Adam, a male physiotherapist, described a conflict between his professional
295 duties as a physiotherapist and his status as an employee of a football club:

296 Players trust you with information of a medical nature... You then make a conscious
297 decision of whether that affects their performance and if you should share that
298 information with the coaches or the manager. However, quite often players might have
299 trusted you with that information either consciously or subconsciously thinking that you

300 won't pass it on. There's an unwritten rule that you choose what to say and who to say it
301 to... But you soon realize that you can't really be a true physiotherapist in a professional
302 sense and in an ethical and moral sense because you can't be confidential.

303 Adam was aware that this situation could be perceived as a violation of trust in the
304 practitioner-client relationship, and could evoke a strong emotional response by the athlete. The
305 potential for emotional labor enactment after disclosing private information is concerning and
306 ethically questionable. Therefore, SMSs find themselves attempting to resolve tensions between
307 professional codes of conduct and the cultural and practice norms in sport organizations.

308 ***Sport organization.*** Interview data also highlighted the unique culture of different sports
309 organizations that permitted certain types of emotional expressions and discouraged others.
310 Zak, a strength and conditioning coach, compared his own experiences in boxing to other sports
311 where the environment affects emotion expressions:

312 So cycling is very sterile. No emotion, no banter. Just get in, get the job done, get out.

313 Whereas boxing is very loose. It is like rugby, there is a lot of chat, there is a lot of
314 banter, so I think managing one's emotions in the boxing is very easy, well it is always
315 hard to do, but it is less energy consuming than it would be in a sterile environment.

316 That is, the respective values and attitudes championed by each sport organization influenced
317 the participants' emotional labor enactment. The interview data revealed a sense of ambiguity;
318 it was important to SMSs that the emotions expressed contributed to professional ends, but
319 sometimes those emotional displays might seem unprofessional to others outside the sport. For
320 example, one topic frequently mentioned was the exchange of banter as Darren recollected:

321 In a football club it is called banter, but there are situations that professional football
322 will put you in and things that you might say in those environments, that you would not
323 say when working with other clients. I would love to give you an example but I am
324 fairly certain it is far too inappropriate.

325 This willingness to be teased was seen to be important to the SMSs' effective
326 functioning, and acceptance by other stakeholders. Nevertheless, SMS were aware of the
327 ambiguity; their professional 'self' might deem the behavior as inappropriate but it was none-
328 the-less considered to be necessary. Stephen, a sports doctor, remarked that despite his
329 professional level of seniority and responsibility, it was important to engage in banter with
330 athletes and other stakeholders to get to know them and appear approachable.

331 **The practitioner.** Participants showed differing interpretations of what appropriate
332 emotional labor enactment constitutes in sports cultures and situations. Throughout the analysis,
333 it was apparent that individual differences between practitioners also affected their emotional
334 labor enactment.

335 *Personal characteristics.* When asked how they express emotions at work, some SMSs
336 reflected on the personal qualities that influenced how they enacted emotional labor.
337 Participants felt it necessary to demonstrate emotion abilities such as emotional intelligence to
338 be successful in their role. Lilly, for example, described her ability to read her disgruntled
339 athlete's emotions:

340 I had a consultation with an athlete on the phone, where that person had not made
341 selection and so their appraisal of that situation is that the coach is useless. I
342 fundamentally disagreed with everything that athlete was saying. Whilst I was listening,
343 I was also internalizing that that person is feeling very emotive, is very frustrated, is
344 very disappointed. The last thing that that person needs is for me to demonstrate that I
345 disagree with them or I am agitated. So you have to. It was completely natural for them
346 to experience a plethora of emotions and totally logical for them to project.

347 Paul, an experienced strength and conditioning coach, highlighted the responsibility and
348 need to 'read' others to achieve work related goals:

349 I think we have to be very good at judging personality types and behaviors, and then be
350 able to respond in the right way to get information across, therefore showing the value

351 that we can deliver... Athletes just behave in their way and the expectation is on you to
352 ensure that you manage your behavior to get the best out of them.

353 For Paul, the ability to judge others' personality, to empathize and be aware of others' emotions
354 was instrumental to achieving effectiveness when practicing.

