

1 Same game, many cultures: A multicultural reflection on a Trainee's
2 intervention work with an elite esports team

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11
12 Abstract

13 This applied case study aims to explore the experience and multicultural reflections of a
14 trainee sport and exercise psychologist working with a professional, multicultural esports team. We
15 showcase the context of the case with a League of Legends team, consisting of five players, along
16 with the intervention conducted. The case is supplemented by critical reflections on practice in a
17 multicultural context from learning logs, applied practice notes, with the T-R-E-E-S model (Gupta,
18 2022) for multicultural practice in sport psychology. This study delves into several critical aspects,
19 namely: a) recognizing multicultural elements, b) customizing interventions to the dynamic esports
20 environment, c) scrutinizing how language and culture impact team cohesion, and d) considering
21 individual boundaries in personal-disclosure interventions. Finally, as one of the first case studies to
22 reflect on multicultural practice in esports, we provide key recommendations and implications to
23 promote multicultural work in research and applied practice in esports.

24 *Keywords: multicultural competence, cultural sports psychology, esports, embedded*
25 *practitioner, applied practice, global*

27 **Context**

28 **Introduction to Esports**

29 Esports is the organised competitive activity within a structure where e'athletes
30 compete online and/or in local-area-network tournaments at the professional or amateur level
31 in contrast to video games which are more recreational (Pedraza-Ramirez et al., 2020).

32 Esports differ according to game genre and games within a genre (García-Lanzo &
33 Chamarro, 2018) which necessitates distinct mental skills (Cottrell et al., 2018) and provide
34 significant physical and mental challenges to e'athletes such as long practice hours, complex
35 team dynamics, and competitive pressures (DiFrancisco-Donoghue et al., 2019; Martin-
36 Niedecken & Schättin, 2020). Research also indicates that esports athletes (e'athletes) face
37 longitudinal stressors over time in the highly changeable competitive environment of the
38 industry (Poulus et al., 2022a; 2022b).

39 Applied practice has observed the use of personal disclosure mutual sharing (PDMS)
40 interventions within traditional sports like cricket (Barker et al. 2014), football academy
41 (Evans et al., 2013), and a football team (Windsor et al., 2011) for the purpose of team
42 building, social identities, team identity based on results, and enhance team performance.
43 Due to the technological element of esports and its culture, telecommunication is often used
44 to conduct sport psychology sessions (Cottrell et al., 2018). Teammates can also
45 communicate and participate in esports while being in different geographical locations (Lin et
46 al., 2023). This proves that esports as a sub-section of sport is inherently multicultural in its
47 athletes, team systems, coaches and even gameplay.

48 **Esports Across Nationality and Growth**

49 The esports industry has seen exponential growth with global revenues reaching
50 US\$1.1 billion and the audience approaching US\$453.8 million per annum (Pannekeet,
51 2019). Online viewership and social media have been instrumental to spreading esport across

52 global national boundaries with platforms such as Twitch, Steam, Dlive and others allowing
 53 cross-cultural growth (Qian et al., 2020). Estimates indicate that more than 30% of the global
 54 population participate in the esports industry with countries in Southeast Asia and other
 55 developing countries witnessing increased participation (Schmidt, 2021). According to the
 56 Indian Gaming Report 2022, the Indian esports market is expected to grow from
 57 US\$40million in 2022 to US\$140 million in 2027 with the number of players growing from
 58 150,000 in 2021 to 600,000 in 2022, a near threefold increase (ETtech, 2023). Similar growth
 59 rates have been observed globally (Statista, 2023).

60 While esports started out primarily in the Global North and West, in recent years there
 61 has been a convergence of Western and Asian esports cultures (see Seo, 2013) leading to the
 62 global internationality of esports. This can be seen when analysing the convergence through
 63 Hofstede's cultural dimensions of a) indulgence versus restraint; b) power-distance; c)
 64 individualism versus collectivism; d) long versus short term orientation; e) masculinity versus
 65 femininity; f) uncertainty avoidance (see Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Research has examined
 66 the participation profiles in esport and e'athlete performance via Hofstede dimensions to
 67 indicate cultural differences (Parshakov & Zavertiaeva, 2015). Other studies have also
 68 focused on e'athletes and consumers of esports in multiple countries across the world as
 69 participation in esports has become multicultural and multinational (Lokhman et al., 2018;
 70 Menasce, 2017; Szablewicz, 2011; Zang et al., 2007).

71 **Applied Sport Psychology in Esports**

72 Bányai et al., (2019) explored the relationship between esports and sport psychology
 73 to categorise three main areas: a) the journey to become an esports athlete; b) the
 74 psychological and skill execution characteristics of esport athletes; c) the pressures of
 75 competition concluding that the developmental journey to be an esports athlete is similar to
 76 that of a professional athlete in traditional sport in terms of training, preparation, obstacles

77 and mental skills. Systematic review evidence highlights cognitive performance parameters
78 of cognitive flexibility, executive functions, inhibitory control, game-relevant expertise,
79 linguistic communication, strategic thinking and competitive anxiety due to spectator
80 pressure as key elements of applied sport psychology areas (Pedraza-Ramirez et al., 2020).

