Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology Portfolio

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of PhD.

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Abstract

This Sport and Exercise Psychology Professional Doctorate portfolio offers an overview of all my experiences encompassed from an applied consultancy, dissemination, and research perspective. These experiences are aligned with the four competencies of ethics and professional standards, consultancy, dissemination, and research. The portfolio begins to explore the three applied case studies from a mixture of my football and exercise psychology encounters. From applied consultancy to research and teaching experiences there is a balance of sport (particularly football) and exercise psychology. The third case study provides an insight into supporting weight management and lifestyle needs of a youth team football player, whilst immersed in a competitive a fast-paced football environment. Through engagement in these main applied consulting experiences, my development and progression has been supported by various other sporting (e.g., boxing and rugby) and exercise (e.g., private practice with clients in physical activity and exercise health) consultations. As a reader you will be presented within this portfolio the evolution of my applied practice philosophy relative to these consulting experiences across the doctorate programme. Following on, are authentic and contemporary engagements with preparation, planning, delivery and evaluation of teaching and training experiences. This has ranged from supporting a PhD study with co-teaching, to sessional cover at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and progressing to a full-time lecturing role in year 3 of the doctorate. Towards the latter of this portfolio, you will be presented with research engagement compromising the growth in my philosophical assumptions through the systematic review, both empirical papers and research commentary.

Declaration

No portion of this work has been submitted to support an application of another degree or qualification at this university or external universities.

Acknowledgements

This doctorate journey I have completed over the last 3.5 years has been both challenging and fulfilling guiding me towards my authentic self and I couldn't have accomplished this milestone without:

My parents, John, and Angela, the opportunity at life, consistent support, and undeniable love you have given me is something I will forever cherish.

My sister, Naomi Mansfield for always being my role model throughout my life. Your support, intelligence and determination inspire me to pursue my passion and become a better person every day.

My friends, Teri-Ann Grindrod, Rehannon Crane and Courtney Butterworth for always being by my side through the positives but especially the lows embarked on this journey.

I am blessed and entirely grateful to share my journey in life with you all. Your love, kindness and support does not go unappreciated. I am dedicating this doctorate portfolio to you all.

My supervisors Dr Martin Eubank, Dr Paula Watson, and Dr Nicholas Wadsworth. I couldn't have completed this journey without your guidance, expertise, and patience.

Thanks to you all – I am a better woman, lecturer, researcher, and practitioner.

Practice Log of Training

Professional Standards (including CPD)					
Client details	**Location**	**Date(s)**	**Nature of the activity**	**Contact hours**	**Placement host details (if applicable)**
CM	LJMU	16/01/2020	Professional doctorate induction Plan of training	6 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/01/2020	Meeting with Martin to discuss plans of training.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30/01/2020	Taught lecture session – all prof doc students – applied experiences	5.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30/01/2020	Read two papers	3 hours	Non-applicable

			Being a sport psychologist. Keegan (2015) Doing sport psychology Anderson (2000)		
CM	LJMU	30/01/2020	Plan of training questions meeting with Martin	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	05/02/2020	Peer supervision New consultancy experiences	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	13/02/2020	Taught lecture session – consultancy	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	13/02/2020	Reading academy football literature on factors that impact performance	2 hours	Non-applicable

			Sager, Busch & Jowett, S. (2010) Mills et al. (2012)		
CM	LJMU	21/02/2020	Plan of training questions meeting with Martin	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/02/2020	Taught lecture session – ethics and professional standards Guest speaker – Gill Cook	10am – 3pm 5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/02/2020	Read 3 papers on philosophy of practice	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	05/03/2020	Read Holt & Strean (2001). Reflecting on initiating sport psychology consultation	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	06/03/2020	Peer supervision New consultancy experiences	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	12/03/2020	Taught lecture session – research assignments for the doctorate Guest speaker – Richard Sille	4.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	12/03/2020	Read challenges for neophyte sport psychologists Holt, N. L., & Strean, W. B. (2001). McDougall, M., Nesti, M., & Richardson, D. (2015).	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	23/03/2020	Guidelines for writing applied case studies in sport and exercise psychology. Keegan et al. (2017)	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	RAFC	27/03/2020	Read reflections with sport psychology services in football.	1 hour	Non-applicable

			Kremer, P. J., & Marchant, D. B. (2002).		
CM	RAFC	01/04/2020	Report writing for RAFC on challenges within COVID-19 for youth team players	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/04/2020	Taught lecture session – Think Aloud with Hayley and Amy Whitehead. Psychological tool utilised in applied practice	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	05/04/2020	Peer supervision New consultancy experiences and ethical challenges	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/04/2020	Staying well in research / self-care	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	23/04/2020	Taught lecture session – Martin Turner Rationale	2 hours	Non-applicable

			Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT)		
CM	LJMU	24/04/2020	Football psychology	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/04/2020	Sport Psychology in Professional Football paper	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	06/05/2020	Seven secrets of highly successful PhD students	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/05/2020	Peer supervision New consultancy experiences and ethical challenges	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	14/05/2020	Teaching and Training	2.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	28/05/2020	Applied psychology practice in exercise settings. Paula Watson	2.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	29/05/2020	Harwood (2008) 5Cs in professional football academy	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	01/06/2020	Guest speaker – Lorraine O'Malley's experiences – City football group	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	04/06/2020	Peer supervision New consultancy experiences and ethical challenges	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/06/2020	Professional standards and ethical practice	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/07/2020	Consultancy process in applied placements	3.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	22/07/2020	Applied consultancy in football and sport research literature. Half day. Harwood (2008), Nesti (2010) and Konter & Beckmann & Loughead, (2019)	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	12/08/2020	Organisational culture in sport reading	2 hours	Non-applicable

			Henriksen, Storm & Larsen (2017) Nesti et al. (2012)		
CM	LJMU	26/08/2020	All included papers for systematic review.	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	23/09/2020	Wednesday writing afternoon	2.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	01/10/2020	Open discussion/ Prof Doc Clinic/ Q&A	2.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/10/2020	Sport Psychology consultancy with British Equestrian Federation	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	26/10/2020	Andy Hill (EiS) academy football	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/10/2022	Read three teaching pedagogy papers	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	29/10/2020	Mike Rotheram - Spotlight	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/11/2020	Online teaching reading Young (2006) Keengwe et al. (2010) Oliver & Herrington (2001)	5 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	08/11/2020	Needs supportive counselling therapy Two papers	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/11/2020	Research on applied consultancy consent for sport players and parents	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	12/11/2020	Fran Champ – practitioner research gap	2.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	22/11/2020	Read one paper on burnout and compassion/self-care strategies Skovholt, T. M., & Trotter-Mathison, M. (2016).	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	November 2020	Three day needs supportive counselling for the HERizon Project. Formal training	8 hours including Zoom sessions and own reading for learning.	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	16/12/2020	A conversation with… debate with Nick and Neil Paid vs unpaid work	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	17/12/2020	Open discussion/ Prof Doc Clinic/ Q&A	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/01/2021	Meeting with Martin. Revisit plan of training e.g., next 12 months – what to include e.g., research for s. review, advanced reading, external CPD e.g., courses, lectures, webinars eDoc training	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/01/2021	Annual review meeting with Paula and Martin	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/01/2021	Enhancing public speaking skills using improvisation techniques	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/01/2021	Karen Flockhart Clinical and sport psychology	2 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	01/02/2021	Attending to you: the c word confidence	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/02/2021	LJMU Global online conference	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	10/02/2021	LJMU careers Anna Sexton – introduction to a business start up	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	March 2022	Player development in English and Norwegian Academy settings and implications for applied sport psychology	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/03/2021	Doing case formulation and intervention applied exercise and sport examples Laura Carey	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	29/04/2021	Doing CBT interventions Gill Cook	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/05/2021	*BASES Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology Day*	9am-5pm 8 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	27/05/2021	Doing person-centred interventions David Tod	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/06/2021	Doing motivational interviewing Jeff Breckon	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External Webinar	28/06/2021	Ethics and professional standards webinar	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	29/06/2021	Crafting a CV with impact	45 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	06/07/2021	Telephone and video job interviews: all you need to know to prepare yourself.	45 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/07/2021	Moore (2003) ethics Brown & Cogan (2006)	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/08/2021	CPD with all staff at RAFC covering confidentiality, ethics and boundaries in football.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/08/2021	Bisciotti (2020). Return to football training and	1 hour	Non-applicable

			competition after lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: medical recommendations.		
CM	LJMU	September 2021	Alice Stratford Psychology, performance lifestyle support and holistic development	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	04/11/2021	Liam Burnell (LJMU and Mindflick) Spotlighting and Adaptability	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/11/2021	Motivational interviewing November 2021 for case study three	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/11/2021	Interviewing skills for doctoral researchers	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/11/2021	Evaluating and synthesising your literature	2 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	24/11/2021	Starting as you mean to go on! Publication strategies during your PhD and beyond	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/11/2021	Enhancing public speaking skills using improvisation techniques	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/12/2021	Read four papers on teaching and training e.g., Exley, K. (2004). Giving a Lecture: from presenting to teaching. London: Routledge Farmer. Exley K (2004) Small group teaching	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/01/2022	Reading literature on conducting a meta-study	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	02/02/2022	Attending to you: the C word confidence	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2021	Fi Barnes and Danny Ransom (LJMU) Applied case studies with professional academy football players	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/01/2022	Karen Flockhart Clinical Sport Psychology Working in triad	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/02/2022	Enhancing public speaking skills using improvisation techniques	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	RAFC	21/02/2022	RAFC CPD courses (including EDI and relative to EPPP)	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/02/2022	Private practice experiences – reflections on 30 years of consultancy in sport psychology	2 hours	Non-applicable

			Guest lecture Brian Hemmings		
CM	LJMU	11/03/2022	Presenting yourself on screen webinar	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/03/2022	Foltz et al. (2015). Applied sport psychology supervision.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	31/03/2022	Tim Pitt Problem-solving with pig wrestling	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	28/04/2022	Community of practice Open discussion with trainee sport psychologists	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/05/2022	Optimising resilience	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	21/05/2022	Read one paper: Working with parents in football paper	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	26/05/2022	Clinical and Sport Psychology Collaboration – case discussion	4 hours	Non-applicable

			Karen Flockhart		
CM	LJMU	27/05/2022	Optimising resilience	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	17/06/2022	Optimising resilience	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30/06/2022	Jeff Breckon advanced MI and integrating CBT	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	12/07/2022	Introduction to systematic reviews three papers Ronkainen, N., Wiltshire, G., & Willis, M. (2022). Meta-study. Paper	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	26/07/2022	Read three papers on weight management and PA	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30/07/2022	Read two papers working in a MDT	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	01/08/2022 – 07/08/2022	Read a vast amount of papers in preparation for	6 hours	Non-applicable

			job interview (lecturing role)		
CM	LJMU	25/08/2022	Narrative analysis for empirical paper one	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/09/2022	Staff development day	8am-5pm 9 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/09/2022	Staff development day	8am-5pm 9 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/09/2022	Stig Arve Sæther (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Martln Littlewood, LJMU. Pan-European approaches to Player Development.	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	22/10/2022	Thinking about equality, diversity and inclusion in research and teaching from EDI	1 hour	Non-applicable

External	Zoom	25/10/2022	Player development teaching session to Malta national academy players. Through the national sport school / psychologist	12-1pm (UK time) 1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	03/11/2022	Peer supervision	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	06/11/2022	Read: women are cancer working in sport	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/11/2022	Evaluating and synthesising your literature	2 hours	Non-applicable
LJMU	Face-to-face lecture	17/11/2022	This was a cohort specific on person centred intervention but I attended as my consultancy at the time	4 hours	Non-applicable

			was attempting to adopt this Jo Butt and Martin Eubank		
CM	LJMU	22/11/2022	Enhancing public speaking skills	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	22/11/2022	Sport psychology programme meeting	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/11/2022	Peer supervision	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	23/11/2022	Getting to grips with method and methodology	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	28/11/2022	Effective interviewing for research	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	29/11/2022	Peer supervision	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	01/12/2022	Liam Burnell Problem solving continued	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/12/2022	Community writing day	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/12/2022	L4 S&F meeting	45 minutes	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	05/12/2022	Bringing your research to life: planning for impact	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/12/2022	Prof. Moira Lafferty (am); Applied Sport Psychology Research Group (pm) Reflection on Applied Practice (am) / Publishing and Presenting Research (pm)	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2022	Read three papers looking at narrative analysis for empirical paper one	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	18/01/2023	Transcribing data for doctoral researchers	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	18/01/2023	RISES Seminar Series 2023 - Exercise without people? webinar	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/01/2023	Wednesday writing afternoon	2.5 hours	Non-applicable

CM	External	01/02/2023	Group CPD consultancy	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	08/02/2023	Group CPD consultancy	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	10/02/2023	Staff Forum	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/02/2023	Peer supervision	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/02/2023	Teaching in higher education reading Atkins & Brown, (2002) Henard et al. (2008)	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	22/02/2023	Group CPD consultancy	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/02/2023	Reading literature on interdisciplinary coach connectedness	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/02/2023	Science and football Programme meeting. + Prog Performance review	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	03/03/2023	Careers in sport event planning	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	13/03/2023	Get that job day	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	13/03/2023	A conversation with… webinar	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/03/2023	Philosophical assumptions and teaching pedagogy research	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	21/03/2023	Sport psychology programme team meeting	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30/03/2023	S&F programme meeting	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	01/04/2023	Read a paper on philosophical assumptions in research	1 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/04/2023	Read 3 papers on teaching pedagogy	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/04/2023	Read two papers on practitioner-researcher	1.5 hour	Non-applicable
CM	External	12/04/2023	Group CPD	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	22/04/2023	Applicant day	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	23/04/2023	Read 2 narrative analysis papers for empirical paper two.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	24/04/2023	Read 1 paper looking at narrative features	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	28/04/2023	Read three papers looking at conducting a systematic review. Galdas, P. (2017). Revisiting bias in qualitative research	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/05/2023	Reading literature on conducting a meta-study	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	03/05/2023	Group CPD	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	12/05/2023	Champ (2020) ethnography	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	12/05/2023	Read 3 reflective papers on practitioner development.	2 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	14/05/2023	Read paper for meta-reflection. Calvo, E. (2015). Scaffolding translation	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/05/2023	Sport psychology programme team meeting	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/05/2023	Knowles & Gilbourne (2010) Knowles et al. (2007) Critical reflective practice research	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/05/2023	Read two papers on meta-study e.g., Paterson & Ronkainen.	2 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	June 2022 – February 2023	As there were a few occurrences with empirical paper two of reading wider literature. This has been combined.	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Groningen, the Netherlands	24-26th May 2023	CPD event – World Congress of Science and Football 3-day event in Groningen, the Netherlands. Including attending multiple face-to-face lectures and note taking.	7 hours each day. 21 hours.	Non-applicable
CM	RAFC	January 2020 – June 2022	Engaged in relevant communication and meetings with the Safeguarding officer (s)	40 hours	Non-applicable

			and Head Physiotherapist at the academy to discuss the need for safeguarding of players, referral to physio, external doctor or external therapists outside of the club. This included communication with relevant coaches or support staff (where appropriate) to support player wellbeing.		
CM	RAFC Be Strong		Engagement with meeting with the Academy manager and Head Coach at RAFC but also placement providers at Be Strong to discuss practical challenges e.g., buy-in of sport psychology	30 hours	Non-applicable

			support, limited time or appropriate space for consultancy to take place etc		33
CM	LJMU	January 2020 – June 2022	Across the course of the doctorate I engaged in consistent peer and supervisor meta-reflection. This focused on applied and research challenges of data protection, confidentiality, working as part of an MDT in football, challenges with private practice etc.	50 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	14/04/2023 – 20/05/2023	As part of the meta-reflection to judge my progressions and engagement with my practice log I have reflected on my lack of attendance at formal	25 hours	Non-applicable

			CPD events, unhelpful thoughts around limited consultancy towards the latter of the doctorate (since leaving RAFC and starting my lecturing role).		34
CM	LJMU	14/04/2023 – 20/05/2023	As part of the meta-reflection to judge my progressions and engagement with my reflective log. I have engaged in a critical layer of reflection by revisiting previous reflective logs and to judge "how would I approach that situation in consultancy if I was faced with it now?" and "am I practicing in a way that is congruent with my values and beliefs?"	25 hours	Non-applicable
				TOTAL AMOUNT OF	

				HOURS CALCULATED = 565 hours	

Consultancy				

Client details	Location	Date(s)	Nature of the activity	Contact hours	Placement host details (if applicable)
CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	12/01/2020	Initial placement meeting with the director of the academy	2 hours	Rochdale
CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	01/02/2020	Placement aims, purpose and goals agreed Aligned with academy philosophy	2.5 hours	Rochdale

			Hours allocated as placement opportunity agreed		36
CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	16/02/2020	Meeting with all the full-time coaches in the academy office Structure of psychological support	1 hour	Rochdale
CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	06/03/2020	Psycho-educational workshop – introduction to sport psychology (U16s-U18s)	1.5 hours	Rochdale
CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	07/03/2020	Psycho-educational workshop – introduction to sport psychology (U13s-U15s)	1.5 hours	Rochdale

CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	07/03/2020	Psycho-educational workshop – introduction to sport psychology (U9s-U12s)	1.5 hours	Rochdale
CM	LJMU	14/03/2020	Meeting with Paula to discuss reflections with applied consultancy work	1 hour	
CM	Be Strong	16/03/2020	Psycho-educational workshop – exercise psychology motivation to exercise Group at Darwin	45 minutes	Be Strong
CM	Be Strong	17/03/2020	Psycho-educational workshop – exercise psychology motivation to exercise	45 minutes	Be Strong

			Group at Accrington		
CM	Rochdale Football Club Academy	In the time of March, April, and May 2020	One-to-one consultancy sessions on Zoom with academy players will be accounted for in the latter season of this table	30 hours per week including record keeping	Rochdale
CM	Be Strong	15/04/2020	Psycho-educational workshop Dealing with COVID-19 Lockdown and psychological wellbeing at Be Strong	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	23/04/2020	Meeting with Martin to discuss update with applied work	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	Be Strong	May 2020	Psycho-educational workshop Two series workshop looking at positive thinking	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Be Strong	June 2020	Psycho-educational workshop Two series workshop looking at positive thinking	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Be Strong	July 2020	Psycho-educational workshop	1 hour	Non-applicable

			Creating healthy habits		
CM	LJMU	29/07/2020	Meeting with Paula to discuss building clientele with consulting business	30 minutes	
CM	Be Strong	August 2020	Psycho-educational workshop Dealing with body image and unhelpful thoughts	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Be Strong	September 2020	Psycho-educational workshop	1 hour	Non-applicable

			Open discussion with the members regarding challenges being experiences e.g., mindless eating		41
CM	LJMU	September 2020	The applied process of consultancy. Understanding Keegan's (2015) model	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	28/09/2020	Meeting with Martin to discuss applied consultancy at RAFC	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	November 2020	Paula Watson understanding of needs supportive analysis for HERizon consultancy.	3 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	13/11/2020	Meeting with Martin to discuss RAFC consultancy including practical challenges with coaches and players	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Be Strong	November 2020	Mindfulness eating and nutrition zoom workshop.	1 hour Delivery of workshop and reflection.	Non-applicable
CM	Zoom	November 2020	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week one	2.5 hours including record keeping	Non-applicable
CM	Zoom	November 2020	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week two. 6 participants 15 minutes each consultancy	2.5 hours including record keeping	Non-applicable

		09/12/2020	Meeting with Paula and Martin to discuss applied consultancy at RAFC	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	Zoom	December 2020	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week three. 6 participants 15 minutes each consultancy	2.5 hours including record keeping	Non-applicable
CM	Zoom	December 2020	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week four. 6 participants 15 minutes each consultancy	2.5 hours including record keeping	Non-applicable

CM	Zoom	December 2020	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week five. 6 participants 15 minutes each consultancy	2.5 hours including record keeping	Non-applicable
CM	Zoom	December 2020	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week six. 6 participants 15 minutes each consultancy	2.5 hours including record keeping	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2020	Spoke with Paula Watson about case study one	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	December 2020	Spoke with doctorate peer about case study one	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	External	December 2020	Phone call with FG discussing working with son in rugby	30 minutes	Non-applicable
		11/01/2021	Meeting with Martin to discuss progress with consultancy over the Christmas period	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week one. **Important to note that weeks 1, 6, 9**	6 hours	Non-applicable

			and 12 were 30 minute sessions. Main trial		46
CM	LJMU	January 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week two Main trial	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	January-February 2021	Four consultancy sessions + write up. FG in rugby	6 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week three Main trial	3 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	January 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week four Main trial	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	01/02/2021	Meeting with Martin to discuss 1-to-1 consultancy with RAFC	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	February 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week five Main trial	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	February 2021 (8th & 9th)	Peer supervision to discuss case study one	3 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	February 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week six Main trial	6 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	W/C 21st February 2021	Changes to case study one	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	22/02/2021	Meeting with Martin to discuss progress with consultancy at RAFC	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/03/2021	Meeting with Paula and Martin to discuss sport and exercise applied work progress	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	March 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week nine	6 hours	Non-applicable

			Main trial		
CM	LJMU	25/03/2021	Meeting with Martin to discuss applied consultancy at RAFC	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	April 2021	HERizon Project consultancy sessions week 12 Main trial	6 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	21/04/2021	Meeting with Martin to discuss progress with consultancy case studies, especially case study two (football player) ideas	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	RAFC	Last week in April 2021	Meeting with HG parents regarding	30 minutes	Non-applicable

			consultancy with son – deselection		
CM	LJMU	05/05/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss applied consultancy in both sport and exercise psychology	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	May 2021 01/05/2021 to 27/05/2021	Write up of case study two	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/07/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss consultancy case studies	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy – club classroom	12/07/2021	Staff induction – introduction into my role and sport psychology support	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	13/07/2021	Meeting with Martin regarding case study two	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy – club classroom	13/07/2021	Player induction – introduction into my role and sport psychology support	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy – club classroom	15/07/2021	Player induction – introduction into my role and sport psychology support	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	First two weeks in August 2021	Changes to case study two	10 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	18/08/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss HERizon Project case study one final changes and reflection	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	02/09/2021	Meeting with the head coach – discuss workshop plans	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/09/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss applied consultancy case study and fear setting in consultancy	15 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	External	18/10/2021	Two consultancy sessions. Semi-professional rugby players	1.5 hours including separate sessions and write-up	Non-applicable
CM	RAFC	20/10/2021-12/05/2022	Consultancy case with U18s player	55 hours	Non-applicable

			Over a 9-month period		
					53
			This involved MDT meetings, 1to1 consultancy and support, the development of an off-season plan at Christmas, Easter and Summer break		
CM	Rochdale football club academy	23/11/2021	Meeting with two U14 coaches	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	27/11/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss potential case study three	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	02/12/2021	Spoken with Martin Eubank regarding sport psychology programme and consultancy challenges	1 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	02/12/2021	Meeting with the academy manager and FPD lead	45 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	06/12/2021	Meeting with the head coach Three consultancy sessions (included in latter section)	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	17/12/2021	Meeting with the academy manager and head coach about overview of	1 hour	Non-applicable

			first team in the season		
CM	External	January-April 2022	Bi-weekly 1-to-1 consultancy with PG. Session and write-up	16 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	February 2022	Write up of case study three (complex case study)	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	04/03/2022	Meeting with head coach regarding development of sport psychology programme	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	14/03/2022	Meeting with physio, nutritionist and manager	1.5 hours	Non-applicable

			Consultancy session		
CM	Rochdale football club academy	25/03/2022	Meeting with the academy manager, U18s player and nutritionist	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	01/04/2022	Meeting with the physiotherapist and nutritionist	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	External	April 2022	Meeting and intake with exercise psychology client	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	April 2022	Discussion with Paula regarding plan for this	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	External	April- July 2022	Exercise psychology client 1-to-1 weekly	15 hours consultancy and write-up	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale football club academy	06/05/2022	Meeting with academy manager and PDP coach	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	May-July 2022	Write up of case study three (complex case study)	25 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	July 2022	Meeting with personal trainer at local gym regarding client referral	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	External	July 2022	Intake with client from PT referral	1.5 hours	Non-applicable

					58
CM	LJMU	July 2022 11/07/2022	Meeting with Paula discussing referral to local therapist.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	External	13/07/2022	Initial intake call with GS Boxing	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	External	End of July and all of August 2022	5 x 1-to-1 consultancy sessions. Occurred weekly	10 hours Call plus report writing	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	26/08/2022	Wrote up consultancy contract case	2 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	W/C 08/09/2022	Changes to case study three	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	External	05/04/2023	Meeting with Paula to discuss case study and philosophy of practice	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2020-January 2023	Engagement of reflective practice from individual perspective and meta-reflection with peers and supervisors. This consisted of a combination of ethical and practical consultancy	20 hours	Non-applicable

			challenges to critically help me to grow as a practitioner.		
CM	LJMU	January 2020- December 2021	Consultancy at Be Strong which has included preparing, delivering and evaluating psychoeducational workshops as well as meetings with the founders/members of staff, development of psychological interventions. It's important to note that my role shifted from practitioner to researcher here.	75 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2020- June 2022	Consultancy at RAFC this has included one-to-one consultancy,	450 hours	Non-applicable

			delivering of psycho-educational workshops to staff, players and parents, regular staff meetings, meetings with talent ID/Scouts, CPD delivery and contribution of sessions, EDI and CPD training within academy club setting.		61
				TOTAL AMOUNT OF HOURS CALCULATED **= 840 hours**	