355 *Experience.* A common element affecting emotional labor enactment was the past
356 experiences of participants. The disparity between the challenges of emotional labor when
357 entering the profession for the first time through to years' worth of experience was evident in
358 participant accounts. Reflection on experience was key to developing the skills required to enact
359 emotional labor and develop flexibility in the ways SMSs reacted to certain situations (see
360 Figure 1). As participants became more experienced interacting with stakeholders, the
361 importance of communicating emotions effectively became clear, especially when seeking
362 credibility as a practitioner. For example, the ability to reflect on emotional labor enactment
363 was perceived as critical to the participants' effectiveness as SMSs, as Lilly articulated:

364 When I think about myself as a person and as a practitioner, I think I could do this job
365 now, I do not think I could have done at the start of my career. Every sport had got its
366 own narrative, its own context, its own rules, and it is quite a unique environment. It is
367 very male dominated, it is very ego driven, and people are not afraid to say what they
368 think. There is a huge emotive aspect to that.

369 Indeed, for many of the practitioners they perceived experience to develop flexibility in one's
370 approach to emotional labor enactment, as Jim mused when trying to push athletes to the best of
371 their ability:

372 It's difficult because I don't think there is an easy way of doing [emotional labor]. It's a
373 question of recognizing when you are under pressure and dealing it. Some players you
374 have to have your arm around them, and sometimes you have to be aggressive with
375 them... actually having a mix of that sometimes works quite well.

376 With increased experience came the confidence to act authoritatively, if required, or
377 affectionately towards athletes without prior concerns about professionalism. Indeed, as
378 indicated in the next theme, emotional labor enactment, it appears that emotional labor
379 perceived as professional depending on the context in which it is performed.

380 **Emotional labor enactment**

381 Given the influence of many personal and situational factors, the data indicate the
382 interplay between felt emotions, observable emotional expressions, and verbal communication
383 in the emotional labor enactment described by participants. Key issues are a sense of ‘acting’
384 out emotions and the ‘authenticity’ that this might connote.

385 **Acting.** Many participants reported instances where they were required to put on a
386 professional ‘act’ in front of stakeholders and to moderate their own emotional behavior, this
387 was dubbed the difference between a good SMS and a bad one by Zak, “I think good coaches
388 are like actors in how they can get people to do things. That is just all about being subtle in the
389 way you say things, how you say things, and how your body language is”. However, the
390 emotions felt by SMSs were not always congruent with observable and verbal expressions; this
391 surface acting displayed by the participants was characterized as the “professional mask”,
392 whereby the SMSs in this study faked emotional expressions needed to appear professional in
393 certain situations. Louise, a sport and exercise psychologist, recalled working with two
394 problematic athletes and the need to conceal her felt emotions:

395 I masked my emotions literally every day with those girls because they were a
396 nightmare. Not only did I not like their behavior, but I did not like one or two of the
397 individuals at all. I had to cover up my feelings because if I told them what I thought of
398 them that would have been the end of our working relationship and the end of my
399 contract quite frankly... because what I wanted to say was not professional.

400 Situations such as these show the effort and self-control required to suppress or to fake
401 emotional expressions. For Louise, the necessity to act professionally outweighed the need to

402 speak out and highlight poor behavior in this case. Despite the discrepancy between Louise's
403 felt emotions and expressed emotions, the need to be remain positive and to act in a
404 professional manner was prioritized.

405 In contrast to such surface acting, some SMSs felt it appropriate to perform deep acting,
406 whereby practitioners purposively modified their felt emotions to be in alignment with the
407 expressions that were required in a specific context. Andrew, a strength and conditioning coach,
408 felt arriving ten minutes early to sessions to prepare emotionally gave him the confidence to
409 execute a coaching session to a high standard and led to appropriate emotions being expressed.
410 "Preparation allows you to focus on the parts of the session that are important, and allows you
411 to be clear about how you are going to manipulate your emotional state to get the result you
412 want from the athletes." In this case, Andrew made the effort to adjust his felt emotions to be
413 positive or neutral with respect to the feelings of the athlete, leading to emotional congruence,
414 and therefore conveyed authenticity to the athlete. Conveying the professional mask through
415 observable expressions to athletes was critical to professional practice, regardless of the method
416 of acting.

