

**ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY: MYTHS, DEFICIENCIES
AND THE BROADENING OF CULTURAL HORIZONS**

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Declaration

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Publications

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Abstract

The concept of culture has become increasingly visible in the performance enhancement discourses of organisational sport psychology. It is now regularly recommended that cultivating expertise in organisational culture is essential so that sport psychologists can work more effectively with groups and in a broader, organisational role. In spite of frequent claims regarding the concepts' importance, the sport psychology scholarly community has developed an action-orientated approach toward organisational culture. An almost uniform concern with how to *use* culture in practical ways related to performance has occurred prior to and at the expense of seeking deeper understanding about what culture actually is. Unmindful of cultures notorious complexity and heterogeneous intellectual foundations, the existing sport psychology organisational culture literature is theoretically 'thin', vague, narrow, and arguably superficial. As a result, emerging research within the field is dominated and underpinned by a range of common assumptions (e.g., culture is what is shared, is easily identified, malleable to planned changed and the domain of leaders) that have not been extensively critiqued or challenged. This thesis is, at its core, an attempt to address these concerns and provide alternative presentations of culture that can progress understanding in the area.

Study 1 aimed to challenge the myth that culture is only conceptualised by what is shared, integrated and consistent. Qualitative interviews were used to gain the cultural understanding of a range of participants (n=7) from elite sport. Martin and Meyerson's three perspective approach was used as an analytical lens and means to fashion and represent three illustrative cases, showcasing different culture perspectives (i.e., what is shared, what is contested, what is ambiguous) for each participant narrative. The study reinforced the need for sport psychologists to resist oversimplifications of culture, such as reducing it to only what is shared, obvious, and the ideas and beliefs of leadership. The findings suggested sport psychologists should develop a more inclusive concept of culture that recognises all in the sport environment as culture-makers, who, moreover, as agentic actors, have the capacity to resist the cultural scripts and ideals of leadership. Study 2 was a critical discourse analysis of #Savethecrew; the Twitter hashtag and grassroots campaign of the Save the Crew movement. This was undertaken with the objective of examining the campaign's (and fan) resistance to owner-led plans for team relocation. The findings showed how the cultural understandings and traditions valued by fans were threatened by club ownership,

plans for progress and the wider capitalistic system. Crew fans and the wider communities that they drew support from (city, business, the wider soccer community) were able to resist powerful forces of governance and economy by protecting the community driven and traditional symbolic meanings that they valued. The findings demonstrated that what is culturally meaningful can be used in deeply practical ways as part of a coherent strategy of resistance to enforced change. Study 3 builds on the findings from the previous chapters but is based in the world of sport psychology and applied practice. Critical nonfiction and an interpretive-critical lens were utilised to construct reflective vignettes that describe a difficult and unsuccessful culture intervention within elite sport. The constructed story acts as a ‘critical moment’ or jumping off point to consider further the concept of culture as an applied concept, and more broadly, the role of the sport psychologist as a consultant that delivers ‘culture’ work. The findings reiterate the complexity of culture and highlight that culture work is intrinsically difficult and ‘ethically charged’ in ways that existing applied sport psychology literature has not considered. For instance, it is suggested culture change has the capacity to contribute to negative, harmful, and destructive outcomes (such as constraining people’s thoughts and actions), as well as favourable ones. Consequently, sport psychologists must deeply consider their values and role when working with culture; or else risk becoming complicit in the machinations of organisation and the attempted management of culture, which is always related to ideas of power, control and domination of others.

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A Prologue...

“All things begin and end in stories”

Ragnar Lothbrok – (T.V. Series, Vikings)

Culture is and has always been bound to story, folklore and myth. In a wonderfully elegant account of Captain Cook's death at the hands of the Hawaiian islanders¹, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1985) displayed at once the power of story to illuminate culture and the capacity of culture to provide insight into social phenomena and the actions of the actors involved:

Captain Cook landed on the shores of Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii, in the January of 1779 during the sacred festival of Makahiki. Owing to the timing and manner of his arrival, Cook and his men were generally believed by the Hawaiian's to be Gods and Cook himself an incarnation of Lono; God of peace, fertility and agriculture, who was celebrated during Makahiki and whose coming had been foretold in Hawaiian mythology. As such, Cook was adored and worshipped with a vigour befitting of a deity, and along with his crew, enjoyed the celebrations of the season and the eager attention shared by the Hawaiian's. Because Cook was accepted as Lono, and consistent with the season of fertility, Hawaiian women offered the sailors sexual favours; both as gifts and as a way to relate to the Divine. The sailors, through their own cultural practices, defined these actions as a form of prostitution, and according to the rules of their own society, felt that this was something they must pay for. Tradition was recast as transaction causing the crew to forfeit their godly status. Cook alone (who by all accounts did not engage in sex with the local women) was spared from disillusionment. In exchange for sex, the sailors gave Hawaiian women metal – which was scarce in Hawaiian society and therefore of great value. For a time, the sailors paid the women with coins and loose iron that they found lying around the ship. Once these resources were spent, the women who now expected recompense for sex, were

¹ An adapted and much abbreviated synopsis is presented here.

given nails and pieces of iron that the sailors extracted from their ships. These actions had a dual effect. First, they changed the Hawaiian social structure because the subordinate role of women in the society was altered by their ability to acquire iron, giving them both status and social-economic power; and secondly, they compromised the structural integrity of the ships.

After enjoying the hospitality of the natives for many weeks, Cook and his crew eventually set sail from Hawaiian shores, just as Makahiki was ending; much to the relief of the Hawaiian's. Makahiki and the time of Lono was coming to an end and the Chiefs and warriors were becoming anxious and beginning to ask when Cook and the British would leave. Nonetheless, the sailors left on good terms and promised to come back the following year. However, after only a few days at sea, Cook quickly discovered that their ships were not seaworthy and required immediate repair. Forced to return to harbour, Cook's unanticipated re-appearance contradicted the Hawaiian folklore and the expected mythological movements of Lono. Makahiki, the season of peace, was over. The rest of the year was governed by Ku, another God, symbolic of chiefdom, warfare and human sacrifice. Cook's return could now be interpreted as an act of aggression or that he was bent on conquest or war. After some skirmishes and minor acts of aggression — which the sailors could not fathom — Cook and his men were set upon by the Hawaiian's; their mythology suggesting that a God returning under these circumstances should be ritually killed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Culture is a riddle wrapped in a mystery wrapped in an enigma.”

Andrew Pettigrew.
Organizational Researcher

1.0. Introducing the Author

I'm Michael (or Mike), a PhD candidate within the sport psychology department at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), and a tenure-track assistant professor of psychology at a small liberal arts college in rural North Eastern Pennsylvania. I returned to education approaching my thirties, with a background in management within the mental health, social care and non-profit sectors. I enjoyed the sport psychology masters at LJMU but having never undergone (or particularly wished to) stage 2 accreditation, I've long since abandoned any claim to identity as a 'sport psychologist'. On the other hand, organisational work (strategy, change, leadership, and so on), and more specifically organisational culture, captivated me during my masters at LJMU. It held the possibility of being able to craft some expertise in a niche area that is valued in the traditional business world as well as sporting ones, and in this way, seemed useful in terms of employment. The attraction of this type of work was also that it could help affect wide ranging organisational change, leading to improved group performance. I felt strongly at the outset of my PhD that culture change could be noble, with links to the improved mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of those who inhabit the organisational world. Alongside academic pursuits, and for the last three to four years, I have also been intermittently and tentatively engaged in working with people and organisations around issues of organisational culture and culture change. This work has varied in scale and scope, ranging from one to one coaching/education (with people from both sport and business), presentations and workshop delivery (some charged for, often free), and small scale change consultancy (at various levels of sport, but most often with new start-up businesses, educational institutions, and non-profit organisations). This practical work, alongside scholarship undertaken, has also shaped the views that follow.

1.1 Introduction to Culture

‘Culture’ is a complex word. If Raymond Williams, the Welsh academic, Marxist theorist, novelist and critic is to be believed, the second or third most complex word in all of the English language (Williams, 1983). The problem, according to Williams, is that we are continually forced to extend the idea of culture until it comes to be synonymous with our whole common life (Williams, 1958). Consider some of the following origins and uses:

The term culture originates from the Latin words ‘cultus’ and ‘cultura’, which mean *to care* and *to cultivate* respectively, and from the French word ‘colere’ which means *to till* as in till the ground (Berger, 2000; Eagleton, 2016; Skeat, 1958). This etymology might be taken to imply that the word culture is implicitly associated with ideas of growth, and that to be part of culture means perhaps to be cared for or nurtured. A positive thought, yet somewhat darkened if we consider that the word ‘cult’ has also originated from culture, suggesting as it does a certain fanaticism, followership of a charismatic leader and the distinct possibility of brainwashing.

Culture was once a term of high art, used to denote intellectual distinction and sophistication, and in this sense, we have developed the word *cultured* to refer to individuals who are suitably accomplished and who have *cultivated* refined, nuanced tastes and appreciations. To say that one is cultured still seems to speak to a certain kind of social snobbery given that the term is most often reserved for the happy and privileged few who are blessed with the time, means, and access to develop an appreciation of art, the aesthetic, and the avant-garde. Still, if those who are uncultured now can become cultured later “then it may be that anyone can accumulate cultural capital if only they put their mind to it” (Eagleton, 2016, p. 2). In this way – and returning to an agricultural metaphor where something carefully tended can grow over a period of time – by

committing to our human projects we can contribute to our spiritual growth and intellectual development over a lifetime (Eagleton, 2016).

In yet another sense of the word, culture is taken to mean the habits, customs, values, beliefs and symbolic practices of a group of people. T.S. Eliot, in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, declared that in this meaning of culture, culture includes “all the characteristic activities and interests of a people” (Eliot, 1949, p. 298) and subsequently listed a number of quintessentially English examples that demonstrated a particular way of living: Gothic architecture, Wensleydale cheese, Derby Day, the dart board, beetroot in vinegar, the music of Elgar, and so forth. Raymond Williams wryly observed that far from representing all the typical activities of a people, Eliot’s notion of culture could really be distilled down to food, sport and a little art (Williams, 1958). In sum, Eliot took the word culture to mean the whole way of life of a people, but in his treatment of it, he restricted the term to only a few selected customs and symbolic practices (Eagleton, 2016). Similarly, it could be said that bagpipes, tartan, whisky, haggis and a vast romantic wilderness denote Scottish culture. This comparison, however, is also constraining and moreover inaccurate, because these described symbolic traditions are themselves the remnants of a more localised (rather than just Scottish) Highland way of life and a Jacobean culture that has long since been eroded. Furthermore, the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder claimed that culture must also include industry, commerce, and technology, and not only the values and sentiment that come from tradition. From Herder’s point of view then, to adequately convey Scottish culture, the boundaries of what constitutes culture would have to extend beyond tradition and the symbolic to include modern exemplars of progress, such as the oil and gas industry, tourist infrastructure, biotechnology and renewable energy.

The critiques offered by Williams and Herder suggest that ideas of culture and civilisation are closely associated (cf. Eagleton, 2016; Kuper, 1999). They also imply an immediate problem (or at least eclecticism) with the culture concept: Does the culture of a people and their characteristic representatives refer only to the symbolic sphere, or does it also include practical and material modes of existence, which can also encapsulate the ways in which they live (cf. Eagleton, 2016)?

Turning towards the modern, globalised world, many of us live in societies that are increasingly multicultural. Everyone has a cultural identity and frequently they have more than one, even if they don't yet know it or are in the process of searching for or finding out about their new identity. Perhaps in response to the increased transnational flow of people and hybridised identities, those who seek to preserve a certain way of life often use the term culture to describe the traditions and values that they perceive are at risk of being changed, forgotten or lost. In Britain, Brexit and its effects loom large for this generation and the next, and for many it is a response to the question asked by 'leavers' "where has British culture gone?!" In Britain, as in America, where a President was elected on his promise to make 'America Great Again', those who lean further to the right answer this question by looking at immigration and racial diversity as sources of its dissolution and their own disillusion.

Of course, if culture operates as a kind of heuristic that indicates a pervasive sense of heritage and deep-rooted meaning that is uniquely typical of a particular locale or geographical location, then it goes without saying that culture helps delineate one group of people from another. Naturally, what constitutes culture for a fisherman from Fraserburgh, Scotland, and a fisherman from Bassein, India is likely to be very different. Still, beyond some obvious variances and *otherness* that they might have to traverse in order to understand each other's cultural meanings

and interpretations, they might have some common ground when it comes to discussing fishing practices, the historical religious inclinations of the local population, or their ancestors experiences of ruthless monarchies and the unstoppable march of imperialism.

Complicating matters and destroying any chance of precise and uniform use of the term culture, “*Everyone is into culture now*” (Kuper, 1999, p. 2). Politicians of a more liberal persuasion — along with those who feel oppressed or marginalised — call for radical cultural change or cultural revolution to resolve fundamental and desperate problems of climate, poverty, crime, education and health. Here, culture seems to refer to a social unconscious, that in some way, if we can listen and respond to its call, might just save humanity itself. The rapper and music industry mogul Jay-Z agrees apparently, recently telling UK grime artist Stormzy, before he headlined Glastonbury, that “culture moves the whole world” (Lavin, 2019). If culture can unite us, it can certainly divide us. Samuel Huntington’s apocalyptic essay in *Foreign Affairs* outlined a new phase of history that is already in motion, where the “fundamental sources of conflict... the great divisions among humankind... will be cultural” (Huntington, cited in Kuper, 1999, p. 3). Politicians point to and exploit alleged cultural differences between genders, generations, races, religions and even nations as a way to divide or gain favour with an electoral base. While earlier talk of culture signified differences between groups of people and populations, a postmodern turn in the mid to late 20th century means there is talk of cultural differences and subcultures elsewhere: in intercultural relationships, or between football teams and conglomerates for instance. When a merger fails between two companies, culture is often singled out as the root cause. When a person does not succeed at work and moves on, or is fired, it is often highlighted that there was not the degree of ‘culture fit’ needed to make the union of individual and organisation a success. Following such logic, companies spend great sums of money to find and hire exemplary people who are just

like others in the environment; which makes complete sense if we are willing to accept that Mercedes has a completely different culture from Jaguar, and that Tesco culture is unrecognisable when compared to Asda's. Armed with the notion that each culture is utterly distinct from another, leaders of corporations have tried for decades to develop specific types of cultures assumed to be desirable (strong cultures, cultures of performance, cultures of excellence, cultures of innovation, and so on). Such widely held views are encouraged by *cutting edge* management advice, courtesy of Forbes, the Harvard Business Review and the like, and thousands upon thousands of global consulting firms and industry specialists who frame culture as the key driver of performance and point out that culture change is a business imperative, so as not to fall behind competitors. Now, as many corporations flounder and are involved in high-profile scandals and blunders, we hear not only of strong cultures but of the dangers of 'toxic' cultures, which are indicative of environments where bullying, harassment and misuse of power are commonplace. Correspondingly, the need for healthy cultures is now touted, and there are specialists who can help with that too.

If corporate culture is big business, so too is pop culture. Indeed, for a large percentage of the planet's population, pop culture is an inescapable reality. Brand marketers sell culture because it is a prime motivator of consumer behaviour and speaks to youth culture and the zeitgeist. It surrounds us, in our eyes and ears and nearly always in our pockets. In 2014, culture was *Merriam Webster's* word of the year and reflecting that popularity and everyday use, we use the word culture even when it may not be needed. To say that there was a 'culture of harassment' is simply to say that there was pervasive harassment. Similarly, and from today's news: "there is a culture of outrage", "the office has a culture of sexual banter and innuendo", "Chernobyl is the very indictment...of a culture of lies", "a culture of commitment", "...defends the culture of killing whales...". One might question why we even need the word 'culture' if we can describe things

perfectly well without it. Culture is a term that is hard to abandon though (many have tried), especially in a postmodern world where a multiplicity of cultures have flourished and showcase the inherent diversity of life and human identity: Bro culture, feminist culture, gay culture, Muslim culture, Biker culture, neo-liberal culture and an inordinate amount of other cultures may prejudice us to believe that, culture, as Raymond Williams prophesied, has extended to everything that exists in the world.

The plurality of meaning that engulfs culture is replicated in academic scholarship. Indeed, such diversity has been perpetuated by the academic world, where it is well observed that just because two scholars use the term culture does not necessarily mean they are talking about precisely the same thing (Schein, 2004). Even within its origins as a modern concept in anthropology, culture has no fixed or broadly agreed upon meaning (Borowsky, 1994; Ortner, 1984). For instance, in what is still regarded as one of the better introductions to culture, anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn (as cited in Geertz, 1973) managed to define culture within one chapter as: (1) the total way of life of a people; (2) the social legacy an individual acquires from his group; (3) a way of thinking, feeling, and believing; (4) an abstraction from behaviour; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a “storehouse” of pooled learning; (7) a set of standardised orientations to current problems; (8) learned behaviour; (9) a mechanism for the normative regulation for behaviour; (10) a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men; (11) a precipitate of history; and turning finally to metaphor, as a map, a sieve and a matrix. In later, highly acclaimed work, Kluckhohn and his colleague Alfred Kroeber (1952) uncovered 164 formal definitions of what anthropologists meant by the term culture, and having explained they had no desire to add a 165th, nevertheless proceeded to add one “culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and

for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols... the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values” (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952 p. 181).

Owing to this eclecticism, the capacity of culture to beguile as much as it fascinates is well-documented by serious culture scholars (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Pettigrew, 1979; Sewell Jr, 1999). Raymond Williams remarked that “I wish I had never heard of the damn word” (Williams, 1979 p. 154), while organisational researcher Andrew Pettigrew famously invoked Churchill’s description of Russia and labelled culture as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery wrapped in an enigma (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 413). Faced with such theoretical complexity and diffusion of meaning, academics — materialists, Marxists, feminists, ideationalists, critical theorists, positivists, realists, rationalists, interpretivists, social constructionists — have waged culture wars (Kuper, 1999; Geertz, 1973; Martin, 2002). Though Adam Kuper quipped “not many dead” (Kuper, 1999, p. 1), some might have wished they were as questions of ontology and epistemology have been the battle ground, as questions of all kinds reigned down.

Is culture a scheme, a system, some sort of framework? A complex whole; an organic superstructure that represents a whole way of life? Or made up of interconnecting parts that somehow work together and must be considered entirely separately from what we take to be ‘culture’? What properties, characteristics or family of concepts actually comprise culture (e.g., values, beliefs, rituals, customs, habits, norms, rules, ideology, discourse, experiences, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, symbols....) and which should be given priority status? How many can one study of culture focus on at any given time, while still maintaining the goal of rich description? Questions of homogeneity or heterogeneity are of central importance, addressing as they do, the degree to which a group (a family, a tribe, a community, to say nothing of a nation or a civilisation) retain and share similar characteristics and ways of living. Is culture completely shared in by the

members of a group? Is it an integrating mechanism, the social glue that holds an otherwise diverse group of people together? Or does it incorporate ideas of contestation, conflict and ambiguity? What and where are the boundaries of culture and how can we tell when one ends and another begins? Is culture singular, as in each group has only one culture — a singular essence that confers who they are and what they stand for or is it more accurate to speak of culture(s)? Is each culture unique, distinct from others or do they contain universal comparables that transcend geographical boundaries and ideas of local knowledge to enable generalisations great and small? If they are different, can we assess some culture as better than others or can culture only be appraised according to the rules of the societies that gave rise to them? Is culture stable, static and slow to change, or more fluid, always evolving? If culture does change, then how and by whose influence and design? How is it produced, negotiated and enacted? Should culture be thought of as an objective or subjective phenomenon? Material or ideational? Does it exist in the minds and mental processes of people or in the public domain? Or somewhere in-between? How is it best interpreted? What cultural forms are latent and which are manifest? Does culture have levels of depth and if so, then how many and what constitutes them? Is it unconscious? Can culture be identified and if so, then how? How do social structure and culture differ? Are structure and culture abstractions from the same phenomenon? Can they be separated, and which is the prime determinant in human affairs? Is culture a part of the social system or is the social system under the rubric of culture? Are people culturally determined or social actors that retain a capacity for agency? How does identity constitute culture and vice versa? Is there a place for ideas of power within cultural analysis? If power and themes of domination and hegemony are to be included in concepts and accounts of culture, how can we ensure that important ideas of meaning are not relegated to the periphery? Who is able tell us most about their cultures and how do we best relate to them? And

among this conceptual morass, how can anyone — insider or outsider — possibly hope to grasp a concept so vast that it has been taken to denote the entire way of life of a group of people, and then communicate that to an audience, academic or otherwise in a way that fairly represents both those under study and the views of the researcher?

Sport psychology research into organisational culture has barely considered any of these fundamental questions that have for decades permeated the very fabric of cultural discourse in disciplines that take ideas of culture seriously — anthropology, sociology, organisational studies, history, economics. Rather, an action-orientated approach has taken hold within our field. Although literature organisational culture literature has grown steadily over the last decade, the difficult, murky business of having to think about culture has all but been dispensed with in favour of quick definitions and a pragmatic approach concerned with how to operationalise it for performance ends. For instance (and as will be discussed more extensively within Chapter 2), culture is almost uniformly conceptualised as a shared, singular, consistent entity that is easily identifiable and susceptible to manipulation and leader-led influence (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten, 2013a, 2014, 2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015). Following this pragmatic approach, the sport psychologist, when working in a broader capacity across the team or organisation, has often been portrayed as an agent of culture change. In this role they are depicted as intentionally influencing culture (or at least supporting others, such as performance leaders in this task), to facilitate athletic and operational excellence (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015). While the practical utility of this notion of culture is high, this presentation of culture and the typical line of inquiry that it is linked to, has arguably fostered a superficial appreciation of what is widely regarded as a notoriously complex concept (cf. Alvesson,

2002; Geertz, 1973; Martin, 2002; Schein, 2010). It is against such uncritical acceptance and ‘thin’ accounts of culture, that this thesis stands.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

In light of the briefly described superficiality of most organisational sport psychology literature that deals with culture, and given that the discipline is still in the formative stages of trying to understand team and organisational culture(s) of sport, this thesis, at its core, represents a broad attempt to progress disciplinary understanding in the area. In support of this endeavour, I have strived to centralise the concept of culture throughout the thesis at all times, so as to contribute to the development of stronger ontological, epistemological and empirical foundations from which future research (and practice) in the area can develop. To attend to this overarching aim, I have deliberately designed studies that critically evaluate and challenge the underpinning ideas and conceptualisations of culture that dominate the sport psychology organisational culture landscape. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate alternative and under-considered presentations of the concept in sport psychology. More specifically, a number of interrelated aims are addressed:

1. In the process of this critical exploration, to strive to consider and integrate theoretical and empirical material from established spheres of culture study (e.g., anthropology, sociology, organisational management studies) that provide important cultural foreground and necessary grounding to increase sport psychology understanding of the concept, but which to date have been effectively ignored.
2. To challenge leader-centric (e.g., Team Managers, high performance leaders, CEO’s, head coaches), managerialist accounts of culture (e.g., culture as a shared and integrating mechanism, espoused values, value engineering, culture manipulation, easy to change) by adopting a 360° approach that takes greater interest in the perceptions and perspectives of

other social actors as *culture makers*, such as coaches, sport psychologists, sport science staff, fans.

3. To use a variety of methods (e.g., narrative, interpretative, critical discourse analysis, reflective vignettes on applied practice) to show different ways of approaching the study of culture, so as to add new insights to existing research in sport psychology and the broad field of culture study.
4. To address deficiencies of existing sport psychology team and organisational culture literature by locating the individual experience, subjectivity and agency of the social actors involved within the described accounts of culture, with focus on their capacity to reflect on, reject or resist the views of leaders and plans for deliberate change.
5. To address the environments and contexts of elite sport, an under-researched level of sport where an organisational role and remit that includes knowledge and expertise in culture is increasingly likely for sport psychologists (existing and future).
6. To investigate the links between culture and sport psychology delivery and to associatively provide suggestions for applied practice.

1.3 Structure and Presentation of the Thesis

Following a traditional representation style, the literature review (Chapter 2) is positioned before the empirical chapters of the thesis. The aim of this is to inform the reader of relevant prior research and appropriate theoretical perspectives in the study of culture. Consistent with the aims of the thesis and claims made about the superficiality of much of the existing literature in sport psychology, I begin the literature review not in sport psychology, however, but with attention to important scholarship and ideas from academic disciplines with more established histories of culture study (anthropology and organisation studies). As I have argued elsewhere (McDougall,

Nesti, Richardson, & Littlewood, 2017; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019), the continued omission of such a large corpus of foundational literature is increasingly unacceptable for a discipline with such clearly stated interests in the culture concept. Moreover, outlining some of the history of culture study early in the thesis helps lay important contextual foreground for the studies and ideas that follow. Then, after reviewing the key culture literature in sport psychology, I adopt a more explicitly critical stance, where I challenge key assumptions (myths) that have been widely (but generally uncritically) accepted within the discipline and argue how they serve to constrain and mislead rather than inform and progress cultural understanding. Specifically, I challenge the pervasive ideas that culture is characterised only by what is shared (myth 1), that culture is a variable and therefore something that a particular group has (myth 2) and that culture change involves moving from the old culture to an entirely new one (myth 3). I challenge each myth through the introduction of alternative theoretical and empirical material and discuss the implications for sport psychology research and practice. The intent of this critical review is not only to stimulate debate, but also to lay the foundations for the studies that I subsequently design and implement.

Given the wide-ranging aims of this review (i.e., to include neglected foundational culture literature from other domains; to not merely review and regurgitate but to review from a critical stance) I have resisted conforming to the academic trend of a shorter 'lead-in' literature review. Instead, I make the case for an extended and in-depth literature review. I believe this is warranted given the complexity of culture and the extent to which it is currently under-conceptualised in sport psychology, and that not to do so, would be to repeat the mistakes of others that I critique in this review and throughout the thesis.

Chapter 3 (Study 1) is an empirical chapter that combines narrative methods with Martin and Meyerson's 'three perspective' culture approach (cf. Martin, 2002; Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987) to examine team and organisational cultures within elite sport. The approach helps the study of culture move beyond ideas of culture as singular, 'shared in', harmonious, consistent and clear (integration perspective); to include also a focus on what is contested (differentiation) and ambiguous (fragmentation). Interviews with three figures from different sectors of sport and with different roles and responsibilities are used as illustrative cases and shaped into narratives to showcase each perspective.

Chapter 4 (Study 2) is an empirical chapter and social media analysis of the #SavetheCrew grassroots movement that mobilised Columbus Crew fans as well as local business and government to prevent the cross-country relocation of the inaugural Major League Soccer team to Austin, Texas. Themes of community, power, organisation and of struggle, change and 'thick' resistance are explored, which help to frame culture as something other than uncontested and the domain of leaders and governance; it is also about people as culture makers and what they hold sacred and will fight to protect.

Chapter 5 (Study 3) utilises a reflective approach, a critical lens and the techniques of critical nonfiction to detail a difficult and early culture consulting experience with a sport national governing body. The reflections, in the form of storied vignettes, also incorporate a re-analysis of data collected from five sport psychologists (collected in 2012, published in 2015), whereby I revisit some of the original themes uncovered from new and evolving understandings of culture. The study highlights the complexity of culture and the personal and professional challenges of applied culture work and are particularly valuable for those who may wish to adopt a different culture

perspective than the one being typically presented in sport psychology culture change literature to date.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis and outlines key findings and major discussion points with specific emphasis on how culture can be conceptualised and what this means for sport psychology research and practice. Limitations and future research are considered.

There are a number of considerations relating to the presentation of this thesis. First, over a seven-year period of part-time study, culture has become more prominent in sport psychology, both in the academic journals and in the language and practices of sport psychologists (cf. Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). I have contributed to a growing body of emerging literature through some peer-reviewed papers and presentations. Some of these works have been cited or responded to directly (for instance a paper ‘Organisational culture is not dead...yet: A response to Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018’ induced a reply ‘Alive and Kicking’: Securing the health of organisational culture in sport — A response to McDougall and Ronkainen’). Consequently, while reticent to self-reference, I do so when it helps to accurately convey the emergence and development of ideas, that in some small way, the ideas and writing within this thesis may have already contributed to. I hope that this adds clarity for the reader.

Second, and again with an eye to clarity, I have opted to forego a ‘method’ or ‘positioning’ chapter and have instead integrated matters of ontology, epistemology and method into each study. I have done so as I am mindful that after an extensive literature review, readers may be keen to move onto original work. Perhaps more importantly, I have also found that integrating extremely detailed methods sections into each empirical study helped to illuminate the work, and moreover this tactic might be practically instructive for the reader. Furthermore, although the research within this thesis has been informed by interpretive traditions (e.g., culture as the domain of the symbolic

and meaning orientated) and an increasingly critical stance (e.g., with a social justice lens, and mindful of systems of dominance) from the outset, my perspective on such matters was neither fixed nor complete at the beginning of study. Incorporating methods and positioning into each study has therefore also helped to showcase an evolving perspective in ways that a single chapter towards the start of the thesis may not have allowed.

Third, this thesis is grounded most clearly in organisational sport psychology and the performance discourses that have tackled organisational culture, rather than in Cultural Sport Psychology (CSP); a growing and parallel track of culture research in sport psychology that often (but not always) focuses on issues of social inequalities and marginalised voices and identities. As I have noted elsewhere (e.g., McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019) and indeed later in this thesis, CSP may have much to offer the performance enhancement culture discourses of sport psychology. However, in the literature review, I only present a brief outline of the emergence of CSP and some of its key ideas and research trajectories and later draw some attention to it where appropriate to make links with organisational considerations of culture. This is primarily because a more detailed review of and attention to the genre is simply beyond the scope of this thesis: CSP has its own heterogeneous roots when it comes to culture study, and like organisational culture scholarship, these foundations are not always clearly recognised or well-articulated. Attending to these limitations and origins as well as those in sport psychology organisational culture literature would extend the range of this thesis too far.

Fourth, and regarding the terms ‘team’ and ‘organisational culture’. While I acknowledge that some authors (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Cruickshank, et al., 2013b) have attempted to delineate their research on team culture from an organisational level focus (in accordance with their precise aims of study), my discussion of literature incorporates sport psychology literature

from both team culture and organisational culture levels of analysis. I do this primarily on the grounds that I focus on and describe observed commonalities that link this culture literature in terms of definition, conceptualisation and operationalisation. For instance, and as one example of necessary conflation, some sport psychology researchers have acknowledged their reliance on Edgar Schein's well-cited definition (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012) and conceptualisation (cf. Henriksen, 2015) of organisational culture to ground and advance empirical research at the team level within sport. The development of team culture literature and culture change research (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015) in sport psychology has therefore been abstracted from ideas of organisational culture in other domains. Thus, no matter the level of foci, these associations and origins are not easy to disregard, because they have provided a base from which subsequent work has emerged. Regardless of the line of cultural inquiry, the extant team and organisational culture literature in sport psychology has also been bound by a similar research agenda, which has typically been one of performance enhancement and culture change. There are other commonalities: most of this research has been explicitly leader-centric and managerialist, whereby scholars have developed a view of culture as a singular, uniformed and easily manipulatable entity. These commonalities bind the body of work and, I think, challenges the idea that team and organisational culture are completely distinct lines of inquiry.² Given that I focus closely on these congruities, I feel it is appropriate (and necessary) to refer to both team and organisational culture literature within sport psychology as part of a broader critique. I therefore often simply adopt the term *culture* throughout the thesis but make regular distinctions (e.g., using

² I direct interested readership to a valuable exchange on the matter (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013a, 2013b; Gilmore, 2013).

the term organisational culture) to guide readership and denote the level of analysis, or particular focus of research, where appropriate.³

Fifth and finally: The range and depth of culture scholarship that exists outside of sport psychology literature means that conceptualising culture is never an easy enterprise. In the midst of decades of feverous academic research, in-fighting, and posturing within and across disciplines, whole volumes and entire careers have been dedicated to the task of making sense of culture and have still often fallen short in the face of the enormity of the task. In the construction of this thesis, I have had to make difficult decisions concerning how to describe and explain culture, while constantly fighting the urge to keep it simple and avoid wading into murky cultural waters. I reached the conclusion, after some considerable time and a not insignificant amount of anxiety, that conceptualising culture, is an enterprise that cannot be tackled definitively and is something that you chip away at, in part because culture knowledge grows in spurts (Geertz, 1973). Accordingly, I am taking the opportunity, as many culture scholars I admire do (cf. Eagleton, 2016; Geertz, 1973; Kuper, 1999; Sewell Jr, 1999), to set reader expectations early on and ask for some measure of forgiveness: The coming chapters offer only glimpses. At times I have sacrificed some coherence and logical progression from one chapter to the next to chase threads and make arguments that I think are vital, and that reflect both my growth and interest in the subject and what I think may be lacking in sport psychology insight and literature. I see this as consistent with the spirit of cultural inquiry, whereby a study should not necessarily pick up conveniently where the another has left of, but rather, follow ideas (Geertz, 1973).

³ A similar section to this was requested by anonymous reviewers in McDougall et al., 2019 as a result of exchanges over the course of the review process. One anonymous viewer felt it was particularly useful to emphasise the appropriateness of delineations between team and organisational research focus in sport psychology, and I have included the section, as requested in peer review, as it may be similarly helpful for context here.

Nevertheless, and recognising that these studies must also form a whole, I have used connective, narrative vignettes to link each of the studies and make clear my rationale for choosing one direction over another. In spite of these uncertainties and to paraphrase the great anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his introduction to his seminal collection of essays *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973); despite my uncertainties, the thesis is a thesis, the chapters are the chapters, and the whole, I hope, has a certain informing rhythm.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

— **J.R.R. Tolkien,**
The Fellowship of the Ring

2.0 Part One: The Importance of ‘Foundational’ Culture Literature

In the introduction I sketched culture as a most complex concept, yet one that is significantly under-theorised in organisational sport psychology literature to date. Correspondingly, I made the strong case for an extended literature review that is thorough in its attempt to situate and conceptualise culture. Following this rationale, the literature review is divided into three clear parts that are designed to progress understanding of culture. Part One addresses some of the origins and foundations of culture literature, selectively tracing its emergence, development and some central ideas in anthropology and organisational studies. Part Two focuses on sport psychology interest in culture, and in relation to the study of the elite sport environment. This section is descriptive and frames the key studies and scholars/practitioners that have shaped the study of organisational culture to date. Part Three brings together the various strands of sport psychology culture research described and outlines the commonalities that exist in our literature. In this section, I break from the traditional linear, chronological literature review that are objective, neutral in tone with significant attention to ‘who was first’ (cf. Martin, Frost, & O’ Neil, 2006), and instead write from a more critical stance. Specifically, I strongly challenge some pervasive myths and limitations that underpin most sport psychology organisational culture literature to date, and in doing so provide some alternative ways to think about culture.

The conceptual ambiguity of ‘culture’ is one of the most significant challenges facing sport psychologists with an interest in it (McDougall et al., 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Of course, many concepts within the social science are ambiguous and need to be conceptually untangled, but culture is arguably different in that it is a *grande idée*, or concept (Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973). These are the ideas that burst on to the intellectual scene with extraordinary force, so that all enquiring minds turn at once to using them (Langer, 1942). Such ideas, Geertz said, are

attractive because they hold the promise of resolving a number of fundamental problems and clarifying a range of obscure issues. Consequently, they captivate academics, who seek to make them the “conceptual centre-point around which comprehensive systems of analysis can be built” (Geertz, 1973, p. 3). It is in this manner that the culture concept has been treated; stretched and deployed in ways so numerous within academic discourse that the full range of its meanings can hardly be traced (Sewell Jr, 1999).

In this thesis, and as a general starting point, I take the term culture in the broad anthropological sense to be a category of social life that refers to the complex patterns in the functioning of societies and social groups (Alvesson, 1989; Sewell Jr, 1999). While this fairly innocuous definition is an acceptable place to begin, it also masks considerable variation in how culture is considered across academic disciplines that have directed significant and sustained attention towards its study and explication. There is a wealth of culture literature available to help sport psychology scholars unpick the many nuances of culture and plainly we should be drawing on them if we are serious about culture as an important aspect of social or organisational life. Nesti and colleagues (2012) have previously emphasised this very point and suggested that researchers and practitioners in sport psychology require an understanding of sociology, anthropology and social psychology in order to make sense of culture. More recently, researchers have highlighted literature in sport management, organisational management, cultural studies, cultural psychology, literature and socio-historical and political commentary as useful (even essential) to inform sport psychology understanding of the culture concept (e.g., Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, Fisher, 2015; McDougall, et al., 2017; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; McGannon & Smith, 2015; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

Claims of usefulness notwithstanding, save for some recent reviews and commentary (McDougall et al., 2017, 2019; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018) what this prior thinking actually consists of has rarely been explicitly articulated. For the most part, the sport psychology community have neglected these rich sources of culture foregrounding. In the absence of serious attention to wider culture scholarship, research in the area has developed with the creation of domain (sport)-specific, pragmatic knowledge in mind (e.g., the work of Cruickshank and colleague); from one position, principally the popularised and well-cited scholarship of Edgar Schein (1985, 2010) (e.g., Bailey, Benson, & Bruner, 2017; Henriksen, 2015); or from a position completely unmindful of previous scholarship, with no mention of either its existence or merit (e.g., Vealey, 2017). These omissions of foundational literature have been challenged. For instance, Gilmore (2013) labelled the rejection of organisational culture literature from organisational management spheres as inexplicable. Later, McDougall and Ronkainen (2019) extended this critique to the totality of organisational sport psychology literature highlighting the continued omission of foundational culture literature (from anthropology, sociology, politics, economy) as inexplicable and unhelpful to a discipline with such a firmly stated interests (and applied hopes) for the concept of culture.

A reluctance to develop our own organisational culture scholarship without proper regard to previous and informing literature is problematic for many reasons. The elusiveness of the term culture and the subsequent possibility for semantic and conceptual confusion is well-observed across many disciplines (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Jahoda, 2012; Geertz, 1973; Martin, 2002; Smircich, 1983; Sewell Jr, 1999; Shteynberg, 2010). Arguably the omission of foundational literature has already led to the tendency in sport psychology to refer to culture in broad strokes, that could broadly be summarised as ‘the way we do things around here’. Such descriptions

reinforce perceptions of culture as a concept that is somewhat ethereal and intangible, and is at odds with suggestions that culture ought to be referred to in purposeful and specific ways, so as not to lose focus or interpretative depth (Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002; Schein, 2004). Without attempting to discuss culture as a concept in more focused, accurate and in-depth ways, as a discipline we encourage the use of culture as an umbrella term meaning little more than normative practices and risk further obscuring the meaning of an already difficult to understand concept.

The resulting lack of disciplinary clarity around culture (as both a term and a concept) also has serious research and practical implications. Against this backdrop of complexity, historically many researchers have felt free to simply choose a convenient culture definition according to one's needs and sensitivities (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984), but this is problematic on two counts. Firstly, in this crowded and sometimes confused interdisciplinary culture literature base, there still exists well demarcated schools of cultural thought. Proposing a particular definition of culture represents a commitment (or at least a preference) towards specific conceptual assumptions and ways of studying culture (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Martin, 2002; Smircich, 1983). Secondly, when what is being researched is not clearly or explicitly articulated, it is unclear what the findings of a given culture study actually represent (Maitland, Hills & Rhind, 2015) and this too perpetuates the semantic and conceptual confusion that tends to follow culture. These arguments also relate to applied work, where it is unclear how sport psychologists (existing and future) can hope to undertake culture related practice successfully without a clearer understanding of what culture is (and is not), how it works, and how it relates to people, groups and change.

For these reasons, this literature review begins, not in sport psychology, but in wider (and earlier) forms of culture scholarship. The range, volume, and heterogeneous character of culture literature, attention to *all* of this important foundational literature is beyond the scope of this thesis.

In the following section, I selectively trace some important genealogies of culture in anthropology and organisational studies. The presented material helps to outline some of origins and development of the modern concept of culture, that are useful for sport psychologists to know. I am cognisant however, that I am omitting wider attention to other important genealogies: early ideas of culture and civilisation, humanist ideas of culture, key literature in anthropology such as structuralism and evolutionary perspectives, sociology, and the broad genre of cultural studies. These have also been extremely important to the foundations and advancement of the culture understanding. Even in terms of the material that *is* detailed, the briefly sketched history of culture scholarship presented should not be considered as complete, either in its range or in its thoroughness. These limitations and omissions notwithstanding, it is my hope that this section is informative for sport psychology scholars with an interest in culture, but moreover is useful in the sense that it can serve to orientate and provide some grounding for the ideas and discussions that permeate this thesis henceforth. After all, modern theories of culture tend to re-use old ones (though not always well or faithfully) (Kuper, 1999). Therefore, an understanding of how the concept has been borrowed, adapted or lost in the process of knowledge transfer from one discipline to another, can help our discipline — still in the early stages of deciphering culture — to find its feet and to sense where there are both opportunities and pitfalls.

2.1 The Anthropologists

At least as a modern concept⁴, the formal study of culture is most frequently traced to anthropological origins and the study of civilisations and societies (Sewell Jr, 1999). As noted in

⁴ Culture, in an older sense of the word, has a much longer lineage, and can arguably date back to discussions in Ancient Greece and East Asian thinkers around the same time (Buddha, Confucious, Lao-Tze) (Erikson & Nielsen, 2013). In addition, many well-known texts on ‘Culture’ begin with the period of German, French, and English romanticism, and discussions of culture and civilization, as a basis for informed culture discussion and conceptualisation.

the introduction though, there is no fixed or agreed upon meaning of culture (Borowsky, 1994; Ortner, 1984). In spite of this heterogeneity, there are some well-known bases and delineated schools of thought that have marked the field. One way to divide these up is to consider ‘older’ and ‘newer’ approaches to culture (Wright, 1998). I adopt this tactic in order to convey some important ideas and how the concept developed, with the aim of presenting information in a logical, informative manner.

2.1.1 Origins

Edward Burnett Tylor wrote what was arguably the first cultural anthropology book *Anahuac: Or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* in 1861. Later, he also offered the first anthropological definition of culture, in the opening sentence of his classic text *Primitive Culture* (1871, p. 1): “Culture, or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.

It is this definition and idea of culture (as a most complex whole) that spawned an intellectual revolution, though in actuality it would take many years for it to begin (Kuper, 1999). In the period after Tylor, anthropological attention to culture stagnated, with fewer than six definitions of culture proposed in the subsequent 32 years (Kuper, 1999). In their exceptionally thorough review of culture (appropriately named *Culture*) Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn attributed stagnation to Franz Boas, one of the founding fathers of anthropology, who only offered his first formal definition of culture in 1930 at the age of 72 (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). A further 157 definitions produced by American social scientists between 1920 - 1952 (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), many of whom were anthropologists and who had taken up Tylor’s definition, and reproduced close variants of it. There are inherent problems with this definition, however.

Tylor had stated that culture was a whole, and had to be treated as such – integrated, structured and comprised of connecting parts (Tylor, 1871). The *whole* that Tylor referred to though contained almost everything imaginable, aside from biology (Kuper, 1999). Essentially, Tylor had described culture as if it were a list of traits, or characteristics – the intention being that they could be tallied and inventoried (rather than analysed and evaluated) (Eagleton, 2016; Kuper, 1999).

Tylor's also subscribed to the Enlightenment and faith in progress, and as such his thinking was reflective of 19th century positivism and British empiricism (Kuper, 1999). Tylor's own approach was to combine Johann Herder's romantic idea, that nations and groups of people within nations and peoples at different periods have distinctive cultures, with the enlightenment idea that each of these cultures were at different stages and evolving towards a more advanced state of European civilisation and rationality. These views were also embedded in 20th century anthropological and colonial thinking in which every 'people' (determined by geographic locales) were presumed to 'have' a culture that was distinguished by supposedly static and homogenous characteristics that could be studied, known and listed (Wright, as cited in Schein et al., 2015). Of course, these imprints may also be seen in more modern formulations of the culture concept, and in many researchers' treatment of it in within organisational management and sport psychology spheres.

2.1.2 Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown

Following in the footsteps of Tylor, and these early anthropologists, were prominent figures who would go on to shape the discipline, and the concept of culture, which had become a flagship concept for the emerging discipline of anthropology. Franz Boas was one such figure and in contrast to arguments that he had slowed the development of the culture concept, is regarded as many as perhaps most responsible for modern formulations of culture (Kuper, 1999). Whereas

Tylor had not foreseen modern anthropological thinking about culture, the influence of Boas, although not always writing about culture directly, can be seen in his development of ideas that are integral to modern thinking about culture: plurality, behavioural determinism, the significance of history, its integrating qualities, its link to relativism, and so on (Kuper, 1999; Stocking, 1996). For instance, Boas wrote of ‘cultures’ (i.e., in the plural sense), aiding the important distinction between culture and *a* culture (Stocking, 1996).

Boas developed ideas of cultural relativism; each people, each nation, or tribe had its unique, irreplaceable character, and it was the task of the anthropologist, as Boas saw it, to document and defend it (his thinking indicative of his status as a prominent anti-racist of the time) (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013). According to Boas, cultural change when it occurred, was argued to be the consequence of chance contacts between groups, or the creative response of cultural members to inherited tradition, in the face of adaptive and environmental challenges (Kuper, 1999). From this view, a central premise in Boasian thought was that cultures were not neatly integrated systems. Occasionally, however, Boas did suggest that culture could be studied as a ‘whole’, as a working system, and in his later years (influenced by his most prominent students Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead) even that a functionalist approach (concerned with the uses of culture) could represent an alternative to historical understanding (each society is a collective representation of its historical past). Boas’s own legacy was secured through the work of Sapir, Benedict, and Mead, who would each make significant contributions to the field of anthropology and the development of the culture concept.⁵

⁵ For consideration of the contribution of Sapir, Benedict, and Mead, influential figures in their own right, I direct interested readership to Kuper’s informative account of the history of anthropology *Culture: The Anthropologists Account* (1999).

Alongside Boas, contemporaries such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown were also shaping the culture concept and the study of it for generations to come. Malinowski's lasting contribution is perhaps his advancements of participant observation and ethnographic practices and through his fieldwork with the Trobriander Islanders (1922, 1948). He is generally regarded as a thorough and systematic ethnographer and is responsible for the assumption that it is essential to stay long enough in the field to learn the local vernacular as one's working language. It was Malinowski's belief that as far as practically possible, the ethnographer must take active part in the ongoing flow of everyday life, while being mindful not to divert the natural stream of events (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013).

Radcliffe-Brown, who was a fierce rival of Malinowski and influenced heavily by the sociology and structural functionalism of Emile Durkheim, maintained a stranglehold over British anthropology. For the Durkheimian structural-functionalists, the individual was "an epiphenomenon of society and of little intrinsic interest – what mattered was to elicit the elements of social structure" (Erikson & Nielsen, 2013, p. 54); a view that contrasted deeply with Malinowski's radical adoption of the 'native' point of view. Alternatively, Radcliffe-Brown, following Durkheim, contended that abstract mechanisms (*social structure*, as defined by rules, moral norms and social statuses) were the means by which society was integrated. These two lineages of social anthropology – the more individually orientated, psychological approach of Malinowski and sociological structural-functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown are significant because they highlight a basic tension in the discipline, still evident today, between what has later been referred to as *agency* and *structure*. The individual has agency in the sense that he or she is a creator of society and therefore their own experience of reality. Society imposes structure on the individual and limits his or her options. The two viewpoints are, as Giddens (1979) pointed out,

complementary, but in interwar British anthropology this was not yet known and Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's schools of thought were considered as opposites and irreconcilable.

2.1.3 The Social Science Account

In 1946, Talcott Parsons established the Department of Social Relations at Harvard, an interdisciplinary coalescing of psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists under his leadership. He re-envisioned a re-formulation of the social sciences, based on a rational and logical division of labour based on function and expertise: Psychologists would of course deal with the individual, sociology with social systems, and the cultural system — now an umbrella term for the symbolic world of ideas, beliefs, value patterns and tradition — would be allotted to the anthropologists. Although acknowledging that there was no consensus on the actual definition of culture, Parsons argued that anthropologists had to define and study culture within specified, and more precise parameters, according to its position in the trinity of psychology, sociology and anthropology. Careful delineation involved separating out the cultural from individualised constructs such as personality, and from social relations: “only by some such definition from its scope can anthropological psychology become an analytical, empirical science, which is both independent of sociology and psychology” (Parsons, 1951, p. 544). Parsons persuaded leading anthropologists of the time to forego questions of history, personality, biology, and social institutions; the price to be paid to study culture within this new vision of social science scholarship (Kuper, 1999) and a new vision for the social sciences gathered momentum.

There was some dissidence. Clyde Kluckhohn and Alfred Kroeber protested the boundaries that were being placed around culture on the grounds that this new formulation of anthropology was restrictive and lessened attention to some of these accepted elements of traditional anthropological study (D' Andrade, 2018; Kuper, 1999). Clyde Kluckhohn, who had been a partner

in the enterprise, objected particularly to the idea that social structure and culture could be completely separated out, “social structure is part of the cultural map... and built upon girders supplied by implicit and explicit culture” (cited in Parsons & Shils, 1951, p. 26-27). The effect of Parson’s grand theory of social action, however, was to encourage anthropologists to re-examine their fundamental ideas of culture, and to express them more clearly. Kluckhohn and Kroeber drew on the German romantic tradition, “where culture was treated as a system of ideas and values, expressed in symbols and embodied in religion and art. The individual found a purpose through absorbing the culture’s values and making them his own.” (Kuper, 1999, p. 68).

Between 1957-1958, Kroeber and Parsons had a series of discussions, eventually published as a manifesto titled *The Concepts of Culture and the Social System* (published in *The American Sociological Review*). The purpose of the manifesto was to delineate culture and the social system, and to clarify their respective nature and relationships to each other. In the truce, although Parsons allowed Kroeber to be first author, and Kroeber had perhaps hoped the truce was a way to resist the growing influence of Parson’s vision, according to Kuper (1999), it was Parson’s vision of culture which perhaps won out:

We suggest that it is useful to define the concept of *culture* for most usages more narrowly than has generally been the case in the American anthropological tradition, restricting it’s reference to transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors, in the shaping of human behaviour and the artifacts produced through behaviour. On the other hand, we suggest that the term *society* – or more generally, social system – be used to designate the specifically relational system of interaction among individuals and collectivities. (Kroeber & Parsons, 1958, p. 582-583).

The truce was supposed to put an end debate about whether culture was best understood from the perspective of society, or society from the perspective of culture, and offer a way forward where both could be differentiated, but ultimately tackle comparable issues (Kuper, 1999). In reality, arguments about culture and structure have lived on in further refinements of the culture concept (e.g., Geertz, 1973) and continue to influence what modern culture scholars pay attention to and how (D'Andrade, 2018). Problematically, the culture-structure distinction is often implicit, or unacknowledged within most modern culture research (including sport psychology). Arguably, this omission is an area of concern since the implications are not inconsequential — for instance, they related to fundamental ontological questions of what culture actually consists of and epistemological questions of how to tackle it.

In sum, it is clear that the major influences on anthropology differed markedly in their theories, but nonetheless shared an idea of the world as being made up of 'peoples', each with a coherent way of life, or 'culture' (Wright, 1998). Several consistent features permeated this widely held 'older' notion of culture, and in fact remain present in contemporary culture scholarship in other disciplines. For example: cultures are bounded, small scale entities, comprised of a number of characteristics, relatively unchanging, in balanced equilibrium or self-reproducing, and a system of shared meanings containing homogeneous individuals (cf. Wright, 1998). These commonalities were and continue to be upheld by a shared faith in positivist methods and logic (Kuper, 1999) ensuring that methodologically as well as conceptually, there was also much to bind the major theories of culture.

2.1.4 The Geertzian Challenge

Clifford Geertz (1973) defended the idea that each particular group 'has' a particular culture, which is 'shared' by all group members (Ortner, 2005). However, it is important to be nuanced in this

observation. According to Ortner (2005), he never subscribed to the idea that all cultures were homogenous or had an ‘essential’ list of distinct traits that made ‘the’ culture; and moreover, considered cultural difference as a means to open up cultural discussions across the taken for granted boundaries between cultures. Starting in the 1950’s, Clifford Geertz, himself a member of the Harvard Department of Social Relations and a product of the Parsonian system, began reconfiguring the concept of culture around ideas of meaning. In accordance with this approach, and borrowing phrasing from Max Weber, the German sociologist and philosopher, Geertz famously stated that:

man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning (1973, p, 5).

Geertz was often vague about what he precisely meant by ‘meaning’, yet an examination of these ‘webs’ placed emphasis on networks of meaning and the decoding of symbols — which carry meaning — and are public, and thus are ‘readable’ like a text (Geertz, 1973). Symbols, according to Geertz, are therefore external to the thinker; words and also images, markings, gestures, rituals, idols, practices, tools, physical landmarks (Geertz, 1973; Lingis, 2014). Thus, an interpretative approach according to Geertz had a degree of objectivity because the cultural could be found in the external world, not only in people’s heads and hearts. For Geertz, neither the identification and tallying symbols, nor their practical and social effects were the primary concern; rather symbols held the key to how social actors “see, feel, and think about the world, or, in other words, how symbols operate as vehicles of ‘culture’” (Ortner, 1984, p. 129). In Geertz’s own words, “Symbol systems, man-created, shared, conventional, ordered, and indeed learned, provide human beings with a meaningful framework for orienting themselves to one another, to the world

around them, and to themselves” (Geertz, 1973: p. 250). From Geertz’s perspective then, man without culture is an unfinished animal and culture is the prime determinant in social affairs (Geertz, 1973). This formulation therefore challenged the Parsonian view that the study of culture was only a part of the greater task – which was the examination of the whole social system. His views also confronted the assumption that anthropologists “were mere handmaidens in a general theory of action” (Kuper, 1999, p. 70).

