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**1 A Tale of Three Seasons: A Cultural Sport Psychology and Gender Performativity**

**2 Approach to Practitioner Identity and Development in Professional Football**

3 *Word Count: 10223*

## **A Tale of Three Seasons: A Cultural Sport Psychology and Gender Performativity**

### **Approach to Practitioner Identity and Development in Professional Football**

#### **Abstract**

The present study explored how the organisational and cultural experiences of a trainee Sport Psychology Consultant (SPC) working in professional football shaped her identity and professional development. Drawing on Cultural Sport Psychology (CSP) and gender performativity as guiding frameworks, we explored the first author's identity development as a sport psychology practitioner-researcher within one professional football club over a 3-year duration. Traditional ethnographic data collection methods were employed, including, field notes and a reflective journal. Through creative non-fiction vignettes, we show that the traditional masculine discourse in professional football shaped the first author's sense of self and subsequent behaviours. From the results of this study, we suggest that SPCs identity development is not smooth or linear, rather it can be described as a 'rocky road to individuation' defined by a series of culturally specific 'critical moments'. We strongly believe that contextual intelligence and cultural proficiency are essential for a trainee SPCs survival during early and later career stages of working within elite and professional sport environments.

*Keywords: Gender performativity, Cultural Sport Psychology, Identity, Professional Development, Longitudinal*

## Introduction

Historically, sport has been classified as a male sector where the female voice is both under-represented and marginalised (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Roper, 2005; Roper, 2008). This is evident in sport psychology, where many of the influential figures of the discipline are either ‘founding fathers’ or ‘grandfathers’ as opposed to ‘mothers’ or ‘grandmothers’ (Yamnor & Connelly, 1991). However, in recent decades, feminist researchers have started to examine the ways in which gender roles (and ideologies) are expressed and embedded in organisational practices (Kezar & Lester, 2008). Butler (2004) re-framed gender identity, and believed that such deeply personalised categories can only be understood as emerging from the lived experience of an individual. In this sense, masculinity can be defined as a social construct that “does not exclusively belong to male bodies, rather it can inhibit and repress both men and women” (Plester, 2015, p. 541). Subsequently, it is attested that men can also perform femininity in the same way that females can demonstrate masculinity. Despite this, Meyerhoff (2014) suggested that deterministic generalisations as to how men and women conduct themselves still dominate many organisations with men being grouped together and prescribed masculine discourses and behaviours (e.g. those of strength, power, and toughness), and females being prescribed with a discourse of sensitivity, gentleness, and emotionality. Consequently, it is argued that gender identities are not only formed from our own performances but are also placed upon us from other people.

The gender identities that individuals both perform and are prescribed will likely shape their applied sport psychology delivery and professional development experiences. In line with this acknowledgement, there is a growing interest in, and recognition of, sport *psychologists* as the ‘person’ and ‘practitioner’, and scholars have started to explore how their **more** personal qualities/**characteristics** and actions as individuals shape the effectiveness of service delivery (Chandler *et al.*, 2016; Tod *et al.*, 2017; Smith *et al.*, 2019; Tod *et al.*, 2019). As Ryba (2009)

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3 68 attested, sport psychology practitioners are multidimensional individuals shaped by their life  
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5 69 histories, identities and identifications (inclusive of gender, age, race and religion etc), and  
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8 70 their practice is not only influenced by their abilities, but also the politics of the sport and  
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10 71 cultural-narrative discourses surrounding what constitutes good service delivery in a particular  
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12 72 sociocultural context. More specifically, professional Sport Psychology Consultants (SPCs) are  
13  
14 73 likely to be embedded within a sports club/organisation with particular organisational cultural  
15  
16 74 values that impose certain boundaries on their practice (McDougall et al., 2019). Furthermore,  
17  
18 75 SPCs will be responsible for working with a diverse group of athletes and/or support staff who  
19  
20 76 have each constructed their own unique narrative within the social context in which they exist.  
21  
22 77 Therefore, a ‘one size fits all’ method of service delivery that is informed by top-down theory  
23  
24 78 and overlooks important concepts such as gender would not be appropriate (Anonymous et al.,  
25  
26 79 2019; Mellalieu, 2017). Rather, designing, implementing and delivering psychological support  
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28 80 that is informed by a bottom-up cultural understanding will likely result in better outcomes for  
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30  
31 81 both the SPC and sports organisation.

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36 82 Sport researchers have explored the consultancy experiences of both experienced and  
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38 83 trainee SPCs (e.g. Tod et al., 2009). However, many of these accounts are developed from one-  
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40 84 off interventions or season-long engagements, and have focused on trainee SPCs experiences  
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42 85 of developing a congruent practice philosophy (e.g. Collins et al., 2013), or the changing role  
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44 86 of the supervisor (e.g. Tod et al., 2017). Although these studies have made important strides to  
45  
46 87 advance understandings of practitioner development, the studies have often focused on  
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48 88 individual SPC qualities and limited attention has been given to organisational cultural and  
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50 89 gender factors that shape practitioners’ development. Feminist sport psychology researchers  
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52 90 (e.g. Yambor & Connelly, 1991; Roper, 2005, 2008) have identified the importance of  
53  
54 91 shedding light on the career experiences of early career and accomplished female SPCs when  
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56 92 working with same-sex and cross-sex athletes. More specifically, Roper (2008) suggested that  
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3 93 female SPCs might be faced with a unique set of challenges when entering and working within  
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5 94 the applied domain (such as attaining roles, perceived status, gender discrimination, family and  
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7  
8 95 balance), and that these challenges are likely to be exaggerated in highly masculine  
9  
10 96 environments. Furthermore, Roper identified that females should be prepared to face  
11  
12 97 discrimination particularly from male coaches due to the “locker room mentality”. Despite a  
13  
14 98 growing interest in women’s experiences, Roper’s work was limited to collegiate sport settings  
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16  
17 99 in North America, arguably a very different environment to professional sport in the UK and  
18  
19 100 Europe. For example, Nesti (2010) argued that in some contexts, the female SPC might actually  
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21 101 have an advantage, in that she could be delivering a caring service that is traditionally viewed  
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23  
24 102 as feminine.

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26  
27 103 Cultural sport psychology (CSP) (see Ryba, 2017; Schinke et al., 2019) emerged as a  
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29 104 critical discourse to challenge culture-blind and ‘a-contextual’ research in sport psychology  
30  
31 105 and to argue for rethinking practitioner identity in sport as a complex cultural construction. In  
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33  
34 106 this paper, we define identity as a sociocultural construction occurring within a particular social  
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36 107 context (Anonymous et al., 2019). More specifically, the “identity of a woman emerges from  
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38 108 her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history and future, as mediated through the  
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41 109 cultural discursive context to which she has access” (Alcoff, 1988, p, 434). Subsequently, we  
42  
43 110 believe that the first authors’ professional identity and development was storied and re-storied  
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45 111 as she negotiated individual, social and cultural narratives within the professional football club  
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47  
48 112 in which she worked (McGannon et al., 2012).

49  
50 113 CSP has gained increasing attention in recent years (e.g. Hacker & Mann, 2017;  
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52 114 McGannon & Smith, 2015) as it allows us to move away from over simplified, monolithic  
53  
54 115 approaches to studying sport, and towards those that better reveal and centralise marginalised  
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57 116 cultural identities such as those pertaining to gender (Ronkainen, Watkins, & Ryba, 2016;  
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59 117 Schinke et al., 2019; Schinke & McGannon, 2015). As an umbrella term, CSP embraces

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3 118 perspectives that come after positivism (e.g., social constructionism, critical realism, feminist  
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5 119 praxis), brings culture to the forefront of the study, and believes that our identity is  
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8 120 simultaneously personal, cultural and social. Blodgett et al. (2015) and others (Anonymous et  
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10 121 al., 2018; Hacker & Mann, 2017; Smith & McGannon 2017) have identified the potential of  
11  
12 122 CSP to advance our understanding of, and facilitate social change in sport. In this paper, we  
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14  
15 123 will explore the identity formation and professional development of a young female SPC in  
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17 124 men's football, with the focus on gender- and age-related identities that were powerful in  
18  
19 125 shaping her experience and relations to others in the club.