417 **Authenticity.** The issues of deep and surface acting are complex and some participants
418 described their need for their internal and external emotions to be congruent, not only for the
419 benefit of stakeholders in sport, but also for themselves. Many SMSs disclosed their awareness
420 of felt emotions in everyday practice and discussed the effortless congruence between felt
421 emotions and emotional expressions in specific situations. Despite this, Andrew reflected that
422 his natural state of authenticity in developing rapport with his athletes could be perceived as
423 problematic by other SMSs:

424 I have always had friendly engagement with my athletes, whereas I think some
425 practitioners will think you cannot be friends with athletes. I think to deny your own
426 tendencies in relation to something like personal relationships is actually a bit false. I

427 still like to be approachable and friendly in professional relationships, rather than cold
428 and typical.

429 Andrew was not typical among the participants, and for many the effort associated with
430 the conflict of felt and expressed emotions was troublesome and depleting. Even so, Rory
431 recognized that authentic emotional displays were not always possible when consulting with
432 athletes. As illustrated by the following quotation, he felt emotions become something that are
433 not advisable or helpful to display:

434 My internal feelings are quite often obvious externally... There are certain
435 circumstances where I control them much better than others, so my natural style is to be
436 very congruent externally and internally... because... to change that... is quite labor
437 intensive. In a one-to-one situation with an athlete or a one-to-two situation with a coach
438 and an athlete or even a group educational session, or where I am doing psychology,
439 then I would [conceal emotions]. You would not be able to tell if I was struggling.

440 Ultimately, for Rory and many of the other participants, the most appropriate
441 professional mask for a given situation must be conveyed, regardless of the increased emotional
442 effort and potentially damaging outcomes.

443 ***Verbal expressions.*** In addition to the silent and observable emotional expressions
444 characterized by “the professional mask” many participants recalled that verbalizing emotions
445 often resulted in avoidable conflict. Ash spoke about how the type of emotions communicated
446 impacted upon others’ personal and professional opinions of him as a physiotherapist:

447 I think you learn quickly not to show yourself up and you learn which individuals you
448 can and can’t say certain things to. You’ve got to be prepared for the backlash, because
449 sometimes [honest, but negative] things do need saying.

450 Clive, a physiotherapist, struggled to understand the injury of an introverted athlete and
451 used positive emotive communication to help the athlete. This way, he created an environment
452 whereby the athlete could talk about the things on his mind:

453 My strategy with the introvert who is not very responsive is to ensure that once a week
454 we have quiet time, where he is free to say anything. It's because our sessions are 100
455 miles an hour otherwise, where I lead a rather clinical meeting. I say, "you're the boss,
456 you're doing the rehab and you tell me what you feel.

457 According to Clive, one result of this emotive communication was athletes 'opening up
458 in a safe environment'. The subsequent information revealed by athletes allowed Clive to better
459 treat the injury and progress their recovery with an enhanced working relationship.

460 **Professional and personal outcomes**

461 Throughout the analysis, outcomes associated with emotional labor enactment were
462 evident in SMSs responses. Participants described how emotional labor enactment was used as
463 a professional tool to achieve work goals, which had professional and personal effects on the
464 practitioner. SMSs highlighted the unique pressures associated with the requirement to persuade
465 athletes to undertake certain interventions.

466 **Professional outcomes.** When discussing the outcomes of their emotional labor
467 participants emphasized their professional priority to enhance sports performance and engage in
468 positive, transformational work with athletes. The data indicate that work leading up to
469 performance improvements is inherently emotional, and requires SMSs to manipulate their
470 emotional expressions to achieve optimal performance environments and working relationships.
471 The analysis indicates that trust and relationship management are important outcomes of
472 emotional labor for SMSs.

473 **Buy in.** Many participants discussed enacting emotional labor to persuade an athlete to
474 cooperate and engage in beneficial activities that would aid their performance. Louise spoke
475 about 'selling the value of sports psychology' to athletes to promote engagement by managing
476 her emotions:

477 It's all about impression management and selling sports psychology. We know goal
478 setting works from the evidence base but if you're not selling goal setting and this
479 person doesn't trust you, then it is not going to work with them.