Geertz allied these beliefs about culture with an insistence on narrative and textuality (Greenblatt, 1999) and calls for ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). Together these conceptual centre-points helped express his epistemological and methodological doctrine and challenged anthropologists to describe the world in the same rich detail and overlapping contextualisation that reflected the ‘native’ experience (Erikson & Nielsen, 2013). Importantly, the idea of culture that Geertz developed resisted (ontologically and epistemologically) accepted ways of conceptualising and studying culture. He rallied against the objectifying tendencies of positivist strategies of research that the founders of modern anthropology and his predecessors had deployed. These strategies included methods of rigorous, systematic, controlled, and verified observation, the tendency to compare across cultures (in order to generalise), mathematised data, and value-free concepts that helped constitute anthropology as a ‘science’ (Boas, 1974; Malinowski, 2001; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Tylor, 1871). Born of logical positivism and British empiricism, these ideas had been central to the study of culture and (according to Parsons, Kluckhohn and Kroeber) even the symbolic could be subject to (or reduced to this type of scientific inquiry (Kuper, 1999). Geertz tackled these assumptions head on and in the process also distanced himself from traditional schools of symbolic anthropology (that treated culture purely as a symbolic system), cognitive anthropology (that dealt in schemas, categorisation and reduced culture to structures of the mind),

and structuralism (that favoured the role of the unconscious). Hermitical approaches, he felt, “run the danger . . . of locking cultural analysis away from its proper object, the informal logic of actual life’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 73), while there was “little profit” he said, “from extricating a concept from the defects of psychologism only to plunge it in to those of schematism” (Geertz, 1973, p. 17).

The result of this sustained opposition was that Geertz offered a powerful alternative to the seemingly “irresistible juggernaut of (a certain kind of) science” (Ortner, 1999, p. 1) and the various functional mechanistic modes of cultural inquiry (regardless of their theories of origin) that had come to dominate the study of culture. The defect inherent in these modes of cultural inquiry was that they consistently posited links between human behaviour and social processes without considering underlying cultural beliefs, values and intentions. According to Ortner (1999), Geertz’s challenge to the authority of functional and mechanistic perspectives is therefore significant in two primary ways. First, meaning — as a culturally constructed frame, model or guide for living, thinking and feeling — helped to support more sophisticated and complex analyses of human behaviour in social contexts. Second, it challenged a view of society as a machine or organism in which the complexities of human subjectivity, intention and cultural formations are reduced to their effects on the social machine. In this regard, Geertz's work can be seen as laying important groundwork for a culturally and philosophically rich theory of agency that can be understood in the practice of the ‘thick description’ of needs, desires and emotions that take seriously the actor's point of view.

Geertz’s writings on culture occupy a central spot in the history and development of anthropology. His influence has also extended significantly across the social sciences and humanities and into disciplines such as literary theory, history, politics, organisation and management, where he is acclaimed as a theorist. He is widely cited by those who want to treat

culture (or the study of otherness) as a project of interpretation rather than function. As is often the case with pivotal and pioneering theorising and scholarship, he also drew a great deal of criticism from the outset. He has been critiqued by the positivists for being too interpretive; by critical scholars for being too politically and ethically neutral; by phenomenologists for descriptions of experience that were ‘too thin’; by materialists for being too idealist; and finally by the interpretivists (themselves products of the Geertzian re-formulation of culture) as being overly invested in an idea of culture that was simply too homogenous and conservative (Kuper, 1999; Greenblatt, 1999; Ortner, 1999; Sewell, Jr, 1999; Shankman, et al., 1984; Throop, 2009). These wide-ranging critical responses tend to downplay his major contributions, however (Kuper, 1999), for which there has been staunch defence (e.g., Ortner, 1999). Significantly, and much like his predecessors Parsons, Kluckhohn and Kroeber, Geertz sharpened and refined definitions and conceptualisations of culture, culminating in an sophisticated and well-designed endorsement of the project of interpretation that above all emphasised culture as the vital component in human nature, social relations and indeed, human history (Kuper, 1999).

2.1.5 Post-Geertz and Landscapes of Power and Resistance

Post-Geertz, theories of power swept the academic (including the anthropological and cultural) landscape, along with postmodern ideas of difference and identity (Kuper, 1999; Ortner, 1999), posing fresh challenges to Geertz’s re-theorisation of culture. In spite of assertions to the contrary, Geertz did not ignore power and politics entirely. His outstanding work *Negara: The Theater State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (1980) is testament to this evaluation of his work because it showed how power is organised differently in different parts of the globe. Geertz did, however, subordinate the influence of power to the cultural argument; that is, making it less significant than the construction of meaning (Ortner, 1999). In contrast, beginning in the early 1980s, there was an

overwhelming push to make power and theories of domination the central force in anthropology and cultural theory (cf. Ortner, 1984). This surge came from a number of diverse areas of scholarship, including various branches of critical studies (e.g. feminism, ethnic, minority and postcolonial studies), from different post and neo-Marxist positions, and of course the tremendously influential work produced by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1977, 1980, 2008).

Foucault's writings on power changed how many scholars understood the concept, challenging the more traditional views stemming from Max Weber whereby a power is defined as the probability that a social actor can enact their will despite resistance (Weber, 1978). For Foucault, consideration of power meant a deeper, more complex concern for the subtle, gross and multifarious ways that power is deployed and infiltrates modern society (cf. Burchell, Gordon, & Miller 1991; Foucault, 1977, 1980, 2008). In Foucault's theoretical framework, power is pervasive and relentless; there is no escape from power and nothing is outside of or uninfluenced by it (Ortner, 2016). Foucault's earlier work (e.g., *Discipline and punish; The history of sexuality*) particularly emphasised these inherent properties of power.

In his own, different way, Pierre Bourdieu also helped transform theoretical discussions of power from something that an individual wields to an ethereal phenomenon that is woven into structures and relations between people. For instance, Bourdieu acknowledged that while some negotiators of culture can have disproportionate power over the negotiated order and that there can be clear moments of coercion, power is most often subtle — An “invisible power” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 164). In this view, power is abstracted from social relations rather than the outcome of formal rules, hierarchy and authority. Like those of Foucault, Bourdieu's theorisations on power had a profound influence on the development of social and cultural anthropology in the 1980s.

Marxist traditions (including the influential writings of Marxist cultural scholars Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson) were also influential in this new trajectory of anthropology, and were used to help unmask the workings of capitalism, colonialism, Western hegemony, patriarchy and politics on the historical and cultural formations of societies (e.g., Fox, 1985; Marcus & Fisher, 1986; Ortner, 1989; Sahlins, 1981). In Marx's view, power was emphasised and maintained through labour relations and the unstoppable march of capitalism; which was a brutal, dehumanizing and controlling social and economic system designed to enrich the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor and powerless (Eagleton, 2011; Ortner, 2016). Like Foucault at his most extreme, Marxian theorisations can often depict the world almost exclusively "in terms of power, exploitation, and chronic pervasive inequality" (Ortner, 2016, p. 55) while emphasising the historical and social structures that produce and maintain such conditions (Jessop, 2014). In this shifting academic world, Geertz's considerations of power appeared meek by comparison. Questions of culture and meaning in a fundamentally Geertzian sense were thus generally pushed aside in favour of new cultural critiques that insisted on taking questions of power, inequality, domination, and exploitation more seriously.

Alongside these major theories of power, corresponding (and overlapping) critiques emerging from postcolonial theory (with postmodern sensibilities) were also significant in reshaping the study of culture and how anthropologists went about investigating it. A new wave of studies from these perspectives focused on issues of difference, identity and how (and indeed whether) "the other" should be represented by anthropologists, who were emblematic of imperialism and whose very system of knowledge was steeped in colonial traditions (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Kuper, 1999). Early and seminal publication in this area included Talal Asad's collection *Anthropology and the colonial encounter* (1973) and Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

Essentially, by measuring, categorising, describing and representing the other as if they were 'known', it was argued that 'natives' had been made objects of knowledge and as such were the target of forms of power and control (Asad, 1973/1979; Said, 1978; Wright, 1998). Talal Asad (1973/1979) was especially influential in shaping the argument that the unitary view of culture (one set of consensus values homogeneously spread and shared by all group members) was actually really a representation of dominant ideology (Clifford, 1986; Wright, 1998). Differently positioned actors may very likely hold different ideas about culture; rendering culture as fluid, ever-changing, only seemingly static in moments of domination (Wright, 1998). Culture was therefore impossible to definitively interpret (Clifford, 1986). Similar to Asad's arguments, Said held that Western scholarship about the Orient must be understood as... an enormously systematic discipline...by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" (Said, 1978, p.3).

These challenges and the subsequent scholarship they inspired demonstrated clearly that the traditional anthropological foundations of culture had been built upon shaky moral ground, bound as they had been to colonialism and projects of power (Wright, 1998). Culture, in the anthropological tradition was tainted precisely because it was usually imposed on others by a dominant, or ruling group and thus it served agendas of power, (Kuper, 1999; Ortner, 1999). Anthropologists, appalled, increasingly distanced themselves from the culture concept, or left behind older conceptualisations of culture in favour or search of new ones.

Nevertheless, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1976, p. 104-105) and culture, because it can be imposed, therefore can also and should be contested (Costas & Kunda, 1995; Kuper, 1999; Ortner, 1999). Hence, alongside attention to themes of power, domination,

oppression and inequality, there also emerged a greater consideration of ‘fairer’ and less judgemental methods of analysis and representation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). There was an increasing and explicit focus on addressing social injustices and inequalities through activism and projects of cultural resistance (Ortner, 2016). The ethical and political ramifications of cultural research were lifted to the forefront of scholarship. What can be known, and indeed what implications the scientific project has for people who are affected by that knowledge, became a more central concern in studies of culture. Inspired by the work of Asad (1973) and Said (1978), anthropologists questioned the utility and accuracy of attempts to describe ‘the Other’; acting, as they did, to contribute to the reproduction of difference and marginalisation. Such scholarship seemed increasingly out of touch with a global, transnational world, with fewer and fewer bounded and local cultures (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Kuper, 1999).

Against this backdrop, and with an emancipatory agenda, social and cultural anthropologists set out to reveal and tackle the other face of power — *resistance* (Ortner, 1999). I use the term ‘resistance’ here in alignment with Ortner (2016) to cover a range of modes of engagement with political issues: critical theoretical discussions; critical ethnographic and social studies; studies of political movements of all kinds; and activist anthropology. I also tie resistance to ideas of *cultural* resistance, and specifically the ways that locals, natives, or ‘the Other’ could engage in their own cultural projects outside of the control and rule of those who impose culture.

Fortunately, the same influential theories that inspired serious considerations of power also provided the means to study and theorise how people could resist it in all its forms. Bourdieu’s work, for instance, represented a clear divergence from earlier constraint-based images of social life (e.g., Durkheim, Weber) because he insisted that culture and society could be made and re-made (and therefore transformed) through social practice. In essence, if we make the world through

social practice it can be made into something different — rendering the work of Bourdieu and those anthropologists who were influenced by him (e.g., Ortner, 2005, 2006; Sahlins, 1981; Scott, 1985, 1990) as essential to studies in, of and for resistance. For instance, James Scott, whose scholarship inspired a generation of studies on resistance, proposed that power was much less psychologically invasive than Foucault had originally contended. In this thesis (and explicitly beginning in Study 2), and aligning with Scott, for example, while not denying that power is woven (sometimes nefariously) through society, I am arguing that dominated people often understand full well what is going on and moreover have explicit traditions or ‘hidden transcripts’ of critique and resistance.

Supportive of such points of view, social and cultural theorists have argued that hegemonies are never total or absolute, either psychologically or historically. Psychologically, people have some sense or insight into their domination, while in relation to history, in the flow of time there are always remnants of the past as well as the possibility for an emergent future (Gramsci, 2000; Williams, 1977). Even in the often-bleak outlook of Marx, there is cause for optimism and means for resistance. Marxists observe the inherent limitations in any exercise of social power that is rooted in forms of class domination because they assume that these forms are innately fragile, unstable, and provisional. This is self-evident because ruling elites must repeatedly struggle to reproduce the conditions for class domination, to overcome inevitable resistance, and to naturalize class power through economic production and labour relations. Consequently, in their writings of domination, Marxists also address resistance through questions of strategy, tactics, discussion of political identity, and by undertaking empirical analyses of actual strategies intended to reproduce, resist, or overthrow class domination in specific periods and places (Ortner, 2016).

In addition to the work of Habermas (1987) and Gramsci (2000) (discussed more in Study 2 and the connecting vignette that precedes it), the discussed theorisations (e.g., Bourdieu, Marx, Williams, Scott, Ortner, Sahlins, Asad, Said etc.) provide the contextual backdrop for an ongoing dialectic between power and culture as imposed (and as a means of control) and those who resist being dominated and subjugated. All of this scholastic work – that weaves considerations of power and resistance through the cultural – is important to the empirical studies and discussions that follow because they enable a focus on the efforts of real actors who grapple with moral dilemmas and ethical choices. Aligning with Ortner (1999), the inclusion of resistance in the study of culture *can* offer a positive and emancipatory counterweight to culture as a form of oppression, world closure and constraint.

It is in this endeavour, that a return to Geertz – even in a post-Geertz, power-infused landscape – is crucial and provides the foundation of considerations of power and resistance within this thesis. A Geertzian perspective remains vital, precisely because it can support and illuminate the cultural constructions of resistance (Ortner, 1999). Just as Geertz subordinated issues of power, power theories have often worked in the opposite direction and relegated cultural construction of meanings to the periphery, focusing on the ideological and structural forms of oppression the structural, while de-emphasising meaning construction and agentic intention. Just as power can be segmented from questions of meaning, so too can meaning be split from considerations of resistance (Ortner, 1999). Frequently this has rendered studies of resistance as ‘culturally thin’ because they are devoid of real attention to agency, subjecthood and the person’s capacity to act on the world through interpretation and practice. The necessity to take seriously the actors’ point of view, as an agentic, intentional being, capable of both interpreting and making cultural constructions is essential, however, to obtain an understanding of the ability of individuals (and

groups) to resist and/or claim power. In this way, Geertz's theory of culture can support better theorising on how power relations (including resistance) are culturally constructed and without reducing a person's needs, desires, and emotions (that form the core of personhood) in the moments where power and resistance clash in a particular time and place.

These ideas and theories of power and resistance flow (sometimes implicitly, and later, more explicitly as I became more aware and confident in them) through the thesis as a whole and are taken up consciously and more deliberately again in Study 2 (Chapter 5) and Study 3 (Chapter 6). They are also picked up and expanded upon in the next section on organisational culture as I describe how older ideas of culture were preserved and found new life in organisational studies, before clashing with the views of critical management scholars, who were aware of the pitfalls of older concepts of culture and their newer re-formulations.

2.2 Organisational Culture

This section details the emergence of 'organisational culture', and like the previous section describes some of the key developments and areas of interest in this domain in order to contextualise the concept of culture and frame its emergence in sport and sport psychology. Specifically, the following sections comprise a description of early organisational culture studies ('forerunners'); the influence of paradigm shifts; corporate culture; tensions within the field; and the decline (and return) of organisational culture in organisation and management scholarship.

2.2.1 Forerunners

Although organisational culture exploded as a concept at the onset of the 1980s, a number of researchers conducted studies of organisation (predating the actual naming of the field, 'Organisation Studies') from as early as the late 1940s onwards. Some explicitly drew on the concept of culture to give an account of organisational life (Gilmore, 2013; Yanow & Ybema,

2011). As ‘forerunners to organizational culture’ (cf. Yanow & Ybema, 2011) many of these studies were directed at forms of organisational bureaucracy and attended to belief systems, symbolic acts and acts of worker meaning making (e.g., Blau, 1955; Crozier, 1964; Gouldner, 1955; Selznick, 1949, 1957). Some researchers focused on meaning-making involved in shop floor work and management, for instance (e.g., Jacques, 1951; Turner, 1971). Elliott Jaques (of the Tavistock Institute) introduced the concept of culture into the field of organisational studies in his study *The Changing Culture of a Factory* (1951) and defined culture as “the traditional way of thinking and of doing things” (1951, p. 251). Twenty years later, in an important piece of organisational culture scholarship, Barry Turner (1971) explored meaning-making and lived experience by focusing on organisational symbolism and the overt and covert symbols that he argued were characteristic of subcultures. He proposed that these symbols (and meaning) took the form of language, ritual and other forms of communication. In spite of this body of work however, the widespread popularity of behaviourism between the 1950’s and 1970’s (particularly in the US) coupled with the growing capacity of computers to handle large and complex amounts of data dampened enthusiasm for these kinds of participant-observer, ethnographic style studies, and turned focus instead towards quantitative analysis of organisations (Van Maanen, 1988; Ybema & Yanow, 2011). In this period organisations were primarily studied through questionnaire methods underpinned by the positivist paradigm, an approach that would continue to have influence on studies of organisational culture throughout the 1980s (Bellot, 2011).

2.2.2 Paradigm Shifts

Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) challenged organisational scholars to take seriously knowledge production and critique the sets of ideas or theories that are shared throughout a discipline (*paradigms*) and the procedures for investigating them. Emerging

organisational scholarship (e.g., Burrell & Morgan, 1979) engaged with Kuhn's key messages and challenged the positivist accounts of organisation that dominated the field. Mirroring developments throughout the social sciences, organisation studies (typically driven by numbers and concerns with function and generalisation) were infused with ideas of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), phenomenology (e.g., Schütz, 1970), continental philosophy (for example, the work of Heidegger, Ricoeur and Habermas), humanistic psychology, and others who articulated meaning-focused theories. The theories of cultural and symbolic anthropology that had re-orientated the study of culture in anthropology towards situated meaning-making and localised knowledge (and in particular, the scholarship of Clifford Geertz) became increasingly influential throughout the social sciences, and consequently in organisational research (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). At the same time, feminist scholars challenged 'God's-eye points of view' and argued that observation and analysis were always situated, resulting in greater concern within the organisational scholarship community for the need for reflexive self-awareness and acknowledgement of situation-specific knowledge production (Haraway, 2003; Longman, 2002).

The growing influence of each of these domains arguably culminated in organisational culture scholarship with Andrew Pettigrew's (1979) study *On Studying Organizational Cultures*. In spite of the earlier described cultural work within the domain of organisation and management, it is Pettigrew's historical-cultural analysis of how rituals, myths, stories, jargon and dress norms shape organisational life and understanding that is generally credited for (re)introducing the term 'organizational culture' within the organisation and management lexicon; taking up as he did, Jacque's (1951) earlier notion of culture and explicating the concept more clearly from anthropology. After this, a special edition (1983) on organisational culture within *Administrative Science Quarterly* and in particular, Linda Smircich's classic essay *Concepts of Culture and*

Organizational Analysis and her fundamental distinction between culture as something an organisation *is* and something that it *has*, was extremely important in focusing attention to the concept of organisational culture. The same year, two other special editions on organisational culture appeared in *Organization Symbolism* (Pondy et al., 1983), and in *Organizational Dynamics* (Vol. 12, No. 2). In total the three collections comprised 102 articles on organisational culture (cf. Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Later, an edited volume summarised papers from a conference held on organisational culture (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985).

Also significant (and remaining so to this day) was the early work of Edgar Schein (Schein, 1985). Schein had studied anthropology at Harvard, under the tutelage of Clyde Kluckhohn. Reflective of earlier anthropological concepts of culture — that were rooted in the premises of structural functionalism — he conceived of organisational culture as referring to deeper, foundational, basic structures and assumptions on which organisational values and artefacts rested. Schein's conceptualisation of culture was much like older notions of it in anthropology in that he argued that culture was unitary, homogenous and acted to bind (integrate) the group together. From this view, Schein produced a series of articles which would become his now classic (and now in its fifth edition) text *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985).⁶

For many organisational scholars of this period the appeal of the culture concept was that it could be used in innovative and playful ways to illuminate organisational life (Alvesson, Kärreman, & Ybema, 2017). Used in this spirit, culture was antithetical to traditional research of organisations — objectivist, abstract and incapable of providing deep, rich, and realistic understandings — and could address the lived experiences of organisational members (Yanow &

⁶ Schein's ideas will be elaborated on more later in this chapter, in relation to his emerging and significant influence in sport psychology.

Ybema, 2009). Furthermore, because the culture concept connected the organisational as a whole with everyday experiences and individual actions, it provided an important conceptual bridge between micro and macro levels of analysis, and between organisational behaviour and strategic management (Smircich, 1983, p. 346). These qualities gave the concept of culture a certain analytical and theoretical value coupled with a distinctly practical significance.

2.2.3 The Rise of Corporate Culture

At the same time as the growth in academic research into culture within organisation, there was increased concern within America about the decline of the staples of American economy (e.g., the automobile and steel industry) and the corresponding growth of these industries in international competitors, specifically Japan (Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Culture quickly became a buzz word as leaders of American corporations looked to Japanese management style and organisational practices for the secrets of company success and worker productivity (Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002). Reflective of this climate, several key texts emerged that were tailored specifically for anxious managers and leaders, most notably Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, and Deal and Kennedy's (1982) *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Theirs and other best-sellers promoted 'corporate culture' as a tool that could be used by organisations to improve performance (Such works typically defined culture in terms of shared values that wove through important organisational outputs such as customer service, quality and innovation and suggested that these could be reinforced and enhanced through attention to corporate values (such as those in a vision or mission statement), norms, rituals, myths, heroes, stories, jargon and so on (Martin, Frost, & O'Neil, 2006; Yanow & Ybema, 2009). Over time, and through attention to these elements, cultures could be made stronger (meaning more unified). As an informal system culture could show employees what is expected of them, how to

behave, and what values to share — the expectation being that productivity and effectiveness would soon follow (Martin et al., 2004; Yanow & Ybema, 2009). Culture from this perspective was the “ultimate solution to problems of organizational change, replacing other ideas that had proved insufficient for understanding and improving organizational performance” (Yanow & Ybema, 2009, p. 4). Taken up by the media and popular journalistic writing, this seductive idea of culture (unempirical and atheoretical) was widely perpetuated and “became the hottest product on the consulting market” (Martin et al., 2004, p. 7).

2.2.4 Tensions and Fissures in the Field

Organisational culture was thus established as an important concept in both academic and consulting spheres. However, the term did not have the same precise meaning in both domains (Barley, Meyer, & Gash, 1988; Yanow & Ybema, 2009), and these differences also caused tensions and fissures in the academic world. Some academics pursued culture as consultants and leaders did and adopted a managerialist perspective, where culture as a variable was identifiable, manageable and indelibly linked to organisational effectiveness. Effectiveness in this sense included several positive functions that culture was assumed to address, such as establishing or providing an identity to members of the organisation, increasing commitment to an organisational purpose or mission and so forth. It was also thought to enhance the stability of the organisational system and as a ‘sensemaking’ strategy could help employees to do the ‘right’ thing (Alvesson, 2002). From this perspective, researchers frequently described organisations as having only one culture, whereby all group members held the same basic shared assumptions (e.g., Schein, 1985) or underpinning values on important matters. Culture was viewed as the domain of leadership whereby it was the responsibility of leaders to ‘create’ and ‘change’ an organisation’s culture (Schein, 1985). From a research point of view, the central research concern was therefore “how to

mold and shape internal culture in particular ways and how to change culture, consistent with managerial purposes” (Smircich, 1983, p. 346).

However, for many organisational scholars, the term ‘organisational culture’ itself came to stand in for wider paradigmatic challenges to positivism and contentious issues of ontology and epistemology (Smircich, 1995; Yanow & Ybema, 2009). In opposition to managerialist studies of organisational culture life, a number of core assumptions that had been populated since the arrival of corporate culture were challenged. These included ideas that culture was underpinned by value homogeneity and susceptible to value engineering, so that leaders could articulate, create and manipulate cultures for high performing ends. In a now classic overview of organisational culture, Smircich (1983) contrasted the managerialist and distinctly functionalist approach to culture described, with an alternative view that defined and conceptualised culture in symbolic, ideational and expressive terms. In doing so, she drew attention to a fundamental paradigmatic question of whether culture is something that a group *has* (i.e., a thing or independent variable to be manipulated), or something that a group *is* (i.e., a root metaphor for group life and a lens through which to better understand it). From this alternative point of view, organisational culture was recast more clearly as an evolving entity and a lens to explore group life. Consistent with the recognition that culture has value beyond function and predicting performance and productivity, this change of focus involved a redirection of attention from concerns about what groups with certain qualities can accomplish and how might they accomplish it more efficiently, towards utilising culture as an analytical framework for seeking and describe patterns of social interaction, subjective interpretation, and symbolic meaning that cultural members value, co-create and hold important (Alvesson, 2002; Smircich, 1983; Sypher, Applegate & Sypher, 1985).

Consistent with emerging anthropological and cultural studies scholarship, many organisational scholars also challenged the assertion that organisations had a single culture that was clear and shared in by all. They argued instead that organisations had multiple and sometimes even competing cultures and critiqued the view was unified and monolithic (i.e., viewed the same no matter the angle). In particular, over a body of work Joanne Martin and Deborah Meyerson (e.g., Martin, 1992; Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987) identified between primary perspectives or approaches to culture that culture researchers typically adopt: Integration (where culture is shared in and clear), differentiation (which highlights the existence of subcultures and which demonstrates culture is often contested and infused with conflict) and fragmentation (where ambiguity, not consensus or conflict is at the core of cultural understanding). In their detailed (1987) study of the Peace Corps, each of these patterns of culture were demonstrated. A year later, they built on this three perspective approach and studied a large multinational company using off-site interviews to reveal an organisation rife with subcultures and uncertainty, challenge the companies claims that they were like 'family' (Martin & Meyerson, 1988). Accordingly, they argued that it was far too simplistic to define culture purely in singular, unifying and harmonious terms, for example in terms of values espoused by management and supposedly shared by most members of the group. Consequently, over a body of work Martin and Meyerson advocated (e.g., Martin, 1992, 2002) that researchers should adopt all three perspectives so as to include multiple patterns of culture within analysis.

Critical management scholars also critiqued the very assumption that cultures could be moulded, manipulated, and were thus amenable to managerial or consultant intervention. Kunda (1992), in a well-known and important study of control and commitment in a Silicon Valley high-tech firm challenged these assumptions directly. Using an ethnographic approach to study

corporate rituals, he described how employees' adoption of their prescribed roles and overt behaviour masked inner ambivalence. In addition to demonstrating how an ethnographic approach could be used effectively in the study of organisation, Kunda also showed how the espoused values of management were not clearly or readily adopted in the simple ways that advocates of managerial perspectives (whereby values could be engineered and culture could be used as a means of normative control) suggested. Other critical work showed the various ways that employees superficially conformed to prescribed cultural norms, such as only smiling at customers while being watched (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 1988) or resisted or modified the 'official' culture (e.g., Collinson, 1992) or the 'façade' (Jermier, Slocum, Louis, & Gaines, 1991). Critical theorist and organisational scholar, Hugh Willmott – whose work with Mats Alvesson (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, 1996) helped mark the 'formal' labelling of Critical Management Studies (CMS) – went further still. He compared normative control and management within organisation to the totalitarian society described by George Orwell in *1984*. In particular, he drew parallels between Orwell's emphasis on "Party discipline", disagreement with core values is a crime against the culture, the patriarchal dictator ("Big Brother"), the language adopted ("Newspeak"), and the slogans used ('freedom is slavery'); each of them working together to strengthen the collective by inviting or seducing the individual to completely align themselves with organisational goals.

However, critical management researchers often do more than only pointing out managerial attempts at culture control. They also work towards shaping management practices that challenge taken for granted assumptions (such as the idea that control is even possible, or that leaders are best placed to initiate and manage change) (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007). Accordingly, critical management research is often driven by emancipatory goals, such as making management practices more reflexive and workplaces fairer (Adler, et al., 2007).

The described themes of course speak to the issues and asymmetries of power and attempts at resistance that many (pro) management scholars are politically naïve or ambivalent to (Alvesson, 2002). When leaders or skilled cultural actors (often consultants or “experts”) influence or try to impose cultural understanding based on a set of consensual values and meanings that everyone is expected to accept or ‘buy in’ to, “a subtle and frequently penetrating form of power is being exercised” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 118). Culture as an expression of power can be viewed as a systematic effort to establish and maintain a particular world view in (values, emotions, accepted norms) among employees (Alvesson, 2002). Ray (1986) referred to this management of culture as the last frontier of control. Subsequent, critics, as already described, have called this management strategy ‘cultural engineering’ (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Kunda, 1992). From these critical perspectives, the establishment and management of culture within organisation can actually be seen as world a form of world closure that reduces the capacity for reflection, questioning and dialogue (Alvesson, 2002). At its most repressive, culture can have prison like qualities (Krefting & Frost, 1985; Morgan, 1986). These possibilities, or at least that leaders may have the wrong values or ideas and that resistance to them may be perfectly sensible to different groups is hardly considered mainstream studies (Alvesson, 2002).

Yet, the actors involved in these social webs have access to different material and symbolic resources and therefore maintain different possibilities when it comes to choosing how their cultural reality is to be defined. Hence, although the power aspect of socially dominating ideas about what is true, desirable, needed and possible must be taken seriously, culture because it is negotiated and re-produced in social interactions can therefore frequently work as a source of employee resistance to managerial designs for control. Critical management scholars thus maintain focus on both the darker, dominating aspects of power relations within organisation *and* the

emancipatory potential of culture as a means of freeing workers from some of the constraints that culture places upon them. Both of these goals align with anthropological developments in culture study and suggest a closer consideration of power within the cultural analysis of organisations is vital to organisational understanding (Adler, et al., 2007; Alvesson, 2002), creating the need for a *questioning-sceptical* rather than *neutral* tone in the work of organisational culture scholars (Adler et al., 2007; Alvesson, 2002).

2.2.5 The Decline (or Death) of Organisational Culture

In sum, from various perspectives and research agendas, these, and other such studies, together challenged managerialist ideas of culture. They stood in contrast with the machine-like accounts that functionalist researchers typically constructed and provided alternative concepts of culture for organisational researchers to consider and choose between. However, within this swell of academic interest, parallel applied practices and competing research agendas, some were already becoming dismayed by the concept of culture and had already predicted its decline as a valuable and interesting concept of study. Calás and Smircich, only a few short years after it exploded on to the organisational academic and consulting scenes in the early 1980's declared that organisational culture research was 'dominant but dead' (1987). It was a reaction to the unrelenting tide of studies driven by functionalism, positivism and managerialist aims that had relegated interpretivist and critical voices to the sidelines. Linda Smircich, an authority on organisational culture at the time, has since reflected on this period (1995): she described how interpretative and critical scholars — who pointed out the managerial bias and flaws within prevailing conceptualisations and studies of organisational culture, became discouraged an ineffective (Smircich, 1995). These scholars prioritised cultural meaning and understanding over a search for causal law and aimed to provide 'thick' descriptions of culture as opposed to 'thin' accounts of it.

However, over time, Smircich claimed they contributed to the intellectual decline that they had hoped to prevent by becoming embroiled in endless ontological arguments about what culture *really* was and were tethered to the exhausting practice of continuously trying to reclaim ‘culture and position theirs as a ‘better truth’ (Smircich, 1995).

Nonetheless, it was retrospectively observed that organisational culture research continued unabated (Yanow & Ybema, 2011). The emergence of some important, even seminal texts such as Martin’s *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain* (2002), Alvesson’s *Understanding Organizational Culture* (2002), Schein’s updates of *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (2004, 2010, 2017), (along with broader organisational texts which nearly always include a dedicated chapter to culture) have ensured that the death knell predicted by Calás and Smircich was somewhat premature. While the study of organisational culture did not quite die, it perhaps limped on in wounded form, before eventually falling out of vogue; the creativity and originality of this innovative field had been stifled and became dominated, like the rest of organisational research, by managerial interests (Martin, 2002).

It is against this historical backdrop that Alvesson and colleagues (Alvesson, et al., 2017) commented on the fall of organisational culture. It is important to clarify however that they ultimately describe a moderate fall, as opposed to a spectacular or absolute one. Specifically, they asked that their “narrative of organizational culture’s presumed fall from grace should not be over-interpreted” (Alvesson et al. 2017, p. 106). Correspondingly, they listed a number of ways that the legacy of organisational culture is preserved in contemporary organisational research. This includes, for instance, cultural themes that interweave through organisational topics of ongoing significance, such as leadership and organisational change; offshoots of innovative research in areas such as organisational identity, sensemaking, and storytelling, for which organisational

culture research has provided important intellectual foreground. They also outlined a rekindling of interest in organisational culture study within a new wave of research that has centralised agency, ‘public cultures’ rather than private ones, and that frames culture as a repository and precursor for action rather than a cause for constraint (cf. Weber & Dacin, 2011). However, while this assessment of decline, rather than death offers some hope for all with an interest in culture, in describing some of these new directions and trends, Alvesson and colleagues point out that modern accounts of organisational culture are frequently ‘thin’ and somewhat superficial. Accordingly, they suggested that a return to the original spirit of organisational culture inquiry, which is embedded in a zeal for thick description and layered interpretation, still has much to offer contemporary analyses of organisational life.

2.3 Enter the Sport Psychologists: Sport Psychology and the Elite Sport Context

For a long time, elite sport remained a relatively under-examined corner of sport psychology literature (Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010). In recent years, however, there has been focused attempts to more adequately map the elite domains that sport psychologists inhabit; thus providing further context for the services that they deliver, or *could*, in order to be more accepted as a valued component of performance support (e.g., Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff, 2019b). There is now a body of literature in the form of research, commentary and practitioner reflections that can guide applied practice across a number of elite domains and specific sport contexts. Such scholarship includes, but is by no means limited to literature that: outlines sport psychology delivery (and the unique challenges of service provision) at major sport events, such as the Olympic Games (e.g., Haberl & Peterson, 2006; McCann, 2000; Sharp, Hodge, & Danish, 2014); describes sport psychology work within a consultancy team that operates within a wider sport performance support system, such as the English Institute of Sport (e.g., Pitt, et al., 2015); and contextualises sport psychology services

in top-level ‘non-Olympic’ sport, such as professional football in England (e.g., Champ, Ronkainen, Nesti, Tod, & Littlewood; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Nesti, 2010, 2016, Nesti & Littlewood, 2009) and in Europe (Larsen, 2017). Some literature has also explored other team sports contexts such as cricket (Barker, McCarthy, & Harwood, 2011; Devaney, Nesti, Ronkainen, Littlewood, & Richardson, 2018) and rugby (Mellalieu, 2017), highlighting that the precise demands and role of a sport psychologist is often determined by the specific sport and competition context and the specific demands that arise as a consequence.

Indeed, such scholarship has been supplemented and synthesised by broader attempts to reflect on and draw conclusions about some of the challenge-laden realities of elite sport and high performing environments (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 2015, Wagstaff, 2019a). Together, this body of work has depicted elite sport as an infinitely challenging environment because of a number of interrelated factors. It is observed, for example, that elite sport has a predilection for a ruthless pursuit of excellence (McDougall et al., 2015; Wagstaff, 2019b) and that the professionals operating within these environments often maintain a scepticism about sport psychology in general (Nesti, 2016; Wagstaff, 2019b). Compounding the difficulties that a sport psychologist faces in such these circumstances, there are also complex social-political-cultural-hierarchical structures to be navigated (Eubank et al., 2014; Feddersen, Morris, Littlewood, & Richardson, 2019; Mellalieu, 2016; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Moreover, the pervasive precariousness of top-level sport, whereby volatility and change is the norm, means that sport psychologists are always struggling to survive, thrive and maintain their employment, sometimes, it seems, against great odds (Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 2015; Gilmore, Wagstaff & Smith, 2018). For many sport psychologists their work lives are therefore permeated by uncertainty, and without clear career paths and structure, many sport psychologists have described

sport psychology as a tough or intense profession, often laden emotional strain and feelings of frustration and insecurity (Gilmore et al., 2017; Larsen, 2017; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010).

To stand a chance of being able to operate successfully in the demanding environments, more than the application of mental skills techniques is therefore demanded (Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff, 2019a). Indeed, the study of organisational culture (and organisation more generally) has emerged from the growing realisation that within these described, difficult contexts, individual-focused ‘traditional’ methods of sport psychology have been limited in their capacity to help applied practitioners to understand and influence team and organisational performance issues (e.g. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996, Jones, 2002; Nesti, 2004). In their seminal review of emerging organisational sport psychology research, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) built on Hardy, Gould, and Jones’ (1996) work on social environments and their oft-cited conclusion that “elite athletes do not live in a vacuum; they function within a highly complex social and organizational environment, which exerts major influences on them and their performances” (1996, p. 239–240), by themselves declaring:

Those governing and managing elite sport have a duty of care to protect and support the mental well-being of its employees and members. In addition to these statutory requirements, NSOs also have an ethical obligation to create performance environments which facilitate individual and group flourishing . . . It appears that the “global sporting arms race” has had both positive and negative consequences for those operating in elite sport. A convergence of evidence points to the organizational environment as having the potential to significantly impact on individuals’ well-being and performance. It also indicates that the climate and culture in elite sport requires careful and informed

management in order to optimize individuals' experiences and organizational flourishing.

However, the body of knowledge is still in its early stages and restricted. (p. 432-433).

In the years that followed Fletcher and Wagstaff's recommendation, the sport psychology community has steadily dedicated an increasing amount of research to the examination of organisational issues in sport (cf. Wagstaff, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012; Wagstaff & Larner, 2015). Correspondingly, organisational sport psychology – as a genre “dedicated to better understanding individual behavior and social processes in sport organizations to promote organizational functioning” (Wagstaff, 2019a, p. 1) – has in many ways flourished as an important subfield of sport psychology. The salience and currency of organisational sport psychology research and practice has been infused by work across four complimentary areas: emotions and attitudes (Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2018; Wagstaff, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2013), stress and well-being (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Larner, Wagstaff, Thelwell, & Corbett, 2017), organisational behaviour (Arthur, Wagstaff, & Hardy, 2017; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), and high performance environments (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017).

It is suggested by Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie (2018) that organisational culture is best located in the research of high-performance environments. A number of scholars have argued that the culture of a team, performance department or wider organisation is imperative to the optimisation of high performance environment and ensuing sustained athletic success (e.g. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013a, 2014, 2015; Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank, 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Henriksen, 2015; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, 2019). Working in a broader capacity across the team, performance department or organisation, this line of research

inquiry has often portrayed the sport psychologist as an agent of culture change, or cultural architect, intentionally influencing culture (or at least supporting others, such as performance leaders in this task), to facilitate athletic and wider operational excellence (e.g. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013a, 2014, 2015; Eubank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015). Organisational culture has therefore primarily been framed as a concept that is absolutely crucial to the continued development of sport psychology as an applied discipline and the ability of sport psychologists to be able to earn (and keep) full-time positions in elite sport environments (Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

Alongside the described growth of sport psychology academic inquiry into organisational culture, the elite sport landscape has also changed (cf. Wagstaff, 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie). There have been a number of high profile cases (and in some instances, scandals) across a range of sports (and sporting nations) in recent years that has led to questions about whether a duty of care towards athlete welfare and safety has been afforded enough attention. In Britain for instance, at a time of unprecedented sporting success (medals, championships) and prestige, this has led to examinations into the balance between winning and welfare is correct and in light of such concern a well-publicised recent report on recommendations for improving the welfare and duty of care for all those engaged in sport in the United Kingdom was published (Grey-Thompson, 2017). Subsequently, in March of 2017, UK Sport implemented a cultural health check across all Olympic sports. Phase one, which included the survey of 1,525 athletes, coaches, staff and stakeholders, demonstrated that the vast majority of individuals felt positive about the UK's World Class programme (90 per cent reported feeling proud to be part of the system, and 91 per cent believing those involved have good intentions). Nevertheless, 30 per cent of athletes had either experienced or witnessed unacceptable behaviour. A further 24 per cent of athletes reported that they felt there

were no consequences when people behaved inappropriately. In light of these findings, it has been determined that those sports falling short of expected standards with regard to athlete welfare (as identified in the survey) have been given action plans following discussions with UK Sport with a view to encouraging positive change that takes into account performance and welfare. A withdrawal of funding was outlined as the ultimate possible outcome for a compliance with agreed action plans.

It is owing to this confluence of research and applied interests that sport psychologists ought to be compelled to increase their understanding of organisational culture (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). I agree with Wagstaff (2019b), that although there have been significant advances in recent years, much more remains to be done to develop organisational understandings and competencies so that sport psychologists do not stay pigeonholed mental skills coaches. In the next section, I focus on the concept of organisational culture as a key path to such broader proficiency, and specifically focus on the emergence of culture as a concept of interest in sport psychology culture literature. In particular, I outline a number of tracks of research that have defined and shaped our understandings of the field and the concepts applications to date. I begin first, however, not with the emergence of culture in organisational sport psychology, as a genre to enhance the performance discourses and practices of applied sport psychology; but with the cultural turn within another genre of sport psychology that pre-dates the concepts arrival in organisational sport psychology – Cultural Sport Psychology.

2.3.1 Cultural Sport Psychology (CSP)

The first references to culture in sport and exercise psychology journals were in relation to cross-cultural observations. It was highlighted that there was no universal (i.e., cross cultural) approach to applied sport psychology and that sport psychologists had little understanding of how to work

with clients outside of their own culture (Danish et al., 1993; Duda & Allison, 1990). These initial forays were an attempt to engage with issues of cultural difference and a means to challenge sport psychology researchers and practitioners to rethink theory and practice from a culturally aware lens. Following these initial mentions of culture, a ‘cultural turn’ (cf. Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010) has occurred in sport psychology, whereby a growing number of scholars (e.g., Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003; McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2005) called for sport psychologists and researchers to develop cultural sensitivity and corresponding practices across different sporting contexts (McGannon & Smith, 2015). This call has been grounded in the frequent observation that sport is increasingly a global enterprise. For instance, the work environments that sport personnel inhabit are influenced by a growing transnational flow of athletes, coaches, and other staff so that contact and interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds is inevitable (Ronkainen & Blodgett, in press; Ryba, Schinke, Stambulova, & Elbe, 2018). As such, Blodgett and Ronkainen (in press) pointed out, that many sporting environments – such as professional sport teams – are multicultural spaces that inevitably house a range of people with different beliefs, values and practices. Correspondingly, other sport psychology scholars have highlighted the challenges associated with athlete adaptation, acculturation and identity as they move between countries and even continents (Ryba, Stambulova, & Ronkainen, 2016; Schinke, Blodgett, McGannon, & Ge, 2016). Such tracks of research have reinforced suggestions that it is now critical for sport psychologists to better understand cultural variability in motivation, communication, and meanings that athletes assign to sport (Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009).

CSP has thus emerged in response to this need to engage with the issues surrounding sociocultural difference, diversity and culturally competent research and practice (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Ryba, Stambulova, Si, &

Schinke, (2013). According to McGannon and Smith, the central reason for the advocacy of cultural sport psychology is “because culture shapes how we think, feel, and behave; we cannot step outside culture, thus to ignore it would be to miss a key matter that shapes people’s self-identities and lives” (2015, p.79). Such a rationale stems from CSP’s origins in cultural psychology, which emerged as a critique of the universalist theories and methodologies that are found in cross-cultural studies, and that propose a ‘culture-saturated’ theory of human psyche, where psychological processes are underpinned by culture (Ryba et al., 2013). From this view of a person’s psychological make up, cultural psychologists have shown how different meanings can be attached to concepts such as motivation, emotion and the self, depending on cultural contexts; and subsequently warn that Western theories that tend to be ‘ultra-individualised’ do not often reflect psychological phenomena for non-Western cultures and people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder, 1991). However, while Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) noted that CSP is a growing genre in SEP that often focuses on issues surrounding marginalised voices and identities, it is important to highlight that since we *all* think *through* culture, cultural psychology research (inclusive of CSP) is needed not only for ‘exotic’ and indigenous people, but also for dominant groups in Western countries to understand how cultural values shape our thoughts, feelings and actions (Shweder, 1991). In this way, CSP has much to offer in terms of understanding sport organisations in the western world.

Furthermore, CSP not only guides the choice of research participants (e.g., minority athletes) but provides a more thorough critique of theorising, concepts and methodology that can have important implications for researching sport organisations. For instance, CSP scholars have challenged some taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin common constructs in SEP including mental toughness; arguing that perhaps it should not be understood as ‘an inner quality’

and a purely psychological construct but rather a sport sub-cultural ideology that reproduces hegemonic masculine values and disdain for weakness (Coulter, Mallett, & Singer, 2016). Working from a cultural psychology perspective therefore also involves a focus on theorising and concepts from a critical perspective and this can be a useful lens to challenge taken for granted assumptions within organisations, such as the western values that dominate management and organisational theory, such as a concern with effectiveness, progress and the incorporation of technology and the language and practices of science (Alvesson, 2002). A second example is that in the team and organisational culture research in sport, very few scholars have focused on issues of privilege and marginalisation, and when culture change agenda is introduced, it is justified in terms of performance enhancement rather than a commitment to ensuring that everyone's points of view are respected and taken into account. For such reasons, I support the conclusion of Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) that there is considerable value in incorporating the spirit, approaches, and methods of CSP into more organisationally focused culture research.

2.3.2 Organisational Culture in Professional and Elite Sport

Mirroring interest in corporate culture by organisations and conglomerates in the 1980s, elite sport teams, those responsible for leading them and the wider sport media have adopted a similar idea of culture in relation to its 'alleged' capacity to propel teams to sporting glory. In the U.K. sporting scene for instance, Sir Clive Woodward pinpointed organisational culture as a key ingredient of England Rugby's 1999 world cup success. More recently, Sir Dave Brailsford has continuously demanded a culture of innovation and excellence during his tenures at Team Sky and British cycling. The teams that have remained at the very pinnacle of sport over an even longer period, such as the New Zealand All Blacks and Barcelona, are frequently hailed as the prototype for a successful team culture and associated ideas of change (Gilson, Pratt, Roberts & Weymes, 2000;

Hughes, 2018; Kerr, 2013). These examples reinforce the idea that culture is indeed a performance optimiser.

Nevertheless, as various scandals have rocked sport at home and abroad in recent years, culture has been placed – along with their leaders – under the microscope (Ingle, 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). In recent years, a number of athletes and coaches have blown the whistle on cultures of bullying and abuse. In the subsequent fallout, played out under the watchful eye of the public and a glaring media, some cultures within sport have been labelled toxic (Ingle, 2017). Sport authorities have reacted and have started to call for more ethically responsible and caring cultures that have a welfare and safety focus to compliment performance agendas. For instance, at a time of unprecedented success for British sport in terms of medals, championships and global prestige, a recent report on gave clear recommendations for improving the welfare and duty of care for all those engaged in sport in the United Kingdom (Grey-Thompson, 2017). Subsequently, in March of 2017, UK Sport launched a ‘cultural health check’ across all Olympic sports. The sports that fall short of expected standards as identified by the check have been given action plans to support the change demanded with the loss of funding an ultimate possible consequence for failed implementation. In sum, as Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) noted, the “elite sport landscape has changed and organizations face unparalleled pressure to ensure both welfare and winning with undesirable consequences should they fail” (p, 7).

2.3.3 Organisational Culture Research in Sport Psychology

Academic interest the study of culture in the performance enhancement discourses of sport psychology has emerged alongside the growing realisation that individual-focused ‘traditional’ methods of sport psychology were limited in their capacity to help applied practitioners to understand and influence team and organisational performance issues (e.g., Hardy, Jones, &

Gould, 1996, Jones, 2002; Nesti, 2004). It has also grown from and alongside burgeoning interest in organisational sport psychology; a subfield of sport psychology focused on understanding individual behaviour and social processes in sport organisations, with a view to developing optimally functioning organisations (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff, 2017). Correspondingly, sport psychology scholars (e.g., Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff, 2017; Wagstaff & Lerner, 2015) have regularly equated the emergence of organisational sport psychology with Hardy, et al.'s (1996) conclusion in their seminal sport psychology text, that stated “elite athletes do not live in a vacuum; they function within a highly complex social and organizational environment, which exerts major influences on them and their performances” (p. 239–240). Subsequent work identified organisational culture as having a considerable effect on performance outcomes at the Olympic Games (e.g. Gould et al., 2002; Greenleaf et al., 2001). In 2009, Fletcher and Wagstaff concluded their review of the then emerging research on organisational psychology in elite sport by asserting that the ‘climate’ and ‘culture’ in elite sport contexts requires careful and informed management in order to optimise individuals’ experiences and organisational thriving, but that this body of knowledge was still in its initial stages and therefore underdeveloped (2009, p. 432).

Since this time, a number of scholars have highlighted that expertise in team and organisational culture, as it relates to performance, is necessary for effective sport psychology delivery (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank, 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Henriksen, 2015; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, 2019); particularly at the elite-professional levels of sport where more than the application of mental skills techniques is demanded (McDougall, Nesti, & Richardson, 2015; McDougall, Nesti, Richardson

& Littlewood, 2017; Nesti, 2010). Working in a broader capacity across the team or organisation, the sport psychologist has often been portrayed as an agent of culture change, intentionally influencing culture (or at least supporting others, such as performance leaders in this task), to facilitate athletic and operational excellence (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013; Eubank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015). The following section outlines the development of this organisational sport psychology culture literature and major tracks of research that has emerged in recent years.

2.3.4 Fletcher and Arnold (2011): Performance Leadership and Management

While there had been earlier mentions of organisational culture in sport psychology (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2007), Fletcher and Arnold moved the study of organisational culture forward by giving it serious attention alongside their focus on performance leadership and management. In their qualitative study, they interviewed thirteen national performance directors of Olympic sports with regard to performance leadership and management best practices. The study emphasised that orchestrating elite performance was a multifaceted endeavour, of which culture creation was an essential component. They subsequently proposed it was essential for modern day sport psychologists to be equipped with culture change expertise.

In spite of this proclaimed importance however, the authors defined culture only sparsely as “shared beliefs and expectations within the team.” (p, 228) and elided any mention of where this definition was extracted from. They did clarify their conceptualisation of culture in a number of ways, however. First, they asserted that an organisations culture must be compatible with the performance management system and moreover should be carefully aligned to the organisation’s circumstances, any problems requiring attention, and the preferred management style. Primarily, they established two higher order themes in relation to culture. These were ‘Role Awareness’

(lower order themes were National performance director awareness and Developing colleague role knowledge) and the ‘Creation of Organisational and Team Atmosphere’ (lower order themes were Creating an identity, Improving the quality and quantity of contact time, and Promoting compatibility behaviours). Through explanation of these categories, culture was framed as essential to performance leader’s ability to lead and manage the performance system. The establishment of a ‘strong culture’ (achievable, for example, through regular “world class” days, that brought people together before major events, and ensuring role clarity) was also suggested as vital because it ensured that everyone knew what to do thus minimising ambiguity and negativity.

Correspondingly, Fletcher and Arnold asserted that if team members understand their own role and aware of others’ roles, the prevailing culture is likely to be more conducive to realising the team’s vision and goals. In their conclusion, the authors suggested the need for culture expertise in elite sport and recommended that both national performance directors and sport psychologists develop their competencies in this area by examining the interface between management and psychology, and utilising knowledge from organisational psychology.

2.3.5 Nesti and colleagues: Culture in English Premier League Football

One of first sport psychologists to refer to the importance of culture in elite sport was Nesti (2010). Based on over 10 years’ experience working Premier League football clubs, in his book *Psychology in Football*, Nesti (2010) outlined the need for sports psychologists to establish a full understanding of the social context in which they operate, because without this very little could be achieved. Nesti provided a far more thorough description of culture than Fletcher and Arnold, and suggested it referred to much more than observable processes, operational mechanisms and everyday practices, but that also included:

other factors that are harder to identify clearly, but which nevertheless have a significant impact on the working environment. Factors here include unwritten rules, precedents, values and patterns of belief. An organisation's culture is therefore determined more by the ideals that govern it, the vision it pursues, and values it adheres to (Nesti, 2010, p. 9).

In later work, Nesti and colleagues (e.g., Champ, Ronkainen, Nesti, Tod, & Littlewood, 2019; Devaney, Nesti, Ronkainen, Littlewood, & Richardson, 2017; Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti et al., 2012; Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne, & Richardson, 2010) have continually provided practice-informed research, commentary and 'insider' insights that have contextualised the cultures of elite football. Consistent with other research in the area that describes football at the elite-professional level (e.g., Richardson, Gilbourne & Littlewood, 2004; Parker, 1995) Nesti and colleagues have depicted this level of football as volatile, ruthless, harsh and authoritarian. In essence, football clubs are described as demanding environments and laden with challenging realities that impact organisational and performance team-specific culture. These are asserted to include; providing services within an environment where there are distracting influences such as the actions and interferences of agents and contract negotiations; significant media interest, rapid (and unexpected) changes of playing and coaching personnel; interdepartmental conflict, interference from club owners; demanding hours that place stress upon family life; building relationships and establishing credibility with a wide-array of different individuals and groups (e.g., athletes, coaches, specialist staff and technical experts, and management and leadership professionals); handling ethical challenges and confidentiality issues relating to information sharing and working with multiple personnel and departments; dealing with interdepartmental communication issues and conflicts; understanding and working within cultures that are often volatile and unpredictable while resisting significant pressures to conform to the demands of the

culture; undertaking a role that involves unfamiliar organisational psychology work and culture shaping practices; and pressures to continually evidence efficacy of support in environments of extreme accountability.

In such conditions, the sport psychologist must be able to quickly grasp and understand the range and diversity of these contextual factors that contribute to the unique culture that exists within each professional sport club (Nesti, 2010; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011; Relvas et al., 2010). Short-termism and volatility are often the order of the day (Nesti, 2010; Nesti et al., 2012) so an inability or failure to read the ‘cultural matrix’ as Nesti has termed it, will almost certainly lead to impaired service delivery, but moreover, possibly a quick dismissal (Nesti, 2010; Relvas et al., 2010). The sport psychologist is not immune to the influences of culture, however, and consequently, must seek to understand the culture and its demands without becoming compromised by them (Nesti, 2010; Relvas et al., 2010). In this regard – and unlike other organisational culture literature in sport psychology – there is a clearer emphasis on the importance of practitioner agency in the face of the socialising forces of challenging environments.

To further support development of understanding in this area, Nesti and colleagues have also considered culture alongside psychological themes such as identity, mental toughness, critical moments and athlete transitions (e.g., Champ et al., 2018; Eubank, Nesti, & Littlewood, 2017; Nesti, 2004, 2010, 2016; Nesti et al., 2012). This more expansive focus has demonstrated that culture is not a standalone concept and that there is considerable value in considering it in relation to other topics that are also of importance to people and how they experience their world.

