

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

Sport Psychology Consultants' Reflections on the Role of Humor: "It's Like Having another Skill in Your Arsenal"

Date of resubmission: 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2019

26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

### **Abstract**

Previous research demonstrates that sport psychology consultants use humor to facilitate the working alliance, reinforce client knowledge, and create healthy learning environments. The current study sought to gain further insights into consultants' reflections on the role of humor, humor styles, purposes for humor, and experiences of humor use. Forty-eight sport psychology consultants completed an online survey comprising open-ended questions. Thematic analysis revealed four themes: (a) it's the way I tell 'em, (b) it's the way I don't tell 'em, (c) this is why I tell 'em, and (d) learning to use humor in consultancy. Participants used two styles of humor (i.e., 'deadpan' and 'self-deprecating') each having the goal of facilitating the working alliance. Although not all participants used humor during consultancy, its incorporation might render the working alliance and the real relationship as resources in ways (e.g., a "barometer" that predicts consultancy outcomes) previously not considered in applied sport psychology.

*Key words: humor style, humor outcome, applied sport psychology*

50 Sport Psychology Consultants' Reflections on the Role of Humor: "It's Like Having another  
51 Skill in Your Arsenal"

52 In clinical psychology, it has been argued that the client-therapist relationship  
53 accounts for a large variance in client outcome compared to expectancy effects and  
54 therapeutic techniques (Lambert & Barley, 2001). Similarly in sport psychology, a general  
55 consensus exists that successful consultancy outcomes are influenced by the client-  
56 consultant relationship (e.g., Longstaff & Gervis, 2016; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999;  
57 Sharp, Hodge, & Danish, 2015). For example, the *working alliance* (i.e., the agreement  
58 between the client and the consultant regarding shared goals, tasks, and emotional bonds;  
59 Bordin, 1979) has been suggested as an important determinant of successful consultancy  
60 outcomes. Researchers have also identified a number of factors that can influence the  
61 quality of the working alliance. For example, the *real relationship* (i.e., a transference-free,  
62 genuine, and authentic relationship based on realistic perceptions), between the client and  
63 the consultant, is said to silently either facilitate or impede an effective working alliance  
64 (Gelso, 2002).

65 In addition to the working alliance and real relationship, a number of personal  
66 characteristics of effective consultants have been found to influence the client-consultant  
67 relationship (e.g., Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008; Sharp & Hodge, 2011; Sharp  
68 et al., 2015; Staples, Sloane, Whipple, & Yorkston, 1976). These characteristics include  
69 good interpersonal skills (Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987), being  
70 approachable (Dunn & Holt, 2003), being friendly, easy-going, fun, and fitting-in with  
71 athletes (Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004; Weigand, Richardson, &  
72 Weinberg, 1999), and more recently, the use of humor as part of consultancy (Pack,  
73 Hemmings, Winter, & Arvinen-Barrow, 2018).

74 Typically defined as “communication which is perceived by any of the interacting  
75 parties as humorous behavior that leads to laughter, smiling, or a feeling of amusement”  
76 (Robinson, 1991, p. 10), humor is a complex biopsychosocial phenomenon, consisting of  
77 physiological, cognitive, affective, behavioral, and socio/contextual components (Martin,  
78 Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Humor use by the consultant can be intentional  
79 or spontaneous, both of which can lead to improvements in the client’s self-understanding  
80 and behavior (Franzini, 2001), client-consultant relationship (by influencing the working  
81 alliance and real relationships), and consultancy outcomes. For example, Nelson (2008)  
82 argued that laughter (as an expression of humor) serves as an attachment process and  
83 facilitates closeness within the client-consultant relationship. When used as a form of  
84 interpersonal self-disclosure, humor has also been found to influence the extent to which the  
85 consultant is “open for approval”, thus indicating the level of congruence between the client  
86 and the consultant (Wheless & Grotz, 1976).

87 The use of humor has also been linked to the development of effective learning  
88 environments. It is known that humor helps to create a non-threatening atmosphere, aids  
89 attention span and retention of information, and enhances problem-solving and coping  
90 strategies (Achike & Nain, 2005; Morales-Mann & Kaitell, 2001; Ulloth, 2003). In  
91 education, teachers’ use of humor has been found to make students’ learning more  
92 enjoyable and interesting (Gilliland & Mauritsen, 1971), and it has been proposed that use  
93 of humor should elicit learnable opportunities to clients (e.g., Falkenberg, Buchkremer,  
94 Bartels, & Wild, 2011).

95 To date research into the use of humor in applied sport psychology consultancy is  
96 limited. A recent preliminary investigation into consultants’ ( $n = 55$ ) use of humor found  
97 that the majority of participants used humor within their professional practice (Pack et al.,  
98 2018). The results revealed that most participants used humor with the goal of facilitating

99 the working alliance, reinforcing client knowledge, and creating healthy learning  
100 environments. The authors concluded that humor in consultancy can be an important part of  
101 enhancing the client-consultant relationship, and as a consequence, it can have a positive  
102 effect on consultancy outcomes. Since the research was the first of its kind, and preliminary  
103 in nature, further research is warranted to gain a better insight into consultants' use of  
104 humor in their practice. The current study sought to gain an insight into consultants'  
105 reflections on the role of humor in consultancy. More specifically, the study aimed to  
106 explore consultants' humor styles, the purpose of humor use, and their experiences of  
107 humor use.

## 108 **Method**

### 109 **Participants**

110 Sport psychology consultants ( $N = 48$ ;  $n = 20$  female;  $n = 28$  male;  $M_{age} 42.2$  years,  
111 age range = 26-77 years) were included in the data analysis (UK:  $n = 38$ ; USA:  $n = 6$ ; Ireland:  
112  $n = 2$  Australia:  $n = 2$ ). The participants' professional experience ranged between 4-38 years  
113 ( $M = 14.2$  years). The sample had experience working with various sport populations (e.g.,  
114 youth, high school, local, state, amateur, masters, national, international, Olympic, and  
115 Paralympic). Please see Table 1 for details of participants' professional certification/s.