81 Where esports can act as a sole means of professional livelihood for e'athletes (Thiel
82 & John, 2018), e'athletes may benefit from mental training, similar to traditional sport, in
83 order to improve performance and maintain mental health (Himmelstein et al., 2017;
84 Monteiro Pereira et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2022), and help the management of psychological
85 demands that provides a growing opportunity for applied support (Trotter et al., 2021).
86 Interventions have been found to focus on relaxation, self-talk, team building, motivation,
87 performance under pressure and self-regulation (see Leis et al., 2023; Poulus et al., 2022a;
88 Swettenham & Whitehead, 2022).

89 **Need for multicultural considerations in applied sport psychology interventions**

90 Systematic reviews (See Bányai et al., 2019; Cottrell et al., 2018; Pedraza-Ramirez et
91 al., 2020) have highlighted esports to have its separate sub-culture in the sport. However, to
92 our knowledge, this reflective case study is the first work to actively consider and review
93 multicultural experiences in esports applied sport psychology. This is a limiter for effective
94 practice since esports teams and athletes are diverse (Lin et al., 2023; Pizzo et al., 2023;
95 Scholz, 2012). Culturally competent applied practice has been shown to improve athlete
96 experience, effective coping strategies and improved intervention outcomes (Schinke et al.,
97 2012). Conversely, lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness reduces participation
98 (McGannon & Schinke, 2013), decreases performance (Blodgett et al., 2011) and fosters
99 feelings of social isolation (Smith, 2013). The lack of multicultural research in esports can
100 also reinforce cultural blindness and homogeneity bias, (i.e., belief that the groups and
101 stakeholders are homogenous and have similar values when in reality they are diverse and

102 heterogeneous, Hacker & Mann, 2017). However, to our knowledge there is no research
103 informing applied practice in the field. This reflective case study aims to provide an account
104 on case formulation and intervention within service delivery, reflect on applied practice from
105 a multicultural lens on the intervention with a culturally diverse esports team and provide the
106 initial impetus to guide multicultural research in esports.

107 **The Team**

108 Team 'Rayzick' (pseudonym) was competing in the League of Legends (LoL) game
109 in an elite level European esports league at the time of the case study. LoL is a multiplayer
110 online battle area which has the ultimate aim of annihilating the opponent's Nexus, (i.e., their
111 base of operation). A team consists of five players playing different positions, mainly
112 'toplaner', 'midlaner', 'jungler', 'support' and 'botlaner/ADC'. Each position has a set of
113 responsibilities in their roles while navigating the map and completing tasks of the game for a
114 win. For example, a 'jungler' is responsible for killing AI monsters, acquiring experience
115 (XP) and earning gold. Team Rayzick was comprised of five professional experienced
116 players within LoL game role between 20 and 30 years of age. They were specifically
117 recruited and organised before the competitive season which lasts for approximately 3
118 months (mid-January to mid-April)¹. Players had 2-10 years of experience in competitive
119 LoL and experience competing in other esports (e.g., Heroes of the Storm, StarCraft). Some
120 players had personal and professional friendships from previous teams. Most athletes spoke
121 the same language (Swedish) and used LoL specific terminology (i.e., 'lingo') that was
122 required in gameplay.

¹ *Note:* new athlete added to the team mid-season.

123 Rayzick sought psychological services from an extended performance support team of
124 which I was a part. Contracting for the scheme of work was conducted between the esports
125 team and performance support team with the trainee engaging in contracting directly with the
126 athletes who sought one-to-one support (confidentiality, ethics, remit of work; see below).
127 The service delivery with Rayzick was contracted to three months, (i.e., the spring season,
128 has concluded at time of writing).

129 **The Practitioner**

130 I (Author 1) am a female sport and exercise psychologist in training enrolled on a
131 Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at a university in the United
132 Kingdom. This case explores one of my early careers applied work experience, and my first
133 time working in esports. My professional philosophy is informed by training requirements on
134 the professional doctorate, whereby I adopt a person-centred therapy (PCT) approach
135 (Rogers, 1957; Gupta & Duncan in press). PCT is a humanistic approach that is athlete
136 focused where athlete needs are worked on via unconditional positive regard, warmth, and
137 empathy to create facilitative conditions for change (Rogers, 1957; Mearns et al., 2013; see
138 other examples in sport Black & McCarthy, 2020; Davis & McCarthy, 2022). In line with my
139 professional philosophy, my practice is focused on developing psychological contact via
140 strong therapeutic relationships with the athlete and the coach. I deliver service provisions in
141 accordance with Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Proficiency (2018),
142 Standards of conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016), and the British Psychological
143 Society's Code of Conduct and Ethics (2021). I was virtually introduced to the team in
144 January 2023 as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist one week into the competitive
145 season. I was in regular contact with the multi-disciplinary performance team during the three
146 months of service delivery and an added period of two weeks for review. The

147 multidisciplinary team consisted of a lead sport and exercise psychologist (SEP), second
148 experienced SEP, a trainee SEP, a senior performance coach and a second performance
149 coach. The male, lead sport and exercise psychologist were registered with the Health and
150 Care Practitioners Council and chartered with the British Psychological Society, with
151 experience working in esports and traditional sport. He helped me to co-construct knowledge
152 of the game, analyse the needs of the team, and reflect on my applied practice through virtual
153 weekly meetings with the team, online personal chats, and one-to-one supervision with the
154 two SEPs. Contracting for one-on-one work and group workshops were conducted to ensure
155 confidentiality, remit of work, and evaluation in accordance with the best practice guidance.