Finally, Nesti and colleagues have also considered the nature of organisational culture work in a sport psychology role. According to Nesti (cf. Eubank, et al., 2014), through this type of work, the sport psychologist has the opportunity to act as a ‘cultural architect’ and help to create the

conditions for a high-level performance culture by working with systems, structures and the climate of the organisation. Nesti (cf. Eubank, et al., 2014) asserted that this organisational role could in some way mirror the duties of a Human Resource figure or Occupational Psychologist, and could include: managing the interface between coaches and sports scientists, helping to shape and implement longer-term strategy for the team on matters like, player and staff recruitment, improving internal communication, and co-ordinating staff training and development needs. In this way, they support the development of high-level performance culture by addressing the cultural systems, structures and organisational climate.

Unfortunately, it is also noted that with a few exceptions, sport psychologists are generally unprepared for this role, through lack of appropriate training and a literature base that rarely considers what sport psychologists at this level of sport actually *do* (Nesti, 2010). While such practice-informed research and insider (emic) accounts of culture clearly have much to offer current research trends into team and organisational culture and the training and education of future sport psychologists, such accounts are rare as the most professionalised environments of sport are often difficult to access for academics (Nesti, 2010). Consequently, there is a clear lack of published articles from applied sport psychology practitioners reflecting on their experiences of working within the cultures of elite sport. This suggests that there is a corresponding need for research that reflects on and describes the varied cultures of numerous other sporting contexts and the challenges faced by sports psychologists working across varied and testing domains.

2.3.6 Cruickshank and Colleagues: Culture Change

Citing Fletcher and Arnold's (2011) study as impetus and justification, Cruickshank and Collins (2012) introduced and outlined the value of *culture change* to sport psychology. Over a number of articles, these authors established made substantial and sustained advances in this particular area,

and more minimally to sport psychology understanding of culture. Acknowledging that culture is complex and providing a definitive definition is problematic, Cruickshank and Collins relied upon recent assertions in sport psychology, social psychology and organisational studies (cf. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; San-Fu & Bor-Shiuan, 2005; Schein, 2004; Shteynberg, 2010), to define culture: “a dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, p. 340).

Once they defined culture however, they quickly moved onto supplying a definition of culture change: “The management-led establishment of shared and group-regulated values, perceptions, and behaviours across the performance department which persist over time” (Cruickshank & Collins 2012, p. 340), which acts to “facilitate enduring high performance” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013, p.8). From this base, they argued that culture change is a unique and important concept, thankfully (and usefully) demarcating it from transformational leadership, group dynamics and organisational sport psychology (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013). In later work, Cruickshank and colleagues developed a first high-performance sport-specific model of applied culture change (Cruickshank et al., 2014) to guide performance directors. Subsequent research has developed this model through an examination of different elite sport contexts, such as within professional sport and within the UK Olympic system (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015).

This body of work (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015) and the subsequent models that were developed from it are underpinned by a distinctly managerialist approach to culture, that is reminiscent of idea of corporate culture and change in 1980s organisational culture literature. For example, Cruickshank et al., have argued that an optimal culture is defined management, their initial actions and ideals, while successful implementation rests on their skilful management and control of the social system (Cruickshank

& Collins, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015). Correspondingly, culture change is presumed to be regulated through a number of tactics (e.g., covertly and overtly shaping perceptions of influential personnel, seeking out allies while ignoring detractors, social dominance, Machiavellian and dark leadership practices and performance-focused ruthlessness behaviours) were all employed during leaders' efforts to deliver change in their performance teams. It is important to note that Cruickshank and colleagues have repeatedly attempted to delineate their focus on team and performance department culture, as distinct from concern with the culture of the organisation. They have argued for this delineation on the grounds that team culture (i.e., within the team/performance department) most closely fits the sport psychologist/performance director remit geographical and location/proximity factors that separate the team/performance department from the wider organisation (e.g., HQ and NGB's) and that this limits the influence of organisational culture on team culture.

2.3.7 Henriksen and Colleagues: Talent Development Environments and Culture

Over a number of studies, Henriksen and colleagues (e.g. Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Henriksen, 2015) have investigated successful athletic talent development environments (ATDEs) and the role of organisational culture in their formation.⁷ According to Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018), this body of work has made perhaps the greatest empirical contribution to the understanding of organisational culture in sport psychology to date. Their contributions have been aided by close attention to ideas from organisational management and in particular, Schein's (1985) model of culture, giving it a more thorough conceptual base than much other work in within sport psychology. Schein (e.g., 1985, 2010) has framed organisational culture

⁷ More recently this focus has now shifted from 'talent development environments' to 'dual career environments', using Henriksen's work as the grounding for the current EU Erasmus and funded multinational collaboration 'ECO-DC' (<https://dualcareers.eu/>).

as a series of assumptions that a person makes about their environment and has organised these assumptions into three categories, or levels. These are artefacts, values and basic assumptions; the assumption being that each level becomes more difficult to articulate and change, and increasingly representative of *the* culture.

On the surface, there are ‘cultural artefacts’. Cultural artefacts include stories, myths, customs and traditions that are evident to outsiders as well as physical cultural manifestations such as clothing, buildings and organisation charts. Artefacts are easy to observe but hard to decipher and a deeper familiarity with the culture is required to determine what they disclose about the culture. Underneath this layer of culture are ‘espoused values’; the principles, norms, goals and standards that the organisation displays to the world. Henriksen noted that these espoused values exist in the minds of the members and serve as visible motivations for actions, although espoused values (i.e., what the members say they do) do not always correspond to the enacted values (i.e., what they actually do). At the ‘core’ of culture are ‘basic assumptions’. These represent the ultimate and underlying source of actions. Basic assumptions consist of beliefs and assumptions that are accepted and taken for granted and which exist at a level below that of the members’ consciousness, and therefore derived by the researcher. Key to this view of culture is that it is characterised by the integration of key basic assumptions into a cultural paradigm that guides the socialization of new members, providing stability over time and helping the organisation to adapt to an ever-changing environment. Leaders and those with cultural expertise are assumed to be able to manage and facilitate this process so that culture in effect changes from one state to the desired one.

Building on his previous research and using this idea of culture Henriksen (2015), described a sport psychology intervention to the Danish national orienteering team, aimed at

improving their organisational culture. He outlined a number of steps across a number of planned phases (needs analysis, workshops to create ownership, designing the pillars of the new culture, integration of new values into daily practices, evaluation) and strategies (e.g., ongoing and collective evaluation, telling positive stories, paying attention to non-verbal communication, making values visible by hanging symbols of values in the training room) as he attempted to change the culture. The intent of this account was to “produce a much-needed set of guidelines to inform the process of culture change” (Henriksen, 2015, p. 141). Henriksen’s own evaluation of the intervention confirmed that the problematic culture had completely disappeared, with athletes feeling at ease in the national team and happy with the new, supportive group culture. In light of a lack of organisational culture intervention within sport psychology (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018), this case study has provided an important set of guidelines that can be used by sport psychologists who are attempting to facilitate culture change.

2.3.8 McCalla and Fitzpatrick (2016): Culture and the Micropolitical Climate

This article focused on how sport psychology can be integrated to high performance teams, and emphasised the importance of the various stakeholders involved, the salience of micropolitics, and culture. The authors’ understanding of culture is derived primarily from Cruickshank and Collins (2012) definition and Schein’s proposed layers of culture model. Building on these foundations, the article reiterated much of Cruickshank and colleagues’ work around culture change: that is the high performing team is a complex system with ever changing patterns of rule and conflict (Cruickshank et al., 2013), and that change has to be managed in order to optimise performance. In this regard, the article offers little to advance current conceptualisations of culture in sport psychology. McCalla and Fitzpatrick do, however, draw attention to some underappreciated aspects of culture within sport psychology culture discourse. They suggested that

while it is imperative that a sport psychologist is familiar with team culture, they must also be mindful of the subcultures within the team and the wider organisational culture. In organisational sport psychology literature at least, the importance of subcultures have only been acknowledged in some work by (e.g., Champ et al., 2018; Relvas et al., 2010; Nesti, 2010). In the genre of CSP, Schinke and McGannon have edited a book about the psychology of sub-culture in sport and physical activity. McCalla and Fitzpatrick's article thus confers a point of separation from the approach to culture advocated by others who have tended to downplay the role of subcultures and the interface between team culture and the broader organisational culture.

McCalla and Fitzpatrick also strongly emphasised that culture change is highly unlikely to be smooth or uncontested, partly because members of a group experience emotional, behavioural and attitudinal response to the various and distinct stages of change (Wagstaff, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2015). Though the difficulty of culture change is acknowledged that (Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015), the underlying implication has generally been that culture is malleable and culture change has been reported as seamless if the sport psychologist/performance leader undertakes certain, specified tasks (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2014; Henriksen, 2015).

2.3.9 Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie (2018): A Thorough Review

This recent review provided perhaps the most comprehensive overview of organisational culture and relevant literature in sport psychology to date. Along with recent publications stemming from this thesis (e.g., McDougall, Nesti, Richardson & Littlewood, 2017; McDougall, Ronkainen, Richardson, Littlewood, & Nesti, 2019) it has made the most concerted effort to conceptualising culture; tracing the emergence of interest in the concept to parallel developments and interest in the applied world of sport and corresponding focus on organisational sport psychology, and in particular, one subsection of this area — the study of organisational environments. To fully

illuminate culture, Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie proposed a case similar to the one I have made in this thesis — that the sport psychology community must first understand where ‘organizational culture’ “has been” (p. 7). To aid this understanding, they grounded attempts to clarify how culture has been defined, conceptualised and used within wider sport research (which predates sport psychology-specific attention to culture) and organisational management research (which has most clearly informed sport research in the area).

The end product is a scoping and informative review. The authors outlined the important contributions made by sport psychology scholars, such as Cruickshank and Collins (culture change) and Henriksen (talent development and organisational culture), but in addition, also highlighted a number of important (and useful) studies within sport management; a discipline they noted that has been primarily leadership-centric in its approach to organisational culture. In essence, this means linking culture to transformational change and the culture building activities of administrators (e.g., Weese, 1995), head coaches (e.g., Schroeder, 2010), and owners (e.g., Frontiera, 2010). Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie also usefully highlighted the work of Girginov (2010) who proposed that individuals carry cultural understanding that relate to upbringing (e.g., family, religion, gender, ethnicity) but can accommodate differences in cultural views; leading him to conclude that sport managers mediate meaning while sport organizations socialise, acculturate and control (p. 413). This work and the conclusions of Girginov suggest that leadership is important to the formation of culture, but should also be culturally informed, a position that Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie also seem to hold (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie also relied heavily on an excellent recent review of sport culture literature (Maitland, Hills, & Rhind, 2015) to ground and develop many of their ideas and central critiques. In a systematic review of 33 studies published between 1995 and 2013, Maitland

et al. uncovered that organisational culture research has disproportionately occurred in America, that most research has adopted the perspective that culture is integrated across the environment and shared and has relied upon Schein's (1985) definition of organisational culture. As noted, by Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, Schein's is the most commonly used definition of organisational culture in sport (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Mills & Hoeber, 2013; Southall & Nagle, 2003). This definition has been reiterated in a more recent edition of his text, Schein (2010) as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 18).

From this perspective, Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie proceeded to describe cultures as microcultures, characterised by the meanings, values, and symbols that are shared by organisational members, and reiterated that many of the definitions within sport-based research have been allied to an integration perspective. In spite of their recognition of the uniform character within sport organisational culture literature, much of the rest of the review is attuned to alternative and more nuanced ways of conceptualising culture.⁸ For instance, they referred to the work of Martin and Meyerson and their three perspective approach (Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987) as a means of detecting contestation and ambiguity, and the fundamental classic paradigmatic split (culture as something an organisation has vs something an organisation is) (Smircich, 1983). They also provided a similar deconstruction (cf. McDougall et al., 2017) of

⁸ Although Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie are thorough in their review of some of the major nuances and issues within organisational culture research, many of these points were also described in detail in an earlier paper *Emphasising the culture in culture change: Examining current perspectives of culture and offering some alternative ones* (McDougall et al., 2017).

various lenses that can be used in the study of culture, focusing in particular on levels and forms of culture. These are outlined briefly below:

Levels of culture refer, in general, to what is espoused and accessible, and deeper, more difficult to uncover. In essence, this is to do with concerns about what is really going on in an organisation. Similar to outlines provided by Henriksen (2015) and McDougall and colleagues (2017), Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie reiterated the influence of Schein's (1985; 2010) work and distinctions between artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions. They agree with Schein's assumption that artefacts and what is espoused represent easier to access levels and that basic assumptions which are (as proposed by Schein) taken for granted and hard to discern, even for those who hold them.

In addition to considering what level of culture that analysis is being conducted, researchers must also consider what forms of culture they will focus on. Drawing on influential and well-known organisational management literature (e.g., Martin & Frost, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1993) Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) outlined a number of cultural forms as "jargon, myths, stories, legends, folklore, jokes, slogans, rituals, ties, ceremonies, celebrations, traditions, heroes, behavioural norms, rules, taboos, dress, and physical arrangements" (p. 24). These forms or 'elements' of culture are comparable to those listed by McDougall and colleagues and suggest that it is unwise for sport psychology researchers to settle into the belief that culture only refers to a small range of concepts and categories (that usually centralise around values and behaviour), and moreover, that greater care is required to elucidate what is meant by descriptors used to characterise culture.

In their concluding remarks, Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie make some excellent comments that have the potential to positively shape the field of study in the years to come. They reinforce

the need to be aware of conceptual ambiguity and highlight it as one of the largest challenges facing our researchers, making it essential that researchers define and clarify their conceptual perspective. At the same time, they are wary of a one-size fits all approach and in the concluding sections of the review made clear some of the major variances within organisational culture research. This diversity included for instance:

- Differences within subjectivist-interpretivist and accounts from an emic (insider perspective).
- Different methods of research used, for instance questionnaire (quantitative) and ethnography (qualitative).
- Variances in whether the aim is to understand how culture is maintained (for instance in the face of employee turnover and change; how newcomers might be socialised)
- Whether culture can be managed or changed, and if so to what extent.
- The role of leadership in efforts to maintain, change, or manage a culture and whether researchers believe culture is leader-led or leader-informed.
- The purpose of organisational culture research (i.e., in pursuit of performance only or striking a balance between performance and well-being).

The explanations of these variances alone make this review an exceptional starting point for culture scholars in sport psychology. I have offered a response with a colleague ‘Organisational culture is not dead. . . yet: Response to Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie’, which in turn generated a further reply ‘Alive and Kicking’: Securing the health of organisational culture in sport A response to McDougall and Ronkainen’. In this exchange, some central tenets of the original article have been challenged, clarified and developed. One aspect of the original article that is highlighted (McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019) is that by adopting a neutral stance, Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie

do not go far enough in their critique of some of the problematic assumptions about culture that have become embedded in organisational sport psychology culture literature to date. It is the detailing and challenge of some of these assumptions and commonalities (or myths), that the literature review now turns.

2.4 Three Organisational Culture Myths and their Consequences for Sport Psychology

Research and Practice

The following section critically disseminates some common assumptions that underpin much of the described organisational sport psychology literature in the previous section. The following section has since been published as: McDougall, M., Ronkainen, N., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M., & Nesti, M. (2019). Three team and organisational culture myths and their consequences for sport psychology research and practice, *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Doi:10.1080/1750984X.2019.1638433. Per copywrite agreement, I am permitted to use this article, or large parts of it, within my own work, as long as it is prefaced by an acknowledgement of the existence of the article, and the full, corresponding citation.

2.4.1 Introduction

Myths, in at least in one sense of the word, are beliefs and ideas that are widely held but which are ultimately false, exaggerated or idealised (Cohen, 1969). As they are told and re-told, myths are perpetuated and over time often become the starting point for all discussion in a particular area. It is only when subjected to empirical scrutiny and critical evaluation, that they are revealed as tenuous and less definite than they originally seemed or was claimed.

There has been a tradition of challenging well-established perspectives, or *myths* in sport psychology. For instance, Professor Lew Hardy in his Coleman Griffith Address and subsequent article (1997) outlined the myths of applied consultancy work. Hardy challenged existing thought

in three areas: that cognitive anxiety is always harmful to performance and should be reduced whenever possible, that outcome goals and ego orientations have a detrimental effect on a number of performance-related variables, and that internal visual imagery is more beneficial to performance than external visual imagery. More recently, Professor Dave Collins — on award of the ‘DSEP Distinguished Contribution Award for 2013’ and in the related paper (2014) — described ‘Three More Myths of Applied Sport Psychology Practice’. This comprised a constructive challenge to the widely held assumptions that we *are* an applied science, that we *are* focused on client experience, and that we *do* have a secure basis for development through our literature base. Challenging myths is an essential endeavour because it is through the critical appraisal of current literature, that we can ensure ‘our educated guesses are truly educated’ (Hardy, 1997, p. 291). Moreover, it is a process that can ‘stimulate debate’ and ‘take things forward’ (Collins, 2014, p. 37). In this section, I build on this important tradition and challenge three myths in an area that increasingly fascinates both research and applied sport psychologists – team and organisational culture. This is a vital endeavour, since there is a general complacency that underlies the uniform approaches to team and organisational culture within sport psychology, and because the very fate of culture is argued to hinge on its uses and the diversity with which it is located and examined (cf. Alvesson, et al., 2017; Ortner, 1999).

While the literature on team and organisational culture has grown steadily, a preoccupation with how to use culture for high performing ends has preceded more focused attempts at first trying to understand what culture is or might be. Aside from some recent attempts to clarify the concept and expand its meaning(s) (McDougall et al., 2017; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, 2019), a number of assumptions about culture (i.e., the myths I will subsequently outline) seem to have been widely accepted within sport psychology without much

discussion. This typical line of inquiry has arguably fostered a superficial appreciation of what is widely regarded as a notoriously complex concept (cf. Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Martin, 2002; Schein, 2010). As McDougall and Ronkainen (2019) noted, shallow understandings of culture operating in tandem with leader-led and managerialist perspectives have already contributed to considerable intellectual stagnation within wider organisational and management culture scholarship. They urged the sport psychology community to be mindful of this point and to recognise that as a discipline we are presently travelling on the same path that led to decline (both in volume and intellectual vitality) in organisational studies almost three decades ago. Alongside Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2019), they further recommended that sport psychology scholars do not oversimplify culture, and continue to cultivate a deeper appreciation of it, its foundations, and the variety of perspectives that can be used to understand and communicate its meanings.

The primary aim within this section is to support a progression of understanding of culture by identifying and challenging three myths that have gathered significant traction within the team and organisational literature. These are: that culture is defined and characterised *only* by what is shared; that culture is a variable and therefore something that a group *has*; and finally, that culture change involves creating a completely *new* culture. We offer observations constructively in the hope they will stimulate debate and dialogue among scholars and practitioners and encourage others to question taken for granted threads that run through the spine of our discipline's team and organisational culture literature.

2.4.2 Myth 1: Culture is Defined and Characterised 'Only' by what is 'Shared'

There is almost complete consensus in the performance discourses of sport psychology literature that culture is characterised purely by what is *shared* (e.g., Bailey, Benson, & Bruner,

2017; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). In a study of performance leadership, Fletcher and Arnold referred to culture as ‘shared beliefs and expectations’ (2012, p. 228), while Bailey and colleagues (2017, p. 228) in an examination of the organisational culture of CrossFit used the extensively cited work of organisational scholar Edgar Schein (2010) to define organisational culture as:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 2010, p. 18)

Cruickshank and Collins (2012) also drew upon the scholarship of Schein to help define team culture as ‘a dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations, and practices across the members and generations of a defined group’ (p. 340). This latter definition is one that has been utilised frequently in research and commentary (including our own), as a base from which to further examine ideas of team and organisational culture and associatively ideas of culture change (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Eubank, et al., 2017; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; McDougall, et al., 2015; McDougall et al., 2017).

Following these definitions, successful cultures, at any level of analysis (e.g., team, performance department, organisation), are argued to be ones built on the creation and regulation of shared cultural elements such as beliefs, expectations, values and practices (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Henriksen, 2015). Themes of unity, togetherness, cohesion, coherence, clarity and commonality of goals and vision are frequently extolled (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017, Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013a, 2013b, 2014,

2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015). There are now also specific courses of action, models and guides to best practice that performance leaders (and supporting sport psychologists) can adopt to maximise these themes to facilitate a high performing and ‘shared in’ culture (Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015).

The precise strategies and practices recommended within these guidelines and frameworks to engender a high performing culture within a team or organisation are varied, spanning a range of planning, evaluation and management activities that help to promote shared perceptions and acceptance of change (Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). Such activities include, for instance, embedding ‘agreed’ upon group values into day-to-day existence and behaviours (Henriksen, 2015); the subtle and covert shaping of the physical, structural, and psychosocial context in which culture members make choices (Cruickshank et al., 2014); and increasing political influence through seeking social allies and cultural architects and aligning the perceptions of key personnel (Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015). Those who toe the line and live the desired values will likely be rewarded (Henriksen, 2015). Conversely, it is suggested that some cultural members should be ignored so as to subliminally create shared expectations and adherence to the focus and principles of the performance programme (Cruickshank et al., 2014). From this view, culture involves ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’ (Cruickshank et al., 2015 p. 46), and is labelled as ‘the way things are done around here’ (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013, p. 9; Cruickshank et al., 2013b, p. 323), ‘the way we do things here’ (Bailey et al., 2017, p. 2) or ‘how we do things’ (Henriksen, 2015, p. 146).

This way of describing culture is a cross-discipline commonality indicative of excessive reliance (either knowingly or unwittingly, but often unacknowledged) upon structural-functionalist traditions that were developed within British social anthropology (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952) from

the social theory of Emile Durkheim (1893). Central to this school of thought is the idea that social systems have a high degree of cohesion and stability, with unity, consistency and harmony characterising relationships between members of a given group or society. While anthropology and sociology became increasingly critical of this idea of culture, structural-functionalism found new life in its profound, even overbearing influence on the rapid development of the organisational culture concept in the 1980s (Meek, 1988; Ouichi & Wilkins, 1985). It is highly visible in the lifetime work of influential organisational culture authority Edgar Schein (cf. 2010), and therefore often present within a significant body of academic literature that adopts Schein's work as an intellectual default position from which to consider culture. In essence, the premises of structural-functionalism – while not always translated faithfully – have been melded to a distinctly managerialist approach which has seen the concept of culture frequently equated with social cohesion on the one hand and group functioning and effectiveness on the other (Meek, 1988).

In the described conceptualisation of culture, there is limited room for contestation, ambiguity and variability of interpretation. For example, in a critique of Cruickshank et al.'s (2013) study of culture change within a professional sport team, Gilmore (2013) observed that the creative capacity by which group members as culture-makers can resist the dominant culture is missing from the account. It is an omission that we believe extends throughout sport psychology team and organisational culture research to date. Yet, as Gilmore (2013) noted, athlete autobiographies are replete with stories of resistance and rebellion to cultural and managerial regimes. Elite sport environments are also consistently distinguished as socially complex, volatile and ridden with conflict and unique flows of power (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; 2015; Nesti, 2010); characteristics that would seem to necessitate a closer cultural inspection of contestation and uncertainty. However, it seems as though anything not clearly shared in by all

group members is viewed in performance enhancement discourses as somehow lying *outside* of culture. The implicit assumption is that culture is a naturally homogenized and homogenizing phenomenon and that anything that is not ‘shared’ in is not cultural, but rather a ‘temporary’ blip to be managed out on the road to unity.

There are other established traditions in wider culture scholarship that resist such neat presentations of culture. For instance, in his phenomenally influential book *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), anthropologist Clifford Geertz declared that ‘nothing has done more to discredit cultural analysis than the construction of impeccable depictions of formal order in whose actual existence nobody can quite believe’ (p. 18). Indeed, anthropologists have become increasingly at ease with the need to rethink culture in terms of being a singular, shared set of meanings that distinguish one culture from another (Abu-Lughod, 1997) and have offered persistent theoretical and empirical challenges to this outdated conceptualisation (cf. Maxwell, 2012). In organisational domains, many well-known culture researchers have also been sceptical of definitions and accounts of culture that are devoid of attention to difference, variability, conflict, contestation and ambiguity (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002, 2004; Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Wilmott, 1993). Joanne Martin, for example, suggested that what the shared culture position actually offers is ‘a seductive promise of harmony and value homogeneity that is empirically unmerited and unlikely to be fulfilled’ (Martin, 2004, p. 7). In cross-cultural literature (e.g., Triandis, 1995), scholars have also pointed out that conflict and variability of interpretation are not only present but also sometimes valued in individualistic cultures (the main context of team and organisational culture research in sport). These challenges denote a common critique directed at ‘impeccable’ accounts of culture; that a concept of culture wed to ideas of consensus and clarity is simply too

undifferentiated, too homogeneous. Given various forms of social difference and inequality, how could everyone within a group hold the same worldview and orientation towards it (Ortner, 2005)?

The implication of this challenge is that regardless of the unit of cultural analysis (e.g., team, performance department, or organisation), the conceptualisation and operationalisation of culture must include more than what is coherent and shared simply because cultural members interpret, evaluate and enact it in various ways. Many organisational management researchers have therefore recognised the purposeful existence and development of sub-cultures and countercultures which can support, contest, or be indifferent to *the* culture articulated and espoused by upper management (e.g., Martin, 2002). Elite sport, having undergone rapid professionalisation and expansion within global economies and multicultural societies, are increasingly acknowledged as occupationally, demographically and culturally diverse (Nesti, 2010; Ronkainen & Blodgett, in press; Ryba, et al., 2018). It follows that the existence of multiple subcultures imbued with alternative interpretations of how things are — rather than one unitary culture — is likely in most sporting contexts. I may also reasonably add that people are usually part of a number of cultures (both within and outside of an organisation or team) and derive their identity(s) and values from many sources. Various identities and identifications can include, for instance, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, politics, religion, spirituality, family, class, and meaningful experiences (Blodgett, et al., 2015). Cultural learning and the identities that stem from these important sources are unlikely to be completely dissolved, forgotten or entirely ignored, even in the face of managerial processes and the forceful promotion of a unitary culture and a ‘way things are around here’ philosophy.

Together, these ideas challenge notions of a single, shared, monolithic culture; highlighting the very premise as unrealistic and even harmful. For example, in cultural sport psychology (CSP) literature, it has been suggested that athletes negotiate their identities in relation to multiple

sources; but that identity can become oppressed and marginalised within sport cultures or particular contexts, such as in the face of discrimination and social exclusion (Blodgett, Ge, Schinke & McGannon, 2017). CSP scholars (e.g., Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009) and applied practitioners (e.g., Nesti, 2004) within our discipline have therefore called for the development of more nuanced understandings of cultural variability in motivation, communication, and meanings that athletes ascribe to sport.

2.4.3 Myth 2: Culture is a Variable and therefore Something that a Team or Organisation ‘has’

In sport psychology team and organisational culture research and commentary, culture is primarily treated as something that a group *has* rather than as something a group *is* (i.e., that permeates its whole existence) (McDougall et al., 2017; Ronkainen & Blodgett, in press). In this way, culture is considered as something that a group has ownership over. As property of a group, culture is framed as a clear entity that is ‘out there’ in the environment, and therefore easily discoverable. In part, what renders culture discoverable is the distinct features and processes that it is assumed to be comprised of. In sport psychology, the most commonly identified core elements of culture are values, practices, expectations and beliefs that group members share (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). It is through the identification of these, and similar elements, that culture is seemingly transformed from a slightly ethereal phenomenon with non-observable properties into something more concrete and that a group can ‘possess’.

From this acceptance of a somewhat positivist view of social reality, culture has frequently been operationalised in a manner comparable to how experimental scientists treat variables. As a variable, culture can be isolated, regulated, mechanically manipulated and ultimately changed through strategy, planning and intervention to support the aims and agendas of decision makers.

Research within this perspective primarily adopts a functional approach (Alvesson, 2002), whereby the emphasis becomes how the cultural parts that comprise the whole (such as beliefs, values, and practices) function to maintain social control (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Following in this structural-functionalist tradition, sport and organisational researchers have attempted to distinguish between cultures that are more or less functional (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Henriksen, 2015; Schein, 2010). Certain types of cultures are assumed to lead to desirable outcomes such as employee commitment, motivation, adherence to values and effectiveness. In this way, culture is framed as *the* critical variable to improve or reinvigorate performance.

The intuitive value of thinking about culture in this manner is continually reinforced by the sport media and performance leaders, who regularly espouse the benefits of getting a ‘strong’, ‘right’, or another particular type of culture in place as if it is easily manoeuvrable. At the same time, those who do not fit the idealised culture are often marginalised and could be labelled in various ways such as ‘team cancer’ (McGannon, Hoffmann, Metz, & Schinke, 2012) or lacking mental toughness (Coulter, Mallett, & Singer, 2016). Typically and in relation to Myth 1, this often revolves around the desire for *having* cultures that are underpinned and regulated by consensus, unity, and coordinated action.

Outside of sport psychology, however, many researchers have discussed the idea that culture is a root-metaphor for group understanding. This means that a group *is* a culture, or rather, can be seen as if it is one (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Smircich, 1983; Wilmott, 1993). Organisations then, for example, are therefore not ‘understood and analysed in material terms, of which culture is a *part* but in terms of their expressive, ideational, and symbolic aspects’ (Smircich, 1983, p. 348). This is a perspective more aligned to the way many anthropologists — especially from the 1970s onwards — have treated culture (Meek, 1988; Wilmott, 1993). It is also more commensurate

with how researchers in the CSP movement – a distinct, yet parallel track to culture research in high-performance sport (e.g., Ryba & Wright, 2005; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009) – have considered culture.

From this alternative position on culture, the social world is conferred a far less concrete (though not necessarily less real) status. As a more fluid and evolving entity culture is no longer viewed as readily quantifiable or easily identifiable (Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Smircich, 1983). Instead, it is seen as a creation of people; a product of the network of symbols and meanings that cultural members negotiate, produce and reproduce over time (Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Meek, 1988; Smircich, 1983). Culture is thus assumed to be borne of social interaction and deeply embedded in and entwined with the contextual richness of the social life of cultural members (Meek, 1988; Smircich, 1983). It is the degree of this embeddedness that renders culture less easy to discover and why it cannot be mechanically moved around (Meek 1988) as if it is a ‘thing’ in the natural world.

Neither is culture seen as something that can be imported into a group or created by leadership or consultants with expertise (Meek, 1988), as culture change researchers in sport psychology have been inclined to imply (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). Rather, because all members of a group are culture makers (Gilmore, 2013), its creation is emphasised as layered and complex, rather than originating or developing from any one person or source (Meek, 1988). Proponents of the root-metaphor view of culture are thus inclined to play down the leadership-driven practical usages of culture that are sought by management; a pursuit that many culture purists have historically deemed unworthy of academic attention (Willmott, 1993). Although this outlook may seem pessimistic and even combative, the link between culture

and group performance — while seemingly intuitive — has been elusive, difficult to establish and lacks empirical support (Gregory, Harris, Armenakis, & Shook, 2009; Siehl & Martin, 1990).

2.4.4 Myth 3: Culture Change Involves Creating a ‘New’ Culture

Central to the functional concerns of team and organisational culture scholars in sport psychology is the process of culture change and in particular, the move towards a *new* culture. It is a fascination induced by growing interest in organisational and management processes, performance leadership and the need for sport psychologists to be more effective with groups (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Culture change is viewed as a way for performance leaders and supporting sport psychologists to meet unrelenting demands for success and avoid the consequences for not delivering it, such as termination of employment (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012). According to Cruickshank and Collins (2012), this process typically involves a change *in* culture (i.e., doing what’s already being done but better) or a change *of* culture (i.e., introducing new principles/practices). It is in the latter that the idea of an entirely new culture is most evident. Change and successful optimisation of an underperforming culture depend on group member acceptance that the *old* (singular) culture is no longer working or supporting goal attainment, or that the new culture is more rewarding or appealing (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Henriksen, 2015).

For instance, in his detailed case study of culture change in the Danish orienteering team, Henriksen (2015) repeatedly referred to the shift from the old culture to a new culture. He described ‘the rocky road to the new culture’ (p. 146), “designing the pillars of the new culture’ (p. 147), and a ‘ritualistic goodbye to the old culture’” (p. 149). During the change journey — spanning initial needs assessment to change program evaluation — anything that opposed this change was cast as villainous, while the new values to be inculcated into the team were heralded

as better and heroic. New values described were ultimately positive, inspiring and agreed upon, and became accepted as the team's espoused values. For culture change to succeed, it was advised that these espoused values must be enacted by team members in daily practices and normal routines so that they become part of the team's identity and basic assumptions.

Reflecting on the case study, the culture change (i.e., from old to new) was assessed as successful by Henriksen (2015). One year after the new culture had been completely embedded, the program was evaluated, with group members in agreement that the problematic old culture was no longer a troublesome characteristic of the team. In other work, Fletcher and Arnold (2011) also articulated 'the creation of a culture' (p. 234); as did Cruickshank and colleagues across a number of articles, while emphasising that the process of culture change is never-ending (Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015).

The myth being perpetuated here is that culture change involves moving from an *old* culture to an entirely *new* one. This is an appealing, but a particularly misleading myth, even if it is meant in more symbolic, rather than literal terms. Wider literature and theory from anthropology, sociology and organisational management offers several points of understanding that do not support the premise of culture shifting so completely whenever some form of change or new practice is implemented (e.g., Martin, 2002; Meek, 1988). While recognising that culture is not a static entity, but fluid, importantly, all cultures nonetheless retain elements that have been historically important and that support the group's existence, growth, and sense of meaning and tradition (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Schein, 2010).

Sport lends itself easily to the sourcing of such examples. The New Zealand All Blacks are unimaginable without the Haka. In football, the legendary *This is Anfield* sign that Liverpool FC players ritually touch as they take the field has endured redesign, restoration and refinement of

tradition, but has nonetheless remained (both physically and with regards to symbolic performance). For instance, and most recently, Liverpool FC manager Jurgen Klopp ordered players *not* to touch the sign before a game. It was his opinion that the current squad of players — in trying to emulate the glory of previous generations — must earn the right to touch the sign as they take the field. In this example, new practice indicates how cultural meaning is preserved even in the face of new and amended practices and rituals.

Cultural symbols and artefacts are valued and protected by a group because they relate to identity (Hatch, 1993), traditions, customs and a *way of life* (Harris, 1964). As such, they will not be given up easily even under demands from authority, suggesting that culture cannot be changed as a whole and may not be malleable or entirely susceptible to leader or practitioner-led change. If some of these inner workings of culture seem incompatible with agendas of carefully planned change, then in part, this is because they are tied to concepts of structure, hierarchy power and resistance. By affording these ideas minimal attention, or grounding them primarily in leader-centric points of view, sport psychology literature — and particularly culture change literature — has arguably provided unrealistic expectations that practitioners can easily change a culture in deliberate ways, even into an entirely new one if that is what is required. The danger, however, of such an action-orientated approach, is that the sport psychologist risks misunderstanding the meanings that people in the sporting environment assign, which can lead to a loss of trust in the practitioner (Balague, 1999). Experienced organisational culture consultants try to access important cultural assumptions before seeking to change what they do not yet understand (Schein, 2010). Nesti (2010) referred to this in the context of sport psychology delivery and emphasised the importance of reading the cultural matrix and delivering a service that is *informed* by the existing culture.

2.5 Concluding Remarks to the Literature Review

In this section, I have identified three team and organisational culture myths that are consistently presented in sport psychology literature and have outlined their potential problematic consequences for research and practice. These are (1) that culture is defined and characterised only by what is shared; (2) that culture is a variable and something a team or an organisation has; and (3) that culture change involves a complete transformation from the old culture to an entirely new one. Unquestioned, these myths have the potential to constrain rather than broaden sport psychology understanding of culture. With this in mind, I have discussed alternative culture ideas and theories from wider sources of cultural research. It is suggested that conceptualisations of culture must also include attention to what is different, contested and ambiguous; that culture is not a variable but rather permeates all aspects of the groups' existence; and lastly, that culture does not shift from an old one to an entirely new one whenever new practices and principles are introduced.

There are a number of ways researchers and practitioners could build on or examine some of these counterarguments, should they wish to. For instance, they could draw on the organisational scholarship of Martin and Meyerson (e.g., Martin, 2002; Martin & Meyerson, 1988) to garner a broader perspective on what might be considered 'cultural'; mitigating the tautological risk of defining culture in terms of what is shared and obvious and then only seeking out confirming evidence, while omitting the rest. Sport psychologists might also become more familiar with the anthropological essays and theory of Clifford Geertz and the subsequent work that his interpretivist re-theorisation of the culture concept inspired across the social sciences. Understanding this important movement and modern iterations of it that address important issues of agency, power,

identity and so forth, will help to develop studies and applied practices capable of producing more rigorous, sophisticated and ‘thick’ rather than ‘thin’ cultural analyses.

A wider inclusion of some of these suggestions can also help to challenge a mono-myth that together, the three presented myths form: Culture is useful, insofar as it is a tool which leaders and sport psychology practitioners can use to manipulate the environment towards the achievement of goals and high performing. It is a presentation that conjures images of unsuccessful cultures continuously being supplanted by new healthier, better, more effective ones. However, over-identification with this mono-myth has meant that important ethical and moral components to working culturally have so far been neglected in our discipline’s considerations of organisational culture. In part, the presentation of alternative ideas and theory in this chapter represents a broad though recognisably limited attempt to facilitate more socially emergent (and perhaps responsible) positions on culture. The ideas outlined here (in the challenges to myths) for example, can support a shift in emphasis away from satisfying the political and ideological interests of leadership, towards considering those of the community as a whole

2.6 Chapter Summary

The literature review has drawn upon literature related to anthropology, organisational studies and sport psychology to better situate the concept of culture and subsequently sport psychology’s general orientation towards it. Next, a critique of three prevailing myths about culture that have a strong and relatively unchallenged foothold in organisational sport psychology literature has been provided. This critical section helped to draw together the various strands of research within sport psychology that had been described previously, by highlighting the commonalities and limitations that bind them in terms of defining, conceptualising and operationalising culture. The challenges presented to each these prevailing views has arguably exposed much of the extant literature as

superficial and excessively focused on the practical applications of culture such as organisational change, at the expense of obtaining deeper cultural understanding. Consequently, this chapter has helped set the tone for the ones that follow, by centralising culture and providing the base to subsequently design studies that critically evaluate and challenge the assumptions of culture that dominate the organisational sport psychology landscape.

2.7 Theoretical Positioning

Having outlined the problems associated with sport psychology scholars failing to neglecting to outline their theoretical positioning with sufficient thoroughness, I detail now, some important assumptions, as they stood at the onset of investigation.

- While I do not seek one authoritative or all-encompassing definition of culture, I do believe that the term must be used more specifically to retain meaning and increase explanatory power and interpretative depth. Failure to do so means that ‘culture’ is used blandly, non-specifically and comes to cover ‘everything’ while meaning nothing.
- I align with Alvesson (2002) that the term ‘organisational culture’ broadly refers to an umbrella concept that refers to a way of thinking about the social world, that takes a serious interest in cultural and the symbolic.
- Like Alvesson (2002), I agree that Frost et al.’s (1985, p. 17) ‘definition’ of organisational culture is exceptionally useful: ‘Talking about organizational culture seems to mean talking about the importance for people of symbolism – of rituals, myths, stories and legends – and about the interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences that are influenced and shaped by the groups within which they live’.
- Following in the interpretative traditions of Geertz (1973), Smircich (1983) and Alvesson (2002), I believe meaning (and more accurately networks of meaning) are central to

cultural understanding. It seems to encourage deeper thinking about what is actually going on and how people interpret and construct their social worlds.

- I am wary of locating meaning primarily in the ‘public’ symbolic world (Geertz, 1973) and of claims that when it comes to culture, it is only collectively held meanings – and not personally held ones – that are of value (Alvesson, 2002). This seems to downplay the idea that *everyone* is a ‘culture maker’ and moreover, acts to downplay the importance of subjectivity, individual experience and actors’ capacity for agency.
- I take seriously Geertz’s idea of culture being a model of and for reality (Geertz, 1973), and like Alvesson (2002) interpret this to mean that culture can be both a way of thinking about the social world, as well as the context in which it occurs.
- In line with the critiques of the myths identified in the literature review, I believe that cultural diversity as well as homogeneity must be understood, with neither discounted or reduced as being culturally insignificant.
- The challenge to myths also helped instil a curiosity for more critical approaches to organisation and managerialism; however, a sense of critical theory and the concepts of critical management scholarship only developed much later. Consequently, early ideas of power, domination, and inequality were only on the periphery of my thoughts as I began Study 1.
- I am aware that most sport psychology organisational culture research has either explicitly identified with or is implicitly embedded in social constructionism, and I am familiar with the historical and paradigmatic developments that have led to emergence and dominance of this theoretical position. While not denying the importance of this mode of study to modern ideas of culture, I have always been a little ill at ease with the notion that all that

we have are social constructions. This stance, and the relativism that social constructionism is wedded to, seems problematic when considered culturally (i.e., culture is reduced to something that is only mind-dependent). As I have tried to untangle my thoughts on this matter, I have found ontological and epistemological positioning exceedingly difficult to unpick, in part because of misconceptions about theoretical and philosophical positioning that shape sport psychology research. For instance, Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, (2018) represent a commonly held assumption when they stated that narrative inquiry and CSP are inherently social constructionist (they often are, but not always or inherently so). A second example also confused me was the suggestion that ontological realism and epistemological constructionism are “incompatible and, in turn, untenable in terms of holding both together simultaneously” (Smith & McGannon, 2018 p. 105). These views seemed at odds with the anthropologist accounts of culture that I enjoyed reading and that seemed to me, to have a better grasp of culture. I did not know at the time that there were strong counter arguments that suggested ontological realism (the world is how it is) and constructivist epistemology (our theories and explanations are social constructions) could be combined (cf. Maxwell, 2012; Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019). Rather, in the early to middle stages of the thesis, I simply subscribed to a common sense approach that aligned with the view that “all scientists... believe that *both* the ontological world and the worlds of ideology, values, etc. play a role in the construction of scientific knowledge (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002, p. 29). Similarly, the anthropologist Karl Barth, in seminal research on the rituals indigenous New Guinea communities, stated “Like most of us, I assume that there is a real world out there—but that our representations of that world are constructions” (1987, p. 87). Later, I would come to locate these positions more clearly

within a critical realist positioning. At the onset of study though, I simply assumed that culture was real – it is embedded in the action and processes of real life and has implications for how we live and see ourselves (Ortner, 1999) – but that our knowledge of it is far from straightforward and inevitably predicated on interpretation. This base was important to me at the outset of study.

Chapter 3: Culture beyond what is ‘shared’: Narratives from elite sport

“The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences.”

**Ruth Benedict.
Anthropologist**

3.0 Connecting Vignette

In my initial plans for the empirical studies that would comprise the bulk of the thesis, I envisaged, first, an ethnographic study, which would then (I hoped) provide significant foreground and the basis for further theorising and any additional studies. Afterall, I had been increasingly influenced by the anthropologists many important contributions to the study of culture, and *ethnography* is what anthropologists *do* (Geertz, 1973). They do other things, of course, but ethnography – in spite of crises of conscience and representation⁹ – still seemed intuitively to have much to offer the study of culture. Though increasingly mindful of the historical and theoretical baggage of ethnography, and contemporary challenges to and within the ethnographic community, I nonetheless felt ethnography was valuable to the study of culture. I could use ethnography to place specific organisational encounters, events, and understandings into a richer, deeper and more meaningful context (cf. Champ et al., 2019; Tedlock, 2000) than had typically been the case to date in sport psychology organisational research. Moreover, as it was often argued that much of culture is hard to identify and inaccessible through general means of study (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews etc.) (Gilmore, 2013; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2019), I reasoned that immersion in a sport environment through in-depth ethnography would help me to access what was typically hard for outsiders to penetrate and understand.

I contacted the Scottish Institute of Sport (now the sportscotland Institute of Sport), in Stirling, Scotland, and at their behest wrote a detailed proposal about how I could, through ethnography, study (and possibly even enhance) their culture(s) as a researcher-practitioner. The

⁹ Here, I refer to fundamental disagreements about what ethnography *is* and if/how/why the other should be studied and represented; concerns over a system of knowledge built upon imperial foundations; ethnographies general inattention to relations of power and the material elements of existence; how cultures could be identified as distinct in an increasingly transnational and global world; the presence, self-reflexivity and voice of the researcher within texts) (cf. Clifford & Marcus 1986; Hammersley, 2018; Ortner, 1999)

proposal seemed to align with their stated goals, that at least publicly, were built around aspirations of high performing, forward thinking and modern organisational principles. Initial exchanges were positive and I was confident that I was in the process of building the good relations that would be essential to allow me to do some long-term (rather than smash and grab) ethnographic work. As time progressed however, dialogue became less frequent and I was ‘put off’ a number of times as I tried to tease out a decision. I had heard informally through my own network that there were a number of changes issues afoot within the Institute, and more broadly in Sport Scotland (“things are not well” one contact told me). Although on the one hand, this could have conceivably strengthened my proposal (i.e., it might be a good time for the Institute to learn more about their culture) my confidence that an agreement could be reached began to wane. The proposal, after some months, was eventually formally rejected. It was conveyed to me that although the ethnographic project was fundamentally interesting and seemed valuable, there were a number of structural and strategic changes in the making, and it wasn’t the best or most practical time to enter into a research partnership. “Maybe next year” was the take-home message. I was disappointed. In the midst of a visa application that would soon see me move to the USA, my broader life plans rendered *next year* an impossibility for an ethnographic undertaking with the Institute. Although the prolonged exchange had been a valuable lesson into some of the difficulties that are closely associated with ethnographic study, such as gaining access in the first place, in practical terms, it felt very much like I was back at square one.

I found encouragement in my understanding that ethnography, though often privileged by anthropologists, was not the only means of studying culture(s). Across disciplines such as anthropology, organisational studies, cultural studies, history, cultural geography and cultural psychology, culture scholars had in fact used a variety of methodology and methods to tackle

culture. Furthermore, ethnography was not a one size fits all method that stood alone but was actually reliant upon and comprised of many research methods that could still be utilised: field notes, participant observation, the use of carefully selected participant-informants, interviews, the analysis of discourse, attention to symbols, language, and story, and so on. I turned to the creative ways in which these research tactics had been deployed and woven together in the search and representation of culture, and honed in on the idea that culture could be uncovered and ‘got at’ through talk, text and story. At the same time, I began to draw up a list of people in elite sport that I could talk to about culture and who might have something interesting to say about the cultures of the elite sport environments that they worked in. Responses were swift and people were generous in their time, allowing me to make up some lost ground and lay the foundations of Study 1 (and the thesis) in stories and the interpretation of them.

3.1. Introduction

According to Clifford Geertz, all writings on culture are interpretations, and moreover “second and third order ones to boot”, since by definition, “only a ‘native’ makes first order ones: it's his [*sic*] culture” (1973, p. 15). As such, Geertz argued that accounts of culture are fictions, which is not to say they are false, or somehow not real, but rather that they are fashioned; a story constructed (Geertz, 1973). In organisational culture literature to date, the story most commonly constructed tale of culture has been one of integration. In this presentation of culture, key assumptions are that consistency, group-wide consensus and clarity exemplify culture so that it is only really understood in terms of what is shared among group members. In this way, culture is framed as an integrating mechanism or social ‘glue’ (Alvesson, 2002; Champ et al., 2018; Schein, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018) through which all cultural members hold or come to share the same basic assumptions, values and practices (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Cruickshank, et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015).

In organisation and management studies this viewpoint has been termed the *integration* perspective (e.g., Martin, 1992, 2002, 2004; Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Within this sphere of study, it has been by far the most widely used perspective to understand and represent organisational culture (Martin, 2002; Smerek, 2010). This perspective is also the most commonly adopted organisational culture position in sport disciplines, such as in sport management literature (cf. Maitland et al., 2015). In a review of 33 sport management studies that researched organisational culture, 23 adopted the integration perspective “viewing culture as something that is clear, not ambiguous” (Maitland et al., 2015, p. 8) or “like a solid monolith that is seen the same way by most people, no matter from which angle they view it” (Martin, 2002, p. 94). Maitland and colleagues pointed to a study by Weese (1996) as indicative of this position,

where the relationship between transformational leadership, organisational effectiveness and culture was emphasised, and where culture is a single variable to be understood in terms of its strength relative to other organisations and organisational cultures. As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, this view of culture has been firmly established as the dominant position within organisational sport psychology. In the previous chapter, I pointed out that although there has been a common (and often uncritical) acceptance of this position, the integration perspective has been subject to severe critique on ontological, epistemological, and empirical grounds across several domains (e.g., anthropology, sociology and organisational and management studies) (cf. Alvesson, 2002; Archer, 1985; Martin, 1992; 2002; Maxwell, 1999; McDougall et al., 2019; Meek, 1988; Ortner, 2005; Smircich & Calás, 1987). These arguments have already been outlined in the literature review, within the challenge to ‘myth 1’ but are reiterated to aid the framing of this study.

Broadly, scholars from a range of academic traditions have argued that this perspective represents a theoretical and methodological restriction of the culture concept, because it only includes (or at least privileges) what is shared and consistently understood¹⁰ (cf. Alvesson, 2002; Hannerz, 1992; Martin, 2002; Meek, 1988; Ortner, 2005). At the same time, the integration perspective discounts and discredits what is not shared as not cultural or of less cultural importance, thus marginalising other worldviews, value systems and cultural identities (Martin, 2002; Ortner, 2005). It is noted that this tendency often results in empirical studies capturing only the obvious, less remarkable and easier to detect ‘shared’ patterns of culture (Martin, 2002). Many organisational culture scholars have also asserted a lack of empirical support for any relationship between integration and group performance (Alvesson, 2002; Gregory, Harris, & Armenakis, &

¹⁰ It should be noted that the integration perspective is most commonly tied to what is shared among the group, but there are some exceptions to this common treatment; that is, not all integration scholars follow the idea that culture is only really defined and understood in terms of what is shared (cf. Martin, 2002).

Shook, 2009; O' Reilly III, Caldwell, Chatman, & Doerr, 2014; Siehl & Martin, 1990) as is often suggested or implied by those who hold the integration perspective. For Martin (2004), what the integration position actually offers is “a seductive promise of harmony and value homogeneity that is empirically unmerited and unlikely to be fulfilled” (p. 7). In sociology, Margaret Archer described the problematic, all pervasive ‘Myth of Cultural Integration’ and reiterated the claim that the myth is “one of the most deep-seated fallacies in all social science” (Etzioni, cited in Archer, 1985, p. 8).

Sport psychology scholars have also recently argued that exclusive reliance on this concept of culture can be problematic. Over-adherence to it can mean downplaying, dismissing or misunderstanding other types and sources of sport culture content that are not shared, clear, homogenised or coherent (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). It has already been noted in sport management literature that without a broader conceptualisation view of culture, the complexity of day-to-day cultural life as experienced by coaches, managers, and athletes with marginalised identities or lower status and authority is potentially excluded (Girginov, 2006). In sum, and reiterating critique from the literature review, it is clear that the concept of culture cannot be restricted to only to a set of shared concepts, symbols, beliefs, practices and community understandings.

How then, can culture be conceptualised and studied, if not through the lens of integration? Similar to suggestions within the preceding literature review, recent reviews and commentary in sport management (Maitland et al., 2015) and sport psychology (McDougall et al., 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018; McDougall et al. 2019) have suggested Martin and Meyerson’s (Martin, 1992, 2002; Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987) three perspective approach to culture as a viable alternative. The three perspective approach (which in addition to what is shared

and integrated also includes attention to what is contested and ambiguous) has been suggested as highly valuable for sport researchers looking for ways to consider culture beyond patterns of sharedness (Maitland et al., 2015; McDougall et al., 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). At the time of writing, however, no study in sport psychology has utilised this framework in empirical research.

The aim of this study is to use these three perspectives to explore the cultural understanding of social actors in elite sport through complementary lenses of integration (what is shared and consistent), differentiation (what is contested), and fragmentation (what is ambiguous) (Meyerson & Martin 1987; Martin, 1992; Martin, 2002) to show nuances in cultural life that are often omitted in the integration perspective. Through open-ended interviews with seven participants employed in different roles and organisations within elite sport, I reconstruct three ‘ideal cases’ of cultural interpretations of sport culture insiders to show how integration, differentiation and fragmentation manifest in these actors’ narratives about organisational cultural life in elite sport. In doing so, I aim to foster greater awareness and acceptance of the existence of multiple and complex cultural patterns with a view to challenging the dominance of the integration position as the only way to approach the study of culture. It is hoped that ultimately this will encourage sport psychology research (and practice) that is focused on and informed by more than ideas of integration.

3.2. Martin and Meyerson’s Three Perspective Approach

Organisational scholars Joanne Martin and Deborah Meyerson developed and used the three perspective approach over a body of work to distinguish between researcher perspectives of integration (what is shared), differentiation (what is contested), and fragmentation (what is unclear and ambiguous) (e.g., Martin, 1992, 2002; Martin, Frost, & O’Neil, 2006; Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). In addition to the integration perspective already discussed, they

suggested that in the differentiation perspective, rather than being a source of order and integration, culture is characterised by a lack of consensus (Martin, 1992, 2002). Studies from this perspective “focus on cultural manifestations that have inconsistent interpretations” (Martin, 2002, p. 101). In comparison to the integration view, less influence is attributed to leaders and their assessment of what the culture is (Martin, 2002, 2004). Instead, differentiation researchers often privilege and report subcultural conflicts, issues of power, and differences between stated attitudes and actual behaviours (Martin, 2002; Smerek, 2010). It therefore naturally challenges the premise that culture is singular (i.e., there is only one culture per group) and monolithic (i.e., it looks the same no matter the angle) and alternatively offers a more pluralistic view of culture (Martin, 2002; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). For differentiation researchers, culture, more accurately, is a collection, or nexus of overlapping subcultures. These may be formed on the basis of any number of factors related to occupation, role or hierarchy; demographics such as those relating to race, class, age, ethnicity, gender; or even based on the amount of personal contact, friendships or beliefs about leadership actions and decision-making (Martin, 2002; McDougall et al., 2015).