22 126 Generally, sport psychology has not always been well received as traditionally  
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24 127 conceptualised and delivered in elite sport settings (Anonymous et al., 2018; Mitchell et al.,  
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26  
27 128 2014). More specifically, it has been viewed as primarily a feminine discipline, conflicting  
28  
29 129 with the traditional narrative surrounding the professional sport culture (McDougall et al.,  
30  
31 130 2019). Historically, sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture  
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33  
34 131 (Connell, 1995, p.54), and is often viewed as a method of nurturing in boys the qualities  
35  
36 132 necessary for manhood, including competitiveness, toughness and superiority (Holt, 1989;  
37  
38 133 Benyon, 2002). Beyond this, several scholars have argued that professional sport is founded  
39  
40 134 upon sacrifice and brutality (Mellalieu, 2017) where abuse is often overlooked and/or accepted  
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42  
43 135 (Feddersen et al., 2019), and athletes can be commodified in a win-at-all-costs mentality.  
44  
45 136 Subsequently, sports clubs and organisations might possess the opinion that sport psychology  
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47 137 is only of value to those athletes who have a 'problem', or are too 'weak' to cope with the  
48  
49 138 demands of professional sport (Anonymous et al. 2018; Pain & Harwood, 2004). We argue that  
50  
51 139 these perceptions of sport psychology might be further exaggerated in professional football due  
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53  
54 140 to the hegemonic constructions of masculinity that dominate the professional football culture  
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56  
57 141 (Anonymous et al. 2018). For example, players and staff behave in the 'most honoured way of  
58  
59 142 being a man' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). Often, this determined by who can  
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2  
3 143 withstand the most physical and emotional pain, and who best keeps their personal feelings to  
4  
5 144 themselves (Anonymous et al., 2018, p.4). Furthermore, the reluctance of many clubs to engage  
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8 145 with organisational outsiders poses an additional barrier (see Anonymous et al., 2018; Nesti,  
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10 146 2012).

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13 147 Despite these potential obstacles, opportunities for sport psychology practitioners to  
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15 148 work in various sports are increasing (McEwan *et al.*, 2019). For example, in 2012 the Premier  
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17 149 League (PL) introduced the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), which formalised sports  
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20 150 science and sport psychology support methods in professional youth academies. In addition to  
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22 151 this, in May 2019 the National Basketball Association (NBA) launched a new Mental Health  
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24 152 and Wellness Program that has seen all NBA clubs employ a psychologist/sport psychologist  
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26  
27 153 to support their athletes' psychological wellbeing. These examples suggest that the cultural  
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29 154 discourse (i.e. verbal and non-verbal cultural communications) surrounding sport psychology  
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31 155 are changing to include a broader recognition of the value of the discipline structurally at the  
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33 156 higher levels of performance (e.g., national governing bodies), but the question remains  
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36 157 whether subcultural insiders (e.g. performance and support personnel) in various sport  
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38 158 organisations are actually embracing it.

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41 159 The in-depth analysis of this extensive fieldwork as a practitioner-researcher allows for a  
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43 160 deeper understanding of how the professional football culture and shaped one female SPC's  
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46 161 identity and development. This is an important contribution to existing literature, as we  
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48 162 examine the reciprocal relationship between a practitioners experiences and her environment  
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50 163 as part of the individuation process (see McEwan, Tod, & Eubank, 2019). Our aim is to address  
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52 164 the following research objectives:

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56 165 1. To examine the organisational, cultural and gender-related experiences of a female  
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58 166 trainee SPC over a longitudinal time frame (3 full footballing seasons).



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3 167 2. To examine how the organisational, cultural and gender-related experiences of a female  
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5 168 trainee SPC shaped practitioner identity and professional development.  
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### 169 **Methodology**

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11 170 This confessional tale stands alongside and extends our recently published realist tale;  
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13 171 which explored how the organisational cultural experiences of elite youth footballers shaped  
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15 172 their identity development and behaviour (see Anonymous et al., 2018). The confessional tale  
16  
17 173 is an increasingly popular genre in sport studies (see Dart, 2008; Douglas & Carless, 2010;  
18  
19 174 Cavallerio et al., 2020), and is most commonly used as a method for researchers to discuss the  
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21 175 trials and tribulations they experience whilst embedded in applied settings (Sparkes, 2002; Van  
22  
23 176 Maanen, 2011). Consequently, we view this article as the opportunity for the first author (I) to  
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25 177 position herself at the forefront of the piece, “announcing here I am. This is what happened to  
26  
27 178 me, and this is how I felt, reacted and coped. Walk in my shoes for a while” (Sparkes, 2002, p.  
28  
29 179 59). The research team (we) hope that this article will illuminate the deeply complex and  
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31 180 fluctuating relationship between the first author and the professional football club.  
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37 181 We approached the confessional tale from the viewpoint of a relativist ontology (belief  
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39 182 that there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knowledge is created through  
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41 183 social and cultural interactions) and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (data  
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43 184 collection occurs in the world of the participants) (Cornbleth, 1990). In keeping with a CSP  
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45 185 approach, confessional tales share the view that there is no neat separation between subject and  
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47 186 context, and that experiences are messy/open to multiple interpretations (McGannon & Smith,  
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49 187 2015). Furthermore, in line with the ambition of CSP to generate knowledge that can help make  
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51 188 a positive difference, we aspire that the research can inform education and supervision of  
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53 189 students and early career (especially female) practitioners to help them navigate career  
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55 190 challenges and build working relationships in the challenging world of elite sport.  
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3 191 ***Biographical positioning***  
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6 192 As a social constructionist researcher, I believed that I was in a constant state of  
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8 193 ‘becoming’, shaped by social, personal, cultural and political experiences (McGannon et al.,  
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10 194 2012). At the point of entry into the professional football club, I was a trainee SPC, a doctoral  
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12  
13 195 student, a self who was a young female, an ex-footballer, and a passionate football fan. The  
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15 196 impact of each of these intersecting identities is centralised in the ‘Results and Discussion’ as  
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17 197 they influenced how I experienced the organisation, and what is reported on in this study.  
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20  
21 198 ***Context***  
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23  
24 199 For the purposes of the study, we have chosen to represent the participating organisation  
25  
26 200 using the title ‘Fulgrove United Football Club (FC)’. Fulgrove United FC is a medium-sized  
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28 201 professional football club currently in the English Football League. However, it is primarily  
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30 202 acknowledged within the footballing world for the quality and productivity of its youth  
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32 203 academy. Currently, Fulgrove United FC houses over 150 players (academy and 1<sup>st</sup> team), and  
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34 204 around 50 support staff at its training complex. This is unique in comparison with other  
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36 205 professional football clubs that create a clear separation between the academy and the 1<sup>st</sup> team  
37  
38 206 through the use of different training facilities. Therefore, my experiences within the social  
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40 207 context were not isolated to those individuals positioned within the academy, rather my  
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42 208 organisational cultural experiences were shaped by both 1<sup>st</sup> team and academy members.  
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47 209 ***Developing the confessional tale***  
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50 210 Immersive methods offer researchers the opportunity to acquire detailed  
51  
52 211 understandings of social contexts where research is sparse (Cavallerio et al., 2020). This  
53  
54 212 confessional tale arose as part of a broader ethnographic doctoral research project that explored  
55  
56 213 sport psychology practice in professional youth football. Adding the authorial presence allowed  
57  
58 214 us to portray a more balanced and inclusive picture (Van Maanen, 1988; 2011; Plummer, 2001;  
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3 215 Douglas & Carless, 2010). Across the 3-year duration of the study, I occupied a dual role as a  
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5 216 sport psychology practitioner-researcher.  
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8 217 More specifically, in my role as a SPC, I was embedded within Fulgrove United FC for  
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10 218 3-4 days per week dependent on the training and match schedule within the academy and held  
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12 219 sole responsibility for the delivery of psychological support to academy footballers, and  
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14 220 support staff. Methods of support included; psychological profiling, individual support  
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16 221 sessions, group workshops, pitch based delivery, and stakeholder education. Although my  
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18 222 applied practice philosophy was rooted within a holistic, humanistic consulting approach, the  
19  
20 223 EPPP psychology requirements meant that I was also required to deliver elements of Mental  
21  
22 224 Skills Training in group settings (e.g. self-talk, imagery). Many stakeholders within Fulgrove  
23  
24 225 United FC (e.g. players, staff, parents) had no prior experience of sport psychology, and I was  
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26 226 the first female member of sports science staff employed by the club. Subsequently, I also  
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28 227 viewed myself as an educator within the organisation on the discipline of sport psychology.  
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34 228 Being embedded within the organisation across the full duration of my BASES  
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36 229 professional training, and for the year that followed was a key feature of the research. The  
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38 230 longitudinal nature of the study allowed me to truly capture my journey to individuation as a  
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40 231 SPC.  
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#### 44 232 ***Data collection***