156 **Critical Reflection Model**

157 During my doctorate, I (Author 1) have based reflective practice on Anderson et al.'s
158 (2004) model of contextually reflective practice. Combining this with the ethos of critical
159 reflective practice (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010), the purpose of reflection was to
160 acknowledge personal and professional sociocultural-political contexts within my applied
161 work. Specifically, I reflected-in-action, engaged in reflection-on-action to inform my future
162 practice via reflexion-for-action (Farrell, 2012). Specific to multicultural reflections, I
163 adopted the Gupta (2022) T-R-E-E-S model to connect case-based instances to a larger
164 multicultural landscape.

165 The purpose of this work is to embrace the call to action on how sport cultures,
166 norms, social identities and multicultural contexts influence client mental state and team
167 cohesion in line with cultural sport psychology (e.g., Horn, 2008; Gupta & Divekar, 2022;
168 Krane & Baird, 2005; Ryba, 2017; Schinke et al., 2012). We outline the intervention
169 conducted and reflect on multicultural consideration within the case using the T-R-E-E-S
170 model developed by Gupta, 2022. In the T-R-E-E-S model, T stands for theory and evidence,
171 which serve as foundations for applied practice; R stands for research we engage in, both

172 formal and informal; E stands for ethics that influence the direction of our actions; E stands
173 for our experience and how we reflect on it; and S stands for context specificity. This model
174 helps the applied practitioner to find meaning in their experiences, introspect, explore and
175 recognize their “self/selves”, how we perceive ourselves and others in the world, and our
176 biases (Gupta, 2022).

177 **The Case**

178 **Intake and Needs Analysis**

179 Needs analysis was an ongoing process through the season and conducted by the
180 multidisciplinary team using methods of questionnaire, behavioural observation, stakeholder
181 analysis (coach, manager, multidisciplinary team) and analysis of game-specific demands.
182 Elements of the game, in-game roles and responsibilities and communication patterns in the
183 team were described to analyse game-specific demands. The initial needs analysis was
184 conducted with an online open-ended questionnaire developed by the senior performance
185 coach. The questionnaire was sent to and completed by the coach and the players reflecting
186 upon their personal and team goals, strengths and challenges within the team (for example,
187 “What do we need to do to have the best chance of achieving set goals?”).

188 Identified from the responses to the questionnaire, a key difference within the players
189 was their different prioritisation on enjoyment versus winning the league. Improved training
190 practices requiring honest, open communication about the game, informal conversation and
191 environmental restructuring to create an environment that balanced challenge and support to
192 promote confidence and resilience (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016) was another area of focus. A
193 key challenge I identified during initial observations of team interaction during scrimms, was
194 the feedback process and management of opinion differences, strategy for drafting (selecting
195 in-game champion before a game) and game plays. Due to the recent formation of the team

196 pre-competition, trust, respect, understanding of the roles of other players and compassion
 197 was limited. The coach and one player reported feeling stuck between disagreements and
 198 emotionally supporting one or the other. These issues identified within needs analysis are
 199 common within esports (Leis et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2019) and hindered team cohesion
 200 (e.g., coming to a mutual decision on selecting an in-game champion during draft) affecting
 201 team performance and environment.

202 Observations in the applied context were utilised as a second source of information
 203 during needs analysis (Holder & Winter, 2017)². Overt observations of scrims and matches
 204 were made online wherein the trainee watched and listened to game plays and player
 205 interaction with little to no intervening. Observations allowed the trainee to understand
 206 nuances, the game-specific terminologies, slang and accents of the players³. Understanding
 207 nuances of the game itself, such as game-specific terminologies, slang references, and accents
 208 of players were challenging for me at first. Developing game knowledge and grasping
 209 multiple accents was facilitated by a performance coach in the multidisciplinary team who
 210 had prior e'athlete and coaching experience within LoL. This helped me to understand the
 211 contextual uniqueness of LoL more readily by asking the performance coach about LoL
 212 terminology, performance demands, and game rules. Team Rayzick's coach added to this
 213 game knowledge in weekly meetings and virtual chats. The coach also helped the
 214 performance team in building understanding of issues identified in observations and the
 215 initial needs analysis, including interplay of in-game roles (e.g., jungler) and intra team
 216 dynamics. For example, 'Sheldon' (player 1) was observed to have leadership behaviours in
 217 scrims and matches, which was later clarified by Rayzick's coach and the performance coach

² A simple participatory observation was adopted where I made notes of what I believed to be key elements (Holder & Winter, 2017).

³ The term 'scrim' stands short for "scrimmage" which is an online practice match (often competitive games) between teams and many players in unranked matches.

218 that in his role as “jungler” in LoL game, he would have to listen and mediate disagreements
 219 within gameplay.