There is some consideration of subcultures and ‘cliques’ within organisational sport psychology (e.g., Champ et al., 2018; Nesti, 2010; McDougall et al., 2015, 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018; Wagstaff, Martin & Thelwell, 2017). There is also attention to subcultures in sport and physical activity (McGannon & Schinke, 2014). Nevertheless, focused research through an organisational culture lens is lacking. The prevalence of subculture in elite sport organisational has been supported however by Gilmore (2013). In an invited critical commentary, Gilmore (2013) challenged the plausibility of an integrationist account of a ‘single’ and ‘shared’ culture (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013), by pointing out that subcultures often existed below the radar of

management. Reflecting on her research within elite Premier League football, Gilmore further described how the cultural rituals adopted by a small group of players were in contradiction to the regulations established by sports science staff, yet they were also facilitated by at least two of them. While just one sport-specific example, it draws attention to the tensions and complex and contested nature of culture that often seem to be omitted in integration studies.

The fragmentation perspective differs from both the integration and differentiation orientations with regard to the way ambiguity is treated. Integration and differentiation perspectives both minimise the experience of ambiguity, which in this sense includes “multiple, contradictory meanings” and “paradoxes, ironies, and irreconcilable tensions” (Martin, 2002, p.110). From a fragmentation perspective, both integration and differentiation perspectives are oversimplifications that fail to capture the complexity of contemporary organisational or group life (Martin, 2002). Fragmentation scholars therefore adopt what they feel is a more realistic stance: proposing that culture is neither clearly consistent nor inconsistent, placing ambiguity rather than clarity or conflict at the cultural core (Martin, 2002). With ambiguity centralised as the defining feature of culture, organisational life is often described as unpredictable and in constant flux as individuals bounce from experience to experience and are influenced by specific areas of decision-making, governance, and day-to-day happenings and events (Parker, 2000). Researchers from this orientation focus particularly on that which is unclear, confusing and contradictory, and acknowledge that because meaning is created and re-created in the flow of social life, creation and the meaning people ascribe are fluid and may change over time (Martin, 2002).

The adoption of the fragmentation perspective is rare in studies of organisational culture and there is opposition to making ambiguity a central feature of culture (cf. Alvesson, 2002, Martin et al., 2004). A significant body wider scholarship within organisational domains however,

suggests that ambiguity is a normal and inescapable part of organisational life (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Hoyle, 1986; Martin et al., 2006; Martin, 2002; Meyerson, 1991; Weick, 1995, 2015), including sport organisational life (Gibson & Groom, 2018). Moreover, certain environments and occupations are arguably predisposed to the presence of ambiguity. For example, in professions where decision-making might not be clear (Martin, 2002; Richter & Koch, 2004), environments diversified by workers from different national cultures and backgrounds (e.g., Wels, 1996), and where there are significant changes to day-to-day operations (e.g., Risberg, 1999). Indeed, elite sport organisations, which are increasingly diverse and tend to be volatile, precarious, ‘fast’ short-termist and unpredictable (Gilmore, Wagstaff, & Smith, 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010) may be one such context where ambiguity is prevalent and thrives.

Martin (1992, 2002) described the boundaries of the three perspectives as permeable and has clarified that all cultures contain elements of integration, differentiation and fragmentation. According to Martin, there is no such thing as an ‘integrated culture’ or a ‘fragmented culture’; there are only cultures that are viewed through these perspectives (by researchers or participants) (Martin, 2002).¹¹ Nonetheless, in Martin’s view, rather than providing a way to categorise culture, she asserted that each perspective is more like a lens or “worldview” (Martin, 2002, p. 108) that selectively emphasises or accentuates certain features of cultural complexity. Most accounts of culture feature all three perspectives but typically stress one approach to a lesser or greater degree (Smerek, 2010). Martin termed this “a home perspective” (2002, p. 121) that researchers (but also participants) habitually adopt or hold, in order to understand and describe the culture(s) they are a part of.

¹¹ In spite of this effort to separate the perspectives from the reality they depict (i.e., the researcher constitutes the object, and there are no a priori essences contained within a culture that are reflected by the perspectives) this view is challengeable and something we problematise and return to later as we outline our own positioning).

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Theoretical Positioning

The study is informed by the interpretivist paradigm and its traditions and uses within anthropology and organisation, where ‘meaning’ is fundamental to the concept of culture (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Ortner, 1999, 2005; Smircich, 1983). From this view, culture is not an external force or entity that can be studied through the means of gathering ‘objective’ facts, but refers more to cultural symbolic phenomena that people interpret and ascribe meaning to (Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Maxwell, 2012). Culture is thus a way to think about, interpret and understand certain aspects of the social world (Geertz, 1973; Yanow & Ybema, 2009) and as a network of meaning, ‘non-mechanically’ guides thinking, feeling and acting (Alvesson, 2002).

While interpretivism is usually equated with a relativist ontology (reality is multiple, created and mind-dependent) and epistemological constructionism (knowledge is constructed and subjective) (e.g., Smith & Sparkes, 2008), Packard (2017) pointed out that this common portrayal is inaccurate since most interpretivists do not subscribe to a relativist ontology and the view that “reality is merely in the eye of the beholder” (p. 540). Rather, interpretivists wrestle with difficult issues of subject-object, celebrate the permanence of the real world, and try to access it by centralising first-person experience and subjectivity (Schwandt, 1994). This suggests that there is a place for individualised interpretations of culture to be garnered and communicated in culture research, and that the aggregation of multiple points of view (cf. Wagstaff & burton-Wylie, 2018) (a practice that conceivably prejudices the researcher towards consensus anyway) is not the only means of studying culture. Furthermore, interpretivism is a broad church and not *always* wedded to relativism. The position outlined here maintains realist undertones, in that I assume that participant narratives are not simply constructions of the mind but have the capacity to reflect the

realities of their personal experiences and that “there is a congruent relationship between talking about life ... and actually living that life” (Crossley, 2000, p.155). Although agreeing with Martin that there is no such thing as an “integrated culture” or a “fragmented culture” (2002, p. 156) *per se*, and all cultures have features of each perspective, this realist view challenges Martin’s well-documented assertion that the three perspectives outlined are *only* a means for the researcher to view culture without any significant ontological implications.¹²

This study also draws extensively from narrative theory and methods as a way to explore the meaning(s) of organisational experience (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). From a narrative perspective, people *are* storied beings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and because they can never be separated from the cultures and cultural influences that surround them (Geertz, 1973), culture is inevitably interwoven into the fabric of the narratives that people and groups create for themselves. Consequently, the “stories individuals tell of their lives offer insights into the cultural settings in which they are immersed” (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p. 701).

In line with such rationales, storied approaches have long been conceived (though not by mainstream organisational researchers) as a means to explore organisational experience (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). It is an approach that builds on the premise that stories have ontological significance within organisations (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). As such, narrative methods enable the gathering of rich, contextual data that can aid theory building (Mintzberg, 1979) and do not only seek to present information or facts about 'events' but rather aim to enrich, improve and infuse facts with meaning (Gabriel, 2000). Stories then, hold a privileged position compared to other discursive methods in that they uniquely contain and demonstrate subjective meaning-making,

¹² Interested readership may find Taylor, Irvine, and Wieland (2004) helpful for considering some ontological issues and challenges attached to the three perspective approach, while Ronkainen and Wiltshire (2019) is useful for a more focused and thorough framing of realist positioning in relation to sport psychology research.

while at the same time claiming to represent reality (Gabriel, 2004). This quality renders story as much more than just mere chronologies or fictions (Gabriel, 2004) and rather, allows researchers to gain deeper experience into organisational realities (Gabriel, 1998). Stories can therefore uniquely illuminate organisational life from the point of view of thinking, feeling, agentic social actors and allow for the experiential study of a wide range of organisational phenomena that together constitute organisational life; including organisational politics, culture, change and sensemaking, for example (cf. Gabriel, 1998; Rhodes & Brown, 2005).

Consequently, one important quality of stories is that they help organisational communities to pass on and preserve their spiritual, moral and cultural heritage over generations (Gabriel, 2000). Like other symbolic cultural forms, stories can mean different things to different people and thus require interpretation and deciphering, in part, because they convey deep and layered meaning, and not only the mundane, the everyday and the obvious (Gabriel, 2000). For instance, and importantly, for this study — which deals in culture beyond consensus and harmony — it has been argued that stories have an ability to reveal hidden aspects of culture, such as the other side of rules, norms, and values that might be particularly valuable in cultural research (Soin & Scheytt, 2006). Stories therefore neither automatically assume or enhance the view of culture a unitary and unifying force that acts to integrate and control (Gabriel, 2000). Rather, stories showcase and explore the emotion-laden world of the individual operating in a complex socio-cultural-political mesh where themes of frustration, injustice, oppression and trauma are commonly encountered (Gabriel, 2000). Because stories depict these types of realities, they can also inspire resistance and opposition to imposed systems of cultural control and not merely a commitment to them (Gabriel, 2000; Kunda, 1992). Hence, the stories that are told by organisational members are a vital means of exploring the nuances and complexity of sport organisational life and culture because they can

challenge rather than perpetuate the stale and privileged position that tales of cultural integration and sharedness currently occupy in sport psychology.

3.3.2 Participants and procedure

Following institutional ethical approval, I used purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1988) and personal-professional connections to facilitate interviews with a range of sport personnel (e.g., strategic leaders, coaches, athletes, support staff, administrators) from different areas of sport (n=7). Purposeful sampling allows researchers to establish criteria for participant selection and to seek out participants who have experience in the topic of study and are therefore well-positioned to address the aims of the research (Flick, 2009; McDougall et al., 2015). A purposeful sampling process is often used in research into elite sport contexts (e.g., Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; McDougall et al., 2015) because there is reduced or limited access to elite environments, athletes, coaches and support staff for sport researchers (Cruickshank et al., 2015). For this study, the central criterion was that participants were currently operating (or had recently, within the last 2 years) in elite sport. While there is no precise agreement on what constitutes *elite* in sport psychology research (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005), this study aligned with the advice of Hanton and colleagues (2005) and previous research (McDougall et al., 2015) and defined elite sport environments as those that contain athletes who are current national squad members and/or perform at the highest level in their sport. To increase the diversity of perspective, no parameters were placed upon the type of sport (i.e., individual or team-based) or the length of time that a participant had spent in elite sport.

Following these purposeful sampling procedures, each participant was invited to take part in an open-ended qualitative interview at a place and time convenient to them. The final participants included a national governing body performance director of a wealthy and high-

profile (UK) sport, an early career sport scientist working in an academy of an English Premier League football club, a sport psychologist working within Scottish Premier League football, an athlete within a team sport Team GB, a recently retired elite female athlete who competed for many years at the professional level within a ‘tour sport’, a performance analyst within English Championship football, and an assistant coach of a national team that competed on the international stage. All participants provided written informed consent prior to the interview. The interviews were low-structured (i.e., with some loose ideas, themes and questions in mind) and focused on eliciting stories. After the opening questions, which invited the participants to tell their stories and how they came to be in their current role, I asked participants to reflect on their initial impressions and experiences of the culture(s) within their sport team/organisation (e.g., “can you tell me about the team culture here?”) Consistent with a narrative interviewing style, I listened for stories, elicited them and attempted to “stay with” interviewee responses, using probing questions to follow up and accrue further insight where necessary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews lasted for a mean of 65 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim producing 210 double-spaced pages of data. Three of the interviews occurred face-to-face, in an environment comfortable for the participant, while four interviews were conducted over Skype.

3.3.3 Data Analysis and Representation

Narrative researchers can arrive at a better understanding of the stories participants tell if they conduct the analysis with concern for both the form and content of stories (cf. Spector-Mersel, 2010). Narrative researchers also consider each interview to be unique in its own right, focusing on the internal working of the stories rather than on a cross data set analysis (Ronkainen, Ryba, Tonge, & Tikkanen, 2019). With these principles in mind, after familiarisation with each

participant's data and immersion into participant narratives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), I focused closely on the general plot(s), structure(s) and storyline(s) of each participant's narrative (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Riessman, 2008). When reading the transcripts, I asked questions such as "What did the story or storylines convey or seem to be about?" "What were the key events and in what sequence did they occur?" "Who were the other key characters and what role did they play in the events and storylines communicated?" Preliminary work on the content involved noting initial ideas in relation to the meanings participants seemed to ascribe to events, stories, practices, beliefs, rituals and values, and other cultural elements that together comprised and informed the narrative resources for individual stories. At this stage, I attempted to analyse the participant interviews inductively, with a focus on the unique voices and stories of each participant. In relation to this part of the data collection, it is important to emphasise that I did not set out to deduce themes of integration, differentiation and fragmentation during the interview process. Rather, my understanding of the usefulness of Martin and Meyerson's three perspective approach (i.e., how it could guide later stages of analysis and be used to frame the wider study) evolved organically.

Subsequent phases of analysis were more expressly deductive and involved detecting patterns in the data and coding them thematically in relation to Martin and Meyerson's three perspectives of integration, differentiation and fragmentation. Consistent with Martin's (2002) argument that all cultures inherently contain characteristics from each perspective (integration, differentiation, fragmentation), initial thematic work confirmed the presence of patterns (to varying degrees) of integration, differentiation and fragmentation within each participant's data. I therefore, came to realise (and agree with Martin) that the degree to which each perspective is emphasised in research is ultimately determined by a) the degree to which perspective dominates the participants narrative and b) the researcher's own culture lens (framework for understanding

culture) and the corresponding emphasis they place on each perspective in the design and analysis of the study.

Codes were further developed, combined and eventually grouped into categories under the major themes of integration, differentiation and fragmentation, indicating which patterns were most prevalent in each participant's data. To further flush out and determine the core narrative (integration, differentiation, fragmentation), that each individual was communicating, I paid particular attention to Frank's (1995) notion of narrative type in order to uncover the most general storyline that could be recognised underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories.

When each participant's data had been 'matched' (based on story content and the dominant narrative in each participant's data) with one of the three perspectives, I began to fashion a coherent narrative from the many events and stories episodes spread throughout each interview that centralised the voice of the participants as well representing each perspective. During this process, I searched the transcript to find and consider units of text, passages and patterns of meaning that supported and contradicted the core narrative's plausibility, and constantly checked and compared themes against existing literature and theoretical material.

In the following representation, I use participants' stories as exemplars (cf. Carless & Douglas, 2013) to illustrate Martin and Meyerson's three perspectives (integration, differentiation, fragmentation) and to show how each can be used as an analytic lens by researchers to construct and represent participant experiences. The three cases (the performance director, the academy sport scientist and the assistant coach; all Caucasian, British, male and aged between 28 and 50) were selected because they offered the most eloquent narratives depicting the three perspectives. They had worked/performed in their current or most recent elite sport context for at least one year and therefore had detailed insight about its workings. Moreover, these participants' interviews had

lasted longer than 60 minutes, offering rich material to reconstruct the stories. Direct quotes from the participants were used extensively to form the basis of the narratives. Some minor information and parts of the narrative were modified to enhance flow, feel and aesthetic of the stories and to help anonymise participants (cf. Smith, 2013). Pseudonyms were also created for each participant to protect their identity.

3.3.4 Research Quality and Validity

I addressed rigour from the realist understanding that validity is conferred through the relationship between the researchers' account and those things it is supposed to be an account of, rather than following a standard set of procedures (Maxwell, 2012); and through countering threats to descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity (cf. Maxwell, 2012; Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019). Descriptive validity refers to factual accuracy of the account and the accurate reporting of events, subjects, setting, time, and places within participant accounts. It was increased through careful transcription of audio recorded participant interviews and substantial familiarisation with the data set. Interpretive validity relates to the meanings held by participants and therefore involves inference from their words and actions in the situation studied (Maxwell, 2012). Interpretive validity was increased firstly by drawing extensively on additional contextual resources provided by a co-researcher's considerable experience working in elite sport environments. Content analysis is often used as a means to confirm qualitative findings and what is believed by the researcher (Mayring, 2010; Krippendorff, 2018). Interpretative validity was also increased through using a confirmatory content analysis on the three cases application of a as a further means to ensure that each participant's data had been appropriately matched to one of the perspectives. Furthermore, while each story was 'fashioned' to fit one of the three perspectives, both descriptive validity and interpretive validity were addressed by the extensive use of participant quotes and own language

in the representation. Finally, theoretical validity refers to the capacity of the theoretical explanation to describe or interpret the phenomenon (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019). This was addressed primarily through the stringent criteria employed to help select suitable participants and illustrative cases, giving increased confidence that the collected data adequately supports interpretations and the narratives crafted. Furthermore, all supervisory researchers were involved in scrutinising the accounts crafted, offering alternative explanations. Finally, an ‘outside’ critical friend currently employed in elite sport as a sport psychologist was engaged and asked specifically about the plausibility and the practical utility of the accounts. This feedback was used to further refine the narratives.

3.4 Results and Discussion

The constructed narratives reveal and communicate a myriad of cultural understanding and meanings related to the people, events, values, beliefs practices, traditions, identities and structures that participants described. For analytic purposes, the results are shaped to illustrate the three perspectives and emphasise the features of each perspective. Following each narrative, interpretation of the narratives are provided – while recognising other meanings may be evident or extracted by different readers – in order to further explicate and narrow down on the meanings that participants identified with and ascribed to their organisations’ cultures.

3.4.1 Simon’s Narrative of Integration: From a Game for Players to a Sport for Athletes

My mantra coming in was that I needed to change it from being a game for players to a sport for athletes. I’m about high-performance. That’s my background; as an athlete, as a coach, as a performance director. I need athletes with the right mindset, the right physicality to really push themselves onto the next level and that was massively alien to 99.9% of them. That transition was huge really, and, probably naively, I thought some of

it would have been easier to do than it really is. For starters, we don't have a centralised programme, like a cycling or canoe might have, where their athletes go to one place and all meet up and train regularly. What we have are a lot of regional bodies and clubs throughout the country and within that you have to try and develop a performance culture and a structure to feed players through into what is still a very young national academy programme. That's extremely complex. The sport also has a massive cultural heritage – upper middle class, real old school blazers, ties and badges...stuff that's great for the history of the sport and its place in the nation, but an utter hindrance when it comes to performance and making changes. So it was critical to try and get those doors open really quickly and not having come from the sport, you know with no strong allegiances, actually made it a little easier for me to knock on doors and build rational plans that key stakeholders could see make sense. You know, going away from some of the stuff that happened in the past to where we wanted to go and getting people to buy into that relatively quickly. I've got people who are far better than me to go out and negotiate with individuals about coming on board with programs because I'm not an expert in the sport, I've never played it and I don't really know the nuances of clubs and their structures, so once we've decided what we need to do I rely on my team of experts who are really embedded in the sport to do all that.

One of the first big changes I made was to go to abroad for a month before Christmas and then somewhere else again for six or seven weeks early in the new year and just spend a lot of time with all the players and coaches and service providers. It enabled us to start changing the way players perceived their support and training programs, you know, making a difference to their habits, their attitudes, their expectations. When we go

on training camps now we have a skill acquisition expert, a biomechanist, a physiologist, a psychologist, a physio, spending chunks of time with the squad, educating them, talking about the culture you need to be high performing athletes. It's about creating the right environment to develop that kind of understanding in young players. We developed the concept of development centres. Getting the best players into centres and giving them the opportunity to get a good quality of coaching and all the other things that come with that so there is standardisation. At first, a lot of the players had come through the old system doing what they wanted to do, good players, but never really bought into some of the support. They've left the program. They didn't want to do all the things I wanted them to do. The majority we've got now are very young players, and a lot of them have come through the new system and are more willing and able to buy into what we're doing.

A lot of it is carrot and stick. We've got performance bonuses for people who do well. If they win, we'll put some money in their expense account. The better they play the more money they get. If they comply, they get additional access to things: resources, funding, equipment... because as you move through you get access to what we have access to. If someone isn't doing it, they get warnings. So if they don't respond to emails they'll get a reprimand; if they don't turn up for a psychology booking, we'll take money out of their expense account. Historically, it's been a relatively soft, passive sport. There are rules and regulations but often they've never been applied. I've toughened them up and applied them. We need to make examples of people who aren't really showing the right change in the right direction and recently we just removed somebody from the squad for not fulfilling the requirements in their athlete agreement. We have another one on a red warning and unless they change their ways in the next month or so they'll be off the squad as well.

Obviously, there is a bit of give and take, but ultimately if you bend the rules too much you will get kicked out. It's still nowhere near where I want to get to, but we've moved on a massive way and that is your huge, big sport cultural shift right there.

3.4.1.1 Discussion of the Integration Narrative

Like many of the existing integration accounts in sport (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013), the tale begins with the vision and planning activities of the leader set firmly against the described disorder, conflict and the lack of alignment between key stakeholders that are assumed to exemplify an underperforming organisation. Culture is predictably depicted as malleable and the role of leaders and those in authority in its creation, management and control is emphasised, thus aligning with existing sport psychology culture change literature (e.g., Cruickshank et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). Simon has substantial creative, strategic, operational and decision-making autonomy to shape the culture to his vision (“a sport for athletes”); which he ultimately achieves through the deployment of a familiar array of culture change and management tactics, for example: establishing a compelling vision and ensuring that people ‘buy’ into it, building strong partnerships, managing upwards and downwards in the hierarchy, seeking out cultural allies, knowledge experts and sport insiders to deliver and sell key messages outside of the performance team (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015).

Early in the narrative, Simon also alludes to the importance of cultural fit. Ideals and images of high performance are embedded in his own identity and self-descriptions as a former athlete and coach at the elite level, so he understands the precise fit (“athletes with the right mentality”) required and is subsequently able to set the terms and conditions that make an athlete successful (or not) within the environment. As in other sport psychology integration accounts (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015) athletes are moulded (socialised) through

education, role modelling, incentivising (and withholding of incentives) and punished; in this case so that they either transition out of the programme or come to exemplify and display the culturally desirable behaviours demanded within the new system. This array of tactics is consistent with advice in seminal organisational culture texts (e.g., Schein, 1985, 2010) and are used to minimise resistance to change and increase compliance to the new system. Over time, alternative meanings attached to the old way of doing things are replaced with the ideals of high performance that Simon values most of all.

Simon's narrative is typical of culture change in sport (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015) and organisational management (e.g., Schein, 2010) in that there is an awareness of resistance, but it is a relentless march toward progress that dominates the account. The new system — of which Simon, as the leader, is a standard bearer — is symbolic of modern performance sport: consistent, scientific, rigorous, standardised and clinically efficient, while established ways of doing things, that embody tradition and the history of the sport are perceived as unhelpful and outdated. In this regard — and consistent with the integration perspective — resistance is constructed as a temporary obstacle and an old consensus is simply replaced by a new, more effective one.

3.4.2 Oliver's Narrative of Differentiation: There's Trouble Abroad

If I looked back to that team, that tournament, it's an absolute fallacy to say that we had a culture of x or y. It was quite clear from that journey, from when we first got together, that the culture of the group ebbed and flowed and there was a variety of subcultures at play at times. There was a culture within the coaching team. There were various sorts of cultures within the player groups. Looking back, it's almost impossible to identify that there was one set of values or one culture or thread that ran through the whole group.

I mean at the national team level, the make-up of the player groups are potentially quite distinct anyway. Individuals are coming from different backgrounds both socially, culturally and even their sport development and experience of coaching has been different. Geographically, I mean, there would be players from the east, west and from up north, and down south. There are some quite definitive splits in terms of how the sport organised and played in those different geographical areas. So their club cultures are probably quite different. Then you bring them together as a group and it can take a long time to bring along that mentality of “this is how the national team are going to do it.”

Before we went off to the championship, the governing body allowed us to have about 25 hours of contact time before we went off, which is nothing. The time is so short that the focus has to be on the tactical, technical side of the game, the game critical stuff. We did do a few exercises... I wouldn't call them cultural exercises exactly but perhaps team group exercises to try and break down some of the barriers in the group to try and bring the team together. We developed documents with team standards, core values, what we believed, that sort of thing. We probably thought prior to the tournament that we had been successful in developing a culture, our way of doing things.

So we get to the tournament, right? We felt that with the talent we had we were capable of going and winning the tournament. Like we really thought we could do well and in the first game we ended up losing late on and it was probably the first sense we had that all wasn't well. We picked up on some disharmony among the players about how various people were performing. One player, in particular, didn't seem to be playing at the level we were accustomed to and we were aware that there were conversations going on between players that weren't overly favourable about team selection, tactics, who was playing and

so on. We managed to regroup though, actually got to the semis and if we lost that game we'd be playing for the bronze. Basically, in the semis, they scored quick and our heads dropped. It was a blowout. Quite a few words were exchanged after that game. There were a number of comments about players from different clubs not doing their job properly and you know, "that's how he always plays when he's playing for his club and why should we expect anything different when he is playing for us now?!"

A number of players and one player in particular, who had had quite a distinguished domestic playing career, just kind of called out the head coach in front of the group, said that he felt he had made the wrong decisions. This was going to be his last tournament, his last opportunity to play for us so no doubt he wanted to go out on a high. Some of the criticism, I agreed with. There were valid points but that's easy to say when you're not the one totally accountable. So yeah, some of those resentments and deeper feelings definitely did carry over even after we had created this model for performance and expected behaviour, and I would say those became more evident when we lost. Maybe on reflection, resentments were always bubbling under the surface and sometimes you know, they kinda came over the surface and went too far. There was a whole lot of tension in the group in the aftermath of that game, and we still had to play for third place!

And you know what, the player that that wasn't playing to the level we thought he was capable of. . . after the bronze medal game, he turns around to us and shows us his foot and it was all swollen. It was purple at which point he tells us that he thought he had actually broken it just prior to the tournament. "Well, why did you not say anything?" And he said "well I knew if I said anything, I wouldn't get to play". So we were starting this guy, a star player, in every game and we're thinking "why's he not playing properly? Why is his head

going down?” Well, he’s playing with a serious injury and he didn’t feel he could tell the coaches before the tournament. I think that’s quite insightful that he didn’t feel he could tell someone. Or at least tell us, the coaches, because there were a group of players who certainly knew how bad his injury was. He hadn’t told all the players, but the players from his club knew, the ones he was close to and no one felt they could tell the coaches! And I was blown away by this. It was the exact opposite of our espoused values, being a team, competing for each other. But when I said something, the other coaches almost. . . almost kind of laughed it off, like “well I might have done the same.”

Personally, I got on quite well with the other coaches, but there’s been a slow change in the sport, in terms of embracing modern coaching. They probably aren’t overly professional from a coaching standpoint because everything is done on an absolute shoestring. They’re all volunteers, nobody gets paid. You get to go out to tournaments and there’s a feeling among the traditional ones that it’s a bit of a holiday and all that, sort of “well they’re almost kind of lucky to have me so you know if I’m coming out here, well yeah, I’m going to have a beer after the game and I’m going to relax and enjoy myself.” I suppose my criticism is that they didn’t approach the whole incident with as much professionalism as they could have and in a way, they endorsed the behaviour of an athlete who had covered up his injury and let everyone down.

3.4.2.1 Discussion of the Differentiation Narrative

Oliver, an assistant coach of an international men’s team, described a number of subcultures and the tensions between them. Prior to the tournament, subcultures formed on the basis of club affiliations, the geographic locations of those clubs, and intense competition/rivalry for places, reinforcing recent assertions (Wagstaff et al., 2017) in sport psychology literature that subgroup

formation can originate from a broad array of sources. Selected players brought with them other styles of play, methods of training, and expectations of coaching and behaving, as well as previously existing feelings towards other members of the team. Such understandings derived from personal as well as ‘other’ cultural resources (cf. Girginov, 2010) and did not simply dissipate upon joining up with the national team and when faced with other cultural standards and values that the coaching team tried to inculcate. Rather, they remained dormant in the face of attempts to manage them out and achieve unity. The narrative is aligned with other sport psychology research that has suggested the presence and influence of subcultures in elite sport and that suggests tensions and conflicts manifest, even intensify during the stress and high stakes of an important tournament or in the aftermath of an unexpected loss or poor performance (McDougall et al., 2015). Even more broadly, Oliver’s narrative reaffirms suggestions within sport psychology research that conflict between team-mates and between athletes and coaches is an inherent but underestimated part of sport team life (e.g., Holt, Knight, & Zukiwski, 2012; Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017).

Typical of differentiation studies (e.g., Ogbonna & Harris, 2015), Oliver’s narrative shows a multiplicity of understood and ascribed meanings through which players and coaches resisted and challenged the ‘official’ culture and the espoused team ideals and values set forth by leadership. Ogbonna and Harris’s (2015) human resource study of subcultures in an English Premier League football team also revealed tension between individual needs and organisational requirements. Similarly, in Oliver’s narrative, players demonstrated that they held individually oriented meanings and that playing in the tournament (even if in poor form or injured) was personally significant even if it was to the detriment of the team. Consequently, contentious issues of de-selection and loss provided the grounds for conflict, assignment of blame and the means for players to challenge hierarchy and authority.

Oliver also identifies and labels subcultures in dichotomous terms — a hallmark of a differentiation perspective (Martin, 2002) — such as (east/west/north/south, players/coaches, selected/de-selected, professional coaching/unprofessional coaching). While consensus is typically described as contained within these boundaries (e.g., players uniting against coaching decisions or failing to tell coaches about an injured ‘club’ team-mate), sometimes consensus is also informal and transcends boundaries (cf. Gilmore, 2013) or occurs in response to arising issues and events. For instance, Oliver finds himself in agreement with players regarding some criticism towards the head coach, while later in the narrative, a coach appears to informally support the actions of the injured player. For Oliver, the incident confirmed the fractured and opaque relationship between coaches and players and the ultimate failure of coaching team to instil ideals of unity, togetherness and a single way of operating. The incident also spoke to latent differences within the coaching team, and more broadly, to tensions that have been observed in wider sport literature between the voluntary coaches and an emerging younger, more professionalised generation of coaches (Grix, 2009; Ronkainen, Ryba, McDougall, Tod, & Tikkanen, under review). Oliver, a progressive, young coach identifies with a more professional approach to coaching and is in internal disagreement with the sometimes casual and somewhat ambivalent views of the ‘voluntary coach generation’ where tournaments abroad are interpreted as a “holiday” and not only as a benchmark of performance and something to be won. This is a strong example of the described frictions inherent and centralised in differentiation studies (Martin, 2002; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015), and specifically points to tensions between espoused values and (in Schein’s terms) ‘basic underlying assumptions’ or taken for granted values and values (Schein, 2010, p. 24), highlighting again that inconsistency and not the consistency of the integration perspective exemplifies culture.

3.4.3 Mark's Narrative of Fragmentation: Into the Unknown

It was slow going initially because I started the role towards the end of the season, when everything was winding down. Moving into football, I'd prepared for a whirlwind, because that's what you hear in your education and training, and actually it was the end of the season coma. People were in and out, some were having time off and it was perhaps one or two weeks, until I actually even met some key people in the academy. It was just a case of being told by one or two people who were still around that "This is it", having a little bit of a tour, "here are the buildings, here are the facilities, here's the people" and then being left to just figure quite a lot out. You know, have at it really.

I joined under the premise of doing a very particular role and being responsible for a very particular thing, and within six months I was doing stuff that other people were doing or supposed to be doing. I was chipping in everywhere, gaining an understanding of different facets of the organisation, which was great for me because I was able to learn what was really valuable, and you get to see the perspectives of lots of different people in different roles. So my role has changed considerably in the last three or four months, yet my "official" role, job description and job title hasn't. And it's not just me. . . [long pause] it's flipping baffling. You can't work it out. I mean if you had to look at an organisational chart of how a sport organisation runs, and then you look at our organisational chart, there would be questions galore: "Who controls this aspect of the academy? Who controls or who is accountable for ensuring this takes place?" And it's kinda like "oh well, he also does that" "oh right ok...well what about this side of things?" yeah well he's picking this up at the minute". In terms of role clarity, you know role clarity in terms of perceived versus actual roles, it's messy. Really messy. You can't make sense of it.

Some of that's because we, support staff I mean, we basically get on our hands and knees and run about doing whatever the coaches say. You've got people within the academy management team doing jobs where [laughs heartily] where they could quite easily turn around and say "I shouldn't be doing this, this isn't my job whatsoever". It's been like that since I joined. The coach is the teacher and you're support network, so you provide the coach whatever it is they need at a particular moment in time. Whatever that might be, who knows? They have this power over other employees who technically on the organisation chart are on the same level, or even above them, because they almost see themselves as the experts of everything, whereas and you're merely there to offer a suggestion. So even though the line manager is above an age group coach, according to the unofficial organisational chart, or how things really are, culturally, he's below them.

Take communication, or lack of it. I'll give coaches a feedback report or an observational report and not hear back from them. "Did you get my report? I sent it over to you, you want to grab a coffee and talk? Make sure we're on the same page?" "Nah, it was good mate, some good points in it". Essentially that's all you get. So you don't know where you stand on anything really and the communication and the cohesion, goes completely downhill. Because coaches, they're 'football people' they think they know how to develop players, develop teams but when it comes to it, do they know how to communicate? Or produce cohesive teams of staff and a cohesive organisational model? And that's important because they're the unofficial decision makers. We've got demands as an academy. We're a category 1 academy, so the expectations, the blueprint that we're trying to aspire to, I don't know how we are able to maintain the category that we are. We're not doing successful multi-disciplinary work because no-one communicates. The

demands are much greater than the ability of some people. No one challenges the coaches. We've got a ridiculously low budget for what we expect to achieve. I don't know how we're going to achieve what we're supposed to. No one seems to know. We just sort of plough on.

To make matters worse, the shit has hit the fan this week. The Academy Director is gone. Just gone. No idea what happened there yet. No one's said. Now he's gone, we can't really even make small decisions. There are people as part of the management team, who are there to make decisions, and I suppose could, but it's like they've been programmed not to make them because, in all the other matters, the coaches have been the unofficial decision makers. So now, there's no one to give the final thumbs up. It's like "yeah we might have to park that idea until the new guy comes in". So essentially, we're functioning without someone to make the final decision on many, many things because that's the way the culture works. And there's been no communication about it from club leadership. There is a total lack of communication, a real gap there. We've got a CEO who is overseeing everything just now and the academy is probably in the middle of his list of things to do and be responsible for. We're in the total unknown here and there are decisions that need to be made and things that need to get done right now.

3.4.3.1 Discussion of the Fragmentation Narrative

In the fragmentation perspective, ambiguity is at the core of narrative (Martin, 2002). Like many neophytes in a new and unfamiliar position (e.g., Larsen, 2017; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard, 2007; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2015; Nesti, 2004), Mark describes feelings of immediate uncertainty due to his new role (his first in sport and in the world of football) and a tokenistic induction that provided little guidance or clarity as to what he should be doing on a day-

to-day basis. Instead of this uncertainty lessening as the nuances of the role are learned, Mark's confusion was maintained as he finds himself doing a variety of tasks that lie outside the sphere of his job description and his expectations of what he is responsible for, muddying his ideas of what his job actually *is*.

Somewhat paradoxically, the lack of existing structure provides Mark with the opportunity to learn more about other people's roles and the unknown facets of the organisation. He is able to gain knowledge that might have otherwise remained hidden to him in an organisation with a more rigid, bureaucratic structure, with well-defined roles and responsibilities that are enforced. Such mobility, resulting from a lack of bureaucracy, has also been found in organisational literature and can lead to benefits such as a fluid, more agile organisation, broader competency (as opposed to entrenched capability) and the opportunity to recombine knowledge in novel and valuable ways (e.g., Ravasi & Verona, 2001; Weick, 2015).

A further layer of paradox and irony, which are also recurrent features of fragmentation studies (Martin, 2002) and organisational life more broadly (Hatch, 1997), is woven into Mark's narrative as this broader perspective and increased knowledge reveal to Mark not clarity, but a complex, layered relationship between coaches and other staff. The formal organisation – depicted by organisational charts and stated structures of hierarchy – is juxtaposed with the informal organisation (cf. Gulati & Puranam, 2009), whereby coaches maintain a historical power and sway over others in the environment. On the one hand, this provides a common framework of meaning to better understand unwritten rules and 'how things really are'. On the other hand, it brings disorder, disorganisation, ineffective multi-disciplinary work and further obscurity to Mark's role; not least because Mark and other staff are subservient and their job outlines are dependent on the

fluctuating needs and whims of coaches. He therefore experiences ambiguity due to a lack of control over what he does day-to-day and because of the opaqueness of internal decision making.

The unpredictability and constant flux of academy organisational life described by Mark may be typical of organisational life in a football academy (cf. Gibson & Groom, 2018). It is also indicative of the micro-political power struggles that permeate football and coaching environments (Cushion & Jones, 2006) in general, rendering such contexts as chaotic, confusing and unpredictable (cf. Thompson et al., 2015). The narrative concludes with the sudden and unexpected departure of the Academy Director. The informal culture has undermined and eroded the legitimacy and competency of those in positions of authority and in the aftermath, there is a decision-making vacuum; with no one seemingly able or willing to sign off on important decisions that must be made. The narrative ends with the academy in stasis and uncertainty, leaving Mark unsure of what is happening, how stated academy goals and plans will be achieved and if, when and how important issues will be resolved. In organisational literature, this discrepancy, or gap between formal organisational goals and what can actually be achieved on the ground is a source of both ambiguity and anxiety for employees (Hoyle & Wallace, 2008).

3.5 Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to use Martin and Meyerson's three perspective approach as an analytical framework alongside an interpretive-narrative approach to show patterns of culture beyond integration (i.e., typically what is shared, consistent, unified and clear) to include also patterns of contestation and ambiguity. Following this aim, the three narratives depict (in order) the three culture perspectives of integration, differentiation and fragmentation and highlight the different lenses that can be applied to view and understand culture. While the integration position is most commonly adopted in sport psychology literature, attention to the frequently omitted

patterns of contestation and ambiguity demonstrate that the integration perspective is theoretically and operationally restrictive. It is also a position that simplifies cultural life and often (explicitly or implicitly) serves managerialist agendas by de-emphasising and diminishing the cultural meanings ascribed by other actors in sport environments. It is important that sport psychology researchers attend to multiple culture patterns (i.e., beyond those of integration), so that the complexity and reality of team and organisational sport life is more accurately captured and represented in the future (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

To support progress in this research area, the three perspectives on culture can be applied flexibly and in varied ways. For example, the differentiation approach can be used as a means to rigorously search for and examine themes of conflict, power, use of and resistance to authority, and ideational inconsistencies between different cultural values or between espoused values and actual behaviour (Martin, 1992, 2002; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015; Smerek, 2010). This perspective may be particularly useful in sport research, because researchers have recently argued that, although conflict is prevalent in sport, it is under researched and under theorised (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Furthermore, a fragmentation approach could be used to examine unclear goals and objectives, the absence of clearly defined or understood cultures and meanings, or consensus as transient and issue specific (Martin, 2002; Smerek, 2010). Such tracks of future research are likely to be fruitful in elite sport contexts, where ambiguity perhaps naturally coalesces with the fast-paced, volatile, short-termist, unpredictable nature of these environments (e.g., Nesti, 2010). Ambiguity is therefore something that must be understood and made sense of if applied practitioners are to survive and thrive in difficult and challenging contexts. A fragmentation perspective can also help sport psychology researchers to portray organisational change and a complex and chaotic organisational reality with unforeseen consequences, inherent ambiguity,

confusion and misunderstandings, rather than as sequential list of steps (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015) as has sometimes been the case in organisational sport psychology literature (e.g., Henriksen, 2015).

While it can be useful to look at culture through a ‘single’ perspective, each perspective and the corresponding portrayal is incomplete (Martin, 2002). To adopt a single perspective — even when couched within the precise aims of a particular study — invites an unavoidable tautology: the culturally informed researcher defines and conceptualises culture in specific and narrow terms and then seeks out the ascribed cultural meanings and interpretations that supports those views, while reducing or omitting what does not fit (Martin, 2002). Accordingly, although each single perspective offers heuristic value it should not be used to promote categorical thinking (i.e., “this is an integrated culture”, “team X has a fragmented culture”). The narratives presented here are therefore meant as illustrative examples of each outlined perspective rather than intended as typologies and models of culture.

Consequently, Martin (1992, 2002) advocated for a fourth possibility: each perspective can be held simultaneously. This perspective potentially enables researchers to attend to a wider range of cultural meaning and subjective interpretation and show how culture is simultaneously integrated, differentiated and fragmented, demonstrating that multiple and competing cultural meanings and patterns can be in play at any one time within a team or organisation (Martin, 2002). By way of example, consider the athlete who covered up his injury in the second narrative (differentiation): From the coach’s point of view (and the differentiation perspective used in the analysis) this action provided evidence that the player held individually orientated meanings that contradicted the espoused values of the team, revealing subcultural differences between players and coaches and between different player groups. Conceivably though, interviews with the player,

his team-mates, or even use of another perspective in the method is likely to have revealed a different, or more layered interpretation; for instance, that the injured player was actually trying to uphold team ideals, for example. As a star player, perhaps he felt as though he could not let his team-mates down, and so concealed his injury and played through significant pain in a display of commitment and loyalty to the team and *integrated* ideals. It is also conceivable that his club mates who also knew – but did not raise concerns – were preserving the consensus and following an unwritten cultural rule that prevented disclosure of concerns to those in authoritative positions. A consideration of ambiguity in analysis of this key element of the narrative could also potentially raise the possibility that the player was caught between a number of competing understandings and faced with uncertainty about what to do, simply persisted without disclosing. Preservation of the status quo is proposed as a common reaction to organisational ambiguity (Merkus et al., 2017). Consequently, the fourth possibility that Martin has advocated can support the development of a more complex cultural analysis that is at once broader (because data consistent with more than one perspective is examined) and deeper (because analysis does not begin and end with the easy to identify, home perspective of the researcher) or what is immediately obvious (Martin, 2002; Martin et al., 2004).

Using the three perspectives together could, therefore, be a way to examine layered and complex cultural meaning ascribed to any number of significant events, practices, and issues that occur in elite sport (e.g., major tournaments, de-selection, coach behaviour, organisational change). It could also provide a means to explore how culture is understood at different levels of hierarchy or between various groups that make up the sport environment (e.g., experienced athletes/junior athletes, athlete/support staff, coaches/sport science/administration) or among demographic groups (older/younger, male/female). Using the three perspectives simultaneously is

therefore consistent with the subtle realist approach adopted and the realist assertion that some perspectives will describe reality more faithfully and accurately than others (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019). Starting out from this position is one way researchers could increase interpretive validity in their studies of culture.

Mirroring and building on these suggestions for research, there are practical implications to these potential uses of this broader view of culture. It is increasingly reported that sport psychologists in full-time positions in elite sport have a broader (and more diverse) role (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010), whereby they often have to work across the team or organisation in order to be deemed worthy of full-time positions. This wider functioning requires they work with an array of athletes, support staff and administration and organisational personnel and must build, maintain and balance multiple relationships at different levels of hierarchy and specialism in order to be effective (McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010). Arguably, such a remit speaks to the usefulness of a more nuanced, more encompassing concept of culture (i.e., one that exists beyond leadership ideas of integration and homogeneity). Developing a less restricted concept of culture can support practitioners to better understand non-leadership sources of cultural content, including existing subcultures, countercultures, general tensions, ambiguities and uncertainties, to the benefit of their applied practices and service delivery.

More specifically, the fuller comprehension of culture supplied by the three perspective approach can be applied in a number of ways to enhance culture understanding and effect organisational change. The following section comprises some initial suggestions in relation to applied implications. First, and aligning with other scholarship, the three perspective approach suggests that confidence in culture management based on conformity and consensus is misplaced (Harris & Ogbonna, 1998; Martin, 2002). It is unlikely that applied sport psychologists will find

a core set of consensus values and meanings that exist across all areas of a large, complex sport organisation and that adequately or comprehensively explains the cultural understandings of all involved. Accordingly, sport psychologists should adopt a questioning and sceptical approach to the discovery and development of value sets and messages that appear homogeneously and uniformly understood, and that are designed to manage the cultural meaning people derive from events and organisational life (Alvesson, 2002). As part of this endeavour, sport psychologists might follow the advice for researchers previously detailed and instead seek out and identify multiple and layered cultural understandings that show contestation and uncertainty. Aside from arriving at a more accurate and realistic account of the cultural reality, there is also value in revealing the differentiated and uncertain aspects of organisational life. For instance, this more thorough and inclusive approach to culture can be usefully used to help prevent people with the authority to dictate courses of actions, from failing to see events and issues from the perspectives of others. For example, assuming consensus and harmony and “buy-in” to managerial programs of change, where in fact there might be none. A failure to detect resistance or to overestimate support for planned changes are sure-fire ways of decreasing the likelihood of successful change, and sport psychologists can help leaders to mitigate this possibility, simply by being attuned to and respectful of alternative cultural meanings.

Paradoxically, the described approach may at times actually be used to facilitate efforts at developing coherence and important shared views, because the sport psychologist, using the three perspective lens can work across groups, roles and layers of hierarchy and functionality to access and gather alternative cultural understandings. In doing so, they can usefully expose the gap that exists between individual sensemaking and organisational espoused values and discourage the trivialisation of difference and deeper cultural meaning. With these points in mind, sport

psychologists in their evolving organisational role (cf. Eubank, et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff, 2019a, b) may be uniquely positioned and equipped to better explain organisational change and culture initiatives to members of different groups or subcultures; who, owing to a host of intersecting reasons are likely to hold varying cultural interpretations of events. Of course, this point is not supposed to imply that sport psychologists merely become “expert” pawns or stooges in grand managerial ambitions of change that ultimately revolve around increasing compliance and the removal of resistance. Rather, it also means that sport psychologists can encourage more collaboration and a participative approach to planned change efforts, by helping to ensure that alternative and marginalised viewpoints are heard and considered by leaders in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, understanding how people re-negotiate and re-produce culture in patterns that are differentiated and fragmented can help to re-configure the very idea of resistance to leader-led change (and practices that focus purely on its identification and suppression). Taken as evidence of valued and constructed cultural meaning – as opposed to being seen as evidence of a lack of culture, or of a weak one, such as in the view of Schein (2010) – resistance can be reconceptualised from something to be overcome, to something that must be understood. That is, resistance can be reformulated as evidence that alternative cultural meanings are in play. Thus, the possibility for cultural preservation or renewal as opposed to change based on the erosion of cultural meanings may be an entirely sensible option for leaders to weigh. In this regard, sport psychologists can have value, not merely as ‘cultural architects’ who are involved in the design and execution of culture *change*, but as preservers and protectors of culture and as skilled and culturally-sensitive professionals who can help people to have meaningful conversations within and across cultural lines.

Contrary to existing sport psychology guidelines on culture change within elite sport contexts (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015), these new ideas for sport psychology organisational practice encourage the applied sport psychology community to push back strongly against linear thinking that promotes the mechanisation of culture and the management of meaning. A persistent, fatal critique of these mechanical modes of culture thinking and application is that they are often bound to and encourage the essentialisation of culture (Ortner, 1999, 2006). The essentialisation of culture refers firstly to the idea that groups of people *have* a culture, and secondly, that the distilling of complex social and cultural phenomenon down to key characteristics that define a particular group and how they act, is both possible and desirable. (Meek, 1988; Ortner, 2006). In other disciplines, the tendency to essentialise cultures has been met with scepticism, partly because it has tended to generate a somewhat static picture of culture which has typically struggled to explain change (Martin, 2002; Ortner, 2006). In their early culture change work, Cruickshank and Collins (2012b) have already warned the sport psychology community to be wary of linear, episodic and n-step models of change. Yet, as a community of scholars and practitioners, we have nonetheless remained unwittingly tethered to such thinking, since we have failed to realise that the very concept of culture that we have uncritically adopted, supports the development and use of mechanical modes of change. Use of the three perspective approach in our applied practices can, therefore, encourage a move away from these dated ideas of culture and the static, prescriptive models of change that continue to dominate applied work (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Hughes, 2015; Todnem By, 2005). For the organisational sport psychology and practitioner community, this process will likely involve fostering organisational practices that are agile, that emerge from different layers of authority and hierarchy, and that frame change as a

continuous, open-ended process of learning and adaptation to changing circumstances and unpredictable conditions (By, 2005; Burnes, 1996, 2004); an entirely different way of working organisationally than is typically depicted in guides to culture change best practice within sport psychology (e.g., Henriksen, 2015).

Finally, and with a view to further shaping the future of applied practices in the area, it is specifically hoped that a greater awareness of the three perspective approach can challenge the idea that culture is a totalising, monolithic whole. This assumption has deep practical implications for sport psychology delivery because it encourages practices that revolve around the assumption that a culture can be identified and moved in extreme and wholesale ways, through leader and expert intervention. Taken to the extreme, influential sport psychology literature has stated clearly that sport psychology intervention can change a culture into an entirely new one if that is what is required (Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). The three perspective approach highlights this view as a fiction, and de-legitimises associated practices, because culture is not uniform, singular or monolithic, but is also differentiated and fragmented. On a practice level, this suggests the need to be more modest and humble about what our applied work entails and can achieve. It also suggests the need for and potential effectiveness of smaller scale culture projects, for instance, work with smaller groups and across silos of hierarchy, role, and specialism to effect realistic, yet meaningful culture change (Alvesson & Sveninngsson, 2015; Harris & Ogbonna, 1998).

There are a number of limitations to the present study. First, the narratives have all been informed by a white male perspective. Having undergone rapid professionalisation and expansion within global economies and multicultural societies, elite sport environments are increasingly acknowledged as occupationally, demographically and culturally diverse (Nesti, 2010; Ronkainen

& Blodgett, in press; Ryba, et al., 2018). The narratives presented in this study do not reflect such diversity, and future research should seek out a greater variety of voices so as not to repress or marginalise certain cultural identities. Second, the study was deliberately grounded in the interpretations of individual local actors and focused on interpretive validity and the meanings they ascribed. This arguably reduced attention to outside context and wider goings-on at different levels of analysis (organisation, wider sport, society), which also influence how culture is negotiated, produced and reproduced (Hofstede, 1982; Martin, 2002). Finally, although the three perspective approach has been developed as part of a critical management movement and challenges the legitimacy of leader-centric accounts of culture, arguably the differentiation and fragmentation narratives constructed do not show subcultures or ambiguity in a particularly positive light. Indeed, both accounts could be read as cautionary tales for what happens when integration fails or is not implemented correctly. To address this critique, future research from a critical stance could deliberately seek out more positive accounts of conflict and ambiguity, such as how they might foster creativity, positive disruption, or acceptance of alternative viewpoints. Such accounts exist in wider literature (e.g., Gilin Oore, Leiter, & LeBlanc, 2015; Mowles, 2015; Tjosvold, 2017) and indicate how a non-consensus approach to culture (and organisation) can act to support organisational effectiveness, morale, or the maintenance of non-leader views, which are also important in wider organisational life.

These limitations notwithstanding, it is hoped that the use of narrative, interpretative traditions, and/or the three perspective approach will be used to inspire both subtle and deep analyses of culture that manage to tease out the contextual richness, cultural diversity as well as the importance of subjectivity and the agency of intentional social actors. These methods and ways of conceptualising culture offer a means to challenge present oversimplifications of culture as a

tool that leadership can employ to engineer operational and on-field athletic success. Furthermore, they suggest that resistance to cultural master narratives, the rule of 'elites' and hegemonic management practices are important lines of future inquiry.

CHAPTER 4 – A Critical Discourse Analysis of #Savethecrew: Power, community and 'thick' cultural resistance

“Every city in the world has a village in its heart.”

**Didier Levy.
Fictional character in the
novel *Shantaram***

4.0. Connecting Vignette

In the months that followed Study 1, I considered the various sport organisations that I could possibly research so I could continue the themes of investigation from the preceding chapter, but at an organisational, rather than individual level. Again, my thoughts returned to the potential of ethnography. Continuing from Study 1, I could perhaps re-apply Martin and Meyerson's approach – with the three perspectives held simultaneously this time – to examine the different cultural interpretations that co-existed within the one organisation, perhaps with more focused attention to ideas of resistance that increasingly encroached on my culture thinking. I sketched research plans for the whole thesis and was confident that such a study would help bind the thesis as a whole and segue comfortably into Study 3, which could possibly centre around some sort of reflection or autoethnography of my initial (and very recent) consulting experiences in sport.

Nevertheless, reality bites, and having recently immigrated to the USA, my time and capacity for any long-term organisational ethnography was quickly curtailed as I started working three jobs (one in a bakery, one as a bid and tender writer, while picking up some consultancy work in sport and business settings on the side). I was also still trying to find my feet (personally and professionally) in a new country. Even if I could somehow find the time to do an ethnography, most of my professional network was either in Scotland or the connections of Liverpool John Moores faculty and supervisors, and scattered across the UK. Without the flexibility that comes with being a full-time student, and disconnected geographically from my professional and support network, I was isolated and coming up short in terms of how to implement a worthwhile ethnography. My motivation dipped considerably and my research again began to languish. I was firmly in the dreaded PhD lull, and rudderless, I drifted aimlessly for a considerable time.

It was during this period of substantial non-productivity, that I slowly came to find other ideas of culture that lifted me out of the mire and that reinvigorated me. While I wasn't conducting studies per se, I *was* reading more widely than I ever had, and came into contact with an abundance of culture ideas, nuances and problems that preoccupied me and began to feel unignorable.

For instance, one problem that I returned to repeatedly was the extent to which the interpretations presented in Study 1 (and how I represented them) were de-contextualised from wider goings on. I was loosely aware of this issue in the analysis, as I fashioned participant narratives. Now, as I re-read the original interview transcripts and early drafts of participant narratives, each story seemed to be firmly couched within broader (macro) concerns that existed outside of the organisation and the omission was more glaring than I had imagined. In narrative one, the performance director was trying to build a performance culture within a specific national culture and sporting heritage. I had lessened the effects of this established history and the cultural traditions of the sport, its clubs, and its members, to showcase the colonizing qualities of the integrative perspective. In the second narrative, simmering tensions between coaches alluded to observed frictions in recent years between the volunteer and professional coach generations in the context of professionalisation of sport in the UK (Grix, 2009; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). The professionalisation of sport also lurked in the background of the third narrative, as the academy sport scientist revealed a chasm between how the academy was performing and the blueprints that were laid out by the Football Association, as part of a wider process of standardisation.

