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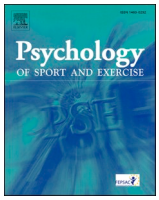

Interpersonal psychological well-being among coach-athlete-sport psychology practitioner triads

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ABSTRACT

The importance of psychological well-being (PWB) is widely acknowledged in global policy and has important ramifications for health, performance, and engagement among sport performers. Despite this compelling knowledge, little is known about PWB in close sport relationships. We aimed to explore the interpersonal antecedents, transfer mechanisms, and outcomes of PWB within and among athletes, coaches, and sport psychology practitioners (SPPs). Underpinned by an interpretative paradigm, we conducted individual and triadic interviews with three coach-athlete-SPP triads from individual sports and analyzed data using abductive reasoning applied to reflexive thematic analysis. The themes we constructed relating to antecedents of PWB were situational properties of stressors, factors relating to the organization, shared values and characteristics, and interpersonal resilience. PWB was transferred among the triad via interpersonal coping, emotional contagion, and social appraising. PWB was cyclic in nature and, thus, we constructed themes (i.e., psychological safety, meaningful experiences of growth and development, and relational dynamics), which represented those factors that acted as both antecedents and outcomes. Our findings transcend individual understandings of PWB in sport by representing the first interpersonal examination of PWB among coach-athlete-SPP triads. This shift is crucial for informing how performers can collectively evaluate and manage PWB in the context of their close sport relationships. These findings implicate two primary recommendations: first, we recommend that researchers extend conceptual understanding of PWB among those in close sport relationships. Second, organizations and practitioners are encouraged to consider how mentoring and relationship-building schemes can be tailored within wider education and support programs to bolster PWB among athletes, coaches, and practitioners.

Psychological well-being (PWB) has been widely discussed in global policy (e.g., Grey-Thompson, 2017) and has important ramifications for health, performance, and work engagement among members of sport organizations. High performance sport can facilitate positive emotions (McCarthy, 2011), can help individuals find meaning and purpose in life (Potts et al., 2021), and can anchor high-quality close sport relationships (e.g., Davis et al., 2022). However, competitive sport environments can also catalyze experiences that lead to ill-health among athletes (e.g., McLoughlin et al., 2021), coaches (e.g., Didymus et al., 2021), and support staff (e.g., Cropley et al., 2016). Indeed, these populations, individually and collectively, encounter copious organizational (e.g., team conflict), personal (e.g., maintaining relationships), and competitive stressors (e.g., underperformance) that can undermine PWB and lead to health- (e.g., burnout; McCormack et al., 2015) and performance-related outcomes (e.g., coach turnover; Baldock et al., 2021).

PWB is crucial for health and performance but is difficult to define, not least because both philosophers and psychologists have proposed definitions that are not inherently complementary (see Fabian, 2020). Definitions that represent ill-being rather than PWB (e.g., Kaski & Kinnunen, 2021), those that focus on common sense judgements of what PWB is, and those that aim to be empirically adequate have been proposed (Bishop, 2015). In light of these definitional uncertainties, the theoretical principles for this study are that PWB, as an integral mental health construct, can be recognized through distinct yet related dimensions of hedonism and eudaimonism (Diener et al., 2017; Ryff, 2014). Hedonia accentuates happiness, subjective well-being, and affect (e.g., Diener et al., 2017) whilst eudaimonia expresses six components of wellness: personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relationships, and purpose in life (e.g., Ryff,

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2014). These dimensions are inherently entwined.

Despite research that has studied PWB as an outcome (i.e., ill-being; e.g., Kaski & Kinnunen, 2021), limited attention has been paid to the more complete essence of PWB (i.e., hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions; Lundqvist, 2011) in sport psychology research (Neil et al., 2016). This is a significant gap in literature given the repercussions of diminished PWB and its links to organizational, cultural, and relational dysfunction (e.g., Wachsmuth et al., 2018). Researchers have, however, unearthed correlates of athlete PWB relating to the social environment (e.g., interpersonal conflict; Davis & Jowett, 2014) and the individual (e.g., mindset; Sauvé et al., 2022), and have begun to explore how PWB can be conceptualized among those competing at a high level (Uzzell et al., 2021). With reference to the social environment, Davis and Jowett (2014) reported that interpersonal conflict influenced athletes' positive and negative affect (i.e., hedonia). Kipp and Weiss (2015) focused on individual factors that are related to PWB and found that perceived competence was a significant mediator of the relationship between coach behaviors and female adolescent gymnasts' well-being. More recently, McLoughlin et al. (2021) highlighted that lifetime stress exposure predicted lower athlete PWB whilst Sauvé et al. (2022) suggested that interpersonal (e.g., coach-athlete relations), operational (e.g., communication), and intra-individual (e.g., feelings of isolation vs connectivity) factors contributed to, or undermined, PWB among Olympic Canadian athletes. Taken together, these findings suggest that both intra- and inter-individual factors are important considerations when developing understanding of PWB in sport.

Alongside an emerging body of literature with athletes, researchers have sporadically examined PWB among sport coaches. In a study of perceived coaching styles, Stebbings et al. (2015) reported that individual differences in positive affect and integration of coaching with one's sense of self were positively associated with autonomy support, while individual differences in negative affect were associated with increased use of interpersonal control. These findings highlight that elements of PWB influence the behaviors that coaches display and, in turn, suggest that coach PWB affects the ways in which they work with athletes. In other research (e.g., Didymus et al., 2021), stressors (e.g., workload) have been shown to have a positive relationship with coaches' sense of purpose whilst benefit appraisals are positively linked with environmental mastery and self-acceptance. Threat appraisals on the other hand appear to have negative associations with coaches' autonomy and environmental mastery (Potts et al., 2021). Among professional football coaches, effective coping is thought to facilitate functional adaptations that influence hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of PWB (Baldock et al., 2021). In another study, Davis et al. (2022) reported that coach efficacy was associated with indicators of coach well-being and performance, and that coach efficacy explained the link between coach-athlete relationship quality, well-being, and coach performance. The findings of research with coaches reinforce the sentiment that PWB can transcend the individual to infiltrate relationships with significant others. This suggests a need to shift thinking toward PWB as an interpersonal, rather than individual, phenomenon.

Sport psychology practitioners (SPPs), like athletes and coaches, should be considered performers in their own rights (Poczwardowski, 2019). Despite this suggestion and knowledge that SPPs can experience work-related factors that undermine or facilitate their PWB (McCormack et al., 2015) limited attention has been paid directly to PWB (e.g., eudaimonia, hedonia) among this demographic. This is a noteworthy dearth in understanding given that SPPs are influential in facilitating optimal athletic performance (cf. Arnold & Sarkar, 2015). Researchers in this area have, however, extended understanding through broader constructs and conceptualizations of PWB. For example, researchers have highlighted that ill-being (e.g., burnout; McCormack et al., 2015) can be experienced despite high work engagement, that coping may function as a protective mechanism for practitioners' PWB (cf. Cropley et al., 2016), and that professional quality of life is important among practitioners (Quartiroli et al., 2019a). Self-care (e.g., see Quartiroli, Wagstaff, & Thelwell, 2022) is subsequently important for enhancing personal and professional well-being (e.g., Martin et al., 2022), for supporting the self-care of others (Quartiroli et al., 2019b), and for career longevity (Quartiroli, Wagstaff, Zakrajsek, et al., 2022). Recently, Hill et al. (2021) identified risk (e.g., excessive workload, post-competitive loss, isolation) and protective factors (e.g., effective organizational cultures, transformational leadership, access to high quality social support) that can influence PWB among coaches, practitioners, and performance directors.

Despite these contributions exploring PWB within individuals, little is known about PWB among individuals in close sport relationships. One such relationship is the coach-athlete-SPP triad, each member of which plays an integral role in the achievement of optimal performance. Indeed, interactions between the coach-athlete-SPP triad within the performance environment can have implications for how conflict is managed (Wachsmuth et al., 2022), for the perceived provision of psychological support to coaches (e.g., Kelly et al., 2018), and for minimizing the risk of athlete burnout (e.g., Davis et al., 2019). Understanding PWB among members of coach-athlete-SPP triads is essential given the importance of quality coach-athlete relationships (i.e., those that contain complementarity, commitment, closeness, and co-orientation; see Davis et al., 2022), the influence of the therapeutic alliance between practitioners and clients (i.e., athletes or coaches; Poczwardowski, 2019), and the need for SPPs to manage their own PWB to be able to effectively support others (Quartiroli et al., 2019b). To unpack the interpersonal nature of PWB in sport, recent research (Simpson et al., 2021) has called for work on PWB that involves key stakeholders (e.g., SPPs) beyond those who have typically been sampled (i.e., athletes and coaches) in literature to date. The aim of this paper was, therefore, to explore the antecedents, transfer mechanisms, and outcomes of PWB within and among athletes, coaches, and SPPs.

1. Methodology

1.1. Philosophical assumptions

This study was paradigm-driven due to the value and practicality of this approach as a heuristic device for researchers. The authors share a relativist ontological stance (Smith & Caddick, 2012) and assume that reality is contextually dependent, fluid, and that multiple experiences influence understanding. Our epistemology is nested within social constructionism, where we recognize that knowledge is molded through social interaction (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Thus, we see the process of understanding as an active, spontaneous, and cooperative conversation between us and the participants (Gergen, 1985). Underpinned by these assumptions, this paper offers our interpretations of the participants' experiences of PWB. To ensure a transparent approach to how knowledge was co-constructed, the lead author maintained a reflexive journal and shared this with co-authors to identify personal meanings, emotional involvements, and subjectivity in the research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

1.2. Interviewees

Following ethical approval, three coach-athlete-SPP triads were purposively sampled from individual sports (e.g., athletics). These triads comprised nine participants (one woman; Mage = 41.3, SD = 14.9) who operated at an Olympic, international, or national level (see Table 1). Data collection with nine participants helped to achieve a breadth and depth of information to address the research aim, while remaining sensitive to the controversial notion of data saturation and not committing to a fixed sample size a-priori (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). Individual sports were targeted due to the suggestion that athletes who compete in individual sports perceive their coach-athlete relationship to be closer and more committed than those in team sports (Rhind et al., 2012). Closeness and commitment may influence eudaimonic and

Table 1
Participant demographics.

	Athlete			Coach			SPP			No. years working together
	Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years)	Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years)	Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years)	
Triad One	Woman	36	18	Man	76	35	Man	28	4	2
Triad Two	Man	28	11	Man	45	14	Man	31	7	3
Triad Three	Man	31	11	Man	56	33	Man	42	15	9

hedonic components of PWB such as happiness, personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relationships. Individuals operating in high-performance sports were targeted for three reasons (a) SPPs (e.g., HCPC-registered psychologists): are usually employed at the higher echelons of sport competition, (b) PWB is known to influence performance (Lundqvist, 2011), and (c) there is a need to understand PWB among those (e.g., athletes, coaches, support staff) involved in competitive sport (Simpson et al., 2021).

1.3. Interview guide

Informed by our philosophical assumptions (i.e., social constructionism) and underpinning theory (i.e., hedonia and eudaimonia), we developed two bespoke semi-structured interview guides. The first guide facilitated individual interviews with coaches, athletes, and SPPs, and the second guide informed one triadic interview with each triad. A semi-structured approach facilitated discussions in areas of perceived importance to the interviewees (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) whilst addressing the research aim. This approach also complemented our constructionist position by allowing us and the interviewees to engage in flexible co-construction of knowledge. In the individual interviews, we used open-ended questions to facilitate discussion (e.g., "how much autonomy do you have?"), flexible probing questions to encourage elaboration (e.g., "what enables this autonomy?"), and clarification questions to add clarity or garner further detail (e.g., "has this always been the case?"). Within the triadic interview guide, we used bridging (e.g., "how does this resonate with you?") and open-ended questions (e.g., "how do you experience autonomy within the triad?") to enhance understanding of collective PWB and further build rapport with the interviewees (Morgan, Ataie, et al., 2013).

1.4. Pilot study

The first author conducted two pilot interviews: one individual interview with one athlete and a triadic interview with the same athlete, her coach, and their practitioner. The aims of these interviews were to evaluate the clarity and fluidity of the interview guides in relation to the research aim (Morgan, Ataie, et al., 2013), to quality assure the data collection process, and to demonstrate the usefulness and effectiveness of the chosen methods (e.g., Potts et al., 2019). Following feedback from the pilot interviews, subtle changes to the structure of the interview guide were made to group questions that focused on hedonic (e.g., affect, happiness) and eudaimonic (e.g., growth, mastery) components of PWB together. This reduced repetition among the questions whilst still reflecting our conceptualization of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being as entwined concepts. Feedback from pilot participants also related to the need to foster a sense of comfort during the interviews. Thus, we expanded the briefing sections of the interview guides (e.g., "are there any topics in particular that you would or would not like to discuss?") to gauge where sensitivities may lie.

1.5. Procedure

To begin recruitment, we reached out via e-mail to those with whom we had a pre-existing relationship (i.e., coaches, practitioners) and met the inclusion criteria (i.e., operating within high-performance individual sports). With this email, we included a formal invitation to participate, an information sheet, and a consent form. Using snowballing and purposive sampling, the initial participants who we contacted acted as an informer to other individuals within the coach-athlete-SPP triad. In light of our recruitment strategy and the risk of potential coercion, we asked informers to neither encourage nor discourage participation from other members of the triad. We also asked each member of the triad to contact the first author individually to discuss whether they were willing to participate, and to explicitly check whether they were happy to do so of their own free will. Those who advised that they were willing to voluntarily participate were sent the same information sheet and consent form that was sent to the informer and were asked to read both in full before making an informed decision regarding participation. Each member of the triad needed to independently provide written informed consent for the triad to be included in the study. Following informed consent, participants were contacted to arrange one individual and one triadic interview. Interviews were arranged at a mutually convenient time and, due to COVID-19 restrictions, were conducted virtually and recorded using Microsoft Teams®. The quality of the interviews was maintained during virtual data collection because real-world conversations between close relationships (e.g., coach-athlete-SPP triad) can be replicated on online platforms (Morgan, Ataie, et al., 2013). Recorded interviews were then stored in audio-only format on a password-protected file on Microsoft OneDrive®. Briefing and debriefing procedures enabled participants to be informed of and to ask questions about their involvement in the study, their rights to withdraw, and confidentiality of the data (i.e., pseudonym use, removal of identifiable information during data analyses).

1.6. Data analysis

Individual interviews ($n = 9$) lasted between 60 and 92 min ($M_{duration} = 72.7$, $SD_{duration} = 11.2$) whilst triadic interviews ($n = 3$) lasted between 116 and 123 min ($M_{duration} = 120.3$, $SD_{duration} = 3.8$). I (the first named author) transcribed the interview audio files verbatim using Microsoft Word®, which aided my immersion in the data. We (all named authors) used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), applied with abductive logic (i.e., generating inductive themes before deductively comparing these themes with theory), to construct, analyze, and report shared meanings in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). This method was compatible with our epistemological position because it allowed us to focus on explaining and understanding the coaches', athletes', and SPPs' experiences by exploring the dataset as a whole. NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2016) helped with data management during six reflexive phases of analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2019a). First, I re-familiarized myself with the interview data and made notes on NVivo and in a reflexive diary about pre-emptive thoughts relating to the construction and interpretation of the data. Second, I generated inductive codes from the individual interview transcripts whilst remaining mindful of the evolving iterative process of analysis. I then searched for themes within the individual interviews and used literature (e.g., Gosai et al., 2021) to deductively find connections between theory and the interviewees' experiences. Code generation and theme-searching were replicated with the triadic interview data, whilst simultaneously recognizing similarities

and differences between the data collected from the individual and the triadic interviews. I then reviewed, defined, and named each theme iteratively with theory in mind, and made comparisons between the individual and triadic data (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). These iterative and comparative processes helped to accentuate rigor and reflexivity by encouraging the exploration of different meanings in the data. We also enhanced rigor and explored different meanings in the data during discussions between the named authors, which took place during each phase of the analysis. These discussions, for example, focused on how we perceived the power dynamics between different members of the research team (i.e., the named authors) and how these dynamics influenced our interpretations of psychological safety within coach-athlete-SPP triads. We managed our power dynamics via open communication and discussions that led to a mutual understanding of how psychological safety was viewed to both influence and be influenced by PWB. These processes (i.e., iteration, reflexivity, discussions) helped to "provide access to blind spots… that were immediately unobservable" (Townsend & Cushion, 2021, p. 263) and to "explore ongoing surprises and un-doings in the research process" (Wadey et al., 2019, p. 9). Our analyses, reflections, and discussions were facilitated by the notes that I recorded on NVivo and in my reflexive diary.

1.7. Research quality

Guided by a non-foundational perspective, our relativist ontology, and constructionist epistemology (Smith & Caddick, 2012), we encourage readers to judge the quality of this research using the following time- and place-dependent criteria: (a) credibility, (b) resonance, (c) significant contribution, and (d) methodological and meaningful coherence (Smith & McGannon, 2018). I (the first named author) enhanced credibility using three strategies. First, I maintained a reflexive diary to recognize the personal meanings and subjectivities in our understanding of PWB, particularly as a white British man (first author) and white British women (second and third authors) respectively, who have all personally and or vicariously experienced the stress-laden environments of competitive sport. Second, we engaged with participant reflections (i.e., follow-up discussions) to discuss the co-constructed themes. Third, we enhanced credibility by including detailed and transparent quotes in our presentation of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Turning to resonance, gathering participant reflections (e.g., on the distinction between interpersonal resilience and coping) helped us to co-create findings that held value and could make a significant contribution to athletes, coaches, and SPPs. This significant contribution is accomplished via conceptual (e.g., extending knowledge of PWB), methodological (e.g., novel use of triadic interviews), and applied contributions of the research. Meaningful and methodological coherence were achieved via discussions with critical friends from within academia (three women: two who have expertise in PWB and qualitative methods as full-time lecturers, and one doctoral candidate who is studying topics relating to health and social justice). The two critical friends with expertise in PWB and qualitative methods evaluated coherence between the research aims and the presentation of the findings, which informed our use of conversational dialogues. The woman who is completing a doctorate degree helped to gauge whether findings were meaningfully connected to the concept of PWB. Engagement with these critical friends allowed interpretations of the data to be checked and challenged and helped us to create a clear, meaningful, and coherent overview of the findings.