Research

Client details	Location	Date (s)	Nature of the activity	Contact Hours	Placement Host details (if applicable)
CM	LJMU	30/01/2020	Meeting with Martin. Plan of training progression and questions	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	03/02/2020 16/03/2020	Progress on plan of training writing with submission	8 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	05/04/2020	Meeting with Paula and Rebecca Murphy	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/04/2020	Meeting with Martin. Systematic review ideas	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	03/05/2020	Systematic review searches	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	06/01/2021	Meeting with Paula. Systematic review progress	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	26/01/2021	Systematic review progress. Meeting with Martin and Paula	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	10/02/2021	Meeting with Paula and Rebecca Murphy. Systematic review analysis	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU		Database search (4 databases) for systematic review	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU		Meeting with David Tod PRISMA-P diagram	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU		Follow up meeting with course peer to discuss systematic review	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU		Meeting with Jan Burrell – LJMU librarian for systematic review	45 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU		Emailing authors for MT and Resilience in systematic review and follow-up chat.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/03/2021	Meeting with Paula systematic review progress	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	14/03/2021 – 16/03/2021	Begin write up of systematic review introduction and methods	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	17/03/2021	Conduct changes in my systematic review protocol	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/04/2021	Meeting with Paula. Progress with systematic review	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/04/2021	Conducted systematic review searches	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/04/2021	Read abstracts of papers and entered in Rayyan database	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/04/2021	Read abstracts of papers and entered in EndNote database	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	21/04/2021	Meeting with Martin. Systematic review progress and empirical paper ideas for RAFC.	30 minutes	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	05/05/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss included papers. Compared the papers to both individual searches	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/05/2021	Systematic review read full papers and conducted systematic mapping Go through systematic review all papers to identify more themes/raw quotes for all the included papers Decide on all sub themes and main themes and update Paula, Becky, and Martin on them via email	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/06/2021	Meeting with Martin to discuss empirical paper with RAFC applied experiences and ideas.	30 minutes	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	03/06/2021	Meeting to discuss the HERizon Project publication	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	05/06/2021	Report of reflections for publication	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/06/2021	Meeting with Be Strong providers to discuss ideas for research project. Follow up communications on email.	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	07/07/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss empirical paper one ideas after initial search and systematic review	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	18/08/2021	Meeting with Paula to discuss systematic review data extraction. Rayyan.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/09/2021	Meeting with Paula to briefly discuss Be Strong empirical paper ideas	30 minutes	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	22/09/2021	Wrote up ideas and mapped topics of interest for the Be Strong empirical paper	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/10/2021	Meeting with Paula to briefly discuss Be Strong empirical paper ideas.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2021	Engaged in writing of ethics application and relevant appendices (e.g., participant information sheet, consent form etc). empirical paper two.	25 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/01/2022	Meeting with Martin to discuss systematic review and empirical paper with RAFC ideas.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	February 2022	Engaged in writing of ethics application and relevant appendices (e.g., participant information sheet, consent form etc). empirical paper two	25 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	13/04/2022	Meeting with Paula to discuss Empirical paper one ideas for Be Strong. First draft of methods and results section. Planning the numbers and members from Be Strong for the recruitment and a social media advert	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	14/04/2022	Meeting with Martin to seek advice with recruitment for RAFC empirical paper. Contacted relevant staff for recruitment	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/05/2022	Meeting with Paula to discuss systematic review progress	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	21/05/2022	Conducted reading and write up for interview questions for Be Strong empirical paper	3 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	May 2022	Meeting with Paula and Be Strong providers at the HQ in Be Strong	2.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	13/06/2022	Conducted pilot study for empirical paper one and transcribed.	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	05/07/2022	Meeting with Paula to discuss plan for empirical paper with Be Strong recruitment	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	13/07/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P1	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	15/07/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P2	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	22/07/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P3	10 hours	Non-applicable

CM	Home	24/07/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P4	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/07/2022	Meeting with Paula to discuss progress with Be Strong empirical paper interviews	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	Home	30/07/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P5	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	August 2022	Progress on systematic review. Re-read all papers.	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	August 2022	Wrote up methodology section of the systematic review and revisited the introduction.	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	02/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P6	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	04/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P7	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	18/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P8	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	18/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P9	10 hours	Non-applicable

CM	Home	23/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P9	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	30/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P11	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	31/08/2022	Conducted and transcribed interview with P12	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Home	August 2022	Progress on systematic review. Re-read all papers.	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	September 2022	Progress on the methodology and results section (mapping for narrative analysis findings for empirical paper one)	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/11/2022	Meeting with Martin and Paula to discuss support for the reminder of my research projects	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/11/2022	Meeting with Gill to discuss support with football empirical paper	30 minutes	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	22/11/2022	Meeting with Martin to discuss research funding and RAFC empirical paper. Change of methodology.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2022	Meeting with Laura Thomas to discuss empirical paper one. Introduction and methodology changes	5.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/01/2023	Meeting with Martin to discuss systematic review feedback and progress.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/01/2023	Meeting with Laura Thomas to discuss empirical paper one. Narrative analysis.	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2023	Began progressing on the write up of narrative analysis	15 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU		Meeting with LJMU librarian to discuss systematic review search terms and quality assessment tool. Scientific writing on this review.	1.5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2023	Meeting with Nick regarding systematic review	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2023	Worked from systematic review feedback	4 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30/01/2023	S&F Programme team meeting	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	20/02/2023	Meeting with Nick to reflect on golden thread and purpose for empirical paper in football	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/02/2023	Re-writing introduction and methodology for football empirical paper	5 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	06/03/2023	Meeting with my supervisor Nick regarding Research philosophy	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/04/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach one	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	11/04/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach two	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	17/03/2023	Meeting with librarian to discuss systematic review	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	26/04/2023	Systematic review tutorial	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	28/04/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach three	10 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	29/04/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach four	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	02/05/2023	Meeting with Laura Thomas and Marianna to discuss empirical paper one narrative stories	30 minutes	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	04/05/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach five	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	08/05/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach six	10 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	09/05/2023	Conduct and transcribe interview for empirical paper two Academy coach seven	10 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	May 2023	Further write up and changes to systematic review, empirical paper one and two.	25 hours	
CM	LJMU	11/05/2023	Supervision with Martin regarding portfolio	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	September 2022 – May 2023	ASP research programme meetings across the academic year	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	22/05/2023-23/05/2023	Changes on empirical paper one, two and systematic review	5 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	March 2020-May 2023	Consistent self- and meta-reflection with relevant peers and supervisors to conduct all pieces of research. Relative to the key competencies as a researcher.	65 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	May 2023	Wrote up research commentary (feedback and changes)	25 hours	Non-applicable

| CM | LJMU | 17/05/2023- 24/05/2023 | Engagement of meta-reflection linked to the reflective log. Critical layer of reflection occurred to judge my competence and progression as a researcher. Addressing how my research philosophy, awareness and enjoyment with research has changed. | 35 hours | Non-applicable |
| | | | | **TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS = 612** | |

Dissemination

Client details	Location	Date (s)	Nature of the activity	Contact Hours	Placement Host details (if applicable)

CM	LJMU	September 2020	3is presentation for teaching qualification	30 minutes presenting 4 hours preparation	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2020	The HERizon Project teaching and preparation	15 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2020	Meeting with Paula Watson to discuss the HERizon Project teaching session two feedback	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	December 2020	Peer student meeting to discuss feedback from HERizon teaching	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January – March 2021	The HERizon Project supervision. Supervising MSc students with the main trial for the HERizon Project. Weekly meetings	10 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	January 2021 (semester two) September-December 2021 (semester one)	LJMU sessional cover. Teaching across L4-L5 on ASP programme. Teaching and preparation in 2nd year of Professional Doctorate.	55 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2021	Meeting with Laura Thomas to discuss sessional cover teaching plan.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	February 2021	Meeting with Laura Thomas to discuss sessional cover teaching progress.	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	MMU	February 2021	Guest lecture. Sport confidence and MST to L4 Sport Coaching students.	1 hour teaching and 5 hours preparation	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	January 2022- May 2022	LJMU sessional cover. Teaching across L4-L5 on ASP programme. Teaching and preparation in the second half of my 2nd year of Professional Doctorate.	40 hours	Non-applicable
CM	Rochdale Sixth Form College	June 2022	Guest lecture – sport psychology degree explained and my career journey.	1 hour teaching and 3 hours preparation	Non-applicable
CM	College in the Wirral	June 2022	Guest lecture – sport psychology degree explained and my career journey. With sixth form students.	Half day with workshops 5 hours with preparation	Non-applicable

| CM | LJMU | September 2022- May 2023 | Semester one, two and three teaching on the Science and Football and Sport Psychology undergraduate programme.

This includes Teams, face-to-face teaching and preparation. | 150 hours | Non-applicable |
|----|------|------|------|------|------|
| CM | LJMU | 14/09/2022 | Meeting with Lorcan to discuss placement module for L6 | 30 minutes | Non-applicable |
| CM | LJMU | 20/09/2022 | L4 S&F what makes a good student workshop | 2 hours | Non-applicable |
| CM | LJMU | 21/09/2022 | Meeting with Gill Cook to discuss L4 teaching on core psychology | 30 minutes | Non-applicable |
| CM | LJMU | November 2022 | MSc Sport Psychology transitions lecture and preparation | 6 hours | Non-applicable |

CM	LJMU	16/11/2022	ASP drop in clinic student support	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	25/11/2022	Panopto training	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	30th November 2022	MSc Sport Psychology transitions lecture and preparation	6 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	September 2022-April 2023	Dissertation/major project supervision meetings 4 ASP students 4 Science and Football students over the academic year.	80 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	September 2022-April 2023	Personal Tutor meetings	30 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	14/12/2022	ASP drop in clinic student support	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	16/12/2022	Professional practice presentation meeting	1 hour	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	23/02/2023	Professional doctorate session teaching Consultancy case – navigating an MDT.	10am-12pm Thursday With preparation = 8 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	01/03/2023	ASP drop-in clinic	1 hour	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	March 2023	MSc professional doctorate teaching	2 hours 1 hour delivery and 1 hour preparation	Non-applicable
CM	St. Cuthbert's Business and Enterprise High School.	March 2023	Guest lecture – sport psychology degree explained and my career journey. With all students from year 7-11	Half day 6 hours with preparation	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	December 2022-31st March 2023	6101SPOPSY and 6102SPOPSY placement project support L6 Sport Psychology students	60 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	19/05/2023	Restructuring the teaching diary	2 hours	Non-applicable
CM	LJMU	January 2020-May 2023	Consistent engagement in reflective practice (formal communication in logs) and course peer supervision addressing the dissemination competencies. For example, promoting psychological principles, practices, services, and benefits. This engagement consisted of writing the teaching diary.	75 hours	Non-applicable

CM	LJMU	17/05/2023- 24/05/2023	Engagement of meta-reflection which was consistent to my reflective log. Using critical layering of reflections to document my progression. As there was clear evidence especially in my teaching diary of teaching in football and exercise psychology as well as in my academic roles. Reflection based on the purpose of these teaching sessions, my teaching pedagogy, challenges faced and how teaching may look in these environments was evidenced. Educational workshops are evidenced in consultancy log.	45 hours	Non-applicable
				TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS = 620	

Reflective Practice Diary

Reflection process

To acquire the Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology qualification and registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), evidence of competency through the four key roles of ethics, consultancy, dissemination, and research informed practice is documented through the reflections below. My reflections are illuminated below through using the Gibbs (1998) reflective model, where my ability to *'survive and thrive'* was present (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014) with evidence of a critical layer of reflection that occurred (for some cases) (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). My rationale for choosing the Gibbs reflective model arose from being introduced to this model during my undergraduate programme and finding value with understanding my experiences through each step. I have aimed to tell a story to describe what happened with each experience, attaching my feelings and thoughts, how I have made sense of this experience and what I have concluded with relevant action plans in place to elucidate my learning.

References

Eubank, M., Nesti, M., & Cruickshank, A. (2014). Understanding high performance sport environments: Impact for the professional training and supervision of sport psychologists. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, *10*(2), 30-37.

Gibbs, G. (1988). Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. *Further Education Unit*.

Knowles, Z., & Gilbourne, D. (2010). Aspiration, inspiration and illustration: Initiating debate on reflective practice writing. *The sport psychologist*, *24*(4), 504-520.

Ethics and professional standards

Monitoring of client

A fundamental aspect during the beginning of my professional doctorate journey, consisted of being aware of and grounded in ethics and professional boundaries as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist to best support clients with individual growth, enhancement and enjoyment in sport and exercise (Aoyagi et al. 2012). I was delivering sport psychology support to adolescent females who wished to increase their physical activity (PA) levels during the COVID-19 lockdown in the United Kingdom (UK). This reflection specifically explores the PA journey of one adolescent female, Emily (this is a pseudonym to protect client's identity), from The HERizon Project (e.g., Cowley et al. 2021). Before the consultancy started, I was aware of some of the background information of Emily as she completed an objective questionnaire as part of the health and safety procedure for the project. The questionnaire contained demographic and PA questions to elicit personalised responses to find out how much exercise Emily engaged in before the project started. As well as this, Emily highlighted that she had previously engaged in several sessions with a clinical therapist to help her manage her social anxiety (Heimberg, 2002). Before the UK COVID-19 lockdown, Emily had struggled with social anxiety and found it difficult to make friends and socialise in events outside of her family circle. Acquiring this information was useful before the consultancy sessions begun, as it allowed me to be aware, mindful and act accordingly to any mental health cues and display a duty of care for Emily by developing, implementing, and maintaining personal, professional, and ethical practice. I kept a mental health log and

engaged in regular communication with my supervisor who is a qualified sport and exercise

psychologist and has extensive experience with supporting mental health referrals. This was

the first consultancy case within exercise psychology, where I was working with a client who

had a previous history of mental health, so if I am being I felt anxious about how best to

support Emily during the project (Holt & Strean, 2001). However, I was grateful to lean upon

the support from my supervisor to not only effectively support Emily but help manage my

current anxious feelings (Cruickshank, Martindale & Collins, 2020; Wylleman et al. 2009). I

thought it would be useful to let my supervisor know when the consultancy sessions took

place (e.g., at 6:30pm on a Monday evening) so if I needed to discuss anything I could

contact Paula on Tuesday morning (Rejeski & Brawley, 1988; Van Raalte & Andersen,

2000). For example, during the second session, Emily opened up about her mental health

experiences and that she struggled being in social situations. She said that being at social

gatherings with a lot of people that she did not know increased her anxiety and she did not

feel comfortable. To find out more as to why she felt this way whilst being empathetic and

non-judgemental I used a lot of open questions. Emily quickly said that she had only

completed two out of the three sessions for the week, as if it was a negative thing. She said

that she would only choose to go for a walk when she knew it was not too busy outside as she

did not want anyone "staring" at her. In that moment, I wanted to find out more as to why she

felt this way, but I was worried about being presented with information that I could not

support with… potentially related to her social anxiety and that I was "going to say

something wrong" (Andersen, Van Raalte & Brewer, 2001). Many thoughts were circulating

my mind during this time, and I was worried about deviating from the session structure, but I

wanted to prioritise showing care and compassion to Emily. What made this difficult was

delivering the support aligned with my supervisor's practice philosophy and not my own, so I

questioned whether this support was "right or wrong". Self and meta-reflection allowed me to

make sense of why I was feeling this way and how I could still practice congruently within the space I was in. I knew if I wanted to feel calmer and more competent during consultancy service delivery, it was key to expand my understanding around sport psychology boundaries and mental health to best support Emily and other clients that I would work with (e.g., Fletcher & Maher, 2014; Taylor, 1994; Watson, Way & Hilliard, 2017). This is exactly what I planned to do, so I began to read and understand the BPS ethical and professional standards as well as book onto any relevant webinars to appreciate the link to applied practice through other trainees' sport/exercise experiences.

Working in an MDT team in football

During my applied work at RAFC, I engaged in consultancy from an MDT perspective with an U18s player, Jorge (a pseudonym used to protect the players' identity, for reference, see case study three), the academy manager and the strength and conditioning (S&C) coach (Nesti, 2010; Nesti & Sully, 2014). Jorge had spoken to me confidentially to say that one of the U18s coaches had been calling him names and he felt intimidated at training in front of his teammates. I could not help but notice that Jorge sounded upset. My priority was checking to make sure that Jorge was ok and see if there was anything that I could do to help (e.g., talk with him through his emotions or talk to the manager regarding these comments). I know how important confidentiality is in displaying ethical practice, but when Jorge told me this, I was unsure at first whether to act on this and tell the safeguarding officer (Andersen, 2005). Jorge said that this was not the first time the manager has made similar comments at training in front of other people and what he had noticed is that the coaches would pick on him after training by making him run laps on his own to help with weight loss. Sometimes he would hear comments such as "you're overweight", "you need to lose weight" and "you're

lazy". I straight away knew that this was bullying, and I immediately logged these comments in my own diary (separate to my reflective diary) that I usually make "quick" notes in with observations that occur at training. Then I contacted my university supervisor to discuss the best course of action. As I was still at training, I spent a bit of time thinking about what to do in this situation, so I asked Jorge if it was ok to contact the safeguarding officer in which he agreed. The safeguarding officer suggested that I make a log of these comments on the football academies portal online to monitor them. I could not help but feel sorry for Jorge, so as well as making sure that he was ok, I reassured him that I would not say anything to the coaches regarding these comments.

Reflecting further in the season…

At this point my supervisor was aware of the ethical and practical challenges that I was experiencing (examples as reflected above), and I started to see the benefit of engaging in regular supervision to talk through any challenges that I was experiencing during consultancy and just provide a general update of how it was going. Although I did not tell the coaches or manager that I knew about this bullying behaviour, I still wanted to reflect with Jorge about how it was making him feel (e.g., impact on his mental health and well-being) and presence within the football environment (Collins, Evans-Jones & O'Connor, 2013; Longstaff & Gervis, 2016). He said that he felt quite uncomfortable and was scared to make a mistake during training. If I am honest as well, I did not feel comfortable, competent and that I was in a position to be confronting the manager about this behaviour although I did not agree with the language that was being used (Andersen, 2005). However, staying in close communication with the safeguarding officer helped to seek advice about what was best to do whilst monitoring Jorge's well-being. If I am honest, I felt like I was not helping Jorge much

during this time and you could say that I was not being true to myself. All that I could do was show care, support, and interest to him and ensure the situation did not get worse.

Same player, different need for support…

Tuesday 22nd March 2022

As we were progressing throughout the season, Jorge was still engaging in consultancy sessions and quite recently, he had missed two training sessions in a row (at the start of this week). On Tuesday morning of that week, I found out that this was because there had been issues at home where the police were involved. I found this out from one of the coaches at training and I could not help but worry for Jorge. I did not know what to think and nothing was mentioned during the sessions that indicated that he was struggling with family issues at home, so this came at a surprise even though the sessions occurred weekly. After this training session, I contacted the safeguarding officer to see if I could find out more with what happened at home as I was eager to make sure that Jorge was ok. He suggested that I check in with Jorge when he returns to training, which will be on Thursday or Friday morning. After a conversation with my supervisor, then the safeguarding officer, academy manager and Jorge, the best course of action would be to refer him to an external therapist to help him effectively deal with his current family issues (Gardner & Moore, 2006; Van Raalte & Andersen, 2014). At this point, I felt like my role and boundaries were "blurred" and I had limited understanding about how or if I would still support the player during this case of referral (Roberts, Faull & Tod, 2016). Self- and meta-reflection with my supervisor looked at the current situation and how it would be best for me to take a step back from consultancy as the focus had shifted (e.g., from weight management to potentially dealing with childhood trauma). I knew that this was the right decision, to take a step back from an ethical and

practical sense as Jorge was experiencing things in his life that were out of my remit (Gardner & Moore, 2006). At the time, I did not feel competent to support Jorge fully with this but educating myself and understanding the competencies of clinical support is key (e.g., Aoyagi et al. 2012). I continued to communicate with the safeguarding officer during this time to seek advice regarding supporting Jorge (Mawn, 2012).

Individual exercise psychology client
Friday 1st July 2022

I am a regular member at my local gym, so it is not uncommon for me to speak to the personal trainers that work there. At the end of one of my recent gym sessions, one of the personal trainers, who I am friends with (so knows that I am a doctorate student and a trainee sport and exercise psychologist), came up to me and ask for some advice regarding one of his regular clients. He asked, "what are your boundaries with the work you do and mental health?" and continued to talk about one of his clients, Kate (this is a pseudonym to protect client's identity), is currently engaging in four gym sessions a week but noticing signs of overtraining. At this point, I had attended a BPS conference on "signs and symptoms of over exercising", so I had started to consider the factors that are associated with this, such as an eating disorder, mental health issues etc that were out of my remit (Davis, et al. 1997; Faulkner & Taylor, 2005; Smith et al. 2013). Visually, he noticed that Kate was fatigue during a gym session and asked if he was ok. At that point, Kate outlined the amount of exercise she was doing. For example, she was going on a 10-mile run in the morning, going to a gym class at 9am and then coming back in the evening to do a personal training session for an hour, with finishing the day with another run. This was occurring at least five days a week. We both felt concerned for her physical and mental well-being and he suggested that

she seeks support from myself. As I was only presented with a little bit of background information about Kate, I agreed to reach out and speak to her to see if I could offer her some psychological support. A couple of days later myself and Kate arranged an intake call where she outlined some comments that required a level of mindfulness an action within my duty of ethics and professional standards to communicate with my supervisor about moving forward with support (Foltz et al. 2015). For example, Kate suggested that "I always need to be on the go" and this really affected her when we went into lockdown as she felt like a "caged animal like she was looking at the same four walls". Exercise was initially used as coping mechanism to forget what was going on around in her head and to stop the negative and unhelpful thoughts for Kate. As well as "the exercise controls her instead of her controlling the exercise" and that's when she realised that she had an addiction to exercise (Berczik et al. 2012; Egorov & Szabo, 2013). This was quite overwhelming, I tried to support as best as I could displaying non-judgement, care, and compassion (Andersen, 2018) and made notes were necessary to communicate with my supervisor.

Reflection-on-action, after the intake call, I thought that I was able to support Kate with her exercising behaviour and thought processing, due to my previous experience with supporting clients with exercise and lifestyle behaviours (Dryden, 2005; Hutchison & Johnston, 2013). I spoke to Paula, my supervision about what had been said during the intake call and we discussed what the best course of action was moving forward with Kate. This supervision made me make sense of my initial thought processing of "feeling competent to support Kate with the experience and knowledge I have" to support from an external clinical therapist. I was competent with this decision, I had previously created a support network of individuals qualified as a clinical psychologist who I could refer Kate to if she was interested, instead of me continuing the support (Sly, Mellalieu & Wagstaff, 2020). I knew that this was the right

decision but in my head at this point because I was aware of what was going on for Kate, I wanted to check in with her as and when in the gym as a duty of care.

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Consultancy

Sexism and lack of buy-in of psychology

Tuesday 4th February 2020

Prior to starting the sport and exercise psychology professional doctorate, it is expected to have an applied placement secured to ensure that consistency of the four professional practice competencies is displayed. It also shows your proactivity and independence as a student, which I was eager to show in my doctorate application (through continuing my applied work at 'Be Strong'. My professional doctorate journey began in January 2020, and my role as a trainee practitioner commenced at RAFC. Not only was this my first role in a sporting organisation but it was the first time that the club had had any psychological support for the players, coaches, and parents. I felt excited but very nervous to start. I had a lot of knowledge and understanding of football (e.g., rules, regulations, current news of professional football etc) from growing up watching football with my dad, but I'd never played football before, so I felt quite overwhelmed heading into this academy environment. My exposure to football from a young age has led to my eagerness and passion for wanting to work in football. When I was unsuccessful at obtaining the applied placement at masters' level at Blackburn football club academy, I was a bit disheartened, but it left me keen to seek other football opportunities.

After speaking to the director of the academy, I received positive feedback and response about providing support to the academy and I started my role on a volunteer basis with quite a structured role from the contract but unstructured number of hours that I'd be at the academy due to agreeing on attending training as and when I was available (Nesti, 2010).

I attended the first evening Tuesday training session to watch the under 13s and under 14s teams. This was one of the first times I were meeting some members of staff and I was starting to immerse myself into the environment by getting to know the players the coaches and even briefly speak to the parents. During this training session, I ended up speaking to one of the strength and conditioning (S&C) coaches who had just finished the session with the under 13s before their training session had started. I introduced myself to him and he seemed friendly and outgoing. Then he started to ask questions about what I do and what my role consists of in general. The conversation started off normal, but it suddenly started to become intense, and I began to feel uncomfortable. The next thing he asked was, "what are you even doing here we don't need a sports psychologist". At that moment I didn't have a clue with what to say, quite honestly, I was shocked. My immediate response was to ignore the comment that he just made and continue the conversation by explaining why psychology is important in football but nervously laughing. I could not help but take it personal. I did not want to show that the comment angered me, so I just tried to carry on with the conversation as normal. At this point he started to ask questions "as a woman why would I work in football?" I responded with asking "why is this an issue?" and he replied "no, no issue, I was just asking". It is common for some female sport and exercise psychologists experience sexist attitudes and communication from colleagues (Krane & Waldon, 2020). I did not want to be a part of this conversation anymore, so I started to walk to the side line of the pitch to gather my thoughts and compose myself. I felt small. I was surprised that a staff member at the academy came out with such uneducated comments, and I felt like I did not want to confront him as it was like he did not realise that he was being sexist (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). It was this moment where I realised that I did not feel accepted or valued and I struggled to understand that this was ok at this moment in time. Sexism in sport is commonly overt yet

simultaneously unnoticed and treated less seriously (Fink, 2012). To me it felt like he was ok just openly making these comments about me as a female working in football. Like it was just a normal occurrence. I did not feel in a position to confront him either, especially with only just starting this role in the academy, I did not want to get off on the wrong foot. The S&C coach clearly interpreted what he was saying as not being and sexist (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). I started even questioning, "do I even want to be here?" and "does everyone else think this as well?". My anxieties around my own competence increased and my self-belief was pretty much non-existent.