As noted by a range of scholars, organisational culture is also profoundly affected by other, wider cultures that exist outside of organisation – such as those of societies and nations (Gilmore, 2013; Hofstede, 1985; Girginov, 2010). I reflected on Hardy et al.'s (1996) analogy, that “elite

athletes do not live in a vacuum” (p. 239) and wondered whether I was challenging the analogy or maintaining it.

As I thought about the idea of culture ‘outside’ of the organisation, I increasingly turned attention to more sociological interpretations of society and culture (e.g., Archer, 1985, 1995; 1998; Eagleton, 2016; Giddens, 1979; Weber, 1978) and paid more heed to the influence of social structures, such as power, domination and economy that were always in some way working, even when covertly, to influence the cultural world of ideas, beliefs, values and meanings.

The introduction of ideas of power into my existing understanding of culture was particularly jolting. Without attention to power, the central premise of my thesis – that deeper theories of culture were needed as a means to explain social goings on in organisations – seemed toothless and quaint. Culture absent of power, seemed ill-equipped to tackle the political and darker aspects of sport. I scoured sport psychology literature and was shocked at the virtual omission of power considerations in journals, and wondered if this might be the reason, so many accounts of sport psychology practice within elite sport seemed sanitised. Finding little joy in sport psychology, I turned to wider sport literature looking for definitions, themes, discussion and empirical studies that offered an insight into the workings of power; before, still unsatisfied, attempting to trace and understand some of the classic and fundamental power ideas woven through the likes of Weber, Foucault, Bourdieu, Gramsci and Habermas.

The more I read, the more I was alarmed at what I did not know. Increased awareness of power issues had the same effect on me as it had on anthropologists and social theorists of the late 1970s and early 1980s — it politicised my understanding of the social world. The classic Geertzian concept of culture retained much of its appeal though, because it speaks, still, I felt, to people’s capacity to understand and construct their world through meaning and I saw no sense in throwing

the baby out with the bath water. Rather, like Ortner (1984, 1999, 2006, 2016), I thought that deeper understandings of both culture *and* power could be fused to the benefit of both concepts and to the overall aim of intricate social analysis. Culture in this sense could still provide the framework that enabled people to interpret and act upon the world, but couched within narratives that lent themselves to the analysis of power (for example, narratives of politics, ideology, class, inequality, and capitalism), it could be harnessed to do different kinds of analyses. I began to see culture as simultaneously enabling and constraining, and indelibly capable of framing how subjective, conscious actors make their way within regimes and machinations of power.

With refined aims, and a modified formulation of culture, simply, re-applying Martin and Meyerson's perspective at a different level of analysis would no longer satisfy my intellectual curiosity or what I wanted to do with the concept of culture in sport psychology research. If I was serious about understanding culture – and I desperately wanted to be – it was clear I had to break free of the vacuum and step into some unfamiliar territory (e.g., structures of power, domination, resistance, economy) before I could come back (to sport psychology) armed (hopefully) with new culture knowledge.

At the tail end of these breakthroughs in my culture thinking and thesis planning, a news story broke that the Columbus Crew SC (a Major League Soccer team) were potentially going to be moved to another city. I had lived in Columbus after I had moved to the US from Scotland and had seen the Crew play a number of times. I had close friends who were 'die-hard' fans, and they immediately started texting me, asking whether I had "heard the news about the Crew" and "that they would not give up their team to another city without a fight". My friends asked me to check out the hashtag #Savethecrew", and to share it if I could, spreading the word about what the Crew owner was trying to do. I did check out the hashtag and started following it, first as a curious but

casual observer and then very quickly, as someone with a specific interest in culture and issues of power and resistance.

4.1. Introduction:

“I’ve shown my commitment to Columbus. We wore the city’s colors this year on the pitch. We put Columbus back in our badge. I’m tired of the insecurities. We’re playing for Columbus.”

- Anthony Precourt, owner of the Columbus Crew, October, 2016

“Your City, Your Crew” - Columbus Crew Billboard, downtown Columbus, July, 2017

In her influential introduction to *The Fate of Culture: Geertz and Beyond*, Ortner (1999) argued that cultural analysis could no longer be an end in itself. To remain relevant in analyses of social processes, culture had to be made to do new kinds of work, so that it could more appropriately attend to power and its themes (e.g., domination, inequality, hegemony, resistance, and so on) which had often been omitted from more traditional analyses of culture in the interpretive and Geertzian tradition (Ortner, 1999). There *are*, as she noted, *always* stories of struggle and change, where actors are variably positioned with respect to power and intention. To help address these elisions (and to better attend to these types of stories), Ortner suggested the necessity to situate cultural analysis “within and, as it were, beneath larger analyses of social and political events and processes” (p. 9). This meant planting culture more firmly within the grounds and stakes of action, and examining it at the “borderlands” and “zones of friction” in which the clash of power *and* meaning and identity is the substance of change and transformation (Ortner, 1999, p. 8; Rosaldo Jr, 1989). In this new positioning, culture could remain meaning-focused and an important means to understand the life worlds of actors, yet better equipped to attend to the forms of power and agency they are able to construct and are subject to (Alvesson, 2002; Ortner, 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to conduct such an analysis. Specifically, I undertake a critical discourse analysis of the #Savethecrew Twitter feed and grassroots campaign. The analysis is also

inclusive of surrounding discourses, such as press statements, news articles, and a variety of other online media material, such as images and videos linked to Tweets to describe and analyse the high profile and contested events that pitted the owners of the Columbus Crew Soccer Club and Major League Soccer (MLS) against Crew fans and the city of Columbus. Guided by a critical stance and adopting an emancipatory tone, I focus closely on themes of power and domination to understand the resistance discourses of the #Savethecrew movement and the cultural meanings ascribed and circulated by its members.

As noted in the literature review, there are of course, a great many different theories and definitions of power in existence because it has been widely and variably conceptualised by a range of incredibly influential figures (e.g., Karl Marx, Max Weber, C. Wright Mills, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Anthony Giddens). I refrain from detailing all of these theories and their associated works here, as space and ensuring an appropriate flow to this chapter, does not permit for such a substantial segway. Generally speaking though, most of these theories can be placed along a spectrum that ranges from defining power as de-limited and behavioural (such as the classic Person A makes Person B act in a certain way, despite B's resistance) to theories that locate power as a more complex, subtle (sometimes nefarious) phenomenon that is embedded in structures, social relations and in the world of ideas, images and preferences (Alvesson. 2002). While the classic theories (e.g., Weber) focus on individual and behavioural elements they can disregard the more covert, subtle and less significant workings of power.

Adopting any specific theory inevitably colours the analysis. For the purposes of this study, I have paid attention to Marxian theorisations of power that concern economic and class exploitation and power relations as they flow through issues of economy, commerce, and

commodification (Marx, 1975). In this regard, the Marxist-inspired sharpening of the anthropological concept of culture by Raymond Williams (1977) may also be seen as an influence, blending as it did the American concept of culture (where à la Geertz, meaning is central) with notions of hegemony and culture as ideological. Importantly to the work that follows, I am reluctant to afford power deterministic status by subscribing to the belief that there is no ‘outside’ to power. I have therefore sought guidance in literature that focuses not only on power and domination, but on the other side of power, which is resistance, and specifically the agentic capacity of social actors to resist powerful agents, structures and relations (e.g., Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu, 1999; Gramsci, 2000; Habermas, 1987; Ortner, 1999, 2005, 2006, Scott, 1985; Scott, Benedict, & Kirkvliet, 1986). Whether actors are dominated or resist in the face of powerful forces is thus, for me, a matter of empirical investigation, not an ontological fiat. To ground these concerns, I maintain a close relation with the Geertzian concept of culture and subsequent iterations, such as the important and highly regarded work (described earlier in this study and in the literature review) that have been provided by Sherry Ortner (1984, 1999, 2006, 2016). To my mind, this allows for a close consideration of cultural meanings and the cultural construction of agency as a means of empowerment and of pursuing projects of ‘thick’ resistance in a world suffused with domination and inequality (cf. Ortner, 1999, 2006).

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 Power and the Sport Landscape

Inspired by the ‘critical impulse’ that swept through the academic landscape in the 1980s, researchers from sport disciplines have utilised theories and themes of power within sport scholarship as a means to challenge positivist, functionalist-driven research agendas; and moreover, to demonstrate struggles of real-life power relations, inequality, and forces of

domination, exploitation, control and hegemony. Within the broad genre of sport research (e.g., sport sociology, sport history, sport communication, sport psychology) there is a considerable body of critical scholarship that is grounded in cultural studies (e.g., Birrell & McDonald, 2000). Although there are a variety of theoretical positions that fall within this broad genre (e.g., Marxist, critical race, feminist, and so on), research in this area tends to have an in-built orientation towards social justice, focusing on sport culture(s) as a means to draw attention to inequality and issues of power that can help to explain social life (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; McGannon & Schinke, 2014). As part of this community of sport scholars, sport psychology scholars have for a long time (e.g., Butryn, 2003; McGannon & Schinke, 2014; McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2005) advocated for a more critical cultural approach to issues of power and how it is enacted (across relations of identity, race, class, gender, and sexuality, and so on); and along with this broader corpus of work, has forever destroyed “the myth that sport is an innocent pastime that exists outside of the realm of economic and political forces” (Birrell & McDonald, 2000, p. 5).

While the extensive scope of this research across disciplines and limited space precludes a thorough review, some examples that have contributed to understanding of power and its distributions may serve to illustrate. From feminist theory, we know that sport is most clearly the preserve of males and the site of male hegemony and patriarchal control (e.g., Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010; Bryson, 1987; Messner, 1988). Sport as an inherently male domain also has deep implications for power issues related to sexuality (Krane, et al., 2010), social norms (e.g., Krane, 2008), and homophobia (e.g., Bryson, 1987). Critical scholarship focused on race and ethnicity has progressed understanding of evolving social constructions and meanings of ‘race’, as they pertain to discrimination, participation and representation (Birrell & McDonald, 2000). Research within sport psychology has also drawn attention to how power issues manifest in

emotional abuse and athlete-coach relationships in elite sport (Kerr, Stirling, & MacPherson, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2009).

Other research, often from Marxist perspectives, has shown how sport and issues of power are interwoven with capitalist practices, ideologies of economy and the commodification of sport (e.g., Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012; Taylor, 1971), for example, in the takeover, closure or relocation of a team (Gruneau & Whitson, 1994; Kennedy, 2012; Rowe, 2000). From Marx's sociological perspective, commodification is at the heart of capitalist progress, the goal of which is to transform virtually everything into a commodification (Gruneau, 1983). Essentially, the concept of commodification in associated literature refers to the process by which something with no (or limited) economic value becomes valuable (Ben Porat, 2012). Owing to the domination of capitalism, the commodification of soccer is inevitable (Ben Porat, 2012; Giulianotti, 2005), but although it occurs everywhere, it is specified and shaped by local characteristics (e.g., nation, culture, politics).

4.2.2 The business of Team/Franchise Relocation in the USA

Unlike in other sporting nations, such as the UK and in Europe, sport leagues in America do not operate their sporting systems in terms of promotion and relegation between leagues based on performance. Instead, the same teams compete in each league, year on year, within a franchise system¹³. A place in a major sport league is therefore desirable and prestigious. Although there is no promotion or relegation, cities (often with backing from leagues), can compete for the right and

¹³ The professional sports leagues of North America maintain a stipulated number of teams, known as franchises, which field one team each. The franchises have exclusive territorial rights, usually large enough to cover major metropolitan areas, so that they have no immediately local rivals. New teams can enter the competition only by a vote of current members. This system is often called a "franchise system" and was first introduced in baseball before later being adopted by the other North American sport leagues.

privilege of hosting a franchise and a space in the league (Baker, 2018). In the major sport leagues of America, franchise relocation has been commonplace (Baker, 2018)¹⁴ and is reflective of the American spirit of entrepreneurship, progress and mobility as a necessary means to seek out better, capitalistic opportunities. Although such relocations are accepted as standard practice in American sport, it has not prevented a number of accusations being levelled at franchise owners and league commissioners. These include allegations of cronyism, unethical practices, corruption, and using the possibility and threat of relocation as a means to bargain for and extract advantageous terms from cities, such as favourable tax rates, local subsidies, public funding for new stadiums and support for planning permissions (Baker, 2018).

In contrast to other American sport leagues, the MLS has managed to remain comparatively immune to franchise relocations with only one previous relocation in 2006, when, the San Jose Earthquakes moved to Houston and were rebranded as the Houston Dynamo.¹⁵ While the process of commercialisation of soccer is an almost global phenomenon (Ben Porat, 2012), Phil West (as cited by Jeffrey, 2018), author of *The United States of Soccer: MLS and the Rise of American Soccer Fandom*, argued the reason the MLS has not subscribed to a culture of mobility and opportunism is because soccer is viewed as nobler and less beholden to the machinations of money and greed than other American sports. Soccer fans in the US see their club and clubs' culture much like soccer fans in other parts of the world do; as locally rooted and as part of their identity

¹⁴ There have been more than 30 team relocations since 1966 (Delessio, 2016.), including the recent high profile moves such as in the NFL (the Chargers from San Diego to Los Angeles, Rams relocated from St Louis to Los Angeles, the and the Raiders from Oakland to Las Angeles, to Oakland again, before moving to Las Vegas; and In the NBA, the Supersonics famously moved from Seattle to Oklahoma City and was rebranded as the Thunder.

¹⁵ In 2005, the owner of the Earthquakes, Anschutz Entertainment Group, announced plans (and was given permission by the MLS) for relocation to Houston due to failing efforts to secure a soccer-specific stadium in San Jose. The organisation in Houston would be considered an expansion team by the league, eventually becoming the Houston Dynamo, beginning play in 2006. The Earthquakes returned after a two-year hiatus, resuming play in 2008.

(Kennedy, 2012; Hognestad, 2012), “functioning as a church in a way” (West, as cited by Jeffrey, 2018). The MLS has carefully cultivated such communal tones as part of their overall mission and strategy in a bid to appeal to US sport fans who are looking for a different kind of fan experience than what is supplied in the major sport leagues of baseball, basketball, football and hockey. League Commissioner Don Garber, for instance, has frequently stated that soccer must be embedded in communities and the civic identities of soccer fans (e.g., Carlisle, 2016).

Correspondingly – and consistent with the extreme commercialisation of soccer witnessed in other parts of the world (cf. Andrews & Ritzer, 2007; Kennedy, 2012) – MLS leadership has also set ambitious strategic goals to transform soccer into one of the major sports in the US and the MLS into one of the most prestigious soccer leagues in the world. Consequently, in recent years there has been considerable growth in the MLS with more teams being added to the league roster, plans for league expansion (from 22 in 2017, with eventual plans to expand to 28), more stadiums being built in attractive and accessible downtown areas, and an unprecedented interest in soccer from Americans and cities/new markets looking to establish a team within their cities and communities (Couch, 2016). The professionalisation and commercialisation of sport and their major leagues and teams is however, only one aspect of how sport has changed in recent decades. There has also been modernisation through the introduction of technology and social media – developments that have altered how sport leaders, managers, coaches, athletes and fan are able to interact. These developments are traced in the next section.

4.2.3 The Value of Social Media Research and a Changing ‘Field Site’

The arrival of social media, defined here “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0¹⁶, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), has had a significant effect on all societal institutions, including sport (Pedersen, 2014). From a fan perspective, there are numerous reasons to use social media. For example, it facilitates interaction with other fans, athletes, coaches and brands (Frederick, Clavio, Burch, & Zimmerman, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Through social media, fans can obtain and keep up to date with sport/team news, stories and information about teams, athletes and coaches (cf. Abeza, O’ Reilly, Séguin, & Nzindukiyimana, 2015) and remain informed about events (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012). Social media can therefore help fans to feel and be part of a community and to share in a social identity (Kassing & Sanderson, 2015; Wann, 2006). Social media can also be used to express discontent, organise protest and engage in activism (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012). It is owing to the omnipresence of social media and its varied and dynamic uses that social media has become a domain of serious interest for academic researchers (Pedersen, 2014), and moreover one with clear social and cultural connotations (Abeza et al., 2015). Of particular interest and relevance to culture scholars, social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter – and the internet and technology more broadly – have changed the idea of what constitutes a ‘field site’ and where culture is located and can be studied (Abu-Lughod, 1997; Murthy, 2013; Wittel, 2000). In more traditional anthropological ethnographic work it has been taken as a given that culture was contained in a location – within the boundaries of a geographical (or physical) location and/or attached to a particular group

¹⁶ Web 2.0 is a term that was first introduced in 2004 to describe the new way in which software developers and end-users had begun to utilise the World Wide Web as a platform whereby content and applications are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion, rather than being created and published solely by individuals (cf. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

(Ortner, 1999). In essence, the ‘locals’ have a culture and the job of the researcher is to come back and tell us what it is (Geertz, 1973). However, this now ‘classic’ concept of culture has become increasingly difficult to sustain. Societies have modernised and diversified and so have cultures (Abu-Lughod, 1997; Wittel, 2000). Those who study culture can no longer underplay the “complex social formations . . . , transnational networks, discontinuous discourses, global ‘flows’, increasingly hybridized identities, and so forth” (Ortner, 1999, p. 7). Technology – inclusive of social media – has comprised an important part of this changing cultural landscape and have helped develop the idea that boundedness of a culture is something constructed rather than *found* (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014; Wittel, 2000). Such ideas have led many scholars to direct their attention not only on material spaces but to the study of cyberspace and online modes of communicating and interacting, suggesting that social media platforms and online and virtual worlds are legitimate field sites to investigate social and cultural phenomenon (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014; Posthill & Pink, 2012; Wittel, 2000). Naturally, these developments have given rise to a number of ethical questions, which are addressed in the methods section.

In this study, I focus on Twitter as the existing source of cultural data and the primary field of analysis. Twitter is a microblogging site, where through ‘microblogs’ users create and distribute communicative messages to other users (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). User accounts are linked to a username preceded by the @ symbol, and ‘Tweets,’ (messages) are now limited to 280 characters per message. People become connected to other users by choosing who to ‘follow’ and each Tweet sent by a user is transmitted to each of his or her followers, who can either respond by sending a Tweet of their own, or ‘retweet’ the original Tweet to share with their own followers. Owing to character limits, brevity and abbreviations used, Twitter has been criticised on the grounds that it normalises poor communication and is only useful for sharing simple status updates and engaging

in superficial communication (Miller, 2008). However, in spite of such communicative constraints, Twitter has become enormously popular with a variety of users (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010) and is one of the most widely used social media platforms in sport research (Abeza et al., 2015). It has also been argued that due to the instant updates and real-time participation of Twitter, it has the potential to facilitate considerable insight and awareness of others and “to augment our spheres of knowledge”, by linking us into a global network of individuals (Murthy, 2018 p. xii). In short, Twitter has emerged as a powerful channel for communicating, organising and tapping into the zeitgeist of the internet, its users, and society (Zimmer & Proferes, 2014).

4.2.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) How was power wielded and resisted in the events that surrounded the proposed Columbus Crew relocation (with particular focus on strategies and means of resistance)?
- 2) What cultural meanings are ascribed, constructed and shared by those who resist the powerful forces described?
- 3) How was Twitter and the hashtag #Savethecrew used to communicate and support resistance efforts?

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Theoretical positioning

The theoretical approach adopted for the present study is one that integrates interpretive traditions with critical theory. From an interpretive perspective, culture is a system of worldviews, values, and so on (i.e., meanings) that can be understood through interpretations and recording ‘thick description’ of publicly available cultural forms (symbols) (Geertz, 1973; Ortner, 1999). I proceed from the position that a) culture exists in the public sphere and can be read as if a text (cf. Geertz,

1973) and b) that sport and sport events/incidents can be usefully analysed as cultural texts and that the analyses produced by a ‘reading’ of these texts can in many ways resemble the rigorous analysis of scholars who read more traditional literary texts (cf. McDonald & Birrell, 1999).

Mindful of the critique that interpretive scholars have often relegated issues of power to the periphery by subordinating them to the culture-as-meaning argument (Ortner, 1984, 1999; Yanow & Ybema, 2009), I adopt an explicitly critical social theory position and assume that “culture bears the imprint of power” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 142). While there are multiple and varied strands of critical theory that have been shaped by influential figures (e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer¹⁷ of the Frankfurt School¹⁸ and Jürgen Habermas), I take critical theory to be, in its broadest sense, an umbrella term applied to scholarly work that adopts an essentially critical or radical stance on contemporary society; and which is geared towards “uncovering exploitation, repression, unfairness asymmetrical power relations...distorted communication and false consciousness” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 12).

I draw specifically on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to inform and conduct the research, emphasising CDA as both theory and method (Rogers, 2004; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Grounded in the traditions of critical theory, CDA is a broad label for an approach to discourse that primarily focuses on the way power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (van Dijk, 1995; McGannon, 2016). Owing to its focus on language and text (which can extend beyond the non-verbal to semiotic, multimodal, visual aspects of communication and therefore applicable to the study of images and

¹⁷ ‘Critical Theory’ in the sense of the Frankfurt School is mainly based on Max Horkheimer’s influential (1937) essay and means that social theory should be directed towards critiquing and changing society as a whole ,in contrast to traditional theories that only seek to understand or explain it.

¹⁸ The Frankfurt School consisted of a group of thinkers (e.g., Max Horkheimer), who were interested in the way Marxist theory could shed light on twentieth-century developments in capitalism.

media) (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), key assumptions (cf. Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) are that power relations are discursive, that discourse is integral to society and culture, that the link between text and society is mediated, and that discourse analysis is both interpretive and explanatory. Reflecting its critical roots, CDA is problem or issue orientated and researchers using CDA often take an explicit position – typically an oppositional stance – against the elites and the powerful, and subsequently aim to understand, expose and resist inequality (van Dijk, 1995). CDA is therefore laden with wider goals of emancipation, enlightenment, and social justice (Waugh, et al., 2016; Wodak, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). By implication, it often supports strategic formulations that aid the enactment and development of “counter-power and counter-ideologies in practices of and challenges of resistance” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18). However, according to a number of CDA scholars, much of CDA focuses on the oppressors and the powerful rather than oppressed and the powerless (Breeze, 2011; Flowerdew, 2008; Martin, 2003) Flowerdew (2008), for example, highlights that resistance to power is understudied in CDA; an unfortunate omission since it is central to “the debunking of power by the powerful” and because “resistances to power is all the more real and effective precisely because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised” (p. 205). Agreeing therefore with researchers such Flowerdew (2008) and Martin (2004), it is both essential and appropriate to adopt the position of the less powerful and to document and give voice to their attempts at resistance in the face of the powerful.

4.3.2 The Context of the Study: The Proposed Relocation of the Columbus Crew Soccer Club

The following narrative is constructed from a number of sources, most notably from the newspapers *The Columbus Dispatch* and *The Austin American-Statesman*, online business publications such as *BizJournals.com (Columbus Business First)*, sport media and news outlets such as *ESPN* and *Fox Sports*, the MLS’s own website and press releases, the Columbus Crew SC

website, the Save the Crew website, and a number of online fan articles from *MassiveReport.com*, a site that ‘hosts’ a number of dedicated team ‘news’ sites for soccer clubs such as the Columbus Crew.

The Columbus Crew Soccer Club (SC) (hereafter “the Crew”) are a professional soccer club based in Columbus, Ohio, competing in the Eastern Conference of the MLS. As the inaugural member of the MLS (joining in 1994) – they played their first game in 1996 and moved into the first soccer-specific stadium ever built for an MLS team in 1999 – the Crew have an established history in the league and presence in Columbus. In spite of these ties, on October 16th 2017, a news story broke that Anthony Precourt, the Crew’s owner and CEO of Precourt Sport Ventures (PSV) intended to move the team to Austin, Texas. Alex Fischer, president and CEO of the Columbus Business Partnership, a group of local business and community leaders, revealed that Precourt had decided to pursue a number of options, which included Austin and a new stadium that was being planned. Fischer disclosed a counter-offer (described as an aggressive effort) to enter into a 50-50 partnership and to do what was needed to keep the team in Columbus. According to Fischer, those efforts were roundly rejected. As the story grew, other sources speculated that Precourt had become frustrated with the Crew’s declining revenue and poor attendance and was considering a new location as a possible solution. The following evening, Precourt held a conference call with media and announced that he was indeed prepared to move the team to Austin if plans for a downtown location for a new stadium in Columbus could not be finalised:

The MLS is experiencing unprecedented growth. Our league peers are improving on and off the field year over year. Precourt Sports Ventures has spent the last 4 ½ years committed to elevating the Columbus Crew SC into one of the top clubs in MLS, both on and off the field... Despite all the efforts... our business is struggling to keep pace with the rising

standards of Major League Soccer...There's a growing disparity in attendance and corporate support in comparing Crew SC with its MLS peers and with other MLS markets such as Kansas City, Orlando, Portland and Salt Lake City... This Club has ambition to be a standard bearer in MLS, therefore we have no choice but to expand and explore all of our options. This includes a possible move to Austin, which is the largest metropolitan area in North America without a major league sports franchise. Soccer is the world's game, and with Austin's growing presence as an international city, combined with its strong multicultural foundation, MLS in Austin could be an ideal fit.

(Mlot & Murphy, 2017).

Precourt was clear, however, that no final decision had been made and clarified that he was not seeking public tax dollars to build a stadium in Columbus or Austin. Asked pointedly whether the Crew staying put was dependent on a Downtown stadium, Precourt replied, "Yes. Whether that's Franklinton or Arena District or Downtown, yes." (Erickson, 2017).

There was an immediate groundswell of public opinion, particularly among Crew fans who had long harboured suspicions that Precourt had never been entirely committed to Columbus. Precourt, in Austin, Texas (the day after the Crew playoff game against New York City) for a meeting with reporters, took a difference stance and again blamed low attendance and general disinterest from the fans and local business community; pointing out that in the last match of the previous season, with a playoff spot on the line, there were 11,000 people in a 20,000 capacity stadium. MLS Commissioner, Don Garber, weighed in and supported Precourt's claims, contrasting low Crew attendances with league-wide record attendances and unprecedented interest from different markets across the country who sought to join the MLS. Garber claimed that the Crew were near the bottom of all business metrics and that while the MLS were always reluctant

to allow teams to relocate, they would support Precourt's efforts to explore options outside of Columbus.

On November 15, 2017, Precourt and Garber met in New York with Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther and civic and business leaders, including Alex Fischer (of the influential Columbus Business Partnership group and vocal spokesperson against Precourt and plans to move the Crew) about the Crew's future in Columbus. After the meeting, contrasting narratives were presented. According to Precourt and MLS representatives, Columbus leaders did not present any plan for a downtown stadium. The delegation from Columbus held that Precourt and the MLS refused to take the relocation threat off the table. In a joint statement from Fischer and Ginther, it was made clear that neither Don Garber nor PSV had any commitment for the team to stay in Columbus, that "Great American cities do not get into bidding wars over sports teams to benefit private owners" and that "Once the league and owner are committed to Columbus, we stand ready, willing and able to support the team's success" (Newpoff, 2017). With battle lines seemingly drawn, it was a script that would play out over a tumultuous 13 months.

4.3.3 Twitter and the #Savethecrew Data Set

In CDA there is no accepted standards for data collection, however many CDA researchers work with existing data (texts not specifically produced for the respective research projects). In this study, I focus on Twitter as the existing source of data and specifically #Savethecrew data; the official hashtag of the Columbus soccer community's advocacy group, established with the aim of keeping the team in Columbus. Spearheaded by local fans, the #Savethecrew hashtag was used the day after Precourt's announcement that Crew may be leaving the city. It quickly gathered momentum and became the focal point of an extremely organised (and widely praised) grassroots campaign that galvanised Crew fans, but also local businesses, sponsors and government. The

campaign also engendered support from soccer fans of other MLS clubs and indeed clubs around the world. I focus on the #Savethecrew hashtag and Tweets between October 18th, 2017 (one day after Anthony Precourt's announcement about potential Crew relocation) until December 28th, 2018 (the day the Crews' fate was officially decided). This comprised over 4000 original Tweets (not inclusive of replies to Tweets), which increases this number substantially and which were also considered in the data analysis). In addition to evaluation of the text component, I also analysed associated images, videos, website links to images, media and online articles that were embedded within Tweets and replies). Moreover, while #Savethecrew was the primary analysis, I attended to other discourses that were associated with the Crew story (e.g., articles, MLS press releases, sport media coverage, fan-made videos and documentaries) so that analysis of #Savethecrew Tweets occurred alongside a more informed understanding of the wider social context and events.

4.3.4. Twitter and Ethics

While social media research has been a burgeoning area of study for many years now, it still presents a number of ethical challenges and areas of confusion for scholars. First, although there have been attempts at establishing guidelines for internet and social media researchers for both social media and specific platforms (e.g., Twitter) (e.g., Williams, Burnap, & Sloan, 2017), internet and social media research remains a highly contested and evolving domain. For instance, there are no agreed-upon standards to provide researchers with precise guidance on how to ethically conduct a study involving use of social media (Moreno Goniu, Moreno, & Diekiema, 2013; Vitak, Shilton, and Ashktorab, 2016). Second, reviews of social media research (e.g., Henderson, Johnson, & Auld, 2013; Zimmer & Proferes, 2014) have noted that most researchers using social media data do not detail ethical issues or considerations in relation to the research design and data collection,

and that, in fact, only a small percentage even make any specific mention of obtaining approval from an ethics board,¹⁹ which again contributes to a lack of guidance for social media researchers.

In accordance with a significant body of literature in the area (cf. Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Zimmer & Proferes, 2014) and following discussion with research supervisors and guidance from the institutional research and ethics committee, it was ultimately decided that ethical approval was unnecessary for this study. This decision was arrived at primarily on the grounds that data from Twitter is public domain content (Bolderston et al., 2018) and that there was no interaction with human subjects in order to obtain data that could be considered private (Moreno, Goniou, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013; Xiong, Cho, & Boatwright, 2019). To elaborate, “What you say on the Twitter Services may be viewed all around the world instantly. You are what you Tweet” (Twitter, 2016). Essentially, Twitter users, when agreeing to the Terms of Service, consent to their profile information, Tweets and associated metadata (e.g. location), being publicly available. Moreover, the #Savethecrew hashtag is a public hashtag rather than a personal account. Given the precise aims of the #Savethecrew movement (to reach as wide an audience as possible, garner support and increase awareness of the relocation situation), it is reasonable to deduce that there was no expectation of user privacy and that informed consent would not be expected. This is consistent with the assumptions of researchers (e.g., Townsend & Wallace, 2016) who argue that if a Tweet contains a hashtag, then the user Tweeting this has intended for their tweet to be visible to a broader audience and therefore informed consent is not necessary when reproducing the tweet in an academic article.

¹⁹ My own observations in engaging with/reviewing social media research supports these claims. Very few articles detail if or how ethical issues were considered, which is not to say that the studies are unethical, only that ethical issues are unreported.

However, these considerations do not absolve the researcher of ethical obligations. It was expected that I would undertake the research ethics committee training which provided further guidance on social media research and engage with the supervisory team if ethical questions or issues arose. I was particularly reflexive on issues regarding Twitter's own policies (such as how data can be obtained and presented) and how I selected and presented data (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), for instance ensuring that content was not sensitive, embarrassing, or revealed personal information. Similarly, I was careful in the images selected, for example choosing images of crowds, and where particular people were unidentifiable. In representation of the Tweets, I have avoided using user IDs (handles) unless they were used to occasionally identify organisations and high profile individuals²⁰ as either Tweeters or targets of the Tweets, because this helps to contextualise Tweets, events, intent of posts, and the strategies of resistance enacted, therefore aiding the representation the data.

4.3.5 Data Analysis

In light of criticisms that CDA research is often unsystematic and lacking detailed and rigorous descriptions of how the analysis was actually undertaken (Breeze, 2011), I offer a detailed account of how the data was analysed, in the hope that it might provide some guidance for sport researchers. Broadly, I worked from the widely held principle that CDA is an approach or attitude toward textual analysis as opposed to a step by step method, and that can, therefore, be applied in diverse, flexible and creative ways (Huckin 1997, p. 78; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). I was also cognisant of the criticism (e.g., Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Toolan, 2002; Waugh et al., 2016) that CDA

²⁰ Examples include MLS league commissioner Don Garber (somewhat comically – or ominously, depending on one's interpretation – named @thesoccerdon), owner of the Crew Anthony Precourt, various public figures such as state officials and politicians, various soccer analysts, reporters, players and former players, and Morgan Hughes, who was a leader and most visible spokesperson for the Save the Crew campaign.

scholars have a tendency to place excessive emphasis on the textual elements and semantics of grammar at the expense of a wider consideration of context, which can often render CDA analyses unnecessarily complex (Toolan, 2002). The analysis was therefore couched firmly within the aims of the research and was pragmatic in the sense that it was conducted with an eye at all times to the broader social context and the important, constantly unfolding events, developments and storylines that surrounded the Crew's potential relocation. Guided by these principles, I devoted attention to larger units of text (i.e. whole Tweets and threads/replies) as opposed to focusing on isolated words, semantics of grammar and syntax. The analysis was therefore geared towards the study of action, contexts and interaction of various discourses.

In the first phase of analysis, I followed the hashtag over a 13-month period through frequent (typically bi-weekly) 'check-ins'. This facilitated familiarisation with the timeline of events and also allowed me to experience the Tweets as they would have been read by others (for example, a Crew fan) following or tagged into the hashtag (allowing me to experience some of the uncertainty, the drama, the anger in real-time as events unfolded). At this stage, I made preliminary notes about key events, people and themes within the Tweets.

In the next phase of analysis (after the Crew's fate had been decided), I used the advanced search option to search for all #Savethecrew Tweets within small (one week) increments and repeated this step a number of times until all displayed Tweets over the 13-month period had been read and examined. This ensured further immersion into the data, although in this phase, I was more explicitly focused on analysis. Consistent with the theoretical positioning on culture adopted for this study, I was focused particularly on the meaning-laden and experiential, and in line with the application of CDA, paid particular attention to the following: Worldviews, values, metaphors, ideologies and systems of thought, master narratives, relational aspects, types of arguments and

tropes, interests and agenda-setting, and the historical and socio-political foreground that was often referred to in Tweets. The analysis was both deductive (informed by themes and theories of power/resistance and emancipatory aims) and inductive (looking for new insights and adhering to CDA principle of trying to uncover what was silent, implicit, less obvious, hidden, or underlying). Influenced by both deductive and inductive processes, I sought key ideas, themes, and emerging patterns (Patton, 2002) in Tweets that could structure the data and help to bind the larger narrative (McDougall, et al., 2015). As part of this process of developing larger, key themes, I developed codes for each Tweet that were either organisational (topic-based ‘bins’ that information is sorted into) or theoretical codes (derived from existing theory) (cf. Fletcher, 2017; Maxwell, 2012). At this stage I tried to maintain a flexible rather than a rigid approach to coding in an attempt to guard against concerns that “preconceptions of what to expect ... may distort your objective and even interpretive observations of what is ‘really’ happening there” (Saldana, 2013 p. 146). Codes were therefore treated provisionally and as such were subject to change or deletion as the data warranted. In the next phase of coding, codes were placed in parent codes which then became the themes, or building blocks, of the story that would later be crafted.

As with all approaches to CDA, the analysis was also abductive (involving theoretical description) and oscillated between theory and data analysis in retroductive (continuous movement between abstract and concrete and theoretical and empirical work, involving both interpretive and causal dimensions of explanation) ways (cf. Belfrage & Hauf, 2017; Fletcher, 2017; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For instance, once the main empirical findings (themes) had been established, I sought to re-describe the data in varied ways using a range of relevant concepts. I drew on, for instance, theories of culture informed by ideas of meaning (e.g., Geertz, 1973), structure (e.g., Maxwell, 1999; Williams, 1983) power as it relates to meaning (e.g., Ortner, 1999) and economy

(Eagleton, 2011; Thompson, 1991). Specifically, I created a number of conceptual maps to support visualisation and re-description of the findings. The aim of this abduction was to encourage reflexivity and to increase engagement with data beyond thick description of the empirical material, and to acknowledge that the theories applied to help describe and interpret findings are ultimately fallible (Fletcher, 2017). To further attend to retroduction, I followed recommendations from Vincent and O' Mahoney (2018) and imagined causal (or generative) mechanisms, which, if real, could account for the phenomena in question, creatively asking *what if* to identify whether there were some discourses of resistance that were more persuasive than others. At all stages of analysis, supporting researchers were used as critical friends to further increase reflexivity and to challenge emerging ideas.

Finally, it is important to mention that the analysis was undertaken with the performativity of discourse (what is achieved by the discourse, why participants may use it) in mind and from the view that language not only describes reality, but creates it (Fleming & Banjaree, 2016). From this view, the analysis was therefore informed by the idea of 'critical performativity' and the 'active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices' (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009, p. 538). In other words, I retained modest hope that the analysis would reveal ways that managerial practices can be challenged through fan resistance and discourse.

4.3.6 Rigour

I addressed rigour from the understanding that validity is not achieved through following a standard set of principles but rather through the relationship between the researchers' account and those things it is supposed to be an account of, rather (Maxwell, 2012). Following advice from Maxwell (2012) and Ronkainen & Wiltshire (2019), I attended specifically to perceived threats of validity at different levels (descriptive, interpretive, theoretical) (cf. Maxwell, 2012) as shown in

table 4.1, below. These tactics helped establish whether the account constructed suitably reflects the events and resistance of the Save the Crew campaigners, as analysed through the #Savethecrew hashtag and surrounding, contextualising discourses.

Table 4.1: Threats and Countermeasures to Validity

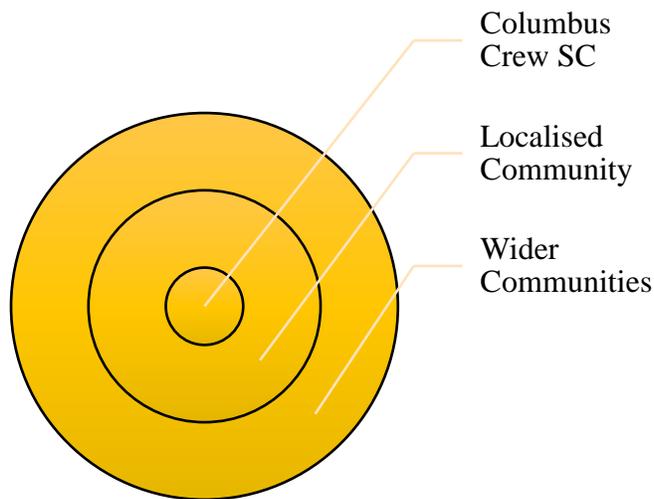
Type of validity	Countermeasures to validity threats
<p>Descriptive Validity</p> <p>(Factual accuracy of the account and the degree to which descriptive information is accurately reported)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged engagement with the data through following of the #Savethecrew hashtag (and wider story) over a 13 months period, involving general familiarisation with events and notetaking. • Substantial use of other sources for context, accuracy and fact-checking. • Extensive use of #Savethecrew (unmodified) Tweets • Use of two long time Crew fans and season ticket holders to check the account and timeline of events for factual accuracy.
<p>Interpretative Validity</p> <p>(The meanings held by participants and the degree to which their viewpoints, thoughts, intentions, and experiences are accurately understood and reported; interpretative validity is inherently a matter of inference from the words and actions of participants in the situation studied).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDA should focus on naturally occurring language (rather than abstract systems of language or invented examples (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), which is arguably a feature inherent to Twitter thus orientating interpretation towards meanings intended by users. • Extensive use of #Savethecrew (unmodified) Tweets. • Involvement of Crew fans and season ticket holders provided additional context and helped understand meanings of cultural insiders. • Use of a secondary author as a “critical friend” to challenge meanings inferred and arrived at.
<p>Theoretical Validity</p> <p>(The capacity of the theory to describe, interpret, and explain the phenomena under investigation; the degree to which a theory or theoretical explanation informing or developed from a research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of secondary researchers and supervisors with varied educational training and theoretical orientations to explore alternative theoretical explanations and furnish selected ones. • Application of retroductive techniques that supported oscillation between theory and data (for example: re-describing the data using a range of theoretical concepts and creating corresponding

study fits the data and is, therefore, credible and defensible).	visual maps to challenge the authority of the selected theories/presentation of data; imaging causal mechanisms, which, if real, could account for issues of power and resistance.
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4.4 Results and Discussion

The analysis reflects a multifaceted and dynamic conceptualisation of community in which it emerged as the central and organising concept that provided both the context for and site of hegemonic struggle between the owners of the Crew and MLS and attempts to save the Crew. Importantly, community – embodied by #Savethecrew – was a rich and symbolic cultural centre-point for meaning-making, organising, informing, and engendering support, not just locally, but nationally and globally (see figure 4.1 below). Moreover, through the continuous enactment, construction, and re-construction of meaning, community supported the development of resources and the creation of a compelling narrative that sustained Crew fans and provided them not merely with the capacity to resist power, but the means to reclaim it.

Figure 4.1 Circles of community



 **Twitter/ #Savethecrew**

The following account is presented in a flowing narrative form that helps capture the Save the Crew story, outline temporal aspects of the story, and that addresses the strategies of resistance at a local (Community as Local and as *Belonging*) and wider (Welcome to the Resistance: Fighting for the *Soul* of Soccer) levels of community. Although these sections have been delineated to aid coherence, readability and the extraction/presentation of resistance strategies, in reality they were dynamic, interactive and mutually reinforcing, and this should be kept in mind in the reading.

4.4.1 Community as Local and as Belonging

“Listen REAL hard to these words @thesoccerdon and remind yourself what you’re trying to take away. Community. Passion. History”.

Integral to the idea and reality of any community and associatively ‘community spirit’ is the sense of localised *belonging* that people demonstrate to a social or cultural entity (Block, 2018; Cohen, 1985). From the beginning (and indeed throughout the Save the Crew campaign), #Savethecrew Tweets were regularly and clearly embedded in the traditional and symbolic language of

community: “history, “home”, “family”, “tribe”, “us”, “sacred” “culture”. The consistent appearance of this type of language framed community as a culturally meaningful resource for Crew fans and challenges assertions that the authenticity of community meanings constructed by supporters have been all but eroded by extreme commercialisation of the sport (e.g., Andrews & Ritzer, 2007; Giulianotti, 2002). It affirms recent sport sociological research that suggests that soccer clubs remain integral to local communities (Ben Porat, 2012; Hognestad, 2012; Kennedy, 2012) and can facilitate locally rooted belonging and identity in supporters of a club. Crucially, far from this type of language being redundant, reflective only of emotional attachment and sentiment, or indicative of an ethereal, elusive and ‘feel good’ concept (cf. Bauman, 2001; Posthill & Pink, 2012), *community-as-belonging* was useful; providing the bedrock for practical ways of resisting the systemic power that threatened to dismantle it. It was repeatedly used to emphasise and cement the meaning-laden and symbiotic relationship between fan, club, and city. This use of language therefore extended ideas of community (and belonging) beyond the physical (i.e., possession of the Crew by virtue of their location within city boundaries) and the material, (i.e., “Anthony Precourt owns the Columbus Crew, but it's not his, it's ours. He can't take it. We're not going to let him.”) to something more sacred and spiritual. Kennedy similarly described as a sense of “moral ownership” that supporters often feel towards their club (2012, p. 343). As an inaugural member of MLS, Crew fans argued that they (and the city) had had nourished and cultivated the team since the inception of the league (“Keep the Crew in the city that built it!”). Over time the bond between city-club-fans had been woven through and forged by the history of the club as a *Columbus* team and the identity and cultural legacy of Columbus as a city that loves sport (“Columbus is a sports town. #SaveTheCrew is about more than soccer. It’s about our city and our culture... This is a fight for the future of #Columbus. Come join us. #CBJ #GoBucks #ClipShow #CEFC #OilUp”). For

the people of Columbus and Crew fans, the bond was meaningfully experiential. This finding aligns with soccer research that suggests the significance of soccer clubs as sites of memory and nostalgia for urban communities (Botiková, 2018). It also conferred a temporal quality to community that was grounded in the matchday rituals passed from one generation to the next, and in the memories, personal identities and collective consciousness of fans:

“My dad and grandpa have been season ticket holders for 22 years!!!! There’s so much love for soccer in our city! KEEP THE CREW IN COLUMBUS”

“The father/daughter #Crew96 tradition is a special one. Growing up, my dad and I had our matchday routine worked down to the minute. I'll be damned if that's ruined for future generations”

Images 4.1 and 4.2 Example images shared on #Savethecrew



The presentation of these strong associations and wholesome themes of community helped provoke instantaneous and strong support from various facets of local community. This included other established sport institutions ("We need to come together as a community." A message from #CEFC ownership: <http://www.columbuseaglesfc.com/wp/2017/10/20/eagles-support-savethecrew/>) and perhaps, most importantly, the wider civic and business community. Led by visible community leaders such as Alex Fischer of the influential Columbus Business Partnership group and a number of local businesses and Crew partners/sponsors (some with national and

international presences) it was clear from Tweets that the Crew and Crew fans were valued for their civic and social contributions: “This movement is about people and community. It’s about boys and girls and their heroes. It’s beautiful. And it’s worth all of our effort.” (Jeni Britton Bauer—Owner, Jeni’s Ice Cream).

Significantly, Crew fans, through the medium of social media and the #Savethecrew hashtag, were engaging with local business in a productive way that Precourt never wanted or seemed able to. #Savethecrew Tweets also indicated that Crew fans were far from naive to important matters of economy. Research has suggested that soccer fans recognise the widespread commercialisation of their sport (e.g. Giulianotti, 2005) and Crew fans understood deeply that there was an inevitable commercial aspect to soccer and MLS plans for expansion and growth. After all, as they pointed out, it was ultimately their dollars that lined the pockets of Franchises and the MLS. Cognisant that money talks, #Savethecrew consistently circulated the idea that *community* could be made to do important ‘material’ work and that fighting capitalism with capitalism was a counter-power strategy that Crew fans must embrace to save the Crew. In the first few days following Precourt’s announcement, detailed information about MLS ownership, Crew corporate sponsors and local businesses was gathered and shared at the #Savethecrew hashtag. Followers of the hashtag were encouraged to utilise contacts (“email”, “write”, “tell”, “call”, “Tweet”, “send carrier pigeon”) to enlist support and express their dissatisfaction that the Crew might have to leave town. Crew fans responded, with Twitter as a primary medium to engage businesses: “If I was @Acura I would cancel all sponsorship with @ColumbusCrewSC As well as @LandGrantBeer @OhioHealth @ScottsLawnCare scot #SaveTheCrew”. In turn, the business community responded with more than just moral support. Elevator Brewing Company provided a strategic Headquarters where Save the Crew Leadership would meet and plan, local businesses —

spreading the word via #Savethecrew — organised initiatives, fundraisers, and donated proceeds to Save the Crew efforts. Some prominent local businesses with longstanding ties to Columbus (Jeni’s Ice Cream, Mikey’s Late Night Slice, and Landgrant Brewery) even banded together to create an awareness video that was distributed locally to raise awareness of the Crew situation and how it affected all of Columbus commercially, civically and socially.

In the analysis it was clear that while #Savethecrew users were communicating in the language of commerce and economy as a means of strategic resistance, paradoxically it was also evident that business forces were using the traditional language (and communal practices) of community to engage with Crew fans and citizens of Columbus. Words like “identity”, “loyalty” and “local” appeared regularly in their Tweets to #Savethecrew and is not *only* the language of community and soccer, but of business, brand marketing and customer relations (e.g., Alsem & Kosteljik, 2008; Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). Crew fans seemed acutely aware of this nuance of language and applied it when seeking support from their business comrades in arms: “At @AEPOhio, they say, ‘Our business is about making connections -- to communities and to people.’ We love that--and now, our community and our people are being threatened with the loss of our soccer team. Please sign on as a #STCally to #SaveTheCrew! <https://savethecrew.com/allies>”. Using Twitter, #Savethecrew formalised this support (calling supporting businesses “Business” or ‘Crew’ Allies) and Crew fans could access information about each of these supporting businesses at the corresponding #Savethecrew website (“75+ companies are currently listed on our Business Ally page with a lot more to be added! Thank you all very much. We love the outpouring of community support! <https://savethecrew.com/allies> #SaveTheCrew #ForColumbus”). Supporting the symbiotic relationship they had promised in their mission statement (see appendices), Crew fans deliberately

patronised supporting businesses, which through focused, persistent engagement and utilisation of #Savethecrew as an informational and organising medium, eventually totalled more than 300 businesses.

“The cool thing about having nearly 300 #SaveTheCrew allies is there are so many options when choosing where to spend money. Tonight, I decided on @Donatos, cause they support Columbus and that’s the way I like it.”

This counterpower strategy reaffirms suggestions in soccer literature that issues of economy are integral to constructions of community, not outwith or apart from it (Kennedy, 2012; Hogenstad, 2012). However, unlike other soccer studies that involved, for example, relocation of a stadium (e.g., Kennedy, 2012) the language of commerce did not replace or come to dominate the traditional language of community, but rather was intertwined and constitutive of it. Crew fans spoke market rhetoric from the beginning as opposed to being driven to it by forces of commercialism and understood how it was/could be fused with traditional ties of community and civic bonds to garner support. Local businesses also used community laden language in their demonstrations of support, suggesting that traditional, symbolic language of community is neither antiquated or redundant, but powerful, persuasive and flexible. Supporters are therefore not only consumers and at the mercy of the commodification (cf. Giulianatti, 2002) of their sport but are able to transform the language and meanings of consumer culture (cf. Wheaton, 2007) in ways that were community infused and advantageous to efforts of resisting.

The community and economy were seemingly working in tandem. There was a spirit of resistance within the city, and even with the Crew’s fate very much hanging in the balance.

#Savethecrew, and particularly leaders²¹ of the movement, such as Morgan Hughes filled the void of uncertainty created by the limited information provided by the MLS and Precourt, even as various plot twists and developments continued to occur. “The silence from @MLS today is deafening, and intentionally so. People like Don Garber, Anthony Precourt, & every stakeholder within the league truly believe that their continued silence will shut you up”.

Those who want to rip our team away from our community are counting on you falling into a spiral of silence. They think they can ignore you & you’ll go away. Do not be silent. Be louder than you’ve ever been before. This is not over. Tell everyone you know.

Following directions provided via #Savethecrew by Save the Crew leadership to stay positive, loud and visible, Crew fans hustled. They engaged with community members and institutions, encouraged new fans to support and attend Crew matches (even organising transport for them), spoke to city councils, petitioned the MLS, and staged protests that attracted both dedicated and casual fans. They harangued Don Garber at MLS events, photobombed televised sport events such as Columbus Blue Jacket (the NHL team in Columbus) games and appeared at widely watched sporting events such as College Game Day with #Savethecrew banners. Columbus citizens who were not Crew or even soccer fans got involved, as did high profile and visible members of the wider Columbus community, ensuring that movement had strength in numbers and a variety of support.

Local and state government became involved with these pragmatic, community-centric and visible modes of resisting and provided the movement with hope and additional teeth. A local law firm provided free legal support for the campaign. On March 5th, 2018, Columbus City and Ohio

²¹ Save The Crew leadership were identified leaders and founders of the Save The Crew campaign, who strategically coordinated the campaign on Twitter and offline.

State Attorneys filed a joint lawsuit against Precourt Sport Ventures, invoking the 1996 Art Modell law that stated no professional team that gets public assistance or uses public facilities could leave town without giving six months' notice and providing locals with an opportunity to buy the team. While this order was temporary (and the outcome uncertain) it created a legal quagmire that jeopardised Precourt's proposed timelines for relocation to Austin, and perhaps even forced him to consider selling the Crew to local buyers. Later (August 5th, 2018), city Judges extended the order on Precourt Sport Ventures and denied (December 3rd, 2018) the request of Precourt and the MLS to dismiss a lawsuit by the City of Columbus and the State of Ohio to keep the Crew in Columbus. Crew fans were in no doubt of the role that the system — one embedded in community and working on its behalf — played in fighting *the system*:

Thank you @MayorGinther for your support during this #SaveTheCrew #SavedTheCrew saga. And @ColumbusCouncil @FranklinCoOhio and the city attorneys, @CityAttyKlein as well as the attorney general's office @MikeDeWine and @mikeduffey. Together, we showed the world the Columbus Way.

4.4.2 Fighting for the Soul of Soccer

For proponents of the move, relocation was framed as necessary progress that Crew fans themselves, according to Garber and media figures like Alexi Lalas (former US soccer player and ESPN media analyst) (“It's just business. Nothing personal. Recognize the ambition. #SaveTheCrew”), were, in a sense, resisting. Such ‘progress’ can be viewed as part of a wider process of *hypercommodification* (Giulianotti, 2002) of soccer (new and ultra-modern stadiums, media, TV deals, sponsorships, higher ticket prices, astronomical star player salaries), whereby commercial culture has encroached on traditional values and culture of the game (Hognestad, 2012). Many within the US soccer community viewed commodification as pragmatic, inevitable

and essential to the continued growth of the MLS. Michael Bradley (US soccer player and Captain of MLS team Toronto FC), for example, expressed sympathy for Crew supporters, but felt the Crew had fallen behind other markets in terms of the quality of the Crew stadium, the atmosphere and what it is like to play there. He was a persistent voice that suggested soccer in the US must keep advancing to find its place in the modern game (Prince-Wright, 2017). Indeed, one of the Crew's former players, Kei Kamara even suggested, much to the ire of Crew fans, that if he was owner he would move them not to Austin, but to Las Vegas.