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47 233 Field notes were completed on every occasion I was present within the organisation and  
48  
49 234 included brief sentences or phrases to identify events and their key details (see Taylor, Bogdan,  
50  
51 235 & DeVault, 2015). While the field notes documented all events in chronological order, I also  
52  
53 236 completed a reflective journal which was emotive, helped me to make sense of my experiences,  
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55 237 and considered both the short-term and long-term impact of the events on my identity and  
56  
57 238 professional development (Anonymous et al., 2019; Smith, 2010). In this study, I engaged in  
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3 239 'reflection' which indicates stepping back from a situation to make logical sense of events in  
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5 240 the outside world (Atkins & Murphy, 1993), and 'reflexivity' which is "a process of looking  
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7  
8 241 outwards to the social and cultural artefacts and forms of thought which saturate our practices,  
9  
10 242 and inwards to challenge the processes by which we make sense of the world" (D'Cruz et al.,  
11  
12 243 2006, p. 78). More specifically, I reflected on meaningful interactions with players and staff  
13  
14 244 and attempted to make sense of my experiences through reflexive discussions with the research  
15  
16  
17 245 team and critical friends. Subsequently, I re-visited many of the events documented in the  
18  
19 246 reflective journal on more than one occasion. It was through this longitudinal and continued  
20  
21 247 reflection that I began to empathise with other staff members, and treat them with the same  
22  
23  
24 248 level of sensitivity that I was gifting to myself. Taking the time to write in-depth reflections  
25  
26 249 further engrained them into my memory and provided an initial outlet for recording impressions  
27  
28 250 and ideas before more formal analysis.

### 31 251 *Data analysis and representation*

34 252 The first step of the data analysis was to revert to the field notes and reflective journal  
35  
36 253 and re-read my journey across time. Raw data was then used to populate a 3-year timeline that  
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38  
39 254 was split into the 12 different months of the year. This timeline noted all interpersonal events  
40  
41 255 that had a significant impact on my journey to individuation, and was used to create  
42  
43 256 meaning/make sense of my experiences temporally (Braun & Clarke, 2019). From the timeline,  
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45  
46 257 I engaged in reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (see Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2018), and  
47  
48 258 approached the reflexive TA through a social constructionist lens. The 'central organising  
49  
50 259 concept' was SPC identity and professional development, and the overriding themes of  
51  
52 260 'gender' and 'organisational culture' developed as patterns of shared meaning across time  
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54  
55 261 (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It was understood that these interpretations were contextually bound,  
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57 262 positioned and situated (Braun et al., 2018), and the aim was to understand and create meaning  
58  
59 263 from my experiences as opposed to finding a singular truth. At this stage, I then engaged in

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2  
3 264 collaborative and reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The purpose of critically discussing  
4  
5 265 themes with research team members was to develop a richer and more nuanced understanding  
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7  
8 266 of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Schinke et al., 2016; McGannon & Smith, 2015).  
9

10  
11 267 The final step was to represent the data. In keeping with the characteristics of the  
12  
13 268 confessional genre, we have chosen to use creative non-fiction vignettes. Creative analytical  
14  
15 269 practices are complex, and cannot be constrained by a set of rigid guidelines on how they  
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17  
18 270 should be constructed or structured (Douglas & Carless, 2010). Rather, the writing “needs to  
19  
20 271 be framed within the stylistic preferences of the writer and the context of the particular project”  
21  
22 272 (Douglas & Carless, 2010, p.4). CSP researchers (e.g. Blodgett *et al.*, 2015; McGannon &  
23  
24 273 Smith, 2015; Schinke *et al.*, 2016) advocate the use of vignettes in enhancing our cultural  
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26  
27 274 understanding in elite sport environments and delivering culturally informed sport psychology  
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29 275 support. The purpose of the vignettes was to enhance the reader’s understanding from more  
30  
31 276 than just a cognitive perspective, rather, to connect with the reader on an emotional,  
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33  
34 277 behavioural and embodied level, allowing an empathetic understanding to emerge.  
35

### 36 278 ***Research Quality and Methodological Rigor***

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38  
39 279 Our approach to research quality was guided by CSP researchers. More specifically, Smith  
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41  
42 280 and McGannon (2018) identified critical dialogue, reflexivity and contribution to knowledge  
43  
44 281 as central considerations in producing high quality qualitative research. I engaged in a dialogue  
45  
46  
47 282 with critical friends to further explore my interpretations of the data. These critical friends  
48  
49 283 included members of the research team, other trainee SPCs and individuals working in a similar  
50  
51 284 capacity at other professional football clubs. We also judge the credibility of this research on  
52  
53 285 the contribution it makes to applied sport psychology delivery methods, and practitioner  
54  
55 286 training and development. We understand that these checks like any other validity procedures  
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57  
58 287 do not provide access to objective reality, however, they do add dimensionality, and reflexivity  
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3 288 to the interpretive world, and help sort out more plausible explanations from less plausible ones  
4  
5 289 (Anonymous et al., 2019).

7  
8 290 ***Ethical considerations***

10  
11 291 For this study, ethical approval was sought from the relevant University ethics board.  
12  
13 292 Confidentiality is assured for individuals within the organisation as no real names or  
14  
15 293 information that might lead to the identification of any individual was included (Silverman,  
16  
17 294 2016). In line with Reeves (2010), I attained gatekeeper consent for access to the organisation  
18  
19 295 and the individuals within it. In addition to this, parental consent, and informed assent was  
20  
21 296 attained for players under the age of 16. However, occupying a dual role as a practitioner-  
22  
23 297 researcher within the organisation raised ambiguity regarding the organisation's anonymity, as  
24  
25 298 it may be possible for readers to identify the organisation of study via other means. It was  
26  
27 299 decided that all information would be anonymized as far as possible. Finally, in line with  
28  
29 300 relational ethics principles (see Ellis, 2007), I based my actions and behaviours on my relations  
30  
31 301 and commitments to players, staff and parents within Fulgrove United FC. More specifically,  
32  
33 302 I aimed to ensure that I engaged in open dialogue and active listening with the participants,  
34  
35 303 considered a diversity of perspectives, and connected with others based on mutual respect  
36  
37 304 (Ellis, 2007).