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Tuesday 9th March 2020

Continuation of sexism attitude experiences

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This evening I was at the U15s and U16s training session observation players that I was working with on a 1-to-1 basis. At this training session there were some U18s training who were coming back from an injury, so the academy manager suggested that these players trained with the U16s to get more training and playing time as they were transitioning back on the pitch. It must have been about 30 minutes into the training session, and I saw someone from school, it must have been well over seven or eight years since I last seen this person and they said, "what are you doing here Chiara, I didn't know that you work here", so we were just talking and catching up. I told him that I work is the Academy psychologist I need turned around and said, "that's a load of rubbish, I don't believe in any of that stuff" and "I didn't think that women would have a job like that especially in football". Although, sport is perceived to be predominantly male oriented (Aicher & Sagas, 2010) I was shocked and I didn't know what to say especially from somebody that I knew from school and that suggested he works in professional football himself, I thought that he would have and understanding of what sports psychology is. I decided to just laugh it off, instead of taking it

personal this time. He clearly did not think anything wrong with the comments that he was saying (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). But the comments just kept coming and I felt like I wanted to say something this time, so I just replied, "what's wrong with being a woman working in football?" and "I've done a lot of work with players 1-to-1 to help support them with their well-being and performance here at the academy". Throughout both experiences I have realised just because somebody does not have an appreciation or understanding of psychology or even why women work in football, it does not mean that my role and responsibilities are invalid or that I should not be there. You could say that I learnt to confront people, and this necessarily is not a bad thing. I think it is important to be honest and open about how comments make you feel. Also, this does not take away my feelings of self-belief and feeling competent with my job role.

First consulting experience in football – "thrown in the deep end."

Wednesday 17th March 2020

Before the COVID-19 lockdown I had started delivering 1-to-1 consultancy to some of the players across the academy, but this was quite sporadic. Maybe because the notion of psychology was still quite new to the club and the understanding of how the support may benefit players was unknown (Pain & Harwood, 2004). Until the lockdown began, and all academy teams were forced to stop training. Players, staff, and everyone else (me included) struggled to adapt to this new way of living. Many players began to seek psychological support and to be honest I felt like I had been thrown in the deep end because there was a high demand for psychological support to be delivered to players on coaches during this challenging time (Bisciotti et al. 2020; Champ et al. 2021; Lima, Deneral & Senisik, 2021; Lundqvist et al. 2022; Schinke et al. 2020). I think as I was the first person to come into the

Academy and deliver this support the workload to help these players deal with the current challenges, such as mental health concerns, no training sessions, or games, away from friends at football and school etc was huge **(**Zago, Lovecchio & Galli, 2022). Very quickly my time was being taken up with at least 20 to 30 consultancy sessions a week. I was tired. I felt overworked. Most of my time during this period was being taken up by consultancy so I didn't even have time to consider the research element of the doctorate right now. However, I was gaining a vast amount of experience through working with age specific coaches (e.g., U12s coach) and the Head Coach to create educational content to deliver in workshops on Zoom (see appendix 2) (Chandler et al. 2014**).** With providing consulting sessions, psycho-educational workshops and record keeping some weeks I would be doing 30 to 40 hours, so it was overwhelming, especially being new to the environment and an early career trainee practitioner to consultancy. Although, finding this period challenging, I was enjoying it. It brought a sense of satisfaction and reward helping the players during this difficult period and reminding me why I am working in the psychology domain.

Moreover, this was also the first opportunity of delivery 1-to-1 consultancy to athletes as it was the beginning of my professional doctorate journey, so I experienced a lack of self-belief, competence, anxiety, and stress (Holt & Strean, 2001; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009; Tod, Hutter & Eubank, 2017**).** As it was the beginning of my journey, I was still discovering who I was as a person and a practitioner and learning about the consulting process "on the job" (Keegan et al. 2015; 2020). Although I was following Keegan's model of applied consultancy to be honest there were times where I felt like a "fraud" and I didn't know what I was doing, so I ensured the I engaged in regular supervision to reflect on my consulting experiences and any ethical challenges that I was facing during this difficult time for us all (Barney, Andersen & Riggs, 1996; Foltz et al. 2015; Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000)

as well as protecting my own mental health and wellbeing. Although, at times I felt uncomfortable during consultancy from my overarching feelings of anxiety and incompetence, I am currently grateful and appreciative the opportunity to support the players and staff within the academy. Being grateful is supported through verbal feedback of, "you're doing a great job, Chiara" and "your support is really helping me", which is clear evidence of effective service delivery (Cropley et al. 2010). I am beginning to understand more about the role of sport psychology and the part it plays within the football environment.

Thursday 25th March 2020

I decided that at this point it was useful to reflect on my current engagement with consultants there especially after the professional doctorate lecture on consultancy work and a recent tutorial with my supervisor Martin regarding my thoughts and feelings (Barney, Andersen & Riggs, 1996; Foltz et al. 2015). Due to only starting my 1-to-1 sessions with players at RAFC in January, I felt like I was fairly new to the process of how the sessions work and are structured especially, to help support the player's needs. I developed more knowledge in this lecture around the consulting process as a whole and I started to bridge the gap with this knowledge of where the disconnections were in my applied practice. This professional doctorate lecture focused more on case formulation, and it really opened up my eyes as I didn't realise the extent all of this on the sport and exercise psychology consulting process (Gardner & Moore, 2005; Keegan, 2015). At this moment in time with my consulting I had been focusing on trying to solve the problem for the player straight away, trying to build the working rapport but as soon as the client presented the problem to me, for example, "struggling with unhelpful thoughts", my initial response was to help solve this straight away (Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009). It was clear that just over two months into my consulting

experience that I didn't have the knowledge of the consulting process and to be honest I felt like I rushed into the process of delivering these especially placed in high expectations on myself to support the players immediately. Straight after the lecture, I began to research the case formulation process further, make notes I'm right an example of case formulation using the ABC model based on a previous 1-to-1 consultant said that I had completed with a player. To help support this reflection, I communicated this to Martin during the tutorial, but I also mentioned to him that I wanted to take a step back from consultancy with players for a few weeks to help reflect my current competency (it's important to note, I would still continue weekly check-ins with players to help support their well-being during this critical time). I wanted to spend some more time engaging in research around this before putting it into practise so when a situation arises again where I feel like my competence is being judged or threatened, I will be sure to have an understanding around the sports psychology consulting process prior to going ahead with a new client as this will help to increase my self-belief and feel competent with my service delivery (McEwan & Tod, 2015**).**

Monday 24th May 2020

To document progression with my sport and exercise psychology consulting knowledge and experience from a theoretical to practical learning point (mentioned in the reflective account above), I thought it would be useful to highlight this. I am currently working with a player from the academy who is an U14s player (to note this is case study two client). We are currently in the middle of the intervention process and judging on the progress with the player I am not sure at this point whether he is understanding the importance of the intervention in relation to the issues that he is struggling with. I felt quite confident with this process initially, I had learnt a lot about him in terms of his background and what the current

issues were but there was something telling me thought the work I was doing was not helping Harry at all (Fortin-Guichard et al. 2018). I still felt quite nervous before the consultancy sessions and began to judge my competence, so I knew that it was best to explain these feelings to Martin relative to the consultancy context. Harry is struggling with his self-belief, mindset and cannot help but compare himself to other players. His self-belief is impacted by irrational thoughts, for example, during a consultancy session he said, "I don't want to play for the team anymore" and "it's annoying, he's bigger than me and stronger on the ball so I think that's why I don't get picked for games". Obtaining background information from the intake, needs analysis and case formulation of Harry, I decided that Rationale Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) would be the best suited intervention to support his current needs (Dryden, 2005; Ellis, 1998). Three weeks into REBT, it seemed like Harry, just was not interested in engaging with the intervention. During the sessions, I noticed that he would get distracted easily or his responses would be quite blunt, and I started questioning myself saying, "what if I needed to change the intervention now?", "why is he not engaging in the intervention process?" and "is it because I'm not good at my job?" (Fletcher & Maher, 2013). I took this quite personal, and I was confused with what to think. Again, I reflected on this with Martin, where we discussed other potential interventions that may suit Harry. "Maybe it was not the intervention itself, maybe I am just not delivering it in a way that is accessible to Harry and that is why he is not engaging". It made sense to begin simplifying the language to help him understand the purpose of the intervention, to go back to the basics (McGannon & Smith, 2015). As well as this, I revisited the case formulation process to pick up on some of the information that he had communicated was essential at this point. I feel like REBT highlights the importance of understanding the case formulation process, especially as challenges within consultancy are very uncertain and can occur at any time so to feel

equipped as a consultant acquiring the knowledge and skills of when to adapt during this process is key (Gardner & Moore, 2005).

Monday 21st December 2020

Yesterday evening I had a meeting with the academy manager and head coach regarding the current progress and an update of my support so far this season. At this point I was still providing a great amount of support (e.g., 1-to-1 consultancy, educational workshops) whilst stretching myself across attending training sessions in the academy. I wanted to observe those players of who I am working with at training and games. So, attending training sessions for me meant that I could observe and make notes on player behaviour and then pick up on these behaviours during consulting sessions. This meant that my attendance at the club currently, was spread across 5 days most weeks. Although, I enjoy my role at the academy and it brings great satisfaction seeing players progress personally and with their performance, I do feel like too much is being asked of me and I am asking too much from myself. This is being reflected in the number of hours that I am doing in this role for free. After the meeting yesterday, I was driving home and I said to myself "when should I start asking for paid work?" but I quickly thought "no, maybe it's too soon" and "the academy can't afford it at the moment with the loss of income from COVID-19". Many trainee sport and exercise psychologists undergo this "battle" of asking placement providers for paid income and even to the extent of expenses for travelling to and from the club and I resonated with this (Hemmings, 2015). When I got home, I made a note in my diary to speak to Martin about this and see what he thought. I am grateful for the opportunity and flexibility of supporting players right now, but I do feel like I deserve some recognition with a contract or expenses paid. This was dependent on me being

open and honest to ask the academy manager and understanding that there will never be a "right time".

Wednesday 2ⁿᵈ December 2020

As part of a PhD students research study around conducting a home-based intervention programme to help increase adolescent females' physical activity levels during the COVID-19 lockdown, I was invited to deliver exercise psychology support to these adolescent females as part of the intervention (Cowley et al. 2021). This reflection is based on my current consulting experience is in exercise psychology, this was the first time that I delivered within an exercise psychology space at a 1-to-1 level and I was quite nervous as many trainee practitioners do (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015). I was feeling grateful and excited to start offering support to the participants in this intervention. I enjoy working in the exercise psychology space, since it resonates with my own exercise participation and experiences with psycho-educational workshops since completing my master's sport and exercise psychology placement at Be Strong a few years ago. However, at this moment in time, I was feeling quite anxious as I was delivering based on the philosophy of practice that wasn't my own (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004).

The intervention was a 6-week programme, and it was my responsibility to deliver a psychological support session to six adolescent females once a week. A structure to the programme is highlighted in case study one. The aim of consultancy consisted of delivering support aligned with the needs supportive counselling approach and specific behaviour change techniques to support these participants (Teixeira et al. 2020). At this point, the 3-day training from my supervisor, Paula, on the needs supportive counselling approach finished

yesterday. If I am honest, although I have already engaged in consultancy with players from RAFC, I am feeling quite confused and nervous about going ahead with the consultancy sessions for The HERizon Project. I do feel out of my comfort zone as I will be using an approach that I am unfamiliar with. Also, I am in the process of becoming aware and understanding fully each step of the consulting process (e.g., what an intake session looks like) with my work at RAFC (Keegan, 2010; 2015) so I do feel like this is an additional concern to be anxious about ahead of The HERizon Project. The next steps will involve sharing with my supervisor how I am feeling and professional doctorate peers who are also delivering on the project to manage any unhelpful thoughts.

Reflecting on paid vs unpaid work

Tuesday 11th May 2021

So, I have been delivering psychological support to RAFC for 1.5 seasons, and I felt like it was time to ask for a paid role at the club. I have thought about asking for this in the past, but nothing ever really came from it. What I mean by that is I felt quite nervous to ask in case the academy said no. I was aware that the manager did not have the resources or money available to provide me with a paid contract. So, to be honest my way of dealing with it was to just forget I asked and just carry-on providing support. However, I felt like this was the right time as I was one of (if not the only) person still on a volunteer contract (Hemmings, 2015). If I am honest, I was quite nervous to do this. I put this off for so long because I was worried about the outcome, so I just kept putting it off. I tried to psych myself up to ask the Academy manager about potential paid contract and I just kept saying to myself "I mean the worst that could happen was that the manager would say no". But I knew that if the manager would say

no, I probably would just carry on with providing support, which I did not want to do because I felt like I had become part of the academy and I deserved some recognition for that.

One Tuesday evening at a training session I decided to just bite the bullet and ask the manager if there was opportunity next season for a paid role. It took me at least 4 months to do this (which was near the end of the current season) and I was thinking long-term for my development and continuation within football, going into the 2021-2022 season. Reflecting on my progress, I had delivered a variety of sport and exercise psychology topics aligned with the EPPP and 5 Cs to the U9s-U18s players, parents, and coaches. As well as supporting players during 1-to-1 consultancy sessions. I had dedicated a lot of time to the academy, and I felt like I was at a point where I deserved to be recognised and valued for the work that I do.

I was walking up to the manager on the training pitch and it was around 7:45pm. My anxiety was overpowering, my heart rate was rising, and I was breathing quite heavily. At this point, my whole body was shaking. I did not want to ask for paid work straight away, but I also knew the longer that I would leave it to ask during the conversation, the less likely that I was going to ask. Last week I asked one of the coaches for advice and he suggested that it was right that I should be receiving some type of payment whether that is with the travel expenses or on an hourly basis. I had in my head 20 hours a week (a part-time basis) that I wanted to ask the manager, as all the part-time staff at the academy were on. When I finally asked, the manager said that "he would think about it" as 20 hours was too much, but he might be able to offer 15 hours. I felt happy inside, I was "buzzing" to be honest. I felt like the support that I had been providing had finally paid off and the staff at the academy were finally starting to see the value in the work I was providing. This was a great challenge when I first started my work at RAFC as I struggled with the "buy-in" of staff (Malone et al. 2019). I just wanted to

share with both my supervisors this good news. I felt like I had finally been given a purpose for the work that I was doing, and this would help me to have more structure to my working week provide an applied consultancy and support as I was told that I would have to document my hours every week.

<div align="center">

Paid vs unpaid work reflection

Wednesday 9th June 2021

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I think that I have learnt a huge amount when considering paid vs unpaid opportunities with work already (Williams, 2003). Just as I felt confident enough to start offering my consultancy services at a fee, after the intake session with a potential client, it was asked if I could provide the service for a lower price. At this point I was feeling quite frustrated and, in the past, I would have just automatically said yes to this to "add" to my consultancy hours. I sort of had the mindset of "the more experience I get, the better I'll be with consulting". I did not want to do that now. It was an external group CPD session, titled, "cost of consulting sessions" that gave me the confidence to start saying no if necessary and take pride in the work I do. However, instead of completely saying no to this potential client, maybe it is not within their budget, but they still recognise the value of what the support that I can offer. I do believe that sports psychology should be accessible to everyone. I spoke to this potential client regarding what they can afford and what I can provide in return. Working collaboratively to come to an agreement and compromise. For example, instead of offering 6 to 8 sessions of weekly psychological support, it was decided between us both that four sessions suited his budget comfortably. I was proud of myself with how I navigated this initial "challenge" of paid work, as it would have been something that I avoided or just provided for free. This is especially during private practice as I can struggle with just wanting

to help people and place others as a priority before myself… which sometimes results in being disadvantageous for my own health and well-being. Instead, working with the potential client's needs and available budget at the time meant that I could still offer psychological support, through being adaptable of how best to support them within the given timeframe (Quartiroli et al. 2019; Roper. 2008).

Exercise psychology client – private practice

Sunday 23rd October 2022

Today was the last consultancy session with Eleanor. I knew this was coming as I felt prepared for her exit of consultancy. To be honest I felt happy and satisfied with the progress that she had made as we began to reflect on everything that she had achieved over the last 8-months. Eleanor was the first 1-to-1 consultancy client that I had in the exercise psychology space (with my own private practice). At first, I was hesitant on how best to support her due to previously being friends with Eleanor at high school. I did not think it initially at the time, but it was challenging trying to balance a personal friendship and professional working rapport. As well as understanding the boundaries with supporting weight loss and she previous period with an eating disorder during her teen years. Throughout this consultancy, there were times where I needed to lean on Paula's, my supervisor's, expertise, and knowledge if a referral was necessary. I was mindful of this from the beginning and made a note of any behaviours that stood out and needed to be acted on if out of my remit. For example, during one of the earlier consultancy sessions, Eleanor said *"I just feel like I hate my body and I don't want to fall back into the mindset of I can't eat this or I can't eat that".* This consultancy taught me a lot from a personal and professional perspective, such as self

and spatial-awareness, self-belief, and adaptability to Eleanor's needs' and it strengthened my passion for working in exercise psychology to support personal development and behaviour lifestyle change (Horn & Smith, 2018). Partly because I have been through lifestyle behaviour change myself and worked with personal trainers who tend not to create a psychologically safe space to "listen" to you if you have had a bad day or eaten off track. Understanding what worked and did not work for me as a client of a personal trainer in the past when wanting to change my own lifestyle and eating behaviours was a useful practice to recognise what works for me as a trainee practitioner.

Applied consultancy progress

Friday 20th January 2023

So, I have just finished the meeting of my final annual review with both Martin and Paula. During this review we all spoke a lot about my interests and experience with applied consultancy. I feel like since I started this full-time teaching role, I have not had the opportunity to engage as much consultancy within sport as I would have liked to. My consultancy experience within exercise psychology in private practice occurred weekly or bi-weekly with some clients and I was quite happy with the progress. However, I could not help but feel like a "fraud" that I was engaging in a full-time psychology and football lecturing role within academia but not currently demonstrating my applied consultancy skills in an applied football environment as much (Collins, Evan-Jones & O'Connor, 2013). Although, I do not feel like this lack of consultancy within sport was impacting my teaching knowledge and contributing to enriching the student experience, as my previous consultancy at RAFC was plentiful. This was clearly evidenced in my case studies for the doctorate, reflections, and reference with lecture content. For example, when necessary (dependent upon the topic)

during lectures I would ask the students to engage in group discussions and critical thinking of example case studies that I have experienced as a trainee, such as ethical and practical considerations as a neophyte practitioner, being a female working in a male dominant sport, increasing the buy-in for sport psychology and just general challenging demands that occur. These applied examples provided context and insight for the students to use their existing and current knowledge to critically think and problem solve regarding what they would do if they were in my shoes or experienced a similar scenario in future applied work.

With that in mind, I just could not help but compare myself to my colleagues who were not only more experienced than me in every aspect of sport and exercise psychology from an academic lens but were consistently engaging in applied work from a broader organisation or individual level. Being part of the Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) research group and both ASP and Science and Football (S&F) staff meetings solidified these feelings. I felt like I was going to become incompetent and almost "forget" what it means to be an applied practitioner working in football. Applied practice has always been somewhat part of my identity and it was making me feel uneasy that this was not being maintained due to other responsibilities. Sometimes, I do feel like I criticise myself too much and feel like I should be doing 100% of applied, research and academia work without considering the practicalities and demands of how manageable this is. I have learnt across the course of the doctorate programme that there will be times where I engage in more applied or research work at certain time points. Most of my applied work came at the beginning of the doctorate, the research was sporadic throughout and much of my teaching towards the latter. This is normal. Both Martin and Paula were highly supportive of my physical and emotional wellbeing on wanting to take on too much to fulfil this. I appreciated this support as it helped me to understand the feelings of being overwhelmed and the personal criticism (Watson et al. 2004). However, I did let both

know that I am mindful of when and where I can "pick up" this applied practice and not let time pass me by with becoming almost non-existent. I was thinking of ways to network within the current pool of staff and peers that I worked with on a regular basis to potentially build upon this experience. As well as actively seek networking opportunities through my social media platforms of LinkedIn and Twitter. This annual review meeting encouraged me to reflect on what my current priorities are, such as completing the remaining of my professional doctorate work and current responsibilities with my full-time job role. Although almost four months into my full-time role I was still becoming familiar with *what it meant to be a lecturer* but also enhancing my current understanding of specific roles and responsibilities with marking, supporting students, and delivering teaching content effectively (Agha, 2017; Keegan, 2010). I just needed to be mindful of how much work I was willing to take on moving forward and complete to the best of my abilities whilst still maintaining to my emotional well-being, mental health, and happiness.

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Dissemination

Sessional cover experiences

Thursday 21ˢᵗ October 2021

My first sessional cover teaching session that I taught face-to-face was yesterday and I noticed that I was heavily reliant on the PowerPoint lecture slides. I wanted to make sure that all the content was delivered in a standardised way to help with the students learning, so you could say I was heavily using a teacher-led approach. Due to my lack of teaching experience and being quite new to this lecturing space, I felt comfortable and safe in doing so. I felt in control of what I was delivering and as I knew the content thoroughly in my head there was no way of messing up or looking like a fraud. About a week before this lecture, I visited the lecture hall to become familiar with the space and to ensure that there were no technical issues (e.g., the sound on the laptop and computer were working, that I could log into CANVAS ok, the connection of my PowerPoint slides to the projector were in working order etc) as well as the sizing of the lecture hall (e.g., how the seating structure was set out and the path for me to walk up and down the lecture hall if needed). I thought this would make me feel more comfortable on the day but as soon as I walked into the lecture hall, I felt like the pressure had got to me straight away I felt nervous, anxious, and overwhelmed with the experience as the students started to come into the lecture hall. Within 5 minutes there were about 150 to 200 student eyes just beaming on me (Bachman & Bachman, 2011). It felt like the same experience as when I conducted my master's presentation, it did not seem to matter how many students were there. I spent weeks and weeks preparing the content to make sure that I felt confident and comfortable with what I was delivering. I learnt from my masters' presentation not to prescriptively memorise the lecture content but ensure that I understood fully what I was teaching. However, as soon as I was all ready to start my mind just went

blank. I tried to compose myself by practicing my breathing and taking a sip of my water, but it just did not seem to work (Connolly & Williamon, 2004; Vealey, 2007). I was just surviving the lecture at this point and wanted it to be over. All I could think about was whether I was good enough to be teaching (Carrilo & Baguley, 2011).

The lecture was timetabled to last two hours, but it ended up only lasting for 45-minutes. I knew as soon as I got halfway through the lecture that only 25 minutes had gone by and at this point it was not even time to give the students a break as a halfway point. I said to myself "I just want the ground to swallow me up". I spoke too quickly; my palms were sweating, and I could feel my heart rate increasing. I knew that I would feel anxious, but I thought that the lecture would have been better than what it turned out to be by only lasting for 45 minutes. I could not help but be self-critical. I felt embarrassed as I remembered when I was undergraduate student and lectures finished earlier than expected I sort of questioned "is that it?" Now I have experienced this as a lecture now, I emphasised with those that have previously taught me and it helped me to realise what challenges neophyte teachers experience (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz & Santiague, 2017). Supervision helped me to capture what worked well (although I did not think that anything did!) and what could be improved on next time I teach.

Teaching progression

First teaching as a module leader in my new role

Monday 26th September 2022

Monday 26th September 2022 was the first teaching session of my maternity cover 10-month lecturing role in Psychology and Football and as a module leader. This module that I was

leading was for Level 5 S&F students, during semester one of the 2022/23 academic year (September – December 2022). The module consisted of a 2-hour lecture followed by a 2-hour seminar every Monday morning for 6-weeks for the psychology block, then the performance analysis block would commence. I delivered my first lecture and seminar to these students today. The PowerPoint lecture and seminar slides were already made available to the students prior to the lecture. Although this was the first time meeting these students I did not feel as nervous as I usually would before lecturing in the past. Especially when I think back to my first lecture during my sessional cover experience (see previous reflection). I was the most nervous about whether the lecture would last for the two-hours as it was only an introductory lecture to the module, and I was not sure about what the students' engagement would be like (Bachman & Bachman, 2011; Quaye, Harper & Pendakur, 2019). Here, my unique personality and presence as a teacher is fundamental to student learning. As the students entered the lecture hall, I started off asking them their name so I could get to know them from the get-go and show interest in who they are. The students respected this. There were smiles and engagement from each student as they walked in. Reflecting on my previous experience with the first face-to-face sessional cover lecture I would just hide behind the computer screen and most of the I did not even say hi to the students when they walked in. This progression shows the development within my self-belief, personal values, and authenticity as a lecturer (Kreber, 2010; Kreber et al. 2007; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004).

I was excited for this lecture and to deliver on this module, it was titled "current issues in science and football" and the topics I was teaching coincided with my theoretical and practical experience as a trainee, such as an introduction into sport psychology, mental skills training (MST), the role of an applied sport psychologist etc. All topics were relative to the

football environment that I have applied experience in. Although, the lecture this morning was just an introduction into the module and the role of sport psychology in football, it gave me an insight into which students were passionate about sport psychology and what knowledge the students already had. For the seminar, I planned various case study tasks based on my own applied experiences for the students and I was eager to see what their thoughts were. The seminar space allowed me to delve into discussion of these tasks and I knew this was where I could support with learning. I felt comfortable and autonomous in combining my previous teaching, research, and applied consultancy experiences to enrich the student experience (Wylleman et al. 2009). I felt like I connected with the students pretty much straight away. What helped was that this was not a huge group so throughout the lecture, I could dot myself around the room to chat to different groups of students. My aim was to discover how the students learn, stay engaged and relate to the content and enhance their learning, rather than reading from PowerPoint slides, which I feel like I was already doing quite well (Cook-Sather, Bovil & Felten, 2014; Exley, 2004). About halfway through the lecture, I spoke to a group of female students who said that some of this lecture content was similar to what was learnt last year. In the past, I would have panicked about this and maybe went away from the lecture thinking that I have not contributed to the students learning but I emphasised that this module was an enhancement to the knowledge these students had learnt last year. What made this lecture and in fact all lectures on this module unique is the addition of my own personal experiences as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist working in a football academy setting. Hopefully, my unique experience would contribute to the students' understanding and translate theoretically for their assignment that was due in six weeks' time. Although, reflecting on my first day teaching this group and it was my first lecture in my new role that I felt like my dream was coming true. However, I could not help but feel the pressure of managing my very own module for the first time. I was

extremely happy with how the lecture went. I know that there is always room for progress, so I emailed my colleague who was co-delivering on this module (very experienced with teaching this group and in general) to share my experiences and ask questions regarding the module. Evidence of peer learning from other colleagues and supervisors' expertise would contribute to maximising and enriching the student experience and become more aligned with my teaching pedagogy (Boud & Cohen, 2014; Byrne, Brown & Challen, 2010; van Rensburg, Mayers & Roets, 2016).