Generally, the internet has provided opportunity and means for 'official' discourses to colonise fan opinions and steer discussion towards system imperatives (Kennedy, 2012). However, the same communicative capacity affords the opportunity for supporters to give collective voice to potentially rivalling anti-systemic discourse (Kennedy, 2012). In order to therefore resist becoming a victim in the inevitable march of progress, it was imperative that the Save the Crew campaign crafted an equally compelling narrative and one capable of transcending the cold, rational logic of business metrics, market growth and profitability. The business argument — while economically sensible on the surface — was antithetical to (and therefore susceptible) to the localised understandings of community previously described. It also threatened the very spirit of the game of soccer and fundamental ideas of 'club culture'. Fans of other MLS clubs also understood these meanings and the Crew's contribution to the construction of them, as a founding MLS team: ("The only reason we're here is because of them"). While there were some dissenting voices, en-masse fans of other MLS teams supported the narrative that was being crafted.

"Those of us in Montana are proud to stand with our fellow Timbers supporters and the supporters of all clubs to help #SaveTheCrew from this proposed move."

“We stand with the entire @Nordecke as they are facing betrayal from their “owner”
@APrecourt #sCREWed #savethecrew #crewvolution”

“So, every team in #MLS (at least on Twitter tonight) has changed their colors to Black & Gold in support of the Columbus Crew. Very cool. #SaveTheCrew”

Image 4.3: MLS team logos changed to Crew colours and shared via Twitter as a show of solidarity.



Framed against the machinations of capitalism and the American sport model and armed with traditional meanings of community, club culture and the romantic language that often typifies resistance, #Savethecrew was able to deliberately craft “their” narrative as the “good fight”: “Only in the money-grubbing world of American sports is this not good enough.”



Image 4.4: A sell-out crowd at the Mapfre Stadium (Linked to the above Tweet).

“Do you know why the #SaveTheCrew movement is so important to me? Because at this point, especially given the current state in our country, instead of corporations who do not care about us, i’d like to see the people win one for a change. Good needs to conquer more often.”

Users of the #Savethecrew hashtag often juxtaposed what they found culturally and personally meaningful (as shown by the above Tweet) against the negative aspects of the capitalist system. In doing so, they highlighted the capacity for individuals (and the wider community) to resist the culture change being forced upon them by a cold, detached governance. Save the Crew members (unsurprisingly) cloaked the antagonists and powers behind the potential move (the MLS, Garber, Austin City officials, and most of all Precourt) in the language of deceit, conspiracy, and betrayal. They were “liars”, “back-stabbers”, “cowards”, “snake oil salesman” and “thiefs”. They were the “outsiders” and “men in suits”; “asshole businessmen” who were driven by values

and motivations based in economy. Voices from within the soccer community that lent the business case for relocation credibility such as Lallas and Bradly were met with derision and labelled as “sell-outs”, “trolls” “corporate stooges” and “anti-soccer”. Metaphorically, they were blacklisted, expelled from the soccer fan fraternity. Significantly though, and to counter the argument that the Crew were only at risk because they could not keep pace and compete with newer, fresher, more viable soccer-hungry markets #Savethecrew users did more than appeal only to the heart and sentiment of supporters. They quickly attuned to and perpetuated a narrative that this was about “more than the Crew” (“#SaveTheCrew is bigger than the Crew the soul of the league is at stake”). Key to this narrative was that *all* MLS clubs could conceivably be at risk of owner-league conspiring and metric-driven relocation in the future:

“Most MLS 1.0 teams attendance is suffering. It’s a league-wide issue, yet @MLS has Columbus in its crosshairs. What makes you think @thesoccerdon will stop here? Anyone could be next”.

“The most disturbing thing for all #mls supporters is the suggestion that cities need to compete with expansion markets for the teams they already have. This reinforces everything we have heard from @Morgan_Hughes and #savethecrew”

“FWIW Columbus is a test case. If Precourt gets away with it, your club could be next. Don't kid yourself, in a world where #MLS creates artificial market scarcity, if they get away with moving the Crew, anyone can move at anytime.”

The plausibility of this existential and decidedly corporate threat to established MLS teams and fan bases was lent further credibility by a number of seemingly “underhanded” ‘goings on’.

Publicly distilled, these provided the optic that Precourt – aided by the MLS – had through

various backchannels, secretly courted the city of Austin as a site for Crew relocation for years, as Columbus reporter Michael Arace conveyed:^{22, 23}

Whatever happens, this Austin episode is already the single most shameful event in MLS history – worse than the San Jose/ Houston row, and even worse than the Chivas Debacle. According to Don Garber himself, Precourt has been trying in some fashion to relocate the Crew to Austin since he bought the team in 2013, though of course the public wasn't made aware of his machinations until late last year

As always, #SavetheCrew covered the story, closely scrutinised it, and shared its implications:

New blog from @MLSinSA lands, reveals a 28-page research document and website detailing what appears to be years of backroom dealing between @MLS and @austintexasgov to foist a soccer team on Austin any way possible. Read the blog & linked doc. #scandal #boondoggle #SaveTheCrew

With a strong whiff of conspiracy following Precourt, the MLS and Austin city officials, language within the Twitter sphere of #Savethecrew no longer seemed like the understandable reaction of a loyal, dismayed fanbase. Tweets were not simply the echoes from fans unwilling to face up to the march of progress or the unsuitability of their city, business market and outdated, inconveniently located stadium, but increasingly seemed like the language of truth. They had been right about

²² Precourt was part of the MLS Expansion Committee (giving him access to details on expansion team applicants such as ownership, stadium, and financial information). He removed himself from the Committee sometime in 2017 (date unclear) having previously joined it in December 2016. A widely discussed assumption though was that Precourt used the inside information made available to him via the committee to plot how he could line his own pockets via relocating the Crew to Austin and in turn help Austin to city jump que for a new MLS team.

²³ To the knowledge of few outsiders, MLS commissioner Don Garber had given his blessing to include an exit clause, specifically for Austin, in Precourt's purchase agreement of the Crew from Hunt Sports. It was alleged, that even then, in 2013, that Garber was name-dropping Austin into conversations about expansion — at a time when the city of Austin was not even bidding for an expansion team (The Columbus Dispatch, August 14, 2018).

Precourt and the MLS all along. #Savethecrew used this informational power and alleged instances of deceitful manoeuvring by Precourt and the MLS to forcefully challenge the legitimacy and authority of their market-based rhetoric. They challenged the authenticity of the data itself and suggested that Precourt had been deliberately trying to sabotage brand growth and had wilfully neglected upkeep of the Crew stadium, allowing it to become dilapidated. Many Twitter users suggested Precourt had even taken measures to reduce and misreport attendance (“Couldn't confirm it myself, but spoke to three different Crew fans who said gates normally open for ingress were closed off when they entered the stadium tonight. Big crowds still outside”).



Image 4.5: Crowds before a play-off game at the gate and struggling to get inside the stadium before kick-off.

“The #SaveTheCrew folks have been saying PSV wasn’t being truthful about this whole move. Now it comes out on court documents that PSV wasn’t being truthful about this

whole move. What else is necessary to get people to believe that the attendance figures aren't true, either?"

While American sport fans are no strangers to the rule of economy (The Athletic, November, 17, 2017; Giulianatti, 2002), MLS soccer and associated fandom were *supposed* to be different from their counterparts in baseball, football or basketball because the MLS had relied heavily on 'club' culture, local ownership and ideals of community to gain a market foothold in American sports (The Athletic, November, 17, 2017). Commissioner Don Garber had frequently referred to the important place of community in MLS strategy and plans for growth and popularisation of the league while Precourt had previously referred to the Crew as authentically Columbus, one big family and had focused on the City name in a recent club re-brand. Now, in openly pursuing the profit-based American sport model at the expense of community ideals, the espoused culture of the MLS, and the image they were trying to project seemed to be incongruent with their actual culture and actions; a hypocrisy that #Savethecrew tweets regularly and mercilessly pointed out:

“Without a hint of irony, Don Garber said in an interview with @TaylorTwellman that part of what makes #FCCincy work so well is a local owner with commitment to the community.”

“This is so surreal. Just two seasons ago @APrecourt was tweeting about how @ColumbusCrewSC team and supporters are a family. Now he is speaking at #atxcouncil like we never even existed. So much for family.”

"Home is where your club is" On these dates: <http://soc.cr/rfPM30hkLdd> Morgan Hughes RetweetedMajorLeagueSoccer “Until we tear it away from you after 24 years, LOL SRY BOUT IT FAM”

This apparent change in strategy placed the MLS at risk of being just like other American sport leagues and exposed the MLS's adoption of the concept of community as casual, convenient and inauthentic: "@thesoccerdon So MLS only cares about fans/cities/community when its profitable? Letting the Crew leave is a pretty NFL move." The sentiment within the #Savethecrew community was that adopting this position to gain access to new markets such as Austin risked alienating the existing market and loyal supporters who had been drawn to soccer precisely because they were looking for a different, less commercialised, and more meaningful fan experience. A common assertion was that the Crew situation represented a critical juncture in the league's history:

"Irreparable harm will be done to @MLS. Fans here may never forgive the league no matter what happens. This is abhorrent. "Community"? Please...  #SaveTheCrew"

"For me this is a defining moment for the league. Is MLS really in it for love of the game and community? If it turns out to be no different than the NHL and NFL, ripping away teams that people put their heart and soul into, I'm done. Choose wisely @thesoccerdon #DCU"

"Let's #SaveTheCrew so I can keep following the league I've supported since '96 @thesoccerdon".

Fan activism in soccer tends to arise in response to the tensions between sport governance and supporters (Hognestad, 2012). Supporters resist the introduction of new rules and situations and the neoliberal business culture of modern soccer (Numerato, 2015). It is also noted that a special kind of fan activism occurs in soccer when the club or its image is endangered, such as through relocation away from the fan community (Brown, 2007, 2008). Consistent with such literature – and with the image of soccer in the US at stake – supporters from other clubs rallied and fought

for the type of league and soccer that they wanted and believed they were a part of. They Tweeted their clubs and owners, threatening to not renew season tickets if the Crew move went through (“If it turns out that @NYFC voted to move #Crew96, I will cancel my season ticket for 2018 and beyond”). They organised protests at their stadiums and put stickers in the black and gold of the Crew on their seats to indicate that Crew relocation would result in the non-renewal of season tickets. The ideology of community was once again being made to do practical work.

Crew fans were also making pragmatic use of Twitter. A unique feature of hashtag use is that adding a hashtag sign makes it easier for other users to search, link, follow or interact with Tweets (Yang, 2016). #Savethecrew used this feature to Tweet Garber, Precourt, influential figures in soccer, media outlets and online journalists to ensure that the contradictions in MLS strategy and the serious implications for pursuing this path were not ignored: “It’s a shame @thesoccerdon doesn’t remember his own words. It would be nice to get this flip flop out to media outlets to #SaveTheCrew @AleMorenoESPN @ESPNNFC @vincenzolandino @DegenerateTBone @NBCSportsSoccer @FOXSSoccer @kylemartino @beINSPORTSUSA”

It was this strategic use of Twitter that helped draw attention to the possibility that a firm commitment to the American sport model could actually compromise and delegitimise the important MLS strategy of becoming a respected league in the global game: “Anthony Precourt is testing the compatibility of #MLS's dual visions: to be a world-class soccer league AND a major North American sports business, writes @jeffrueter ...” The story, aided significantly by #Savethecrew garnered international attention, for example, featuring on Chelsea FC’s website: “This is on @ChelseaFC 's official website. Is this what @MLS wants to be known for across the world?”. The story was also covered by a BBC article (*Columbus Crew: Two US cities fight over one football team*) (Jeffrey, 2018). Crew captain Federico Higuain, conducted a TV interview in

which he declared that a team leaving their home city would be unthinkable in his native Argentina, contrasting the American sport model with how soccer is conducted in the rest of the world, calling into question the MLS goal of becoming a respected league within the global game. Soccer fans labelled the whole debacle a public relations nightmare for Garber and the MLS and Crew fans summed up in a number of Tweets, such as “MLS must #SaveTheCrew to be taken seriously internationally” and “Either we have a soccer system that might one day take its place alongside other respected leagues around the world, or MLS is just another North American Sport business operation.”

4.5. Concluding Reflections

On December 28th, 2018, 437 days after Precourt had announced potential relocation plans, the Columbus Crew were sold to Jimmy and Dee Haslam (owners of Cleveland Browns, one of Ohio’s two NFL teams) and Pete Edwards (a former Crew physician, Columbus native and prominent local investor). The role of the Save the Crew campaign in keeping the Crew in Columbus was widely recognised within the local community (the campaign won the 2019 Spirit of Columbus award) and within the world of soccer, drawing interest from British newspapers such as the Guardian. The campaign was also widely lauded by news, media outlets and reporters on Twitter: “I’ve been incredibly impressed by the dedication of @ColumbusCrewSC fans. They stepped up and made this a team investors wanted” (Ben Garbarek, reporter and Columbus resident). In what must have been a particularly sweet moment, Crew fans Tweeted Don Garber’s praise for the campaign: “#SaveTheCrew: ‘You inspired all of us to rediscover what the Crew means to the city, to soccer in America...’ Says without it, he doesn’t think this would have gotten done. #crew96”.

While ultimately successful in keeping the Crew in Columbus, it is in the competing discourses and contrasting cultural meanings described that the heart of hegemonic struggle is

revealed. The fans and members of the Save the Crew movement were not *only* opposing a relocation but were resisting the overarching power of the capitalist order, whether they intended to or not. Soccer clubs (and the MLS) are ultimately part of a wider capitalist system (Jozsa, 2017) so once the Crew no longer served the purpose of profit maximisation, relocation became a viable option consistent with the hegemonic pulse of America and the high capitalism principles of the American sports model. However, in their language and actions, #Savethecrew users and supporters of the Crew were telling MLS leadership and the Crew ownership that loyalty and community matter more than dollars and cents. Consequently, in the discourses examined, members of the campaign are urging ownership to do the opposite of what is demanded by the capitalist system and therefore represent the bearers of cultural resistance and keepers of community ideals and values associated with locality, belonging and tradition.

Similar to Kennedy's (2012) study of Everton football club, stadium relocation and the commodification of football, these findings can be usefully contextualised within broader work that pits modernisation against tradition, and cultural understandings and meaning(s) against the powerful influence of system and structure. Kennedy for instance, applies the terms and ideas of critical social theorist Jürgen Habermas (1987) to contrast how the *systems world* (manifested in abstract social structures such as money, economic markets, formal organisations and corporations and in rational logic, bureaucracy and expert knowledge) intersect with *life world* (ideas and practices communicated through culture and mediated through myth, symbols, rituals and intersubjective understanding between people) within modern capitalism. As with the events that situate Crew fans in opposition to Crew owners and the MLS, the life world cannot escape the powerful and unrelenting rationalisation of the systems world and is often dominated by it; yet as

Kennedy (2012) stressed (supported by findings in this study), the systems world's dominance of the life world is always permeated by resistance and is never complete.

In this study, fundamental ideas of community were at the core of all resistance to perceived 'outside' hostilities (cf. Kristiansen, Skirstad, Parent, & Waddington, 2015). Time and time again, #Savethecrew users returned to the cultural understandings and local meanings ascribed to community and the strong sense of identity that was a means to resist (Kristiansen et al., 2015). To be able to use community as a means to effectively resist powerful systemic forces, however, it had to be made to do practical kinds of work. It was in the unearthing and crafting of these pragmatic uses of community (that traversed both the systems world and the life world) that the #Savethecrew movement truly excelled. They used their cultural understanding of community to support each other and to inform, organise and encourage online and offline activism. It was a means to resist cold economic rationale and to craft an alternative and compelling narrative that could persuade wider circles of community (local, national, international) across sport and business domains to side with and support them. It drew attention to the disingenuous and underhanded while exposing inherent tensions and contradictions within MLS strategy, showing how favouring the prototypical capitalist American sports model could ultimately compromise and undermine the MLS and US soccer's integrity and standing within the world game. Significantly – and paradoxically – community-driven capitalistic forces were used against the broader system of capitalism as a means to preserve that which Crew fans held sacred and “above” issues of economy.

The strategies deployed were in many ways similar to the tactics employed by elites to control the masses (Keller, 2017), or by managers or change consultants to ensure the adoption of their ideas of culture and planned change (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Kotter, 1996; Schein,

2010). For example, the Save the Crew campaign spelled out what was important and created a compelling vision, enlisted volunteers and allies to the cause who shared similar goals and values, used cultural ideals and values and a strong identity to ensure togetherness, and identified and cast out those who did not feel the same, such as some soccer fans from other MLS clubs, sport analysts, media pundits and members of the wider soccer community who's views did not align with Crew fan ideals.

The use of social media and the #Savethecrew – which in itself was also community laden with ascribed cultural meanings, worldviews and symbols – accentuated each of these resistance strategies. Previous research has observed that the discourses of the systems world, or “official” discourses, have typically colonised fan forums and online discussions, steering views toward “system imperatives” and language (Kennedy, 2012, p. 353). Kennedy also suggested, however, that the same communicative capacity of the internet can provide a platform for supporters to showcase a collective voice which they can develop into a potentially rivalling anti-systemic discourse (Kennedy, 2012), such as demonstrated by #Savethecrew. Far from being an echo chamber, there is merit in recent assertions that Twitter (and social media more broadly) retain the possibility of being revolutionary, through their capacity to democratise and disrupt the existing social order (Candon, 2019). In part, this is because Twitter can extend the boundaries of community beyond the physical and the local and aid communication across cultural lines.

These findings, though they may appear abstracted from the realm of sport psychology, actually have significant implications for sport psychology culture theory and associated practices. They speak to the primacy and value of understanding how the culture of any football club (or other sporting entity/ organisation) with a fan base can be permeated by cultural meaning that is supplied by fans, their fandom and wider, lasting and constructed social structures and relations,

such as ideas of community – a *community-infused culture*, if you will. This point reinforces the important understanding that the cultural meanings held by any team or organisation are always a layered blend of industrial, societal, organisational and group-level phenomena (Alvesson, 2002; Hofstede, 1985; Schein, 2010). Cultural meanings are not contained or constructed solely within the confines of the immediate group and their mental and physical borders. For sport psychology scholars and practitioners, this is a significant point to heed as they begin to explore and take on more complex organisational roles in elite sport contexts, since to date, they have largely elided this theoretical point. Rather, they have treated culture (team, performance department, organisation) as isomorphic and segmented off from each other and wider layers of culture and society. This is in contrast to taking a more holistic and interactive view whereby macro cultures (e.g., local, regional, national, capitalist) are also regarded as influential at the level of the organisation. Effectively, sport psychology as a whole has fallen into the trap of treating culture and an organisation's cultural dimensions as a closed system, whereby the relationship between the wider social context and culture is normally treated as weak and indirect. Direct and open cultural flows between cultural layers are seldom seriously considered, if at all. According to Hofstede (1985), however, there is a blatant interplay between these macro 'entities' and the production of cultural meanings and manifestations of the organisation.

A wider perspective is valuable because it allows for the acknowledgement that the team/performance department/organisation is part of a greater, complex environment, which exists alongside and constantly shapes 'internal' goings-on. Society then, including structures of community, can exert a powerful influence and imprint on the range and scope of values, activities, and behaviour at all levels of the elite sport organisation, thus shaping, vitalising and nourishing the cultures within as well as their institutional practices.

To be able to elaborate more precisely on the role and influence of community specifically, on organisational contexts in sport, it is necessary to add more flesh to what is meant by community and how sport psychology scholars and practitioners might conceptualise ideas of community in their future culture work. Community, like culture, is a messy word (Bradshaw, 2008; Hillary, 1955). Indeed, the two terms have often been used interchangeably at times, not least because communities are sometimes called “cultures”, designating the tendency to think of communities *as* cultures, with a homogenous, singular shared set of bounded meanings, that are distinct from other communities in different locales (Abu-Lughod, 1999). This refers to classic understandings of community in which it associated with place (in the geographical sense) (Bradshaw, 2008). Abu-Lughod’s (1999) research on television and culture demonstrated, however, that in the modern world, an understanding of community often needs to be de-coupled from propinquity in order to deal adequately with global flows of migration, transnationalism and hybrid identities. This notion is also supported theoretical commentary (e.g., Baumann, 2001; Bradshaw, 2008; Lechner & Boli, 2012) and in this study, whereby it is suggested that networks of people can be tied together by solidarity, cooperation and shared identity and goals that does not necessarily reside in a particular place. From this perspective, community is formed not merely by geographic location alone, but through meaningful relations, a sense of belonging and by the sharing of a number of areas of interest and norms or common enterprise (Bhattacharyya, 2004; Bradshaw, 2008). In relation to sport psychology culture scholarship and practices, community should therefore not be conceived of as one group tied to a location. Rather, from a culture perspective, in which culture is a way of thinking and making-meaning, community can be conceived of as a rich symbolic cultural resource, that people can draw understanding and resources from.

Sport psychologists who are mindful of these preceding arguments may be able to develop more advanced understandings (and corresponding applied practices) that maintain attention on a sport team or organisation's cultural embeddedness within communities (or their relatedness to them) and the organisation's open relationship to that aspect of the environment. For instance, fans form communities (often, but not always tied to place). As wider sport research has noted (cf. Botikova, 2018; Hognestad, 2012; Kennedy, 2012) fans are important cultural contributors to sport teams/clubs, protecting, preserving and carrying cultural meanings that speak to the legacy, traditions, history, identity and image of what the team and club is and stands for. Arguably, fans are potentially even the most significant stakeholders in this regard, because whereas athletes and key coaching, support, administration personnel come and go, fans are a more or less constant, over time and across generations and are thus important to the cultural heritage of the team (cf. Hognestad, 2012; Kennedy, 2012). Quickly attuning to and reading the cultural matrix of elite sport organisations is suggested as critical to sport psychologists' ability to survive and offer a valuable service (Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010). It is useful for sport psychologists to realise that their understanding of this matrix can be enhanced through looking outside of and beyond the confines of the immediate team, department or organisational context, towards ideas of wider and contributing communities. A new sport psychologist working with Liverpool FC, for example, could stand to benefit from learning about more than just the unique inner workings of the organisational and the general characteristics of elite sport that shape team/organisational culture (McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010); and should also come to learn what the club means to the local community and city, as well as the wider and global communities that comprise Liverpool fandom.

Correspondingly, they should also become cognisant of how the meanings that are held important within the club are constituted or influenced by these communities. Seeking out such knowledge designates a boundary-breaking task for sport psychologists to engage in because it involves acknowledgement that the borders of constructed local meanings are blurred and extend beyond the confines of the team or organisation; an important exercise for the sport psychologist indeed, if they are to pay more than lip service to the oft-made point that athletes indeed, do not live in a vacuum (Hardy et al., 1997).

The described evolution of culture knowledge has further implications for future developments of the organisational sport psychologist role and the work that sport psychologists can reasonably undertake in the challenging contexts of elite sport. The broader and more interactive view of culture described opens up the potentiality for psycho-cultural-educational roles, whereby sport psychologists could help to communicate/explain/translate cultural meanings (some of which will be community informed) to new cultural members. These include for instance, new athletes, coaches, or support staff, who have been recruited from other sport teams or organisations. As an example, this work might involve translating what is culturally meaningful to the cultural members of Liverpool FC that makes it different to say, Arsenal, Manchester United or even another local club, such as Everton.

The importance of this potential role is amplified in light of the increased diversity within elite sport environments in recent years (Ronkainen & Blodgett, in press; Ryba et al., 2018); and because high performing sport organisations go to great lengths to attract and retain the most talented personnel from around the globe (Nesti, 2010). A transnational flow of sporting talent is now a part of modern sport, and it is well-documented that athletes frequently experience acculturation issues as they move to and settle into new parts of the world, requiring them to adapt

to unfamiliar customs, rules, and expectations at both the team and societal level (Nesti, 2011; Ryba, et al., 2016; Schinke, et al., 2016; Schinke, McGannon, Yukelson, Cummings, & Parro, 2015). From an organisational perspective, a sport psychologist is likely to be valued if they can support organisational endeavours to first attract and then retain talent from the global talent pool, through their ability to understand and translate cultural and community messages (for instance. “this is why our club exists and what we are about”). They can further supplement this value by being integral to harnessing community-infused cultural understanding to facilitate stakeholder and operational togetherness and shared understandings, as well fostering a culturally informed appreciation of where difference and diversity might exist within and between communities and different sets of stakeholders.

There are, of course, limitations to this study which warrant discussion. First, a deliberate focus on wider context prohibited a closer attention to the form and semantics of language. This type of analysis may have yielded different strategies of resistance that were more specifically embedded in nuanced language use or acted to supplement the explanations of resistance given here (e.g., the use of satire, irony as a means to sustain the community and persuade others). The analysis was also limited to the confines of the online world. Although, as noted in this study, the online world has implications for social practices in the physical world, research in the virtual space (e.g., social media ethnography, digital ethnography, netnography) increasingly advocates for a dual focus that spans participants’ online and “offline” lives, so as to emphasise these boundaries as permeable and constitutive of each other (cf. Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014; Posthill & Pink, 2012). After all, although Twitter and the #Savethecrew hashtag provided an online world for supporters to meet, communicate and socially construct meaning, these interactions were not confined only to the virtual because users met face to face to strategise, protest, and watch the

Crew play. This study might have, therefore, been supplemented by offline interviews, participant observations, or ethnography so as to assess how the online discourses reflected actual lived practices.

Finally, one further limitation of the research is that in taking a more positive CDA stance and focusing on resistance rather than the power wielded by oppressors, some of the more insidious machinations of power may have been omitted from the analysis. For instance, the Save the Crew story ends in seeming success. They are saved, and new local owners are in place and looking forward to working with the city and the people of Columbus. In another reading of events, however, arguably none of the major stakeholders ‘lost’. The MLS welcomed Austin FC (with Precourt at the helm) as their 27th member and are due to begin playing in 2021, a result pleasing to both Garber (who will have a team in the largest untapped soccer market in the US) and Precourt (who has gotten perhaps what he always wanted, a team in Austin). Meanwhile, in Columbus, plans are in progress for the development of a state-of-the-art downtown stadium and surrounding mixed use area that will be privately and publicly funded (again arguably what Precourt and the MLS had tried to wrangle in the first place). The Crew, now in the midst of a difficult 2019 season, continue to experience low attendance. In a post-truth era (cf. Sismondo, 2017), a more critical stance and less-romanticised view of the Crew resistance could construct a case against the fan narrative and question whether there is some truth in the position that the Crew are not well enough supported to be viable. In this reading, changes — such as a new, better-located stadium — are more likely to be considered as a necessary progress. In this more negative reading that focuses on oppression and domination instead of the strategies and enaction of resistance, it could be asked ‘whether anything has really changed?’ Indeed, it is possible that Crew fans, had in the end, been

dominated and exploited by a more implicit, covert hegemonic power that was layered within the broader system, as opposed to being wielded by any one individual, such as Anthony Precourt.

These limitations – which could be addressed in future research – notwithstanding, this study contributes to existing culture literature in sport by emphasising that culture as a way of thinking, and ideas of community are much more resilient than many scholars (particularly those with structuralist-functionalist leanings²⁴) have supposed (cf. Alvesson, 2002; Bauman, 2001; Block, 2018; Cohen, 1985). Because culture and community are embedded in local meanings, they act against the homogenising logic of structures such as economy and rational planned change; attacking their base while rebuilding their own boundaries on symbolic and meaningful foundations (Cohen, 1985). The finding here supports such arguments while challenging research (cf. Andrews & Rizer, 2007) that has claimed local meanings speak primarily to a romantic fixation with local heroism and are on the wane in the face of the extreme commodification of sport. Rather, it is suggested that there is a need, still in modern society (Cohen, 1985; May, 1991) for a resurgence in community as a concept of interest and value.²⁵ For modern culture scholars and those interested in change at macro, micro or meso levels (whether in societies or within organisations), culture – symbolically charged and community infused – remains vital yet radically under-considered. Driven by local meanings, these conceptualisations have practical implications that relate to the functional aims of progress and planned change initiatives, such as suggesting that resistance is always a given. More broadly it suggests culture is of moral and

²⁴ Such as those that have dominated the team and organisational culture and culture change landscape in sport management and sport psychology (cf. McDougall et al., 2019).

²⁵ Owing to its diverse applications and “feel good” connotations, community has often been deemed a problematic concept in anthropological and sociological theory for many decades, often leading to researchers abandoning it as an analytical category of worth (cf. Posthill & Pink, 2012).

political value (Alvesson, 2002), offering as it does a way to resist attempts at homogenisation and integration (Kuper, 1999). A concept of culture that blends both a critical stance with interpretative traditions that centralise meaning is ideally positioned to support such lines of inquiry and can provide valuable insight into power, domination, forms of resistance and the “fragile webs of story and meaning that are woven by vulnerable actors in nightmarish situations; as the grounds of agency and intentionality in ongoing social practice” (Ortner, 1999, p. 11). As Ortner noted, these types of issues retain a fundamentally Geertzian view of social life and culture: “meaning-laden, meaning-making, intense, and real” (Ortner, 1999, p. 11).

Chapter 5: Getting critical about culture and consulting: A critically reflexive account of failed culture work within elite sport

There's a whole world out there where people fight to be relevant every day.

Sam.

Birdman

5.0 Connecting Vignette

In an original and seminal article on sport psychology practice, John Corlett (1999) drew parallels between the practices of the Sophists and Socrates and modern-day sport psychologists. He argued that sport psychologists were like the Sophists of ancient Greece in that they are technique driven and primarily concerned with the application of specific skills that can produce performance results. Socratics in contrast, encouraged rigorous personal self-examination and the deconstruction of knowledge as uncertain, as the pathway to deeper, more meaningful understanding. In applying this logic to sport psychologists and their approach to culture and culture change, it seems our scholars have primarily been Sophist rather than Socratic in their work to date. As a result, sport psychologists have produced shallow culture knowledge and ‘quick fix’ cultural solutions to complex issues. This scenario has already played out in organisational management and as part of the *technocratic project*, where change is conceived of as a grand project (Alvesson, 2002), with a number of steps and phases, each facilitated by various techniques and strategies deployed by consultants. In Socratic terms, however, technique-based symptomatic relief is not enough (Corlett, 1999). According to Corlett (1999), from a Socratic perspective, contrived or unjustified self-confidence is nothing more than a Sophist endeavour that yields empty affirmations (Corlett, 1999). Rather, knowledge must be pursued with courage, asking difficult questions and a preparedness to undertake intellectual hard work, while all the while being prepared to fail, and search anew.

I approach this final study with a very different sense of culture to the one that I began with in early 2013. Throughout the PhD journey, I have collected ideas about culture: it exists in multiple (and interacting patterns) beyond what is shared and is not always clear and uncontested. It is a group phenomenon but is experienced personally and emotionally and does not always look

the same no matter the angle. It is the domain of people, not only of leadership. It is symbolic, experiential and grounded in the networks of meaning that people construct and re-construct over time, and is, therefore, to be interpreted, both by those who make it and those who study it. It is thus both a way of seeing and analysing the social world, as well as the setting and context in which cultural sensemaking occurs. It confers local understanding and a sense of tradition, even in the face of change, progress, and modernity, which perhaps may also be cultural; and from this, springs tensions and clashes of meaning that inevitably pull social structures, such as power, economy, and the political into the domain of culture study and maybe also within the sphere of culture itself. In this study, I carry these ideas of culture with me — incomplete, unresolved, poorly demarcated and still searching for answers — but return to the world of sport psychology, organisation, and practice, which for me at least, have also shaped the ideas within this thesis. The return is warranted, also in part because sport psychologists inhabit the messy and complex life worlds described so far, and because increasingly they may be asked to contribute to the shaping of them.

5.1 Introduction

According to Wagstaff (2019), the current preparation of sport practitioners for “the professional realities of elite sport is woefully inadequate” (p. 143). These concerns are also well-voiced in research and commentary by experienced applied sport psychologists (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2004; 2010, 2017; Nesti et al., 2012) and supported by the reflections of neophyte practitioners, that again highlight a general under-preparedness for the demands of elite sport environments. For example, Larsen (2017) recently colourfully described that the practical challenges associated with attempting to integrate into an elite sport organisation was akin to “bringing a knife to a gunfight” (p. 7). According to Nesti (Eubank et al., 2014), based on the working reality of the high-performance sport environment (as outlined throughout this thesis), it is imperative that trainees who have ambitions to work in this domain of sport have greater awareness about the importance of organisational psychology theory and research.

With regard to organisational culture work specifically, it has clearly been identified that intervention research is largely missing from sport organisational culture literature (cf. Henriksen, 2015; Wagstaff & Burton-Wyilie, 2018). Exacerbating this problem, and as has been pointed out in preceding chapters, there are also limitations in the extant sport psychology research that *does* provide guidance on how to work practically with culture. Henriksen (2015), for instance, in an account of a sport psychology-led culture change within an elite Danish orienteering team, described a series of unproblematic steps. These spanned needs analysis, workshops to create ownership, designing the pillars of the new culture, integration of new values into daily practices, evaluation. He also used a range of strategies to change the culture (e.g., ongoing and collective evaluation, telling positive stories, paying attention to non-verbal communication, making values visible by hanging symbols of values in the training room). The intent of this account was to

“produce a much-needed set of guidelines to inform the process of culture change” (Henriksen, p. 141). Yet, the account reads as almost entirely positive and unchallenging; an impression supported by Henriksen’s own evaluation of the intervention that confirmed the problematic culture had completely disappeared, with athletes feeling at ease in the national team and happy with the new, supportive group culture.

Further practical guidance in sport psychology literature is supplied by the culture change research of Cruickshank and colleagues (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014). This work culminates with the presentation of a sport-specific empirical theory and framework of culture change best practice for Olympic sport performance teams (Cruickshank et al., 2014) and the performance departments of professional sport organisations (Cruickshank et al., 2015), as led and perceived by incoming team managers (and supporting sport psychologists). Similar to Henriksen’s (2015) account, the authors outline a number of carefully planned phases (spanning initial evaluation, planning, and impact phases) that are “enacted alongside the enduring acquisition, negotiation, and integration of internal and external stakeholder perceptions” (Cruickshank et al., 2015, p. 49). Problematically, this work has been critiqued as focusing on change at the expense of culture (Gilmore, 2013; McDougall et al., 2017). As outlined earlier in the thesis, like Henriksen, Cruickshank and colleagues also describe culture as easy to ‘get at’ and proceed to depict culture as a somewhat mechanical entity; placing excessive faith in the malleability of culture in the face of leader/practitioner-led change and value engineering processes (cf. Gilmore, 2013; McDougall et al., 2017; McDougall et al. 2019).

As a result, both Cruickshank et al. and Henriksen have provided the first ‘academic’ discipline-specific guidance for sport psychologists to undertake culture work within elite sport, that while intuitive, and practically instructive (in terms of what can be done to change culture) is

replete with a number of limitations. Most clearly, it is arguably de-contextualised from: (a) a rich concept of culture in the interpretative and anthropological tradition, where culture is less concrete and malleable; (b) serious and layered attempts to centralise culture and de-construct it in the analysis; (c) the agentic capacity for social actors to reflect on the plans for change that are designed and implemented by leaders and (potentially) sport psychologists; and (d) the personally challenging emotional-experiential realities for the practitioner conducting this type of work.

Moreover, the accounts of culture change in sport psychology bear little resemblance to my own initial experiences of delivering culture-focused work within sport and business, which have frequently been personally difficult, laden with challenges, and a steep learning curve. Correspondingly, and contradicting Henriksen's account in particular, wider organisational management literature suggests that organisational change has high rates of failure generally (e.g., Burnes, 2011; Burnes & Jackson, 2011). Furthermore, because culture change is especially complex, time-consuming, and infinitely challenging (cf., Schein, 2010), it is a type of consultancy that maintains one of the highest rates of failure of all types of organisational change work (Rogers, Meehan, & Tanner, 2006; Smith, 2003).²⁶ Consequently, while organisational culture work has been framed repeatedly as an important part of the modern sport psychologists armoury (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015; McDougall et al., 2015, 2017, 2019; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, it is important that as a discipline, we are realistic in our descriptions of organisational culture work and appropriately frame the magnitude of the task of changing an organisation's culture. Indeed, we should also encourage questions about whether it is even possible to do so as an individual consultant. A failure to consider these issues

²⁶ Failure/success rates of change is a hotly contested domain. Interested readership can access some of the debate in the following articles: Hughes, 2011; Burnes, 2011; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Jones, Firth, Hannibal, & Ogunseyin, 2019.

is to radically underplay the difficult nature of this type of work, again contributing to a lack of sport psychologist preparedness.

For practitioners who adopt a less functional approach to culture, the nature and scale of organisational change takes on additional layers of complexity. Interpretative and critical scholars (who challenge functional approaches to culture and change) are especially uneasy with the automatic assumption that culture can be deliberately changed (Alvesson, 2002). For instance, in a penetrating study of corporate change, Pettigrew (1985) adopted a less functional approach and focused closely on the cultural aspects of change and organisation, demonstrating the complexity of cultural change: “providing an important corrective to all superficial accounts of how to gain and change control of culture” (Alvesson, 1989). Similarly, competing worldviews, and tales of resistance have permeated studies one and two of this thesis. These findings suggest that the unproblematic accounts of culture change described by Henriksen and Cruickshank and colleagues are idealistic; and moreover, conveniently devoid of attention to conflict and actor uncertainty, subjectivity, agency, and the capacity to resist and re-produce culture in ways that do not conform with what leaders or managers expressly desire.

5.1.1 Purpose of this Chapter

With this critique in mind, the purpose in this study is to supplement existing sport psychology literature and provide an account of organisational culture intervention within an elite sport setting to give insight into the nature of organisational culture work, and the problems and challenges that can arise. Using storied methods of creative nonfiction and personal narratives, I present a series of applied reflections that critically de-construct a personal account of a difficult (and ultimately

unsuccessful) culture consultancy within elite sport²⁷. The description of this consultancy (over a number of *scenes*) comprises vignette 1. Next, and recognising this consultancy experience as a “critical moment”²⁸ in my scholar-practitioner journey and attempts to understand the concept of culture, I use this re-constructed case as a ‘jumping off’ point to further reflect on the consultancy experience from an increasingly critical lens (vignette 2). Finally, I re-visit previous research (McDougall et al., 2015) as a means to further reflect on, contextualise and makes sense of both the experience and the concept of culture (vignette 3).

Together, the three critical reflections form a meta-reflection that demonstrates the ongoing evolution of my perspective on culture over time. Moreover, the personal narrative — as a critically reflexive (and critical management-informed) ‘whole’ — is constructed with a view to challenging the managerialist view of culture that has been generally adopted as the default culture position within sport psychology literature (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015; Vealey, 2017). Consistent with a critical management approach, which often (but certainly not always,) adopts an anti-managerial stance (cf. Fournier & Grey, 2000), this study is constructed to provoke debate. It therefore not only begs the question of how we might do organisational culture work but asks whether we *should* be doing it at all, and correspondingly provides a number of points that sport psychologists may wish to consider in terms of their own congruence and ethical responsibilities. Consequently, this chapter may be of particular interest to researchers and practitioners who are dissatisfied with the preoccupation with functional, mechanistic accounts of team and organisational culture that

²⁷ Elite sport is defined here as sport environments that house athletes who compete at the national level or at the top of their sport (cf. McDougall et al., 2015).

²⁸ Critical moments are defined as those frequently experienced personal/professional moments (both positive and negative) in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with important changes in our identity (cf. Nesti, et al., 2012).

dominate the sport psychology landscape and that always seem to end well, with objectives achieved. It is my hope that the reflections may also stimulate debate and interest from others with an interest in organisation and culture, but who are, like me, in the formative stages of working out what an alternative position on culture²⁹ may mean for research, practice and practitioner development.

5.2 Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

5.2.1 Critical Management

The common use of the ‘Critical Management Studies’ (CMS) label to identify alternatives to established, mainstream conceptions of management is generally regarded to have followed the publication of Alvesson and Willmott’s (1992) edited collection *Critical Management Studies* (Adler, et al., 2007). However, the traditions of CMS pre-date this publication and can be found in critiques of bureaucracy and corporate capitalism (cf. Grey & Willmott, 2005; Smircich & Calás, 1995), research that highlights the exploitation of workers by employers (e.g., Braverman, 1974; Freire, 1970), and critical theory in the social sciences (cf. Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Scherer, 2009). Consistent with the position I adopted in Study 2, I take critical theory as an umbrella term for work that adopts an essentially critical or radical stance on contemporary society; and which is geared towards “uncovering exploitation, repression, unfairness asymmetrical power relations...distorted communication and false consciousness” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 12). CMS, like critical theory, is also a broad rubric with many variants, vectors, and areas of contention. Broadly though, CMS offers an alternative to mainstream management literature (that sport psychology culture change literature has relied upon and replicated in establishing its goals,

²⁹ As described in previous chapters: Culture as symbolic, meaning infused, people rather than leadercentric, less mechanistic, interwoven with power and structure and more inclusive of cultural patterns beyond sharedness

methods, and theoretical underpinnings) and its acceptance of social injustice, destructiveness and the wider (exploitative) social and economic order and moral apathy that managers and organisations serve and perpetuate (Adler et al., 2007). For instance, Mumby argued that a critical stance is vitally important in studies of change and organisation, where it has long been observed that claims of neutrality, often mask a managerial bias:

The study of organizational behavior is replete with research that claims such neutrality but that actually privileges managerial rationality. Such research is not overtly pro-management. However, because it tends to operate within particular institutional parameters and belief systems, it incorporates a managerial worldview (Putnam, Bantz, Deetz, Mumby, & Van Maanen, (1993, p. 225).

Though not wishing to downplay contentions and fissures in the realm of CMS³⁰, a number of common themes are typically pursued by CMS scholars. This study is informed by attention to these common threads (cf. Adler et al., 2007) which are outlined below.

Challenging structures of domination: CMS challenges the prevailing discourses of modern management and within a broader, radical critique of contemporary society. From such a remit, CMS scholars regularly come into contact with various forms of domination such as capitalism, patriarchy, racism, imperialism³¹ (cf. Adler et al., 2007), and so forth that can repress, exploit, de-personalise and de-humanise workers. As part of this challenge, CMS proponents (often, but not always) hold that the promise of a better society (and management practices) are

³⁰ For an overview of these tensions, see Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott (2009), Fournier & Grey (2000), and Grey & Willmott (2005).

³¹ Since these terms are important in CMS, it may be helpful to briefly define them using definitions provided by Adler et al. (2007). *Capitalism* is a form of society where the class of owners dominate others and where there is competition between firms (thus domination by the anarchy of the free market). *Patriarchy* refers to gender dominance of men over women. *Racism* is the domination of one racially defined group over others. *Imperialism* relates to the dominant class in one country economically and politically exploiting and dominating the population.

possible, though the degree to which such transformation is possible and how, is widely debated (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

Challenging the taken for granted. CMS challenges the taken for granted assumptions that underpin mainstream management practices and literature. For example, that someone has to be in charge, that managers are better placed by virtue of their education, training, and ‘expertise’ to be in charge, or that culture is automatically integrated and harmonious. By questioning the self-evidence of such ‘truths’, CMS highlights common assumptions and practices of management as institutionalised and precarious, and a source of struggle between those able to impose these beliefs and those who have lacked the resources or means to effectively challenge them and establish an alternative.

Moving beyond instrumentalism. In mainstream studies of management, a typical view held is that the value of social relations is most clearly instrumental; meaning that ideas and concepts (such as culture) and people (as resources) are conceived of in terms of in terms of production, output and effectiveness. In this way of thinking all action is then evaluated in terms of instrumental rationality and ethical and political questions concerning the value of this instrumental-means-to-an-end view are excluded or suppressed. CMS scholars therefore attempt to move beyond instrumentalism, both in terms of how else ideas and people can be conceived in the workplace, and in challenging the doctrines, methods and pedagogies that support modes of research that are instrumental. Ultimately this can help provide a wider range of ways to understand and evaluate how business can be done and people managed (French & Grey, 1996).

Call for reflexivity and meaning. Broadly, this refers to the capacity to recognise how accounts of management (by either researchers or practitioners) are produced and under what

conditions (reflexivity) and what understandings (meanings) are attributed to key terms, for example, trust, responsibility, leadership, citizenship, culture.

Power and knowledge. Each of the outlined themes coalesce around the close and often implicit relationship between power and knowledge. Working from the assumption that culture change research in sport psychology is managerialist, it is almost inevitable that the researchers responsible for this work have become the servants of power, suppressing as they do the voice of employees, or integrating them seamlessly into the voice of management.

5.2.2 The Use of Story and Critical Nonfiction

The importance of story to the construction of accounts of culture – as meaning infused and intensely lived – is well-known (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Geertz, 1973). To aid the stories told, I use creative nonfiction. Creative nonfiction is a creative analytic practice (CAP) that tells a story which is at once grounded in literary sensibilities and empirical data that the researchers observed somehow through ‘being there’ (participant interviews, people’s lived experience, etc.) (Smith, McGannon, & Williams, 2015). In other words, “the story told is fictional in form yet factual in content” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 59). Through the use of the storytelling techniques of fiction, fact can be made more compelling and emotionally vibrant (Cheney, 2001). Creative nonfiction, therefore, does not merely report facts and events but delivers them in a way that moves the reader towards a deeper understanding of the topic and themes conveyed (Cheney, 2001).

5.3 Developing and Contextualising the Account

5.3.1 Stylistic Choice: Evocative or Analytic?

It is well recognised that creative nonfiction is a broad church with no one-size-fits-all approach (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). While the various forms may share many commonalities, one division within the creative writing community rests upon distinctions between analytic and

evocative stylistic choice. Evocative (or emotional) writing involves a postmodern or post-structuralist literary approach to writing that seeks to show, rather than tell, theory through emotionally driven and often confessional tales (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Gariglio, 2019; Smith, 2017). The aim of which is to develop an emotional resonance and a heartfelt understanding of culture within the reader (Smith, 2017). On the other hand, there is a more analytic style that can be adopted. This type of writing can also be evocative (Smith, 2017), but it differs from more emotionally charged creative nonfiction in the sense in that the author typically interjects at some point and tells the reader what the theoretical aims of the story are; a practice typically resisted in more emotional writing (Smith, 2017).

In many ways, these nuances can be mapped onto wider ontological and paradigmatic debate. Evocative writing; creative, artistic, performative and emotionally driven is often embedded and aligned with social constructionist thinking (Ellis, 2009; Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010), whereas more analytically orientated accounts are often more clearly grounded in traditional ethnographic practices and realist leanings (Ellis, 2009; Gariglio, 2019). One way out of this apparent binary choice is to adopt a critical realist positioning. Despite assertions to the contrary (cf. Smith & McGannon, 2018), forms of realism, such as critical realism can combine ontological realism (the world is how it is) with constructionist epistemology (our theories and explanations are social constructions) (cf. Maxwell, 2012; Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2012). From a position that increasingly identifies with a critical realist perspective, I assume that phenomena (such as culture, for example) are real — they are embedded in the action and processes of real life and can be generative in that they have consequences for how we live and see ourselves — but that our knowledge of them is far from straightforward and inevitably predicated on interpretation (McDougall et al., 2019; Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019). By adopting a critical realist meta-

theoretical position, it is possible (and beneficial) to be at once evocative *and* analytical within creative nonfiction because: (a) data are not simply texts to be interpreted or represented only as constructions (although they are of course, *still* constructions); they are also “evidence for real phenomena and processes (including mental phenomena and processes) that are not available for direct observation (Maxwell, 2012, p. 103), and (b) because the aim of research is to explain social-psychological phenomena, not only to provide thick descriptions (Ronkainen, Wiltshire, & Ryba, 2019).

5.3.2 Constructing the account

In line with Sparkes’s (2000) definition, the creative non-fiction account presented draws on my experiences to provide a highly personalised narrative of a difficult culture consulting experience within sport. The account was reconstructed and narrated using reflexive processes that have been frequently utilised in autoethnography. I used *emotional recall*, which involved revisiting the consultancies and reflecting on them (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). According to Ellis (1999), this involves imagining being back in the scene, both emotionally and physically, which helps in the remembering of other details. Reflexivity and factual accuracy were supported by approximately 50 pages of field notes, 12 reflective journal entries (written at the time) and dozens of emails and reports that were crafted during the course of the consultancy. I also re-visited the consulting experience in conversations with my colleague (Paul) who undertook the work alongside me. To my surprise, the documents used to facilitate recall were more emotionally charged than I had remembered and contained a multitude of lived emotions layered within the text. This helped take me back to the scene, and I think, significantly aided the evocative elements within the writing. However, reflecting on and writing about the consultancy experience, now, a number of years³²

³² The precise number of years has deliberately been omitted from the account so as to help protect client anonymity.

on, aided an analytical perspective. It allowed me to step back from the material, be more emotionally distant, analyse it from a cultural perspective (cf. Ellis, 1999) and to move back and forth retroductively (cf. Wodak & Meyer, 2009) between memories and data on the one hand, and theories of culture and organisation on the other.

It was also my sense that writing evocatively did not negate or undermine, but complimented, the analytical dimension of this work. It afforded the opportunity to show underexplored power-related issues³³ that relate to the arguably darker aspects the sport and indeed consulting. In this sense, evocation supported the development of a critical edge, which has helped delineate the account from conventional organisational intervention accounts. This has allowed for more explicit focus on power issues and the situating of both the personal and cultural alongside attention to wider societal structures and systems of domination (cf. Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Marcus & Fischer, 1986).

In the representation of each reflection, I deliberately write evocatively to convey felt emotion and lived experience in order to convey as directly as possible the discomforts, struggles and messiness of the described organisational practices (King & Learmonth, 2015; Knights & Willmott, 1999) and in particular, the difficulties of working culturally from an increasingly critical perspective. Subsequently, and using Nesti and colleagues (e.g., Nesti, 2004; Nesti et al., 2012) applied reflections as guidance, in the conclusion, I adopt a more analytical voice and seek to elaborate on and contextualise the described content with theory-informed analysis.

5.3.3 Rigour

³³ Here, I use the term power with some of the terms 'classic' meanings in mind, such as the ability to get others to do what you want them to do (Weber, 1978), or something they otherwise might not do (Hardy, 1995), while recognising that power, as referred to by Foucault, is diffuse and permeates all aspects of social life.

To evaluate rigour, I ask that the current study to be evaluated by the following criteria (cf. Drew, Morris, Tod, & Eubank, 2019): (a) transparency: is the approach adopted clear to the reader? (b) coherency: this refers to the way the different vignettes, reflections and interpretations create a more complete and meaningful picture, (c) impact: do the vignettes affect the reader and help create new questions and ways of practicing? and (d) substantive contribution: does this piece enhance understanding of life (Smith & Caddick, 2012) and in particular of organisational life? To address rigor in relation to these criteria, the research was enhanced in a number of ways. For example, in addition to processes already described, I later outline the benefits of and rationale for reflections and re-visiting previous research. Finally, supervisory researchers with significant working experience in elite sport were used as critical friends and provided contextual and storied resources that I could draw upon to modify stories and analysis in ways that reflected elite environments and that could enhance applied practices.

While the account is predominantly based on actual events, many identifying factors have been omitted or modified with a view to protecting the privacy of characters portrayed (Ellis, 2004). To further support this ethical choice, I have at times blended characters and elements of different consultancy experiences to deliberately obscure the details of events and people involved. Consequently, while the account is grounded in experience, my story might even semi-fictional as it has been fashioned and dramatised to an extent in order to protect the anonymity of those involved (Whiteman & Phillips, 2008).

5.3.4 The First Author – Competency and Applied Positioning

Through previous employment as a manager (and experience of leading large teams) within the mental health, social care and non-profit sectors, I was not unfamiliar with internally led change or management processes. Before returning to postgraduate education to complete a masters in

sport psychology at LJMU in 2012, I had also worked for a number of years as a manager and leader for a non-profit organisation at the intersections of mental health and social care. We went through a number of changes in relation to internal strategy implementation, or in response to government legislature and policy change. I have also formerly served for three years as a group manager for *Organisational Change Practitioners* – the largest online group of change professionals (with a membership of over 60,000) – where I would screen, curate and deliver up-to-date organisational change related content and education for group members on a daily basis. These experiences have complimented my educational interests and have meant that I have *some* familiarity with the practical application of ideas about culture, leadership, management systems, strategy, and the models, tools and techniques of change management and organisational development. However, these experiences do not represent a formal education or certification in matters of organisational change. I am not an applied or accredited sport psychologist or a certified change consultant, with an industry-recognised qualification. Furthermore, although I outlined early in the introduction to this thesis that I have gained some experience of organisational work and consulting, at the time of the described consultancy, this experience was extremely limited.

At the time of the described account of culture consultancy, I had also recently emigrated from the UK to the USA. Alongside part-time PhD study, and in the midst of a fairly major life and a career transition, I was working part-time in a bakery, part-time as a bid and grant writer and was beginning to supplement my income through occasional culture/organisational consultancy. This is worth mentioning as I was perhaps less vocationally (and financially) secure than I had been prior to moving across the world. I was also very much in the grip of trying to wrestle (theoretically and practically) with a concept of culture that seemed infinitely more troublesome than the one that was being presented and pushed in sport psychology organisational literature.

To aid the reader's interpretation of the account and analysis that follows, my assumptions about culture at the time were informed by the interpretative traditions described throughout the thesis, specifically cultural thinking focusing on meanings and symbolism (e.g., Alvesson 2002, 2015; Geertz 1973; Martin 2002; Smircich 1983). In terms of adopting this perspective for applied work, it was my hope that our culture work would support focused and in-depth inquiries that could produce findings that were informative and beyond what was on the surface and culturally unremarkable (Alvesson (2002). From an interpretive point of view, I was sceptical about achieving substantial and widespread transformational type change and was instead aiming, more modestly, for greater understanding, which of course may relate to performance in a number of ways anyway. I was therefore interested in "what was going on?", but even more so in questions such "what do people think they are up to?" "What do events, activities and things of historical organisational importance mean to them?" (cf. Alvesson, 2002). I wanted to explore issues of change and performance not through objective fact gathering and planning of a series of steps, but through taking seriously the reasons why the culture(s) had formed the way it has, and the interpretations around such evolution and history (cf. Schein, 1999, 2010). I felt that this would place more emphasis on participant observation and regard for how people went about their daily business. This approach also meant a concerted effort to interpret the meanings, thinking and patterns of action that were less obvious and not always shared or consistent (cf. Martin, 2002). My culture positioning was also supplemented by a familiarity with organisational change literature and theories, and I was cognisant of shifts in thinking that have challenged the dominance of linear step, logically driven models through the introduction of more dynamic, fluid and emergent processes and practices (e.g., Burns, 2011; Burns, Hughes, & By, 2018; By, Armenakis, & Burns, 2015; Higgs & Rowland, 2005) .