220 **Case Formulation and Intervention Planning**

221 Two group-level interventions consisted of a) psychoeducational workshops and b)
 222 group level participatory interventions such as PDMS (Barker et al., 2014) that would
 223 provide space for development on the needs of the team identified through needs analysis.
 224 The psychoeducational workshop aimed to a) increase open and honest communication, and
 225 b) build working relationships, while the group level participatory intervention (PDMS)
 226 aimed to c) increase adaptability to others’ beliefs, attitudes, efficacy, and feedback, and d)
 227 develop positive team environment. Both interventions were tailored by identifying the needs
 228 of the team, the target team behaviour and expected outcomes. For example, needs analysis
 229 prior to workshop one indicated need to improve training practices, leading us
 230 (multidisciplinary team) to target feedback process and effective communication and
 231 expected resolve in intra-team conflict and improved team performance. Aligned with the
 232 person-centred approach of being genuine and authentic in a relationship by being open and
 233 honest with other, I aimed to provide empathy, warmth and care to build relationships and
 234 understand the individual with a non-judgemental attitude which may foster growth in
 235 individuals and motivate them to work towards their goals in a fully-functioning way.

236 **Intervention Delivery**

237 ***Workshop One: identifying team and individual goals and effective training practices***

238 Following needs analysis, the first online workshop was prepared by the senior
 239 performance coach in the multidisciplinary team. This workshop explored team and
 240 individual goals, communication issues during training and identification of strategies to

241 manage them. To support me and the performance coach (early career practitioners) in
242 gaining applied experience in our roles within esports, we were given the autonomy to
243 approach the delivery of the workshop in a way that aligned with our philosophies (non-
244 directive and directive, respectively). The performance coach and I delivered the workshop
245 online with the aim of facilitating an environment that encourages players to develop in-game
246 skills, abilities within the game, social competence and adaptability to teammate attitudes.
247 The focus was on effective training practices, including constructive feedback, effective
248 communication demonstrating trust and efforts in training optimally (Abbott et al., 2022).
249 Aligned to a person-centred approach, I asked players non-directive open-ended questions to
250 initiate interactions about feelings and thoughts amongst them on a specific situation, e.g.,
251 opinion differences, that occurs frequently within games. Each athlete was encouraged to
252 share their thoughts and feelings. This psychoeducational approach helped reinforce the team
253 goal of the season which was to win the European-based league. The interactions between the
254 facilitators (myself and the performance coach) and the athlete focused on training practices
255 and how they linked into shared differences for game-specific factors. Players shared how the
256 action of the other teammate influences their own performance and mood during games.
257 Stuart shared that interpersonal conflicts within any two players negatively affected the team
258 environment and he felt irritated during conflicts. They discussed team issues with strong
259 personal thoughts and feelings. Towards the end of the workshop prompts (e.g., What would
260 your calm response be towards negative/conflicting feedback?) were provided on
261 communication improvement strategies to improve team functioning. The team engaged in a
262 shared development on goal setting for their next training with each player developing a goal
263 on how they would respond to a triggering situation. For instance, Howard (player 2) planned
264 to listen to feedback, understand the other's perspective and respond with acknowledgement
265 of the feedback. This personal aim of improving communication was expected to help

266 maintain a positive team environment. In evaluation of the workshop by the players, they
 267 expressed their need to learn on how to improve team dynamics, give game-specific
 268 examples, and share their opinions directly. This evaluation of the workshop from the players
 269 was valuable in informing goals for workshop two.

270 ***Workshop Two: PDMS***

271 PDMS (personal disclosure mutual sharing) is a team-building strategy in which
 272 individuals publicly share previously unknown personal tales and facts to team members
 273 (Holt & Dunn, 2006). The ~~second~~ workshop on PDMS aimed at disclosure of personal stories
 274 that athletes had not shared with teammates before. Based on observations on personal and
 275 game-related interactions between players, I proposed to the lead psychologist on conducting
 276 a PDMS workshop. We planned to conduct a relationship-based personal disclosure mutual
 277 sharing (r-PDMS) workshop with the aim to strengthening team identity and mutual
 278 understanding between players by gaining a collective understanding between players of their
 279 personal stories (beyond esports and within esports), and values, beliefs, attitudes and
 280 personal motives (Barker et al., 2014; Windsor et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2013). The process
 281 of introducing PDMS to the team was adopted from Barker et al.'s (2014) delivery to an elite
 282 cricket team and tailored for the current case. Considering the need of the team and mitigate
 283 the risk of complete closedness from players and following the protocol of Barker et al.
 284 (2014), we shared the following instructions with players on a group Discord server a day
 285 prior to the workshop.