Thursday 23rd February 2023

I was challenged during a doctorate taught session which I was teaching. I did not understand what philosophy was in general and my own practice philosophy.

On Thursday 23rd February 2023 during a full-cohort lecture, I was invited to present my case study 3 for the professional doctorate students of sport and exercise psychology (my course peers) around how I navigated an MDT relationship to support player weight management. Prior to the session when I was creating the PowerPoint slides, I felt excited to deliver this consultancy case as I found it to be the most complex case I have experienced thus far. It would be the first time to try and communicate it from "start to finish" to my course peers to make sense of it in my own mind and hopefully provide a helpful insight into my development. I was responsible for navigating an MDT working rapport (see case study three in my portfolio for reference), setting role boundaries and engaging in consistent communication. I experienced hierarchical conflict, interests of power relating to decision making and understanding who the client is. So, I was really looking forward to delivering this case to the professional doctorate students especially the newer cohort who had only just

started the programme. I thought this session would be a useful opportunity for the students to reflect on their own knowledge and journey to discuss what they would do if they were presented with a similar case. I presented the case in chronological order of the ethical challenges that arose along the way, relative to Keegan's Sports psychology applied consultancy framework model (Keegan, 2015). However, when discussing my practice philosophy, I got confused, I could feel myself panicking and sweating and I think some of the students picked up on this. I was asked the question of what my practice philosophy was and if the delivery of my theoretical framework would have changed if the client was an adult rather than an U18s player. I felt as though I could not answer the question accurately as I could not make sense of it in my own head. I defaulted to the theoretical orientation first rather than what my individual core beliefs and values were. I mean it sounds simple when you look at the practice philosophy model (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004) but I suppose this is how I've been approaching consultancy by considering what theoretical framework I am going to implement first. In this case, I implemented the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in a practitioner led mode, due to Jorge obtaining a limited understanding and knowledge of how to change (Gustafsson, Lundqvist & Tod, 2017; McArdle & Moore, 2012).

As this session was a joint delivery with my supervisor Nick, he could see that I felt uncomfortable and challenged during this moment and so I wanted to arrange supervision to discuss my practice philosophy to explore where the disconnections were. Straight after the taught session finished, I began researching practice philosophy and reflected on my previous consultancy notes. I was eager and keen to understand what I was missing but I was also a panicking and felt like a 'fraud' and that I had gone through my professional doctorate journey without fully understanding who I am as a person and what it means to be a

practitioner, although this is common with trainee and neophyte sport psychology practitioners (Collins, Evan-Jones & O'Connor, 2013; Hings et al. 2020; Tod, 2007) This explains why I struggled to provide an adequate answer when my supervisor was curious about understanding my consulting decisions in The HERizon project and case study two. The confusion with my unfulfilled teaching pedagogy resulted in struggling initially to provide effective teaching, for example, "not knowing" how to deal with awkward silences, experiencing a "mind blank" within lectures and becoming overly nervous and talkative that the teaching session only lasted for 45 minutes instead of 2 hours (Ogeyik, 2017). This was evident not only with decisions during consultancy and teaching but throughout my personal life. I began to reflect on what it means to be "Chiara". I spent some time to unpick what values and beliefs resonated with me and how these beliefs could potentially present themselves in "Chiara's social world". I remember being introduced to the personal values activity in the professional practice module during my masters' programme, so I did have a general idea of values that I found important. I decided to arrange a meeting with my supervisor to reflect on these. I knew that discussing these values and my experiences attached to them may feel uncomfortable, but it was essential to connect with who I was. During supervision with Nick, I gained a valuable insight into his own expertise, development and experiences of becoming authentic with himself (Foltz et al. 2015; Olsson et al., 2017; Tod, Eubank & Hutter, 2017).

Bringing my teaching experience together
Wednesday 12th April 2023

To reflect on a few core beliefs in relation to teaching; the past experiences of teaching and evaluating the effectiveness of student learning has influenced my present teaching. My

desire to help students develop academically and personally is enhanced through an adaptable style of teaching, such as facilitating group tasks, case study problem-solving and personal disclosure of my applied sport and exercise experiences have contributed to the teacher-student working rapport. I am a firm believer that the formation of new sport and exercise psychological knowledge evolves from a combination of both theoretical and practical encounters (Anderson, 2022). Understanding my internal beliefs and values of growth requires empathy and connection, empathy in the working relationship needs to be central, adverse scenarios provide an opportunity to grow, change and develop, the past influences the present, a desire to help individuals develop as a person and a performer and personal disclosure helps at times with empathy. Trust, compassion, empathy, and growth allow me to uphold my beliefs to establish the practitioner-client rapport and deliver support through a flexible practitioner and client led mode of practice dependent on the context (Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). Adopting this style of teaching has helped me to understanding my teaching pedagogy and tailor teaching to the students needs. For example, by setting student-teacher expectations and postulating that learning is a collaboration and creating an environment where it is ok to be interactive allows students to be challenged, grow and be themselves.

Reflecting on my experiences within teaching, from delivering group presentations at undergraduate level to completely 'blanking out' due to nerves and anxiety during my Masters' presentation to admiring where I am today… I never thought I would be saying that I am a full-time university lecturer and that I have quite a bit of experience planning and delivering lectures to Level 4-8 students. I used to be scared and so nervous presenting in front of others because I was worried about what other people thought of me, especially my course peers. All I could think was whether what I was saying was "correct", if what I was

saying showed that I was incompetent and if I would be judged or "found out" to be a fraud (Williams & Andersen, 2012). Looking back now it makes sense that these feelings and thoughts I encountered relating to my competence were existing as I lacked authenticity (Tod & Eubank, 2020). I did not know who I was as a person so, as Chiara, never mind who I was as a lecturer and my behaviours were not consistent with who I am. I had an idea about my core beliefs and values, but I had never really explored these properly to understand how they inform my work (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004).

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Research

Systematic review process

Thursday 6th February 2020

Today, I was sat in my second professional doctorate lecture, which was focused on the research related assignments required for the programme. It was refreshing and valuable to listen to one of the current third year student reflections of his experiences throughout the

doctorate but also more specifically to the systematic review. I mean during MSc I submitted a systematic review assignment on mindfulness, but all the papers were provided to us, so I had never conducted one myself before. I felt quite uneasy and anxious even thinking about this assignment as I began to "reflect" back to my masters' programme, as I know how much I struggled with it (Knowles et al. 2007**).** This lecture felt quite overwhelming and confusing to be honest especially as it was a huge jump from the masters' programme and because none of the assignments had any deadline dates. Panic and worry quickly appeared and I was thinking "how am I going to stay on top of all these assignments?" and "this is completely different to the masters' programme; it is going to be challenge". One comment that stuck with me from the student was how he started his systematic review first out of any other assignments because he knew how much he would struggle with it and straight away I knew that this would be the case for me (Hutter et al. 2017). I went away from the lecture, and started to explore what a systematic review was and potential topics that I would like to look at. I felt like I was being proactive and taking his feedback on board. At this time point, it just made sense to explore areas within football psychology as I had just begun my applied placement at RAFC. This encouraged me to begin reflecting on my current applied experiences and highlight any topics of interest, such as confidence, competitive anxiety and communication between players and staff in academy football. I was ultimately looking for a strong association between practice informed research (Champ et al. 2020; Winter & Collins, 2015**).**

As I was interested in competitive anxiety, MT and just the notion of academy football in general, this enlightened me to draft an email to send to both Paula and Martin to start exploring these ideas and see which route I could take for my review. Although at this point, I was only conducting a search around ideas and topics of interest for the systematic review,

and my understanding of the systematic review process was quite limited. I felt excited and determined to start this piece of research, but I was mindful of balancing my time with consultancy and research too (Waite & Pettit, 1993).

Tuesday 4th August 2020

It did not come to a surprise reflecting back onto the lecture in early February when it was suggested to start the systematic review first. I decided to take his advice on board and start this first before any other piece of work. I have recognised how valuable peer experience is and I began to emphasise with these experiences, which helped to be proactive, plan and progress with the systematic review despite its challenges (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014; Hutter et al. 2017; Timson, 2006). It has been a tough six months working on it. After much discussion with both Paula and Martin, Paula decided to take the role to support me with this review but as part of the research team, another member of the sport and exercise psychology team kindly joined. I decided to explore MT, MH, and resilience in football, which was generated mostly from my applied experiences of working in football. To be honest, these terms, especially resilience appeared to be used frequently within football whilst I was on placement specifically. For example, I have heard the manager shout, "you're not mentally tough enough" and "he's not resilient on the pitch and it shows" to several players (e.g., Crust, Nesti & Littlewood, 2010; Wieser & Thiel, 2014). These terms seem to get thrown about too much and I wanted to find out the meaning attached… whether there was a "danger" of misusing these terms in how the players may perceive for their own developing. Immersing myself in the organisational culture literature (e.g., Henriksen, Storm & Larsen, 2017; Nesti et al. 2012). I was keen to explore these psychological constructs further. After examining the literature, MH was coming across quite like MT and resilience, it seemed that

all these terms are being used interchangeably within the football environment. There did not seem to be a distinction in the literature relative to the level of football that was played (e.g., professional, or recreational). The similarities were confusing to understand at first, so my next steps were crucial in posing questions to my research team and unpicking any previous knowledge or experience they may have.

Further reflection with my systematic review
Friday 29th July 2022

In July 2022, 2.5 years later and I am still working on my systematic review. I am yet to complete my first draft. At this point, it is not like I felt like giving up, but I am for certain becoming frustrated with this piece of work. For some reason that I just keep putting the review off and I have done for a while. There have been several times where I have felt as though I have been asking "silly questions" when seeking support on certain aspects of the systematic review that I did not understand (e.g., what a meta-study is). My own self-belief and internal thoughts were creeping in at this point. I felt like I should not be asking certain questions as I should have already acquired the understanding a couple of years ago before I started or at least in the first six months of working on the review… well in my own head anyway! I just wanted to avoid the systematic review and forget about it by carrying on with or starting other pieces of work. Sometimes, I am guilty of starting pieces of work and not finishing them straight away. I tend to overwhelm myself with the "bigger picture" rather than breaking the work down into smaller chunks to ease my anxiety levels and just piece of mind! I know that this is not effective for my professional development or well-being! I am willing to work on this, but the first steps are all about being open with myself through keeping up with reflecting and my supervisors about where I am currently at and how I will

get to a comfortable position of understanding my review. I have a view in mind of what my next steps are. I am going to revisit the structure of what I need to do and simplify it, such as looking at "what is a meta-study?" and "what is meta-theory?" to fully understand the concepts before "re-attempting" to continue my work with it (Patterson et al. 2001). I know that this will take persistence, time and concentration and blocking out a big chunk of time is needed to progress!

Tuesday 7th March 2023

My engagement with the systematic review has been quite a journey. It was the first piece of research that I started and the last piece of work I completed. As mentioned, prior, I experienced many challenges with this research engagement, such as the inconsistencies in my research team, one member of the research team became ill within the initial period and a lack of understanding and support with the systematic review process at times. As well as challenges that were out of my control, personally, this created heightened feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and uncertainty regarding the systematic review process. However, the systematic review has been the most challenging but enjoyable piece of work that I have conducted! Providing me with not only the skills, knowledge, and capability of publishing my own review (whether it be this one or additional reviews that I work on in the future) but confidence in supporting major project students on their learning and developing with a systematic review during my current teaching role.

Empirical paper one reflection on recruitment

Thursday 17th November 2022

In July 2022, I started my recruitment for empirical paper one with 12 participants from 'Be Strong' and at this point I am going through the process of analysing the data from the interviews. I feel like now is the time to reflect on some critical learning points from the data collection period. I conducted 12 qualitative semi structured interviews on Microsoft teams with 'Be Strong' members using purposeful sampling. During conducting the interviews, I felt like I encountered a positive experience overall, especially with grasping meaningful and purposeful reflections of identity and lifestyle transformation but that has not come with some challenges, which have made the research process a little bit more difficult than expected! For example, I simply struggled to get in-depth responses out of some participants! At times, these responses were quite blunt, and I found it difficult throughout the interviews to ask the members to expand on their answers. I did use probes throughout the interviews to help the participants elaborate on the questions being asked but even then, I felt like at times, it was a bit of a push during some interviews to ask participants to elaborate on what had been said. I was forcing further response. Reflecting on this process, it was challenging to build that initial rapport and connection with some of the participants and encourage them to open up (Knowles et al. 2007; Quartiroli et al. 2021). I do not know if this is because of a combination of things (e.g., interview conducted on Teams, comfortability with the members placing themselves back to "who they were" before the identity and lifestyle journey etc). It is strange and difficult to comprehend because I rarely struggle with this from an applied consultancy perspective even from an online perspective! I probably am just making assumptions here… I was familiar with some of the participants that I interviewed based on my previous applied consulting experiences at 'Be Strong', thus, as the connection with these participants had already been built and the interview was easier to navigate. The interviews just seemed to flow easily. Body language and the language used in some participants

responses implied that there was a struggle with talking about themselves. For example, "tell me about your experiences with exercise from when you first started 'Be Strong' to where you are today?". Additionally, some responses required the participants to reflect on their identity, their body image, their experiences with weight loss so I noticed this was difficult at times for participants (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). It was important to create the time and space for participants to discuss these areas if they wished to do so. I also struggled to ask the participants further questions without feeling like I was forcing the interview and I felt quite uncomfortable during these moments… I rushed past them to the next question… similarities with this approach in teaching. It was a clear indicator that I lacked an element of competence and belief in my own abilities, and you could say made the interviews quite "prescribed".

Another reflection was relative to some of the questions that I was asking the participants… I felt like I asked them in a way that was long-winded instead of just getting start to the point of the question. Being clear, concise, and direct was key. I needed to work on this. Again, I tend to "waffle" and just do this in everyday life as well so it's not surprising that I struggled with this during the interviews! At times participants had asked me what the question meant or if I could repeat the question, as the participants had felt quite confused. Reflecting on action this feedback from the participants indicated that I simply should not overcomplicate the questions and just ask the questions in its simplest form. There were numerous times where I tended to ask more than one question at the same time, so participants were unaware of which questions to focus on again leading to confusion (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Conducting interviews give me valuable insights for when I conduct empirical paper two with "challenges" or just improvements to consider from a personal and professional researcher perspective. For example, the direct language I am using, my communication style and to manage any unhelpful thoughts where overthinking and overcomplicating the research

process might occur… also an opportunity to reflect on these behaviours in my broader life interacting with others.

Empirical paper two

Monday 20th February 2023

This morning I had a supervision meeting with Nick regarding my current empirical paper two ideas… I feel like I am in a comfortable position and happy with the progress I am making. Over the last year this empirical paper has improved greatly from initially wishing to focus on all members of staff in a football academy with an unfocused aim and rationale to diving into the current research and really focusing on where the gaps are. To be honest, this is a BIG relief because I did feel like in the past year, I just was not making efficient progress with this piece of work. It made sense to directly focus on football academy coaches only, initially. For example, initially, I wanted to address the experiences of coaches and support staff in a focus group regarding their multidisciplinary team effectiveness on player development within a football academy. It is all about finding the golden thread. After engagement with some critical reflection during supervision I felt like I finally found a gap and golden thread within the research data as I spent a lot of time during these past couple of weeks to delve into the literature (Foltz et al. 2015; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). I feel relieved. I feel excited to conduct this piece of research. My aim is to look at successful and unsuccessful experiences of coaches specifically around the interdisciplinary connectedness between academy coaches exploring experiences from two football academies within the UK. I was also looking forward to recruiting coaches from two academies, one with which is external to my applied experiences. Although, my progression with the study rationale, exploring previous literature and my understanding as to how this can be added to the field,

my current frustration lies with recruitment. I know that this stage of research cannot be controlled, being heavily reliant on when the participants are available to conduct the interviews, but I do feel like with the point as to where I'm at in the professional doctorate, in February 2023… I cannot help but feel stressed. My nerves and anxiety arise from not knowing whether this piece of work will be completed to a high publishable standard within the time frame that I have set myself to finish the doctorate… but I guess that is my negative thoughts talking again! As a researcher in the past, when recruiting for qualitative data it is common to feel like you are "annoying" or "pushing" participants to complete the participant consent form and try to arrange an interview time that is best suited to their schedule, so I was aware of this when recruiting (Haberl & Peterson, 2006; McDougall, Nesti & Richardson, 2015). However, I am looking forward to starting the recruitment and uncovering participants experiences around this phenomenon as I believe this topic area has great potential from a practical and theoretical lens!

Research philosophy

Friday 17th March 2023

If I am quite honest, I know that this reflection has appeared quite late on in my professional doctorate journey (and I am super critical) but it is simply to do with the fact that I have only just become aware of my research philosophy now. What is refreshing to reflect on is that I do feel like it "clicked" and started to make sense when I delved deeper into who "Chiara" is in my personal life and applied consultancy. I am grateful for the opportunity to explore this during my supervision meetings with Nick during our recent tutorial meetings. What helped to start to bridge these conversations and start to make these connections was being open about where I am currently at and understand the power of being vulnerable. I know that

increasing awareness of my research philosophy starts with me. It is the belief about the ways in which data of a phenomenon should be collected analysed, but I could only conduct this effectively when I understood who I was as a person, practitioner, and teacher. Reflecting on action with my research journey from my undergraduate studies highlighted a common trend of adopting qualitative focused approaches (Knowles et al. 2007). Consistent with my philosophy of practice, I believe growth occurs from empathy and trust of a developing rapport with clients as well as with research participants (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). Exploring participants experiences has coincided with my practitioner philosophy and identity. For example, undertaking qualitative semi-structured interviews allowed for honest, person and in-depth experiences of the topic phenomenon to be captured and interpreted through my theoretical and practical knowledge. Although, my philosophy and internal beliefs and values were not uncovered until recently, it makes sense as to why I chosen these decisions in research. Just because this understanding and aware came quite late, does not mean that the decisions I made in research did not put the participants best interests and the research purposes at the forefront of my work. My inner and stable values of compassion, empathy, trust, and growth meant that I felt competent with delivering semi-structured interviews and analysing using qualitative methods (e.g., thematic and narrative analysis) through observing participant behaviours and interpreting their experiences through a subjective lens. It comes as no surprise that this is where my research philosophy currently falls. To be honest, it's an amazing feeling starting to piece the puzzle together with my applied and research philosophy! I am more of a subjective constructivist and interpretivist researcher. I enjoy using a "Socratic style of questioning" which is consistent with my applied practice philosophy (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). Adopting an interpretivist epistemology, considers the set of perspectives through phenomenology and narrative analysis, which is aligned with my research philosophy (e.g., Garrick, 1999; Smith

& Sparkes, 2009). I understand the importance of ontology and epistemology adopting social constructivism to help understand research at a social, cultural, and historical level within participants' social worlds. I am confident in the research that I have conducted whilst studying on the professional doctorate and I am excited to continue my journey within research moving forward! I have found a real passion with conducting research… which is a huge advantage of my professional doctorate journey and progression along the way. The use of supervision with Martin and Nick has helped to excel this passion within research and it is exciting to begin thinking about publishing my pieces of work with potentially continuing to work in an academic space.

Empirical Paper two recruitment
Tuesday 9th May 2023

Now all the data collection is complete with seven semi-structured interviews across two football academies, reflecting on my engagement with the research process I am happy that recruitment "fell through" and potentially did not go to plan last summer. The research study has worked out better than I could have imagined, and I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to open up new and contemporary avenues for the importance of interdisciplinary connectedness within football. Research informed practice would be useful here especially when engaging to future consultancy… for example, reflecting on my previous research experiences when completing case study three, around the navigation of a multidisciplinary team (MDT) relationship whilst supporting weight management and player development in an U18s academy scholarship player. One of the reasons why the MDT working relationship broken down and appeared inconsistent throughout consultancy comes down to all disciplines working in silo rather than from an interdisciplinary perspective. If all members of the

working team (myself as the psychologist, the S&C coach, the academy manager, and Jorge) worked from an interdisciplinary perspective, sharing knowledge and expertise but viewing it as a tool to understand and support each other, maybe the support and communication may have aligned to the consulting needs (Knowles et al. 2007). The semi-structured interviews have opened my eyes up as a researcher to critically think and reflect on the fundamental nature of interdisciplinary work. It involves trust, openness, and honesty that all disciplines within the football academy or working team to cooperate and collaborate effectively. There is limited research on the interdisciplinary connectedness within football, specifically not from an academy football perspective… so switching my focus from collaborating these perspectives with coaches and support staff may have initially been focusing and overwhelming. Here, it may be useful to reflect on my empirical paper two findings and begin to make connections with my experiences from applied practice within football when I was working at RAFC. From the research study, it was identified that the successful experiences generated interdisciplinary work and the unsuccessful experiences captured multidisciplinary work. Thus, when reflecting on my case study three example with Jorge and specific members of a few disciplines in the academy, it makes sense that the MDT experienced unsuccess from various strands. For example, all members of the MDT displayed their expertise when working individually with Jorge, but there was a concurrent disconnection between the communication, support, and successful outcome from an interdisciplinary level. Whether this was due to an influence of power, lack of working towards the academy's philosophy and values or inconsistencies from the sport science team (consistent with coaches' perspectives from empirical paper two) is up for interpretation but I know if I was faced with a similar scenario in future, I would personally approach it differently based on the knowledge I acquire now. This comes from understanding all MDT members roles and responsibilities, followed by setting boundaries and expectations in the

initial stages to provide clarity. The most important facilitator within this is to engage in regular and open communication to ensure the consulting needs are being met or a change is required.

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Case study one – The HERizon Project

Exercise Psychology support

Case study context

Outlined below is a reflective case study account of an applied consultancy experience with a 16-year-old adolescent female participating in exercise, as part of an intervention research programme; the HERizon project. The project was psychologically underpinned by the self-determination theory (SDT), illuminating human motivation, development, and well-being. To maintain intrapersonal motivation and well-being the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy need to be satisfied, leading to an autonomous motivation for PA (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2002; 2008). By employing motivation and behaviour change techniques (BCTs) (Teixeira et al. 2020) through SDT, the project aimed to nurture these three needs during the calls, which is highlighted in my philosophy of practice below (Cowley et al. 2021).

The HERizon project was a six-week, home-based intervention aimed at increasing and maintaining physical activity (PA) levels in adolescent females aged 13-16 years old, through engaging in enjoyable activities to sustain in the long-term. The adolescent girls were of various levels of PA, such as a low activity level (a 10-minute walk to and from the school bus stop every day) to a high activity level (daily exercise for sport training and competitions). This project consisted of two groups; a control group who didn't receive any intervention and were just asked to continue their usual PA routine, and an intervention group who were provided with weekly behaviour change calls and PA (Cowley et al. 2021).

My role within the project, outlined as an "activity mentor", consisted of delivering weekly behaviour change calls to the adolescent girls in the intervention group to support their PA participation throughout the 6-week project. As an activity mentor, I supported five adolescent girls in both the intervention group and post-intervention control group (Cowley et al. 2021). Highlighted in this case study is one client who experienced numerous challenges and positives, demonstrating a clear shift towards a PA behaviour change. Seven calls in total took place (see figure 1), on a weekly basis, with the opening call lasting thirty minutes and the remaining six for ten minutes. Each call occurred on a WhatsApp video or Zoom platform due to the current restrictions with Coronavirus during the UK Lockdown 1.0, between March – June 2020. These calls were based on a pre-planned session outline, client centred and focused on PA (Cowley et al. 2021).

Structure of the HERizon psychology calls with activity mentor	
Each week involved setting and reviewing action plans, and barrier identification.	
Week 1	Familiarisation and goal setting
Week 2	Benefits of physical activity
Week 3	Environmental restructuring
Week 4	Social support
Week 5	No specific topic/free week
Week 6	Maintenance of physical activity and coping planning strategies
Week 7	Overview of the project and celebrating achievements

Figure 1: *Table outlining the standardisation of the structure of the calls for the HERizon project.*

The client

For the case study, a pseudonym was used, Harriet, to protect the identity and uphold confidentiality of the described client. At the time of the consultancy period, Harriet joined the HERizon project in the hope to increase her PA levels, especially during the lockdown restrictions. Harriet engaged in some PA (e.g., involvement in school PE lessons, weekly Karate sessions and occasional family walks). Unfortunately, due to the UK national lockdown restrictions, all schools were closed, outdoor PA or sport was limited, and it was advised not to leave your home unless necessary. This had a negative impact on Harriet's PA levels during this time. At the time of starting the HERizon project, Harriet didn't meet the recommended PA guidelines for her age range of an average of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity per day (Department of Health, 2019); 84.7% of female adolescents are insufficiently physically active (Guthold et al. 2019). However, Harriet's family and friends were highly supportive in encouraging her to engage in more PA.

The practitioner

At the time of the consultancy process, I was 23 years old and three months into the first year of my accredited British Psychological Society (BPS) Professional Doctorate qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology. This opportunity was my first 1-to-1 consultancy experience as a trainee, I engaged in the relevant training procedures (i.e., needs supportive training) as well as adhering to ethics and consultancy competencies that were pertinent during this work. These competencies included establishing and maintaining practitioner-client working relationships and responding to unpredictable events in an ethical and professional manner, for example, symptoms of mental health which is common for individuals partaking in PA (BPS, 2018).