5.3.5 The Context for the Consultancy

The consulting opportunity came about after prolonged networking and a number of informal conversations with the CEO (Richard) and a member of his leadership team, about performance management, leadership and organisational culture over the span of several months. Myself and my colleague (Paul) – who I delivered the consultancy with – were initially invited to present to Richard and his leadership team about the importance of values to organisational performance. Of the back of this presentation – which we did for free – we were later (some months later) contacted about our availability/capacity to deliver a more extensive piece of work with regards the culture of the organisation. It was a big year for the organisation. There were some major tournaments on the horizon, and in the wider picture, there were changes afoot concerning grassroots development and plans to grow and professionalise the sport.

In light of our previous discussions and what Richard had described as increased ‘culture chatter’ among his peers and within elite sport in general, he felt that his organisation could establish (in his words) a “world class culture”, or at least a “culture of excellence.” As he was unsure of exactly what that would entail, we were largely able to craft our own scope of work within a specified budget and time frame. From the outset, we made Richard aware of our more temperate and cautious views about culture change, and to our surprise, he had, in his words, found our views refreshing. After a number of conversations, he seemed to be on board with our idea that culture – as a means to increase understanding and make sense of organisational issues – could have influence beyond the fictional, idealistic ‘A to B’ journey of change so often depicted. Following this understanding, we agreed that the first phase would comprise an extensive evaluation (or needs analysis phase) where we would build an understanding of the current culture, after which point, we would present back our findings, and outline next steps and agree on terms

and fees for any additional work. In total, we conducted over 20 sessions/meetings with various members of the organisation over approximately 50 hours of contact time (see Table 2, below, for a more detailed breakdown of work).

Table 5.1: Description of Consultancy Work

- Educational group sessions/workshops with each team (leadership, business, coaching, development) to increase understanding and awareness of culture as a concept and why it matters in social relations and practical matters
- Group sessions/focus groups to explore organisational member's interpretations of their own culture
- Series of informal 1-1 discussions with staff across the organisation
- Strategy session with the leadership team
- Participant observation (being in the workplace, attending meetings)
- Informal discussions with external partners and stakeholders
- Analysis of key policies, strategy documents, organisation's website and social media activity

5.4 The Applied Reflections

The applied reflections (three stories in total) begin with Applied Vignette 1, which forms the basis for subsequent reflections. The 'scenes' that follow (and comprise the first vignette), provide a glimpse of culture consulting work, as it was carried out over a period of approximately three months. At times, I use my voice as a narrator to provide context (displayed by use of italics) and to help guide the story and move it along.

5.4.1 Applied Vignette 1: Warts and All

Scene 1 – Meeting the leadership team. We're sitting around the table with the leadership team when Richard bumbles into the room, decked in cycling gear, encumbered with bags and

mumbling apologies. “Sorry, sorry... I err had other meetings this morning that unexpectedly got put on my plate, and err I got here as quickly as I could. Gimme a couple of minutes to get changed, make a couple of quick calls and I’ll be right out...10 minutes tops”.

Having met some of the team a few months back already, the small talk isn’t all that painful. Lisa, the most naturally social among us thankfully takes the lead and keeps conversation ticking over until Richard re-appears, still a little flustered, and breathless, 15 minutes later.

“Ok good morning everyone”, Richard begins, almost inaudibly. I’m sure by now you have all introduced yourself to Michael and Paul and probably have a fair idea why they’re here today. They have been working in the sphere of organisational culture and leadership, and as we have a big year coming up and look to develop our own culture of excellence, I thought it very apropos to get them in and to do a check, an audit of *our* culture, if you like”

Richard pauses, before going on “Now... no one is saying we’re gonna be Barcelona, or the New Zealand All Blacks...or I don’t know...the Green Bay Packers. They each have their culture and we have ours” Richard looks at me and Paul, and holds our gaze for a fleeting moment, and I nod imperceptibly to let him know that I *know* that he’s taken note of our previous conversations. “Nonetheless, while we do lots of things very well, as you know there is always room to improve. Guys, you want to weigh in?”

“Thanks” Richard, I say, standing slowly to make sure I have the attention of the room. We want to help you to understand your culture because it affects everything that you do as a group. How you think, how you act, what you value, what you find meaningful and why. You can’t step outside of culture. With this in mind, we firmly believe that culture is every organisations’ first and most important competitor” I wince a little as I deliver the line, but it hits home, and encouraged, I

proceed. “It is our belief that leaders in sport must heed the message from the world of business, which is now startlingly clear: Either attend to your culture and thrive, or don’t and perish.”

Paul takes over, “What we want to do today is to start getting a sense of what your culture looks and feels like. You’re the experts on that. What we do essentially is hold up the mirror and help you to see it more clearly. Now, sometimes you might not like everything you see, but that level of self-awareness is important, right? Or else, what people do is they just maintain the status quo, so you have to start with this organisational self-awareness, if you’re really serious about culture and building the foundations of high performance. So, to do that, we are going to be speaking to you a lot, but also, to people throughout the organisation at different levels.”

“Great!”, Richard who has been listening intently, becomes animated again “. I like that. And I think, if we’re honest, we need it... A warts and all account, so to speak.”

Lisa raises her hand: “I do like the idea of getting a perspective of our culture from various teams, but, I think, to be quite honest, we’ve tried things like this before and I’m not sure what you’re going to get back that is all that useful. When we did something similar at the last company I worked for, we developed a better understanding of our culture at the leadership level, you know...what our culture of excellence should look like etc, then we rolled it out and got people to buy into it”.

Paul, replies — it is an opportunity to educate, which we would be doing a lot more of as the day progressed anyway: “well, we do want to hear from all of you of course. Your input will be incredibly, incredibly important. But equally, when it comes to culture, we have to recognise that there is no one culture as such, where everyone sees or values things in the exact same way. To get that nuance of understanding, we have to get multiple views of the culture, and also recognise everyone’s contributions to making the culture, so it’s not just a top-down initiative.

Lisa nods in understanding, then adds, maybe a little defensively “I see. I mean, I think we lead well, but outside of this room, to be perfectly honest with you, there is a serious lack of talent and drive within the teams and wider organisation. With the best will in the world, it’s really hard to deliver high performance if you don’t have the people who can execute. Am I right?” She looks for support.

Everyone nods collectively and mmmhmmm’s. A picture of consensus.

In the afternoon session we move from education to analysis, addressing the groups interpretations of their culture. Focusing on what is shared, what is contested, and what is unclear, provides a helpful mental framework for us, but getting at what is meaningful and what really matters is elusive. Their answers seem rehearsed, generic, unsure, and we struggle to peek beneath the surface of them. We can feel we’re losing them and in our opening address to them, it’s all too easy to return to the functional, and the pragmatic: priorities, vision, mission, pain points, strengths, weaknesses, what culture offers in terms of performance. Their strategic plans, vision and ways of working seem vague, disjointed and confused. We press them, asking probing, challenging questions, trying to piece together parts of the cultural puzzle, but it’s difficult. Really difficult, and I think they can sense it.

At the end of the day and with hands shaken, Richard walks us to the elevator. “Great stuff guys, I think the team got so much out of that”

“Well, we hope so” Paul replies. “It was a great first session. Your team did very well and we certainly got a lot from it too. We’ll be seeing you soon.” We shake hands again and the elevator door closes slowly.

Paul looks at me and waits a moment for the elevator to move, before speaking. “thoughts?”

“I think we’re going to have a little bit of trouble mate”

Scene 2 – Gaining multiple perspectives. John, a member of the development team, edges closer and looks around as if he is going to tell us something that could be a secret. “Look man, he says in a low voice, “it’s like this. I don’t care what anyone up there tells you,” waving a thumb in no obvious direction, and louder now “I’ve not had a plan in years. Years”

“What do you mean by that, John?” I ask.

“There’s no direction, none. Everyone works in completely different ways and no sooner do we start one initiative they’ve got another five on the go. It’s exhausting man. It makes you apathetic. It really does”

“I agree”, Anne, quiet until now, chimes in. “I’d rather do one thing to a good standard, you know... than do, a bunch of things just ‘ok’.

“Do you feel you do high performing work as an organisation?” I look around the group and wait for someone to answer. It’s dead silent.

“Mate, we’re a shambles”, John finally says.

“What’s the main issue?” I fire back.

“Leadership. I mean look, as far as bosses go, they’re ok. They’re nice even, for the most part. They ask for your opinion and ideas, although it doesn’t ever really go anywhere, because ultimately, they already know what they want to do. That’s just what managers do though isn’t it? Which you can accept really, but we change direction all the flipping time and it’s exhausting, and when you look closely, nothing really changes at all. And some of them, they’re never a leader in a million years. Our external partners don’t put it as politely as that and they complain they never see Richard. What am I supposed to say to that? It’s true.”

Anne nods quietly, before looking up “this isn’t going to get back to anyone, right?”

I reassure her but do wonder how we relay some of this back. “We’ll be very careful how specific conversations get fed back to any of the leadership team, and we’d certainly take care not to land anyone in it” It somehow sounds ominous even as I reassure her.

“Ok, then I agree with John.”

Amy, also part of the group we’re interviewing speaks, “We’re also just really outdated and we never...”

Scene 3: an ethical conundrum. *Once we had completed our sessions with the teams and gathered our thoughts, we scheduled a day to present back to leadership. Richard cancelled the day before due to an unforeseen schedule conflict. The next arranged workshop was cancelled too, and the next one, and before we could reschedule for a fourth time, Richard called to ask if we could send on our findings in advance, in the form of a report. His boss was intrigued about the culture work they had been doing and would like to read about it. We hesitated and pushed back as this was not our preferred way of initiating some potentially difficult conversations. We relented in the face of reassurances from Richard, that he was ready and looking forward to reading our analysis with an open mind. We sent the report, and waited, for weeks, for any sort of a reply.*

Richard’s name flashes up on the mobile.

I pick up after a couple of rings “Hi Richard, how you doing?”

“Good, Mike, very well thanks”. His voice is even, his tone firmer, less friendly than usual. He is as assertive as I’ve ever heard him and sounds every inch an authority figure. My stomach tightens a little.

“Listen... sorry I’ve not been in touch, since Paul sent the report on.”

“It’s ok, Paul mentioned you usually have quite a lot on at this time of year” I say, giving him an out. “Have you had a chance to read it...?”

“Yeah...that’s why I’m calling” he sighs, and hesitates “so...I must admit, my heart sank a little when I read it. It was difficult to see some of that, you know in black and white.”

We had softened the report significantly, while probably accentuating the positives more than we ought to have.

“Yes, look we did feel that parts of it might be tough to read, which is why we really wanted to break it down face-to-face, although we do hope that you aren’t ignoring the many positives...”

Richard interjects with a laugh, more relaxed now he has gotten some of this off his chest “yeah I guess there were some. It’s is easy to focus on the negatives I suppose. It’s just... I dunno...it felt like getting a bad report card and I didn’t think we were that bad. Like, we’re not that bad, surely, you know?”

I remain silent and wait for Richard to continue.

“Anyway, I’ve digested it and we know there is more work to be done, and we do want to get you guys back in due course to go through this with the team. I know some of them have questions...”

Richard lets that hang “but for now I was wondering, and this is a little awkward...”

I wait.

“I still haven’t sent it on to my boss because I’m not sure it puts us in the best light to be honest. And he’s asking for it. I told him it was written basically, before you sent it, and well, the long and the short of it is that he wants to see it.”

“Yeah...”

“So I wonder, if I sent it over to you with some of my concerns highlighted, if you could re-word, or omit some of the more contentious points... not change it wholesale, just, you know soften it around the edges a bit, make it a bit more palatable, and then fire it back over to me”

I pause, “Richard...I...” I start

Richard jumped in, cutting me off “Listen, you’ve done good work. I think there might be more work, with us for sure...but I think if we can share some of this, you could get some really good traction of the back of this”.

Scene 4 – Rejection. Paul’s calling and I pick up. “Buddy...so you been on social media today by any chance?”, he asks before I can even muster a hello.

“eh, nope, not really, why?”

“Well we will definitely *not* be getting invited back for more culture work with Richard and the gang by the looks of things”

“Wait, what? Why?”

“They got someone else in. To do culture. Can you bloody believe the cheek of that? I guess he’s worked with a bunch of teams, some big names. He’s done three workshops with them already. One on vision, one on establishing core values, and one on matching values to behaviour, or something like that, with the view to rolling it out across the organisation and getting everyone...wait for it... ‘on the same page’. All the things we warned them about! To top it off, they’ve thanked him publicly on their website and social media for helping them to understand their culture. Lisa called to apologise. I mean, it’s not like I was expecting more work, it’s been weeks, but this feels like bit of a kick in the teeth doesn’t it?”

5.4.2 Applied Vignette 2: Getting Critical: Hired Guns and Savages.

In re-visiting this consultancy experience, I realise how disappointed, even depleted — and dare I say jaded, I had felt in the aftermath of it all. We had been effectively replaced by another consultant, albeit a more experienced one, without so much as a call or email from Richard to say that we wouldn’t be needed for the next phase of work. It was a rejection, that in spite of my attempts to rationalise it and brush it off, chafed and it remained surprisingly raw for longer than

I thought it might have. More than that though, our ideas of culture that we had been developing – less mechanistic, less deterministic, less leader bullshit, but more democratic, realistic, but still we, thought, powerful and explanatory – had been utterly defeated; ironically by the very rival we had spent considerable time educating and warning Richard and his team about: fast, superficial, alluring for sure, but unrelated to performance and probably not in the least bit *cultural*.

More than any personal angst, professional frustration and slight embarrassment (we would get over it) I felt sorry. Sorry that we had failed to make a difference and sorry for everyone who had allowed us into their world and taken the time to be open with us: their frustrations, the general lack of direction, the inconsistency of leadership, unfinished projects, silos, not being heard or recognised and the stifling of meaningful, creative and passionate contributions. It wasn't just our voice that had been suppressed, it was theirs. Whereas, we could move on, they were still there, languishing. The public façade crafted by the organisation, that they were about to step confidently into a new and optimistic future with clarity, vision, purpose, and with a deep sense of their culture, made the jape all the crueller.

Angry, I doubled-down on critical literature feeling at once cynical and hopeful, and began to de-construct culture and the world of consulting. I became increasingly sceptical of the organisational change communities I was a part of and my colleagues and friends who were organisational strategists, change managers, project managers, human resource professionals and consultants of every variety. I had often looked to them for guidance, but now, I was less sure of their advice, which always seemed to involve the need to “be more flexible” “to bend just a little and play the game”. They were, in many ways, like sport psychologists. Concerned as they were, with finding ways to contribute to high performance and wider operational excellence; and perpetually trying to distinguish themselves in a competitive profession and market, laden with

competing voices (and many “gurus”), all fighting to be heard. They worked one to one with leaders, and managers, and with groups, armed not with the tools of psychology but with those of organisational change: change management models, project management, organisational development, process design, agile, scrum, sensemaking. Within frameworks of performance, many of them wanted to take care of people too, and were always looking for new, fairer, healthier, efficient and more evidence-based ways of guiding people through the complex, difficult, and anxiety-provoking process of organisational change.

On closer inspection though, even their most inclusive and democratic practices seemed tainted by the need to commodify their services and bend to the will of management: transformational change, bottom-up practices, flatter hierarchies, democratic decision making, building volunteer armies to enact change, mindfulness, the formulation of authentic workplace values...). They were just illusions that concealed a darker, more nefarious reality. The models, techniques and tools of change may have been updated, and the language made more palatable, but pull back the veil and they were all still somehow implicitly tethered to ideas of Taylorism, old regimes of command and control (reduce resistance increase compliance) and the hegemonic practices of management. Whether they knew, it or not, the organisational change community was contributing to the perpetuation of this system, not changing and challenging it like they told themselves. To be successful, they had to give leaders what they wanted and they wanted concepts that were pragmatic, that were influenced by and aligned with goals of the organisation, which in turn was governed by what the market demanded. Cogs. In. The. Capitalist. Machine.

The image that came to mind at the time was that in spite of their best of intentions and claims to the contrary, organisational change consultants were little more than hired guns, working for the wealthy oil barons and telling the townsfolk to get off the land, and to move with the times...

or else! It was a depressing thought. I myself became gun shy and retreated from actively looking for consulting opportunities. I worked more in the bakery and wrote more bids for companies. I returned to the business academic work and I thought a lot about culture: How it had been transferred from anthropology and distorted in the borrowing from ideas of local meaning, kinship, religion, tradition, community and ritual, and about whether it had ever really been a concept for the 'natives' or had, instead, always been the language of the colonizers, those in control and whose vision of progress and a more 'civilised' future might, just might, save the ignorant 'savages'.

5.4.3 Re-visiting Data

Qualitative research can be synthesised with previous qualitative research to form new interpretations of the field under study (Walsh & Downe, 2005). In this process, phenomena do not have to be revealed in a final, absolute conclusion, but can be geared towards an appreciation of research synthesis as an ever-expanding, boundary-breaking exercise (Sherwood, 1997; Walsh & Downe, 2005). Treated in this way, research synthesis can be a process used to examine multi-layered contexts that can be peeled back to reveal generative processes not typically uncovered in standalone studies (Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997; Walsh & Downe, 2005). This interpretation of research synthesis also suggests it is a way of researching that can support critical scholarship, of which a central aim is to investigate local forms of phenomena and relate the empirical themes at hand to the wider historical, economic, cultural, and political context (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

It is in this spirit of critical inquiry that I attempt a very modest synthesis of qualitative research and fuse a consideration of the applied reflections already presented with a critical reflection of masters study (data collected in 2011, published in 2015) (*The challenges of sport psychology delivery in elite and professional sport: Reflections from experienced sport*

psychologists)³⁴. This research examined the challenges facing practitioners who operate in elite environments, highlighting challenges to congruence (cf. Lindsay et al., 2007) that occurred in relation to the broader, more organisationally orientated role that they were often required to adopt. Insight into how specific challenges were understood and dealt with, and how sport psychologists were able to provide an effective service while managing themselves and the demands of the environment were also described. The practitioners were all experienced and described challenges that were in many ways similar to the ones I had faced in an organisational role. The rationale for returning to this study and the original data is that it can be used to aid reflection and aid reinterpretation of my own failed experience. Moreover, this study also represented the start of my academic journey and considerations of culture, and therefore presents an opportunity to reflect on how my views on culture changed? How had I changed? Could the interview data and corresponding article provide me with new insight into consulting and organisational work? What it might tell me about culture, practice and myself. For the following reflections, I use the data of 5 sport psychologists who gave their informed consent for the data to be used in future analyses and scholarship.

5.4.4 Applied Vignette 3: Elite Sport, Sport Psychologists, and Psychic Prisons

I read through the paper from start to finish for the first time since it was published and pour over the original transcripts, making notes and trying to stay open to new interpretations and the possible re-storying of the data. I wonder if had always had critical leanings, even before I knew what critical scholarship, or indeed scholarship, really was. The paper could certainly be characterised as a negative reading of the elite sport environment and there are persistent allusions to oppressive

³⁴ The following is a link to this article, in pre-publication form, in case it is of use to readers in the reading and interpretation of the next sections.

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/3677/3/McDougall%20et%20al%20TSP%202015%5B1%5D.pdf>

regimes; a hallmark of critical studies. I note how I used the powerful and evocative language of participants to essentialise elite sport cultures as ruthless, harsh, and almost uniformly performance-obsessed. It's a picture strengthened considerably by somewhat 'dark' imagery embedded within the participant-conjured metaphors of virus and disease, claustrophobia, being boiled alive and underwater immersion that are used to communicate that these cultures are unhealthy, harmful, intense, and inescapable.

I'm also drawn to the sense of loneliness that permeates many of the practitioner stories. Perhaps this is because I have always felt like a bit of an outsider in the sport psychology academic and applied communities; a symptom of not being quite sure of where I fit, and of doing a part-time PhD, largely from abroad, I suspect. In the original study, the detailing of loneliness and isolation had been placed under a theme titled 'Being a Part and Apart'. It referred to the detachment that many of the participants described that arose from operating in a broader, organisational capacity that required they not 'get too close' to any one group (governing body, athletes, coaches). I'm pulled toward this theme now, not because I was alone in the environment (working closely with Paul provided emotional as well as decision-making support), but because I now better identify with the struggles of the individual and the environment that were powerfully described. The participants all resisted (to varying degrees) and succumbed (to varying degrees) to the socialising forces of culture and structure. At the same time, they seemed to be trying to find, or carve out 'their' place in a challenging environment, and to find a means to deliver services that are valued but that do not completely compromise their sense of self and identity as 'psychologists' or as people with moral values. The socialisation to cultural norms they described is sometimes subtle, implicit, even unconscious and insidious ("Practitioners that you've known all your life — people just go weird"). On other occasions, it seemed more forceful, often driven

by a playground gang-like mentality (“You’re going to be one of us. You’re going to do the things that we do, the things we think, or the things that we say or bugger off.”).

I think about the metaphors. Metaphors, like culture, are concerned with meaning, and as imagery devices, provide meaning as we connect one experience to another, broadening our understanding of all aspects of life (Morgan, 1996). I try to become more abstract in my analysis. Culturally, what is it that they are trying to communicate? They are saying they are isolated, alone, trapped even, and they are trying to maintain their identities...resisting, but in the face of what? Authority? Power? Socialisation? Institutionalisation? I thought about Morgan’s (1985) metaphor of the organisation as a psychic prison. In this metaphor, culture guides, conforms, constrains, and subjects cultural members to prison-like rule and patterns of relating to the world; the metaphor highlighting how individuals and groups can become stifled and imprisoned in their thinking. Or, as Morgan put it: “the last thing a fish is likely to discover is the water it is swimming in” (2006, p. 209). Leaders, themselves, of course can be socialised by the prevailing beliefs, discourse and ideologies of elite sport, and because of this attempt to wield culture as a means to maintain ideological control. In doing so, they are protected from the expression of alternative values and opinions that may challenge their worldviews and the existing order (Alvesson, 2002). The culture becomes a prison that traps everyone, and on realising this, my feelings toward Richard soften a little.

I thought about my own failed experience. As external consultants, we were only ever visitors. Why had we been expelled though? Was it because we had threatened managerial control and the balance of the existing social order? Had we misread the cultural matrix? Had we failed to deliver a service that was valuable within the cultural context that we were operating in? Could, or *should* we have been more socially and politically savvy? Or, in flexing to this cultural reality

in order to be more effective, to survive and thrive, would we have taken the first, ever so tentative steps towards our own eventual imprisonment within the ideologies that flow through elite sport? We had not been members of the culture, nor overly invested — personally, contractually, financially — yet as neophyte consultants, with one foot in the door, the lure of future work was alluring. I remember clearly the case for compromise. It was logical. It was visceral. And it was tempting:

“If we leave out some of the harder hitting stuff, appease Richard a bit, we can stay in the game longer, and hopefully make a difference down the line, right? That’s surely why we got into this” I had said to Paul, while we weighed up the pros and cons of amending our report. If he doesn’t bring us back, everything everyone has told is just potentially down the drain? I mean, at the end of the day, what good can we do if we’re not around, right?”

I float between reflections and the challenges that the experienced sport psychologists had told me about. By comparison, I’m not sure I have ever had any right to complain, or to feel jaded or skeptical. They described days where they were far from home and utterly exhausted, incredibly stressed to the point of fracture. Their sense of ethics were tested regularly, yet they were still prepared to keep trying, compelled even, so as to be of service to the athletes in their charge. Some see this work almost as a higher calling, something approaching the spiritual. I read over one account in particular. He seems scarred by his experiences of work within the cultures of elite sport, but has been able to transcend the immersive, suffocating, qualities he described by becoming a consultant. Free to step in and out of elite sport as he chooses, he is renewed, and with a more philosophical outlook, feels less required to vehemently resist or judge the elite environment. In his words, he can “just be himself and let the environment be around him”. The word he uses is “authentic”. I pause, put down my pen on the desk and lean back into my chair,

lost in thought. Ultimately everyone is the hero of their own story. If culture is a psychic prison, I am not yet sure whether sport psychologists are captives, jailers or liberators. I gaze out the window of my office. A little less lonely, a little more optimistic.

5.5 Discussion and Further Reflections

This chapter responds to the call (Wagstaff, 2019a, 2019b) for increased organisational intervention research in sport psychology. It supplements the few research studies that do exist in the area by providing a highly personalised account of an ultimately unsuccessful organisational intervention that centralises the personal and practical challenges of this type of work. It therefore stands in contrast to extant literature that has arguably either been detached from emotional realities of organisational work or that has been excessively idealistic in descriptions of such work as relatively ‘challenge free’ and unproblematic (Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). The use of creative nonfiction methods and the adoption of a critical stance has helped to show an alternative concept of culture that I hope can stimulate reflection and debate within the sport psychology community about the problems and possibilities of culture research and practice. Continuing in the style of the creative nonfiction genre, some further reflections on the reflections already provided, are offered next.

5.5.1 The Complexities of Culture and Delivering a Culturally Informed Service

The complexity and ethereal qualities of culture have been discussed extensively in preceding chapters. This study demonstrated that adopting a perspective on culture that is mindful of these inherent qualities of culture has clear practical and applied consequences for sport psychologists hoping to undertake organisational culture work. Unlike previous academic research in sport psychology, our own attempts to work successfully in a cultural and organisational capacity were fraught with difficulties, in part, because of our conceptualisation of culture. If culture is less

mechanistic then it's patterns and influences are far from linear. Less malleable means less susceptible to influence and therefore planned change. This is a 'hard sell' for leaders who find culture luring for its apparent link to performance (Martin, 2002), and managing expectancies was challenging (Alvesson, 2015; Schein, 2010). Adopting the idea that all in the environment are culture makers means to take seriously the idea that multiple interpretations beyond those of leadership are important and not to be gathered in some tokenistic manner. The idea that networks of meaning are more important culturally than espoused values and visible behaviours makes culture harder to identify and analyse. In contrast to more functional views, we were appreciative of the fluidity of culture, that it is always in the process of change and re-negotiation, so the very premise that it could be captured as a static entity gnawed at us. Even deciphering the history, the traditions, and why the cultural patterns may have formed as they did was taxing, because we were not there, and different explanations were presented as to why things were 'the way they were'. In sum, theoretical assumptions have practical implications, and sport psychologists adopting a more critical-interpretative approach have some challenging times ahead as they work out what some of these ideas mean for applied practices.

We also found that 'getting at culture' required time (both in the field and in the analysis), but in reality we were limited by a number of practical issues, including time pressures (we had agreed a number of sessions over a limited period of time) and a general reticence of influential cultural members to be forthcoming on matters of culture. We made extensive use of participant observation and techniques beyond interview (as recommended by Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018) and coupled with an analytically powerful interpretative approach, still found it difficult to "penetrate the front of people's desires to present themselves in a favourable light" (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, p. 22-23).

The leadership team in particular habitually deferred to espoused values, not only under questioning but in their observed interactions. They regularly avoided or deflected feedback that may have been ‘harder’, an approach that seemed in line with an observed tendency to evade difficult conversations or conflict in general. Correspondingly, they rarely offered strong, or controversial opinions and seemed unwilling to deeply consider the possibility that some of their practices and assumptions might be wrong or harmful to people or general workplace effectiveness. This behaviour, of course, was at odds with their outward expressions of welcoming a ‘warts and all’ account of how they were performing. In contrast to descriptions of elite environments as harsh, ruthless and performance orientated (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff et al., 2017) our experiences of our elite sport (and our hosts) were that the environment was exceedingly polite, even subdued. To avoid the detection of ‘warts’, the leadership team were prone to impression management activities (Goffman, 1959), not only with us, but with their staff, which was a point of contention and frustration that was came up continually in our data collection. While literature has suggested that the impression management activities of leaders can enhance organisational change as well as convey their own competence (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012, 2016), our experience indicated that impression management is problematic for a culture consultant, because it makes it difficult to have conversations that might lead to a genuine questioning of current practices and the existing culture(s) within the sport context.

From a consultant point of view, our inability to get penetrate what was outwardly presented was a deep source of frustration. It also led to our own anxieties that, perhaps, could in turn be traced to our own insecurities about whether we were really ever ‘getting at’ *the* culture(s) and the important consideration of why it had developed the way it had (Schein, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Correspondingly, we also felt an internal strong need to continually justify

our presence and demonstrate value and expertise (cf. McDougall et al., 2015), as well the potential of culture to provide practical benefits. As outside consultants, we knew our position was not long-term or secure but in trying to address some of the pragmatic aims of the project, had to constantly resist the urge to succumb to a number of cultural ‘traps’ (cf. Alvesson, 2002). For example, searching for and framing culture as if it was an essence, or fixed entity in the environment that was easy to uncover and work with. We also frequently found ourselves thinking about and indeed occasionally describing culture in functional ways that were reductive, cliché and antithetical to our more symbolic, less obviously pragmatic, interpretive approach. We were particularly prone to essentialising culture (reducing/describing it to a few key terms or traits). We often lapsed into totalising culture (using it as a way to refer to almost everything as cultural, therefore lessening its value). It was also difficult to refrain from excessive focus on overt behaviours and espoused values, because are readily accessible and most commonly ‘related’ to performance (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015), that while important speak more to compliance than they do actual cultural understanding (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015).

In retrospect, we were at least intermittently engaged in our own impression management activities. While this served the purpose of helping to manage relationships and demonstrate the value we needed to stay in the environment, by making these concessions in our culture work it meant that we were sometimes behaving like others in the environment; slipping ever so easily into inauthentic conversations, not challenging taken for granted assumptions or disrupting the status quo. Upon reflection, it is possible that these compromises made our eventual presentation of our cultural analysis, which was the ‘warts and all’ picture asked for, all the more jarring. This observation also speaks to Nesti’s point that it is essential that sport psychologists operate within

a culture without becoming assimilated by the culture, and that being able to remain apart to some extent allows them the space needed to provide an informed but critical voice (Nesti, 2010, 2017).

5.5.2 Critical Sensibilities

A further way that this study extends previous research is by adding a critical sensibility to sport psychology organisational literature. While a critical approach has been integral in cultural sport psychology literature (McGannon & Smith, 2015), organisational sport psychology scholars (and practitioners) have generally assumed a managerialist, rather than critical voice in their research. This means that while sport psychologists might work culturally, for example to improve communication, reduce conflict, or promote culturally congruent view of performance excellence (Eubank et al., 2014; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018), research into how these tasks might be undertaken has been guided by a performance agenda and the preferences of leadership. A contrasting lens, such as being informed by an approach sensitive to issues of power, domination, control, oppressive forces, social injustices and inequalities, has been eschewed. That these important concepts — Power, hegemony, domination — are radically under-theorised in organisational sport psychology literature might be taken to indicate that the academic work of our scholarly community is simply feeding the managerial machine, with minimal pause or regard for other ways of understanding organisational life.

Yet, in seeking out multi-level perspectives in order to gain a broader and deeper understanding of cultural understanding within the elite environment (cf. McDougall et al., 2017, 2019 Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018) there is inevitable exposure to, even embroilment in different worldviews and modes of cultural understanding. On a practice level, this places an immediate burden on the culture consultant that coalesces around a central and troublesome issue of how to handle sensitive cultural information (Schein, 2000). This difficulty may also be

magnified when the information concerns potentially competing cultural scripts that may be at odds with leadership ideas and models of culture based around consensus and harmony. The practitioner can even contribute to the development of such issues, by raising ideas and questions that ‘natives’ have not previously thought about or considered extensively (Schein, 2000).

This also relates to an ethical burden and paradox that is placed upon consultants operating in an organisational capacity. From a critical perspective, some influential scholars have argued that critical theory is neither automatically or relentlessly anti-management (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996). Accordingly, critical scholars should aim to transform organisational life and management behaviour by promoting more humane modes of managerial practice in which communication is productive and less distorted by oppression, inequality and asymmetrical relations of power (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996, Anthony, 1998; Grey, 1996). A second position in CMS is one of disengagement from managerial practices, and sympathetic dialog, viewing dialog itself as a weapon of the powerful (cf. Fournier & Grey, 2000). From this view, the task is not to transform management, through sympathetic conversation, into a more ethical activity, but to undermine it through critique; to shock, provoke and expose and ‘piss in public’ (Burrell, 1993). This challenge is not the mark of intellectual elitism, but rather a profoundly political act (Burrell, 1996), against the oppressive and controlling tendencies of management. From this position, researchers who dialog with managers risk the corruption of their concepts by managers who can turn them into tools to further their domination with intellectually credible theories (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

This risk arguably increases for scholar-practitioners and consultants. Unlike academics, they cannot maintain a safe and cynical distance from the understanding and practices of organisations or management (cf., Huault, Kärreman, Perret, & Spicer, 2017) because their endeavours are more than a purely intellectual enterprise and inevitably they must engage and

dialog with managers in the course of their applied work. With specific regard to a sport psychology and elite sport context, it has been identified previously by some experienced practitioners that there is often deep suspicion about the role and usefulness of sport psychology in elite sport, making management backing for the sport psychologist integral to being able to deliver a service (McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). The sport psychologist as a practitioner is therefore unable to avoid interaction and collaboration with authority figures.

Nevertheless, we know from wider literature that consultants, including sport psychologists, — particularly neophyte ones — can very quickly become socialised and subject to normative control (McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010; Poulter & Land, 2008; Schein, 1968, 2010). Working culturally, this could mean they become complicit in the suppression and diminishing of alternative or marginalised views by either willingly or unwittingly adopting or becoming socialised to a managerial perspective. In the consultancy described, because we were consultants and ‘externals’, we never felt in the thrall of power, or subject to formal rules or expressions of authority that had to be obeyed. Rather, the pressure exerted on us to comply was informal and indirect up until the point where Richard (not so subtly) exerted power in our phone call interaction and asked us to amend our report, using the possibility of future work as leverage. In a later, unexpected conversation with Richard, a couple of years after the consulting project, he revealed he was sorry how it had ended with us, but that ultimately he had bosses to answer to as well. With close scrutiny on NGB’s, he revealed that he had hoped for a concept that might have given him more control of the environment and the many problems that they were having. Thus, Richard, may also be seen as being under the control of a wider system, and depending on the CMS stance adopted, this too may affect the conclusions that readers arrive at. Future sport

psychology and critical management scholar-practitioners may wish to reflect on this point and decide whether this means that dialog with management can be helpful and productive or is essentially contributing to the normative control of others under their management.

On a personal level, these themes generated a considerable amount of tension and reflection over the consultancy. The felt conflict — between wanting to improve performance and not becoming an unthinking tool for management to wield in the application of control — is inherent within metaphors of consultants as hired guns, organisations and cultures as psychic prisons or as a form of colonisation (e.g., Morgan, 1986; Schein et al., 2015; Wright, 1998, 2004). These metaphors, along with the vignettes presented, challenge the authority of the (often functionalist) view that culture and culture change are innately and automatically positive. For example, the belief that culture provides people with shared understanding, clarity, direction, feelings of belonging, motivation, increased productivity, and so on, is widespread (Alvesson, 2002) and has generally been assumed in both the academic and applied sport world (e.g., Henriksen, 2015). Although in the minority, there is some organisational culture scholarship that has recognised how applied culture work can have negative, destructive and unintended consequences (e.g., Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990; Alvesson, 2002; Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Wankhade & Brinkman, 2014). The vignettes presented here suggest that these possibilities are very real and moreover demonstrate how culture (and consequently the sport psychologist through applying culture expertise influencing) can reproduce a particular social order that restricts, constrains and denies. Cultural meanings that are engineered by leaders and skilled actors — such as a sport psychologist with organisational competencies — can therefore counteract questioning and independent thinking, and when this occurs, a subtle and frequently penetrating form of power is being exercised (Alvesson, 2002).

On an application level, the implications of thinking about culture and the elite sport context in this way presents a number of challenges and dilemmas for sport psychologists to navigate in the course of their cultural work. Perhaps, the major dilemma facing critically conscious practitioners is how they can blend a critically informed approach that is suspicious of the taken-for-granted assumptions of organisation and management — that at its most extreme adopts a ‘pissing in the street’ mentality (Burrell, 1993) — with necessary engagement with leaders to make genuine attempts to contribute to socially mindful and emancipatory change that can still influence the performance issues that are of primary concern in elite sport. And additionally, how to do so without becoming trapped in a cynical and socially impotent critical consciousness, where nothing good can ever be done or achieved. Some guidance on how these challenges might be faced can be found in the emergence of the concept of *critical performativity* (cf. Spicer, et al., 2009) — a concept designed to enhance practical intervention in organisational life while maintaining a critical perspective (Cabentous, Gond, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016; Spicer et al., 2009).

It was against the backdrop of excessively negative critique of Critical Management Studies (CMS), that Spicer and colleagues (2009) originally conceived the concept of critical performativity. They argued that the explicit non-performativity (performativity meaning contributing to reality, rather than just describing it) of CMS made it impotent in the promotion of social change. By situating itself in a position of perpetual critical judgement, Spicer and colleagues alleged that CMS can only go through the motions of demolition and destruction, and is destined and doomed only to break, never to build (Spicer et al., 2009). In sum, applied practitioners from this position may be able to articulate what is wrong with the organisations they work in and for (e.g., ruthlessly capitalist, managerialist, patriarchal, technocratic, socially

irresponsible pursuit of performance) but when the question turns to what they want or what the organisation should henceforth do, they are often unsure and given to “a vague set of platitudes, pauses and vacillations” (Spicer et al., 2009, p. 542).

According to Spicer et al. (2009) the need to engage with performativity *can* be achieved in critical, socially responsible and progressive ways, suggesting that critical performativity involves “active and subversive interventions into management discourse and practice” (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009, p. 538). This is a view which is seemingly aligned with Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie’s balanced commentary of organisational culture practice in elite sport environments sport. In a recent review of organisational culture, they suggested that exclusively leader-led approaches to organisational culture are inappropriate, but that practitioners should be leader-informed from a theoretical perspective in order to get things done (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). In their seminal (2009) paper, Spicer et al. detailed some strategies through which successful intervention may be achieved: adopting an affirmative stance (maintaining close proximity and a critical intimacy of the object of investigation, so as to be able to pinpoint potential points for revision. That is, being close to the ground, so to speak); focusing on ethics of care (respecting the worldview of others while also being able to challenge them; in this way neither accepting/legitimising the social order or condemning it); being pragmatic (rejecting presentations of powerful systems as integrated, totalising, all powerful singular entities, thus affirming their sovereignty and all-powerfulness and leading to the assumption that they cannot be challenged or changed; instead working piecemeal and incrementally, making small incisions on matters of concern, not matters of fact; micro-emancipation rather than large scale change); engaging with potentialities (creating a sense of what *could be*, rather than *is*; orientation toward the organisation to come, rather than focusing on rejecting the organisation that currently is); and attending to a

normative orientation (systematic assertion and application of criteria to aid judgements of what is good and valuable forms of organisation).

Critical performativity has thus provided a valuable alternative to stagnant traditions of CMS. Indeed, the popularity of critical performativity³⁵ has ensured in the years since its introduction, it has enjoyed support, debate and re-formulation to test the feasibility and application of the concept across a range of critical and management sub-topics (Huault, et al., 2017). Correspondingly, there have, of course, been strong critiques of critical performativity. For example, through the use of personal narrative and case study, King (King, 2015; King & Learmonth, 2015) reflected on his own experiences and difficulties of putting critical performativity into practice, highlighting how attempts to apply theory to the real world of work are always messy and complex. There exists, a significant gap, he suggested between, the theory and application of critical performativity, which is hardly ever as straightforward as is implied by Spicer and colleagues (2009) (cf. also Koss Hartmann, 2014).

There are other severe criticisms, most notably coming to the fore in the heated exchanges of a special edition of *Human Relations* in 2016. For example, and mirroring criticisms that dogged earlier CMS scholars, Fleming and Banjaree (2016) warned that critical performativity could result in a ‘collaborationist’ approach to research that dulls critical sensibilities and is of limited interest or practical use. In another article within the special edition, it was claimed that critical performativity does not consider seriously the objects and relations of power (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, Learmonth, 2016). For some (e.g., Parker & Parker, 2017), much of the scholarship that has built on the seminal Spicer et al. (2009) paper have already crept toward a position that is more

³⁵ In all its guises and interpretations there are different theoretical underpinnings and current understandings of what constitutes both the critical and the performative

managerialist than critical. Parker and Parker (2017) further argued that the producers of such scholarship have keenly and consistently bemoaned the problems of adopting an antagonistic approach to organisations and managers, as though being against a straw version of non-performativity was a position in itself; thus creating an identity problem for critical performativity in that it often stands for very little and still struggles to discuss what could or should be done. Extending this argument, if proponents of critical performativity only serve as allies and not threats to management, then they help to cement yet another victory of corporate and managerialist hegemony (Fleming & Banjaree, 2016). Ironically, such critiques return scholars to the same problem that they argue antagonistic critical researchers have – being unable to engage with management in a practical manner (Parker & Parker, 2017).

Still, it seems the critical academic (and practitioner) therefore has two primary options. Either they can withdraw, for fear that their actions might lead to compromise or colonisation by powerful managerial and organisational forces, or they can find ways to live with and transform often unequal power-relations and the challenges which come with engagement (King, 2015). As other academics have shown (e.g., Chatterton, Hodkinson, & Pickerill, 2010; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007), such inevitable tensions are in fact crucial to any participation in change. By engaging in organisational practices that produce performative knowledge, the critical scholar and practitioner will inevitably encounter difficult situations as an intrinsic part of any engagement. The ability to cope with these tensions and to be reflexive and open about them in non-santised ways is therefore part of the maturation process of practitioners (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Such tensions are likely to be an inevitable, even necessary growing pain in the field and practice of organisational sport psychology, as it evolves to include greater engagement with organisational practices and critical issues.

These observations are deeply relevant in light of recent culture health checks within UK Olympic sport and a number of scandals that have occurred throughout sport in general (cf. Wagstaff, 2019b; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Accordingly, and with limitations of organisational sport psychology, CMS, and critical performativity literature in mind, I suggest that the darker aspects of culture, including how power can be wielded to socially dominate others through ideas about what is true, natural, good, possible and expected must be taken seriously by sport psychologists as they begin to develop expertise in the matters of culture. Nevertheless, given that culture is also resistant to deliberate manipulation (Gilmore, 2013; McDougall et al., 2019; Pettigrew, 1985), it is also important to highlight that culture does not work as a source of domination solely through the intentional acts of powerful actors and carefully orchestrated organisational arrangements such as symbols of hierarchy or carefully crafted rituals (cf. Alvesson, 2002). It also produces hegemonic effects through the carrying of ideas and values that everybody — leaders and sport psychologists included — take for granted and can become a prisoner to. In this way, culture can also become a form of world-closure, restricting the views of everyone within.

From an emancipatory and critical point of view then, work involving culture is never simple because it must be considered as more than a purely functional and performance-driven pursuit and as an enterprise not reduceable to simply caring and ethics of responsibility either. Instead, it is an endeavour governed also by eye-opening ambitions that should aim to question rather than confirm that which is known, established, and ‘asked for’. To maintain a critical and performative culture agenda may mean a return to some of the original spirit and zeal of critical management and critical performativity; involving an appreciation of the contexts and constraints of management of organisation and taking seriously the struggles, suffering and life-worlds of those who live in and engage with organisations (Spicer et al., 2009; Spicer, Alvesson, &

Kärreman, 2016). At times, culture work may therefore be about preserving what is known and established, while at others, it should disrupt rather than simply reproduce cultural traditions, systemic order and desires of leaders that can restrict people's thoughts, actions and agency; which in the end are uncondutive to aspirations of high performance anyway (Alvesson, 2002). To straddle a performance *and* a critical and emancipatory agenda is practically and personally challenging for sport psychologists (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018), but realism and modesty about this endeavour should not prevent us from acknowledging that this is a powerful rationale and way for thinking culturally.

Chapter 6 – Synthesis, Implications & Recommendations

The purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself
Albert Camus

The final chapter of the thesis provides a comprehensive synthesis of the research findings that have been presented in each of the previous chapters. Further to this, both the theoretical and practical implications — which are inextricably linked — of the thesis are discussed in relation to sports psychology and the broader literature and field of organisational culture study and practice. Finally, limitations of the research are identified, and potential avenues for future research are considered and suggested.

6.1 Aims of the Thesis

In its simplest form, this thesis was a focused attempt to explore the concept of organisational culture (and more broadly, just culture) within sport contexts and to extend understanding of this area within sport psychology. To attend to this overarching aim, I deliberately designed studies that critically evaluated and challenged the underpinning ideas and conceptualisations of culture that have dominated sport psychology culture literature to date. In doing so, I demonstrated alternative presentations of the culture that have not been considered or conceptualised in sport psychology. To reiterate, the specific (interrelated) aims of the research were as follows:

1. In the process of this critical exploration, to strive to consider and integrate theoretical and empirical material from established spheres of culture study (e.g., anthropology, sociology, organisational management studies) that provide important cultural foreground and necessary grounding to increase sport psychology understanding of the concept, but which to date have been effectively ignored.
2. To challenge leader-centric (e.g., Team Managers, high performance leaders, CEO's, head coaches), managerialist accounts of culture (e.g., culture as a shared and integrating mechanism, espoused values, value engineering, culture manipulation, easy to change) by adopting a 360° approach that takes greater interest in the perceptions and perspectives of

other social actors as *culture makers*, such as coaches, sport psychologists, sport science staff, fans).

3. To use a variety of methods (e.g., narrative, interpretative, critical discourse, critical nonfiction and reflective vignettes) to show different ways of approaching the study of culture, so as to add new insights to existing research in sport psychology and the broad field of culture study.
4. To address deficiencies of existing sport psychology organisational culture literature by locating the individual experience, subjectivity and agency of the social actors involved within the described accounts of culture, with focus on their capacity to reflect on, reject or resist the views of leaders and plans for deliberate change.
5. To address the environments and contexts of elite sport, an under-researched level of sport where an organisational role and remit that includes knowledge and expertise in culture is increasingly likely for sport psychologists (existing and future).
6. To investigate the links between culture and sport psychology delivery and to associatively provide suggestions for applied practice.

Chapter 1 of the thesis was not a typical ‘gentle’ introduction to the subject matter. Rather, in the playful consideration of the etymology and use of the term ‘culture’, alongside the detailing of some important ontological and epistemological questions, it was more of a ‘critical’ jab aimed at the superficiality of sport psychology organisational culture literature. While the primary function of this jab was to highlight the generally uncritical acceptance of a theoretically ‘thin’ concept of culture (and therefore set up later, more significant counterpunches), Chapter 1 begins to make some inroads regarding thesis objectives by minimally addressing aims (1, 2, and 4) above.

Chapter 2 was an extensive literature review that comprised three discrete, but interrelated sections that could be read and considered separately but also as part of a connecting whole. Part one took seriously the critique that sport psychology culture research has ignored foundational culture literature from other disciplines (Gilmore, 2013; McDougall et al., 2017; McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Following this argument, I briefly sketched some important genealogies of culture literature in anthropology, social science, and organisational studies. In the process, I presented a different, more nuanced and more thorough grounding in the history of culture scholarship than has typically been the case in sport psychology literature to date. Part two was a review of existing organisational sport psychology culture literature relevant to the objectives of the thesis. This section provided a brief overview of the emergence of culture and how it is depicted within different sport psychology studies and tracks of research. In part three, I returned to a more critical approach and identified, reviewed and challenged three powerful and prevailing organisational culture myths within sport psychology literature. The challenges to these myths exposed existing weaknesses and gaps in the current literature base and provided the impetus for the empirical chapters that follow. The literature review addresses, in particular, aims, 1, 2, 4, and 6.

Chapter 3 was an empirical research chapter that combined Martin and Meyerson's three perspective approach to organisational culture with the use of narrative and interpretive traditions to explore and represent the cultural interpretations of different sport personnel within elite sport. Three narratives were developed as illustrative cases, with each showcasing a different culture perspective (i.e., what is shared and integrated, what is contested, and what is ambiguous). This chapter addressed aims 1-6.

In Chapter 4, I stepped outside of the confines of sport psychology and individual narratives and interpretations of culture by conducting a critical discourse analysis of the Twitter hashtag and grassroots campaign of the Save the Crew movement. This was undertaken with the objective of

examining the campaign's (and fan's) resistance strategies to owner-led plans for team relocation. The study of culture was contextualised through attention to the nuanced depiction of community-informed and constructed meanings and enhanced by focus on forces of power and domination that occur in relation to issues of governance and economy. It addressed aims 1, 2, 3 and 5 specifically.

Finally, Chapter 5 addressed all aims (1-6). Using the methods of creative non-fiction and critical reflection, I described and re-constructed a difficult culture consulting experience within elite sport. The study contextualises the nature of this type of work within a sport environment, as well as the professional and personal challenges that can ensue from adopting a critical-interpretative perspective on culture, rather than one that is purely functional, simplified and designed to further the needs of management.

6.2 Novel Contributions of the Thesis

The following section presents a critical synthesis of key findings and ideas that flow through the thesis and that are derived from the three empirical chapters presented. These findings are discussed in light of existing literature in the field, with respect to how they complement and extend our knowledge of culture within organisational sport psychology research and practice. I hope that these findings will make novel and original contributions to current understanding of culture and culture related work within sport psychology and various sporting contexts.

6.2.1 Preserving the Intellectual Vitality of Culture

A key contribution of this thesis is that it highlights the complexities, and therefore the intellectual vitality of culture. As the chapters progress, an expanding, evolving concept of culture is outlined and a variety of different cultural meanings, nuances, and uses are extracted and presented. These alternative presentations of culture stand in contrast to the typical conceptualisation in sport

psychology literature. The preceding chapters, therefore, extend disciplinary understanding of what culture is and how it might be understood and approached. The findings thus contain warnings that oversimplifications of culture can be limiting and problematic. In particular, an interpretative approach, that is more mindful of symbolic traditions within anthropology and organisational studies (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Smircich, 1983) has been used throughout the thesis as base from which to explore culture. Consistent with the historical deployment of the interpretative approach (such as by the authors mentioned above), it has been used here to challenge more mechanistic and sterile accounts of culture that have reduced culture to a performance variable (and thus, accordingly, neglect its conceptual nuance and undermine its explanatory power). This has helped to re-frame culture in terms of what is meaningful, symbolic, and expressive, and as a way to think about the social world, as opposed to only conceiving of culture as something that a group has and that relates primarily to group functioning (and in the case of sport teams and organisations, athletic success and organisational effectiveness).

In this regard, a major contribution of this thesis is that it has helped move sport psychology from old ways of thinking about culture (culture as shared and consistent leader-led, static and mechanical, easily identifiable) to newer ones. In these newer formulations of culture, culture is contested, interpreted and negotiated by all, fluid, harder to identify and access, comprised of networks of meaning, and is interwoven with structures of the social system, such as power and economy. For example, the narratives in Study 1 demonstrated how culture can be described, analysed and illustrated through lenses other than what is shared, consistent and clear, to include also patterns of conflict and ambiguity. In Study 2, the interpretation of culture revealed local understandings and culturally ascribed meanings that were beyond the purview of owner-led change, and instead centred around ideas of community, tradition and belonging. These cultural

understanding and meanings were not confined to a discrete group, as is often the case in sport and organisational research, where culture is generally described as bounded within a physical location, team, department or organisation. Rather, and consistent with more modern ideas of culture in anthropology (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1999; Ortner, 1999; Wright, 1998), through the medium of technology and social media, culture and the meanings constructed by supporters were capable of transcending local boundaries. Culture influenced, and was influenced, by power in an open, politicised, global, technology-mediated, consumer-driven society, where communities exist both in the virtual and every day, physical worlds. In Study 3, the possibility that culture could be negative, constraining and a means of world-closure was explored. Correspondingly, the implicit and uncritical assumption that culture change (and leadership ideas of it) is automatically positive and done for the benefit of all, was challenged. These conceptualisations of culture mirror historical developments in other areas of culture scholarship, such as in anthropology and organisational studies, where static and simplified views of culture were gradually left behind, or at least challenged by other views and arguments. The findings, therefore, have the capacity to bring culture thinking in sport psychology in line with more recent scholarship and the many key ideas that have permeated academic debate in other disciplines with more established histories of culture study.

The grounding of each study in the historical developments of culture study also helped provide a platform to be more explicitly critical about what is currently problematic about the uniform assumptions that shape organisational culture research and practice in sport psychology. This is important since recent and excellent contributions (e.g., Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie, 2018) have been overly cautious in their critique of existing sport psychology literature and do not go far enough to spell out the problems of an uncritical acceptance of a theoretically thin (and narrow)

concept of culture. In sum, a simplified and restricted view of culture is unhelpful to both researchers and practitioners who are serious about culture, because it lacks both the theoretical precision and the explanatory power necessary to help them make sense of the complexities of organisational life. In essence, because the conceptualisations of culture used in the leader-centric and functional view of culture are somewhat ‘thin’, the analyses that follow are also, subsequently thin, and moreover, downplay the intricacies of social relations. Ultimately, such reductionism is detrimental to the quality of both research and practice, and as such, should be resisted by the sport psychology community at every opportunity.

