Bringing Sports Coaches' Experiences of Primary Appraisals and

Psychological Well-being to Life using Composite Vignettes

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being to Life using Composite Vignettes

Research attention has been directed toward coaches' stressor experiences, yet less is known about the role of stress appraisals and psychological well-being (PWB). Considering the links between PWB, mental health, and retention in the coaching profession, this study will explore primary appraisals and PWB among sports coaches. Guided by our constructivist paradigm that underpinned our relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, we conducted theoretically informed semi-structured interviews with six coaches (five men and one woman) who represented both team and individual sports. We analysed data thematically using an abductive approach and constructed 10 composite vignettes that describe a powerful and shared account of the coaches' lived experiences. The vignettes offer insight to the coaches' primary appraisals and the impact of stress transactions on PWB. For example, benefit appraisals had a positive impact on environmental mastery and self-acceptance, threat appraisals had a negative impact on autonomy and environmental mastery, and harm/loss appraisals are shown to influence health. Based on these findings, we propose several impactful recommendations for researchers, practitioners, and National Governing Bodies (NGBs). For example, we recommend that practitioners working with coaches should foster positive working relationships with athletes to support coaches' PWB. Further, we encourage NGBs to work closely with coaches and practitioners to promote safe and favourable working environments, increasing coaches' autonomy, and maximise flexible working conditions.

Keywords: appraising, coaching, creative non-fiction, psychological stress, qualitative

Introduction

UK Coaching (2017a) emphasised coaching as essential to encouraging the nation to be more active and lead healthier lifestyles. The mission is to put coaching at the heart of physical

activity and sport, given the wider impact that coaches have on sport engagement and society by contributing to participation and health improvement. Approximately 21% of the workforce in the United Kingdom (UK) is in a paid coaching role, 46% in a voluntary coaching role, 16% in a paid and voluntary coaching role, and the remaining 17% falling into neither category (UK Coaching 2019). There are, however, over 10 million inactive coaches in the UK who have not coached in the previous 12 months (UK Coaching 2017b). Substantial investments are made annually by National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in coach development programs and it is, therefore, important to better understand coaches' experiences to facilitate positive encounters and prevent them from becoming inactive.

One reason coaches may become inactive could be due to the stressors that occur during their transactions with the environment they operate (Lazarus 1999) as these often determine the outcome of a stress experience. For example, researchers (e.g., Smith 1986; Frey 2007) have highlighted that stress transactions could have a negative impact on coaches' performance and can promote emotional outbursts. Furthermore, while coaches in Thelwell et al.'s (2017) study perceived that their own experiences of stress can have positive effects on their athletes, yet the negative effects were sometimes overwhelming and impacted numerous factors (e.g., performance, development, and behaviour). These findings stipulate that coach stress effects not just their own performance but also that of athletes, which can be detrimental across all levels of sport engagement. In addition, researchers (e.g., Olusoga et al. 2010) have explored both the physical (e.g., increased heart rate, shaking hands), psychological (e.g., making negative decisions, lack of confidence), and behavioural (e.g., body language, clock watching) impacts of stress. In extreme cases, coaches may experience burnout as a result of stress transactions (Hjälm et al. 2007). High levels of perceived stress have been significantly related to burnout among coaches (Malinauskas, Malinauskiene, and Dumciene 2010) and can emanate from challenges in the performance culture (Lundkvist et

al. 2012). To negate these impacts on coaches and work towards more positive experiences for them, it is imperative we understand how and why the aforementioned outcomes occur as a result of stress transactions.

A catalyst in determining the outcome of a stress transaction on an individual is his or her primary appraisal of stressors. This type of appraisal is an 'evaluative process by which the relational meaning, which is the meaning an individual interprets from his or her relationship with their environment (Lazarus 1991), is constructed' (Lazarus 1999, p. 13). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1987), there are four main types of primary appraisal: benefit, challenge, harm/loss, and threat. To date, these have only been cited in two sport psychology studies that have sampled coaches: one with Olympic and international coaches (Didymus 2017) and one with academy coaches (Dixon and Turner 2018). In the first study, Didymus (2017) highlighted that coaches experienced each of the four appraisals but that the coaches reported less information about their appraisals compared to their experiences of stressors and coping. In the second study, Dixon and Turner (2018) explored demand and resource appraisals and uncovered the emotional and behavioural consequences of such appraisals. The authors highlighted that the determinents of stress appraisals are complex and interdependent in nature and, in doing so, also highlighted the nature of appraisaing is interdependent and intrapersonal. From a theoretical perspective, Lazarus' (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory suggests that the appraisal of a stressor largely determines the impact of stress transactions on an individuals' well-being.

There is little consensus across the academic community about how best to define well-being (Giles et al. 2020; Norris, Didymus, and Kaiseler 2017). While many researchers define this concept according to its dimensions (e.g., hedonia and eudemonia; Robertson and Cooper 2011), they often fail to capture the essence of what well-being actually is (Dodge et al. 2012). As a consequence, multiple broad definitions have been reported (Gasper 2010).

One well-established, theory-based, multidimensional operationalisation of well-being is psychological well-being (PWB) that is informed by the works of Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995). This operationalisation complements our beliefs about the transactional nature of stress (e.g., Lazarus and Folkman 1984; Lazarus 1999), as both relate to the interaction between an individual and his or her environment, and is widely used among the academic community (e.g., Kishida et al. 2004; Burns and Machin 2009). The operationalisation encompasses six distinct elements of wellness: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Each of these elements are thought to be relevant to and consistent among men and women of different ages (Ryff and Keyes, 1995).

Thus far, literature on PWB among coaches has adopted quantitative methods and typically explores how coach behaviour can impact PWB (see, for a review, Norris et al. 2017). Indeed, the extant literature concludes that three conditions are needed to facilitate coach PWB: basic psychological needs satisfaction, lack of basic psychological needs thwarting, and self-determined motivation (e.g., Alcaraz, Torregrosa, and Viladrich 2015; Stebbings, Taylor, and Spray 2015). In the sport psychology literature more generally, sports individuals who have more self-determined types of motivation tend to have better performance (Gillet, Berjot, and Gobance 2009), persistence (Sarrazin et al. 2002), and PWB (Gange, Ryan, and Bargmann 2003). However, reduced PWB, which could emanate from recurring stress transactions, may result in individuals being less productive, having impaired decision-making abilities, and being more prone to absenteeism (e.g., Sparks, Faragher, and Cooper 2001). Thus, coaches' experiences of stress could have an impact on their health and PWB but the links between stress and PWB among coaches are yet to be explored in detail. Addressing this void would help to inform policy makers on a national, regional, and local level and practitioners working closely with coaches of ways in which coaches' health and

PWB could be optimised. Furthermore, it would help to retain coaches at all levels of the workforce, and would assist in offering coaches experiences that bolster rather than undermine their health and PWB. Indeed, calls from scholars (e.g, Didymus 2017; Potts, Didymus, and Kaiseler 2019) have highlighted the importance of exploring coaches' experiences of psychological stress and PWB using qualitative methods. Furthermore, research from positive psychology (e.g., Rothman, Jorgensen, and Hill 2011) has recently shifted the foci of investigations of stress to encourage the exploration of facilitative aspects of stress transactions. In particular, investigations relating to psychological growth that can enhance the study of optimal functioning, rather than the study of dysfunctions and problems (Rothman et al. 2011). With this in mind, understanding coaches' positive experiences will be helpful to inform the development of interventions to enhance poisitive functioning and foster PWB.

Despite the aforementioned literature, there is a lack of published research that has specifically explored primary appraisals and PWB among sports coaches. To date, published work by Didymus (2017) explored coaches' experiences of stressors and appraisals at an Olympic and or international level and Dixon and Turner (2018) explored the stressor, appraisals, and emotional and behavioural consequences of appraisals among academy soccer coaches. Furthermore, Potts et al. (2019) explored the stressor experiences of volunteer, part-time, and full-time coaches, yet this work overlooked the pivotal role of appraisals (Didymus and Fletcher 2012) and the impact on PWB. While these three studies do provide a useful contribution to the literature, it is imperative that an understanding of primary appraisals and PWB is developed. Therefore, this study aimed to address these significant and important gaps by exploring primary appraisals and PWB among sports coaches. This research is warranted if we are to work towards a more thorough understanding of coaches' experiences and will be integral in the development of stress management interventions that foster PWB.

Methodology and Methods

Philosophical Assumptions

This study was informed by our constructivist paradigm, which underpins our relativist

ontology and subjectivist epistemology. As constructivist researchers, we aim to seek out

knowledge that is specific to a phenomenon (Sparkes and Smith 2014) and, with our relativist

ontological position in mind, we believe that there are multiple realities that are constructed

in the minds of individuals (Al-Saggaf and Williamson 2006). Thus, we acknowledge that the

results presented in this work demonstrate our (i.e., one) interpretation of the coaches'

experiences. The knowledge we develop is socially constructed between us and each coach as

opposed to being objectively determined (Carson et al. 2001). Our subjective understanding

is such that experiences are context bound (Smith and Heshusius 1986) and facts cannot be

detached from values (Smith 1983). Therefore, we acknowledge that there is no *correct*

interpretation of a reality (Slevitch 2011).

Interviewees

Following ethical approval from the authors' institution, six sports coaches (see Table 1)

contributed voluntarily to this study. The sample of coaches was purposefully chosen to

afford opportunities to examine the coaches' experiences in rich detail (Smith 2018). The

final sample size was shaped by the richness and complexity of the experiences shared by the

sports coaches when addressing the aims of the study (Braun and Clarke 2019) and

compliments our constructivist epistemology. As such, we encourage readers to interpret the

findings as useful for coaches when and where appropriate (Kay 2016) because experiences

are subjective and context bound (Smith and Heshusius 1986) rather than being generalisable

to all (Smith 2018). To be involved with the research, coaches were required to be actively

engaged with coaching at the time of recruitment. At the time of the interviews, three coaches

were preparing for the upcoming season (Keith, Matthew, and Liam), two coaches were in

the middle of their season (Chris and Paul), and one coach had just finished for the season

(Louise).

[Table 1 here]

Procedure

The first stage of the procedure involved the first named author contacting sports coaches via email. This initial communication contained an invitation letter and a comprehensive overview of the study, including information about what would be required from the coaches if they chose to participate. We used a combination of snowball sampling (Sadler et al. 2010; Handcock and Gile 2011) and purposeful sampling (Patton 2002) to recruit interviewees. This involved identifying coaches we knew via existing working relationships and asking them to identify other coaches, while also seeking other coaches who met the inclusion criteria to yield a depth of understanding (Patton 2002). At the time of recruitment, we informed each coach that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without providing a reason for doing so. We also explained that all insight provided by the interviewees would remain confidential and that they would remain anonymous in all reproductions of the data. A convenient time and location for each interview to take place was agreed with each coach. The interviews took place in safe locations where conversations could happen in confidence. This ensured that the confidentiality of the first named author and each interviewee was protected, and helped each coach to speak freely about his or her experiences (Adams and Cox 2008). Written informed consent was obtained from each coach at the start of each interview. The interviews were digitally recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder and lasted between 37 and 98 minutes ($M_{duration}$=58:50, SD=22:24 minutes). Following each interview, the first named author transcribed verbatim each audio file using a password protected Microsoft© Word© document that was stored securely on a General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant cloud.

Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth data from each coach. Such a

technique has been used previously in sport psychology research with coaches (e.g., Thelwell et al. 2008; Didymus 2017; Potts et al. 2019) and in coach development literature (e.g., Gilbert, Cote, and Mallett 2006). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate given our relativist ontology because they allowed us to understand the coaches' realities and how their experiences are constructed in their minds (Al-Saggaf and Williamson 2006) through a standardised yet purposefully flexible structure to direct conversations, whilst allowing coaches freedom to elaborate on questions they felt were important (Sparkes and Smith 2014). They were also suitably aligned to our subjective epistemology because the experiences that we explored were context bound (Smith and Heshusius 1986), which refers to the original context the experience took place in. Using this standardised but flexible approach was in line with our constructivist ep.istemology because we aimed to develop knowledge that was specific to the coaches' experiences of primary appraisals and PWB (c.f. Potts et al. 2019).

The interview guide was informed by Lazarus' (1991; 1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory when focusing on primary appraisals and by Ryff's (1989) conceptualisation of PWB. The interview guide was made up of five sections: (1) interviewee recall of stressors in the memorable past (e.g., "list the stressors you can remember experiencing in your role as a coach?"), (2) an in-depth exploration of each stressor individually and how the coach appraised the stressor (e.g., "how did you evaluate this stressor?"), (3) coaches' PWB experiences in relation to each stressor (e.g., "how was your PWB influenced/changed by this stressor and your appraisal of it?"), (4) an opportunity to recall any experiences not yet discussed (e.g., "are there any other stressors you have remembered that we have not yet discussed?"), and (5) a review of the interview itself (e.g., "do you feel you could tell your full story during the interview?"). Whilst exploring stressors was not a primary foci of this study, it was important to gather contextual information relating to the coaches' stressor

experiences so that primary appraisals and the impact on PWB could be explored and understood.

Pilot Study

The first named author conducted three pilot interviews. Pilot interviews have been used in previous sport psychology literature (e.g., Olusoga et al. 2010; Barker and Winter 2014) because they offer an opportunity to enhance the clarity and fluidity of the interview guide (Gratton and Jones 2004). The pilot interviews allowed us to assess whether the interview guide was applicable in achieving the aim of the study, to ensure that the questions could be understood, and to make amendments to the interview guide before the main phase of data collection commenced. No amendments to the interview guide were needed and, thus, the pilot interview data were used as part of the final dataset (see Thabane et al. 2010).

Data Analyses

We took an abductive approach (Dubois and Gadde 2002) to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Braun, Clarke, and Weate 2016). This allowed us to be flexible by using pre-identified themes that we had generated using previous literature whilst also searching for new knowledge (Dubois and Gadde 2002). We used the work of Lazarus (1991; 1999), Ryff (1989), and Didymus (2017) to identify codes that would fit within a primary appraisal or PWB theme. Specifically, the overarching themes relating to primary appraisals and PWB were deductively driven and informed by previous literature. When looking at the sub-themes, those relating to primary appraisals (e.g., challenge, harm/loss, and threat; Lazarus and Folkman 1987, benefit; Didymus 2017) and PWB (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, relationships with others, and self-acceptance; Ryff 1989) were also deductively driven because our findings were well suited to sub-themes within existing literature. This approach allowed us to be informed by established frameworks when systematically exploring the phenomena of interest (Creswell 2003) and allowed us to build logically on existing theory, research, and practice (Potts et al. 2019) by remaining open to

the development of new themes and sub-themes. It is, however, important to note that no new themes or sub-themes were developed during the analyses of data, despite remaining open to the possibility. The abductive approach complemented our constructivist paradigm because it facilitated the description and explanation of relationships across the data (Aronson 1995).

Thematic analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis and can provide rich, comprehensive, and complex accounts of data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013). As such, this type of analysis allowed us to identify, analyse, and report patterns and themes within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013; Braun et al. 2016). We used six phases of thematic analysis recursively to analyse the interview transcripts (for a guide, see Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013; Braun et al. 2016) and used NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd. 2016) to organise and analyse the data. This helped us to systematically store text that was labelled under each theme and to easily access each of these.

All data were collected, transcribed, and analysed primarily by the first named author who is experienced in conducting qualitative research with sports coaches. The second and third named authors acted as mentors and critical friends throughout the research process and contributed to analytical decisions. To expand, while the first named author coded the data into themes and subthemes, the second and third authors reviewed each quote, theme, and sub-theme to ensure that interpretations of the data accurately represented the experience co-constructed between the first named author and each coach. As a research team, we met regularly in person to discuss the analytical decisions and to achieve a number of other outcomes (e.g., reflect on progress, produce this manuscript).

Data Representation

Following the analyses, we used quotes within each theme to develop 10 composite vignettes (Ely et al. 1997). This type of vignette is a type of creative non-fiction that offers an

opportunity to share a deeper understanding of lived experiences (Ely et al. 1997; Schinke et al. 2016a) and provides a voice to participants' during the write up of research. Creative non-fiction allows a story to be told using facts, while adopting techniques of fictional writing to deliver facts in ways that can help the reader develop a deeper understanding of a topic (Cheney 2001). In this study it was important to understand the coaches' meanings and interpretations (e.g., appraisals) that are used in reaching outcomes (e.g., outcome on PWB) and this type of creative non-fiction offers one opportunity to illuminate and explore these complex processes (Barter and Renold 2000). Composite vignettes also allowed us to display the key themes among the data and to shed light on and centralise the coaches' voices (Blodgett et al. 2011; Yungblut et al. 2012) as a single, all-encompassing narrative (Spalding and Phillips 2007; Blodgett et al. 2011). When creating the composite vignettes, we blended multiple coaches' voices into a single sketch about each theme (e.g., Yungblut et al. 2012b; Ronkainen et al. 2018). This allowed us to draw together the coaches' stories and to amalgamate them into a more powerful, shared account of their experiences (Schinke et al. 2016b).

We began crafting the composite vignettes by examining the themes and subthemes that we developed during the abductive thematic analyses. We then extracted exerts from the interview transcripts that related to each theme or subtheme and, through creative writing, reorganised and fitted together fragments of the transcripts to create a coherent and evocative storyline (Smith, McGannon, and Williams 2016). We engaged in this process by hand to create a skeleton of each composite vignette. Direct quotes and contextual examples were maintained from the interview transcripts as much as possible to preserve the coaches' voices (Shinke et al. 2016a, 2016b). Each vignette was reviewed and revised recursively alongside regular visits to the thematic analyses and the interview transcripts. This allowed us to ensure that each vignette accurately represented the coaches' experiences and the relevant theme

was comprehensive and fluid. Whilst the themes and sub-themes within the data are presented as individual vignettes, it is important to acknowledge that the experiences presented do not exisit in isolation but are chapters in a broader story (Kerr, Nixon, and Wild 2010).

Research Quality

Based on our assumption that criteria for assessing qualitative research quality are time- and place-contingent (see Sparkes and Smith 2014), we encourage readers to judge the quality of this research using the following criteria: (1) significant contribution, (2) sincerity of the research, (3) rigor, and (4) resonance. This study offers a significant contribution to the literature and to policy and practice, which is achieved by offering an understanding of social life by presenting the coaches' lived experiences and bringing clarity to their experiences. This generates insight and deepened understanding of the topic area (Tracy 1995). By incorporating self-reflexive methods as part of the study design, we were able to enhance the sincerity and rigor of the research (Smith and McGannon 2017). Most notably, throughout the research the first author maintained a reflexive journal that was shared with the second and third authors. This allowed the first author to document an audit trail of the project, to become aware of her strengths and shortcomings, and to remain aware of biases and motivations that may have influenced the data and the write-up. This study demonstrates resonance because the findings, interpretations, and outcomes of the research have remained rooted in the contexts and individuals they stem from (Sparkes and Smith 2014). Composite vignettes afford an opportunity to resonate with readers in a meaningful way (Blodgett et al. 2011) and facilitate understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the coaches using their own voices (Schinke et al. 2016b).

Results

The vignettes that were constructed are presented below. We offer 10 composite vignettes

that capture the knowledge that was co-constructed between the first named author and the coaches of the coaches' experiences of primary appraisals and PWB. Table 2 outlines our definitions of the themes and each vignette that is used in the results to guide the reader's understanding.

[Table 2 here]

Primary appraisals

This theme is made up of four vignettes that were deductively driven by previous frameworks of stress appraisals (e.g., Lazarus and Folkman 1984) and sports coaches' appraisals (e.g., Didymus 2017): benefit, challenge, harm/loss, and threat.

Benefit Appraisals

Athletes achieving goals ahead of schedule is positive on every front for me, and being ahead of schedule is a massive benefit. If my athlete is set on making it professional and you have a three to five-year plan and they're hitting their goals in two then brilliant, there's more chance they're going to make it and you're going to succeed in the end goal. So yeah, it's totally beneficial for me. When athletes win or there's a positive outcome, I go home glowing for days! It's a massive benefit working with athletes when they win and it's huge for my coaching and personal development. When your input, in particular, has improved the athlete, it makes you feel really good and boosts your confidence as a coach. I've been lucky to work with different players in different environments, which has made me a better coach because I'm getting more exposure, and I'm learning more. I coach kids too, which is great. Like, seeing the kids progress and building confidence among them is great especially when you've coached them for a long time. Seeing the kids grow and the club build is a huge benefit of coaching for me.

Challenge Appraisal

It's crazy how challenging people in the coaching environment can be. So athletes, for example, who don't listen to me are just hard work. I could choose to not work with them but the challenge gives me an opportunity to grow and learn how to deal with these situations. NGBs can be a nightmare as well, especially when we are working on selection because it's incredibly hard trying to get that athlete through the selection process and working out the best route, you almost feel like you're jumping through hoops. It can often be a challenge working with difficult characters in this environment, especially when no one has been able to work with them effectively before, especially more senior coaches. Keeping athletes and parents onside is a tricky one too because I want to keep providing good experiences to the players and to keep them at the club. The club is good and I want to continue to build it but it can be really challenging when I only get sent the training plan the night before. I'm expected to learn and understand the technical terminology of a particular discipline quickly too, which is hard when I'm trying to balance part-time coaching alongside a full-time non-coaching job. But, I get on with it and see it as an opportunity to try and prove myself.

Harm/loss Appraisal

I wanted to tell the head coach what I really thought about his coaching practice. We already had a bad relationship and I felt the strain of this but I knew if I said something he would not want to work with me next year. I found this really harmful to me in terms of my mental health, especially with my anxiety and not sleeping properly. We had some additional funding to buy new players through scholarships but this hadn't been done before. I suggested to the head coach that we brought new players in and changed the culture of the club but him and the original coaching staff, dinosaurs I call them, weren't happy with this and it caused friction between us. It

stopped me from growing and developing the club, which basically prevented me from doing my job as a coach properly. I've had to work with athletes before who either aren't improving or are struggling at races. I find it really draining and it can be particularly damaging and unhealthy for my mental health and state of mind. I don't want to cut off the working relationship with an athlete when the cirucmstances are like this, but at the same time it's stopped me from working with other athletes and stopped the progression of my coaching career.

Threat Appraisal

I didn't lie but I had to water down what I wanted to say to the head coach about his coaching practice, so he would still want to work with me next season. I felt threatened by that when I was just a volunteer, but I thought that once I got in here full-time and I got through my probation period then no one could touch me. It did worry me and I wondered if it would stop me moving forward as a coach and, ultimately, I want to progress and push myself. The nature of the league we play in is tricky enough as it is without the threat of the head coach over my head. We have three fixtures over 200 miles away, which created a 15-hour round trip for each game. I don't mind travelling to games but that's an excessive demand and just exhausts not just me but my players as well. I always worry that travelling and the long hours will have a big and bad impact on our performance, and I want us to win at all costs. I often reflect back to when I was coaching children. If a child misbehaves when they are under my control, I feel like it's a reflection on me and my coaching and what I'm doing. It's really hard when the children are misbehaving or talking back to me, particularly if I'm coaching them on my own. If the children are misbehaving then it's because I'm not engaging them enough or they're not enjoying what they're doing; it's my fault. The children have a lot of power at this age group because if they're not

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happy then they can easily go to another coach and say "we're not happy with the coach, can you get rid of him?" If the children were to say that then, ultimately, it could threaten my future coaching aspirations.

Psychological Well-being

This theme is made up of six vignettes, which were deductively driven by Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes' (1995) conceptualisation of PWB: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, relationships with others, and self-acceptance.

Autonomy

I have a really nurturing environment at my current club where the director lets me do what I like, and he gives me constructive feedback on sessions. So, for example, I'm allowed to register new players with the club and collect subs which, while it can be stressful at times, is nice to be given independence to just get on with the admin side of the job and not be questioned all the time. Whereas, at my old club, even though I was still full-time, it was completely different and I had no autonomy and received no feedback, which made it an easy decision when I was considering which club to leave. I find it a challenge to control things like selection though. I have some control over getting the athlete to be at the level to perform that can help them make selection but, in terms of actually getting the selection and getting them through that process, that's out of our hands because we don't pick the teams. They don't always pick the best athletes for the job; we can try to help with that but, ultimately, it's the selectors' call.

Environmental Mastery

If something goes wrong and I get stressed or feel threatened, I remember that we've got protocols in place, so I start looking at the objective goals and, as soon as I've done that, I'm generally happy and okay with it. The second we need to get that

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protocol in place, we can, and it starts working and we're back on schedule then all that anxiety goes away. I manage my own diary with my athletes and my work schedule. So, tomorrow I have taken advantage of a quiet morning and deliberately kept my diary free so I can train and I'll work 13.00-21.00 instead. It's totally flexible so I can maintain my work-life balance. When I was part-time I used to juggle coaching alongside another job but being a "yes person" I just used to take things on. At that time, I was young and had no ties and everyone was telling me it's too much but it continued to get worse and worse throughout the year and the demands became increasingly stressful. I had to work really hard, not just in my coaching and work, but to manage these separate demands and make sure I could make use of as many opportunities that came my way as I could.

Personal Growth

I was working with and mentoring different athletes but I decided to go to university and I did my degree, my masters, and started my PhD to continue my development. I really enjoyed being at uni and was grateful that the club gave me the opportunity to grow alongside coaching. Balancing uni and coaching wasn't easy and I found it a juggling act at times, but I saw it as an opportunity to grow and develop and set myself up for the future. I've now moved away from that club and I have set up my own coaching business, which I work at full-time at a research level to inform my coaching. For me, I find it important to listen to others who are working with other athletes, coaches, and teams. Sharing experiences with others and listening to other coaches is really important to me as I find comfort in knowing others are in the same boat as me and tackling the same stressors. It also means we can share how we have dealt with the situations and help each other to grow and develop. I also enjoy going to conferences to keep up to date with the research. I want to be head coach at the best

club in the world but, for now, I just need to keep improving and developing myself. There are other qualifications that can help me get there through the NGB and I'm halfway there. I just need to pass the practical which, although I do find the practical side of it challenging, I'm looking forward to completing it. I want to widen the scope of the sport more and make it more appealing to others who might want to get involved.

Purpose in Life

I think my sense of purpose is very good; the athletes couldn't do their job without me…that is genuinely how I feel. Particularly in the early stages of an athlete's process, they absolutely couldn't do it without me. As a volunteer coach, I find working with young children really rewarding. You can gain so much from them and you can influence them in a really positive way. If you can see that your input has improved them, it makes you feel really good. Loads of benefit for me in that respect. Helping athletes win is huge for my feelings of purpose. If someone is winning, it's because I've helped them, and I feel absolutely chuffed and you bask in that glory.

Relationships with Others

I try to make my relationships with my athletes informal and friendly. It's very rare that I have to be authoritative with them. Some coaches are authoritative but I don't think it's sustainable as they see you as a dictator and that just doesn't work long term. I try to instil in the athlete that I'm their coach but we're a team and it's a two-way street. It can be a challenge to develop that approach but when you've got a relationship like that, it's easy to say something to the athlete and they respect it. Having this type of relationship with athletes has only gone, what can you say, "upside down" once. I felt I couldn't benefit the athlete anymore but he thought it could work so we continued. He was disgruntled with progress and became hostile

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and aggressive towards me. Misunderstandings between the two of us made it difficult to work through and he ended up overtraining and becoming ill. I felt responsible for the athlete but, ultimately, I had to terminate the working relationship with this particular athlete as it just wasn't good for either of us. Moving away from my athletes, other coaches are often interesting to negotiate with and develop relationships with. So, for example, when I started at the club, no one got on with the head coach. I made it my mission to get him on side. My relationship building with him has taken a long time because he's a very complex character but we've worked on that and we're really close now. Being honest with each other and having deep and meaningful conversations are key. Being honest with parents is equally important and I try to make sure they are involved in sessions, rather than having them on the side-line. If I can get them involved, they feel invested in the club, you get them onside, and they start to trust you.

Self-Acceptance

Every athlete I coached that was supposed to make selection, made selection. It may sound egotistical but I am very good at what I do. I can tell if an athlete's going to make it professional within the first six to eight weeks of working with them. I don't want to blow my own trumpet but I've built up a good reputation. That being said, I would be lying if I sat here and didn't say I did some things wrong last year coaching wise. So, for example, I have had a couple of athletes who I have pushed too hard, who could have been on the brink of burnout. I thought they could handle the extra training load but I quickly realised they were struggling and it was important that I took responsibility for this and changed their plan so they could ease off. As long as I stay honest, truthful, and respectful to that person or that environment then I know I can walk away with my head held high.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore coaches' experiences of primary appraisals and PWB. To address this aim, we co-constructed experiences with six coaches through semi-structured interviews and presented the findings via 10 composite vignettes, which provided realistic insight to and depth of information about the coaches' experiences. Most research on psychological stress among coaches has tended to focus on stressors and coping (e.g., Olusoga et al. 2011; Potts et al. 2019) and, in doing so, has overlooked the critical role of appraising and the value of understanding positive PWB experiences rather than focusing on distress (e.g., Rothman et al. 2011). Overlooking these critical points is problematic due to the influence of primary appraisals during stress transactions (Lazarus 1984; Waters and Moore 2002) and often determining the outcome of the stress transaction, and the subsequential impact on PWB (e.g., Schaufeli, Taris, and van Rhenen 2007). Thus, the focus in the current work on primary appraisals and PWB extends existing literature with coaches and provides real-life insight to primary appraisals and PWB via composite vignettes.

Coaches explained that being ahead of schedule, winning, positive aspects of performance, and working with different players were stressors that they appraised as a benefit. Indeed, these experiences often left coaches with a glowing feeling and a sense that there was some benefit to their coaching and personal development. Furthermore, seeing children progress and building their confidence were appraised as a benefit, gave coaches a feeling of fulfilment, and they showed care about their athletes (Côté and Salmela 1996). This, in turn, could have positive connotations for PWB (Taylor and Brown 1988), can drive professional commitment (Eason, Mazerolle, and Pitney 2015), and foster longevity and retention in the occupation (Mazerolle et al. 2016). Rewarding and benefcal experiences such as these contributed to coaches' sense of purpose in life and have been found to help outweigh the challenges that individuals encounter (Mazerolle et al. 2016). It would appear,

therefore, that coaches' appraisals have an impact on PWB, which supports previous literature (see e.g., Waters and Moore 2002; Berjot and Gillet 2011). This novel finding in a coaching context has implications for researchers and practitioners because benefit appraisals relate to elements of PWB, such as environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff 1989). It is, therefore, important for researchers and practitioners to work with NGBs to offer rewarding opportunities for coaches to work with different players (i.e., via a coaching secondment) to increase continuity and retention across the profession.

Coaches appraised stressors such as working with difficult individuals, keeping people onside, and working with NGBs around selection as a challenge. Coaches felt a need to maintain relationships with athletes and parents to keep players at the club. These experiences relate to findings from Olympic and international level coaches (Didymus 2017) and have connotations for coaches' PWB, particularly their ability to master the environment and their relationships with others. Indeed, fostering positive relationships with others and strong social support networks are both important elements for improving and maintaining PWB (Alcaraz et al. 2015; Norris et al. 2017). This finding has applied implications for the coaches themselves, as it appears important for them to improve communication and relationship building skills, such as active listening (Moen and Federici 2013), in an effort to develop and maintain strong working relationships (Rhind and Jowett 2010) with athletes and parents.

Within the vignette that represents the harm/loss theme, the coaches talked about how they felt their coaching career could be ended if they spoke too honestly to the head coach. A harm/loss appraisal relating to damage to self, in particular, has been reported in the sport psychology literature among sports coaches and can cause damage to PWB (Didymus 2017). This resulted in some form of damage to the coaches as it had a harmful impact on their mental health, caused anxiety, and resulted in a lack of sleep. Furthermore, work overload,

which was experienced by the coaches, can lead to feelings of exhaustion and negative attitudes towards work (see, for a review, Lee and Ashforth 1996), which could have implications for PWB. Practitioners working with coaches must be mindful of this implication due to the impact that potential job loss can have on an individual's mental health (e.g., increasing the likelihood of depression; Price, Choi, and Vinokur 2002). Changing the club culture and bringing in new players was often not welcomed by existing coaching staff. Although conflict among coaching staff has been reported previously (e.g., Thelwell, Weston, and Greenlees 2010; Didymus 2017), the current study develops understanding by offering insight to work misfit (e.g., Chatman 1989). To expand, the coaches talked about "dinosaurs" halting change and progression, thus demonstrating an incompatibility or level of discomfort between an individual and others (Follmer et al. 2018) This particular situation was appraised as a harm/loss by the coaches because it prevented them from doing their coaching job. To help resolve misfit situations, a variety of options are available (e.g., resolution, relief-seeking, or resignation; Follmer et al. 2018) so it seems important that NGBs and practitioners work with coaches to equip them with the skills needed to solve this type of situation should it arise. Collectively, these findings highlight that it is important for practitioners who work closely with coaches to encourage coaches to move away from appraising stressful transactions as a harm/loss wherever possible, to help prevent negative influences on coaches' PWB.

Coaches explained how they often had to be careful what they said to the head coach to ensure the head coach wanted to work with them next season, as this could potentially threaten the coach's future at the club. While it may be essential for coaches to maintain this relationship to mitage against potentially harmful outcomes (e.g., leaving the club or preventing progression), it is important that coaches work on their communication and relationship building skills to foster positive and trusting relationships (Ryff and Singer 2008)

with head coaches. This is important to minimise any potential threat on their future coaching career and improve PWB (Ryff and Singer 2008) and is something coaches should seek to encourage as part of their coaching practice. Furthermore, coaches could make more favourable appraisals toward certain stressors, which could be done by reappraising the stressor as a challenge and acknowledging that the challenge of improving their communication and the relationship between the coach and the head coach could lead to more positive outcomes (e.g., promotion or wider development opporutnities). As appraising is a complex process which is often largely unconscious (Lazarus 1999), it will be important for coaches to explore opportunities for reappraisal training to assist in this process and work with practitioners to make more favourable appraisals and, consequently optimise PWB.

The findings highlight the potentially detrimental impact of balancing multiple coaching and non-coaching roles, which is one of the reasons why coaching has been described as inherently stressful in other literature (e.g., Lyle 2002; Miller, Salmela, and Kerr 2002). It is important, therefore, that NGBs work with coaches and practitioners to facilitate favourable working environments (e.g., one which allows coaches to manage their work schedule themselves; Allen and Shaw 2013). By allowing coaches to have control over their own schedules and to have autonomy over their work, which is integral to PWB (Gao and McLellan 2018), will help provide more positive experiences for coaches. Furthermore, it is essential that high pressure demands (e.g., in the build up to Olympic games; Olusoga et al. 2012) and role ambiguity, are reduced because these may lead to exhaustion and impaired health (Halbesleben and Buckley 2004).

We were reflexive throughout this study so it is important to consider the strengths and shortcomings of the work presented. Vignettes can be highly accessible to participants (Parry 2007; Spalding and Phillips 2007) and can resonate in a meaningful way with those who are in similar environments (Blodgett et al. 2011). By creating the vignettes as

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composites that represent the voices and experiences of all six coaches, it allows the reader to understand the experiences of the coaches through their own voices (Schinke et al. 2016b). Another strength of this study is that it included representation from full-time, part-time, and voluntary coaches. Previous literature has tended to share the experiences of those working at a full-time and elite level (e.g., Olusoga et al. 2009; Didymus 2017) and has not reported on those working at a part-time or voluntary bases despite individuals in these positions contributing to a substantial part of the coaching workforce (UK Coaching 2019). Notwithstanding the notable strengths of this study, it is important to be aware of potential shortcomings. For example, it was not possible to standardise the interviews so that they took place at the same point in the season for each coach. This was due to the nuances of different sports and the varied timing of seasons in each sport that the coaches worked in. Although this is not necessarily a significant issue, it is important that readers are aware of this lack of standardisation because the coaches will have been influenced by their context in relation to the competitive season at the time of data collection.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has advanced understanding of sports coaches' appraisals and PWB and, in doing so, provides a significant contribution to the literature. The use of composite vignettes provides a novel and real-life contribution by giving the coaches a voice. Benefit appraisals seemed to have a positive impact on environmental mastery and self-acceptance, challenge appraisals appeared to have an impact on relationships with others, and threat appraisals seemed to have a negative impact on autonomy and environmental mastery. This study also brought to the fore the harmful impact that harm/loss appraisals can have on coaches' mental health, which was shown to cause anxiety and sleep disturbance. This has important implications at both an individual and organisational level, particularly relating to interventions aiming to promote coaches' PWB. For example, on an individual level, it is

important that future interventions working with coaches encourage appraisals which are less harmful to health and PWB (i.e., challenge and benefit). On an organisational level, it is important that interventions optimise coaching environments to provide positive experiences and to reduce the burden on coaches of non-coaching related tasks, such as travel. Researchers need to continue working with coaches to construct further knowledge of coaches' stress appraisals and the impact on their PWB. This could be done via longitudinal (e.g., 28-day daily diaries) and or qualitative methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews) that can help to capture and co-construct experiences relating to coaches' stress transactions and appraisals on a daily basis and work towards a more comprehensive understanding of coaches' PWB. Finally, in future, researchers in this area should consider the experiences of coaches who are working on different employment bases (e.g., voluntary or part-time), which could be done through more purposeful sampling (Palinkas et al. 2015) with this cohort of coaches to co-construct experiences, and should seek to recruit more balanced samples (i.e., those that include more women) to address current inequalities in the literature. This will not only address aforementioned limitations but will also help to inform policy makers and practitioners of the most up-to-date research with both men and women coaches from different occupational backgrounds.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest are reported by the authors.

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Table 1

Coaches' demographic characteristics

Coach (pseudonym)	Occupational group	Gender (M/F)	Ethinic group	Age (years)	Sport	Contracted volume of coaching per week (hours)	Coaching experience (years)
Chris	Full-time paid	M	White british	31	Endurance sports	38	9
Keith	Full-time paid	M	White british	27	Rugby union	38	12
Matthew	Part-time paid	M	White british	27	Rugby union	12	8
Paul	Part-time paid	M	White british	47	Road cycling	10	26
Liam	Voluntary	M	White british	25	Football	6	7
Louise	Voluntary	F	White british	29	Triathlon	4	1
Mean				32.67			10.50
SD				8.14			8.41

Note. SD = standard deviation. All coaches were operating in the UK at the time of recruitment and data collection.

Table 2

Key definitions

Theme	Vignette	Definition
Primary appraisals: *Concerned with the motivational relevance of what is happening and whether the stressor is pertinent to an individual's PWB (Lazarus and Folkman 1995)*	Benefit	An appraisal where any experiences are perceived to have provided some form of benefit to the coach or attain a goal
	Challenge	An appraisal where the coach perceived sufficient resources to meet the demands of the stressor, viewed the stressor as an opportunity to prove him or herself, or anticipated potential mastery or personal growth from the experience
	Harm/loss	An appraisal where the coach perceives that damage has already occurred to the coach themselves or inhibited his or her goals
	Threat	An appraisal where the coach perceives they have insufficient resources to meet the demands of the stressor and, therefore, that threat to their goals was apparent
Psychological well-being: *A*	Autonomy	An individual's perceptions of control and the independence

multidimensional structure which includes		and regulation of his or her thoughts or behaviours
autonomy, environmental mastery,	Environmental mastery	An individual's ability to choose or create environments which are suited to them, control an array of complex external activities, and making effective use of surrounding opportunities
personal growth, purpose in life,		
relationships with others, and self-		
acceptance (Ryff and Keyes 1995)		
	Personal growth	An individual's emphasis on continual growth and development, whilst remaining open to confronting new experiences and challenges
	Purpose in life	Having goals, ambitions, and a sense of direction, which contribute to a meaningful life
	Relationships with others	An individual having strong feelings of empathy and affection towards other individuals and an ability to develop deep friendships and warm to and care for others
	Self-acceptance	An individual holding positive attitude towards the self, understanding and accepting multiple aspects of the self that are both positive and negative, and feeling positive about his

or her past life