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44 305 **Results and Discussion**

45  
46 306 In this section, we present three separate but interrelated vignettes that each aim to  
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48 307 illuminate how the dominant cultural practices within Fulgrove United FC and my experiences  
49  
50 308 of them challenged my ways of thinking about and engaging with participants as an SPC, and  
51  
52 309 ultimately my practitioner identity and professional development.

53  
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55  
56 310 ***The first Sucker Punch***  
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3 311 The following vignette centralises my first experience of working with the parents at  
4  
5 312 Fulgrove United FC. The workshop was titled '*An introduction to Sports Psychology*', and was  
6  
7 313 delivered two weeks into my first season working at the club. The primary objectives of the  
8  
9 314 workshop were, to introduce sports psychology as a discipline, outline the psychological  
10  
11 315 development program that I had designed, and explain how it would be implemented across  
12  
13 316 the upcoming season.

14  
15  
16  
17 317 *Upon entering the education suite, my mind immediately reverted back to my first school*  
18  
19 318 *nativity; a grand gathering of judging parents in an overcrowded and humid room that smelt*  
20  
21 319 *of stale sweat. I started the presentation a smiley, chatty and friendly figure, hopeful for a*  
22  
23 320 *productive session. The support program had been designed specifically to support those*  
24  
25 321 *players who were contracted to Fulgrove United FC (U9-U23). I believed that the parents*  
26  
27 322 *would be impressed. During a period of time where the development of meaningful and trusting*  
28  
29 323 *relationships was paramount, I made clear reference to my affiliation with a top UK Sports*  
30  
31 324 *Science institution, and considerable playing experience in the Women's game. However, a*  
32  
33 325 *few minutes into my presentation some of the parent's behaviour changed. They slumped back*  
34  
35 326 *into their chairs, pulled their phone out of their pockets and scrolled down their screens, I felt*  
36  
37 327 *the energy sap from my body. Eye contact became even more important, I placed a focus on*  
38  
39 328 *those who were still engaged. As my presentation finished the parents collectively applauded,*  
40  
41 329 *overall, I was pleased with how it went; I felt that I had sold the program well. Then came the*  
42  
43 330 *sucker punch!*

44  
45  
46  
47 331 *There was still 10 minutes before the start of training, so I asked if anyone had any questions-*  
48  
49 332 *at this point the parents took control. I had prepared beforehand for a short Q&A at the end*  
50  
51 333 *of the session, as expected, the first couple of questions related to the availability of content*  
52  
53 334 *for parents, and how a child could catch up if they missed a session. I felt comfortable in*  
54  
55 335 *answering these as the questions demonstrated that the parents had actually been taking note*

1  
2  
3 336 *of what I was saying, and were genuinely interested in the logistics of the process. In the*  
4  
5 337 *meantime, there was a deep, dark, rumbling noise coming from the back of the room. I looked*  
6  
7  
8 338 *to the back and a couple of the dads smirked, my hands felt clammy. As I made eye contact*  
9  
10 339 *with one, he loudly shouted, “How old are ya then? You look too young to be working with our*  
11  
12 340 *lads, shouldn’t ya still be at school”. His ‘pals’ laughed, and so did some of the other parents*  
13  
14 341 *scattered across the room. Taking a second to observe the audience’s response, I adjusted my*  
15  
16 342 *posture attempting to cut a more authoritative figure. Some of the parent’s eyes were on me,*  
17  
18 343 *others on him. It felt like a standoff with the school bully, I didn’t want to back down and cave*  
19  
20 344 *in; I wasn’t there to be the butt of his humour. I commented, “At least I will be thankful when*  
21  
22 345 *I get to your age”. My stomach was churning, hands a little shaky, and head a muddle of*  
23  
24 346 *contrasting thoughts. I had worked so hard on the content of my presentation, believing that*  
25  
26 347 *this would be the foundations of their judgement. Yet, one remark on something that I couldn’t*  
27  
28 348 *control undid everything that I believed my presentation had achieved. It was about to get*  
29  
30 349 *worse. His mate then chirped up, he looked bigger, stronger, even more threatening. It felt like*  
31  
32 350 *the previous question had opened the door for anything... “You must be brave, you know, being*  
33  
34 351 *a girl and all that. I wonder how that’ll go down”. This time I had no comeback, deflated and*  
35  
36 352 *defeated, I drew a fake smile and told them they had better get a move on if they wanted to be*  
37  
38 353 *outside ready for the start of training. My heart racing, head pounding, I removed my memory*  
39  
40 354 *stick from my laptop and picked up my coat, I left the room paranoid about aspects of myself I*  
41  
42 355 *couldn’t control; my appearance. A little part of me felt like giving up. If the parents went home*  
43  
44 356 *thinking this then what would they tell their child? And more importantly, what are the*  
45  
46 357 *implications for my future work. I had been rocked and was now questioning my readiness for*  
47  
48 358 *the cannibals that lurked in the real world.*

55  
56  
57 359 *Initially, I was looking forward to an opportunity to attain the respect and support of*  
58  
59 360 *parents at Fulgrove United FC. Talent development researchers (e.g. Martindale et al., 2011;*  
60



1  
2  
3 361 Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) have highlighted the significant role that parents have in shaping  
4  
5 362 how their child constructs themselves and their world-view, and their youth athletes well-being  
6  
7 363 (Aunola et al., 2018). Therefore, I hoped that educating and working with these stakeholders  
8  
9  
10 364 would encourage them to convey positive messages to their son/s regarding the importance of  
11  
12 365 sport psychology practice, and how to interact with a relatively marginalised other (a young  
13  
14 366 female). **Although on the whole, the event was a success, this vignette demonstrates that only**  
15  
16 367 **a couple of instances was all that it took for me to feel undermined, isolated and insecure about**  
17  
18 368 **being a female within a historically male dominated club.** Lester (2008) identified that  
19  
20 369 organisational cultures “shape and reinforce socially appropriate roles for men and women” (p.  
21  
22 370 277), and that females might have a tough time in negotiating their own identity when they first  
23  
24 371 enter male-dominated cultures. Our findings support this notion, we believe that when trainee  
25  
26 372 SPCs first enter professional sports environments they are at a particularly vulnerable stage of  
27  
28 373 development due to an emotional labour gap (see Hings et al., 2018). More specifically,  
29  
30 374 trainees might be unable to manage emotions and emotional expressions as part of the work  
31  
32 375 role (Grandey & Melloy, 2017).

376 Many scholars have written about ageist attitudes in Western Societies, where older  
377 people are viewed as vulnerable or weak in comparison with the younger and fitter members  
378 of society (Nelson, 2004). Sports in particular are exemplars of sub-cultural contexts that  
379 generally valorise youth and discriminate against older athletes. In this sense, I could have been  
380 considered in a privileged position compared to others, being a young female might have made  
381 it easier for me to connect with players, and given me some familiarity with common cultural  
382 activities and expressions. However, as the vignette shows, when it comes to working in a  
383 supporting role in a sports organisation, and specifically when interacting with parents, **youth**  
384 **can** become a marginalised identity. In this case, older age was associated with a greater level  
385 of knowledge and/or expertise. Consequently, the parents would have positioned someone who

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2  
3 386 looked older as being more capable of working with their child. Further, the father's comments  
4  
5 387 about me being a female reinforced the traditional domination of masculine narratives, and  
6  
7  
8 388 limited opportunities for females to be successful in professional sport (Anonymous et al.,  
9  
10 389 2019; Nesti, 2012).

11  
12  
13 390 I attempted to respond to the parents by engaging in a common cultural feature of  
14  
15 391 professional football, 'banter' (Anonymous et al., 2018; Kelly & Waddington, 2006). This is  
16  
17 392 often utilised by players and staff as a form of deflection to hide their true feelings about an  
18  
19  
20 393 event (see Anonymous et al., 2018), and was my attempt at demonstrating a narrative that  
21  
22 394 aligned with the personal qualities (e.g. hardiness, sense of humour, ruthlessness) that these  
23  
24 395 individuals believed were important to be successful within professional football. By behaving  
25  
26 396 in this manner I was suppressing my feminine qualities in an attempt to remove stereotypical  
27  
28 397 gender markings (e.g. sensitive, emotional) (Roper, 2008). In addition to this, I learned an  
29  
30 398 immediate lesson about which identities are desirable and which ones should be downplayed  
31  
32 399 to survive in sport (Ryba et al., 2017). For example, I was now driven by continuing to construct  
33  
34 400 a more masculine self that was better aligned with the other organisational insiders (e.g. I tied  
35  
36 401 my hair up every time I was present at the club, wore a loose-fitting tracksuit, and took part in  
37  
38 402 some aspects of training).

39  
40  
41  
42  
43 403 In summary, this vignette demonstrates the complex and gender fuelled negotiations  
44  
45 404 that young developing professional women might face when they first enter and operate within  
46  
47 405 masculine cultures (e.g. questions surrounding capability and survival), and illuminates that in  
48  
49 406 the short-term constructing desirable identities might offset some of these challenges.

50  
51  
52  
53 407 ***Power, Dominance and Control***

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2  
3 408 The following encounter occurred prior to an afternoon weights session for the U18s,  
4  
5 409 U23s, and 1<sup>st</sup> team, meaning that all players within these age groups and respective sports  
6  
7  
8 410 science staff were in the gym at the time.  
9

10 411 *I'm stood in the gym, although somewhat intimidating I feel a sense of comfort and security. It*  
11  
12 412 *is here where each male boasts his rugged, red-blooded dominance, testosterone levels are*  
13  
14 413 *high and the stronger players were mocking the 'weaker' members of the group. For example,*  
15  
16 414 *the U23 captain was stood in the centre of the room imitating one of the younger boys by*  
17  
18 415 *pretending that he couldn't bicep curl the lightest weights on the weight rack. It is the*  
19  
20 416 *afternoon, the busiest part of the day. U23 players, 1<sup>st</sup> team players, and sports science staff*  
21  
22 417 *congregate in preparation for the start of the gym session. Matt (1<sup>st</sup> team fitness coach) enters*  
23  
24 418 *the gym; his eyes fixate on myself and the player I was talking to (like a lion looking at his*  
25  
26 419 *prey). Matt spoke, "OI anonymous... I need to speak to you about your progress", the clanging*  
27  
28 420 *metal came to a halt, and silence filled the air. All eyes were on me, my face beating as the*  
29  
30 421 *blood rushed to my burning red cheeks. I somehow plucked up the courage to confidently*  
31  
32 422 *respond, "Yeah of course, when are you free?" ... Matt's bellowing voice delivered the next*  
33  
34 423 *embarrassing blow "Il find you when I've got time". He then turned around, and without*  
35  
36 424 *looking back left the gym. I spent the next hour pacing back and forth, unable to think of*  
37  
38 425 *anything other than my interaction with Matt. Matt finally approached me and suggested we*  
39  
40 426 *talk in his office (shared with 1<sup>st</sup> team manager and assistant manager). I felt isolated, alone,*  
41  
42 427 *and lacking any control over the situation I found myself in. However, what came next would*  
43  
44 428 *serve to enhance these feelings further. In a cold, harsh tone, Matt demanded that I remove my*  
45  
46 429 *email address and contact number from any document that could be seen by the academy or*  
47  
48 430 *1<sup>st</sup> team players. I was stunned... the gym boasted an overly large notice board, pinned to this*  
49  
50 431 *was a personal profile of all staff working at the club (each one gave a contact number and*  
51  
52 432 *email address). I mumbled, hoping for a positive response "my role at the club means that*  
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3 433 *occasionally contact with the players outside of club hours is vital". Matt responded, "You're*  
4  
5  
6 434 *a female, you don't need to be contacting anyone outside your allocated hours". Head down I*  
7  
8 435 *shrank into my seat, hoping that somehow it would swallow me up and this encounter would*  
9  
10 436 *end.*  
11  
12  
13 437 *Just as I perceived myself to be at breaking point, the door barged open, no knock... nothing.*  
14  
15 438 *James (1<sup>st</sup> team manager) entered. With a welcoming smile on his face, he spoke "Hi*  
16  
17 439 *anonymous, how are you finding things so far? You seem to be settling in well, we're all happy*  
18  
19 440 *with how you're doing", I put on a brave face and lied. I said that things were going really*  
20  
21 441 *well, and I was starting to feel a part of the club. I glanced quickly back to Matt, worried what*  
22  
23 442 *he may say next. However, it was now Matt who looked nervous, and even embarrassed. I took*  
24  
25 443 *lead in the conversation and explained my plan of action for the following month. The tension*  
26  
27 444 *had diminished; it was as though the opening of the office door brought with it a presence that*  
28  
29 445 *had a holding effect on Matt. Not only was he smiling, but he also agreed with what I was*  
30  
31 446 *suggesting, and spoke in a soft, quiet tone of voice. The conversation came to a natural end. I*  
32  
33 447 *left the office, a mix of emotions running wildly through my head... I took my details off the*  
34  
35 448 *notice board and decided it would be best to take some time alone to try and make sense of*  
36  
37 449 *what had just happened.*  
38  
39  
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44 450 This was one of the most challenging events that occurred within my first season at  
45  
46 451 Fulgrove United FC. Subsequently, I encountered a range of deep-rooted emotions that resulted  
47  
48 452 in me questioning every aspect of my identity. In this situation, I felt totally disconnected. My  
49  
50 453 background was very different to many of the staff and players at the club, in that I had not  
51  
52 454 constructed my identity within the dominant narratives surrounding professional sport (see  
53  
54 455 Anonymous et al., 2018; Carless & Douglas, 2012; Ronkainen et al., 2016). In contrast, I had  
55  
56 456 been exposed to a range of environments (e.g. university, full-time work, female sport) that  
57  
58 457 had each contributed in some way to how I viewed myself (Schinke et al., 2012). Therefore,  
59  
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1  
2  
3 458 my intersecting identities did not align with the culturally dominant and desirable identity  
4  
5  
6 459 positions (e.g. power, masculinity, toughness, leadership) at Fulgrove United FC. I believe that  
7  
8 460 this might have further exaggerated the negative impact of such experiences (Blodgett et al.,  
9  
10 461 2015; Anonymous et al., 2018). Mitchell et al. (2014) support this viewpoint and suggested  
11  
12 462 that when individuals fail to align their experiences within desirable identity positions they are  
13  
14  
15 463 likely to experience isolation, reduced self-worth, and existential anxiety.

16  
17  
18 464 Matt questioned my professional conduct at a time when I was trying to attain the  
19  
20 465 respect of key stakeholders, and develop strong working relationships within the organization.  
21  
22 466 Professional sports environments by their very nature are highly demanding workplaces where  
23  
24  
25 467 expectations are high, both of the athletes as performers, but also of coaching and support staff  
26  
27 468 (Mellalieu, 2017; Anonymous et al., 2018). I was acutely aware of this and questioned whether  
28  
29 469 the actions of Matt served as an indication that other staff were not buying into my role, or  
30  
31  
32 470 perhaps more concerning, me, and whether I possessed the resources to survive. Immediately,  
33  
34 471 I became explicitly aware of every interaction that I had with players and/or staff, where they  
35  
36 472 took place, and how I handled myself (e.g. I would ensure that I only delivered a one-to-one  
37  
38 473 session with a player in a room that had a window).

39  
40  
41 474 Despite my interactions with Matt posing a significant threat to my identity and  
42  
43 475 professional development as a SPC, over time and through engaging in reflexive discussions,  
44  
45  
46 476 I started to see how people struggle in their own individual ways. More specifically, this event  
47  
48 477 occurred at a particularly challenging time for the professional football club due to a number  
49  
50 478 of poor results at first-team level. Consequently, the pressure that Matt might have been feeling  
51  
52  
53 479 to perform could have evoked his more masculine traits, suggesting that the professional  
54  
55 480 football culture is not only tough for females, but it is also tough for males (particularly those  
56  
57 481 who are *less expressively masculine*). As this only came as an afterthought, we suggest that  
58  
59 482 trainee SPCs might enter settings with a set of predetermined ideas about both the culture and

1  
2  
3 483 those who exist within it. For example, I might have considered this initially just ‘typical’ male  
4  
5 484 behavior without reflecting on how men in sport organisations are also subjected to dominant  
6  
7 485 discourses and might perform masculine behaviours to fit in, to survive, or hide their own  
8  
9 486 anxieties and insecurities. This observation and subsequent reflection demonstrates significant  
10  
11 487 personal development, including reduced narcissism and an enhanced capacity to adopt an  
12  
13 488 empathetic attitude. In summary, we believe that developing the ability to be empathetic when  
14  
15 489 working with many different kinds of people (despite its challenges) is an important part of  
16  
17 490 personal and professional development for SPC’s and other stakeholders in sport.  
18  
19  
20  
21

### 22 491 *Left feeling like a naughty child*

23  
24  
25 492 The following vignette details an event that occurred in the final six months of my time  
26  
27 493 at Fulgrove United FC. The club had recently appointed a new U18 manager (Tony), he had  
28  
29 494 transitioned to the squad following a short period of time working with the U16 age group.  
30  
31 495 Unfortunately, his transition to the U18s manager coincided with a series of poor results.  
32  
33 496 Having entered the Christmas period second in the table with a game in hand, the U18s did not  
34  
35 497 win a single of their next 10 games. This was proving to be a difficult time for both the staff  
36  
37 498 and players involved with Fulgrove United FC.  
38  
39  
40  
41

42 499 *A number of the scholars (U18s) had approached me since the start of the Christmas period*  
43  
44 500 *regarding the challenges associated with a change in manager and run of poor form. I decided*  
45  
46 501 *to sit down with each player individually and attain their perception of what was going wrong,*  
47  
48 502 *with the aim of better understanding of how I could support them through this transitional*  
49  
50 503 *period. One of the second year scholars, Tom, commented, “I’m desperate to speak to Tony to*  
51  
52 504 *see where he thinks I’m at and what I’m doing wrong, but it never seems the right time. There’s*  
53  
54 505 *always something that gets in the way, and then he isn’t available”. Tom was one of only two*  
55  
56 506 *players who had not started one U18 game since Tony took charge, but had played a couple of*  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 507 *games down with the U16 age group. This was surprising especially as he was one of the taller,*  
4  
5 508 *more physical boys. Despite his physical presence, Tom only spoke up if he felt he had no*  
6  
7 509 *alternative, and when he did so it was done in a timid and shy manner.*  
8  
9

10 510 *I scribbled down some notes from the discussion, hoping that some guidance on my next action*  
11  
12 511 *would emerge more clearly. I gulped at the thought of approaching Tom, I guessed that Tony*  
13  
14 512 *would take it badly, but at least I would be the brunt of his aggressive rant as opposed to Tom,*  
15  
16 513 *who was already feeling bad enough about himself. I sat spinning my pen, bouncing my legs*  
17  
18 514 *up and down whilst I considered how to approach him. Tony is best described as a tall, well-*  
19  
20 515 *built, masculine, ex-professional player with clear and overpowering old school views on how*  
21  
22 516 *things should be done. Hesitantly, I gently knocked on Tony's door and asked for a quick word,*  
23  
24 517 *I leant against the door, I felt as though the door offered me some protection. He didn't look*  
25  
26 518 *up; he remained engrossed in his phone. "I've spent the last half an hour or so with Tom, I've*  
27  
28 519 *been reviewing the season so far with all of the players, but I was concerned about a couple of*  
29  
30 520 *Tom's responses. He seems confused with his progress, and feels that he has taken a step*  
31  
32 521 *backwards by playing U16s football. The aim of this isn't for him to get a starting position, but*  
33  
34 522 *for him to know what he needs to do to give himself a better chance, whether that's in training*  
35  
36 523 *or away from the club...". I could see Tony going red in the face, in an aggressive tone, he*  
37  
38 524 *stated "Right ok. I'll pull him in now! He can't be questioning that if he's not happy he can go,*  
39  
40 525 *and I'll tell him that. I will tell him that straight up, no messing!... They get given a scholar*  
41  
42 526 *and then they think the club owes them everything. You tell him, and the rest of em that if they*  
43  
44 527 *want to moan about not playing then they can go, we don't want them here!" I calmly waited*  
45  
46 528 *for him to finish, I half expected this response, and so I responded "no, I don't think you*  
47  
48 529 *understand what I said, Tom is confused about why he isn't starting and wants to understand*  
49  
50 530 *what he can do to give him a better chance of attaining a starting place". Tony sat back into*  
51  
52 531 *his chair, huffed, puffed, and put his hands on the back of his head, "he isn't good enough, he*  
53  
54  
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2  
3 532 *will never play for the first team, so does he expect me to start him now when he's got no*  
4  
5 533 *chance? The lad should never have been given a scholar, he will be going in a couple of months*  
6  
7 534 *anyway". He shook his head, paused again, and then added "and if any of the others come to*  
8  
9 535 *you and say they're not happy with anything, and I mean anything, you tell me and I'll sort*  
10  
11 536 *them out, I'll fine them". I tried again to say that he had the wrong end of the stick, but he*  
12  
13 537 *swiveled his chair and grunted into his phone. Conversation over.*  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 538         Despite significant organizational change across the three-year time-frame (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> team  
19  
20 539 manager and his assistant, U23/U18/U16 managers, all sports science and medicine staff)  
21  
22 540 stakeholders' displays of particular forms of masculinity prevailed, demonstrating that  
23  
24 541 organizational cultures often endure beyond the involvement of particular members (see also  
25  
26 542 McDougall et al., 2019). For example, coaches would defend their own prestige at the cost of  
27  
28 543 others, dish out banter and expect the target to 'take it like a man', and use intimidation tactics  
29  
30 544 (e.g. shouting and swearing) towards the players/staff whom they perceived to be weak.  
31  
32 545 (Plester, 2015). Given Tony's tie with Fulgrove United FC as an ex-player and now coach, the  
33  
34 546 club had a significant role in shaping how he constructed both his sense of self and his world  
35  
36 547 view. It is suggested that over a large proportion of his life, Tony had been socialized into  
37  
38 548 behaving in a particular way. For example, Tony expected to be listened to as opposed to being  
39  
40 549 questioned, adopted an authoritarian management style administering chores as a punishment  
41  
42 550 for those players who failed to comply to his instructions and used humor as a method of saying  
43  
44 551 his unsayable thoughts. Gearing (1999) argued that behaviours such as Tony's are not  
45  
46 552 uncommon within professional football clubs, where intimidating communication methods are  
47  
48 553 used to display leadership and authority. Those players who are 'brave' enough to question a  
49  
50 554 coach's judgement might be viewed as a 'bad influence'. In accordance with a social  
51  
52 555 constructionist approach to identity, which centralizes the influence of language, the  
53  
54 556 communication style and discourse displayed by Tony towards myself might have been his  
55  
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3 557 attempt at further reinforcing the power hierarchy within Fulgrove United FC (i.e. coaches are  
4  
5 558 experts), and buying himself some respect.  
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7

8 559 The potential impact of this for SPC is concerning; the experiences of being excluded  
9  
10 560 or marginalized due to a hierarchical culture might have a significant negative influence on a  
11  
12 561 person's self-value and/or self-perception (Anonymous et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2015)  
13  
14 562 and could in some cases even lead to leaving the profession (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). At  
15  
16 563 the start of my journey as a trainee SPC, I attempted to align myself with the dominant and  
17  
18 564 desirable identity positions within Fulgrove United FC which involved playing down feminine  
19  
20 565 characteristics and qualities, even if this meant that my behaviours were at odds with my pre-  
21  
22 566 existing values and beliefs. However, as my time at the professional football club came to an  
23  
24 567 end, I was more confident in making decisions and having challenging conversations if they  
25  
26 568 aligned with my core personal values and beliefs (e.g. importance of youth player welfare). My  
27  
28 569 confidence as a SPC was higher than it had been before, I had completed professional training  
29  
30 570 and received excellent feedback from external reviewers. Beyond this, my professional identity  
31  
32 571 as a SPC now encompassed much more than just my role at Fulgrove United FC, I had attained  
33  
34 572 professional accreditation, secured a job in academia and was coming to the end of my PhD.  
35  
36 573 Finally, reading about identities, privilege and marginalization helped me to develop an  
37  
38 574 alternative interpretation of my own experiences. We believe that these alternative  
39  
40 575 opportunities for SPC identity exploration demonstrated individuation (making choices that  
41  
42 576 reflected me as an integrated person), and facilitated both my professional development (shifts  
43  
44 577 in attentional focus and emotional functioning) and psychological wellbeing (sense of  
45  
46 578 satisfaction, sense of purpose, level of control).  
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55 579 **General Discussion**  
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3 580 We explored one sport psychology consultant practitioner's identity development as an  
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5 581 on-going socio-cultural construction (McGannon et al., 2012), and used creative non-fiction  
6  
7 582 vignettes to illuminate how the traditional masculine discourse within professional sport  
8  
9 583 shaped the first author's applied experiences and sense of self. This study extends literature on  
10  
11 584 SPC professional development by using CSP as a novel lens in this context to gain new  
12  
13 585 understandings of how cultural identities shape SPC identity and development. We argue that  
14  
15 586 the training of effective SPCs requires an emphasis on both competence and context (see Tod  
16  
17 587 et al., 2017). Furthermore, the three-year duration of this study, and the subsequent number of  
18  
19 588 hours amassed within the organization allowed for a more detailed understanding of how SPCs  
20  
21 589 experiences are internalized during professional training years and beyond.

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26  
27 590 From the findings that emerged, we suggest that SPCs identity development is not  
28  
29 591 smooth or linear as other models might suggest (e.g. Ronnestad and Skovholt's model of  
30  
31 592 counsellor therapist development). In contrast, my experiences are better described as a rocky  
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33 593 road to individuation defined by a series of 'critical moments' (McEwan et al., 2019). A  
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35 594 'critical moment' is an event which is '... large or small, intended or unintended, and might  
36  
37 595 have a positive or negative effect on a person's sense of self' (Nesti et al., 2012). These  
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39 596 moments were experienced when the first author encountered a clash between her identities  
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41 597 and the organizational culture within Fulgrove United FC.

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46 598 An important insight of CSP scholarship (e.g. McGannon et al., 2012) is that people do  
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48 599 not only position themselves in relation to certain identities (e.g. coaches are the expert despite  
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50 600 their qualifications/knowledge/understanding), but are also positioned by others in ways  
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52 601 beyond their control (e.g. young females are not tough enough to cope with the ruthless, volatile  
53  
54 602 and masculine nature of professional football, or males are intimidating, sexist and driven by  
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56 603 moving up the hierarchical pyramid). These ascribed identities were demonstrated through the  
57  
58 604 everyday behaviours and language used by key stakeholders (e.g. coaches, support staff,

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3 605 parents). The attempted narrowing of my identity by stakeholders ultimately had an adverse  
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5 606 effect on my development as a SPC, which manifested in a reliance on supervisory support and  
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7 607 rigidity in intervention methods (see Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). However, as a result of my  
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9 608 own experiences and knowledge of what it is like to be misunderstood, I developed the ability  
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11 609 to recognize that in other people, and was able to understand athletes and coaches/support staff  
12  
13 610 in culturally embedded ways. Consequently, I developed more client-centered attributes, such  
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15 611 as increased empathy, a more nuanced understanding of how we react and interact, the ability  
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17 612 to make decisions about how I wanted to act, and an increased confidence (see Rogers, 1961;  
18  
19 613 Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). These personal qualities combined with cultural proficiency and  
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21 614 contextual intelligence, led to me becoming a more flexible SPC, and allowed me to better  
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23 615 respond to the situations that I was exposed to.  
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29 616 In this paper, we define cultural proficiency as a way of being that allows individuals  
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31 617 and organizations to interact effectively with people who differ from them (Cross, 1989).  
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33 618 Subsequently, contextual intelligence is the ability to apply concepts, knowledge and  
34  
35 619 theoretical material to the specific culture and context of the sport setting in which the  
36  
37 620 individual operates in a language that makes sense to them (Brown et al., 2005; Mellalieu,  
38  
39 621 2017). We strongly believe that cultural proficiency and contextual intelligence are essential for  
40  
41 622 a trainee SPCs survival during their first few months and beyond of working within  
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43 623 professional sport (Mellalieu, 2017). Cultural proficiency and contextual intelligence can be  
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45 624 developed in a number of ways; (1) *acknowledging the importance of culture* (familiarizing his  
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47 625 or herself with appropriate readings and education, alternative life experiences with individuals  
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49 626 from contrasting cultures), (2) *learning the culture* (through an individual's own playing  
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51 627 experiences, (3) *understanding all aspects of the culture*, (4) *immersing oneself in the culture*  
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53 628 (spending a prolonged period of time embedded within a specific sport setting), (5) *examining*  
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55 629 *one's own cultural background* (explore your own stereotypes and biases), and (6) *working in*  
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3 630 *the culture* (deliver intervention strategies that fit within the cultural constraints and  
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6 631 opportunities) (Brown et al., 2005; Mellalieu, 2017; McDougall et al., 2019). We believe that  
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8 632 the process of individuation was facilitated by continued interactions both within and beyond  
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10 633 my supervisory team e.g. becoming a member of a peer support group and network, and  
11  
12 634 encouraged me to remain passionate about engaging in applied sport psychology consultancy.

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15 635 The findings of this study support those of Collinson and Collinson (1996) and Wright  
16  
17 636 (2015), and others who have explored the experiences of women in highly gender-imbalanced  
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19 637 work settings. A hard lesson to learn was that individuals need to be adaptable to the culture if  
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21 638 they don't want to be weeded out at an early stage (Eubank et al., 2014). Consequently, female  
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23 639 SPCs must continually manage the tension between personal and professional identities that  
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25 640 might be at odds with one another. Perhaps initially, the easiest method to do this is to  
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27 641 (sub)consciously silence complaints about gender and surrender their (female) identity  
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29 642 (Powell, Bagilhole & Dainty, 2009). However strides towards gender equality in societies more  
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31 643 broadly, and the growth of science in sport (including football) means that there are a lot more  
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33 644 academics working in clubs who are more sensitive to marginalization, subsequently, the  
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35 645 possibility of culture change in professional sport is increasing.

### 646 **Practical Implications**

647 More specifically, professional training bodies (e.g. AASP, BPS, BASES) have  
648 primarily focused on skill development, therefore increasing the amount of training on  
649 understanding the sport culture would be important. This might be achieved through the  
650 delivery of expert-led workshops to educate trainees on how professional sport cultures might  
651 inform and influence the delivery of sport psychology consultancy. For example, in some elite  
652 sport cultures where the psychologist is employed on a short-term contract, their effectiveness  
653 might be judged on immediate changes in sports performance (Eubank et al., 2014). This would

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3 654 pose a significant challenge for those approaching sport psychology consultancy from more  
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5 655 humanistic counselling based philosophies. Furthermore, work-based placements in a range of  
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7 656 sporting contexts, role-plays, and Virtual Reality (VR) technology would likely help prepare  
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9 657 practitioners for challenging situations by developing self-awareness, problem-solving, and  
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11 658 decision-making skills (Smith et al., 2019). A stronger support network within the UK and  
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13 659 beyond for SPCs to share their organizational and cultural experiences might act as an  
14  
15 660 alternative form of guidance/support, and as a means of developing contextual intelligence and  
16  
17 661 cultural proficiency. Shared reflection was imperative in facilitating the personal and  
18  
19 662 professional development of the first author throughout her involvement with Fulgrove United  
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21 663 FC, and allowed her to understand that making sense of critical development experiences  
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23 664 should not be done alone. This is supported by Smith et al. (2019) who advocated peer  
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25 665 mentoring for trainee sport psychology consultants.  
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### 31 666 **Conclusion**

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34 667 The present study explored the identity and professional development of a trainee SPC  
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36 668 working in a highly gendered professional sport organization. We highlight the importance of  
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38 669 taking a CSP approach to practitioner identity and development, which allows for an  
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40 670 understanding of being (who we are), knowing (our evidence base for practice), doing (how  
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42 671 we deliver effectively), and the context (environment and culture) (Tod et al., 2017). Additional  
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44 672 SPCs accounts of applied practice that advocate the diversity of identity in sport psychology  
45  
46 673 consultancy and challenge monolithic approaches to applied practice would further extend the  
47  
48 674 field (Schinke et al., 2019). Engaging with such projects longitudinally would deepen our  
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50 675 understanding of how an applied SPCs intersecting identities shape applied practice and  
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52 676 professional development over time. This additional knowledge would be beneficial for the  
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54 677 training and education pathways offered by professional bodies, and subsequently the  
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56 678 development and success of SPCs.  
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**Point by Point Response to Reviewers-**

**We would like to thank the reviewer for being so positive when commenting on the first round of revisions, this really motivated the research team. You have undoubtedly significantly improved the quality of our article with your suggestions and we thank you for the time/effort that you have spent on our work.**

Reviewer Comment	Response	Page Number
<b>One area to revise is smoothing out some of the writing, which I note in several places:</b>		
<p><b>Reviewer 1</b> Transition between the new feminist intro paragraph and the next which was the original intro paragraph, which begins” In recent years...”. The integration of the feminist literature in the rest of the introduction is a better integration, which I enjoyed and valued. That first paragraph connected to the next, though, can be smoother and help set up that major connection between gender and professional development.</p> <p>Final paragraph in the introduction: adjust the aim and central research questions with the gendered focus.</p> <p>The title of the article and your keywords might also be amended to include a gendered dimension.</p> <p>Tightening: A fair amount has been added but the writing can be streamlined in a few places. For example, the ethics discussion, while I appreciated the additional detail, I thought could be condensed.</p>	<p>We have revisited the transition between the first and second paragraph to create a better flow and emphasise the important relationship between gender and professional development.</p> <p>The overarching aim of the study and underlying research objectives have each been amended to reflect the gendered focus of the article.</p> <p>We have amended the title and keywords.</p> <p>Thank you for picking up on this. We have revisited the paper and streamlined the writing throughout with a particular focus on the methods section. The ethics discussion is the best example of this.</p>	<p>P.3, line 62-64</p> <p>P.7, line 165-168</p> <p>See article title and keywords</p> <p>For an example see p.13, lines 290-304</p>

<p><b>In a few places in the vignettes and analysis, I felt there could be refinement. I have noted this in several areas but by no means all:</b></p>		
<p><b>Reviewer 1</b></p> <p><i>Vignette 1:</i></p> <p>- “my feminine attributes” (16): Is the issue here your attributes, or is the issue you as a woman within an historically male dominated club culture? I would suggest the latter and revising that framing/wording.</p> <p>- “young age” (17): should be youth</p> <p>- A concluding sentence or two in the section to reiterate your central point that you want to the reader to take away (e.g., your negotiations as a young developing professional woman in a masculine culture) would be useful.</p> <p><i>Vignette 2:</i></p> <p>- “show don’t tell”: males boasting ruggedness, red-blooded dominance, high testosterone levels, or stronger players mocking weaker ones: You tell the reader this, but the reader doesn’t “see” this. Including narrativized examples of these would have an impact on the reader, giving a sense of the experience of the environment. I know space is an issue so maybe a quick 1-2 sentence “scene” where these kinds of actions are on display?</p>	<p>We have revised the framing of this sentence in line with your suggestion.</p> <p>Amended in text.</p> <p>We have added in a summary sentence to bring together the overall message from the vignette- females will likely have to navigate their way through a number of complex and gender fuelled challenges, in the short-term constructing and displaying desirable identities might help to offset some of these challenges.</p> <p>We have added a sentence to demonstrate this. <i>For example, the U23 captain was stood in the centre of the room imitating one of the younger boys by pretending that he couldn’t bicep curl the lightest weights on the weight rack.</i></p>	<p>p.16, line 366-368</p> <p>p.16, line 383</p> <p>p.17, line 403-406</p> <p>p.18, line 413-415</p>

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<p>- “naturally more feminine”: words like “naturally” don’t sit well with the constructivist side of knowledge production. Comfortably or normally, perhaps? You might also consider “less expressively masculine” in addition to or in place of “more feminine”.</p> <p>- “observation” (21): last sentence in the section, change “observation” to “observation and subsequent reflection”</p> <p>- A concluding sentence or two at the end of this section could directly link empathy to the importance of personal/professional development in working with many different kinds of people (which is always a challenge!).</p>	<p>These terms have been replaced with more appropriate words.</p> <p>Amended in text.</p> <p>We have added a sentence at the end of the section to convey your comment. Thank you for this, it is a really important point to make and one that we hope is clear to the reader.</p>	<p>P.20, line 481</p> <p>P.21, line 486</p> <p>P.20, line 486-490</p>
<b>General discussion</b>		
<p><b>Reviewer 1</b></p> <p>The revisions here are good. Only one item stuck out to me, and that is in the importance of having people with whom you can reflect (and thus develop). Emphasising the importance of support, peers, critical friends, etc. in developing would seem really valuable here. Reflection is important, yes, but having those around you with whom you can reflect has clearly been important for you... Others could really benefit from knowing you don’t have to (and probably shouldn’t) do this alone.</p>	<p>We have chosen to add additional information on the importance of shared reflection in the practical implications section. As a research team we believe that this supports our call for stronger support networks across the discipline of sport psychology. See below for addition;</p> <p><i>Shared reflection was imperative in facilitating the personal and professional development of the first author throughout her involvement with Fulgrove United FC, and allowed her to understand that making sense of critical development experiences should not be done alone.</i></p>	<p>P.28, line 661-664</p>