286 *“Describe a personal story/situation that will help your teammates understand*
 287 *yourself more. Detail a personal story that you would want everyone to know about, one that*
 288 *would make them want to be in the same team as you and want to play alongside you. Your*
 289 *story can be related to any event that took place in your personal life or in your sporting life.*

290 *Your story should illustrate something that defines your character, your motives and your*
291 *desires.*” (Barker et al., 2014)

292 The PDMS intervention aimed to develop a sense of shared identity and attitudes,
293 understanding and increasing empathy between team members (Windsor et al., 2011) to
294 address a few concerns noted through the needs analysis, one being that players may lack
295 access to their teammates’ body language during scrimms and matches because their cameras
296 were turned off. This restricted players from seeing their teammates emotions and attitudes
297 when they spent time together (Venter, 2019). A lack of team-building activities and in-
298 person contact in the initial stages of team formation added to lack of understanding of the
299 emotion behind words and tone of voice (Venter, 2019) and prevented players connecting on
300 interests beyond esports. Additionally, Howard was substituted by a Barry (new player)) in
301 the later weeks of the competitive season who had previously played with Sheldon in an
302 esports team. These factors were expected to play a role in relationship building, mutual
303 understanding, trust and respect between the team whilst having an impact on team cohesion.
304 Substitution of a player had an impact on team dynamics where Barry’s expertise, personality
305 and personal relationship with Sheldon played a role in him mediating game strategies,
306 boosting team morale and some conflict management in the team.

307 The lead psychologist and I discussed facilitation of a PDMS workshop, potential
308 barriers to sharing personal stories and prompts to encourage sharing in addition to the open-
309 ended description of the activity. Preparing for the workshop with the lead psychologist made
310 me confident in the content of the workshop as it was my first PDMS workshop. I felt
311 nervous about my capabilities in facilitating the workshop. The lead psychologists’ presence
312 and ways of co-facilitation put me at ease and built my confidence to speak my observations
313 and prompt players. Potential uptake of the PDMS workshop was discussed with the coach

314 and manager of team Rayzick. They were doubtful of the players openness to sharing their
315 personal life stories.

316 Players and the coach were encouraged to keep their cameras on, listen to each other,
317 and be curious. Three players, including Barry and Bert (coach), kept their cameras on.
318 During the workshop, each player opened up about their personal and professional journey,
319 impact of friends and family in their growth and ambitions in and outside esports. The lead
320 psychologist and I asked follow-up questions to the players, pointing out shared meanings
321 and distinctiveness within their values, beliefs and experiences. Surprisingly, Leonard (player
322 3) and Rajesh (player 4), two players who had the highest in-game conflict rate, were found
323 to be the most curious about each other and formed deep relationships with the rest of the
324 players. All players showed excellent psychological contact, shared laughter, surprise, and
325 mutual appreciation towards each other on personal relationships, education and esports
326 related experience. On the contrary, Bert was not open about himself and his experience
327 within esports. This led to awkwardness and silence for a few seconds as it was unexpected
328 when players had shared their journey. Bert's closedness may also be explained by
329 personality traits (e.g., openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism
330 and agreeableness) playing a role as indicated in a recent study (Birch et al., 2023; see also
331 Matuszewski et al., 2020) with Counter Strike: Global Offensive e'athletes. However, there is
332 lack of evidence on coaches' personality in esports to support this explanation.

333 **Monitoring and Evaluation**

334 The monitoring and evaluation of service delivery primarily centred on observation of
335 coach and players' interpersonal interactions during scrimms and matches. The coach feedback
336 was verbally collected during weekly meetings which allowed me and the lead sport
337 psychologist to discuss and monitor progress towards the intervention aims. The coach

338 reflected and highlighted that he had an autonomy-style leadership where he encouraged
339 players to share their opinions and strategies. Issues in team dynamics (e.g., during feedback,
340 outside scrimms) remained after the workshops and maintained an unfavourable training
341 environment during scrimms and before games. For example, I observed several team issues
342 (e.g., managing differences in opinion, players' uptake of positive and negative feedback
343 from other players) during drafting, mutual understanding of gameplay and receiving
344 feedback. The coach had to navigate the differences within players during game-play
345 feedback and drafting.

346 However, collecting feedback through objective and exploratory questions online
347 from players at the end of workshops led to honest feedback on their needs and feelings from
348 PDMS. For example, Leonard, Rajesh and the new player (Barry) enjoyed and had a better
349 understanding about their teammates from listening to others' experiences, Stuart found the
350 session 'good', but Sheldon gave no feedback. Rajesh, Stuart and Leonard also shared
351 personal situations (e.g., long working hours outside esports, university coursework, sleep
352 deprivation, family time) that influenced their mood during the game and performance. Such
353 scenarios within players after the workshops demonstrated development of trust between
354 them as they openly shared their life circumstances outside esports that played role in esports
355 performance. Some improvements in feedback processes were also observed. For example,
356 Leonard consistently paused before giving his opinions to a player he had conflicts with. He
357 also made an active attempt to listen and motivate another player who was not feeling
358 confident in their ability. There were also instances where Rajesh and Leonard acknowledged
359 their mistakes within the game.

360 Feedback from the performance coach pointed out that some issues persisted when I
361 was not present during games. Leonard and Sheldon had consistent arguments over game

362 plays. Sheldon and Stuart felt frustrated as well over the other players' arguments as shared
363 by the coach and Stuart. Conflicting messages were obtained from my observations and the
364 performance coach's observation. On reflection with the lead psychologist, it appeared that
365 my appraisal of situations may be different to others as I tend to see good in others. On
366 further dwelling over this aspect, I understood it may have been the impact of parenting and
367 upbringing I have experienced which helps maintain a relationship with someone based on
368 the positives in a person. However, it could also be due to my presence as a conflict mediator
369 within the team which influenced players' interactions. No other measure was used to
370 identify impact of intervention other than my observations and weekly meetings with coach
371 and manager. Additionally, a feedback form was sent to players which received no response.
372 I further reflect on evaluation methods and the issue of no-response in the section below.