### 116 **The Survey Instrument**

117 A survey constructed by White (2001) for assessing the purposes of higher education  
118 teachers' humor (see Pack et al. 2018 for further details), was modified to explore  
119 consultants' use of humor via the addition of open-ended questions. Examples of the  
120 additional questions include: (a) do you consider yourself a humorous person? (b) do you use  
121 humor in your professional practice? (c) can you give examples of when/why you have used  
122 humor in your professional practice? Please note your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that  
123 you can remember about these examples; and (d) what is it like to use humor in your

124 professional practice? These questions were intended to elicit responses that would provide  
125 illustrative information regarding the context of humor use, the motives for humor use, the  
126 social dynamics impacted by humor, and personal perceptions of humor, in order to  
127 complement existing research.

### 128 **Procedure**

129       Following institutional ethical approval, potential participants were purposefully  
130 identified via consultant registration lists, the sport psychology Listserv® database, and  
131 contacted via email. Qualified and trainee applied sport psychology consultants worldwide  
132 with a range of experience levels were sampled for the study. The email included a briefing  
133 regarding the purposes of the study, requirements of participation, and a URL to an online  
134 survey. The survey was constructed and distributed using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics,  
135 Provo, UT).

### 136 **Data Analysis**

137       A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was conducted on all responses.  
138 “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes)  
139 within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Initially, all open-ended responses per question  
140 were retrieved from Qualtrics, and reviewed by the authors. Preliminary codes were  
141 generated based upon themes (e.g., humor style; Martin et al., 2003) within existing  
142 literature, and then organised into higher-level themes. The second, third, and fourth authors  
143 acted as critical friends (Smith & McGannon, 2018) to the first author in challenging and  
144 developing the interpretations of the data set, and coding was deemed to be complete when  
145 no new themes or concepts emerged from the data.

### 146 **Results**

147           The following sections discuss key elements of four over-riding themes which  
148 emerged from the data: (a) it's the way I tell 'em, (b) it's the way I don't tell 'em, (c) this is  
149 why I tell 'em, and (d) learning to use humor in consultancy.

### 150 **It's the Way I Tell 'Em**

151           The data revealed that the consultants' used different styles of humor for different  
152 purposes. It seemed that the two most commonly used styles were: (a) deadpan (affiliative  
153 other-enhancing), and (b) self-deprecating (affiliative other-enhancing).

154           **Deadpan (affiliative other-enhancing).** The participants described their humor style  
155 as "storytelling", "quick wit rather than laugh out loud", "light-hearted", "banter", "sarcasm",  
156 "dry humor", "quips", and "curious language." The term "deadpan" was often used. For  
157 example one participant commented: "I am often described as having a dry sense of humor,  
158 saying something odd but keeping deadpan." The effectiveness of deadpan humor rests upon  
159 the way it is delivered and focused, usually in an emotionless, straight-faced, and sarcastic  
160 manner. Unsurprisingly, deadpan might often be viewed as an aggressive/hostile style of  
161 humor when used to disparage self and/or others (i.e., Martin et al., 2003). However, in the  
162 current context, deadpan was portrayed as affiliative (as opposed to disparaging) and as  
163 fostering agency (as opposed to instilling hopelessness):

164

165           I can be sarcastic, and funny in most settings. I think I am able to read individual  
166 clients and see when it might be ok to press their buttons a bit in the name of getting a  
167 smile or a laugh. I believe that this opens a portal for further engagement.

168

169           The importance of explaining the use of deadpan to clients was also apparent:

170

171 One thing I try to do is to ensure my pitch, tone, and body language do not suggest I  
172 am trying to make them feel stupid. I will often, even state that I am not saying it like  
173 this to make you feel silly, but I am saying it how you have said it (which might and  
174 often does sound silly), but it lets them come to that conclusion, which potentially has  
175 more of an impact.

176

177 Contained within the participants' use of humor were aspects of personal and  
178 professional life. In particular, the participants described the use of "irony, incongruity, and  
179 absurdity in the human condition", the "entertaining elements of life", and the "paradoxical"  
180 as being common elements of discussion with their clients. The success of deadpan seemed  
181 linked to the ability to juxtapose seemingly unrelated issues within personal and professional  
182 life to create positive consultancy experiences. Due to the potential nature of deadpan, it  
183 seemed paradoxical that the participants used this style frequently, although several  
184 highlighted the need for a good vocabulary and the creativity to construct and deliver  
185 alternative narratives from often disparate information. However, deadpan seemed to provide  
186 a stabilizing and precipitating factor for clients to permit exploration of complex issues (i.e.,  
187 Marmarosh et al., 2009). Therefore, as Kuipers (2009) stated the (effective) production of  
188 humor seemed to require "considerable linguistic aptitude" (p. 392), and a heightened  
189 reflexive ability and contextual intelligence if the humor was to achieve the intended purpose.

190 **Self-deprecating (affiliative other-enhancing).** Most participants also used self-  
191 deprecating humor, that is humor that involves doing or saying funny things at one's own  
192 expense with the purpose of gaining approval, ingratiating oneself, and permitting oneself to  
193 be the "butt" of others' humor (Martin et al., 2003) in their consultancy. Humor, as a form of  
194 interpersonal self-disclosure renders the consultant "open for approval (or not)" (Wheless &  
195 Grotz, 1976), and consequently is an important factor in developing empathy. Self-defeating

196 humor might also represent defensive denial or provide a mask to one's self-focused negative  
197 feelings (Martin et al., 2003). Thus, elements of emotional neediness, avoidance, and poor  
198 self-esteem are often associated with this style of humor (Fabrizi & Pollio, 1987). However,  
199 the current participants were not seeking to mask such insecurities via humor. Instead, as with  
200 the use of deadpan, some participants considered that sharing humor (e.g., in the form of self-  
201 disclosure of personal fallibility) enhanced their clients' sense of agency: "I use self-  
202 deprecating humor when showing an athlete how I've handled similar situations in the past,  
203 so they understand no one has it all together." Another participant commented: "Sometimes I  
204 may make a joke about myself to make them feel more comfortable. It often makes them  
205 laugh and validates that it's ok for them to feel however it is that they feel."

206         The normalizing and validating impact from the participants' self-deprecation  
207 contradicts researchers (e.g., Saroglou & Scariot, 2002) who suggest that self-defeating  
208 humor is negatively related to communion and security in attachment. However, as with their  
209 use of deadpan, the participants described the importance of not allowing their self-  
210 deprecation to position them inappropriately (e.g., over-shadowing their sport psychology  
211 knowledge) nor to over-shadow a client's issues.

### 212 **It's the Way I Don't Tell 'Em**

213         Not all the current participants used humor in their consultancy. Some participants  
214 considered humor as potentially inappropriate for two reasons: (a) humor is just not me, and  
215 (b) they don't get it.

216         **Humor is just not me.** Most participants seemed to consider themselves as being  
217 humorous, but four participants seemed uncertain, and two considered themselves to have a  
218 serious disposition and as not being naturally humorous. The context of humor use seemed  
219 important to influence these reflections, and one participant also believed that the strength of  
220 the working alliance influenced their use of humor:

221

222           When I feel like I have a strong relationship with my clients, I can then challenge  
223           some of their beliefs, thoughts and actions by using humor. I guess at times it can feel  
224           awkward when you have not built a relationship with someone.

225

226           Some of the participants considered that using humor was incongruent with their  
227           professional philosophy. As Tudor and Worrall (2004) argued it is important for practitioners  
228           to recognize, examine, and align their personal and professional philosophies. One participant  
229           commented:

230

231           I typically follow a person-centred approach in my work and most of my work is  
232           office-based. Much of this philosophy focuses on the other person and displaying  
233           empathy, congruence, and acceptance. I guess there is space for humor outside this  
234           setting.

235

236           In contrast another participant (who did use humor) commented:

237

238           It allows me to more closely match my personality to my work, and that level of  
239           congruence is reflected in the level of rapport with clients. As humor is a natural part  
240           of my personality, I believe that when the time is appropriate, humor allows me to  
241           practice within my humanistic framework of behaving true to myself as a consultant.

242

243           Congruence affords a sense of authenticity when interacting with clients (Tod, 2007),  
244           and involves expressing oneself in a way that is consistent with inner thoughts and feelings  
245           (Harter, 2005). Several participants described their use of humor as “liberating” and as

246 allowing them to “be more of myself” thereby acknowledging a greater personal-professional  
247 congruence resulting from their humor use. However, humor is based upon mutual  
248 understanding and should perhaps only be used by those who receive validation for previous  
249 uses of humor within similar contexts, and even then consultants might “follow the lead”  
250 available from a client’s own humor style (Wooten, 1992). Not only might a consultant  
251 appear unprofessional, and ineffective, but a client might also feel that their issues are being  
252 demeaned or over-looked in favour of a consultant’s ego as their attempts at humor  
253 overwhelm the consultation (i.e., time, and emotional “space”) and the client’s expectations:  
254

255 I also think that the general perception of psychologists is for us to sit there seriously  
256 listening to people's problems and that there is no place for humor because it could be  
257 seen as belittling our clients. It's definitely something that has to be carefully managed  
258 and balanced in order for it to have therapeutic gain, both in terms of developing the  
259 professional alliance or therapeutic relationship and in helping individuals reflect and  
260 change. Too much humor and it will lose its point and we will lose our credibility.  
261 Not enough humor and we might appear as emotionless robots.

262

263 The participants’ choice whether to use humor was considered in terms of  
264 professional and personal congruence, authenticity, the effectiveness of practice, and the  
265 resulting impact upon the real relationship. Despite some participants having chosen not to  
266 use humor in their consultancy other participants’ use of humor highlighted the perhaps  
267 inevitable (and necessary) blurring of personal and professional roles, and the difficulty of  
268 maintaining an artificial boundary between self-as-person and self-as-consultant.

269 **They don’t get it.** Despite using deadpan and self-deprecating humor some  
270 participants did so with an underlying sense of caution. One participant commented:

271 “sometimes it can be difficult judging what is accepted and possibly expected across cultures,  
272 contexts, and individuals.” Sultanoff (2013) pointed out that a client must “get” a consultant’s  
273 humor (i.e., can identify, understand, and appreciate what is meant to be humorous; Garner,  
274 2006) otherwise they are unlikely to perceive the incongruity and absurdity of their situation  
275 suggesting that the intention of humor has been lost. One participant reflected on an instance  
276 when a client had not “got it”: “There is nothing worse than trying to connect with a younger  
277 athlete by being humorous and it going down like a lead balloon, it won't do anything for  
278 helping to develop that relationship.” Researchers have frequently stated the need for  
279 practitioners to impart advice, and communicate, in a manner accessible to all (i.e., using  
280 layperson terminology; e.g. Orlick & Partington, 1987; Pain & Harwood, 2004). Other  
281 participants had considered such issues, including the impact of initiating or reciprocating  
282 humor, and some reflected at length on their possible use of humor prior to its actual use:

283

284       The possibility of misinterpretation is high particularly when being professional on  
285       difficult, complex, and serious concepts and skills. Humor has its place in the form of  
286       not taking oneself too seriously, but never at the expense of clients. Clients deserve  
287       our full attention and for us to take everything seriously. We can respond to their  
288       humor but not initiate it.

289

### 290 **This is Why I Tell ‘Em**

291       The participants who used humor seemed to do so for two purposes: (a) positioning  
292       the sport psychology consultant, and (b) lightening the mood.

293       **Positioning the sport psychology consultant.** Previous researchers have reported  
294       problematic perceptions of sport psychology consultants (e.g., Dunn & Holt, 2003; Pain &  
295       Harwood, 2004; Wilson, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Sailor, 2009). However, humor appeared to

296 combat such perceptions when used to position (i.e., Van Langenhove & Harré, 1993) sport  
297 psychology and to defuse uncertainty and myths:

298

299 Athletes are sometimes intimidated by sport psychology, worried that they are  
300 somehow broken or otherwise concerned that I am psychoanalyzing them. I try to  
301 break the ice by bringing out the elephant in the room using humor and empathy for  
302 their position.

303

304 Another participant commented: “I use jokes about perceptions that people have about  
305 psychology, for example not being a mind-reader, I am not going to crawl into your head and  
306 start reading your deepest thoughts.” Humor helped shape mutual expectations, to normalize  
307 the use of sport psychology and to position the consultant as “human” and approachable.  
308 Previous researchers in sport (e.g., Burke, Peterson, & Nix, 1995; Dunn & Holt, 2003;  
309 Grisaffe, Blom, & Burke, 2003) have identified the importance of such consultant-related  
310 qualities but have not identified the role of humor in constructing and purveying them.  
311 Wampold and Budge (2012) suggested that each client-consultant meeting is a “dose of  
312 connectedness” (p. 611); perhaps this sentiment might be more specific in the current context  
313 and amended to each shared humorous moment is a dose of connectedness. Several  
314 participants commented that they believed their use of such humor enabled clients to perceive  
315 them as “normal” and “authentic” by demonstrating that they are approachable, not above  
316 judgement, not overly serious, and able to reflexively experience and express emotion. As  
317 one participant stated, the use of humor to position themselves as a consultant allowed them  
318 to demonstrated to their clients: “I’m human.”

319 **Lightening the mood.** In addition to positioning sport psychology consultancy,  
320 humor was used to create an atmosphere wherein clients, and the consultants, felt

321 comfortable to discuss issues and to provide respite for observing circumstances within a  
322 wider context. One participant commented: “It lightens the mood and it actually makes those  
323 clients that are perfectionists acknowledge they are doing really well in comparison to the  
324 general population.” It was considered that clients would be more likely to engage with the  
325 consultancy process, and to achieve desired outcomes, if humor was incorporated.  
326 Participants also described using humor to clarify and normalize a client’s circumstances,  
327 and/or to restructure unhelpful perspectives by making light of circumstances to enable an  
328 enhanced appreciation and understanding of current predicaments:

329

330 I often use humor to exaggerate and illustrate the irrationality of an individual's belief,  
331 perhaps taking it one step removed, or even putting myself into the situation so that  
332 the client is imagining me expressing the belief rather than themselves, although that  
333 depends on our relationship and my view of whether it would be beneficial to the  
334 client or not at that point. I don't think humor changes what I would say, but it puts  
335 the message into a memorable context and individuals are able to look at themselves  
336 and reflect on their thoughts, actions and feelings in a more light-hearted way.

337

338 An emphasis was placed upon affording purposeful contradiction and distortion that  
339 gave opportunity to raise consciousness, identify rigid unhelpful thinking patterns (Sultanoff,  
340 2013), reframe irrational circumstances of clients’ issues (e.g., “excessive self-criticism”, and  
341 “temporary setbacks”), and regain a more helpful perspective (or, “remoralization” as  
342 opposed to demoralization; Frank, 1973). In addition to benefitting clients, it also seemed that  
343 humor afforded a “lighter” approach for the participants, some of whom described their  
344 experiences of using humor in consultancy as “refreshing”, “exhilarating”, “comfortable”,  
345 “relaxing”, “pleasurable”, and “rewarding.”

**346 Learning to Use Humor in Consultancy**

347           The aims of this study did not originally include exploring recommendations for using  
348 or learning to use humor within professional practice. However, several participants  
349 commented on this issue and considered that humor should be incorporated within a  
350 consultant's skill-set:

351

352           As I have gained experience I feel more comfortable introducing humor into my  
353 work. It would not be something I would suggest someone developing the  
354 consultancy skills pays conscious attention to trying to improve, but I would suggest  
355 encouraging awareness and reflection as to when it might be useful.

356

357           Therefore, the ability to use humor effectively might only be derived through ongoing  
358 practice, experience, and validation (e.g., in the form of shared laughter). Another participant  
359 went further and suggested that humor can be taught, learnt, and used: "I believe consultants  
360 can be taught to be funny. I believe there are specific skills and tactics that when learned and  
361 applied can be very effective." However, given some of the preceding discussion it might be  
362 difficult to ascertain a client's reasons for laughing, and so it should not be assumed that  
363 clients necessarily share a practitioner's humor.

364

**Discussion**

365           The current study sought to gain an insight into sport psychology consultants'  
366 reflections on the role of humor. More specifically, the study sought to explore consultants'  
367 humor styles, the purposes of humor use, and their experiences of humor use. The results  
368 revealed that participants predominantly used two humor styles: (a) deadpan (affiliative  
369 other-enhancing), and (b) self-deprecating (affiliative other-enhancing). Although many  
370 styles of humor exist (see Martin et al., 2003) the current study captured two recognized

371 humor styles, albeit used for different purposes than typically suggested in the existing  
372 literature. Both deadpan and self-deprecating humor are usually regarded as negative styles of  
373 humor (Martin et al., 2003). However, the current participants used both humor styles in a  
374 positive manner.

375         Gelso and Carter (1994) have suggested that the real relationship is the most essential  
376 element of brief therapy work, and recent research in sport (e.g., Longstaff & Gervis, 2016;  
377 Sharp et al., 2015) supports this suggestion. Gelso (2002) also argued that client-consultant  
378 relationships characterized by high levels of genuineness are likely to be most effective. The  
379 current results suggest that humor may contribute to the development of the working alliance  
380 by enhancing the sense (“amount”) of genuineness and transparency (i.e., the real  
381 relationship) between client and consultant (Watson, Greenberg, & Lietaer, 1998). The  
382 results revealed that many of the participants used humor to integrate their personal and  
383 professional life within consultancy. In doing so enhanced their sense of congruence and  
384 authenticity, by affording transparency whereby the consultant’s experiences are revealed to  
385 clients (Watson et al., 1998).

386         The results also support existing literature (Sultanoff, 2013) with regards to how  
387 humor was used in consultancy. The participants highlighted that humor use in consultancy  
388 should align with, and elicit, core therapeutic ways of being (i.e., Rogers, 1957). That is, the  
389 sender and receiver of humor should mutually experience empathy, acceptance, and  
390 genuineness. Kolden, Klein, Wang, and Austin (2011) argued that consultants using humor in  
391 their practice must strive for genuineness and mindfully develop congruence with their client  
392 via practice, effort, and feedback. Furthermore, therapists might model congruence by using  
393 personal pronouns, expressing personal dis/likes, and using incongruent moments as a means  
394 of returning to genuineness. The current results revealed that the participants were modelling

395 congruence through sharing and explaining their humor with clients in a manner akin to  
396 psychoeducation.

397         The results also revealed that participants used deadpan and self-deprecating humor to  
398 dispel clients' uncertainty regarding the nature of sport psychology and did so by creating a  
399 sense of equal footing and thus reducing perceptions of sport psychology consultants as  
400 frequenting "ivory towers" (Orlick & Partington, 1987). This is an interesting finding, given  
401 that research on humor outside of sport has indicated both of these humor styles are negative  
402 in nature. However, it can be argued that in the context of sport, the participants' use of  
403 deadpan (i.e., as sarcasm) and self-deprecating humor mirrors, and validates, existing  
404 communication styles (i.e., "banter") is inherent and congruent with the existing sport culture.  
405 For example, Theberge (1995) acknowledged that banter plays an important role in  
406 developing and maintaining the sense of community within sport teams. Similarly, Pain and  
407 Harwood (2004) have illustrated the necessity for consultants to possess the character to deal  
408 with the environment and banter of soccer players, and to use language appropriate to the  
409 sport, in order to enhance their integration within that community environment. Kuipers  
410 (2009) argued that humor use is significantly related to group boundaries and social  
411 belonging. As humor often draws upon "insider-knowledge" it represents a form of social  
412 solidarity and emotional attunement, and people who do not share the same humor might be  
413 shunned as outsiders.

414         Use of deadpan humor by the consultant is also likely to cause the client to reflect on  
415 the sometimes ridiculousness of their circumstances. Foster (1978) suggested that humor is  
416 perhaps best used in a professional context when a client needs a temporary detachment from  
417 troubles, especially when they "can't see the figure for the ground, or having stared  
418 excessively at his navel, now comes dangerously to falling precipitously into it" (p. 48). The  
419 use of deadpan humor can also afford opportunity to broach and rationalize difficult issues

420 and provide a platform for subsequent re-interpretation of circumstances (Bercovitch, 2002;  
421 Garner, 2006). In the current study, most participants described using deadpan and self-  
422 deprecation humor as hyperbole and/or to downplay or refute the significance of a client's  
423 irrational beliefs, present paradox, and to challenge negative frames of reference within  
424 clients who seemed unaware of these. Similarly to existing literature, the participants were  
425 also aware of potential problems caused by inappropriate use of humor. These potential  
426 problems included awareness of how failed attempts at humor use might reflect badly upon a  
427 consultant's competency (i.e., Franzini, 2001). Even though use of deadpan humor can lead  
428 from ha-ha to aha moments (Garner, 2006) of reflection and transformation, the participants  
429 in the current study were also aware of the importance of ensuring that the client gets it  
430 (Saper, 1987) for the humor use to be effective.

431         The current participants' development of humor use in consultancy appeared to be  
432 experiential in nature as opposed to formal structured training. This is somewhat problematic,  
433 as the production of effective humor use within a client-consultant relationship is proposed to  
434 be an act of contextualized creativity (Derks & Hervas, 1988; Cayirdag & Acar, 2010). More  
435 specifically, for humor use to be effective, it requires many skills and intelligences (e.g.,  
436 empathic accuracy, contextual, and emotional intelligence). To develop effective humor use  
437 trainees, supervisors, and consultants might explore formal ways of practicing and integrating  
438 humor. This might include opportunities to model (Watson & Emerson, 1988) and role-play  
439 (Lee & Lamp, 2003) established consultants' humor use within an educational curriculum.  
440 Also, consultants could also develop their sense of humor by surrounding themselves with  
441 comedy, jokes, and seeing humorous situations in their own lives and the world around them  
442 (Ulloth, 2003).

443         For humor use to be therapeutic (or cathartic) it should also be purposive (Franzini,  
444 2001), appropriately timed (Salameh, 1987), and extend beyond the simple sharing of jokes

445 in that it should also afford problem-solving and create hope (Salameh, 1987). Wooten  
446 (1992) has suggested that humor should be used only when a practitioner has established their  
447 competency (i.e., a practitioner identity). Experienced practitioners might be more confident  
448 with their abilities and be more prepared (i.e., informed) to take appropriate risks regarding  
449 the use of humor (Sumners, 1990).

450 To use humor in applied sport psychology consultancy, in light of the current  
451 findings, the authors of this study encourage consultants to explore the following: As part of  
452 ongoing personal development counselling, consultants should pay special attention to their  
453 “inner world” by identifying their preferred humor style/s, and any existing personal-  
454 professional barriers to using humor. It would be important for consultants to consider the  
455 development of their holistic cross-context self as a lifelong multi-contextual empirical task.  
456 Thus, the importance of ongoing personal development/counselling becomes especially  
457 salient. Professionals who also supervise trainee practitioners should find ways to afford  
458 specific opportunities for exploring and developing a trainee’s personal development  
459 (including personal-professional congruence, and their use of humor). The use of humor in  
460 sport psychology consultancy should therefore be based upon the following considerations:  
461 Applied consultants should seek to be genuine in terms of “who they are” (as a person and as  
462 a consultant), and whether they also get a client’s humor. Humor should only be used when  
463 the consultant has the ability to be contextually intelligent. Any “fails” during the use of  
464 humor should be acknowledged, reflected on, and used productively.

465 With regard to fails in the use of humor, Gendlin (1967) argued that client-consultant  
466 congruence does not necessarily imply the practitioner is without personal fault or errors in  
467 practice. Instead, being congruent infers that the consultant be true to themselves and move  
468 beyond “formulas and stereotyped ways of responding”, including allowing oneself to “look  
469 the fool (p. 121)”. In the current study, some of the participants (on occasion) purposely

470 positioned themselves as the fool. That does not mean that in order to effectively use humor  
471 in applied sport psychology consultancy the consultants should adopt deadpan and self-  
472 deprecating humor styles. Instead, consultants should develop their own style of humor use,  
473 be aware and knowledgeable of other styles, and permit the immediate context to dictate what  
474 might be achieved using humor (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998). Consultants should be  
475 encouraged to search for such moments of integration, including potentially humorous  
476 experiences, to provide the ambience required for clients to speak freely. Furthermore,  
477 consultants might purposely search for anomalies within a client's speech (e.g., discrepancy,  
478 contradiction, metaphor), which afford humorous interlude.

479         The current study has provided an insight into sport psychology consultants'  
480 reflections on the role of humor in consultancy. Given the scarcity of research in this area  
481 (Pack et al., 2018), further research might further explore: (a) humor styles used by  
482 consultants, (b) humor use and humor styles of athletes in different sports, (c) athletes'  
483 perceptions of consultants' humor use, and (d) how humor might be embedded within  
484 professional training processes. Based on the results of this study, the authors conclude that  
485 applied sport psychology consultants should not "stand behind" a traditional psychological  
486 skills intervention, rather they should permit their personality (including humor style/s) to  
487 direct any interventions used. Equally, it is encouraged that at times, humor use itself can  
488 become an effective intervention. In such cases, consultants must manage possible personal-  
489 professional incongruence, and thus need to separate themselves objectively from their  
490 clients. Although not all participants in this study used humor in their consultancy, its  
491 incorporation might render the working alliance and the real relationship as resources in ways  
492 (e.g., as a barometer that predicts consultancy outcomes) previously not considered in applied  
493 sport psychology research.

494

495

**References**

- 496 Achike, F. I., & Nain, N. (2005). Promoting problem-based learning (PBL) in  
497 nursing education: A Malaysian experience. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 5, 302-311.  
498 doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2005.04.002
- 499 Anderson, A., Miles, Robinson, P., & Mahoney, C. (2004). Evaluating the athlete's  
500 perception of the sport psychologist's effectiveness: What should we be assessing?  
501 *The Sport Psychologist*, 5, 255-277. doi:10.1016/S1469-0292(03)00005-0
- 502 Bercovitch, S. (2002). Deadpan Huck; or what's funny about interpretation. *The Kenyon*  
503 *Review*, 24, 90-134. doi:10.2307/4338379
- 504 Bordin, E.S. (1979). The generalizability of the psychoanalytic concept of the working  
505 alliance. *Psychotherapy (Chicago, Ill.)*, 16(3), 252-260. doi:10.1037/h0085885
- 506 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research*  
507 *in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- 508 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Thematic analysis. In A. C. Michalos (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia of*  
509 *quality of life research*. New York, NY: Springer.
- 510 Burke, K. L., Peterson, D., & Nix, C. L. (1995). The effects of the coaches' use of humor on  
511 female volleyball players' evaluation of their coaches. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 18,  
512 83-90. doi:10.1080/10413200.2011.650820
- 513 Cayirdig, N., & Acar, S. (2010). Relationship between styles of humor and divergent  
514 thinking. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 3236-3240.  
515 doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.494
- 516 Derks, P., & Hervas, D. (1988). Creativity in humor production: Quantity and quality in  
517 divergent thinking. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, 26, 37-39.  
518 doi:10.3758/BF03334854

- 519 Dunn, J. G., & Holt, N. L. (2003). Collegiate ice hockey players' perceptions of the delivery  
520 of an applied sport psychology program. *The Sport Psychologist, 17*, 351-368.  
521 doi:10.1123/tsp.17.3.351
- 522 Fabrizi, M. S., & Pollio, H. R.(1987). A naturalistic study of humorous activity in a third,  
523 seventh, and eleventh grade classroom. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 33*, 107-128.
- 524 Falkenberg, I., Buchkremer, G., Bartels, M., & Wild, B. (2011). Implementation of a manual-  
525 based training of humor abilities in patients with depression: A pilot study. *Psychiatry*  
526 *Research, 186*, 454-457. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2010.10.009
- 527 Fifer, A., Henschen, K., Gould, D., & Ravizza, K. (2008). What works when working with  
528 athletes. *The Sport Psychologist, 22*, 356-377. doi:10.1123/tsp.22.3.356
- 529 Foster, J. A. (1978). Humor and counseling: Close encounters of another kind. *The Personnel*  
530 *and Guidance Journal, 57*, 46-49. doi:10.1002/j.2164-4918.1978.tb05094.x
- 531 Frank, J. D. (1973). *Persuasion and healing (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins  
532 University Press.
- 533 Franzini, L. R. (2001). Humor in therapy: The case for training therapists in its uses and risks.  
534 *The Journal of General Psychology, 128*, 170-193. doi:10.1080/00221300109598906
- 535 Garner, R. L. (2006). Humor in pedagogy. How ha-ha can lead to aha! *College Teaching, 54*,  
536 177-180. doi:10.3200/CTCH.54.1.177-180
- 537 Gelso, C. J. (2002). Real relationship: The "something more" of psychotherapy. *Journal of*  
538 *Contemporary Psychotherapy, 32*, 35-40. doi:10.1023/A:1015531228504
- 539 Gelso, C. J., & Carter, J. A. (1994). Components of the psychotherapy relationship: Their  
540 interaction and unfolding during treatment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 41*,  
541 296-306. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.41.3.296

- 542 Gendlin, E. T. (1967). Subverbal communication and therapist expressivity: Trends in client-  
543 centered therapy with schizophrenics. In C. R. Rogers & B. Stevens (Eds.), *Person to*  
544 *person* (pp. 119-28). Lafayette, CA: Real People Press.
- 545 Gilliland, H., & Mauritsen, H. (1971). Humor in the classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 24,  
546 753-756.
- 547 Grisaffe, C., Blom, L. C., & Burke, K. L. (2003). The effects of head and assistant coaches'  
548 use of humor on collegiate soccer players evaluation of their coaches. *Journal of*  
549 *Sport Behaviour*, 26, 103-107. doi:10.1080/10413200.2011.650820
- 550 Harter, S. (2005). Authenticity. In C.R. Snyder & S.J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive*  
551 *psychology* (pp. 382-394). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- 552 Kolden, G. G., Klein, M. H., Wang, C-C., & Austin, S. B. (2011). Congruence/Genuineness.  
553 *Psychotherapy*, 48, 65-71. doi:10.1037/a0022064
- 554 Kuipers, G. (2009). Humor style and symbolic boundaries. *Journal of Literary Theory*, 3,  
555 392-393. doi: 10.1515/JLT.2009.013
- 556 Lambert, M., J. & Barley, D., E. (2001). Research Summary on the therapeutic relationship  
557 and psychotherapy outcome. *Psychotherapy*, 38, 4, 357-361. doi: 10.1037/0033-  
558 3204.38.4.357
- 559 Lampert, M., & Ervin-Tripp, S. (1998). Exploring paradigms: The study of gender and sense  
560 of humor near the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In: R. Willibald (Ed.). *The sense of humor*.  
561 (pp.231-270). New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter.
- 562 Lee, C. J., & Lamp, J. K. (2003). The use of humor and role-playing in reinforcing key  
563 concepts. *Nurse Educator*, 28, 61-62. doi:10.1097/00006223-200303000-00005
- 564 Longstaff, F., & Gervis, M. (2016). The use of counseling principles and skills to develop  
565 practitioner-athlete relationships by practitioners who provide sport psychology  
566 support. *The Sport Psychologist*, 30, 276-289. doi:10.1123/tsp.2015-0029

- 567 Marmarosh, C. L., Markin, R. D., Gelso, C. J., Majors, R., Mallery, C., & Choi, J. (2009).  
568 The real relationship in psychotherapy: Relationships to adult attachments, working  
569 alliance, transference, and therapy outcome. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *56*,  
570 337-350. doi:10.1037/a0015169
- 571 Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual  
572 differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being:  
573 Development of the humor styles questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*,  
574 *37*, 48-75. doi:10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00534-2
- 575 Morales-Mann, E. T., & Kaitell, C. A. (2001). Problem-based learning in a new Canadian  
576 curriculum. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *33*, 13-19. doi:10.1046/j.1365-  
577 2648.2001.01633.x
- 578 Nelson, J. K. (2008). Laugh and the World laughs with you: An attachment perspective on  
579 the meaning of laughter in psychotherapy. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *36*, 41-49.  
580 doi:10.1007/s10615-007-0133-1
- 581 Orlick, T., & Partington, J. (1987). The sport psychology consultant: Analysis of critical  
582 components as viewed by Canadian Olympic athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, *2*, 105-  
583 130. doi:10.1123/tsp.2.2.105
- 584 Pack, S., Hemmings, B. H., Winter, S., & Arvinen-Barrow, M. (2018). A preliminary  
585 investigation into the use of humor in sport psychology practice. *Journal of Applied*  
586 *Sport Psychology*, doi:10.1080/10413200.2018.1514428
- 587 Pain, M. A., & Harwood, C. G. (2004). Knowledge and perceptions of sport psychology  
588 within English soccer. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *22*, 813-826.  
589 doi:10.1080/02640410410001716670
- 590 Partington, J., & Orlick, T. (1987). The sport psychology consultant: Olympic coaches' view.  
591 *The Sport Psychologist*, *1*, 95-102. doi:10.1123/tsp.1.2.95

- 592 Petitpas, A. J., Giges, B., & Danish, S. J. (1999). The sport psychologist-athlete relationship:  
593 Implications for training. *The Sport Psychologist, 13*, 344-337.  
594 doi:10.1123/tsp.13.3.344
- 595 Robinson, V. M. (1991). *Humour and the health professions*. Thorofare, SLACK,  
596 New Jersey: Charles Slack.
- 597 Rogers, C. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change.  
598 *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*, 95-103. doi:10.1037/h0045357
- 599 Salameh, W. A. (1987). Humor in integrative short-term psychotherapy (ISTP). In W. F. Fry,  
600 Jr. and W. A. Salameh (Eds.), *Handbook of humor and psychotherapy: Advances in*  
601 *the clinical use of humor* (pp. 195-240). Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource  
602 Exchange.
- 603 Saper, B. (1987). Humor in psychotherapy: Is it good or bad for the client? *Professional*  
604 *Psychology: Research and Practice, 18*, 360-367.
- 605 Saroglou, V. & Scariot, C. (2002). Humor styles questionnaire: Personality and educational  
606 correlates in Belgian high school and college students. *European Journal of*  
607 *Personality, 16*, 43-54. doi:10.1002/per.430
- 608 Sharp, L-A., & Hodge, K. (2011). Sport psychology consulting effectiveness: The sport  
609 psychology consultant's perspective. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 23*, 360-  
610 376. doi:10.1080/10413200.2011.583619
- 611 Sharp, L-A., Hodge, K., & Danish, S. (2015). Ultimately it comes down to the relationship:  
612 Experienced consultant's view of effective sport psychology consulting. *The Sport*  
613 *Psychologist, 29*, 358-370. doi:10.1123/tsp.2014-0130
- 614 Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: problems  
615 and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport*  
616 *and Exercise Psychology, 18*, 101-121. doi: 10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357

- 617 Staples, F.R., Sloane, B. Whipple, K. Cristol, A. & Yorkston, N. (1976). Process and  
618 outcome in psychotherapy and behavior therapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical*  
619 *Psychology*, 44(3), 340-350. doi: 10.1037/0022-006X.44.3.340
- 620 Sultanoff, S. M. (2013). Integrating humor into psychotherapy: Research, theory, and the  
621 necessary conditions for the practice of therapeutic humor in helping relationships.  
622 *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 41, 388-399. doi:10.1080/08873267.2013.796953
- 623 Summers, A. D. (1990). Professional nurses' attitudes towards humor. *Journal of Advanced*  
624 *Nursing*, 15, 196-200. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.1990.tb01802.x
- 625 Theberge, N. (1995) Gender, sport, and the construction of community: a case study from  
626 women's ice hockey. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 389, 402.  
627 doi.org/10.1123/ssj.12.4.389
- 628 Tod, D. (2007) The long and winding road: Professional development in sport psychology.  
629 *The Sport Psychologist*, 21, 94-108. doi:10.1123/tsp.21.1.94
- 630 Tudor, K., & Worrall, M. (2004). Issues, questions, dilemmas and domains in supervision. In  
631 K. Tudor & M. Worrall (Eds.), *Freedom to practise: Person-centred approaches to*  
632 *supervision* (pp.79-96). Ross-on-Wye, United Kingdom: PCCS Books.
- 633 Ulloth, J. K. (2003). Guidelines for developing and implementing humor in nursing  
634 classrooms. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 42, 35-37. doi:10.3928/0148-4834-  
635 20030101-08
- 636 Van Langenhove, L., & Harré, R. (1993). Positioning and Autobiography: Telling Your Life.  
637 In, N. Coupland and J.F. Nussbaum. *Discourse and Life Span Identity*. London, UK:  
638 Sage.
- 639 Wampold, B. E., & Budge, S. L. (2012). The 2011 Leona Tyler Award Address: The  
640 Relationship—and its relationship to the common and specific factors of

- 641 Psychotherapy. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 40, 601-623.  
642 doi:10.1177/0011000011432709
- 643 Watson, M. J., & Emerson, S. (1988). Facilitate learning with humor. *Journal of Nursing*  
644 *Education*, 27, 89-90. doi:10.3928/0148-4834-19880201-12
- 645 Watson, J. C., Greenberg, L. S., & Lietaer, G. (1998). The experiential paradigm unfolding:  
646 Relationship and experiencing in therapy. In, L. S. Greenberg, J. C. Watson, & G.  
647 Lietaer (Eds.), *Handbook of experiential psychotherapy* (pp. 3-27). New York, NY:  
648 Guilford Press.
- 649 Weigand, D. A., Richardson, P. A., & Weinberg, R. S. (1999). A two-stage evaluation of a  
650 sport psychology internship. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 22, 83-104.
- 651 Wheelless, L. R. & Grotz, J. (1976). Conceptualization and measurement of reported self-  
652 disclosure. *Human Communication Research*, 2, 338-346. doi:10.1111/j.1468-  
653 2958.1976.tb00494.x
- 654 White, G. W. (2001). Teachers' report of how they used humour with students perceived use  
655 of humour. *Education*, 122(2), 337-347.
- 656 Wilson, K. A., Gilbert, J. N., Gilbert, W. D. & Sailor, S. R. (2009). College athletic directors'  
657 perceptions of sport psychology consulting. *The Sport Psychologist*, 23, 405-424.  
658 doi:10.1123/tsp.23.3.405
- 659 Wooten, P. (1992). Does a humor workshop affect nurse burnout? *Journal of Nursing*  
660 *Jocularity*, 2, 46-47.  
661

662 Table 1 - The professional qualifications/licences held by participants.

Organization	Qualification	Participants ( <i>n</i> )
BASES (British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences)	Accreditation	25
BASES high performance sport accreditation	Accreditation	5
The Science Council (UK)	Chartership	3
BPS (British Psychological Society)	Chartership	23
HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council – UK)	Registered consultant	23
AASP (Association for Applied Sport Psychology – US)	Certified	5
AHPRA (Australian Health Consultant Regulation Agency)	Registered consultant	2

*Note.* Some participants held dual qualifications.