2. Results

The data presented herein comprises themes that relate to the interpersonal nature of PWB. We have grouped these themes into three overarching sections to guide the reader through our interpretations of the data (see also figure 1). The following narrative focuses on antecedents that nourished and or malnourished interpersonal PWB among coach-athlete-SPP triads; the interpersonal mechanisms through which PWB was protected, bolstered, and transferred among members of the triad; and the factors that were cyclical in nature (i.e., discussed as both an antecedent and an outcome). To present our findings in a credible way and to highlight the participants' diverse experiences, a combination of individual quotes and conversational dialogues are presented.

2.1. Antecedents of interpersonal PWB

We constructed four themes that reflected antecedents that nourished or undermined PWB within the coach-athlete-SPP triads (see figure 1): situational properties of stressors, factors relating to the organization, shared values and characteristics, and interpersonal resilience. These themes represented shared meanings of how PWB was influenced and experienced among members of the triad.

Situational properties of stressors. This antecedent referred to underlying features of stressors (e.g., novelty, event uncertainty) that enabled a situation of personal significance to be appraised as stressful (see Didymus & Fletcher, 2012). One coach-athlete dyad commented on event uncertainty surrounding an injury and how this led to a perceived diminished sense of hedonic well-being among the triad:

Athlete: I wasn't really in a good place. Personally, I was very broken …

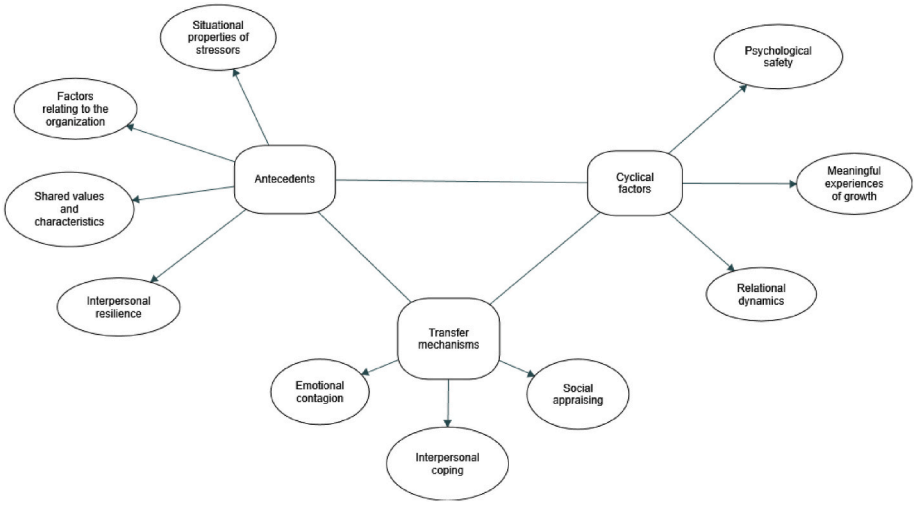

Fig. 1. Antecedents, transfer mechanisms, and cyclical factors of PWB in coach-athlete-SPP triads.

> Coach: During those years, we did have a few difficulties. Because when an athlete's going through issues where injuries keep recurring and bringing back memories from the time prior, that is a hard thing to deal with emotionally…

In contrast, another triad discussed how situational properties of stressors, such as the novelty of working with other people (e.g., other coaches, media) collectively challenged their eudaimonic well-being (e.g., relationships, growth). One athlete highlighted: "we were experiencing a lot of this [competition] for the first time and most of the challenges have been off the track: dealing with people and the media, which has tested our collective growth."

Factors relating to the organization. The triads also described the role of the organization when discussing antecedents of their PWB. This theme encompassed, for example, factors relating to the shared management of workloads and perceptions of the organizational climate. Starting with workload, one coach discussed the way that he and the athlete worked together to manage the athlete's work and training loads, and how this influenced their sense of autonomy (i.e., eudaimonic well-being):

> … when [athlete] started working, that was quite a test for us. We needed to find a routine that works between us and what made it harder was [athlete] working night shifts, still does now. So that makes things very difficult, especially in finding ways of doing sessions and being fully recovered after potentially working 12-hour shifts on your feet all the time. It's taken time to adapt, but we've done well in adapting and making decisions on training. I know now they're in control of their training and I can work around that …

Another testing situation was described by one coach-athlete dyad when they reflected on the negative influence of bullying within their organization on their hedonic well-being (e.g., affect). Interestingly, the same dyad discussed how bullying enhanced their perceptions of eudaimonic well-being (e.g., growth) over time:

> Coach: We were dealing with bullying by two athletes. And it was a slow burn. [Athlete] was the principal recipient of that. Not the only one but would have felt it most. It took some time to establish what was going on, and for athletes to leave. So, if you're on the end of that, your perception? Probably quite frustrated …
> Athlete: … even though it might seem small or really big at the time, we might look back and go 'We got things wrong. We made mistakes. We trusted the wrong people.' And it almost makes your relationship grow stronger.

Shared values and characteristics. In contrast to some antecedents (e.g., bullying) that can both enhance and undermine PWB, shared, complimentary values and characteristics that were held among the triads was discussed as a factor that nourished PWB. During discussions with one triad, the athlete and practitioner highlighted how different yet complimentary personalities facilitated a sense of growth and progression:

> Athlete: … we're all different. That's why the aspect of a larger team of personalities is helpful and important at this point in my career and development.
> Practitioner: … each psychologist you work with has their own personality and way of working. Some practitioners find discussions interesting with different clients and some clients develop more as a result of practitioner philosophies than others …

One of the coaches from the same triad echoed these sentiments and highlighted the importance of shared values (e.g., respect) and common ground in enhancing eudaimonic PWB (e.g., positive relations) with the athlete:

> She is just nice. And that helps. If I don't feel that there's any common ground or respect, I would prefer not to get involved. I don't want to be working with people I can't get on with, and there are people who can't stand me; that's fine. I want to be working with those I respect as individuals and thankfully this is the case.

Interpersonal resilience. This theme represents another antecedent that supported interpersonal PWB among coaches, athletes, and SPPs. Drawing on definitions of resilience (e.g., Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013), we understood interpersonal resilience within the triad as a set of dynamic, psychosocial processes where resources were harnessed to protect each other from the potentially negative effects of stressors encountered during adversity. One coach-practitioner dyad discussed how their navigation of change through an Olympic cycle enhanced eudaimonic PWB among the triad (i.e., positive relations, growth, acceptance):

> Practitioner: … everyone is expecting [athlete] to have a halo 100% of the time … That takes an incredible amount of professionalism and resilience … one of the people [athlete] has lent on and learned from is [coach] because he's been there. Having a lot of coaches holding him in the same regard …
> Coach: … those challenges have grown a program and us as people. Some of them have not been enjoyable. But we come out the other side of all that ready to take on the next tough challenge, a little more equipped, and you recognize where you might have felt your world was coming to an end … we are still here and smiling.

Similarly, interpersonal resilience was shown in the way that one of the other triads encouraged a helicopter (i.e., general) view to collectively withstand pressure and enhance each member's sense of purpose and acceptance (i.e., eudaimonic well-being):

> Practitioner: Our focus was on her ability to cope and manage stressful situations. Using that reflective space to acknowledge how far she has come, taking a helicopter view of, actually, I've achieved a lot, it's good to be grateful and proud.
> Coach: There's one race where she was in the shape of her life, through the first half she was not just on PB time, she was ahead of it, and looked absolutely superb. Now the wheels came off on the last couple laps and she ended up in a time she'd been absolutely delighted with previously. But she seemed focused on what other people think of her. I think she learned from that. And the following week she finished seconds behind the favorite because she just went in more relaxed.
> Athlete: [Coach and practitioner] helped me to realize it's not about what everybody else thinks, it's how I feel about myself and what those who support me think. That helped to change the way I feel about other people and pressures I was putting on myself, using them as a positive instead of a negative. Instead of going into a race anxious, I went in relaxed and comfortable, happy to just enjoy the race.

2.2. Interpersonal transfer mechanisms

Following our presentation of the antecedents that nourish and or undermine PWB, we now explore how PWB was protected, bolstered, and transferred between members of the coach-athlete-SPP triads via three themes: emotional contagion, interpersonal coping, and social appraising (see figure 1).

Emotional contagion. Within the triadic interviews, experiences of emotional contagion were evident between the coach-athlete and athlete-SPP dyads. Our description of emotional contagion refers to the transference of emotions from individuals to other individuals within their close sport relationships (Moll et al., 2010). This was particularly notable when discussing significant and meaningful experiences for athletes. One triad discussed how eudaimonic well-being (collective growth and acceptance) was transferred among members of the triad over time following negative coverage and criticism from the media about the athlete:

> Practitioner: I have seen growth in our relationships in being able to show openly some vulnerability in that I don't know the answers. I can't say anything to make it better. I need time to think about it… I'm struggling to the point tears flow, and you go "Fuck. That's heavy stuff." I need time to take this all in.
> Coach: … some incredible things. If you haven't seen it play out. Some eye-opening stuff that we have sorted out, with the media taking a … unhealthy interest.

Emotional contagion was discussed by another triad to act as a vehicle for the development of hedonic well-being (happiness, affect) among the triad. For example, a coach discussed a critical affective moment during a competition, which led to transfer of emotions between the coach and the athlete, which, in turn, enhanced hedonia:

> … the sheer joy and relief on their face, and on mine too, on that day where there's nervousness for us both, because they wanted it. You want an athlete to do well, not least, because of previous poor experiences. They'd gone into it year-after-year in good shape. Yet it didn't happen. Things like that make coaching so enjoyable. When you see not just the relief, but sheer joy and pleasure from that performance, and you feel that too. My most enjoyable competition for quite a few years.

Interpersonal coping. Interpersonal coping was discussed by members of the triads as another transfer mechanism (figure 1). Similar to our ideas relating to emotional contagion, the data suggest that coping can also be a shared experience that bolsters PWB. Guided by literature (e.g., Staff et al., 2020), we defined interpersonal coping as a dynamic, transactional process whereby members of the triad coped collectively with stressors shared within their relationship. Interpersonal coping manifested, for example, via problem-based strategies and interpersonal emotion regulation (IER). Problem-based coping was discussed by one triad as a way to manage failure (e.g., under performance) that facilitated eudaimonic well-being (e.g., acceptance). One athlete highlighted this when discussing how the triad managed performance setbacks:

> What all three of us do very well is the first reaction isn't to point blame, it's to look internally and go, what did we do? How did we get that so wrong? What do we need to accept and change? That's why we work so well.

IER was another form of interpersonal coping that was reflected by members of various triads. For example, one triad highlighted that regulating their emotions through venting was, at times, a risk to their PWB but that doing so also facilitated their perceptions of growth and trust in their relationship (i.e., eudaimonic well-being):

> Athlete: We are people after all. Trying to cope with the emotions and the pressures and talking about them is important. Sometimes admitting is the hardest. Admitting you weren't right, you didn't put all of your energy into that, or you gave up, being able to move on, grow, and develop. That's where we've created a good relationship.
> Practitioner: Sometimes it's the trivial things that can trip emotions for an athlete. Nothing's off the table in conversations but venting is one of the things we focus on, and one of the challenges is knowing you've covered all bases; you never fully know. There's always a risk you don't ask a question about something, you can overthink …
> Coach: We wouldn't be talking the way we are if it wasn't working these years later.

Social appraising. Similar to the preceding two themes, this transfer mechanism considered how PWB among the coach-athlete-SPP triads was changed following social appraising. We operationalized social appraising as situations where one individual's perception of their PWB (e.g., affect) altered another person's appraisal of a situation and their PWB (Parkinson & Simons, 2009). One athlete described how their appraisal of what their coach or practitioner thought influenced that other individual's appraisal of their hedonic PWB (e.g., affect, satisfaction):

> People know what's going on with me and I can usually read people. I can tell you if [coach] is not happy about something in terms of agreeing on a race build up, or if I'm doing far too much media and having too much fun. I know before he has to say anything, what we're going to talk to [practitioner] about. I've analyzed what he might think in my head the day before. But our discussions always lead somewhere else, [coach] helps me view things in different ways, which is always nice.

Within a coach-athlete dyad, social appraising was identified as a mechanism that both reduced and increased eudaimonic (positive relations, growth, autonomy) and hedonic dimensions (e.g., affect) of PWB over time:

> Coach: … when he does silly things, or doesn't perform like he could, then I become stern, stressed, because I know how much he's putting into it. Sometimes it can be frustrating when we're not getting what we need out of it. It's reminding him sometimes, that's all I do, because I live through the athletes. I want them to perform. It's important to have them turn up and achieve what they're after. I want their best.
> Athlete: His thoughts on what I should or shouldn't do can be a challenge to our collective growth because you question why am I doing this? Rather than what am I doing wrong? You question your confidence, but I guess, the longer you stay with the coach you look in hindsight [at] decisions that were made and [coach] helps you realize it was right for my development, and it just reinforces the trust.

2.3. Factors that acted cyclically as both antecedents and outcomes of interpersonal PWB

In addition to discussions relating to factors that influence (i.e., antecedents) and transfer interpersonal PWB, the coaches, athletes, and SPPs discussed factors that acted as both antecedents and outcomes of PWB. We constructed three themes to represent these cyclical factors and illustrate the complex interpersonal nature of PWB: psychological safety, meaningful experiences of growth and development, and relational dynamics.

Psychological safety. Psychological safety referred to a shared belief and perception that individuals could authentically engage in interpersonal risk taking without fear of negative consequences for self-image and or status. Within one of the triadic interviews, psychological safety was discussed by one coach as a factor that facilitated hedonic well-being (e.g., satisfaction, affect) among their athlete:

> … she [athlete] was confident to come to me and not expect me to throw a wobbler and say, 'you can't do it.' We had a meeting of minds and agreed that some extra [training] volume would be added. We saw success and satisfaction from that.

Psychological safety was also described as reflective of the presence of eudaimonic well-being. This was suggested by a coach-practitioner dyad to result from positive relationship characteristics (e.g., trust) experienced among the triad:

> Practitioner: There's a lot of trust put in. First to explore and to ask questions, there's never been anything I've asked to do with trepidation and apprehension. It's always been, let's go for it. Let's chat about it. Let's explore. In any little contribution I make, there's always a sense of autonomy and trust when doing so. [Athlete and coach both nod]
> Coach: Yeah. I place my trust in you as a practitioner too. To have that autonomy to ask questions. That's what you want in the team. Don't micromanage, you want to trust and let people do their thing.

Meaningful experiences of growth and development. In addition to

discussions of psychological safety, members of coach-athlete-SPP triads spoke of meaningful and memorable experiences of growth and development, which were experienced as both an antecedent and outcome of interpersonal PWB. One athlete highlighted how shared development within the triad enhanced the group's sense of enjoyment (i.e., hedonia):

> The aspect of us developing together has been what we've [collective nods] enjoyed the most because we know what we're doing, but it's almost like we don't know what we're doing. You know why? Because none of us have ever done [Olympics] before. [Coach] has taken athletes to certain levels in the past, but we've surpassed anything close to that in terms of our performance [all smile and nod].

Meaningful experiences of growth and development also resulted from a collective sense of purpose and understanding among the triad, as an athlete-practitioner reflected:

> Athlete: After the initial meeting, I felt like he was the right person to talk to. He was open and willing to listen to my problems and what I was worried about, and we developed from there. [Practitioner] helped me work through the problems, which was a great thing to have around this race with, with no stitch, no problems, and one of the best races I've run. I was really grateful.
> Practitioner: … because [athlete] took it upon themselves to seek support, whereas in other sessions you might have an athlete who isn't sure about what psychology is. They think I'm a Freudian figure where I'm going to analyze their dreams. Some people have a high guard up, but [athlete] had a good perception and clarity.

Relational dynamics. This theme complements and extends those relating to psychological safety and meaningful experiences of growth and development by encompassing relationship alignment, the adjustment and development of relationships, and relationship properties (e.g., communication, interpreting behavioral cues). One relational facilitator of hedonic aspects of PWB (e.g., satisfaction) among the triad was the appreciation of how closely relationships and roles aligned and functioned:

> Practitioner: Even if [athlete] is completely honest, I'll never be able to truly walk in his shoes because I haven't experienced it directly, and while I may have a clear view of their emotional experience, a position I take a lot of pleasure from, my belief is that the role of the coach will be able to get closer to that than I could.
> Coach: If he [the practitioner] hasn't spoken to [athlete] for a month, it doesn't mean that he's not an essential and critical part of that team. [Athlete] and I trust and value the support that he gives. Anything [athlete] achieves, if you slice the metal up into pieces of cake, there's a psychology slice that is always there.

Another factor encompassed by relational dynamics was successful adjustment and development within relationships, which was perceived to be an outcome of a strong vision and sense of purpose (i.e., eudaimonic well-being):

> Athlete: The longer you are in the coolness of it, and spend time with people, the more you get to know them, and the more you get to know somebody, and particularly if the knowledge between you is something that you share experiences, good points, bad points, whatever. The more that clear vision just develops …
> Practitioner: … with us it's almost unwritten, but there has been a physical written code of conduct for how we dealt with things, what we as a group are all about.

Turning to relationship properties within the triad, a clear sense of honesty and openness within communication was critical to developing eudaimonic aspects of PWB within the triad. One athlete reflected how this shared perspective was established (e.g., purpose in sport):

> With the race chats I had with [practitioner] and [coach], I was always open about what I hoped to achieve. Opening up about experiences, talking about the past and being frank on our hopes for the future, which has been something we have got out of our relationships, that clarity, and going through ups and downs together.

This theme also comprised a factor that related to the recognition of behavioral cues within the triad. Such recognition was perceived to influence eudaimonic PWB (e.g., positive relations), as one practitioner shares:

> That element of body language, I can be aware of it, read it. But I'm not a mind reader. Whenever we're having conversations, I'll be mindful of little behaviors, expressions, how [athlete] and [coach] hold themselves and think 'that's something to be aware of.' It doesn't tell you the full story but it's important to notice. It allows you to ask a question on what you're observing and trust to get an honest response.

3. Discussion

The aim of this paper was to explore the antecedents, transfer mechanisms, and outcomes of PWB within and among athletes, coaches, and SPPs. Whilst literature has explored shared experiences of stress and emotions (e.g., Tamminen et al., 2016), this is the first study in sport to directly explore interpersonal PWB among close sport relationships. In doing so, our work answers recent calls for researchers to explore PWB within and among individuals in sport organizations (e.g., Neil et al., 2016; Simpson et al., 2021). The data helped us to unpack the antecedents of PWB (i.e., situational properties of stressors, factors relating to the organization, shared values and characteristics, interpersonal resilience); interpersonal transfer mechanisms (i.e., interpersonal coping, emotional contagion, social appraising) that highlighted how PWB was protected, bolstered, and transferred among members of the coach-athlete-SPP triads; and factors that cyclically acted as both antecedents and outcomes of PWB (i.e., psychological safety, meaningful experiences of growth and development, relational dynamics).

Our findings relating to interpersonal PWB in sport extend knowledge by highlighting four antecedents that influence PWB among the coach-athlete-SPP triad. Situational properties of stressors (e.g., novelty, event uncertainty) and organizational-related factors (e.g., shared management of workload), for example, are typically discussed in sport literature in the context of psychological stress (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2012). Our findings, however, attempt to make connections between theories of psychological stress (e.g., transactional stress theory; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and those relating to PWB to make significant advancements in understanding. Our findings show that factors such as novelty and event uncertainty, for example, can compromise hedonic (e.g., affect) and eudaimonic (e.g., growth and relations) dimensions of PWB, yet that they can also enhance perceptions of eudaimonic well-being (e.g., growth, autonomy, relations) over time.

Turning to shared values and characteristics as an antecedent of PWB, research with practitioners (e.g., Martin et al., 2022; Quartiroli, Wagstaff, & Thelwell, 2022; Quartiroli, Wagstaff, Zakrajsek, et al., 2022) has established that grounding self-care within personal values and meanings and that engaging in self-care activities to benefit the self-care of others (e.g., Quartiroli et al., 2019b) is important for PWB. Our findings propose that when personal values and characteristics (e.g., respect, complementary personalities) are *shared*, this could lead to enhanced eudaimonic well-being (e.g., growth, positive relations) among the coach-athlete-SPP triad. This builds on the idea of self-care as a 'key' to unlock that of others (Quartiroli et al., 2019b) and highlights the importance of researchers and practitioners establishing shared values that underpin self-care within close sport relationships. Another antecedent highlighted within our findings emphasizes the role of interpersonal resilience among members of coach-athlete-SPP triads.

Our findings highlight how the triad harnessed resources to protect each other, and their collective PWB (e.g., sense of purpose, acceptance, growth), from the potentially negative effects of stressors (e.g., navigating change within an Olympic cycle). This supports the idea of social capital (e.g., high quality and caring relationships) captured within conceptualizations of team resilience in elite sport (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013) and underscores the significance of developing resilience collectively in close sport relationships. Our findings relating to interpersonal resilience as an antecedent of PWB also support relational and community focused literature that highlights the critical role of resilience among social relationships (e.g., when dealing with natural disasters; Quinn et al., 2020), and shared values within key relationships (e.g., among police officers; Wolter et al., 2019), in protecting and promoting PWB.

Our findings relating to interpersonal transfer mechanisms indicated that interpersonal coping, emotional contagion, and social appraising reflected ways in which PWB was protected and transferred among members of the coach-athlete-SPP triads. Previous research has focused on interpersonal coping among the coach-athlete dyad (e.g., Staff et al., 2020) and emotional contagion within specific contexts (e.g., Moll et al., 2010). However, studies within sport that examine how PWB transfers between people are limited. Stebbings et al. (2015) found that changes to coach PWB were related to autonomy supportive and controlling coach behaviors, but this study did not examine the effects of these changes or behaviors among athletes. Our findings extend this literature by identifying the roles of interpersonal coping, social appraising, and emotional contagion in explaining how changes to PWB may occur among the coach-athlete-SPP triads. Our findings also suggest that interpersonal coping and social appraising were most common between the coach-athlete dyad, which is unsurprising considering the typical closeness of such relationships in individual sports (Gosai et al., 2021; Staff et al., 2020). Emotional contagion was common within the athlete-practitioner dyad, which can be explained by the sensitive nature of interactions within client-consultant relationships (Poczwardowski, 2019), and the emotional labor experienced during the roles of a practitioner (Cropley et al., 2016). It is important for researchers and practitioners to understand the subtle differences in how the transfer mechanisms highlighted in this study contribute to PWB: social appraising occurs due to the perception of another that purposively changes appraisals and emotional meaning of a situation, and influences PWB. Contrastingly, emotional contagion refers to "catching" another individual's hedonic PWB (e.g., affect) automatically without interpreting its personal significance (Parkinson & Simons, 2009).

With reference to factors that acted cyclically as both antecedents and outcomes of PWB, our findings identified psychological safety, meaningful experiences of growth and development, and relationship dynamics as factors that could both influence and be experienced as an outcome of PWB. We have highlighted the value of psychological safety within the coach-athlete-SPP triad, which supplements the findings of Gosai et al. (2021) who suggested that relationship quality and psychological safety predicted athlete flourishing. Our findings extend the aforementioned study by suggesting that psychological safety enhances hedonic well-being (i.e., acts as an antecedent to it) and is reflective of the presence of eudaimonic well-being among the triad (i.e., is an outcome of PWB). Our findings relating to relationship dynamics also underscore the value of quality close sport relationships (i.e., those with closeness, commitment, complementarity; see e.g., Davis & Jowett, 2014; Davis et al., 2022). In particular, successful adjustment (e.g., via commitment) and development (e.g., toward closeness and complementarity) between the athlete-practitioner dyad was viewed to be a product of a strong vision and sense of purpose established within the triad. Thus, our work suggests the importance of eudaimonic well-being (e.g., meaning and purpose) in strengthening the therapeutic working alliance. Meaningful experiences of growth that were highlighted in our findings denote the entwined and interconnected nature of PWB. Among the coach-athlete-SPP triads, such meaningful experiences were a by-product of a clear sense of purpose (i.e., an outcome of PWB), and a facilitator of collective enjoyment (i.e., an antecedent of hedonic well-being). This extends literature that signifies the role of the practitioner in bringing about positive and meaningful change (e.g., through injury related growth; Wadey et al., 2019) among the athletes with whom they work.

3.1. Strengths and limitations

One strength of this work relates to the participants that we recruited. Accessing athletes, coaches, and SPPs from high-performance sport settings allowed us to construct knowledge of how PWB is experienced within close sport relationships. Given that PWB research has often focused on individuals, the applied implications of our interpersonal research will be useful for sport organizations and NGBs that are seeking to optimize relationships and, in turn, PWB. Another strength of this research was in our abductive approach to data analysis. This allowed us to inductively construct novel findings whilst also drawing on theories of psychological stress (e.g., transactional stress theory; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and PWB to bridge these two related but often dislocated areas of literature. A feature of cross-sectional interviews is that they facilitate retrospective re-description of individual and collective experiences (e.g., Sauvé et al., 2022), yet this study design does limit the naturalistic generalizability of our findings. The homogeneity of our sample (i.e., eight men and one woman), whilst not purposeful, provided limited insight from individuals with different demographic and cultural backgrounds and we did not explore how individual identities may play a role in the construction and co-construction of PWB.

3.2. Applied implications

Our findings indicate three key applied implications. First, psychological safety and social appraisal were factors that acted as both antecedents and outcomes of PWB among the coach-athlete-SPP triads. Thus, practitioners should foster opportunities for mutual sharing to enhance psychological safety among those in their immediate work partnerships. Mutual sharing could be a useful tool for practitioners to implement before and after competition to maintain open channels of communication during critical periods and to bolster and protect PWB among close sport relationships. In addition, given the importance of social appraisal in our findings, appraisal-based interventions (e.g., cognitive restructuring; Didymus & Fletcher, 2017) may be helpful when considering the enhancement of PWB among those in close sport relationships. SPPs may find this technique beneficial when working with athletes on competition preparation or when working with coaches to develop their reflective practice. Second, it is important that leaders and decision-makers consider how to develop, implement, and monitor self-care plans that harness the capabilities of close sport relationships to support PWB. This could include buddy systems that build interpersonal resilience or dedicated spaces within a training block to manage emotional contagion. Third, participants discussed during their interviews and reflections that individually tailored support (e.g., that relating to personalization of PWB; Uzzell et al., 2021) and the cultivation of environments that facilitate collective flourishing were essential for PWB. We therefore encourage NGBs and those responsible for athlete and employee welfare within sport organizations to consider how interventions (e.g., stress management), mentoring, and relationship-building schemes (e.g., Simpson et al., 2021) can be tailored to bolster, maintain, and protect PWB. Such endeavors will support practitioners and coaches in better understanding the interpersonal factors that are critical for PWB, and how they can be equipped to optimize the effective transfer of PWB to, from, and among their athletes.

3.3. Future research directions

Tracking changes to PWB transfer among coaches, athletes, and SPPs over time is a worthy line of inquiry. To progress the cross-sectional nature of this study, daily diary (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2012), think aloud (Simpson et al., 2021), and timelining (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) methods could facilitate deeper understanding of how and why PWB is transferred between members of close sport relationships over time. Conceptually, interpersonal PWB remains largely atheoretical and there is little consensus on how it is best conceptualized and operationalized. Future research should, therefore, illuminate the theoretical and philosophical grounding of PWB through co-producing how it is defined (e.g., Alexandrova & Fabian, 2022) across sport contexts. Recent psychology literature (Oishi et al., 2020) has challenged the renowned hedonia-eudaimonia dualism and proposed psychological richness, defined as a "life characterized by varied, interesting experiences that result in a change to one's perspective" (Oishi et al., 2020, p. 754) as an alternative construct to PWB. It will be important to consider this insight in future research to enhance contextual understanding and to facilitate the development of more robust, co-informed, and sport-specific measures for assessing PWB. Research that explores PWB among different interpersonal relationships is also warranted. The current research studied three coach-athlete-SPP triads who were working within individual sports but future research could examine how PWB is experienced and transferred among individuals in different roles (e.g., support staff; Neil et al., 2016), with more varied demographics, within different contexts (e.g., teams and groups), and among those who represent under-served populations (e.g., women coaches). To build on the findings presented in this study, which begin to unpack the multifaceted and dynamic nature of PWB in sport, we also suggest that researchers explore more closely the influence of one person's PWB on another and how PWB is collectively experienced in varied close sport relationships. Other interesting avenues for future work encompass the exploration of how individual and social identities influence the co-construction of PWB among the triad, and how power and gender dynamics within coach-athlete-SPP triads influence the factors that antecede or transfer PWB among members.

4. Conclusion

Our research offers new insight to interpersonal PWB within and among coach-athlete-SPP triads in individual sports. We have illuminated antecedents of PWB in coach-athlete-SPP triads, have highlighted interpersonal mechanisms (i.e., emotional contagion, interpersonal coping, social appraising) through which PWB can be transferred among members of these triads, and have started to unpack the complex and dynamic nature of PWB by exploring factors that cyclically act as antecedents and outcomes of PWB. We emphasize the importance of understanding the novel concept of interpersonal PWB among those in close sport relationships and extend understanding of the mechanisms that underpin changes to PWB. Future research should move toward clearer conceptual grounding on how PWB is defined and understood across sport contexts and should continue to illuminate social and interpersonal understandings of PWB. NGBs and those responsible for athlete and employee welfare are recommended to consider interventions that harness the relational potential of PWB. This would benefit health, performance, and engagement of coaches, athletes, and practitioners.

Declaration of competing interest

We have no conflicts of interests to disclose.

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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