373 **Multicultural Reflections**

374 **Understanding The Multicultural Elements Within The Esports Team**

375 A key ethical parameter and professional value I hold is prizing equality, (i.e., treating
376 people equally and with respect regardless of personal characteristics). To ensure that players
377 to not feel pressured to disclose personal information on their identity I did not mandate all
378 demographic details in the intake questionnaire. For example, religion and socioeconomic
379 status was not collected. While this was an ethical attempt to respect personal boundaries,
380 there was an unintended consequence which I recalled later reflecting-on-action after initial
381 work (Anderson et al., 2004). I did not fully consider the team composition from a cultural
382 perspective because I was unaware of the overlap between cultural differences and
383 similarities between players. Tod et al. (2017) and Quartiroli et al. (2021), highlight that
384 personal characteristics and their acknowledgement are linked to effective practice.
385 Reflecting-for-action I note that I did not spend enough time considering myself in the

386 context of applied work. I myself have played a team sport (football) with athletes of
 387 different national and state (county) origins, ages, diverse socioeconomic and educational
 388 backgrounds, skill level, and languages that has influenced team dynamics (Gupta & Divekar,
 389 2022; Ong & Harwood, 2018), which influenced how I thought multicultural elements would
 390 impact team formation. The teams I was part of had similar cultural and linguistic markers
 391 which facilitated team communication.

392 In Team Rayzick, this was different, since players had different national, cultural and
 393 linguistic backgrounds. I did observe these team dynamics and made notes of them but did
 394 not make sense of them initially. There is limited research in multicultural diversity within
 395 esports and the studies (Parshakov et al., 2018; Scholz, 2012), that are conducted base
 396 cultural diversity on limited characteristics, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions
 397 (individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and cultural intelligence,
 398 language and diversity in skill; Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Research indicates that cultural
 399 diversity measured on Hofstede's given dimensions, and esports experience/ skill, may or
 400 may not be beneficial in team performance within esports (Parshakov et al., 2018). There is
 401 some evidence on intracultural dimensions but very little within 'multicultural' dimensions
 402 which studies interplay of age, ethnicity, gender and gamer identity with team composition
 403 and team dynamics within esports (see Parshakov & Zavertiaeva, 2015; Parshakov et al.,
 404 2018; Prat, 2002). Reflecting in action and for action, I gradually paid more attention to
 405 multicultural markers and sought context specific clarifications from the performance coach
 406 and other sport psychologists within the multidisciplinary team to mitigate this gap in my
 407 service-delivery following the T-R-E-E-S model (Gupta, 2022). While doing so, I uncovered
 408 details on pre-existing friendships between Leonard and Howard as they had played within
 409 the same team previously. Sheldon and Rajesh got to know each other within team Rayzick
 410 and spoke Swedish, which helped them in building their relationship. I also noted how

411 players were of similar ages, yet vast difference in their experience within esports which
 412 contributed to the social identity formation of the group (Lin et al., 2023; McLaren et al.,
 413 2022; Rees et al., 2015)

414 **Cultural and Linguistic Differences**

415 Within esports, cultural and linguistic diversity in a team is welcomed because it
 416 brings creativity and “out of the box” thinking (Prat, 2002), carries unique skills relevant to
 417 their unique backgrounds and performance of tasks in the team (Brandes et al., 2009).
 418 Literature indicates that intercultural teams may stimulate and motivate e’athletes to improve
 419 their own skills (Parshakov & Zavertiaeva, 2015). E’athletes speaking a common language is
 420 desirable to facilitate intrateam communication (Parshakov et al., 2018) but having diversity
 421 can also increase team efficiency in esports performance (Kołodziej, 2019). In the current
 422 case, I reflected that cultural and linguistic differences within players and between players
 423 and myself was a key factor. Team Rayzick is a European-based team and has three Swedish
 424 players and two Dutch players. Team Rayzick communicated in English, which was
 425 everyone’s second language. However, often some parts of the team would default to
 426 Swedish or Dutch, especially during pressure moments in game which would automatically
 427 cut off the other members (including myself) from the communication loop. I personally
 428 enjoy language exchanges and new languages, but it was difficult for me to keep in the
 429 communication loop. I was also not acquainted with European accents for English which
 430 made it difficult for me to understand what the players were communicating about during
 431 scrimms and matches. Another layer of difficulty was the lack of body language since most of
 432 the time the players kept their camera off, and I had to try and understand with little to no
 433 feedback from facial expressions and body language as most times players kept their camera
 434 off. For example, Rajesh said a statement about psychologists’ presence during the scrimms,

435 but I did not fully understand what was said. Another layer of linguistic diversity was the
436 gaming language itself, which was specific to the sub-culture of LoL.

437 Reflecting on the work, I note I often felt frustrated with myself and the linguistic
438 challenge I faced when I could not grasp players' spoken words. This was after all the basic
439 skills needed to be an effective practitioner. Aligned to the T-R-E-E-S model, I tried to look
440 at research to assist, but found little. Finally, through supervision and working with the
441 multidisciplinary team, Rayzicks coach, I was able to upskill myself on the nuances of game-
442 specific terminologies and accents. This was an additional step but helped fill the blanks for
443 me and bring me a little closer to the communication loop and overcome the linguistic
444 barriers. I searched for particular game terminologies online and observed LoL gameplay on
445 Twitch, a leading streaming platform, to understand the game. Dealing with this challenge
446 through the season, I learnt that, just like traditional sports, having an intercultural team can
447 bring with it extra challenges and considerations (e.g., skillset, creativity) that are unique to
448 their growth in respective cultures. This needs to be accounted for and acknowledged as the
449 applied work is conducted. The remoteness of esports makes this even more crucial to be an
450 embedded and effective practitioner (Gupta, 2022). Secondly, gaining knowledge about the
451 gaming language, which forms a major part of the esports culture, will help myself and other
452 SPCs to connect with e'athletes and stakeholders in esports, something I have actioned as a
453 professional development plan.

454 **Doing PDMS With a Diverse Group of Esport Athletes**

455 Connecting players was an important aim of the PDMS workshop. LoL is a team
456 esports with each e'athlete having skill relevant to game position and exposure (see Case
457 Description section) where each e'athlete brings their abilities, knowledge and personal
458 aspirations to a team environment, requiring them to form a team identity. In traditional

459 sports, satisfaction of personal, social and collective motives will predict an athlete's group
 460 identification (Thomas et al., 2017). Individuals may identify with a group with salient
 461 personal identity motives of distinctiveness, self-esteem, efficacy and meaning obtained from
 462 participating in a group. From a self-categorization theory perspective, members within the
 463 team have shared features that make them different from other groups and teams (Hogg,
 464 1993). Individuals within the group who share similar features can easily integrate the team
 465 identity into their self-concept. For members who do not identify with shared attitudes,
 466 beliefs and behaviours (e.g., teamwork, collective decision making) find themselves at a
 467 cultural rift and face acculturation challenges within the group (Hogg, 1993; Thomas et al.,
 468 2017).

469 Integration of identity motives within the team Rayzick appeared different for two
 470 athletes due to their past experiences. For example, Leonard and Rajesh had distinct
 471 experiences with a team and how they experienced a team environment. Leonard's core need
 472 was the social element of playing with others (Hedlund, 2019; Garcia-Lanzo & Chamarro,
 473 2018) which I personally felt connected to since this has been a core part of my sport life
 474 from my childhood in a highly social collectivistic culture. Conversely, Rajesh found it
 475 difficult to interact with team members due to previous bad experiences in esport and the
 476 culture he was brought up in. This reflection has important implications for the social identity
 477 within a team since Rajesh found it difficult to integrate attitudes, beliefs and behaviour with
 478 the team identity. A key reflection-on-action from the PDMS workshop was my empathetic
 479 response. They were implicitly present, but I did not express them verbally, only through the
 480 facial expression of a little smile because everyone was expressing emotions differently. This
 481 aligns to research around cultural expressions of emotions (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). I
 482 reflect that I, as a practitioner, am carrying my whole being, just as the e'athletes do. This
 483 includes the colour of my face, gender, the language I speak, its fluency and accent, culture

484 and nationality. Learnings from my past experiences also shape my growth and future
 485 integration within a group. This learning places importance on being aware of these
 486 experiences and how they play a role in an athlete's self-concept and team identity within
 487 multicultural elements since in a highly trusting environment such as PDMS, everyone may
 488 disclose and perceive emotional experience differently due to their cultural heritage.

489 **Additional Evaluation Methods And No-Response Issue**

490 On reflection, additional evaluation methods could have been used to specifically
 491 measure impact of the interventions on team cohesion. For example, Barker et al. (2014) and
 492 Windsor et al. (2011) used objective and subjective measures (e.g., Group Environment
 493 Questionnaire, Social Validation Questionnaire) to evaluate cohesion and communication
 494 within professional cricket and football teams after PDMS sessions delivery. Such methods
 495 would have provided clearer and deeper understanding of whether players' expectations and
 496 goals are achieved. Better monitoring and evaluation processes would add to my
 497 understanding if the service delivery was impactful and the mechanisms of intervention
 498 (Keegan, 2016). Evaluation (of outcomes) is a key element of the 'Cycle of professional
 499 practice' in the BPS Practice Guidelines (2017) and an appropriate evaluation method was
 500 missing in the service delivery. Use of the T-R-E-E-S model in this reflective case study adds
 501 to my understanding of the role that multicultural elements have played within this service
 502 delivery. Where there is no theory specific to esports (T of T-R-E-E-S) and research in
 503 PDMS (R of T-R-E-E-S), I ethically (E of T-R-E-E-S) and using experience from supervision
 504 adapted (E of T-R-E-E-S) the TREES model to the esports context (S of T-R-E-E-S).

505 An attempt was made by the lead psychologist to gain players' feedback. A feedback
 506 form was sent to players at the end of the league season which asked players to respond on
 507 practitioners' support and effectiveness in their support through rating on a scale from 1 to 10
 508 (10 being excellent). An example statement is that "After receiving the support I am more

509 confident. I can overcome the issues I have been dealing with.” There were no responses to
510 the feedback form. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the reason for non-response, this may
511 have been due to a lack of satisfaction of service delivery, an unsuccessful intervention, or
512 simply the form being sent at an inconvenient time (i.e., after the season). Communication
513 issues continued until their season and playing contracts ended following which the players
514 disbanded and to my knowledge are not in social contact with each other to any degree.
515 Another reason could be due to the fast-paced, short-season nature of esports not providing
516 enough contact and non-contact time to deliver a successful team cohesion intervention. This
517 supports Brain et al.’s (2022) observations of challenges when transitioning from working in
518 sports to working in esports. Such observations related to the long and short competitive
519 seasons, respectively. This also suggests that as an applied practitioner working within
520 esports, I need to be competent in responding to the demands of esports. One way to do this
521 would be to integrate feedback and monitoring into ongoing service delivery as part of the
522 intervention plan to avoid the possibility of no-response. For example, providing the players
523 with a QR code to a short feedback form during a workshop at multiple time points during
524 the season. This may help practitioners to evaluate and adapt interventions quickly and
525 efficiently for improved performance.

526 **Implications for multicultural applied practice in esports**

527 First, there needs to be a recognition of the personal and professional cultural markers
528 that the practitioners themselves bring to the applied context (Chandler et al., 2014; Gupta &
529 Divekar, 2022). For example, in this case, I noticed myself bringing in experiences from my
530 experience of cultural diversity. While this is a helpful starting point, it runs the risk of
531 overlapping practitioner experience with client experience leading to inappropriate self-
532 disclosure or bias (Day-Vines et al., 2018; Roysircar, 2004).

533 Second, a key element of multicultural applied practice in esport must be the focus on
534 the composition of the team itself. Team Rayzick was composed of multiple national,
535 linguistic, ethnic, racial and cultural diversity markers. Applied practice needs to
536 acknowledge this in the form of cultural humility. Specifically, engaging in applied through
537 the 5Rs of cultural humility (reflection, respect, regard, relevance, and resilience) could be an
538 avenue to allow the practitioner to listen deeply to individual unique experiences in the
539 diverse context they occur (Perelman & Reel, 2023; Robinson et al., 2021). This is useful to
540 build self-awareness in context regarding interactions with others from a multicultural
541 viewpoint (Hook et al., 2013).

542 Third, there needs to be an awareness of multicultural experiential distinctiveness
543 within members of the team and how they interact. In Team Rayzick, all players and the
544 coach were from a white, European background while the I (trainee psychologist) was from a
545 Southeast Asian background. In other teams (see Flegr & Schmidt, 2022; Lin et al., 2023;
546 Parshakov et al., 2018) there may be greater diversity of experiences within the team as well.
547 This is an area to negotiate with white normativity in sport psychology research and applied
548 practice (see Lee et al., 2023). In Team Rayzick I reflected on the facilitative effect of
549 similar linguistic and national background on rapport building within team members. This is
550 in line with social psychology research on cross-cultural relationship development (Goodwin,
551 2013). However, in a context where every member of the team has unique multicultural
552 experiential identities with no limited shared markers, new challenges with social identity
553 development will arise (Rees et al., 2015). Similarly, if there is one member of the team who
554 has a different cultural identity to everyone else, they may be at risk of experiencing minority
555 stress (see Lee et al., 2019).

556 Fourth, there is a severe lack of research around multicultural competency and
557 multicultural applied practice in esports from a sport psychology perspective. To our
558 knowledge, this reflective case study is the first work to showcase multicultural experiences
559 in esports applied sport psychology. As highlighted by Quartiroli et al., (2021) and Gupta
560 (2022) this was a major limitation when I was engaged in the applied work and developing
561 this case study. Due to the limited guidance on multicultural practice, it was often difficult to
562 critically and fully consider the implications of multicultural identities during the course of
563 delivering the intervention in line with critical reflective practice (see Gupta & Divekar,
564 2022; Schinke et al., 2012). Referring to the recommendation of Gupta (2022), I have used
565 the T-R-E-E-S model and gone beyond to social psychology literature to guide my work. I
566 recommend other practitioners to use the T-R-E-E-S model to frame their multicultural
567 reflections and call on literature to provide a focus on multicultural research within esports
568 for the benefit of its participants and practitioners.

569 **Conclusion**

570 To conclude, from a multicultural viewpoint, the theory on multiple social identities
571 within e'athletes is limited (T of T-R-E-E-S) which required an adaptation of existing
572 research to develop applied practice (E of T-R-E-E-S) for ethical practice. This paper
573 showcases an initial offering how to adapt to include unique experiences (E of T-R-E-E-S)
574 within the specific context (S of T-R-E-E-S) to overcome cohesion challenges in a
575 multicultural esports team unit. This also serves as an initial starting point to develop further
576 practice-based evidence on multicultural esports team dynamics.

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