6.2.2 Culture as Sites of Control, Power, and Resistance

Ideas of control, power and resistance permeate the studies of this thesis. The consideration of these concepts and their relatedness to culture are important additions to organisational culture literature in sport psychology, since there has been no serious attention given to them in the extant literature. For example, that resistance is an inevitable feature of elite sport (Gilmore, 2013) has barely been considered in organisational sport psychology culture literature. Instead, resistance has been most frequently depicted as a temporary barrier that is easily overcome by skilful leadership tactics and supporting sport psychology culture knowledge. This omission is attributable to the most typical framing of organisational culture in sport psychology, where culture is essentially conceived of as a tool which leaders and sport psychology practitioners can use to overcome resistance and manipulate the environment and the people within toward compliance and the achievement of goals. This position developed (as it did in organisational studies and management domains) because scholars have drawn excessively from the ideas of structural functionalism. Over fifty years ago, van den Berghe (1963) criticised this perspective for its positivistic tones; its insistence that social order is created and maintained through individually

internalised dominant social norms and values; and for its exclusion and labelling of people holding different values and views as somehow socially deviant. These and similar ideas arguably flow through much of the sport psychology team and organisational culture literature to date. Moreover, in spite of the adoption of qualitative methods to examine the culture of sport teams and organisations (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015), beneath the surface there is a distinctly Machiavellian flavour that excels in positivist notions of leadership control, power to make others do what they want, and the idea that culture can be easily manipulated. Taken to the extreme, the cultural contributions of others can seem to matter only so long as they support the political aims and performance agendas of those in authority.

Associations between culture and themes of control, power, and domination were also central to the concept of corporate culture that came to life in the organisational culture research and practice landscape of the 1980s. Culture as a means of control also has long-standing and strong associations with anthropology and the colonial encounter (Geertz, 1973; Costa & Kunda, 2015; Ortner, 2005; Wright, 2008). Indeed, the ethnographic method, or the close study of others, often explicitly or implicitly labelled other people's as 'primitive', or considered them as inferior; built, as it was, on the assumption that the observer and their culture was "inherently superior to those under study" (Costa & Kunda, 2015, p. 115). According to Costa and Kunda, "This view justified changing, reforming, dominating, or even destroying existing social groupings and their ways of life, or at least assisting or not standing in the way of such projects." (2015, p. 115). In supplying descriptions of cultures as singular, harmonised, and homogenous, academics and practitioners are effectively assuming that this dominance — of opposing worldviews and cultural understandings — has been achieved. Despite increasing awareness and criticisms of these origins and uses, and subsequent efforts to address their problematic implications, similar views still rule

the study and use of culture in organisations today (Costa & Kunda, 2015; Wright, 1998), including sport ones. This type of cultural perspective is in turn, indicative of the assumption that there is an inherently better, or superior way of existing, and that those with authority (leaders, managers) have the knowledge (and right) to make such a claim, and act (govern) accordingly (Alvesson, 2002; Costa & Kunda, 2015).

Following from these arguments, the findings in this thesis reinforce suggestions that to take steps to design or change a culture — even from benevolent motives, such as progress, innovation or efficiency — is an exercise of taken-for-granted privilege, because it is underpinned by the belief that those the change is imposed on are inferior and to be managed (Costa & Kunda, 2015). No one doubts that change or progress can be a good thing, but this realisation does not suppress the need to acknowledge that change is not automatically beneficial (Twietmeyer, 2017). Although sport psychology culture change literature has not considered it, the possibility exists that those in authority might have the ‘wrong’ values or ideas about change. Indeed, resistance to planned cultural change might make perfectly good sense for a group of people, but again, this is a point rarely considered by pro-management scholars (Alvesson, 2002). In this way, studies that focus closely on change or the views of leadership (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015) are in a sense dealing with issues of control and power, but without specifically addressing the topic or taking seriously the possibility of negative consequences for those not in authority who are the objects of cultural control (Alvesson, 2002).

As well as making such studies politically naïve (Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002), it is also possible — as evidenced in particular by Study 3 — that sport psychologists can easily overly subscribe or fall victim to managerialist ideas of performance, by way of unwitting or forced compliance (McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010). As such, sport psychologists can become

complicit in a wider system of hegemonic cultural dominance that helps to suppress and ‘manage out’ alternative meanings, deeply held values, efforts at resisting and modes of organisational life that those in authority either do not understand, care for, or care enough about to preserve.

While, the orientation of authority toward control of culture surfaced repeatedly in each of the studies, the thesis as a whole has also showcased different ideas and forms of resistance, reiterating arguments outside of sport psychology that have argued framed resistance to power as nuanced, layered activity, as opposed to something that is uniform (Heller, 1996). For example, in Study 1, I did not focus specifically on resistance, but in narrative one it seemed to lurk in the background, a covert presence almost, that the performance leader seemed reluctant to name, less mention of it bring it to life. In narrative two, resistance seemed to lie dormant until events converged to present an opportunity for it to be exercised. Throughout the thesis, resistance has also taken the form of overt non-compliance to plans for progress that challenge traditional ideas. Social actors, as part of various subcultures, have rejected and challenged the plans constructed by those in authority. Actors, in communicating their stories, have revealed how they were conflicted about the master, homogenous cultures that leaders constructed, inwardly rejecting what is forced, created, maintained and managed by authority. Within the thesis, there are demonstrated tensions between local meaning and detached governance, framing culture as both the grounds and means of contestation and resistance to control.

These forms of resistance, by both individuals and groups, together suggest that systematic efforts to make people think and feel in a particular way through culture may be realised, but only ever partially so. This finding is consistent with organisational management literature that indicates that “culture is a dynamic concept, always negotiable and in process of endorsement, contestation and transformation” (Wright, 2015, p. 10). No ideology, however hegemonic and entrenched in

institutions and in everyday life, is beyond contest or reproach (Wright, 2015). Inner ambivalence and rejection of formal rule and autocracy can mask outward compliance (e.g., Kunda, 1992). As shown by the findings here, differently positioned actors, with unpredictable inventiveness and creativity can draw on, re-construct and stretch the meanings of 'culture' in new directions, claiming some authority and power in the process (Wright, 2015). Thus, while cultures as sites of struggle for control may always bear the imprint of power (Alvesson, 2002), they also display the mark of resistance (Asad, 1986, Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

6.2.3 Locating Culture and the Individual Through Stories

A novel contribution of this thesis is that stories have been used to study culture, and indeed individuals as situated within cultures. This may seem like an obvious observation, but it is not an inconsequential one within the context of existing organisational sport psychology literature. While storied approaches are accepted and encouraged in Cultural Sport Psychology (CSP) circles as a means of centralising culture (cf. McGannon & Smith, 2015), and in organisational studies (e.g., Czarniawska, 1997; Humphreys, 2005; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983; Rhodes & Brown, 2005), they are conspicuous by their absence within sport psychology organisational culture literature. It has even been recommended that subjective and anecdotal accounts of culture change should be avoided (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013b), and that individual-level data and analysis cannot be taken to reflect culture as a collective phenomenon (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

As demonstrated in this thesis, however, stories can tease out both the personal and the cultural (McGannon & Smith, 2015) in dynamic interaction. Culture is, and has always been bound to story, folklore and myth. Stories and culture *are* inextricably linked, because what we think, perceive, feel, know, and do is shaped by the stories that culture makes available to us (Caddick,

Smith, & Phoenix, 2015; Phoenix & Orr, 2014; Smith, 2017). People are therefore storied beings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and since they can never be completely separated from the cultures and cultural influences that surround them (Geertz, 1965), culture is inevitably interwoven into the fabric of the narratives that people and groups create for themselves. Culture therefore underpins human endeavour, thought and action, providing a lens to better understand, if not quite explain, why people do the things that they do. These reasons are precisely why the study of culture — as the webs or networks of significant meaning — demands a fundamentally interpretative approach, rather than one in search of experimental law and objective categories (Bruner, 1991; Geertz, 1973). Based on such an assumption, Geertz (1973) urged his contemporaries to take seriously analogy, metaphor, symbolic action as drama, argued that tableaux, parables, tales and mini-narratives with the narrator in them could all be used to enhance the lived-experience, meaning and thick description of culture. Sport psychology researchers who investigate the cultures of sport teams and organisations have, however, been unmindful of such logic. They have omitted attention to lived experience, meaning and thick description and have consistently produced accounts of culture that are sterile and mechanistic in their depictions of culture as a homogenous, consistent, and stable entity. Because of this, sport psychology researchers tend to forego a serious consideration of the subjectivity and agency of the actors involved in their accounts, reducing them to passive beings, or unwitting cogs in the social system.

In this presentation of culture, the individual is impoverished in the face of powerful cultural forces and lacking the capacity for agency — is simply integrated into the social machine. This process has been portrayed time and time again in sport psychology organisational culture literature, where actors who are not perceived as having authority or being in positions of authority are repeatedly described as becoming socialised to the ‘way things are done around here’

(e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). It is perhaps this failure to attend to individual subjectivity that has contributed most substantially to the homogenous accounts of culture (consistent, shared, stable, ‘neat’) that are critiqued within this thesis. It is a trend that inflates the deterministic qualities culture; so that opposing voices are never captured, or at least marginalised or silenced with relative ease. Yet, as the findings of this thesis indicate — through use of story and interpretative traditions — people are existentially complex and feeling, thinking, reflecting beings, who make and seek meaning (Frankl, 1984; Nesti, 2004; Throop & Murphy), and there are well-made arguments in cultural anthropology that subjectivity is (and must be considered) a major dimension of human and cultural existence (Ortner, 2005). The findings here support such views and emphasise how individuals struggle in the grip of culture and social structures (power, economy, domination): they comply, resist, challenge, question, mull over, react, re-negotiate, re-frame, and are constantly interpreting culture, but are never merely subsumed by it. If subjectivity is considered as the basis of agentic action (Ortner, 2005), then it is integral to understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. It is therefore essential to locate the individual in cultural critiques, not omit them from it. Stories, then, are particularly useful for researchers who are interested capturing complex, subjective experiences and attempts to find meaning within the personal (Woike, 2008) and who want to retain, rather than wash out, the complexity and messiness of people and their lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). This feature of story is also a most useful quality if we are to consider and treat organisations and organisational life (and cultures) as inherently complex and unpredictable (Czarniawska 1997), which we must do if culture research and practices are to be of any use at all.

A final point in relation to the usefulness of stories is that they are also valuable because they have the capacity to look after people (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). In storied ethnographic

writing, for example (and with the constructed personal narratives of Study 3 in mind) ethnographers first gaze through an ethnographic, wide-angle lens, directing attention outward to the social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, then turn inward, “exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739-740). Following the lead of sports coaching research (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2016; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, & Nelson, 2012), researchers within sport psychology (Rowley, Potrac, Knowles, & Nelson, 2018) have criticised the sanitized and functionalistic representations of practice that dominates research journals. As shown here, in Study 3, the situating of the researcher within the research and stories gathered and told encourages reflexivity (Smith, 2017) and with ‘skin in the game’ so to speak, it is important that the (vulnerable) sport psychologist voice contributes to, rather than becomes marginalised, in accounts of cultures within sport.

Supporting these points, in Chapter 5 (Study 3), I used the methods of creative nonfiction to describe a difficult culture consulting experience within sport and contextualised the account through subsequent vignettes and reflection. Alongside accounts of culture and culture change that demonstrate ‘how to do it’ and that promote our successes and certainties (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015; Vealey, 2018), we need research that reflects on practice that goes beyond the rational and the idealistic (Rowley et al., 2018). For the most part, organisational sport psychology literature is arguably too idealist and protectionist in that it seems that most practitioners want to maintain their successful reputations, as opposed to trying to tell tales of how things really might be in elite sport. There is, however, some research (e.g., Champ et al., 2019) that has revealed the times when we are unsure, depleted and fragile, as scholar-practitioners. These descriptions, like those in Study 3, are so valuable because it is a bold move to show failure

and vulnerability in descriptions of practice, and as such, they hold greater potential for learning. Such research and reflections are vital if we are to prepare sport psychologists (existing and future) appropriately for the emotional demands and rigors of an organisational role.

6.2.4 Culture as Sites of History and Tradition: Against the Modernist Project

Finally, I want to briefly attend to a subtle, more abstract finding that has become increasingly influential in my thinking — and that I now see traces of throughout the preceding chapters — as I draw the thesis to a close and look back on the work as a whole. The previous findings: the complexity of culture, culture as meaning-infused and as a framework for understanding the social world, the persistent revealing of resistance and struggles of control, and of tension between structure and agency, and so on, seem to me, now, to be closely related to the march of modern society. Correspondingly, much of the mainstream managerial-focused literature is built on the premises of modernist science and the ideals of western enlightenment, that promised knowledge through science and promoted the rise of reason and rational logic over traditional values and ways of living (Alvesson, 1989, 2002). It has been pointed out that, in spite of the prevalence of this way of thinking, it is a limited mode of understanding, and moreover a dangerous myth (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). As shown in this thesis, people resist technical knowledge, logical problem solving, arbitrary authority and rationalistic cases for change built on productivity, measurability and predictable results that are argued to lead to progress. They resist in favour of preserving culturally valued and meaning-infused understandings that are legitimised by tradition and history and cemented through time. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in Study 2, where people go to significant lengths to preserve and protect the sense of belonging, traditions, rituals and values that come through being part of a community.

If sport psychologists and culture scholars and practitioners fail to understand the depth of this point, they are themselves simply conforming unthinkingly to the modernist project and using culture both as an extension of it and as a means to realise it. A key finding of this thesis is therefore that it has exposed managerial, functionalist thinking within organisational sport psychology change research as being paradoxically ‘anti-cultural’. In sum, our academic community has become part of the modern scientific attempt to turn society into a machine. With regard to undertaking an organisational and cultural remit, which is so often built around planned change and its implementation, sport psychologists must be mindful not to fall foul of a progressive mindset, where new is always seen as better, and old is automatically thought of as bad or somehow burdensome. The dangers of this type of thinking have been critiqued extensively by some of our finest minds of the last few centuries, including Nietzsche, Erich Fromm and Karl Marx, amongst others. In studies of culture and change — which in many ways seek to bridge the past, present and future — traditions and history can also be viewed as (at least potentially) good, powerful and worth preserving. For instance, a novel contribution that can be extracted from the findings is the suggestion that we cannot direct attention to resistance only with the aim of gaining knowledge that helps to avoid, reduce, and manage it. Instead, it is imperative that resistance is viewed as an opportunity and base for furthering knowledge of what is meaningful and valued in a cultural sense, and therefore to be protected.

6.3. Practical Implications

There are several practical implications that have emerged from the three studies. The following sections will explore such implications with relation to current and future applied sport psychology practice. This next section outlines the following practical implications: Recognising complexity and the limits of practitioner expertise; The need to developing a broader, more informed position;

Working from an interpretative approach; Congruence, compromise and commodification; and Training.

6.3.1 Complexity and the Limits of Practitioner Expertise

The claims made by culture change scholar-practitioners are unrealistic and presents a false and idealistic picture of culture as easily identifiable, malleable and the key to athletic success. In light of the described complexity of culture, there is a strong need for sport psychologists to be less arrogant in their approach to applied culture work, and recognise the limits of their culture knowledge, expertise and what can reasonably be hoped to be achieved in their culture practices. Awareness and acknowledgement of alternative positions *do* have practical implications for sport psychologists: Firstly, because theory *should* inform our practices (and cyclically, practice should also inform theory, so that organic and phenomenological everyday experiences of social actors within sport contexts are reflected in research); and secondly because culture — no matter the orientation towards it — affects social matters and people in deeply profound and practical ways. Moreover, if culture is not fetishised as a variable or as the domain of leadership, then it is immediately rendered messier, more complex, and troublesome. If not a variable, or something simply espoused, then culture cannot be identified, controlled, or regulated (Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002; Meek, 1988) to the extent suggested in sport psychology culture change literature (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2014, 2015; Henriksen, 2015). This too, should alter the organisational services delivered and temper expectations around what can reasonably be achieved.

6.3.2 The Need to Develop a Broader, More Informed Position

Correspondingly, to maximise what they *can* do with culture and cultural understanding, applied practitioners should work to develop a broader, more informed culture position. This will reduce the risks associated with the narrower culture perspective, such as downplaying, dismissing or

misunderstanding other types and sources of meaning and cultural content. For instance, that which is contested, inconsistent and ambiguous and viewing these as not a part of *the* culture. In this regard, practice governed by a narrower, purely pragmatic concept of culture could lead to sport psychologists being guilty of disregarding the individual agency of all cultural members to reject or resist dominant managerial discourses and accordingly retain a sense of personal authenticity and identity (Roderick, 2014). Consequently, sport psychologists acting in a supporting role to leadership, or as an agent of culture change may conceivably contribute to marginalisation of those who do not conform to the dominant *shared* ideology and the invalidation of their experiences. In sum, without a broader view, more nuanced view of culture, the complexity of day-to-day cultural life as experienced by coaches, managers, and athletes with marginalised identities or lower status and authority is therefore potentially excluded (Girginov, 2006; Maitland et al., 2015). Sport psychologists increasingly work across teams and organisations with a number of different groups and figures (McDougall et al., 2015). A failure to develop adopt a more inclusive, democratic concept of culture that recognises the cultural contributions of all in the environment is therefore likely to diminish the ability to work organisationally as well as the effectiveness of overall service delivery.

As applied sport psychologists look to broaden their cultural lens, two potentially fruitful avenues that can help flesh out cultural heterogeneity and different worldviews are Martin and Meyerson's three-perspective framework and the genre of cultural sport psychology (CSP). Utilising the three perspectives approach of Martin and Meyerson offers contrasting lenses through which to view organisational culture and provides an empirically supported means of breaking patterns of sharedness in our culture analyses, so that we also consider contestation and ambiguity. Furthermore, using the perspectives simultaneously (as Martin & Meyerson intended) empowers

the practitioner (as well as researcher) to attend to a wider range of cultural meaning and interpretation, including non-leadership sources of culture content and the existence of multiple cultures and cultural patterns. It can therefore be used to increase practitioner focus on overlooked aspects of culture and to help them to arrive at more comprehensive (and more realistic) interpretations of culture that reveal a multiplicity of interpretation and symbolic meaning co-existing in tandem. There is inherent value in seeking out cultural variations around deeper, more abstract issues (Schein, 2000). For the sport psychologist, it aids cultural sense-making, and may help them to understand and traverse complex and testing environments with greater poise and speed. Of course, if sport psychologists understand more of what is actually going on culturally, then they will naturally be better positioned influence culture indirectly (cf. Meek, 1988) offer advice, suggestion and direction to others, such as leaders, who can benefit from and may expect their input on events and issues occurring at the group level.

To aid with the task of understanding what is going on in a cultural sense, applied sport psychologists could also become more familiar with CSP. As Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) noted, CSP is a growing genre in sport and exercise psychology that often (but not always) focuses on issues surrounding marginalised voices and identities. CSP calls for a more explicit recognition of cultural values and identities in the process of research and practice and greater awareness and incorporation of CSP into organisational practices can sensitise sport psychologists to a more careful analysis of how their service delivery may actually contribute to marginalisation, or for example, the perpetuation of ethnocentric philosophical assumptions. To date, it is notable that sport psychology organisational culture literature has done little work to unpack the hidden ethnocentric assumptions that guide research and subsequently applied recommendations are often offered in a universalistic manner stating that “practitioners should do X to optimise organisational

culture”. As a global discipline and profession, it is crucial that organisational culture scholarship and applied practice contextualises the theories and findings within relevant cultural frameworks of meaning and acknowledges that applications hardly represent universalistic ‘solutions’ for sport organisations across the globe.

These perspectives may also be incorporated into a more critical management agenda, where the aim is to expose oppression, abuse of power, and issues and instances of social inequality (Alvesson, 2002). Correspondingly, the adoption of a cultural praxis is more explicitly engaged in activism and a social justice agenda, centralising issues of ethics and power and focusing on marginalised voices (Ryba & Schinke, 2009). A cultural praxis scholar might, for example, focus on understanding how sport cultures or organisations perpetuate male privilege and marginalise women (e.g., Kavoura, Ryba & Chroni, 2015) or indigenous athletes (e.g., Blodgett & Schinke, 2015) with the explicit aim of bringing about social change. In organisational culture research in sport, very few scholars have focused on these issues of privilege and marginalisation, and when culture change agendas are introduced, it is justified in terms of performance enhancement rather than social justice. One aspect of cultural praxis is therefore to challenge researchers and practitioners to reflexively acknowledge their own ethical commitments and whose interests the generated knowledge and related practice is likely to serve.

6.3.3 The Pitfalls and Potential of an Applied Interpretative Approach

An interpretive approach to culture is theoretically and analytically powerful, but there are some serious and significant issues and problems to traverse when it comes to actually applying an interpretative approach to practice. First, it tends to be easier to use an interpretative approach to point out the problems and pitfalls of other ways of thinking about culture, than to provide clear guidelines for its use (Alvesson, 2002). There is also no strong framework or particular set of rules

for how to apply an interpretative approach to culture practice, partly because purely interpretive organisational culture scholars tend to eschew applied work and often believe that if culture is taken seriously, it cannot be deliberately changed (Alvesson, 1989, 2002; Willmott, 1993). Most applied guidance has therefore expectedly arisen out of functional research and aims. Moreover, as was explicated in Study 3, the harder realities and short-termist outlook of elite sport may be incompatible with an interpretative approach that is orientated toward understanding over the longer course, rather than change in the short term.

In spite of these difficulties, a cultivation of an interpretative perspective also affords some opportunities for sport psychologists. A less mechanistic conceptualisation of culture need not be mutually exclusive with the view that it is important and influences people. Nor does it mean the belief that aspects of culture cannot be shaped by individual action (Meek, 1988). Conceivably, sport psychologists may actually be able to deploy their culture expertise more effectively once they have accepted culture cannot be consciously manipulated as a whole, and that it does not stop and start on command. Centralising meaning-making and prioritising understanding above concerns with function (e.g., Geertz, 1973) can also inspire more subtle and deep analyses of culture that manage to tease out the contextual richness, cultural diversity as well as the importance of subjectivity and the agency of intentional social actors (e.g., Ortner, 1999). For instance, in an applied context some narrative scholars and therapists have discussed ‘widening the narrative context so that people have more resources to construct their experiences in more empowering ways — to become more aware of the stories that shape their lives (McLeod, 1997). At an organisation level, introducing new narratives may be one way to help people think differently about the groups and cultures they are a part of.

In principle, the move toward story and meaning frees the concept of culture from the binds of functionalism and the direct interests of management and instead turns greater focus towards the needs and interests of all cultural members and the wider cultural community. Such analyses can be practically useful because they can increase influential cultural member's (such as leadership) awareness of existing layered and contrasting meanings within the cultural sphere, and why things are happening as they are or have done. Such insights can also be used fused with a critical approach to enhance a social justice rather than a performance agenda. More ethically responsible ideas of culture have already entered the sport domain, for example, in the UK Olympic system, where a 'cultural health check' has been delivered across sports in response to increased allegations of abuse, bullying and toxic cultures. These developments might suggest that sport organisations are in the process of becoming more socially responsible, and that agendas of equality, ethics and fairness — alongside performance concerns — may be more valued than they have been previously. Of course, this approach could also be considered as a functional lens, only with different aims to those that are purely fixated on performance.

From a consulting perspective, the point of difference between interpretative traditions and the functional, 'culture-as-a-variable' view is actually quite substantial. It suggests that the central concern is not to locate culture as if it is an external force and link it to other analytically distinct variables, but to understand how culture (as networks of meaning) is already interwoven with and influencing important practical matters such as leadership, strategy, group member behaviour and team/organisational performance. It is important here, not to treat meaning as a fixed and static essence or entity either, but as situated and processual, and able to change across time and situations (Alvesson, 2002; Geertz, 1973). For example, the meanings of gender, hierarchy, leadership and performance can change across situations and events. As the fabric of culture,

networks of meaning and the cultural manifestations that emerge and are patterned are thus multiple, complex and shifting (Alvesson, 1993, 2002; Trowler, 1998). Practitioners must be prepared to work through several levels of analysis before deciding what is a reasonable interpretation of what is going on, and again, this can be a time consuming and uncertain endeavour.

6.3.4 Congruence, Compromise and Commodification

It is frequently declared within sport psychology research that sport psychologists operating in elite sport must become aware of micropolitical climate and of issues of hierarchy, power, and culture in order to survive and thrive (e.g., McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Although I fundamentally agree that practitioner development in this area is essential to be suitably prepared for an organisational role and that not upskilling in this area might indeed be like ‘bringing a knife to a gun fight’ (Larsen, 2017), there is often a lack of substance in such recommendations. Most of organisational sport psychology culture and practitioner reflection literature is exceptionally vague in the identification of what concepts and issues actually inhabit the micropolitical climate, and in descriptions of how they manifest and present to the sport psychologist, as they struggle to get to grips with them. Moreover, many of the reflections of applied practitioners are fundamentally managerialist, and determining political issues seems to be generally conceived as a way to get ahead, or aid to survive in a difficult environment. Correspondingly, critical management scholarship (cf. Adler et al., 2007; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000) — that provides a critique of the widely held assumptions of organisation and management, and which has amassed a substantial amount of work in organisational and management fields — is missing from organisational sport psychology literature. Consequently, there has been little consideration of how the sport psychologist, in the course of trying to work with culture, could be

acting to the detriment of others. Alongside considering how to operate in a micropolitical climate, perhaps more penetrating and fundamental questions that ought to be asked are, “to what extent are sport psychologists willing to be politically nuanced and are they prepared to compromise their values and practices in order to fight another day?” And beyond this, “what is the professional and personal cost of doing so?”

For instance, while an interpretative approach is analytically powerful and can have applied value, as demonstrated in Study 3, this more anthropologically informed way of operating may not always be welcomed in sport environments, and therefore may especially likely to come under threat. In part, this is because it is a position that may seem impractical and alien, particularly in comparison to a more simplified (banal) concept of culture that while lacking in richness, nonetheless seems pragmatic and is to some degree ‘familiar’ to leaders. This more functional concept is also intuitively appealing for leaders with limited time on their hands and a number of competing priorities (Martin, 2002). Complicating the issue, when the culture concept is applied rigorously (anthropologically) it can gain in theoretical interpretative power, yet quickly lose its pragmatic focus (Alvesson, 1989; Westley & Jaeger, 1985), at least in terms of what leadership and the wider environment demands. Thus, to fit in with expectations of elite sport and in an effort to address this paradox, there is a danger that theoretical rigour and credibility is sacrificed in the interests of practicality.

This, in turn, affects how sport psychologists ‘sell’ their culture expertise and indeed, their overall competency as an organisational culture specialist. Sport psychologists who are less inclined to describe and operationalise culture as a variable, or who maintain a social justice focus may find that there is substantially less receptivity to their culture views from sport organisations and performance leaders who are seeking cultural solutions to practical problems of performance

(Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Sport psychologists should, therefore, be cognisant that an organisational culture remit may have serious implications for their sense of congruence (i.e., does their beliefs and theories on culture align with the practical work they undertake?). In elite, demanding sport environments where there is a ruthless pursuit of performance, it is very easy for sport psychologists — even those with emancipatory aims and the resolution to stay the course and do good over the longer term — to be seduced, or become compromised by performance agendas and demands (McDougall et al., 2015).

The pressure to compromise comes not only through the control and socialisation that is imposed on people by others and the cultures of elite sport, but also because elite sport is part of a global market and economy. Sport psychologists do not just yield to agendas of performance and the demands for results, but to the forces of capitalism and the commodification of their adopted concepts and services offered. Organisational consulting is a competitive industry. Neophyte and early-career practitioners who are less vocationally secure may be at particular risk of conceding interpretive ground to functional aims in an effort to be more ‘hireable’ and professionally valued. Per suggestions by critical management scholars (e.g., Burrell, 1996), even those working against some of the more nefarious and darker aspects of ‘the system’ can quickly find they have become a part of it, as their concepts and indeed themselves are colonised by the aims and practices of management.

6.3.5 Training and Education

As noted, sport psychology has “some catching up to do” in terms of understanding and working with organisational culture (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, p. 32). Aligning with other literature in sport psychology, there is a clearly a need for the further education and training of sport psychologists in organisational culture (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a, 2013; Eubank et al.,

2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). There is, however, substantially less guidance and agreement about how this might be achieved, and it is not exactly clear what education and training would best support an increase in understanding and competence. There have been calls for sport psychologists to receive more education and training in the theories and practices of organisation (Wagstaff, 2017) or occupational psychology to support sport psychology ability to undertake a wider organisational and ‘cultural’ role (e.g., Champ et al., 2018; Nesti, 2010). However, this advice is arguably tailored toward a broader organisational role (in general) because such formalised training is not necessarily culture-specific. Whether education and training occur through graduate programs, MBA’s, or certified, industry-standard change management programs and training (such as PROSCI), my own observations are that the treatment of culture reflects mainstream ideas of culture (i.e., singular, shared, a variable, malleable, leader driven). Plainly, and in line with arguments already made, I cannot see how such education and training advances culture understanding, except to perpetuate the myths, deficiencies and issues described extensively already.

To be able to work with culture, sport psychologists *must* be able to demonstrate cultural thinking. To support the development of this thinking, I suggest that sport psychology practitioners might seek to first become more familiar with the concept of culture itself and how its many forms, such as stories, myths, rituals and language contain, carry and symbolise cultural meaning. This means a far greater willingness to engage with existing and highly informative literature across other fields, with extensive histories of studying culture. As outlined, there is a wealth of untapped culture scholarship across a range of disciplines that the sport psychology community could draw on to enhance their organisational culture thinking and practices. This includes literature from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, cultural psychology, literature and socio-historical and

political commentary and a host of theoretical and critical lenses through which to understand, describe and analyse culture. I cannot see how applied culture practices can be developed without suitable attention to these sources. Correspondingly, applied sport psychologists will have to sharpen the tools of interpretation that will help them to analyse and decipher layered cultural symbols and what they might mean in terms of local knowledge. This could be done, for example, through greater education and training in the ethnographic methods of the anthropologist (e.g., Champ et al., 2018, 2019) or through wider incorporation of contemporary organisational methods of understanding complex environments, such as organisational sensemaking (cf. Weick, 1995).

Beyond these suggested avenues and influences, a return to philosophy could be beneficial – Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Herder, and many others have also offered extensive critiques of culture, civilisation, and society and the person's role within this. Arguably, these sources offer a far better starting point for those with an interest in culture, than mainstream literature and education. For instance, and as just one example to illuminate the point, Plato's *Republic* (1943) is critique of culture and society in which he outlines a vision of a different type of world. Perhaps, as in Plato's *Republic*, where 'philosopher kings' are best suited to wise and moral governance, we are in need of philosopher sport psychologists.

Finally, a serious implication for practice rests in misplaced idea that someone, a sport psychologist or otherwise, can do organisational culture work with culture expertise alone. I wholeheartedly agree with Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) that upskilling for organisational work might include becoming familiar with leadership theories, organisational identity, commitment, sensemaking and institutional theory (and I would add to this the neglected concept of organisational climate). Nevertheless, there is also a distinctly practical component that operates alongside such theoretical foregrounding, and my impressions are that sport psychologists are not

really prepared for it. To be blunt, if sport psychologists wish to become organisational specialists and undertake culture work that involves more than workshop delivery, or organising team building activities, for example, then they could benefit substantially from becoming familiar with the applied practices and skills that actually influence and shape organisational work within organisational domains. This may include, for instance, upskilling in the practices of project management, strategy design and execution, and process design and implementation. It should certainly include knowledge of the practices of change management (with an understanding of old models and newer ones) to include also the practices of organisational development (which provides a different approach altogether). Systems thinking, leadership coaching, the use of agile practices, or ‘the working out loud’ movement can all also inform organisational practices. Our general unfamiliarity with such terms and group-level work suggests that a general need to temper claims of expertise in matters of culture and organisational change is required not only from our researchers, but from our applied practitioners, and that there are many areas that can be looked to for guidance.

6.4 Limitations of the Research

First, as Geertz (1973) suggested, to maximise the theoretical and explanatory power of culture, it must be cut down to size, as opposed to being referred to and treated as a ‘complex whole’, as conceived of by Tylor (1871). I have criticised others over the course of this thesis for failing to cut culture down to size, and pointed out how amorphous, vague conceptualisations of culture lead to ‘thin’ descriptions. For my part, I felt as though a more careful detailing of what culture *was*, would help counter the possibility for thin description, since thick description in its originally intended meaning (cf. Geertz, 1973) refers not to meaty, descriptions of context, but to the quality of the explanation; which is aided by more precise use of the term (as opposed to just *culture*, and

related broad definitions). Nevertheless, I have come to realise that I too have succumbed, at times, to treating culture as a complex whole. For instance, during the interviews of Study 1, I asked for participant insight and understanding of culture, but I could have directed attention more specifically to the meanings ascribed to different cultural manifestations and forms (such as hierarchy, language, or values in relation to formal leadership, rituals, etc.). Essentially, this would have meant designing the study to attend to various culture related phenomena (as opposed to *culture* generally) to help reveal more cultural nuances. This treatment of culture is in line with how many anthropologists have studied culture, directing attention to ritual, human sacrifice, kinship, and religion for example. This understanding came to me late however, and I felt it would be disingenuous to retrospectively try to amend the accounts constructed. Moreover, these retrospective fixes were practically difficult. since interviews had long since occurred and would require returning to participants for more precise questioning.

A thesis objective was to detach from leader-centric accounts of culture and recognise all in the sport environment as culture makers. With this objective in mind, a further limitation that may be that there are some voices that remain unattended to within the interpretations and descriptions of culture. In Study 1, it was noted that the interpretations were all obtained from educated white males. Thus, the study may reinforce an observed adherence in sport and exercise psychology to a mono-cultural approach that privileges white, male, euro-centric views (Butryn, 2002; Parham, 2005; Ryba & Schinke, 2009). Similarly, studies two and three similarly did not challenge this tendency and in this regard may present accounts of cultures that do not reflect the range of diversity (skin colour, gender, sexual orientation and identity, physicality, culture, socioeconomic, and/or religious backgrounds) within modern sport environments, which themselves are part of a more global, transnational context. As noted, the need for sport psychology

to attend to diversity in matters of culture has been primarily outlined in CSP literature (cf. Blodgett et al., 2015), but it is equally as important for sport organisational and management scholars to heed this call. This can help us to avoid the tendency in broader organisational scholarship where theorists writing about culture most frequently share and subscribe to the basic values of Western culture. This includes a pre-occupation with ideas such as progress, efficiency, rationalisation, productivity, dominance of typical male values, the glorification of leadership, elevation and adoration of technology, unequal distribution of rewards, exploitation of nature, control, hierarchy, consumption, among others (Alvesson, 1989, 2002). Perhaps because of these proclivities, other values and ways of understanding the work-place and culture are generally underexamined in organisational culture research (Alvesson, 2002); and this may also be a charge levelled at the three studies that comprise the empirical material of this thesis.

Noticeably, the athlete voice is also missing from the accounts of culture presented. This limitation is not inconsequential, given that sport psychology is so closely bound to the provision of effective athlete support and the deepening of understanding of athletes' inner world so as to deliver a service that is helpful and valued within sport contexts. Although the sport psychologist voice within culture research is vital to develop an understanding of the world athletes inhabit and perform in, researchers must be careful that they do not speak as the sole authority and on behalf of athletes and others who live in, construct and re-construct the cultures under study. This is particularly important to keep in mind as organisational culture research in sport psychology literature begins to move into new terrain, such as developing an emancipatory and social justice focus with greater attention to inequalities, injustices and practices of abuse and oppression. Capturing a wide range of diverse and marginalised voices and identities is therefore essential to contribute to greater understanding of culture within sport and performance contexts by helping to

avoid oversimplifications based on only the understandings of some members of a culture, whose views we prioritise and privilege.

A third major limitation relates to methods of research used in attempts to access and describe culture. Gilmore (2013) explained the difficulties of researching organisational culture and outlined that because it is fragmented and parts of it are unconscious and difficult to articulate, questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews often only access the more visible and unremarkable aspects of culture. The theoretical and methodological positions outlined in this thesis (such as that culture is also public and readable through symbols, is represented in discourse, and that the use of story and interpretation and in-depth unstructured interviews are useful to access culture) arguably help to alleviate at least some of these concerns. Still, the cultural interpretations and understandings arrived at and described in each study might have been strengthened through further interviews or the use of a classic ethnographic method. For instance, in Study 1, each participant was interviewed only once. In Study 2, participant interviews or ethnography and immersion in the Save the Crew movement would have provided greater consideration of the “offline” aspects and more experiential, lived and material components of the campaign. Indeed, the inclusion of an additional “offline” focus would have taken the study closer to digital ethnography (cf. Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz, 2014. Posthill & Pink, 2012) or netnography (Bowler, Jr, 2010). These refer to newer modes of ethnography used by anthropologists to reveal important intertwinements of online and offline lives and communities, as our technology and online communications continue to evolve. Finally, Study 3 could also have been supplemented by follow up interviews with some of the participants of the 2012 study that was reflected on as a way to help me make sense of newly forming ideas of culture and the challenges they may present for practitioners in the field.

Arguably, the use of ethnography may also have aided the enterprise of refining and deepening my understanding of participant worldviews and the cultural interpretations and meanings conferred. Although I agree with many key figures who are at pains to explain the ethnography does not automatically confer access to culture, insight or the production of thicker description (cf. Geertz, 1973), ethnography is what the practitioners of social anthropology – who more than anyone else, have studied culture(s) – *do* (Geertz, 1973). In spite of ethnographic controversies and crises of representation (cf. Clifford, 1986; Hammersley, 2017; Ingold, 2014; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Ortner, 1999), such as issues pertaining to researcher positioning, voice and authority, ethnography arguably remains the key (but not the only) means of accessing and writing about culture(s). Essentially ethnography enables researchers to immerse themselves within a setting to develop a more in-depth understanding of specific subcultures and their social interactions, language practices and behaviours (Maitland, 2012). As a research approach, ethnography aims to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller and more meaningful context (Tedlock, 2000). A criticism of the work presented here could be that it is this level of immersion and researcher understanding of the broader contexts described that is arguably missing from the studies.

Fourth, and finally, one limitation that could easily go unnoticed in a thesis on culture is that by centralising culture there is a danger of inflating it so that it reigns supreme; as it undoubtedly has in some quarters as it came of age as a concept (Eagleton, 2016; Kuper, 1999; Ortner, 1999). For instance, in developing a meaning-focused concept of culture to challenge functional, sterile accounts of the time, Geertz made it the prime mover and shaker in social affairs; and in doing so subordinated other important concepts to ideas of meaning, conferring it an almost deterministic status (Kuper, 1999). As conveyed in Study 3, this can be reductive. The

anthropologist Adam Kuper (1999) offers one of the best outlines of this argument. He described how it is a poor strategy to separate out a culture sphere and treat it only in its own terms. For example, cultural identity can never offer an adequate guide for living:

We all have multiple identities, and even if I accept that I have a primary cultural identity, I may not want to conform to it. Besides it would not be very practical. I operate in the market, live through my body, struggle in the grip of others. If I am to regard myself only as a cultural being, I allow myself little room to maneuver, or to question the world in which I find myself. (Kuper, 1999, p. 247).

Along similar lines, although I tried to incorporate ideas of power, economy and community in Study 2 and personal identity and agency in Study 3, space and the centralisation of culture precluded more extensive explorations of the concepts that border and intertwine with culture. For culture research in sport psychology to advance it is essential to closely consider all the concepts and processes that are sometimes lumped together under the heading of culture, or else we will not get far understanding any of it.

6.5 Future Research

Consistent with the stance adopted within this thesis, future research should be guided by existing literature from other disciplines, because it helps provide solid ontological and epistemological foundations for future research. Moreover, as stated and demonstrated in this thesis, new research tends to recycle the arguments of older research, and becoming aware of different tracks of culture research and the various iterations of culture can help us to more clearly understand the concept we have borrowed and are in the process of developing. In particular, I recommend re-visiting many of the key influences presented in the preceding chapters. There is significant room to elucidate, use, refine and challenge them in future research. I also encourage culture scholars in

sport psychology to look at other key figures from the history of culture scholarship, as they are numerous and have much to offer. For instance, a reading of the key works of Raymond Williams would help considerably in further understanding the intellectual lineage of culture, or to position it within a Marxist, literary or sociological framework. Alternatively, culture could be understood in relation to history, or indeed as history, and a reading of anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins and historian's such as William Sewell Jr would be immensely helpful in such a positioning and corresponding track of research.

To further solidify and advance culture understanding, it is imperative that culture research in sport psychology continues to challenge culture 'myths' that presently exist and that are sure to emerge as attention to the concept grows and branches off into new directions. There are many extant culture myths, and a willingness to seek out and challenge them will ensure our culture research endeavours are underpinned with much-needed reflexivity and humility. Indeed, the present thesis may have given rise to some myths already. For example, in the challenging of culture as only what is shared and what acts to integrate, it may be perceived that an examination of what is shared by a culture is not a worthwhile avenue of study or is somehow intellectually deficient. Of course, this is not true either. All cultures retain meanings that are commonly understood, and therefore a general level of coherence. Moreover, this can be good and positive and aids organising and the attainment of shared goals. The point is that homogeneity is not necessarily 'good' or to be welcomed. Groucho Marx famously claimed that he would be reluctant to join a club that contained people like himself; and by the same token one would also be understandably reticent to join a club run by war criminals (Eagleton, 2016). Similarly, while diversity is also inherent in cultures, and needs to be acknowledged, not all diversity is good. Different points of view are not to be valued simply because they are different, because, from that

position, there is nothing to be concerned about by letting Nazi's into the teaching profession, for example (Eagleton, 2016). These tongue in cheek observations by Terry Eagleton — a highly accomplished cultural commentator — suggest that what is needed is a critical inspection of common and taken-for-granted culture assumptions, rather than a general and often unwitting acceptance of them.

There must also be more variety to our organisational culture research, not only in terms of moving beyond thin description and functional concerns of change, but in terms of the different environments accessed and described. In spite of consistent descriptions of elite sport as ruthless, harsh, precarious, these environments are not uniform. What constitutes elite sport is debatable (McDougall, et al., 2015) and anyway, 'elite' encompasses a range of environments that differ in terms of their history, professionalism or even type of sport. In-depth research and meaningful accounts of these varied arenas and domains is required to flesh out the cultural heterogeneity that exists across elite sport environments. It is this kind of focus that can generate the context-specific (and indeed cross-cultural) insights necessary to increase sport psychologist awareness of what they may face when operating within different sport settings. This is vital to avoid slipping into homogenising tendencies, such as presuming that elite sport teams and organisations are always endowed with the same characteristics; that is to lump them together and assume the characteristics of one can be environment can be easily generalised to another. As part of this process, attention must also be directed towards non-elite environments. Along these lines, although team and organisational culture has been most clearly associated with elite sport research, culture is not the preserve of high performing or elite environments, and non-elite contexts are noticeably under researched domains in sport psychology literature. Sport psychologists work across many environments not classified as elite, particularly as they build their resume, skill set and experience

and it should not be assumed that elite sport is the only context worth attending to. Many athletes are amateur athletes and what cultures they participate in can have a profound influence on experience, well-being, lifelong participation, health and relationship to their body, for instance. Research in the area should therefore help to prepare sport psychologists to understand the cultures of a range of sport and exercise contexts so that they can best serve a range of populations.

Along similar lines, there is a range of possible sport psychology experiences when it comes to undertaking organisational work. Ultimately this is determined by a number of factors such as the type and level of sport, sport psychologist experience and familiarity with an organisational role, and their position (e.g., internal and secure, external as a consultant, researcher-practitioner). It can also be determined by the type of culture work that is sought demanded (for instance, is it long-term or short-term, aimed at understanding or change?). The precise context will also influence the type and range of challenges faced. For these reasons, research that offers insider accounts of culture and ‘various’ types of culture work are vital to progress understanding in this area, and the nuances of practices involved.

In terms of method, and consistent with recent recommendations (Champ et al., 2018), ethnographic and longitudinal research may be beneficial for sports psychology students, and graduates, who aspire to work in elite level sport, because of the in-depth and meaningful accounts of context it can provide. Ethnography is also a broad church, however, and can be applied flexibly to different situations and problems (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). With this in mind, there are a number of specific trajectories that can support an ethnographic and organisational culture research agenda. Briefly sketched, these are as follows:

- Ethnographic research into organisational culture can be informed by a critical perspective.

Critical ethnography applies the tools of conventional ethnography through a justice and

emancipatory lens and seeks to expose embedded practices in society that oppress and perpetuate injustice (Clair, 2003). From this lens, critical ethnographers aim to go beyond descriptions of how things are and to describes the way things could be (Hagues, 2019; Thomas, 2003). Critical ethnographers are thus participatory, and as such, ethnography in this vein could be valuable in contributing to the identification and modification of questionable practices, such as those repeatedly highlighted in various sport scandals in recent years and in cultures described as oppressive, bullying and ‘toxic’.

- Allied to a distinctly critical management perspective (such as Martin and Meyerson’s three perspective approach), critical ethnographies can help sport psychology researchers make sense of sport organisational life as it has it relates to ideas of managerialism, control, hierarchy and identity (e.g., Kondo, 1990; Kunda, 1992).
- Traditional ethnographic research in sport can be supplemented by greater consideration of online, virtual worlds as important sites of community and culture. Key stakeholders in sport (athletes, fans, leaders, and so on) live online lives that are not completely separate from their offline ones. Moreover, there are a number of areas where culture and technology begin to intersect, such as sport organisations use of social media to communicate and build cultural understanding, or to project organisational image or identity (which can also relate to their culture) or athlete-fan interaction.
- Researchers conducting ethnography can extend their insights beyond ‘the local’ to networks of meaning within and alongside the complex social formations that exist outside of the immediate context. This exposes local ideas of culture and meaning to a changing, turbulent contemporary world. It is a focus that challenges researchers to relate culture to broader ideas and forces of power, politics and economy and how local actors construct

and preserve agency, meaning and cultural identities in the face of change, transformation and external sources of tension. More generally, this focus can be tied to the need to locate cultural analysis within and alongside analyses of broader socio-political events and processes; which often necessitate attention to forms of cultural history and ideas of struggle and change (Ortner, 1999). Research in this area (ethnography or otherwise) may benefit considerably from critical realist ideas of more *lasting* ideational and material structures that constrain or enable the actions of individual actors. For example, Layder (2005) argued that while social structures are undeniably created and shaped by human endeavours, they are noted to pre-exist and endure beyond the lifespan of the individuals who create them through their actions and intentions; and in this way are hard to change and not always readily apparent at the everyday level of experience, meaning that we cannot be completely sure what the effects of our actions upon them will be (as cited in Sealey, 2007). A critical realist approach to culture and associated ideas of change therefore enables researchers to challenge positivist ideas of culture as a variable that is easy to isolate and modify, while encouraging also a focus on social structures, that while not always directly observable are nonetheless theorised and shown to be real with real consequences for the actors involved.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

This thesis has been an attempt to progress disciplinary understanding of organisational culture (and culture more broadly) so that future research and practice in sport psychology can emerge from more solid foundations. Three studies were designed and implemented that could challenge some of the uncritically accepted assumptions that have gained a strong foothold in extant literature. I hope that in the alternative conceptualisations of culture presented, the historical

foregrounding of prior scholarship, the originality of methods deployed, and in the novel findings uncovered, an understanding of what culture is and what can be done (or not done) with it, has been increased. The overall key messages from the three studies is that what we (in sport psychology) currently think and write about as culture is superficial, and on shaky intellectual footing; meaning that our claims to be able to work effectively with organisational culture in the applied worlds of sport are unrealistic at best, and arrogant at worst.

Moreover, if pursued at the expense of other ways of seeing culture, the cultural narrowmindedness, or culture blindness often displayed in functional, mechanical and managerial accounts of culture that currently dominated the sport psychology field is a road to the intellectual ruin and stagnation of the culture concept. Mainstream organisation and management studies of the 1980s obsessed over this very concept of culture which it had, in turn, appropriated from outdated ideas of culture in anthropology that anthropologists were fast distancing themselves from (Wright 1998). Thus, these organisational studies, like those that currently dominate sport psychology literature, treated organisational culture as a unitary concept that expressed leader-led social cohesion and assimilation on the one hand, with group effectiveness and performance on the other. Then, an obsessive fixation with these ideas of culture led to declarations that organisational culture research was dominant but dead (Calás & Smircich, 1987). It was a reaction to the unrelenting tide of studies driven by functionalism, positivism and managerialist aims that had relegated interpretivist and critical voices to the sidelines. Worryingly, as a discipline, we are arguably already treading the exact same path that organisational scholars walked over three decades ago, and which led to decline (both in volume and intellectual vitality) of culture research in organisational studies. This thesis therefore extends Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie's (2018) somewhat innocuous recommendation that sport psychologists culture position must be leader-

informed whilst also remaining mindful that a leadership view of culture is not always appropriate, by pointing out that leader-led and (managerialist) paradigms have contributed substantially to the intellectual stagnation within wider organisational scholarship (cf. McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018, 2019).

As there *is* a risk of the culture concept dying an intellectual death within our discipline it is vital to breathe new life into culture scholarship, thus securing its future in sport psychology (McDougall & Ronkainen, 2019; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2019). While informed critiques are needed to challenge the managerialist perspectives of culture that dominate sport psychology literature, we must learn lessons from the history of culture study in organisational domains. For example, critical/interpretivist voices must not become so concerned with opposing managerialist conceptualisations of culture that they lose sight of the primary task; which is undertaking *cultured* cultural analyses of organisational life within the contexts of sport. These are essential in both research and practice domains, as the quality of both research and practice ultimately rests upon the depth of understanding of culture derived from analyses undertaken. More broadly, beyond organisational realms there is a wealth of untapped culture scholarship across a range of disciplines that the sport psychology community could draw on to enhance their organisational culture research agendas. This includes anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, cultural psychology, literature and socio-historical and political commentary and a host of theoretical and critical lenses through which to understand, describe and analyse culture. Modern theories of culture tend to re-use old ones (though not always well or faithfully) and a more deliberately cultivated understanding of the foundations and evolution of culture study will enable us to preserve its intellectual veracity into the future. This *should* guide us into some uncharted territory: for example, the sophisticated consideration of organisational culture *alongside* identity, politics,

economy, hierarchy, structure, agency, hegemony, semiotics, and so forth. By drawing on some of the well-established ideas already that already exist in these disciplines and traditions, culture scholars in sport have the potential to produce fresh insight into sport organisations. Not only in terms of what is shared and (potentially) effective, but what it means for different people to inhabit the lifeworld in these organisations and the possibilities and limitations afforded to them.

As part of developing a more thorough approach to the conceptualisation of culture, it is vital that organisational culture scholars in sport psychology outline more clearly, and thoroughly, their epistemological position and what conceptualisation(s) of culture has informed their work (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). This will sharpen our cultural dialogue and practices. Ultimately, perhaps this also speaks to the need to place greater emphasis on the philosophy upon which our understanding rests if we are to make some sense of the multifaceted, difficult concept that is culture. That is, while a diversity of theory and critique is necessary to do justice to the variety, complexity, and richness of culture, we must also start with reality; a phenomenology of culture that considers what it is before we compartmentalise, categorise, measure and try to utilise it.

Epilogue

“When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun”

Hans Johst
Nazi, playwright

The Manager joined the team in the offseason of 2018. Owing to the timing and manner of his arrival, he was welcomed as a God . . .

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Appendices

Interview questions

Consistent with the narrative approach adopted throughout the thesis, and with suggestions that highly structured interviews are not suitable for accessing participant interpretation of culture (Alvesson, 2002; Gilmore, 2013), the interview will be low structured (e.g., Ryba, Aunola, Kalaja, Selänne, Ronkainen & Nurmi, 2016). Interviews will therefore only be minimally organised, with only some questions in mind.

For example:

Tell me about the culture(s) of the team/organisations you are currently working in just now? Or have recently worked in?

Tell me about your experiences of life at _____

Could you tell me a story about....

How would you describe the cultures you have recently worked in?

What view do you hold of culture now? What would be important for a young and inexperienced sport psychologist to know?

In your most recent experience in elite sport, was there only one culture shared in by all? Were there subcultures?

What characterises the culture(s) of _____ (where you work now?)

In your experience, what leads to the formation of subcultures or countercultures?

How did you come to understand the culture? Did it take time? What strategies did you use to learn it?

What was confusing or hard to understand about the culture?

What was easier to grasp? What makes things uncertain?

What do people clash over?

Do you feel a part of the culture? Or an outsider?

If I was a new member of club/team _____, what would I have to understand quickly in order to get along?

Which perspectives dominates the environment?

Can you tell me a story or give me an example of something that really highlights the culture?

Do you ever feel at odds with dominant ways of thinking? In what ways?



#SaveTheCrew's Mission

Soccer, the world's beloved game, often plants a deep, spiritual root into its fans' very civic identities—one that the modern American sports business models do not always account for. In short, no matter where you go in the world, A SOCCER CLUB IS A COMMUNITY.

#SaveTheCrew is the Columbus soccer community's advocacy group.

WE BELIEVE:

Soccer is more than a sport, it is a fabric of the community that serves the community in many ways:

- It brings people together by providing a communal, social, and civic bond
- It helps positively develop area youth both on and off the field
- It can reflect positively upon a community and serve as an attractor to new people and businesses
- It gives back to the community both in philanthropic ways and as loyal customers support businesses that support the soccer community
- It serves as a civic identity internationally, as its club is known for its league participation through various marketing and merchandising channels and is covered in sports news outlets

OUR COMMUNITY:

We believe in the power of soccer clubs. The hearts of soccer clubs are made up of both supporters and the on-field history of a team. History cannot be bought, only lived and shared through playing for or supporting a team.

OUR TEAM IS THE COLUMBUS CREW, the first charter member of Major League Soccer (MLS).

WHAT WE WANT:

- WE WANT TO KEEP OUR SOCCER TEAM IN COLUMBUS, along with all the club history, and to be conventionally known as The Columbus Crew, ideally as part of MLS
- WE WANT ALL PARTIES TO NEGOTIATE OPENLY AND DILIGENTLY—local business and civic leaders, MLS entities, and all people of influence—to explore all avenues and do absolutely whatever it takes to keep a soccer team named the Columbus Crew in Columbus.
- WE WANT TO FOCUS ON HAVING A TEAM IN COLUMBUS, regardless of what stadium we play in, and acknowledge that private, non-taxpayer funding is probably vital for any new stadium in this day and age.
- WE WANT TO JOIN WITH SOCCER FANS WORLDWIDE who love their club and who believe that the beautiful game belongs to the world's communities and its spirit cannot just be uprooted. We vehemently stand against any such move because IF IT CAN HAPPEN IN COLUMBUS, IT CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE.