

Cultural Sport Psychology

By Schinke & Hanrahan

Chapter 7

Strategies for Reflective Cross-Cultural Sport Psychology Practice

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Sport psychologists, in their work as applied practitioners, face a very challenging yet rewarding task in trying to help individual athletes or teams fulfil their athletic potential. For any athlete, there are potentially a wide range of internal and external forces to consider that can exert influence upon performance and psychological wellbeing. The list of factors that impinge upon individual performance grows considerably once the complexities of group dynamics are added, such that when working with teams our professional skills are likely to be severely tested at times. Take this complex challenge and put it into a completely new cultural context and the complexity grows still further; indeed the ground may appear to shift beneath your feet. This chapter has been written to provide guidance for sport psychology practitioners who have occasion to work cross-culturally and who recognise that cultural differences may necessitate significant changes to their normal way of operating.

Such changes may extend beyond merely adopting a flexible approach to interactions and encompass a more fundamental re-evaluation of how to *do* sport psychology. According to Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002), applied sport psychology “has traditionally been practiced from an ethnocentric, white male perspective” (p. 297), and it is only recently that multicultural dimensions of sport psychology practice have begun to be explored more fully (see Martens, Mobley, & Zizzi, 2000). The traditional dominance of North American and European cultural perspectives in the field has served to characterize sport psychology practice in a way that may be of only limited relevance to the majority of cultural contexts throughout the world. The contents of this chapter will draw on my experiences over a period of nearly 25 years working as an applied practitioner with athletes and coaches of many different nationalities and diverse cultures. These experiences include living and

working as a sport psychologist in Australia, Brunei, Canada, and the United Kingdom, plus working with individuals and teams from countries as varied as China, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, Korea, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States.

Culture, by definition, pervades all aspects of human functioning, referring to patterns of language, thoughts, actions, customs, beliefs, courtesies, rituals, manners, interactions, roles, expected behaviors, and values associated with race, ethnicity, and religion (Ford, 2003)¹. The weight of evidence in support of cross-cultural differences across a wide range of variables that sport psychologists typically see as salient when dealing with athletes, is overwhelming. Researchers in the area have identified cultural influences on processes as diverse as athlete identity (Hale, James, & Stambulova, 1999), attributions of success and failure (Hallahan, Lee, & Herzog, 1997; Si, Rethorst, & Willimczik, 1995), coping style (Hoedaya & Anshel, 2003), goal orientations (Isogai, Brewer, Cornelius, Etnier, & Tokunaga, 2003; Papaioannou, 2006), participation motives (Kolt et al., 1999), preferred coaching behavior (Bolkiah & Terry, 2001; Chelladurai, Inamura, Yamaguchi, Oinuma, & Miyauchi, 1988; Terry, 1984), regulation of emotions (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992), responses to athletic retirement (Stambulova, Stephan, & Jäphag, 2007), and social physique anxiety (Isogai, Brewer, Cornelius, Komiya, Tokunaga, & Tokushima, 2001). In short, it is very clear that cultural influences and psychological responses are closely linked.

Given these acknowledged cross-cultural differences it is hardly surprising that athletes from various cultures would tend to respond differently to the work of a sport psychologist. Indeed, Martin, Lavalley, and Kellmann (2004) demonstrated

¹ It is acknowledged that the terms culture and multiculturalism can be used in reference to sexual orientation and disability as well as race, ethnicity and religion (e.g., Pope, 1995). However, for the purposes of this chapter, the term culture will be used primarily in reference to distinct racial, ethnic and/or religious groups.

differing attitudes towards sport psychology consulting associated with different cultures, even after having controlled for previous experience of sport psychology. A cultural dimension has also been identified in terms of the psychological skills that athletes might typically have learnt. For example, Xinyi, Smith, and Adegbola (2004) showed significant cross-cultural variations across a range of mental toughness dimensions among professional athletes from China, North America, Nigeria and Singapore. Similarly, Cox and Liu (1993) showed cross-cultural differences in self-reported psychological skills among athletes from China and the United States.

Athletes from different cultures have also been shown to vary significantly in the extent to which they use various psychological techniques (e.g., Heishman & Bunker, 1989), while Anshel, Williams and Hodge (1997) showed that cultural differences accounted for 95% of the dispersion in how athletes coped with stressful events in sport. Given that helping athletes to cope with the stress of competition is generally seen as a central focus for applied sport psychology practitioners, this finding is particularly germane for those faced with a new cultural context and points to the need for practitioners to gain a good understanding of the cultural influences upon the athletes with whom they are working.

The present chapter is structured to first provide a theoretical framework for reflective practice as a sport psychologist working in different cultural contexts. It then addresses a range of issues that may be encountered when working in diverse cultural settings, exploring such issues as gaining entry into a *new* world, being faced with a new set of values, attitudes, priorities, behavioral norms and linguistic challenges, and finding ways to effectively adapt existing professional practices to a novel cultural context. After discussing and reflecting on these cross-cultural differences, a series of recommended general strategies will be provided to assist the

sport psychologist working cross-culturally. Throughout the chapter, examples of cross-cultural issues and recommended strategies will be drawn from my practitioner experience at four Olympic Summer Games in Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney and Athens, three Olympic Winter Games in Albertville, Lillehammer and Nagano, three South East Asian Games in Brunei, Vietnam and Thailand, the 2006 Asian Games in Qatar, and more than 50 other international sporting events.

A Model of Reflective Practice

Professionals in the field of sport psychology have shown an increasing interest in *processes* that promote effective practice, whereas previously emphasis had tended to be on the *content* of psychological interventions (see Andersen, 2000). The ability of sport psychologists to build effective therapeutic alliances with athletes is often cited as an essential building block to effectiveness and, in turn, a willingness on the part of the practitioner to embrace a reflective practice approach has been proposed to be a major determinant of the success of this process. Anderson, Knowles and Gilbourne (2004) have produced a thorough and insightful overview of this area in which they defined reflective practice as “an approach to training and practice that can help practitioners explore their decisions and experiences in order to increase their understanding of and manage themselves and their practice” (p.189).

Clearly, there is an expanding literature that promotes the role of reflection among professional groups allied to physical activity and sport. Indeed, reflective practice is generally advocated for all professionals who have a critical need to understand the behavior of, and interact effectively with, those they are trying to support and/or educate. Among others, such groups include sport coaches (see Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001;

Nelson & Cushion, 2006) and teachers (see Gibbs, 1998), as well as sport psychologists (see Anderson et al., 2004; Holt & Streat, 2001).

Several principles underpin a reflective practice approach to sport psychology. The first principle involves recognition that the personal characteristics of those functioning as psychologists exert a powerful influence on their effectiveness as practitioners (see Andersen, 2000). Psychologists are people first, practitioners second and therefore the cultural and personal values that they bring to a working alliance with an athlete inevitably influence the effectiveness of that relationship.

A second principle promotes the benefits of seeking self-knowledge of how, as practitioners, we might be perceived by those athletes and coaches we seek to help. The Scottish poet, Robert Burns, once wrote, "O wad some Power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!" which roughly translated means "It would be wonderful to have the gift to see ourselves as others see us!" An inherent advantage of adopting a reflective approach to analysing the effectiveness of consultations with athletes is the progressive acquisition of self-awareness of the manner in which we are perceived by others.

A third principle of reflective practice was elaborated by Martindale and Collins (2005), who made the point that the nature and extent of the direction provided by practitioners tends to reflect their own theoretical orientation and professional philosophy. For example, practitioners whose approach has cognitive-behavioral roots are likely to be more directive and to provide more psycho-education or mental skills training than those with a humanistic perspective. However, it is quite possible that practitioners, especially those with wide-ranging experiences, are able to adopt different perspectives for different scenarios, perhaps being directive with less

experienced athletes and more person-centered with athletes with a greater range of life and competition experiences.

A model to guide the process of reflective practice is presented in Figure 1. This 6-stage model, developed by Gibbs (1988), is useful both for providing a framework for practitioners to reflect on the relative effectiveness of consultations with athletes, as proposed by Anderson et al. (2004), and also as a framework for athletes to learn competition skills by reflecting back on their own athletic performances. The six stages are straightforward and require little explanation beyond perhaps exemplifying them in a cross-cultural context.

Some years ago I was appointed to work with an international soccer team in Asia. They were coached by an “old school”, former professional player from the English leagues. The coach was highly directive in his approach and very emotional in his treatment of players to the point where his own health was in danger of being compromised. Despite his passionate and often critical manner, or perhaps because of it, he managed to convey a deep sense of genuine concern and affection for his players that motivated them to greater effort and contributed to very successful results.

One of my first sessions with the players involved a group meeting to discuss a forthcoming game against a prominent rival team. Typically, such sessions are highly interactive and good humored, with lots of suggestions coming from the players themselves. On this occasion, the opposite was true. My questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition team and how they might be countered or exploited (see *Game-plan Exercise*: Munroe, Terry, & Carron, 2002, p. 146-150) were greeted with a deathly hush and an apparent refusal to make eye contact. When this

happened (Stage 1) my thoughts (Stage 2) were that they were bored and/or unimpressed and, in consequence, I felt ineffective and incompetent.

To evaluate (Stage 3) and analyze (Stage 4) what had happened during this session, I turned for feedback to the head coach and his local assistant coach. I was initially puzzled that they were both grinning broadly as we discussed what had happened. “They didn’t seem to respond very well to that” I ventured. “That’s because no one’s ever asked them what they think before” the coach replied “And more than that, they barely understood a word you said” he went on. The players were, I discovered, *kids from the kampong* (village kids) who were poorly educated and used to following instructions to the letter rather than being asked for suggestions. Their silence and lowered heads reflected shyness and respect rather than boredom.

I concluded (Stage 5) that I should have completed a lot more preparatory work with the players, notably getting to know them and winning their trust, before I asked them for their opinions in front of their coaches. My action plan (Stage 6) for the immediate future focused on identifying ways to break down the inherent power differential between me and the players by spending considerable time with them in environments in which they were comfortable, such as on the soccer field, over lunch, or around the pool table.

The benefits of reflective practice are particularly relevant for practitioners operating in an unfamiliar cultural context, who often find themselves unsure of the best way to address issues that arise. Typically, sport psychology training in North America, Europe and Australasia, encourages practitioners to function as systematic problem solvers who identify evidenced-based solutions and then apply clearly-defined techniques underpinned by well-established theories derived from the scientific process. Unfortunately, as Schön (1987) points out, practitioners are

frequently faced with situations in which a very broad array of forces impinge upon the practitioner's choice of an intervention intended to preserve performance and/or protect the psychological well-being of the individuals involved. In consequence, it is often far from clear which intervention is the most appropriate. This could be seen as the crossroads where art meets science, where successful melding of the two is a key determinant of the longevity of a practitioner's involvement with a particular team or individual client.

As Schön and others (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Knowles et al., 2001) have pointed out, the ability to take what we know about sport psychology and apply it, perhaps in a unique and previously untried manner, to meet the current challenges that we and those around us face, is the essence of understanding our craft. Using a reflective practice model to glean as much development of our professional skills as possible from interactions with clients is a valuable strategy used by many experienced practitioners either implicitly or through conscious effort to help them take incremental steps towards a better understanding of the craft of applied sport psychology.

Common Cross-Cultural Issues Faced by Sport Psychologists

The reality of working as an applied practitioner in any sphere, especially in a competition environment and even more so in a new cultural context, may be very different from the text books or formal training you might have received in at least three ways. Firstly, in the emotional melting pot of intense competition, there is often an acute time pressure to identify and implement solutions to pressing issues, as though a message along the lines of "Okay hotshot, over to you. Solution please" is being sent. Secondly, presenting issues are very often multi-faceted and complex, and

do not fit readily into the context of examples found in the literature, thereby generating the feeling of flying without a compass. Thirdly, sport psychologists often operate from a base of poor contractual security, either with no contract at all or one of limited duration. Consequently, an acute feeling that your worth is constantly being judged pervades your every action, which may generate either a very conservative approach where you say very little for fear of doing the wrong thing (effectively crossing your fingers and hoping for the best) or, alternatively, abandoning your training and going for the grand intervention in the hope of cementing your reputation for ever more. Either way, it's an uncomfortable feeling and often enough to trigger a form of performance anxiety in the practitioner – the fear that you may not be as smart as your position as sport psychologist infers – a dissonance between self-image and external reality known in the business world as *Impostor Syndrome* (see Buchanan, 2006).

Sometimes the issue can apparently be as simple as an incompatibility in communication style between practitioner and athletes, although even this factor can be seen to have a strong cultural influence. For example, Schinke (2005) reflected on his career as a coach, struggling with communication to athletes from Asia, by whom he was perceived as “blunt, overly direct and insensitive” (p.1), yet in a very different cultural setting was seen as too reserved by athletes from South America. His self-reflections coincide with my own experiences of working as an applied practitioner in many different parts of the world and finding that my “normal” approach was greeted with surprise and confusion in some cultural contexts.

My western orientation, based in a tradition of self-determination and individual responsibility for athletic performance, even in a team setting, was sometimes perceived as a novel and strange philosophy to bring into, for example, a

collectivist environment where athletes were told what to think, feel and do, and acquiesced unthinkingly, or into a culture where athletes believed they would win *if God willed it*, and where essentially the athletes saw themselves as powerless to directly influence the outcome. The dilemma I have often felt is whether to become a cultural chameleon and embrace the values and behavioral norms of the culture in which I am operating at the time, or to remain true to my own cultural heritage and leave the athletes I am working with the challenge of adjusting to my way of doing things. The resolution has usually, and perhaps appropriately, been to find the middle ground where I can act in a culturally-sensitive manner without feeling that I have abandoned my own roots. This has rarely been easy, requiring me to ask a great many questions of others to understand the best way of doing things and a huge amount of self-reflection on my part to enable me to find the answers.

Collectivist cultures, notably those in Asia, tend to place great importance on being a valuable member of a group, be it family, community or team, rather than on the individualistic pursuit of self-actualisation, more espoused by western cultures. One impact of such an orientation is that, traditionally, collectivist cultures do not promote open discussion about anxieties or the acknowledgement of individual weaknesses, some of the very issues that sport psychologists are trained to help address. A practitioner trying to support Asian athletes will often encounter initial or sustained reluctance by athletes to discuss performance anxieties or their limitations as a competitor, which may prevail for some time until complete trust is built. The reasons why probing questions may be greeted with complete silence are often complex but they tend not to be explained by simple denial of issues. A taciturn response from, for example, male athletes of Chinese heritage may be attributed to the

perceived potential shame of losing face in front of a respected outsider (i.e., you as a sport psychologist) and thereby bringing dishonour on their broader cultural group.

A reluctance to disclose personal issues can sometimes be explained by factors that simply lie outside a practitioner's previous sphere of experience or understanding. For example, female athletes from a traditional Indian culture may be unwilling to discuss personal issues for fear of revealing some character weakness that they believe will harm their marriage prospects. Such fear may be irrational in most cases, although in others it may be well founded, as it is not unknown for a potential marriage partner's family to make extensive background checks, where revelations of regular sessions with a psychologist may indeed raise question marks over her suitability as a wife and mother.

During 1999, I spent eight months living and working in the Sultanate of Brunei on the island of Borneo as part of a team from the Australian Institute of Sport. The AIS was contracted to prepare the national teams of Brunei for their participation in the South East Asian (SEA) Games, which was hosted in the country's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. After the first of a planned series of psycho-educational lectures to introduce key performance skills to national team athletes, I was approached by some of the national coaches, many of whom were Australian or American. The essence of the conversation was something like "We really like this sport psychology stuff but if you could just get them to turn up for practice that would be a great start."

Coming from a background where sport had high standing in society and where athletes typically showed a strong work ethic, this comment was a surprise to say the least. It quickly became apparent that the very strong Islamic influences in the country did not wholly approve of sport as an appropriate object for devotion,

especially for females. Further, the traditional condition placed on any future plans – *Inshallah* (translated as “God willing”) – seemed to endow all goal-setting exercises with a fatalistic attitude that “if God wills it then it will happen” which apparently downplayed the role of the athlete in determining the outcome. Perhaps as a result of these twin influences, many Bruneian athletes had a very relaxed attitude towards putting in the necessary effort to make things happen. I decided to tackle this matter head-on during my next group lecture.

With about 200 athletes and coaches in attendance and His Royal Highness Prince Sufri, the Sultan’s brother and an accomplished clay target shooter, sitting in the front row, I commenced a talk that owed much to Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous address. “I have a dream” I offered, “that one day all Bruneian athletes will win a SEA Games medal” (spontaneous polite applause) “*Inshallah*” (more polite applause). “*Inshallah* is an interesting concept” I ventured “God willing” (much nodding of heads). “In my belief system” I went on “God helps those who help themselves.” The room fell silent and all eyes settled on Prince Sufri, waiting for a lead on the appropriate response to my controversial comment. “I could be on the next plane out of here” I thought to myself. To my great relief, His Royal Highness considered my suggestion and slowly nodded in agreement, which set off a huge wave of similarly nodding heads. It felt like a significant cultural breakthrough that was followed by many suggestions of how the athletes present could help themselves – turning up for practice, working hard to improve, following the advice they were given by expert support staff.

In Brunei, the culturally-appropriate way to build relationships as a pre-cursor to conducting any sort of business, including providing psychological support, was to sit down with a drink and a snack and chat about family, friends and life. I quickly

realised that winning hearts and minds in this cultural context involved a much less business-like approach and a much greater relationship orientation than the one I had typically implemented among my own culture.

Some of my experiences in this tiny but very wealthy country with a population of only 300,000 people simply shook my appreciation of what is normal. An experience in the Athletes' Village during the SEA Games, for example, lay completely outside of my previous range of consulting experiences. One morning a small group of female hockey players approached my office and gently pushed one of their teammates, a goalie who I'll call Sharil, in to see me. "Go see Dr. Peter", they urged.

"Come in Sharil, take a seat. How can I help you today?" I asked.

"I feel very bad Dr. Peter. Something's wrong" Sharil offered.

"Tell me about it" I suggested.

"A spirit has come inside my body" Sharil went on, "It makes me feel very upset, very angry, I cannot play good."

At this point I was extremely intrigued. Sharil was a well-educated woman with a University degree, a high school teacher, who, despite her limited English, had seen a fair amount of the wider world. What exactly was she telling me?

"This spirit" I ventured "Where has it come from?"

"My room in the Athletes' Village is on the edge of the jungle. The spirit came from the jungle last night" Sharil explained.

"Has this ever happened before?" I enquired.

"Yes, many times Dr. Peter. Many times every year" she told me.

"And when was the first time, Sharil?" I asked.

"First time was when I was maybe 14 or 15" she answered.

“How often does the spirit come into your body Sharil and how long does it stay?” I continued, starting to understand things just a little better.

“The spirit comes many times every year and stays maybe one week each time, then goes away” Sharil explained.

“I think I know about this spirit Sharil and I think you are going to be fine.” I reassured her.

In the quest for greater cultural sensitivity, there is an inherent danger of giving broad cultural generalizations precedence over individual differences. A delicate balance is necessary on the part of a sport psychologist working cross-culturally between taking the trouble to become familiar with the beliefs, practices, and behavioral norms of an athlete’s cultural heritage whilst, at the same time, avoiding the pitfall of what Andersen (1993) referred to as “sensitive stereotyping” whereby this knowledge of cultural differences brings about a stereotypical interpretation of the athlete’s behavior.

Kontos and Arguello (2005), in an overview of consulting with Latin American athletes, pointed out the perils of assuming that different countries in the same geographical area share the same cultural values. Given the great diversity of adjoining nations in Europe, for example, it is clear that European values and culture refer to a very diverse range of world views and the same would apply to Asian or African values. Indeed, every country on earth includes various cultural groups with whom a sport psychology might have cause to work. Ultimately, the only truly legitimate strategy is to forego all cultural assumptions and to spend sufficient time learning to understand the world view of the client group and the individuals therein.

It is very clear that factors such as language, socio-economic status, awareness of customs and values, and, in some cultures, gender in particular, can all have a

significant moderating effect on how cultural differences are expressed. As a simple example, in some cultures it is considered rude to make eye contact with someone of a perceived higher status or inappropriate for a married female to make eye contact with a male other than her husband, whereas in other cultures it is considered rude or inappropriate *not* to make eye contact in business or social contexts. However, it is quite possible that individual differences in extroversion or shyness on the part of the individuals concerned may override such cultural norms, illustrating how cultural stereotyping is fraught with inconsistencies.

Punctuality is another example of how differing behavioral norms can be the genesis of confusion and frustration. In a 2005 paper, Hanrahan recalled her experiences of utilising sport psychology strategies while working to enhance self-worth and life satisfaction among adolescent Mexican orphans, and the problems associated with persistent lateness on the part of the adolescents involved. This was an issue I have also encountered, for example in my work with athletes from India, who considered it quite normal and acceptable to arrive 30 minutes or more beyond the agreed time for an appointment. Initially, I interpreted such behavior as rather insulting to my position but I soon realized that the athletes had made the assumption that I would arrive even later than they did because of what they perceived to be my superior status. With a little negotiation we quickly reached a common understanding that when it was crucial for all concerned to be punctual, the appointed hour would be designated as *Swiss* time rather than *Indian* time.

Use of standardised tests in a cross-cultural context is another area filled with potential problems. Assessment tests typically used by sport psychologists, quite naturally, have an inherent cultural bias toward the environment in which they were developed, very often a North American or European context. Direct translations of

scales into the first language of clients may on the face of it appear to rectify some of the problems but they may not address the underlying cultural bias and may indeed create issues of factorial instability for the measure. At the very least, it could be expected that measures used cross-culturally would demand culturally-appropriate norms as a reference point, although preferably a full re-validation process would need to be conducted. In the absence of such a process having occurred, it is wise to be mindful of the significant limitations of cross-cultural use of standardized tests over and above their more general limitations as diagnostic or predictive tools.

Recommended Strategies for Reflective Cross-Cultural Practice

There is a wide range of strategies proposed in the literature, some formal and others informal, designed to enhance cultural sensitivity as part of a reflective approach to sport psychology practice. For example, Baruth and Manning (1999) provided a series of experiential exercises aimed at developing greater cultural sensitivity via examining your own feelings, attitudes and behaviors towards various cultural groups. These experiences included watching movies oriented towards specific cultures and attending meetings devoted to diversity issues. Similarly, Si, Lee and Liu (2006) proposed a conceptual framework to assist researchers and practitioners to become more aware of the extent of cross-cultural issues.

Fisher, Butryn, and Roper (2003) went even further, advocating formal training in cultural studies as an appropriate way to enhance the effectiveness of sport psychology practitioners. Indeed, in preparation for participation in the 1998 Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, the entire contingent of athletes, coaches and support staff of the Great Britain team were provided with a series of workshops on Japanese culture, organized by the British Olympic Association, to enhance the effectiveness of

interactions with local administrators, officials, and volunteers during the period of the Games. As a member of the GB team at the time, I personally found the formal training experience extremely valuable, and one that has stood me in good stead ever since.

Looking beyond formal training to more informal strategies, I have found that one of the most effective approaches is to spend considerable time interacting with athletes in a wide variety of contexts, building the rapport that underpins a successful therapeutic alliance, and gradually learning to understand their world. First and foremost, however, it is essential to leave your expectations at the door. Cultural stereotypes should be recognised for what they are – generalisations that will help explain some observed behaviors and inform some assumptions but will be hopelessly wide of the mark for others.

Throughout my career as an applied practitioner, I have spent endless hours at training camps or on tour with teams. During these times, I have often joined in with many of the scheduled physical activities, such as training in the gym, social games of golf or tennis, or helping out at skills practice, even if that entails no more than retrieving errant balls. Such occasions provide a valuable glimpse into the athletes' world, assisting me to appreciate the nuances and little issues that influence their responses to the world around them, and encouraging them to see me as a person who is committed to learning whatever I can to help me to help them.

Occasionally, such involvement has extended further. For example, many years ago when I began work in the sport of bobsled, a winter sport about which I originally knew very little, the athletes arranged for me to compete in the 4-man event of the national championships to “help me understand what it was all about.” The insights that I gained into the finer points of the sport and of the sub-cultural norms

through being intimately involved with athletes in the processes of sled preparation, transportation, testing and, finally, competition proved absolutely invaluable to my future involvement as national team psychologist over the next 10 years.

I find it particularly useful to just “hang out” with athletes, wherever and whenever the opportunity presents itself. While doing so, I have many times heard criticisms of coaches or fellow support staff and have witnessed many indiscretions by individual athletes. I have always taken this willingness on the part of athletes to talk frankly and behave naturally in front of me as a sign that I had, at least in part, won their trust and that they believed in the confidentiality of our working relationship. I have often found that by fostering relationships that encourage open disclosure of concerns, I have been well placed to help athletes re-interpret, for example, coaching behaviors of which they were previously critical and, on other occasions, I have been able to represent athlete issues to the coaching team in an impartial and objective manner without betraying any confidences.

Finally, throughout my experience of cross-cultural practice, I have always made an effort to learn a few words of the first language of athletes, usually just a few essentials like *thank you*, *good morning*, and *how are you?* in the local dialect, or else to gain some appreciation of the sub-cultural linguistic norms of the athletic group, not to enable me to talk like them but rather to avoid having to repeatedly ask for explanation. I see this as part of a broader process of building effective communication between sport psychologist and athlete, of enhancing the therapeutic alliance by bridging the cultural divide.

In conclusion, at least two things are clear about delivering sport psychology cross-culturally. Firstly, it is apparent that a broad array of cultural influences can exert influence on the effective delivery of sport psychology services. Secondly, it

appears likely that adopting a reflective approach to applied work, especially in an unfamiliar cultural context, can pay rich dividends to an applied practitioner.

Hopefully, this chapter will have provided a useful framework for those practitioners operating in a cross-cultural setting.

I would like to conclude by re-emphasizing the pitfalls of cultural generalizations. Although in international competition you might see brash, confident Americans, inscrutable Chinese, dour, machine-like Russians, quiet achieving Australians and so on, underneath these cultural stereotypes lies a great deal of commonality. All athletes have personal lives, relationships, hopes and fears. Ultimately, getting to know athletes as individuals is the only legitimate way to understand what truly makes them tick. In the words of Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002) “Although some athletes may act in accordance with one or more of these ethnic and racial generalizations, each athlete represents a unique ethnic and racial worldview” (p. 298). Gaining insight into the unique world view of each individual athlete, from whatever cultural background they may originate, is a cornerstone of becoming an effective psychologist in the world of sport.

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Figure 1. Six-stage model of reflection (from Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; adapted from Gibbs, 1988)