480 Zak echoed this sentiment and found managing his emotions critical to reaching goals with his
481 athletes:

482 I think unless you can control [your emotions] it is game over because at the end of the
483 day you need that athlete to buy in to what you are doing. You are trying to get them to
484 do something that they may not like, the only way you are going to do that is if you get
485 buy in. It is always about finding what works for that individual and trying to get the
486 emotion across to their level to get the outcome that you want.

487 ***Professional relationships.*** The emotional labor outcomes manifested in professional
488 relationships with clients was indicated-by all the participants as an important part of athlete
489 career improvement. However, negotiating and navigating professional boundaries is complex
490 as no "professional" relationship described was the same and decisions made by the SMS, and
491 the emotions displayed in the practitioner to athlete context was significant for the efficacy of
492 those relationships. Louise stated, "You cannot build a relationship and you cannot build trust
493 without demonstrating appropriate emotions". Louise also reflected that:

494 I think [emotion management] is really important because the way you say things, the
495 way you conduct yourself, the way you manage your reactions to what they may say,
496 influences their whole experience of you... So, you manage your emotions to manage
497 how a person experiences you, that is influencing the relationship. It is the way you sit,
498 the way you react, the way you listen, the eye contact you give, the way you use humor,
499 put people at ease... it all involves emotions and trying to influence someone, not in a
500 manipulative way, but in a way that will help them.

501 Through emotional labor enactment, therefore, SMSs developed rapport and trust, which
502 became the foundation of fruitful professional working relationships and provided the basis for
503 positive athlete engagement.

504 **Positive emotional contagion.** A further outcome of emotional labor, linked with issues
505 of surface and deep acting that participants highlighted relates to the priority of developing
506 positive emotions that increase athlete engagement with the SMS. The data indicate that the
507 interviewees regarded negative emotional displays as unhelpful and unprofessional; the needs
508 of the athlete outweighed personally felt emotions in the workplace. Ryan discussed displaying
509 positive emotions visually and verbally to increase the output of athletes in his sessions:

510 If you are not showing a great deal of enthusiasm for a session that you think is quite
511 important, why should you expect your athletes to not mirror that? The level of emotion
512 I push in my description is going to be something that really gets them engaged.

513 **Personal outcomes.** Although participants were clear about the needs of the athlete they
514 also reported personal detriments associated with their emotional labor and the personal
515 consequences of strains between surface acting and the challenges of achieving professional
516 goals and athlete performance outcomes. This study highlights that there is no right or wrong
517 way of approaching emotional labor when working as a professional SMS. However,
518 inexperience, a lack of reflection on past experiences, or a misjudgment about professional
519 distance had a profound and detrimental personal effect on SMSs. The data indicate the
520 personal and professional pressures of using emotional labor to achieve professional impression
521 management and the struggle to negotiate a balance of personal and professional demands and
522 identity as an SMS.

523 **Responsibility.** Participants in the present study often reported the emotionally charged
524 feeling of personal responsibility when athletes were not performing to the best of their ability.
525 Ash recalled, “You feel very responsible sometimes, like it's actually your fault. It's that ‘Oh
526 God...’ you know? You're feeling responsible for it and you're feeling bad for the player.”

527 Louise questioned her own professional effectiveness and publicly devalued herself on a
528 professional and personal basis when athletes suffered defeat:

529 I have a role to ensure that they achieve and performed optimally when it mattered
530 which is at this event, they weren't. So it wasn't necessarily the moment of emotion
531 regulation that affected me, I mean it was effortful, but I did it so I was proud of myself.
532 It was actually my reflection of 'how have we got to this point? What was my role?
533 What was my failure?' So I actually took it really hard that they had under-performed so
534 significantly. It made me think that I wasn't as good as I thought I was.

535 ***Personal impact.*** The data also suggest complexities associated with emotional labor
536 outcomes; emotional labor to develop relationships with athletes can be significantly positive
537 for professional effectiveness but it also poses a risk should the relationship be suddenly ended.
538 Lilly worked with an athlete over many years, and when this athlete was at a competition in
539 Australia, they became seriously ill, which had knock on effects for the SMS:

540 He was given a less than 5% chance of survival. So you have supported an athlete for
541 prolonged period of time, you have worked with them every week for two or three
542 years, and then you get a call to say, 'I need to let you know, that this person is not
543 likely to survive.' His parents had also received the call who would have then had to
544 have got onto a flight to Australia and would not know whether their child would be
545 dead or alive when they got to the other end. You can't be unaffected by those things.
546 You cannot walk into your house at the end of the day with a smile on your face.

547 The profound impact of situations such as these can have significant implications for
548 SMSs operating in emotionally demanding environments and some SMSs reflected on their
549 own health outcomes as a result.

550 ***Mental health issues.*** The balance between enacting emotional labor and being
551 successful over a prolonged period was reported by SMSs to lead to mental health issues, as
552 illustrated by Jonny's quotation:

553 I think sometimes in managing the demands of work, and the emotional aspects of the
554 work and trying to be successful, my personal life has suffered. So I was effective in
555 what I was doing at work, but it took its toll. And I think sometimes the nature of sport
556 is influential, the unsociable hours, the unpredictability of it, it can be all-consuming,
557 and therefore you look like you are coping with it, and you are, but you are using so
558 much of your resources in trying to cope with it.

559 Lauren made similar comments regarding the demands of SMSs in high performance
560 sport having implications for her mental health:

561 Often, because you feel quite isolated you tend to internalize things. I've got a few little
562 strategies that might help with coping with things like that. But often you don't have an
563 outlet and you've got to be professional all the time.

564 **Discussion**

565 The three overarching themes illustrated how emotional labor impacts SMSs
566 professional practice: (a) factors affecting emotional labor enactment, (b) emotional labor
567 enactment, and (c) professional and personal outcomes. The analysis provides the basis for
568 a model of emotional labor in sports medicine and science (see Figure 1) that emphasizes
569 the importance of experience and reflection for becoming aware of and enacting emotional
570 labor in elite sport organizations. The personal accounts of sports medics,
571 physiotherapists, sport and exercise psychologists, and strength and conditioning coaches
572 underline the value of the findings for a range of audiences, not least: prospective SMSs;
573 those responsible for managing SMS and performance departments in sport organizations;
574 human resources departments in charge of recruiting and retaining talent, and; professional
575 bodies and institutions responsible for educating, training, and developing SMSs for
576 employment in elite sport.

577 Personal and situational characteristics of SMSs are important influences on
578 emotional labor which seems to be a pragmatic issue of emotional control that

579 practitioners in this study needed to deploy when faced with various situations and
580 displays of intense emotions by athletes. As Figure 1 illustrates, emotional labor is
581 developed as a form of tacit knowledge to meet the emotional demands of elite sport. On-
582 the-job experience and the ability to reflect on that experience as a practitioner in the field
583 are important influences on developing capacity for emotional labor enactment. These
584 findings are also apparent in studies of professions such as teaching (Zembylas, 2007) and
585 nursing (Herbig, Büssing, & Ewert, 2001) which indicate that experience and a reflective
586 awareness of emotional knowledge is important when dealing with critical situations.
587 Future research is required to further explore the specific influence of experience, as well
588 as educational and qualification processes, as practitioners who had been in the elite sport
589 context for longer appeared to be better equipped to deal with emotional labor demands
590 than those who were less experienced. To some extent it might be expected that, due to the
591 nature of psychological practice, that sport and exercise psychologists in this study would
592 face numerous and diverse emotion-laden transactions with their clients (principally
593 athletes), some of which fell outside of their professional remit (e.g., clinical mental health
594 issues). Nevertheless, physiotherapists and strength and conditioning coaches also
595 reported similar situations, despite limited professional training for the management of
596 such situations or their emotional fallout. Emotional display requirements were largely
597 influenced by the norms of the sport to an extent (Wagstaff et al., 2012), but these data
598 also show the influence of practitioners' personalities, personal philosophies, and self-
599 awareness.

600 The findings presented here also indicate the relevance of concepts established in
601 the literature (cf. Grandey & Gabriel, 2015); this study provides further evidence of
602 enactment methods of emotional labor (i.e., surface acting, deep acting, and authentic
603 emotional expression). In the case of elite sport, however, participants described their
604 emotions as inherently inter-subjective (i.e., influenced by interactions with others) and

605 performative (i.e., purposefully adjusting observable emotional expressions) in the elite
606 sport socio-cultural context (Tamminen et al., 2017). Indeed, the results of this study
607 indicate that it is reasonable to expect that SMSs, in common with other professional
608 groups such as medical, legal and academic practitioners (Day & Leitch, 2001; Herbig et
609 al., 2001; Anleu & Mack, 2005) will perform a combination of surface acting, deep acting,
610 and authentic emotional expression on any given day via a combination of visual, verbal,
611 and non-verbal communication that conveys professionalism. In response to the array of
612 influential factors on emotional labor enactment, SMSs were aware of the need to wear a
613 “professional mask” and control their emotional reactions. If the appropriate emotions
614 were put across to the athletes in their unique contexts, and were perceived as honest and
615 authentic to athletes, this led to fruitful consequences for professional practice.

616 Figure 1 also identifies outcomes pertaining to the consequences of emotional
617 labor for professional practice in SMS. Participants reported emotional labor to be
618 beneficial to professional practice, but potentially negative in its personal affect.
619 Unreflective behavior was also considered to be detrimental to professional practice.
620 Specifically, the results contribute further evidence about the personal (e.g., mental health
621 issues; Lee et al., 2016) and the professional (e.g., turnover intention or being ousted from
622 a role; Larner et al., 2017) ramifications associated with emotional labor. Despite their
623 awareness of the potentially negative personal implications for practitioners, the
624 participants in this study reported a perceived need to convey the professional emotions to
625 achieve work goals regardless of the method of, or personal cost of, its enactment.

626 A significant contribution from this study is that the achievement of optimal work-
627 related outcomes (i.e., improving athlete performance) was more important than the
628 personal impact of surface or deep acting for SMSs. Given the potentially negative
629 consequences of emotional labor demands, findings such as this highlight the need for
630 governing bodies (e.g., CSP, BPS, British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine)

631 and elite sport organizations to review their range of services to SMSs to raise awareness
632 about the emotional requirements associated with this form of work and the potential
633 effects on practitioner welfare. Further studies into the effects of emotional labor demands
634 on SMS's mental health are also necessary. Such investigations could lead to the design
635 and provision of adequate social support systems (e.g., communities of coping and
636 counselling; Korczynski, 2003) for SMSs when dealing with sensitive issues or difficult
637 life periods, and mitigate professional competency issues before they come into fruition.

638 **Applied implications**

639 Three implications for SMS professional practice arise from the salient
640 competency requirement for emotional labor in the SMS professions. First, emotional
641 labor formed a necessary part of practice in all SMS roles sampled, yet it is currently not
642 evident in ethical codes of conduct and professional practice guidelines (e.g., Health Care
643 and Professions Council) and from policy debates in elite sport organizations. This
644 warrants further attention by these bodies. Second, these findings indicate that an
645 education-training-practice gap exists in SMS with regards to the emotional labor
646 requirements of professional practice. It may be that neophyte practitioners are unaware of
647 the need to enact emotional labor to stakeholders and in differing situations, or the reasons
648 as to why they may enact emotional labor. Previous research has shown the usefulness and
649 effectiveness of reflective practice in sport and performance psychology (Devonport &
650 Lane, 2014), sports physiotherapy (Hollingworth, Dugdill, & Prenton, 2014) and sports
651 coaching (Peel, Cropley, Hanton, & Fleming, 2013). Third, Figure 1 indicates the priority
652 of encouraging reflective practice to understand the intersection between emotional labor
653 and practical skills throughout taught education, training and continuing professional
654 development initiatives to enables practitioners to personally and professionally benefit
655 from reflecting on experiences (their own and that of others) of emotional labor.

656 These results and our interpretation of them indicate several avenues for further
657 research. Specifically, given the pragmatic use of emotional labor dependent on the
658 situation (i.e., event characteristics), and individual differences contingent to the
659 practitioner (i.e., person characteristics) reported here, we encourage practitioners to
660 provide their own in-depth ethnographic accounts to illustrate their personal experiences
661 of emotional labor (e.g., factors influencing emotional labor, emotional labor enactment,
662 professional and personal outcomes). For example, original accounts by practitioners in
663 sport professions would provide meaningful, more personalized understandings of the
664 manifestations of emotional labor and the effects it may have on professional practice.
665 Further, the exploration of emotional labor requirements across various stakeholder roles
666 (e.g., athletes, coaches, SMSs, Performance Directors) and the potential interchange
667 between these individuals and groups would further elucidate the emotional demands
668 faced by a range of stakeholders in sport organizations.

669 **Limitations**

670 Two principal limitations of this study are acknowledged. First, the inclusion
671 criteria for this study and the snowball sampling strategy led to the recruitment of a
672 sample that is predominantly male. This is aligned with the current male domination of
673 SMS professions; European Union statistics indicate fewer women working in sport (43%)
674 compared to men (57%) in the UK (Eurostat, 2015) and gender inequality has been
675 identified in sport and exercise medicine (Bekker et al., 2016), strength and conditioning
676 coaching (Magnusen & Rhea, 2009), and sports psychology (Lovell, Parker, Brady,
677 Cotterill, & Howatson, 2011). Therefore, the study findings might not represent the
678 potentially gendered emotional labor required by females in male dominated environments
679 and this represents an area where further research is required. Second, a combination of
680 face-to-face, telephone, and computer mediated interviewing (i.e., Skype) was used to
681 interview participants and this diversity brings with it a limitation (Hanna, 2014) as visual

682 cues and a volume of contextual and nonverbal data were not available from non-face to
683 face interactions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

684 **Perspectives**

685 This study provides a novel exploration of the emotional labor experiences of SMS
686 practitioners operating in elite sport in the UK. It shows that emotional labor enactment is
687 critical to professional effectiveness, despite potentially negative personal outcomes. The
688 consistent perceived necessity of emotional labor enactment in SMS professional practice
689 raises the question as to whether emotional labor should be considered a professional
690 competency and thus included in education and training. These findings should inform
691 policy and practice in sport organizations (e.g., national sport organizations), Higher
692 Education Institutions involved with training prospective SMSs, professional bodies
693 involved with the training and development of SMSs (e.g., BASES, BPS, CPS), and
694 professional practice bodies in charge of producing ethical codes of conduct and
695 regulating such professions (e.g., Health Care and Professions Council).

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1 **Table 1.** Participant demographic information.

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender	Professional Role	Qualifications/ Accreditation	Practitioner experience
Louise	Female	Sport and exercise psychologist	BSc, MSc, PhD/ BPS, BASES (psychology – scientific support)	16 – 20 years
Ash	Male	Physiotherapist	BSc, PGCert/HPCP, CSP	0 – 5 years
Jim	Male	Physiotherapist	BSc, Dip, MSc/HPCP, CSP FSMM	20+ years
Roger	Male	Sport and exercise psychologist	BSc, MSc, PhD/ BPS, HCPC, BASES (psychology – scientific support)	11 – 15 years
Jonny	Male	Sport and exercise psychologist	BSc, PhD/BPS, HCPC	20+ years
Darren	Male	Sport and exercise psychologist	BSc, MSc/BPS, HCPC	6 – 10 years
Lauren	Female	Physiotherapist	BSc, MSc, PGCert/HPCP, ACPSEM, CSP	11 – 15 years
Lilly	Female	Sport and exercise psychologist	BSc, MSc, PhD/ BPS, HCPC	11 – 15 years
Andrew	Male	Strength and conditioning coach	BSc, MSc/UKSCA	16 – 20 years
Zak	Male	Strength and conditioning coach	BSc, MSc/ UKSCA	6 – 10 years
Ryan	Male	Strength and conditioning coach	BSc, MSc/UKSCA	11 – 15 years
Frank	Male	Sports scientist	BA, MA	0 – 5 years
David	Male	Strength and conditioning coach	BSc, MSc/ UKSCA, BASES (sport and exercise scientist)	6 – 10 years
Paul	Male	Strength and conditioning coach	BSc, MSc/ UKSCA	11 – 15 years
Stephen	Male	Sports Doctor	MD, MSc BSc, MSc, BSc, MSc, PhD/BASES	11 – 15 years
Rory	Male	Sport and exercise psychologist	(psychology – scientific support), BPS, HCPC	11 – 20 years
Adam	Male	Physiotherapist	BSc, MSc, PGCert/CSP, HCPC	11 – 15 years
Clive	Male	Physiotherapist	BSc/CSP, HCPC	16 – 20 years

1 **Figure 1:** Emotional labor and professional practice in sports medicine and science
2 practitioners.

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