When I reflect on my philosophy of practice, I hold six beliefs and four values that resonate with my previous personal experiences and align with my practitioner professional practice (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). The beliefs of; growth requires empathy and connection, empathy in the working relationship needs to be central, adverse scenarios provide an opportunity to grow, change and develop, the past influences the present, a desire to help individuals develop as a person and a performer and personal disclosure helps at times with empathy. Trust, compassion, empathy, and growth allow me to uphold my beliefs to establish the practitioner-client rapport and deliver support through a flexible practitioner and client led mode of practice dependent on the context (Chandler et al., 2016; Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011). Due to this consultancy case being part of a wider research project and the lack of knowledge Harriet held with increasing her PA levels, I adopted a practitioner-led approach using needs supportive counselling, which I was previously unfamiliar with. This needs supportive counselling approach aimed to provide a framework to specifically support the adolescent females in the project, including Harriet with PA behaviour change. Aligned with my core beliefs and values, I delivered this approach in an autonomous-supportive way, using Socratic questioning, asking open-ended questions to encourage autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster positive PA behaviour change (Texieira et al. 2020).

Adopting the needs supportive approach challenged me on occasions, for example, the idea of delivering a structured session plan at times felt incongruent with the humanistic approach of allowing the practitioner to "follow the client" during the entry stage (Orlick, 1989). However, clear parallels exist between the humanistic and needs-supportive counselling approach, such as being client-led, fostering autonomy, providing personal

choice, and unconditional positive regard (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Teixeira et al. 2020). Providing these conditions within the consultancy aligned with my practitioner philosophy.

Thoughts prior to the consultancy

Prior to the consultations, I felt nervous but optimistic, with not knowing what to expect but eager to support Harriet's PA journey. Neophyte practitioners often experience anxiety, self-doubt, and concerns about inadequate effectiveness (Keegan, 2010). Plus, limited competence (Clance & Imes, 1978), and experiencing hopes and fears resulting in thinking questions such as "how do I help this client?" (Tod & Eubank, 2020). To combat these initial thoughts and feelings, I engaged in individual reflections using the Gibbs cycle (1988) to journal my anxieties and unpick what I wanted to gain from the consultancy experience. My practitioner goals included enhancement in my confidence and competence levels during service delivery.

I engaged in a copious amount of reading around PA and adolescent girls (i.e., Dwyer et al. 2006), as well as previous applied experiences of working in PA as a practitioner. This theoretical and practical knowledge helped me to understand potential barriers, benefits, and outcomes that PA brings. Weekly supervision and peer meetings provided a safe and open space to voice any initial preconceptions, thoughts, and challenges. Engaging in role play helped me to encounter what the consultancy may look like with an opportunity to receive constructive feedback. This occurred several times with a peer prior to the HERizon project, adopting a simulated role play of an adolescent female and the practitioner addressing week one and two of the consultancy session structure.

Consultancy process

The consultancy adhered to the HERizon intervention structure (see figure 1) but was individually tailored to Harriet's needs throughout. The SDT and needs supportive approach were implemented to ground the work, and aspects of Keegan's (2015) sport psychology model were used in a flexible and lucid way, through introducing the BCTs (goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring) during week one to inform the consultancy to fulfil Harriet's intervention needs.

Intake and needs analysis

Following ethical guidelines when working with adolescent clients is essential; including a full DBS and consent from both Harriet and her parents to take part in the HERizon project and weekly behaviour change calls. A brief introductory email was sent to Harriet and her mother highlighting my role, to schedule Harriet's first call and to outline potential safeguarding issues (e.g., not speaking in bedrooms, which is highlighted by The Girls Network). Due to this consultancy being part of a research project, Harriet and I had not previously met, underlining the importance of a thorough needs analysis during the first call (Keegan, 2015). As another member of the research team had spoken to Harriet, I obtained her baseline psychometric test scores prior to the familiarisation call. This allowed me to discover an insight into Harriet's current PA levels and interests (Cowley et al. 2021).

During the familiarisation call, confidentiality, data protection, respect, competence, and boundaries were outlined the Harriet (e.g., the only communication outside of the consultancy would be to arrange and remind about the next call). Displaying interest and asking open questions addressing how Harriet was finding lockdown, an overview of her day and to gather information about herself, contributed to forming a practitioner-client rapport with Harriet (Teixeira et al. 2020). I highlighted my role as an "activity mentor" of how I will

support her PA journey and what is expected of Harriet during the project (Cowley et al. 2021). Ensuring Harriet felt comfortable and at ease to open up and discuss her PA experiences was crucial, creating that safe and trusting environment (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006).

The needs analysis occurred in an open conversational style that allowed Harriet to talk about her PA experiences, with use of quantitative measure by reflecting on her pre intervention psychometric test scores. I utilised reflective statements, open questions, and permission statements to explore and understand Harriet's PA experiences and project motivations. Harriet discussed her excitement of being involved in the project, advocating it would help her well-being and provide her with new PA to try during lockdown. Discovering Harriet's interests outside of exercise (e.g., school, other hobbies, and interests) contributed to the practitioner-client rapport. Harriet mentioned that she plays the drums at school, enjoys spending time with family and has participated in Karate from a young age. This led to uncovering what Harriet enjoys about PA, such as family walks that improve her mood, while enjoying the nature, fresh air and spending time together. Fostering relatedness, I shared my experiences of walking during lockdown uncovering similar benefits. Occasional practitioner self-disclosure can contribute a sense of trust and being understood whilst facilitating the practitioner-client rapport (Hanson, 2005). Asking open questions around challenges that Harriet may experience with PA followed. Harriet outlined that usually she would be busy with schoolwork, prioritise other hobbies and has previously experienced social barriers, which are also common among adolescent females and PA (Dwyer et al. 2006). These social barriers consisted of being embarrassed to exercise on her own. Exploring why Harriet felt this way resulted in increased enjoyment and confidence when exercising with friends. However, during lockdown this hadn't been possible, resulting in

Harriet engaging in limited PA. Fulfilling the needs analysis was essential to enhance our practitioner-client rapport (Martindale & Collins, 2013) and provide effective and tailored interventions for Harriet to thrive with PA (Keegan, 2015).

Intervention and consultancy sessions

By fostering needs-supportive communication strategies, the approach aimed to support Harriet to change her PA behaviour through the three basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci 1985; Teixeira et al. 2020). Within the six-week intervention, three BCTs were employed, these being goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring, which were in line with the project aims (Michie et al. 2011). Prior to the intervention initiation, I developed the intervention content alongside my supervisor and peer activity mentors. The fundamental aspect involved individually tailoring these interventions to each of the clients' needs, which is highlighted below within Harriet's PA journey. Each week the BCTs were reviewed to discover what was working well, not so well and anything Harriet wished to change with her PA, for example trying new PA.

After uncovering Harriet's PA experiences, motivations, and interests for the project, we reflected on her baseline psychometric scores from three tests (e.g., the 20m shuttle run, long jump and push up test, Cowley et al. 2021). Harriet wanted to progress on the 20m shuttle run test post project, which led to setting her outcome goal as increasing her physical fitness. As Harriet was new to goal setting, this BCT was explained and implemented clearly and concisely, through outlining why goal setting is important and how it will fit in with her PA journey. Goal setting has been shown to be effective for many individuals seeking to improve their PA levels (Wilson & Brookfield, 2009). Additionally, Harriet expressed her focus on improving her core strength and psychological well-being during lockdown, also

being set within her project outcome goal, providing Harriet with the autonomy of choice. To find out what Harriet meant by "psychological well-being", I asked an open question of "tell me what you mean by improving your psychological well-being?". Due to the lockdown restrictions of not being able to go anywhere or see anyone, Harriet wished to prioritise improving her mood and happiness. I continued to explore how she was currently finding lockdown; it was 'going ok' and she was excited to start the project. To support Harriet in achieving this outcome goal, we then explored how she would do this, (e.g., setting weekly process goals). Completing 3 x 30 minutes of PA per week was a project requisite, and Harriet suggested engaging in various types of PA to foster enjoyment throughout the intervention. During the six weeks, we addressed Harriet's goal progress (e.g., benefits and barriers experienced), checking she was on track or if her goals had changed.

To help Harriet achieve her process and outcome goals, I used action planning. Action planning addressed what PA workouts Harriet engaged in, on which days and how she stayed on track with PA each week (WHO, 2019). A variety of PA were outlined, such as dancing, boxing, Pilates and live HIIT workouts fostering autonomy for Harriet to try new PA. In Harriet's first week she planned to do boxing, a live HIIT workout and dancing. Barrier identification allowed Harriet to address which challenges may occur during the project, such as schoolwork or a lack of motivation (Dwyer et al. 2006). This was apparent during the week two call, Harriet mentioned that she couldn't do the exercises on the days outlined in week one due to a clash with schoolwork. By fostering accountability, Harriet completed the PA on other available days. Adopting self-monitoring encouraged Harriet uncovered the best method to track her PA, by creating a weekly table in her diary to write down which PA she completed. By increasing Harriet's understanding around her weekly achievements and

offering motivation during the weekly calls to complete and monitor her PA, this aimed to provide Harriet with a sense of achievement.

During the first three weeks of the project, Harriet appeared positive and motivated with completing all three physical activities each week. She discovered enjoyment in PA that she used to engage in (e.g., a bike ride and new PA that she had taken an interest in, such as a HIIT workout). In week three, Harriet went on two socially distanced bike rides with her friends and attended an online live HIIT session. For Harriet, the PA started to get easier, she was feeling stronger, happier, and enjoying PA. As a practitioner, I was confident with how well the consultancy sessions were going and was yet to experience any practical challenges.

During the week four call, Harriet answered the call with her jacket hood up, the camera directed at the wall behind her and with only the top of her head in view. I stuck to the usual call format by asking how she was and how her day had been with online school. At first, Harriet mentioned her day was ok but moved on quickly to addressing how being in lockdown is getting to her, a recent fallout with her friends, feelings of demotivation and missing school and normality. As I initially knew that something was wrong due to her body language, this didn't come as a shock, but I wasn't expecting Harriet to be as open and honest with how she was feeling. Recognising Harriet's well-being was a priority through allowing her to open up and speak about what happened and why she felt this way in more detail. Being an active listener, understanding Harriet and displaying empathy encouraged open questions, such as "can I ask, what are you missing about school and normality?" and "you said that you feel demotivated, can you tell me why this is?" Whilst showing interest and care in what Harriet was expressing (Teixeira et al. 2020). This information provided a clear insight into her current thoughts and feelings with issues surrounding her well-being and

lockdown restrictions. Harriet mentioned that she was missing meeting and seeing her friends at school, as well as Karate, resulting in feeling demotivated and not wanting to exercise, only engaging in one PA this week.

Harriet mentioned she was glad she had spoken about what was on her mind because it encouraged her to complete all three physical activities during the next week. We recapped the benefits she has experienced and her progress thus far (e.g., increased core strength and number of sit ups, feeling stronger and satisfaction with her PA improvement). Harriet addressed the PA she enjoys the most, leading to organising a bike ride with her friend on Saturday, attending the live HIIT workout on Monday and completing a full body workout on Wednesday. After the call, I engaged in reflection on action and made notes about what happened, outlining the issues and my approach to dealing with them. In the group reflection meetings, we spoke about next steps if similar issues arose again (e.g., to monitor comments to ensure Harriet's well-being had improved).

During the week five call, Harriet again answered the call with her camera facing the wall so I could only hear her speaking. Taking all into consideration, from the previous week how she was feeling and how her week had been, she highlighted that she still felt demotivated and only managed to complete two PA. My first reaction involved offering meaningful praise to Harriet about completing two PA workouts and focusing on what she enjoyed. However, I felt like it was my duty to address why Harriet experienced feelings of demotivation this week. She mentioned struggling to find motivation to exercise because of other things going on, but when she did the PA, she enjoyed it. Using reflective statements helped for Harriet to continue to open up and discuss her demotivation in more detail, and she outlined the benefits that she experienced this week and her previous successes.

Based on the project's session structure, coping planning strategies to combat maintenance of PA post HERizon were not scheduled until week six. However, in this case, Harriet experienced demotivation in week four and five, therefore I felt it was important to discuss coping techniques with her at an earlier stage. Adopting adaptability, openness, and flexibility as a practitioner (Chandler et al. 2016), we worked through two activities that helped Harriet regain her motivation and enjoy the remainder of the project. To support Harriet experiencing this demotivation, the two activities I delivered were mindfulness and positive self-talk. Mindfulness allows individuals to focus on the present moment, observing and accepting our thinking with being non-judgemental (Bishop et al. 2004) and positive self-talk looks at changing thought processes from negative to positive (Hardy, 2006). My rationale for choosing these were based on prior knowledge and experience of utilising these strategies and consideration to Harriet's current life experiences. For example, demotivation with PA, a fallout with friends and worrying about the future. The aim of delivering positive self-talk involved combatting Harriet's negative thoughts to positive to improve her PA motivation and enhance well-being. For example, Harriet mentioned in previous calls "I can't do it", "I am bored of lockdown" and "I didn't want to do PA" and identified a more facilitative outlook, such as "I will try my best", "I am going to do things I enjoy in lockdown" and "I will engage in PA that I enjoy" (Hardy, 2006). The aim of the next activity, mindfulness, was to help Harriet enjoy the present moment by being non-judgemental of her thoughts and feelings (Bishop et al., 2004). By adopting mindful thinking towards PA, Harriet was encouraged to focus on the present moment and enjoy PA, her schoolwork and spending time with family and friends.

Evaluating the intervention

As part of the prescribed intervention programme, an evaluation was conducted with the researcher and clients in a 1-to-1 interview format, which explored both the psychological and physiological aspects of the programme and the client's experiences in increasing PA. The participant quantitative data showed that intrinsic motivation, push up and 20m shuttle run scores were all significantly greater in the intervention compared to the control group (see appendix 1) (Cowley et al. 2021).

To gain Harriet's specific views about the project, PA outlook, and consultancy calls, I encouraged frequent verbal feedback (Bull, 1997). During the calls I would ask Harriet how she was finding the action planning, self-monitoring and if she was on track with her goals. This feedback related to the usefulness of the interventions, including any changes to make, the benefits and challenges of using them and likelihood of continuation post HERizon. Engaging in informal chats helped to evaluate the effectiveness of my delivery and support from Harriet's perspective (Gordon, 1990) as well as ensuring Harriet's needs were fulfilled. In call seven, Harriet highlighted how it was valuable to focus on a goal, helping her to increase core strength for return to Karate and improving her well-being. Additionally, action planning helped to stay on track with her PA as well as organising and completing schoolwork and scheduling to meet with friends. Overall, Harriet mentioned the weekly calls were helpful to check in and stay motivated with PA throughout the project. Harriet enjoyed the live workouts, which offered a sense of relatedness through exercising with other girls on the project and the bike rides with her friends. Her plan was to maintain her PA levels post HERizon. To obtain additional and more authentic feedback, it would have been beneficial to provide each client with a quantitative end-of-project measure of feedback, such asa questionnaire addressing the weekly calls effectiveness and the assessment of client satisfaction development of a general scale (Larsen et al. 1979). Moreover, the opportunity to

gather ongoing feedback by emailing a Likert scale questionnaire (1 not helpful and 10 being very helpful) relating to how useful Harriet found the calls. For example, how helpful I was as an active mentor, what they enjoyed about the calls and the benefit to help achieve their goals.

Throughout the HERizon project, I kept an individual journal to reflect on how I delivered the interventions, their effectiveness in supporting Harriet's PA journey and how this contributed to my own development as a practitioner. Engaging in note taking and reflections using the Gibbs cycle (1988) helped me to evaluate my delivery of the interventions. For example, during the first call, action planning was delivered clear and concisely for Harriet to understand. Group reflections aimed to address the intervention process, through discussing thoughts and experiences around the intervention effectiveness. These discussions facilitated feedback to improve the evaluation and monitoring process.

Critical reflection

Reflecting in and on action during this consultancy case fostered insightful learning points that contribute to my personal and professional development. The reflection included aspects that worked well, didn't work so well, would be done differently next time and skills I enhanced, postulating many positives and challenges I experienced as a neophyte practitioner (Keegan, 2010; Tod & Bond, 2010). The case challenged my thinking, behaviour and helped me learn more about myself and the world around me.

As a trainee practitioner, I spent time being aware of, and paying considerable amount of attention to, potential ethical and practical challenges that could arise; I experienced both

personal and professional challenges throughout this consultancy case. The structure of the calls and my philosophical approach emerged as an initial challenge. I had limited knowledge regarding the content and delivery of the needs supportive approach. I received training around this approach, however, the training was limited, hindering my in-depth understanding of delivering in an effective needs supportive way. Additionally, I provided Harriet with meaningful feedback "well done for completing the three PA this week", however, reflecting on this example used, through learning more about the needs supportive approach and in-depth training for the HERizon main trial in January 2021, I realised that this feedback wasn't meaningful. Offering clear, relevant, and constructive feedback would have been a more effective option. For example, explaining to Harriet that completing the three PA and sticking to her action plan is great but addressing why this worked well, by writing the PA in her logbook and pursuing support from her friends. This feedback would aim to foster competence for Harriet by understanding what it is she is doing well to continue the PA behaviour. This practical challenge helped intensify my confidence as a practitioner that preparation and knowledge around theoretical approaches is key to delivering service effectiveness (Tod & Bond, 2010).

Moreover, there were other points during the consultancy where my lack of knowledge and inexperience of delivering a needs supportive approach showed. For example, Harriet mentioned in week three that her friends couldn't go for a bike ride, so she changed to HIIT instead to avoid going on her own. I missed the opportunity to explore the reasons for this through using open questions and showing interest (Teixeira et al. 2020) and instead just focused on what she enjoyed about the PA this week. Neophyte practitioners often focus on the pre-determined session structure content and duration (Collins et al. 2013), however, through engaging in reflection-on-action after the call I recognised the importance of

balancing this with an ability to more effectively explore other comments that arise 'in the moment' (Knowles et al. 2001). Furthermore, at times I struggled to keep within the session plan whilst also exploring emotions Harriet displayed. Due to my 1-to-1 inexperience I sometimes felt 'on the spot' when unexpected comments emerged and not knowing what to do or say that may help Harriet. As an example, during week four, Harriet outlined that she didn't complete all three PA. I began to ask why, and multiple reasons emerged, but I was worried that we weren't sticking to the session structure so these were briefly overlooked. A needs supportive practitioner should explore client's perspectives through open questions and listening empathically, without judgement (Teixeira et al. 2020). Making notes post call allowed me to identify which points I could explore in-depth during the next call to help Harriet psychologically and physically overcome the challenges she was experiencing. Through individual and group reflections, I became increasingly self-aware of exploring how other theoretical orientations can improve service delivery (Tod & Bond, 2010).

Additionally, knowing where practitioners' boundaries lie when emotional issues begin to surface was another challenge encountered (Sharp & Hodge, 2019). At times this appeared blurred, and I did not have any clinical mental health concerns with Harriet during this consultancy. However, since the pilot trial I have completed mental health awareness training through the BPS and safeguarding training as part of the HERizon main trial. I have learnt from this training that I should have raised some of my emotion and wellbeing concerns for Harriet during individual supervision with my supervisor to work through the best solution together, through sharing experiences, monitoring, and documenting this development (Knowles et al. 2007). My self-awareness of, and openness to individualised ethical boundaries that can occur unexpectedly during consultancy has improve immensely. As a result of this, at the consultancy close, Harriet outlined that she was feeling stronger and

has high motivation to maintain PA. However, it was difficult to tell how Harriet felt psychologically with the issues she was struggling with. It may not be realistic to expect drastic psychological change within seven weeks of 10-to-15-minute PA behaviour change calls.

Highlighting the two coping strategies I delivered (e.g., positive self-talk and mindfulness) there were many challenges and learning curves I encountered as a practitioner (Tod & Bond, 2010). Initially, when delivering the coping strategies in week six, as activity mentors we were provided with the choice of which techniques to choose; I chosen mindfulness and positive self-talk. However, at the time and reflecting on action, I didn't choose these strategies based on an alignment with my philosophy of practice but instead based on the case formulated need of Harriet's emotions, behaviours, and thoughts during the consultancy. Thus, both coping techniques require different aims and outcomes, highlighting a philosophical distance from not considering coping strategies that philosophically aligned with my theoretical orientation. Supervision, individual and group reflection allowed me to recognise and increase my awareness of effective service delivery through understanding coping strategies in more detail before implementing them (Hutter et al. 2015). Moreover, further reading, engagement in 1-to-1 consultancy and discussions with supervisors helped to enhance my critical thinking and questioning of my philosophical approach and behaviour towards my own professional development and future consultancy. It is more congruent with my philosophy of practice for the client to discover their own coping strategies, whilst still being an active agent through facilitating choices they make and illuminating how they can help (Friesen & Orlick, 2010).

Conclusion

This consultancy case highlighted how delivering a needs-supportive counselling approach, consisting of the three BCTs of goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring influenced behaviour change of experienced PA for an adolescent female, Harriet, by improving and maintaining her PA levels throughout the HERizon project. As discovered from the need's analysis and familiarisation call with Harriet, she experienced barriers towards PA leading to low engagement. My role involved delivering these interventions, attempting to encourage positive PA behaviour change, in supporting Harriet to find PA she enjoyed, overcome barriers, and recognise the benefits of PA. Although, this was my first 1-to-1 applied consultancy as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist, tailoring these interventions to Harriet's needs and supporting her HERizon journey helped to contribute to the increase and maintenance of her PA. Harriet highlighted the weekly calls helped her to foster accountability to stay on track with PA. Increased awareness and development addressing my own personal (i.e., confidence levels, level of empathy) and professional development (i.e., flow of the calls, self-awareness of issues) emerged from this consultancy experience, increasing my appreciation of working in an exercise environment to foster behaviour change through supporting clients to reach their goals and adopt positive PA behaviours.

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Appendix one – outcomes of physical fitness 20m shuttle run, long jump and push up scores

for the intervention and control groups

Table 4. Outcomes for physical fitness, physical activity and psychosocial measures in the intervention and control groups.

Variable	Baseline (Mean ± SD)		Post-Intervention (Mean ± SD)		Adjusted Mean Difference between Time Points (95%CI)		Group * Time p
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control	
20m shuttle run, stages	5.22 ± 2.6	7.04 ± 4.2	7.04 ± 3.3	7.34 ± 4.3	1.82 (1.20, 2.43) ***	0.31 (−0.33, 0.96)	0.001[†]
Long jump, cm	162 ± 23.0	171 ± 40.5	169 ± 30.2	170 ± 42.1	6.7 (−1.4, 14.8)	−1.0 (−9.5, 7.5)	0.193
Push ups, repetitions,	15 ± 11.3	15 ± 15.41	22 ± 12.5	15 ± 12.73	6.9 (4.3, 9.5) ***	2.3 (−0.5, 5.2)	0.022 [†]

Appendix two – Harriet's project post intervention physical fitness scores

Push Up	Long Jump	20mSRT	Steps (avg)
41	188	6.02	

Appendix three – the notes the practitioner recorded of Harriet's weekly PA diary

Week one
Action plan - Saturday **boxing**, Monday **live workout**, Wednesday **dancing**

Week two
Action plan – Monday **bike ride with family**, Tuesday **bike ride with friend**, Wednesday **bike ride with friend**, Thursday **live workout, Sunday bike ride**

Week three
Action plan – Tuesday **bike ride with friends**, Wednesday **bike ride with friends,** and Thursday **live workout**

Week four
Action plan – Thursday **rock club**

Week five
Action plan – Saturday **bike ride**, Monday **live workout**

Week six
Action plan - Monday **Karate**, Tuesday **Pilates**, Wednesday **walk**

Appendix four – a blank copy of the PA monitoring log Harriet filled in

	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
WEEK 1							
WEEK 2							
WEEK 3							
WEEK 4							
WEEK 5							
WEEK 6							

Case study 2

Dealing with critical moments – an academy football player

Case study context

Portrayed below is a reflective case study account of an applied consultancy experience with a 14-year-old adolescent male, an academy football player in an elite category three setting. For the case study, pseudonyms were used for the client (Harry) and the club (St. Edward's) to uphold confidentiality and protect identification. Harry has made the academy journey from U9s level to currently playing at U15s. He is predominantly involved with the U16s but for more game time he occasionally plays games for his U15s team. This consultancy period occurred over the course of four months (April-July 2021) consisting of seven sessions via Zoom, due to the Coronavirus pandemic and current UK lockdown restrictions at the time. Harry was experiencing several moments, inside and outside of football, impacting his psychological well-being and performance. Critical learning points arose relating to my own personal and practitioner development.

Amid the consultancy process, I was 24 years old and four months into my second year of the accredited British Psychological Society (BPS) Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Liverpool John Moore's University (LJMU). Currently, I have been the "Academy Psychologist" at St. Edward's for one year and eleven months, heading into my third season with the club. My role entails supporting players, coaches and parents through 1-to-1 consultancy and educational workshops with well-being and performance attributes. A fundamental aspect of my role consisted of working as part of a multidisciplinary team (e.g. the manager, age-group coaches, physiotherapists, nutritionists, head of education and the safeguarding officer), whilst being under supervision during my

training. Within the academy's safeguarding guidelines during the Coronavirus restrictions, all 1-to-1 consultancy sessions occurred on Zoom, with the camera and microphone on, in a communal area (i.e., Harry's living room) and a parent within an earshot. This consultancy period was during the final two months of Harry's 2020/21 season and in the beginning of his season break. The seven sessions lasted approx. thirty to forty-five minutes and took place on Wednesday evenings. Highlighted below in figure one is the consultancy session structure.

Structure of the consultancy calls	
This consultancy followed by adapted Keegan's (2015) sport psychology framework	
Week 1	Familiarisation intake session – establishing rapport, getting to know Harry
Week 2	Needs analysis – strengths, improvements
Week 3	Case formulation
Week 4	Intervention – introducing REBT e.g., what it is, what the intervention will look like, identifying his thoughts
Week 5	Intervention – REBT ABC model, awareness
Week 6	Intervention – REBT revisiting the model, judgement
Week 7	Case re-formulation the consultancy focus shifted from confidence to dealing with pressure of potential deselection and currently not enjoying football. This consultancy occurred with Harry and his mother. This was the final consultancy session has Harry made the decision not to return to St. Edward's for the reminder of the season

Figure 1: Consultancy session structure with Harry

Initially, Harry was referred to me by his coach, highlighting worries and concerns from his father due to recent panic attacks and a lack of confidence prior to games, in which he was seeking external therapy. I discussed this in further detail with Harry's father at training, this lack of confidence where he thought that he was not good enough on the pitch and suffered with panic attacks. Harry's return to training in March 2021, due to the Coronavirus restrictions impacted his routine and confidence levels. Common upsets for academy football players experiencing a lack of confidence correlate with setbacks, comparison and limited self-belief in one's own abilities (Mills et al. 2012). Harry was currently challenging for a scholarship and working for a consistent place in the U15s team, whilst undergoing his GCSE exams. Thus, my role consisted of providing weekly support attending to Harry's well-being and performance during these experienced critical moments.

Reflecting on my philosophy of practice, six beliefs and four values closely resonate with my previous personal experiences and align with my practitioner professional practice (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). The beliefs of; growth requires empathy and connection, empathy in the working relationship needs to be central, adverse scenarios provide an opportunity to grow, change and develop, the past influences the present, a desire to help individuals develop as a person and a performer and personal disclosure helps at times with empathy. Trust, compassion, empathy, and growth allow me to uphold my beliefs to establish the practitioner-client rapport and deliver support through a flexible practitioner and client led mode of practice dependent on the context (Chandler et al., 2016; Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011). During this consultancy, the consultancy needs that Harry postulated around his negative thought patterns but unawareness of how to transform them, I decided to connect with rationale emotive behavioural therapy (REBT) from a practitioner led mode of practice. Using a Socratic style of questioning was an effective tool to identify Harry's emotional

trigger, associated cognition, and behavioural response through asking open-ended questions that fostered internal reflection of Harry's current experiences (Clark & Egan, 2015; Eubank & Tod, 2020; Turner & Bennett, 2018). REBT is an active-directive psychological intervention and a type of CBT, which aimed to support Harry in identifying empowerment and personal worth through evidence-based practice. This was captured through communicating his current irrational beliefs and negative thought patterns to move towards rational ways of coping with his confidence and anxiety state. By encouraging Harry to adopt accountability of recognising the impact of his current emotions, beliefs and thoughts relative to his life experiences helped develop the tools to handle the multitude of existential challenges in football (Henriksen et al, 2014; Nesti, 2004).

Thoughts prior to consultancy

I experienced feelings of enthusiasm arose in hope to support and guide Harry with successfully increasing his confidence and managing these critical moments. Due to previous applied consultancy work within football, I felt confident in delivering effective support (e.g., creating a safe space for Harry to express his concerns, thoughts and feelings). Although, with every client I work with questions such as "how do I help this client?" and "is my support effective?" began to circle my mind (Tod & Eubank, 2020). The Gibbs Cycle (1988) was an effective self-reflection tool to journal and monitor my consultancy thoughts and emotions, such as the initial spike of fear and nervousness. I read relevant literature regarding athletes' confidence levels (Mills et al. 2012), practitioner consultancy experiences (Wadsworth et al. 2021) and the provision of support facilitated by coaches and support staff (Barker & Winter, 2014; Larsen et al. 2015). Consequently, enhancing my knowledge and

understanding of these areas relevant to football academy environments, I felt better equipped to support Harry during consultancy.

Consultancy process

This consultancy adhered to the session structure outlined in figure one, guided by Keegan's sport psychology applied consultancy framework (2015) in a chronological but flexible way. The consultancy was addressed following the intake, case formulation and intervention but allowed for individual tailoring to Harry's needs throughout the consultancy in a person-centred manner. Aligned with my philosophical and theoretical approach, I guided Harry through a journey of self-discovery, encouraging him to understand his own behaviours, attitudes and emotions on/off the football pitch (Maslow, 1968, 1970). I maintained strong active listening through non-judgement, caring nature and empathy, being fundamental attributes in the formation of a safe, trusting and therapeutic environment (Chandler et al. 2016).

Intake and needs analysis

In line with the academy's safeguarding procedures and ethical guidelines to adhere to as a practitioner, consent from Harry's parents and assent from Harry prior to the consultancy was obtained. The zoom link, details and safeguarding policies (e.g. speaking in a communal area of his house, the camera being on and parents within an earshot were clearly stated).

During the first consultancy session, I outlined that my role was a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist under supervision as part of my professional doctorate. Additionally,

the consultancy structure and expectations were emphasised, such as weekly sessions for 45 minutes and Harry had opportunity to ask any questions before moving forward. By outlining key information around practitioner competence, confidentiality, respect, data protection and boundaries to both Harry and his parents helped to ensure ethics and professional standards were being upheld (BPS, 2018). Although, brief communication had occurred with Harry at training, I felt like it was important to build the working rapport as he seemed quiet and reserved during the first consultancy sessions. As always during consultancy, I began to create an open and trusting environment, which aimed to ensure Harry felt comfortable and at ease to share his experiences around well-being and performance (Gibourne & Richardson, 2006).

I captured insights into Harry's football background, other hobbies, family life and goals for the consultancy period during the needs analysis (Keegan, 2015) through an open conversational style allowing him to his experiences in detail. Firstly, I explained the method of performance profiling to Harry, emphasising the importance of reflecting on his current strengths, areas for development, opportunities and potential threats within football. As Harry played in the left back (defender) position, he identified technical, tactical, social, physical and psychological aspects relevant to his role (Currie, 2018). On the performance profile (appendix one), he scored eight skills and characteristics with reasoning on a scale from 1 (needs improvement) to 10 (high quality) and the processes of improvement. Confidence, mindset and defending 1v1 were rated the lowest, this offered a clear focus to continue exploring these areas relevant to Harry's consultancy goals. I noticed that at the latter of the needs analysis, Harry communicated feelings of worry, panic and uncertainty of receiving an academy scholarship. A reason being that there were two additional left-backs (Harry's

football position) who were taller and physically stronger than him, so he began to tell me and himself that she wouldn't receive a scholarship offer.

Case formulation

The case formulation model was presented to draw upon discussions in the needs analysis and existing theoretical knowledge by extending beyond the known data of Harry to assess his current situation (Keegan, 2015). I decided to use the 5P's model of case formulation to capture Harry's story including specific 'micro' level issues (e.g., his current self-confidence levels and feelings of worry Eells et al. 1998). Outlined below is a visual representation of the common themes identified from Harry's case formulation.

A huge factor was his previous injury which impacted his confidence and competence levels within football, for example resisting going in for tackles in case he gets injured. As a result, Harry recognised that he was not playing to his optimal potential, influencing his negative thoughts and worries of receiving a scholarship. Identifying opportunities to change Harry's perspective on his current thoughts, behaviours and emotions surfacing from these current difficulties that he was experiencing (Bergner, 1998). I identified that Rationale Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) was a useful approach to take (Ellis, 1950).

Previous ankle injury, starting on the bench, low confidence to tackle opponents, previously dropped

Not playing well e.g. knocked off the ball, experiencing negative emotions and thoughts

Predisposing

Presenting

Dad, family and coaches
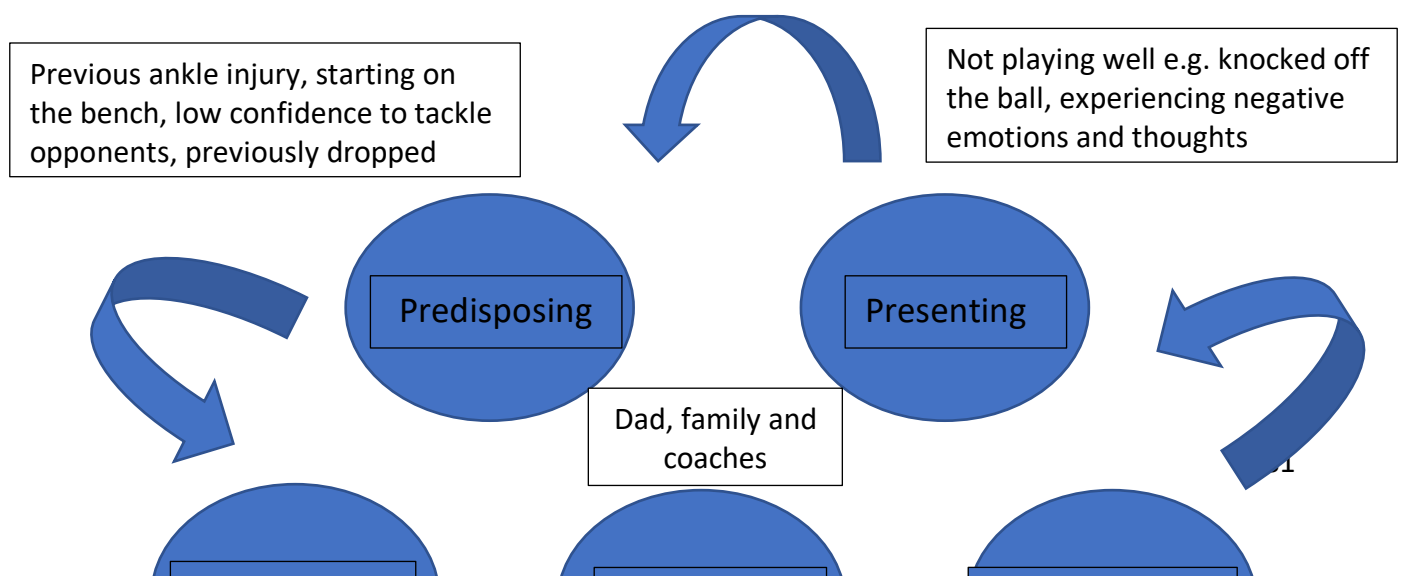
Figure 2: Visual representation of Harry's experiences through the 5P's case formulation diagram.

Intervention and consultancy sessions

The case formulation helped to guide the REBT intervention process for Harry. Offering a carefully designed, individualised, realistic, and practical plan focusing on his unhelpful thoughts aimed to implement the desired changes into his lifestyle. The process involved working together and weekly monitoring for a four-week period, which by that point Harry would know the scholarship decision (Keegan et al. 2015). REBT is an active-direction intervention that looks at one's judgement of an event that causes psychological disturbance, not the event itself (Ellis, 1950s). It recognises the importance of emotions, helping to identify irrational beliefs and negative thought patterns that may lead to emotional or behavioural issues (Turner & Bennett, 2018). It was apparent that Harry's judgement of his performance on the pitch was causing an emotional (i.e. frustration, low confidence) and

cognitive (i.e. unhelpful thoughts "I am rubbish") distortion affecting his well-being and performance levels. The aim of the intervention was to provide Harry with helpful coping mechanisms to deal with his unhelpful thoughts and emotions. To promote intervention effectiveness, Harry was encouraged to adopt an active role away from the consultancy by engaging in home tasks (see appendix 2) and implementing REBT principles in his football.

The first REBT session focused on an introduction to the intervention by concisely explaining what it is and the relevance to his experiences. Highlighting that it is not the event that causes the psychological distress, it is his individual judgement of the event. This helped to recap on previous examples Harry had encountered and look at ways to support him. He game, an example of "unhelpful thoughts" and the impact, from a recent game. On Tuesday evening he gave the ball away, which led to a goal and said, "it's all my fault" and "I'm not good enough". Harry emphasised that he lost confidence to shout for the ball again and he felt annoyed with himself. Here it was important for Harry to recognise the consequence of these unhelpful thoughts and instead acknowledge the positive impact of helpful thoughts. Reflecting that it's ok to be disappointed that he wasn't good enough in one game but drawing the line between this and thinking he's had a "disgraceful" performance can negatively impact wellbeing. Harry identified further examples, playing up and making mistakes he struggles to move on from them, which affects his confidence and performance. At the end of the session, a home task was set asking Harry to identify his thoughts, emotions and ways of managing them in his scheduled training and games.

REBT session two began reflecting on Harry's thoughts and emotions in recent training sessions and game, which was set for his home task. I checked in to see if Harry has understood the initial introduction to why REBT is important for supporting him. He verbally

recapped on what we discussed in last week's consultancy session, which encouraged him to take an active participant role in his own development. An introduction to the ABC model of REBT was presented to Harry. Presenting the ABC model helped to uncover the activating events, beliefs, and potential consequences of Harry. Through reflection on the 5P's model and previous knowledge gained from the consultancy, we spent time acknowledging the activating event or situation that triggers potential negative reactions. Harry identified that only when playing up in training or games he experiences these negative reactions (e.g. comparison to other teammates in his position and limited self-believe in himself due to their physicality). These are aspects that Harry cannot control, the act acknowledging what he can and cannot control during the activating event helped to uncover his underlying triggers. Using a whiteboard, Harry communicated that his mindset going into a game, performance levels and strength and fitness away from football correlates to controllable fundamentals. Evidently, athletes associate unhelpful thoughts with the experienced event (Turner & Bennett, 2018), leading to addressing his irrational thoughts and beliefs. Identification of Harry's three initial then transformed beliefs (see figure 3 below) uncovered whether he thought they were having an irrational or rational effect on him. Harry's home task for this week was to reflect on and make a note of all his emotions experienced at football, school but also being aware of who he is around when he experiences positive and negative emotions.

Unhelpful thoughts	Helpful thoughts
"I'm rubbish"	"I'm trying my best"
"They are stronger than me"	"I'm confident on the ball"
"I can't do it"	"I can't do it yet"

Figure 3: outline of Harry's unhelpful and adaptation to helpful thoughts.

The next consultancy session again initiated reflecting on the home task set in the previous week of helping Harry to be aware of his own emotions and what thoughts he has been associating with these. He highlighted that he was "putting himself down" and saying things such as "I can't do it", which was leading to frustration. Due to the consultancy occurring at a crucial point of his year 10 GCSE exam period, there was added pressure to perform well. Harry highlighted that through reflecting on his emotions he became more aware of how to view them in a more effective way. For example, he recognised that feeling nervous was because he cared about performing well. We summarised all the events, feelings and thoughts in a visual form for Harry to reflect on and add to (see appendix 5). This led to moving onto the final component of the ABC framework model looking at the consequences that result from the irrational thoughts or emotions mentioned prior. His current frustration, negative thoughts and lack of confidence as a result of not performing well led to overthinking and a loss of concentration, which highly impacted his performance. Potential consequences consisted of not performing well, not receiving a scholar and whether football will be a part of his life moving forward. Harry reflected on which potential consequences that he can control, and he mentioned that he can control how he performs. Currently, as he wasn't happy with his performance, he knew that he was focusing on external and internal factors that he couldn't control. We revisited his strengths and ways of managing the consequences by combining his activating beliefs, thoughts and feelings (Ellis, 1962). It was important to reflect upon the performance profile strengths from Harry, he mentioned that these were dribbling, positioning and awareness on the pitch and his technical ability and it was key for him to work on maximising these to help shape his mindset and confidence.

Harry was aware that the REBT intervention would last for approximately four weeks with weekly reviews to evaluate intervention effectiveness. However, after the third REBT session, there were no consultancy sessions for three weeks due to Harry's other commitments, so contact was just via email with his parents. After two or so weeks, I received an email from Harry's mother asking to arrange a phone call where she outlined that he currently wasn't enjoying football, wanted to quit and that he didn't see the point to going back to the club to be placed on an eight-week developmental plan. His father emphasised the importance of the support that he has provided to Harry during his time playing football, such as buying kit and travelling up and down the country to get him to games. It was clear that Harry enjoyed skateboarding with his friends more than progressing with football and he didn't "see the point" in the current psychology sessions. I communicated to his father that even though Harry mentioned this, I still felt within my duty of care the value of supporting Harry. I created and sent an activity around "understanding the self" via email for Harry to complete independently. However, after a reminder email and when I received no response, I highlighted to his parents the importance of another consultancy session with Harry to talk through his current situation, feelings and thoughts, in which they both agreed would be beneficial. Observing Harry's body language via a zoom session would help me to pick up on cues and evaluate his overt behavioural actions outside of his football environment (McKenzie & van der Mars, 2015; Gee, 2011). There was a recognisable shift in consultancy focus and an avenue to closely monitor Harry's psychological well-being.

Prior to the next consultancy session, I received an email from Harry's mother highlighting that he didn't want to sit in the session on his own but with his mother too. I respected Harry's choice as the key element was his desire to agree to another consultancy session and trusting that it would be beneficial. At the start of the session, I observed quickly

that Harry's body language was low, as he sat back on his sofa, particularly quiet and there was no eye contact with the camera. His mother took control of explaining his current situation, which was highly useful, but I began to direct my questions and conversation to Harry by using his name and understanding his current experiences. As I wanted to uncover what was happening for him, I started off engaging in a normal conversation of how his day had been, what he had been up to in the holidays before moving onto how he was feeling right now. The immediate response that I got was that he was "fine", but I paused, didn't say anything, and gave him chance to open up, where he mentioned about the feeling of overwhelming with exams at school, worrying about football because he didn't want to go back to the club and that he just wants to spend time skateboarding and being with his friends. Due to previous conversations with his mother and father, I was obviously aware of the situation and had time to plan how to support Harry during this consultation. Harry mentioned that prior to his most recent game, he was excited, confident, and eager to play but he had a "bad" game and didn't play as well as he wanted to, he cried in the car journey on his way home. The pressure he places on himself is very high when he plays for the team down because he knows he must be the best but no pressure playing before because the football is a better standard. Hates negative critical feedback from the coaches as it affects his confidence and referred to his teammates as being "selfish". It was apparent that Harry was outlining a lot of underlying issues into why he didn't want to go back to the club, he wanted to play somewhere where he enjoyed football, and it didn't matter at what level. I helped Harry to understand the importance of his identity and exploring different avenues into how he could enjoy football again at the club or at another club or even recreationally. We also looked at other areas in his life that he enjoyed, such as skateboarding, hanging out with friends, video games and spending time with family members. I asked Harry "what do you enjoy in life?" and he explored to play football but not at the top level.

During the final consultancy session, Harry emphasised that he felt like "a weight had been lifted off his shoulders" and he was feeling positive about his future with football. Harry thought that it would be important to engage in a further consultancy in preparation for pre-season to check in and set an action plan in approaching the new season. This consultancy session was arranged for two days before pre-season began and Harry arrived on the call with the decision that he did not wish to go back to the academy for the new season and that was his conclusion. I emphasised to Harry, his mother and father of my availability to support with his well-being, mental health and transition out of the club. Much research identified that dropout behaviour of adolescents in football is associated with the change of interests and preferences, for Harry he didn't enjoy playing football at that competitive level and found an interest of skateboarding with his friends (Schlesinger et al. 2018).

Evaluating the intervention effectiveness

To ensure I was delivering effective sport psychology practice, my philosophy of practice needed to influence my chosen intervention strategies and tools (Lindsay et al. 2007; Poczwardowski et al. 2004). To improve both personally and professionally as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist, it was my role and responsibility to take accountability for evaluating and documenting my service delivery effectiveness (Anderson et al. 2002). This consisted of an evaluation form via email (see appendix 5), verbal feedback from Harry and practitioner self-reflection throughout the weekly sessions. Honest evaluation on the intervention process required me to pro-actively seek sincere feedback from Harry (Cropley et al. 2010, p.527) which facilitated effective practice. Through providing a variety of evaluation methods, I identified that Harry underwent many self-discovery and growth

moments, which changed his beliefs and worldviews (Wadsworth et al. 2021). For example, a loss of athletic identity and lack of enjoyment with football at elite level but enjoyment with other hobbies. Emphasising the importance of individual identity and wellbeing in sport and broader life (Rogers, 1951).

I encouraged frequent verbal feedback throughout about his experiences with the intervention (Bull, 1997). Reflection via the home tasks to gather insights of intervention implementation during and outside of football training/games deemed beneficial to monitor the effectiveness. Engaging in informal chats with Harry but phone call conversations with both his parents, aided the evaluation of my delivery and support from the client's perspective (Gordon, 1990) whilst attaining to Harry's consultancy needs. This verbal feedback facilitated reflection-in-action to address challenges and formulate effective change.

Self-reflection-on-action was consistent post every consultancy session in my reflective diary (see appendix 6 account). Ongoing self-reflection helped to facilitate my understanding of practitioner professional philosophy, contributing to effective consulting practice (Poczwardowski et al. 2004). Alongside these reflection encounters I engaged in constant supervision and shared reflection in triangulation with my supervisor. Supervision provides a quality control mechanism for ensuring the delivery of competent services by novice practitioners (Watson et al. 2004).

Critical reflection

Self and meta-reflection with my supervisor and up to date research emerged insightful personal and professional learning developments. This covered elements that worked well,

didn't work so well and perhaps would do differently in future consultations. As well as skills I enhanced which highlights my experiences as a neophyte practitioner (Keegan, 2010; Knowles et al. 2007; Tod & Bond, 2010). The consultancy case thoroughly challenged my behaviour, thinking and decisions whilst working in this football environment.

Delivering consultancy support online via Zoom was an initial challenge that I faced. This generation thrives from face-to-face interaction and due to the unprecedented times of the COVID lockdown, all consultancy resulted to being solely online (Reel, 2020). However, as I had prior experience of delivering consultancy support online, it was the challenges of arranging the sessions, receiving limited email responses and building the rapport with Harry that took place (Reel, 2020). As a sport and exercise psychologist, the foundation of supporting athletes, especially from a person-centred approach focusses on the strength of the working relationship (Rogers, 1951). Between session six and seven, there was a three-week gap, due to limited email responses from Harry's parents. During this time, I engaged in supervision and self-reflection (see appendix eight) as I was feeling confused and lost with what was going on. Harry's mother sent an email during this time stating that Harry didn't want to engage in the sessions anymore because he didn't think they were helping. I began to question my effectiveness as a practitioner "how do I help this person?" (Tod & Eubank, 2020) but also switched my focus to Harry "what is the individual's current state of affairs?" (Egan & Reese, 2018). I arranged a zoom call with his father to discuss what was currently going on for Harry. He mentioned that he didn't want to go on the 6-week development plan at the academy, he was "stressed out" because of his GCSE exams and was spending a lot of time with his friends skateboarding. During this meeting myself and Harry's father agreed for Harry to complete a home task of psychological activities (appendix 9), however, after a couple of days I reflected that wasn't an effective decision. I reached out to Harry's parents

again to arrange a consultancy support session via zoom, I knew that as he was experiencing these current critical moments, allowing him to open up and freely express his emotions and thoughts would provide great benefit (O'Halloran, 2019). Through reflection-on-action, I identified that being an adaptable and flexible practitioner allows you to discover the most effective next step in fulfilling client's needs during their current critical moments.

Additionally, my role within the academy was challenged regarding where my boundaries lie when delivering sport psychology support. Boundaries were set at the beginning of consultancy around confidentiality but in the case of harm, this may be broken (safeguarding officer) (Lang & Hartill, 2014). Concerns of potential clinical issues arose during the consultancy, for example the impact of not training during the COVID lockdown and the 8-week development programme on Harry's wellbeing. As well as dysfunctional thought patterns, such as "I am not good enough" and "I performed terrible yesterday". My practitioner role was vital in this moment, I picked up and acted on these behavioural and emotional cues in an ethical and professional manner (BPS, 2021). I met regularly with my supervisor to monitor comments made and plan for the best course of action through sharing advice, experiences and thoughts (Knowles et al. 2007). As well as consistent contact with Harry's parents to gather the support he was receiving at home outside of football. Due to no previous experience of working with a client who alerts potential clinical concerns, I initially felt lost and was conscious about making the right decision. To increase my competence with this area, I engaged in consistent self-reflection, gained advice from experienced peers and regular supervision to express my thoughts and decision making.

A challenge to my practitioner congruence occurred due to the broader role of managing multiple working relationships. Within this role, confidentiality is a fundamental

aspect to build a meaningful rapport with your client (Champ et al. 2020). This was outlined to Harry clearly and concisely at the beginning stages of consultancy in relation to the boundaries. At times Harry's coaches and parents would ask what was being said in the consultancy sessions, as a practitioner it was key that I respected Harry's decision of confidentiality unless stated otherwise. However, this created confusion throughout the consultancy as I was unaware about how much Harry had told his parents and coach. Without breaking confidentiality, when information from these multiple stakeholders was presented to me, I didn't make them aware about what Harry has told me in relevance to this. I learnt how essential it was managing multiple working relationships, whilst maintaining confidentiality and strengthening trust, which helped to easily operationalise across the football environment (McDougall, Nesti & Richardson, 2015).

As a practitioner working in a team sport, it's fundamental to immerse yourself in the natural environment in which athletes perform (Bird, 2020). Through attending multiple training sessions and games post lockdown 3.0, I observed, recorded and evaluated many of Harry's attitudes, behaviours and emotional cues whilst he was in his competitive environment (McKenzie & van der Mars, 2015). For example, Harry avoiding tackles against taller opponents, elevated frustration when making mistakes and a lack of communication between his teammates. By observing Harry's overt behaviours outside of the formal consultations allowed for indicators of psychosocial processes (Holder & Winter, 2017). These observations were reflected on during the consultancy sessions. This created a safe and open space for Harry to reflect on his decisions, behaviours, and emotions on and off the pitch but also gain evidence and to view Harry in his real-world context (Holder & Winter, 2017). At first, I struggled with "what to observe" but as the consultancy went on, it became more apparent of how his emotions affected aspects of performance. The use of observations

helped to increase my spatial and self-awareness as a practitioner, in understanding Harry's rationale for decisions made and the impact on wellbeing and performance.

Towards the latter stages of consultancy, I faced an unexperienced challenge of reformulation of the consultancy case. Usually, in previous consultations these have occurred in a linear manner as suggested in Keegan's (2015) sport psychology consultancy model. Due to the three weeks break in the consultancy with Harry, I knew that he was experiencing challenges in football and broader life, so it was key to be adequately prepared to support Harry (e.g., being patient, open and supportive) during this critical period. Since Harry discovered that he was being placed on an 8-week development programme he wasn't enjoying football anymore as he was struggling to cope with the pressure and wasn't engaging in it for the love of the game. Enforced deselection left Harry questioning his athletic identity and other under-developed identities which recreate the self (Woods et al. 2003 as cited in Brown & Potrac, 2009) and this called for the consultancy focus to be switched from performance issues to wellbeing and identity concerns. Through consistent self-reflection and supervision, I reflected on my consultancy decisions when supporting and guiding Harry to choose the best course of action that prioritised his emotional wellbeing (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). In this case, it resulted in the consultancy ending unexpectedly and Harry taking a break from football for during the summer 2021 break.

Conclusion

This case highlights my professional and personal development as a trainee sport psychology practitioner working with a client in a professional football academy environment. Although the consultancy ended unexpectedly due to Harry's departure from the academy and no

scholarship obtained, I believe that this consultancy constitutes elements of success. For example, he made positive improvements in his wellbeing, enjoyment with other hobbies and football at a different level and individual self-believe, highlighting the significance of prioritising the person before the player. This case accentuated a key learning journey of working as part of a MDT team, adaptability in supporting critical moments in football and practitioner awareness of ethical boundaries whilst working in an elite football academy environment.

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Combining exercise and sport psychology in weight management: An intervention Case Study in Youth Team Academy Football

Case study context

Explored below is a reflective case study example of an applied consultancy with a 17-year-old adolescent male, who is a first-year scholarship player, at St. Edward's, an elite football academy in the North-West of England. For the case study, pseudonyms were used for the described client, Jorge and the club, St. Edward's, to uphold confidentiality and protect their identity. Jorge has been involved in professional academy football since the age of seven, playing at two academies, but at St. Edward's since U11s. At 16, Jorge was selected to make the transition into full-time football, being offered a two-year scholarship programme. This programme aims to prepare players with the appropriate skills and qualities, essential to becoming a professional footballer (Mills et al. 2012). At the time of the consultancy, Jorge was two months into his scholarship programme, training with his U18s teammates, with the occasional opportunity to train with St. Edward's first team who are in League One of the UK football divisions. Scholarship players either continue into their first team on a professional contract or get released from the club. At the time of consultancy, Jorge was overweight and in the obese 30+ category. He had previously worked with the nutritionist, academy manager and age-specific coach at St. Edmund's Academy to lose weight but had experienced a continuous cycle of losing weight and putting weight back on, described as a "yo-yo" process by the academy manager and the nutritionist (Prochaska, 2008; Prochaska & Velicer, 2020). It's important also to note that Jorge sometimes lacked stability in his home life and had a difficult relationship with his father.

The staff at St. Edmund's academy were aware that I had just commenced my professional doctorate when I started my role at the club in January 2020 as a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist. My role at the academy involved supporting players and staff through 1-to-1 consultancy, psycho-educational workshops and on-pitch support aligned with my developed psychology programme (see appendix one). I began this role on a voluntary basis attending two training and one match every week as well as multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings and the delivery of the psychological support, however, this progressed to receiving a paid 10-hour per week contract in July 2021. At the time of consultancy, both the manager and nutritionist were concerned with Jorge's weight, influenced his individual physiological level and team performance. For example, quickly losing breath and appearing slow on the ball with lose of ball possession. The strength and conditioning (S&C) coach highlighted below average from Jorge's sprinting and plyometric scores last season. Based on both my observations in Jorge's training sessions and conversations with staff, during which we discussed the role of psychology in weight management.

The practitioner

At the start of this consultancy period, I was 24 years old and 22 months into my accredited British Psychological (BPS) Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). Through attending training courses and extended reading of Motivational Interviewing (MI), Rationale Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) and counselling skills, I felt equipped to deliver effective consultancy practice at the academy. I had worked at the club for 1 year and 10 months before the psychology support began with Jorge, thus delivered plentiful 1-to-1 consultancy with other football players in the academy. Additionally, my experience with exercise psychology began in February 2019

and is currently active with an organisation called 'Be Strong'. This is a lifestyle support group, founded in 2016 to increase social, physical, psychological, and emotional attributes to living a healthy life. My role involved delivering psychological support to members regarding their exercise, mindful eating, and lifestyle behaviours (e.g., developing healthy habits).

When I reflect on my philosophy of practice, I hold six beliefs and four values that resonate with my previous personal experiences and align with my practitioner professional practice (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). The beliefs of; growth requires empathy and connection, empathy in the working relationship needs to be central, adverse scenarios provide an opportunity to grow, change and develop, the past influences the present, a desire to help individuals develop as a person and a performer and personal disclosure helps at times with empathy. Trust, compassion, empathy, and growth allow me to uphold my beliefs to establish the practitioner-client rapport and deliver support through a flexible collaborative mode of practice dependent on the context when necessary (Chandler et al., 2016; Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011). In this case, due to the lack of knowledge, awareness and understanding Jorge held of himself in facilitating behaviour change I was more inclined to adopting a collaborative approach utilising cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This approach appeared most effective when it is practised in an autonomy-supportive way, through Socratic questioning, asking open-ended questions that encourage internal reflection from Jorge (Clark & Egan, 2015; Eubank & Tod, 2020). By using CBT, I had a framework within which to guide Jorge to increase accountability and discover personal worth through evidence-based practice, helping him to adjust his thinking from unhelpful to more realistic ways of coping with what was currently happening for him (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Scott & Dryden, 2003).

Consultancy overview

This consultancy took place over a nine-month period (October 2021-May 2022), with a total of fifteen consultancy sessions via Zoom and face-to-face (i.e., in the academy office, gym setting or at the training ground – see ***table one***). Originally, consultancy occurred weekly as required but varied dependent on circumstances highlighted in the case.

Table 1 – the structure of the consultancy sessions with Jorge

Structure of the consultancy sessions	
This consultancy adopted Keegan's (2015) sport psychology framework in a flexible manner. A collaborative approach utilising all expertise of the academy manager and nutritionist was necessary.	
Session 1	Intake – introduction and getting to know Jorge. Understanding to what was currently happening for him. Beginning of building the rapport and trust.
Session 2	Needs analysis introduction – building upon information captured in session 1. Uncovering areas of strength, improvements, opportunities, and threat. It's important to note that the needs analysis occurred from the beginning of October to the end of November 2021 (two-month period)
Session 3	Case formulation – beginning to conceptualise the unique issues for Jorge's current experiences to understand how best to support him (Gardner & Moore (2005)

Session 4 and 5	Session 4 - Introduction to the behaviour change techniques (BCTs; Teixiera et al. 2020) such as action planning, self-monitoring, and goal setting.
Sessions 6 - 9	Intervention – Motivational interviewing introduction and change-talk
Sessions 10 - 12	Case re-formulation – Christmas break
Sessions 13 - 15	Structured motivational interviewing 10-week plan (until the rest of the season). This occurred for three sessions
Sessions 16 +	Referral to an external therapist.
Off season plan	8-week off-season plan

Prior to the consultancy, I felt optimistic in the hope to support Jorge with his weight management and well-being whilst operating in the elite football academy environment. However, due to the case complexity evident during the consultancy and need beyond psychology feelings of apprehension, limited self-belief and worry sparked my mind with questions relating to "am I competent enough to be providing support?" replayed (Tod & Eubank, 2020). This was my first experience working as part of an MDT so regular engagement with supervision to monitor my applied practice decisions was fundamental (Sharp, Hodge & Danish, 2021). Despite this, I had developing experience working with individuals in exercise and football settings, my university supervisor has 8+ years' work in a child weight management context and the nutritionist holding 6+ years' experience of

working with academy footballers. Thus, seeking expert advice from both individuals not only increased my self-awareness and knowledge of this case but also placed Jorge in the best position to help support his weight management (Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015).

As mentioned in Table 1, this consultancy adhered to Keegan's (2015) model of sport psychology in an adaptable way. Due to the MDT nature of this case, it was collectively agreed with Jorge, the manager and nutritionist that all the information would be shared with the staff unless Jorge requested confidentiality. I actively encouraged the manager and nutritionist to implement sport psychology strategies with Jorge, such as positive reinforcement and self-talk on the football pitch or in the gym (Gould et al. 1989). I also tried to increase both staff members' awareness of the strategy benefits during MDT meetings or during conversations on the pitch (Van Raalte, Vincent & Brewer, 2016). My role consisted of implementing cognitive-behavioural principles to support Jorge's weight management but providing him with the autonomy to enhance self-awareness of his own behaviours, thoughts and emotions during his behaviour change journey (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Teixeira et al. 2020). Written informed consent was gathered from Jorge prior to consultancy, in line with the academys' and university's safeguarding procedures.

The needs analysis occurred over a two-month period in a dynamic and fluid way, capturing the case complexity, adaptation to critical demands and revaluating Jorge's needs (Keegan, 2015). Ethics and professional standards were met by increasing Jorge's and members of the MDT's awareness of competence, confidentiality, respect, data protection and boundaries of the consultancy in the initial stages (BPS, 2018). I proposed a meeting to discuss and check understanding of these ethical requirements with the staff members prior to consultancy initiating.

Before the consultancy commenced, I gathered an insight into Jorge's previous experiences, attitudes and behaviours whilst maintaining an open and non-judgemental approach (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Jorge was open to receiving sport psychology support when I initially approached him after a football training session and asked when it would start. My priority lay with establishing a trusting working rapport to ensure intervention success with Jorge due to minimal previous interaction in educational workshops and at academy training (Andersen, 2000; Sharp & Hodge, 2011). Implementing multiple needs analysis forms aimed to capture what Jorge wanted to receive from the support and to understand what was currently happening for him. For example, informal conversations on the pitch side and in the academy gym, utilising a performance profiling measure (Butterworth, Turner & Johnstone, 2012; adapted from Butler & Hardy, 1996), conducting a qualitative interview and weekly training observations.

The intake indicated that support from his family, teammates and coaches was limited, and he required direction with exercise, nutrition, and his weight loss journey from the MDT (Gonzalez, Detling & Galli, 2016; Keegan, 2017). However, as the needs analysis progressed, the manager wished to see quick weight loss results. This began to cause challenges because sustainable weight loss requires consistency of healthy behaviours across a long-term approach. For practical reasons (e.g., the academy office having no clear confidential space) the consultancy took place in the gymnasium area where none of the coaches or manager spent their time, as there were times when I noticed the manager's presence appeared to make Jorge uncomfortable. During the consultancy Jorge constantly checked over his left shoulder, his eyes would wander, and his voice would tremble (Martin,

2005). I tried to reassure Jorge that no one else could hear the conversation and checked to see if he was ok when I noticed these behaviours.

Employing interview techniques complimented Jorge to tell a story of his current experiences (Anderson, 2000). The needs analysis identified five trends (e.g., worry of injury, a lack of self-belief towards weight loss, difficulties responding to constructive feedback, family demands and an unhealthy relationship with food). The consultancy context (i.e., the complexity of the MDT working relationship, client needs and Jorge's adherence) influenced the needs analysis duration (Keegan, 2010). Jorge's difficulty in implementing positive self-talk, unhealthy lifestyle habits, limited PA engagement and self-belief indicated that his motivation to change was low. However, he recognised that applying these changes would not only make him feel better in himself but improve his football performance, such as being quicker on the ball.

I adopted a non-judgemental, empathetic, and compassionate approach to explore Jorge's current experiences inside and outside of football (Beale & Wilson, 2013). Using reflective statements such as "I can understand that that may be difficult for you, can I ask, what are the challenges of engaging in these behaviours?" helped to relate to his current life experiences. For example, the difficult relationship that Jorge had with his father meant that if there was an argument, Jorge became frustrated and "not in the mood" to attend the gym. As well as communicating a lack of time to exercise and prepare healthy meals as his priority was to take care of his ill grandad. Family circumstances proved difficult for Jorge during this time, which impacted his relationship with food, motivation to exercise and self-confidence thus, using reflective statements helped to understand Jorge's current circumstances (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011).

Although the priority for Jorge and members of the MDT centred around weight loss, he required further support around family issues, confidence, and overall lifestyle change. The manager made unhelpful comments during this time, such as "you're not starting the game at the weekend if you've not lost X amount of weight", however, due to a lack of other players in Jorge's defensive position he would still end up playing the game. Jorge would talk about the confusion and the lack of support he felt when presented with these statements followed by a lack of consequences. This potentially impacted his ambivalence and previous short-term success of health behaviour change (Fortier et al. 2012). Jorge was worried and self-conscious about a further weight gain impacting his future of injuries and game time. He wished to be happy in his own body through fuelling his body with healthy food and adopting a consistent exercise routine that he enjoyed.

Case formulation

Thorough consideration of the best suited intervention was supported by an in-depth case formulation working model, refer to Figure 1 below (Gardner & Moore, 2005). Utilising the 5P's model of case formulation encouraged Jorge to open-up and discuss what situational demands were currently and previously present (Gardner & Moore, 2005; 2006; Hutchinson & Johnston, 2013) to decide on an individually tailored intervention (Moore & Bonagura, 2017). The needs analysis uncovered each aspect of the 5Ps model, but it was useful to actively involve Jorge as a collaborative process to understand his behaviours and causes of his current lifestyle challenges (Beckmann & Kellmann, 2003). The main perpetuating factors of a low motivation to change, lack of self-confidence and internal pressure from himself and external pressure from others (e.g., coaches helped to set Jorge's intervention

goals; Gardner & Moore, 2005). Due to this more than one intervention was considered, these were the Rationale Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI). Presented below is a visual representation of Jorge's relevant experiences gathered from his case formulation.

Predisposing

Previous history of being overweight
Poor relationship with his father as a child
Previous injuries

Presenting

Currently injured
Overweight
Unhealthy behaviours and habits

Protecting

Support from Jorge's Nan, Grandad and Mother
Previous success of losing weight

Perpetuating

Low motivation to change
Low self-confidence
Internal and external pressure from himself and others

Precipitating

Concerns about his health
Whether he'll receive a professional football contract

Figure 2: *A visual representation of Jorge's weight management experiences using the 5P's case formulation working model.*

Jorge previously being overweight, the poor relationship with his father from a young age and prior football injuries were predisposing factors to be mindful of, for example, missing gym sessions and emotional overeating due to arguments with his father. The perpetuating factors of Jorge's low motivation to change, low self-confidence and pressure from himself and others to lose weight contributed to his unsuccessful attempts to adopt a healthy lifestyle change. Jorge's lack of body confidence, for example, being unhappy with his physical appearance, engaging in negative self-talk and comparison to other teammates led to finding comfort in emotional eating (McLean, Jarman & Rodgers, 2019). Exploring Jorge's current experiences aimed to address all behaviours, emotions and thoughts that were keeping him stuck. I was struggling to decide between two interventions that seemed relevant to Jorge's current circumstances. Either MI to address Jorge's ambivalence and motivation to change or REBT to work through unhelpful thinking patterns regarding weight management (Dryden. 2005; DiGiuseppe & David, 2015; Ellis & Dryden, 1997; 2007). During supervision the most prevalent existing factors of low motivation and self-confidence were uncovered and to implement MI was decided.

Within the first four consultancy sessions prior to Jorge's Christmas break we focused on revisiting the BCTs of goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring whilst collaboratively working with the nutritionist and myself. During this period Jorge lost 6kg in weight, felt confident in himself and adopted an enjoyable PA and nutrition routine. However, throughout the 2-week Christmas period he gained 6kg in weight. As an MDT we met and discussed what happened for Jorge including the challenges of no football training,

PA, or mindful nutrition choices. A follow-up meeting with the manager and nutritionist aimed to reflect on Jorge's personal values, where he addressed that education, family and football were all important, but he failed to see his health as a priority.

In February 2022, I started a 10-week MI programme with Jorge (as there were only 10-weeks remaining until the end of the season). As mentioned previously, prior to the Christmas break MI was introduced and strategies of change and predictive talk were implemented (see appendix one). The reason why only three MI sessions occurred before the season break and didn't commence on return was due to a shift in consultancy, for example, dealing with a challenging homelife where Jorge's wellbeing was a priority. Thus, when the 10-week MI programme was introduced, we picked upon Jorge's previous thoughts in relation to the intervention. The intervention aim involved working collaboratively through MI with change talk, predictive statements, and commitment language to enhance motivation to lose weight and maximise optimal performance (Mack et al. 2017; Keegan et al. 2015). MI aimed to guide Jorge through a journey of health behaviour change by exploring and resolving his current ambivalence and low motivation (Teixeira et al. 2020; Miller & Rollnick, 2002). The intervention aimed to answer questions such as "do you wish to sustain long-term behaviour change, be compliant to others or neither?" It was important for the MDT to be supportive during this period of Jorge's journey as his health was more important than his football performance. Although MI required collaboration, Jorge was encouraged to independently continue with action planning and self-monitoring ensuring accountability over his nutrition and PA.

Initially, I focused on explaining what MI is and the relevance to Jorge's development in a clear and straightforward way for him to understand. This involved addressing where

Jorge currently sees himself and looking at how he can move to his ideal self. I encouraged Jorge to identify where the disconnection between the two lies and what useful gradual behaviour changes would strengthen the connection. To improve his thinking, I asked Jorge to write down on a whiteboard what his ideal self looks like and his responses were, for example, a professional footballer, being healthier, happier and confident in himself, selected for every youth team game, injury free, having a healthy relationship with food and PA as well as making his family proud.

Jorge emphasised that during last year's pre-season he felt like he experienced "his ideal self" where he was happy with his personal and professional development. I noticed that it took longer for Jorge to think about and write down aspects of his current self as he suggested that he wasn't happy with the way that he looked, currently injured, feeling down and demotivated to attend the gym. When asked to rate what his current motivation levels where he said 6.5 out of 10 reflecting the inconsistency in his drive to engage in these behaviours (Mack, Breckon, Butt & Maynard, 2017).

To thoroughly understand this disconnection, I asked Jorge "what behaviours are important to engage in to reach your ideal self?", "how do you think you'll get there?" and "what will need to change?" aiming to develop the autonomy of choice when choosing to engage in enjoyable and healthy behaviours. His thoughts were captured using a whiteboard activity to empower Jorge to visually take himself back to when he was previously at his "ideal self" and outline where the disconnection is now. Currently, Jorge described feelings of sadness and frustration with being injured, finding it difficult to maintain an enjoyable gym routine that doesn't feel like a "chore" to attend outside of scheduled training time. He

mentioned about wanting to lose weight but was continuing to overeat, leading to a

procrastination and motivation to previously change (Breckon, Butt & Maynard, 2017).

Throughout the intervention Jorge indicated that he had begun to actively implement

healthier lifestyle changes and use commitment language. For example, walking to the gym

instead of taking a taxi, food preparation and healthier snacks instead of mindlessly eating

and going to the gym four times a week instead of two. These behaviours signified that Jorge

was making gradual changes to his lifestyle, weight loss and wellbeing but would need

further commitment to be sustainable (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983).

Critical moments

Prior to our next scheduled consultancy, Jorge missed two football training sessions due to a

family argument and upset at home over the weekend. I contacted the club's safeguarding

officer and checked in with Jorge via the team app, as part of my duty of care (BPS, 2018).

On his return to training, Jorge opened up to me about what had happened and the

psychological and emotional impact on his wellbeing and that training was an "escape" from

being at home around his father. During supervision, I reflected on my boundaries as a

trainee sport and exercise psychologist with what support that I was qualified and

comfortable to deliver. Thus, referring Jorge to an external and qualified therapist would be

in his best interest to work on his childhood trauma. Effective communication with my

supervisor and the MDT prioritised Jorge's psychological welfare, central to service delivery

and ethical practice (Anderson et al. 2002).

Evaluating intervention effectiveness

I recognised the value in documenting, reflecting on and evaluating the effectiveness of consultancy in a variety of ways to enhance successful practice (Knowles et al. 2007; Anderson et al. 2002) for example, through observation and verbal and, written evaluation. I gathered verbal evaluation from Jorge during consultancy by posing questions such as "how else can I support you?" and "how useful have you found the intervention?". Additionally, when the consultancy finished, I provided Jorge with a Consultant Evaluation Form, where he had the opportunity to assess the overall usefulness of the support.

Jorge signified many behaviour lifestyle changes, such as being more mindful with controlling his emotions, beginning to enjoy exercise, and learning to implement coping strategies to cope better with family and football pressures (Collins & Winter, 2020; Wadsworth et al. 2021). I spent time observing Jorge's behaviours on the pitch which contributed to adapting my communication and delivery of the BCTs and MI elements to match his consultancy needs. For example, Jorge kept forgetting to log the food he was eating during the week, so we collectively agreed that Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday afternoon worked, after his gym sessions. Due to the case complexity, I engaged in reflection-in-action and on-action consistently (Knowles et al. 2007; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Through engaging in this purposeful reflection, it cultivated self-questioning about my practice, to guide a detailed understanding of Jorge's current experiences (Knowles, Gilbourne, Cropley & Dugdill, 2014) to inform better decisions in practice (Cropley & Hanton, 2011).

Jorge was sent a Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF) via email to capture an overview his honest consultancy experience through responses to statements on a Likert scale and in an open manner (Cropley et al. 2020). The first section was relative to consultant characteristics

(e.g., *proved to be trustworthy* and *displayed empathy and compassion to my experiences*) where Jorge illuminated high ratings. The following section contained open questions regarding specific support for Jorge (e.g., *how supportive and effective was your consultant and why?*). Jorge's responses illuminated that he felt valued, listened to, and supported during the consultancy. Engaging in self-reflection, meta-reflection, and supervision consistently helped me to manage several ethical challenges, such as protecting confidentiality, self-regulation, managing MDT conflict (Andersen & Williams-Rice, 1996; Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2012) and boundaries of practice including psychological safety and a duty of care (Andersen et al. 2002). Managing these key critical reflections will be discussed below in terms of my personal and professional development.

Critical reflection: MDT navigation and conflict

My role within the MDT during this consultancy involved creating a safe, open, and trusting space to support players, Jorge in this case, to express his thoughts, feelings and concerns around his wellbeing, weight loss, football performance and overall lifestyle during the 1-to-1 consultancy (Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015; Tod, Hutter & Eubank, 2017). All relevant information was then communicated with the MDT staff members to ensure consistency of support from all expertise aligned with Jorge's consultancy needs. To support my initial engagement with the consultancy intake and needs analysis, understanding the common trends and outcomes from Jorge's previous support from the nutritionist and academy manager provided valuable insight (Jones & Mullen, 2007). However, it was not uncommon that I experienced anxiety related competence and a lack of self-belief posing internal questions, such as "am I a fraud?" whilst learning how to navigate and contribute to this

MDT working rapport effectively (Andersen & Stevens, 2007; Kelly et al. 2021; Tod & Eubank, 2020). A critical learning reflection of this consultancy encouraged self-awareness of how anxiety does not equate to practitioner incompetence (Wadsworth et al. 2021).

I, Jorge and members of the MDT engaged in consistent communication during the initial period of the consultancy, however, this began to break down when conflicting opinions from staff arose. I believe that this lack of communication contributed to Jorge's inconsistent adherence and consultancy outcomes. For example, one member of the MDT advised Jorge to undergo "intermittent fasting" without any sufficient evidence, although an individualised and tailored nutritional plan was already being followed. Jorge mentioned that as a result he experienced heightened anxiety and confusion of who he should listen to (Reid, Stewart & Thorne, 2004) and as a member of the MDT, I felt "let down" that decisions were being made without communicating first. Moreover, this was further signified that the academy manager held more hierarchal power and control over me and the nutritionist when determining the "final" consultancy decisions. I could have been more assertive in arranging and sticking to the monthly MDT meetings to facilitate the working rapport, which may have avoided some challenges mentioned above. In hindsight with the nature of the "footballing culture" and demands of individual staff roles, for example, dealing with defeats, injuries, or poor behaviour this may have proved to be challenging for all members of the MDT to meet and contribute to support Jorge.

During a conversation with the manager on the training pitch, I communicated the remarkable lifestyle choices that Jorge had currently accomplished as part of the long-term weight management process (Nesti, 2010). Examples being, measuring his food portion sizes, walking instead of taking a taxi to the gym and paying for his own gym membership.

However, I felt quite "undervalued" and "unsupported" when the manager responded with questions such as "but how much weight has he lost this week?" and "he should be losing more weight than that now" as the healthy behaviour changes that Jorge had made were going unnoticed. The manager trusted that Jorge would be at 90kg (from his current 101kg) weight by the end of the season with the support from the MDT staff. This was regardless of any internal or external challenges that Jorge experienced, such as a poor supportive system at home. I communicated the importance of appreciating what Jorge was currently doing well as opposed to what Jorge isn't doing, such as adhering to his nutrition programme to the MDT, to help foster a supportive environment at the academy. I knew that the manager and nutritionist would not be "happy" with this approach as both were getting "frustrated" and "losing their patience" with the lack of persistence Jorge was showing. Conversely, being honest and patient during these amid moments of conflict, helped to keep Jorge's needs at the foremost of the consultancy and manage the MDT staff members' thoughts and feelings accordingly (Nesti, 2004; 2010; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). For example, I spent time listening to the manager's and nutritionist's thoughts and shared their "frustrations" but continued to emphasise the importance of collectively providing support for Jorge moving forward as an element of "duty of care".

Critical reflection two: ambivalence vs adherence

I experienced the challenge of Jorge's "buying in" to the psychological support as it was recommended from the MDT staff that he engages in consultancy. It was clear that Jorge did not demonstrate value in the provided support, evident in his adherence to the nutritional programme and exercise routine. I felt uncomfortable with Jorge's ambivalence as I began questioning my own practitioner competence, as to whether I was "good enough" and the

support I was offering was effective (Fortin-Guichard et al. 2018). Additionally, I felt pressure from other staff to "show what I could achieve" due to the unsuccessful weight loss attempts from Jorge in the past. At times, Jorge provided limited evidence of his exercise and nutrition activity with broad or closed answers, such as the gym on Monday without specifics of what the gym session entailed. Members of the MDT suggested that Jorge was only presenting information that "we wanted to hear". I knew that my communication, creation of a supportive environment and commitment to Jorge's journey would contribute to the value Jorge sees in the psychology support and help to facilitate the working MDT relationship. Throughout the consultancy, I recognised that my level of consistent communication and persistence with revisiting the BCTs added to Jorge's behaviour change adherence. For example, when Jorge struggled to adhere to the structured nutrition plan, I asked him, "what foods do you enjoy eating?" and "can I ask, what are you currently finding challenging with the nutrition?". Jorge mentioned that reflecting on the positive elements of nutrition rather than avoiding the plan helped to make small progressions. By ensuring that Jorge felt listened to and was provided with choice facilitated confidence in working through challenges that may have been impacting his weight (Teixeira et al. 2020).

However, the MDT were becoming frustrated and confused whilst attempting to support Jorge through his continuous ambivalence to controlling his weight. At this point I did not know whether the frustration was directed at my role as instant changes weren't prevalent. As the consistency of the working MDT relationship continued to break down, I engaged in practitioner reflection (part of the MI process) to question this inconsistency (Mack, Breckon, Butt & Maynard, 2017). My conclusions posed action plans to help "bring everyone on the same page" where I tried to plan a meeting with the two MDT staff members to discuss where Jorge is currently at, how our individual roles can assist and what our

responsibilities are as an MDT in providing consistent support. However, after conversations to attempt to plan this meeting, it didn't occur due to differing priorities and interests for "continuing support". For future consultancy, although I stayed consistent communicating with Jorge, my communication "dipped" with the MDT as I didn't agree with some of their decisions at times. Acknowledging consistent communication across all key individuals may have led to reliable monthly check ins. While I couldn't remove Jorge's ambivalence without his joint effort, if the MDT and environmental conditions were more supportive then he may have felt comfortable and supported to change.

Critical reflection three: complexity of the consultancy intervention

Due to the case complexity and duration of working with Jorge over a 9-month period, I struggled with deciding on the best suited intervention to implement. At this point of my consultancy experience I had more understanding and experience with delivering REBT, but I felt that MI was more appropriate to implement due to Jorge's needs of weight management and motivation that arose from the needs analysis. After case formulation, I began to feel elevated pressure to quickly choose an intervention as members of the MDT and the football environment in general expect fast results, for example, "why is it taking Jorge so long to lose weight?" (Nesti et al. 2012) but behaviour change is a gradual process that requires consistency to adopt a healthy lifestyle (Michie & Johnston, 2012).

I acquired some prior experience of delivering MI in an exercise setting (e.g., at Be Strong) but most of the knowledge and understanding around the intervention came from reading. MI aimed to unfold Jorge's ambivalence and motivation to change his lifestyle through acknowledging his demotivation and low self-belief levels (Mack et al. 2017; 2019;

Miller & Rose, 2009). I was encouraged throughout by my supervisor to consider the rationale behind the intervention that I was choosing, which critically challenged me to question the approaches I was taking during the consultancy. Communication around adopting a systematic, evidence-based approach, such as needs-supportive counselling combined with the current BCTs may have been more appropriate to support Jorge's needs and as I acquired previous consulting experience with this approach (Knowles, Gilbourne & Tomlinson, 2007; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Teixeira et al. 2020).

I obtained and utilised a combination of sport and exercise psychology knowledge during this consultancy. My expertise in both domains allowed me to carefully attend Jorge's sport performance-related concerns (e.g., slow on the ball, deselection, and injury) as well as exercise weight management-related concerns (e.g., weight loss, development of healthy habits and nutrition and training plan) accountability. Moreover, I became mindful of other staff members' professional roles and responsibilities (e.g., nutrition and coaching expertise) as well as understanding organisational and systemic issues (e.g., individuals' psychological readiness for support, supportive environmental conditions and the coaching operations of training and matches; Arnold, Fletcher & Daniels, 2016). Due to the MDT inconsistencies mentioned previously, I was required to make consultancy decisions based on Jorge's current needs, in difficult and changing circumstances based on my own professional and ethical judgement, for example implementing MI (BPS, 2018).

Conclusion

The case complexity emphasises my personal and professional enhancement as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist working in collaboration in an MDT, in an elite football academy environment and addressing client weight management. As captured from the needs analysis, Jorge initially struggled with motivation to change, an inconsistent healthy eating and exercise routine and engagement with professional support from staff. My role consisted of delivering BCTs of self-monitoring, goal setting and action planning as well as MI as an intervention to increase adherence and motivation to manage his weight. Although this consultancy was ongoing throughout the season and ended prior to Jorge reaching the desired weight loss goal, I felt like he had experienced meaningful lifestyle behaviour changes during this journey. Jorge emphasised that the consultancy sessions helped him to adopt accountability and talk about any challenges he was facing outside of football. For example, positive well-being improvements, enhanced confidence and body image, development of healthy habits, a healthier routine with training and nutrition and enjoyment. This case enhanced my awareness of the importance of exercise psychology within a professional football environment, which can indirectly impact individuals' well-being and football performance.

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Appendices

Appendix one – *sport psychology programme for the 2021/22 football season.*

Delivery method	Foundation phase	Youth development phase	Professional development phase	Staff/coaches
Introduction workshop	30 minutes - 1 hour duration Delivered to each age group (U9s-U12s) Activity based	30 minutes - 1 hour duration Delivered to each age group (U13s-U16s) Activity based	1 hour duration Delivered to each age group (U17s-U18s) Discussion based	2-hour duration Delivered to all coaches and staff (introduction from all staff)
Psychological profiling	During 1-to-1 consultation (intake phase)	During 1-to-1 consultation (intake phase)	During 1-to-1 consultation (intake phase)	N/A
Drop in check-ins at training	Dependent on demand at training	Dependent on demand at training	Dependent on demand at training	Conversational at training/office
One-to-one sessions	Yes, via online platform e.g., Zoom and arranged at training e.g. in the classroom	Yes, via online platform e.g., Zoom and arranged at training e.g. in the classroom	Yes, via online platform e.g., Zoom and arranged at training e.g. in the gym	Yes, conversational based at training or in the academy office
Workshops	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability

Workshop or 1to1	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery timescale
Introduction workshop	Introduction into sport psychology, how it can benefit performance/well-being and key psychological aspects	All FDP and YDP (U9s-U16s)	September
The power of a routine and individual identity workshop	The importance of broadening your individual identity, adopting a routine, rituals and daily habits	All FDP and YDP (U9s-U16s)	January
Effective Communication and Self-belief	Effective vs non-effective communication, how to hold optimal confidence, strategies to improve communication and confidence	All FDP and YDP (U9s-U16s) FDP face-to-face (players and parents U9s-U12s) YDP zoom workshops (just players U13-U16s)	April
Common areas for 1to1 work are: performance profile, confidence, effective communication, dealing with injury, negative thoughts and motivation	Providing 1-to-1 psychology support. Players have an opportunity to be an active participant in their own development by engaging in self-discovery of their own attitudes and behaviours to implement positive change whether that's in their performance, well-being or within personal developments	Several number of individual players from U9s-U16s	August-ongoing

Workshop	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery timescale
Goal setting & motivation	Psychological role as a GK, setting goals for the season, effective goal setting, individual and team goals. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	All U9s-U16s goalkeepers	September in the Bamford Lounge
Confidence and personality types	Understanding your own confidence, the role of self-belief, strategies for improving and maintaining confidence	All U9s-U16s goalkeepers	November in the Bamford Lounge
Dealing with challenges and expectations	Understanding their own challenges and expectations, mistake rituals, the role of parents in providing facilitative support	All U9s-U16s goalkeepers and parents	February in the Bamford Lounge

Workshop and 1to1 focus	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery month
Introduction and emotional control workshop	Introduction into sport psychology, performance and wellbeing benefit, understanding your own emotions, performance and wellbeing impact and strategies to control emotions	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years including the head of education	September in the Bamford Lounge
Individual, player and team values workshop	Understanding your own values and beliefs in the team and individual football environment but also outside of football	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years. Including the manager, U18s coach and head coach	October in the Bamford Lounge
Managing adversity and setbacks workshop	Types of communication i.e., verbal and non-verbal Effective team and individual communication – facilitators and potential barriers	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years including the head of education	November in the Bamford Lounge
Effective communication workshop	What reflection is, why it is important, how to reflect effectively on and off the pitch	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years including the head of education	November in the Bamford Lounge
Common areas for 1to1 work are: performance profile, confidence, effective communication, dealing with injury, negative thoughts and motivation, weight management	Providing 1-to-1 psychology support. Players have an opportunity to be an active participant in their own development by engaging in self-discovery of their own attitudes and behaviours to implement positive change whether that's in their performance, well-being or within personal developments	Youth Team	July-Ongoing face-to-face at training e.g. in the gym, the Bamford Lounge at the club or on zoom

Workshop focus	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery block
Sport psychology, values and effective communication	Role & responsibilities of sport psych, individual values, psych strategies coaches can implement on the pitch to support players and effective communication between coaches and players	All – full time staff	2-hour Block 1 September
Common areas for 1to1 work/support via conversations at training are: effective communication, decision making, managing challenging players/situations, dealing with negative thoughts and emotions etc	Providing 1-to-1 psychology support. Coaches or support staff have an opportunity to be an active participant in their own development by engaging in self-discovery of their own attitudes, thoughts and behaviours to implement positive change whether that's in their coaching/expertise, well-being or within personal developments	All staff – based on the demand	July – ongoing Can occur at training, in the academy office

Consultancy contract report

Eleanor Briggs

The below report highlights the journey of our (you, Eleanor Briggs and me, Chiara, the Sport, and Exercise Psychologist in training) exercise psychology consultancy period from 14th April-October 2022.

Nature of the contract

- When we began the consultancy support in April 2022, it was agreed that no end date would be confirmed as you were starting your physical activity (PA) and fitness journey. Due to your previous engagement with a personal trainer, your knowledge around changing your lifestyle was clear and it was agreed that adopting healthy exercise and lifestyle behaviours would be a gradual process. However, at the end of the initial intake call, it was agreed that progress would be assessed after six consultancy sessions before moving forward.

- Support has been provided in accordance with the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of conduct and ethical principles (e.g., evidence of good practice by documenting processes of dealing with a challenging, ethical issue in my consultancy notes, which can be referred to if the decision is revisited and respecting privacy and confidentiality of all information that you have discussed during the consultancy sessions).

- We aimed to collaboratively worked together and enhance the rapport previously built through cognitive behavioural therapy principles.

Standards of conduct

- To regulate confidentiality, all information discussed during the video calls were confidential and all meeting notes were stored on a password protected account on a personal computer device, that only I will have access to as the trainee psychologist. However, you were made aware of disclosing information to a third party with your informed consent.

- Additionally, if I felt that you were under threat or harm to yourself or others, in accordance with the ethical code of conduct this may be communicated to an external party, for example, my university supervisor who is a qualified sport and exercise psychologist.

- Following an ethical decision-making process established in the code and constitutes an acceptable breach of confidentiality.

- As a Sport and Exercise Psychologist (in Training), I outlined in the first consultancy session that my work is under supervised support through LJMU, thus, if clinical issues, such as eating disorders arose, I would act accordingly and within my role boundaries competently.

Consultancy details

- It was agreed that the consultancy started and continued until we both felt as through the intervention needs and goals had been met.

- We collaboratively arranged the meetings at a time suitable within your busy work schedule (Sunday morning at 10am)

- The frequency of the consultancy was dependent upon your preference, for example, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly either face to face Facetime video call or by phone.

- The cost of each session was agreed as £55 per hour which includes a session report following each meeting.

- A cognitive-behavioural approach was utilised in an autonomous-supportive way to help assist your consultancy needs.

- It was your responsibility to engage with the tasks and document progress outside of consultancy time, such as keeping a weekly fitness log and reflecting on unhelpful thought patterns during your week.

- It was my responsibility to complete documentation of the session content immediately after every session, aligned with what was discussed and upholding anonymity and confidentiality of your personal data. This helped to reflect or refer to relevant content during future sessions and as a reflective process for me as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist (in Training) to emphasise personal and professional judgement of client and practitioner progress.

Session report

Dear Miss Eleanor Briggs,

Presented below is a report highlighting the progressions you have made resulting from the exercise psychology support from April 2022 to October 2022 from the Sport and Exercise Psychologist (in Training). This includes:

- On overview of the presenting issues, you wished to seek support on (highlighted in session one).

- The intervention aims and outcomes achieved.

- A reflection of your progressions, consultancy experiences and future steps.

Session one

We began our first session exploring your current thoughts about wanting to lose weight as you were unhappy with your current weight and your self-image. This presented an opportunity for the Sport and Exercise Psychologist (in training) and client to spend time discussing your current behaviours, any barriers to exercise and reflect on your previous behaviours, such as mindless eating and an inconsistent exercise routine. Your knowledge on the type and duration of exercise to engage in as well as healthy food options to choose was present but you struggled to stay consistent and accountable without a coach to provide support. This was partly associated with the unhelpful thoughts and emotions you experienced, for example being stressed from work or experiencing frustration from an argument at home resulted in you not exercising that day or overeating. Additional contributions such as dealing with hormones, your occupation working as part of a mental health crisis team and current relationship issues impacted. We spoke through the support you received during these challenging periods to help you deal with them in a positive way has been limited from other professionals so engaging in the current support from a Sport and Exercise Psychologist (in training) would be beneficial. You emphasised having "someone to talk to" not only about the challenges you're facing but all areas in life that are contributing to the role of your exercise adherence, engagement, and wellbeing.

You communicated the importance of exercising and eating well to help regain confidence with your body image and enhance existing relationships in your life, but you struggled with

"how to get there" and stay consistent. Especially, since you noticed that you currently don't feel yourself. This is extremely difficult for you as it is affecting whether you go to social events, how you feel in certain clothes and your relationship with your partner and meaningful people in your life. As a result, you have been putting off exercising and going to the gym. Being vulnerable and authentic with how this is making you feel and the impact it's having on your life helped to set our intervention goals. Communicating everything that is going on in your life, such as your job, social life and other commitments was a key activity to help increase your self-awareness on how you will prioritise and fit time in to exercise and begin to look after your health. At first you seemed conscious about how you might do this without experiencing any barriers, such as going to the gym after a long day in work. However, it was refreshing to hear about your previous experienced benefits with exercise to begin to build upon your confidence and aligned this with your desired lifestyle goals.

Agreed intervention goals

1. I will create an open, trusting, and confidential space for you to explore your experiences inside and outside of exercise.
2. Collaboratively we will work through any barriers you may face that influence your exercise adherence by using principles from psychological interventions (CBT)
3. You will be committed to the tasks outside of consultancy session and hold accountability for your weight loss, exercise and nutrition progress.

Session 10

Although initially we agreed to let consultancy follow a "free flow" with no end date, the last consultancy session occurred in October 2022 (session 10). We began exploring your weight loss progress across the last six months. In the last two sessions it was evidence that you had developed the skills, knowledge and understanding of yourself and exercise psychology to continue independently on your fitness journey. You have not only experienced an incredible life-changing weight loss (over one and a half stone loss) but evidently you have become more autonomous with your lifestyle choices and your confidence in the self and the gym has improved. Additionally, your routine of scheduling exercise in your day has become a priority and you have recognised the importance of exercise on your wellbeing which is in turn benefitting dealing with 'stress and trauma' at work and social relationships. It was inspiring to be a part of your lifestyle journey and hear about the benefits experienced.

At the latter of the session, we collaboratively reviewed whether the intervention goals set in session one was achieved and agreed that you were in a comfortable position to take a step away from the consultancy and implement the learnt psychological tools on your own (i.e., action planning and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). This new life that you have formed through creating healthy and balanced habits, such as tracking your food, prioritising exercise and completing activities to help improve your confidence have opened up opportunities to engage in other activities that you may not have considered in the past (i.e., CrossFit and the couch to 5k) as well as making healthy choices with food (i.e., low calorie alcohol drinks and going to restaurants with healthier meal options).

It was enlightening to hear that you now feel more aware and in control of how to deal with any unhelpful emotions (i.e., feeling frustrated or stressed at work) to not let them affect your mood, the rest of your day or whether you engaged in exercise. You did this by recognising

the unhelpful thoughts that may be associated with these emotions and reflecting on them through journaling to help you to cope with what was currently happening for you. An example that was evident in session six, you communicated that you were experiencing a "bad body image day", resulting in feeling quite low, in this moment you were kind to yourself by improving your quality of thoughts and decided to go to the gym but wear an outfit that you felt comfortable in. This was exceptional progress of the self through being mindful of your thoughts and contributed to the increase in self-confidence.

Overall, I have noticed not only physical improvements (i.e., your weight loss appearance, progression with cardiovascular fitness and strength) but psychological tendencies (i.e., being comfortable in your own skin in the gym and whilst on holiday, improved wellbeing and happiness). Your confidence of feeling yourself in nice clothes on holiday, being able to go to the gym yourself and comfortably use the gym equipment and maintain healthy relationships greatly improved. Although this was the final consultancy session, you have agreed to meet once in November and December 2022 to reflect on how you're maintaining these skills and tools learnt.

Appendix one – consultant evaluation form

Had useful knowledge about sport and exercise psychology that seemed to apply directly to my sport. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Was easy for me to relate to (e.g. I felt comfortable that she understood me) *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Tried to help me overcome possible problems or weaknesses in order to make my best performance /weight management more consistent. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Provided clear, practical, helpful strategies for me to try out in an attempt to solve problems or improve the level and consistency of my performance /weight management. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Proved to be trustworthy *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Seemed willing to provide an individual sport and exercise psychology programme based on my input and needs. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Had a positive, helpful and constructive attitude. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Provided clear, practical, helpful strategies for me to try out in an attempt to solve problems or improve the level and consistency of my performance /weight management. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Displayed empathy and compassion to my experiences *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	◉	High

Teaching and Training case study

The HERizon Project teaching

Context

At the point of my teaching and training case study work, I was 10 months into my professional doctorate. I identified as a neophyte teacher due to recently completing the LJMU 3is teacher training qualification in September 2020, with the teaching for this case study occurring in December 2020. The teaching opportunity occurred from an LJMU PhD research study (The HERizon Project) addressing the physiological and psychological impact of physical activity (PA) on adolescent females, which required several psychology students, including myself to deliver behaviour change consultancy sessions. The HERizon project was a twelve-week, home-based main trial intervention aimed at increasing and maintaining physical activity (PA) levels in adolescent females aged 13-16 years old, through engaging in enjoyable activities to maintain in the long-term (Cowley et al. 2021). Previously, I delivered behaviour change support for the HERizon pilot study as an "activity mentor" (see table 1 for context), holding valuable experience and knowledge of the structure and delivery of the behaviour change support consultancy sessions. I progressed to a "senior activity mentor" in the main trial, where my role consisted of training, supervising and supporting other activity mentors. The mentors formed the client group for this case study, who received their activity mentor training from me in the form of a five-session training programme online via Zoom.

The HERizon project was psychologically underpinned by the self-determination theory (SDT). Satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs (competence, relatedness and autonomy) will ensure maintenance of intrapersonal motivation and well-being, leading to an autonomous motivation for PA (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2002; 2008). By implementing

motivation and behaviour change techniques (BCTs) (Teixeira et al. 2020) through the SDT, the project aimed to foster these three needs during the consultancy process so my role as a teacher emphasised the importance of this (Cowley et al. 2021).

HERizon Pilot trial	HERizon Main trial
My role: Delivering six individual behaviour change support consultancy sessions to six adolescent females for six consecutive weeks.	**My role**: Delivering eight individual behaviour change support consultancy sessions to six adolescent females in an intervention group and six in the control group across a 12-week period
What is it: A six-week home-based intervention aimed at increasing and maintaining physical activity in adolescent females aged 13 -16-year-olds	**What is it**: A twelve-week home-based intervention aimed at increasing and maintaining physical activity in adolescent females aged 13–16-year-olds
Relationship between the two trials: • Providing behaviour change support • Zoom or Teams video calls • Worked as part of MDT to seek support from supervisors, other peers etc	**Differences between the two trials:** • Delivering support to an intervention and control group • Change of structure to the session outline • Supervisor to three master's students – supporting their applied consultancy work

Table 1: a description, my role and similarities and differences of both The HERizon Project pilot and main trial

Client group

The goal of the training was to enable the activity mentors to deliver behaviour change calls to adolescent females involved in The HERizon Project main trial. I was responsible for training the activity mentors as part of a broader psychology team structure. This consisted of the mentors engaging and interacting in small group tasks, such as role play and large group discussions. The client group (n=11) consisted of seven LJMU master's students who were involved in The HERizon Project as part of their placement module, two professional doctorate students and two BASES SEPAR candidates. All members of the cohort were female and either took an interest or had experience in delivering exercise psychology to support individuals PA levels.

Teacher and training needs analysis and programme development

The HERizon training programme was developed by the PhD student, myself, a qualified exercise psychologist and another professional doctorate student. Working as a multidisciplinary team (MDT) was a key attribute for developing an effective programme (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This was through a process of collating and reflecting on the findings gathered from the pilot trial, individual reflections and weekly meetings to share ideas and expertise to contribute to the teacher and training programme development.

This process of collectively sharing our experiences, thoughts and ideas on potential topics to cover as an MDT, contributed to the design, structure, content and delivery of the HERizon teaching and training programme. Examples being, evidence-based aspects of

physical activity and health, what BCTs will be used and the style of delivery and the activity

mentors' roles and responsibilities (e.g., mental health awareness, safeguarding and reflective

practice BPS, 2020). Once the draft structure of the teaching and training programme was

collectively developed and finalised, the decision of "who" would deliver which sessions was

decided. The other doctorate student and I were given the autonomy to choose which five

sessions to deliver for our teaching and training module. My rationale for which teaching

topics to choose related closely to my student experiences and development, providing

delivery competence as a neophyte teacher. Each teaching session was planned individually

prior to acquiring group feedback from the MDT meetings. Logistics of the teaching sessions,

such as the duration, delivery and time of day were also discussed during these meetings.

Reflecting on my previous teaching experiences, including the challenge of student

interaction, encouraged me to think of alternative delivery options, such as using open instead

of closed questions. These reflections allowed me to incorporate a mixture of teacher and

mentor-led sessions to facilitate the mentors learning (Thomas & May, 2010).

Initial teaching thoughts

Initially, I felt anxious but enthusiastic to teach on the HERizon training programme. Due to

my inexperience with teaching, I lacked in self-confidence and competence of presenting and

delivering to an audience who I hadn't previously met. Neophyte teachers often experience

bounds of self-doubt and feelings of anxiety (Tod, Anderson & Marchant, 2011). I didn't

know what to expect and I was unaware of what the trainee's previous knowledge and

experience would be. To better equip myself, communicating with my supervisor to gain this

information prior to the teaching and training was deemed essential. In the hope of

overcoming my feelings, I engaged in reflective meetings with my supervisor and course

peers to discuss challenges to delivery, confidence, and student engagement (Tod et al. 2009).

For example, we discussed my worries around a lack of student engagement and "awkward"

silences when presenting individual or group tasks as I did not want to portray myself as

incompetent. Openly reflecting on these worries and potential teaching challenges allowed

me to be adaptable in my approach, such as planning a variety of teaching activities and, in

turn building my competence and confidence both professionally and personally.

Teaching pedagogy

A teaching pedagogy is a fundamental requirement when working in higher education; it can

enhance the quality of teaching, create a sense of connectedness with students (Loughran,

2013), increase student engagement, the reproduction of new knowledge and flourish during

lessons (Bhowmik et al. 2013). Initially, I struggled to determine my teaching style due to an

unfulfilled teaching identity (Moore, 2012), as I could not base this on the student's preferred

way of learning or knowledge base. This encouraged me to incorporate more than one

teaching style, such as teacher-led (instruction) and student-led (constructivist) by engaging

in large and small group teaching. To combat my initial teaching incongruence, I presented a

body of knowledge for the mentors to learn (Knapp & Glenn, 1996) before absorbing

learning in group discussions and small group tasks to adopt an active role in their own

learning (Kalamas Hedden et al. 2017). Although there were a lot of new knowledge to be

learnt on The HERizon Project mentor training programme, I emphasised the importance of

facilitation and structured learning activities to consolidate the mentors learning. Learner-

centred, enquiry-based and active learning underpinned by teaching pedagogy. For example,

the mentors engaged in numerous role-play examples, small group discussions and 1-to-1

support which aimed to enhance their independent learning actively (Felder et al 2009).

Providing the mentors with opportunities to reflect on their practice, receive feedback of their progress and actively contribute to their educational process was my teaching aims (Gravells & Simpson, 2010; Kaufman, 2003).

Programme delivery

The teaching and training programme occurred on two full days between 9am-4:30pm and half a day between 9am-1pm on three days throughout December 2020. The teaching sessions that I delivered ranged from 30-60 minutes at various points during these days.

Table 2 – outline of the structured three-day HERizon mentor training programme, including the five-session teaching programme I delivered (highlighted in yellow)

Teaching and Training Programme	
Day one	
Setting the scene 9:30 – 10:45am	Introduction, icebreaker and HERizon overview (intervention, timescales, individual roles as activity mentors)
What does the evidence say? 11-11:30am	Physical activity and health – what is PA, the guidelines, benefits, consequences, sedentary behaviour, mentors self-reflections of own PA/sedentary behaviour
What does the evidence say? 11:30am-12pm	Adolescence, girls and physical activity – prevalence of PA in adolescent girls, barriers & facilitators, successful and less successful interventions, pilot study learning points, mentors self-reflections of adolescent experiences

What does the evidence say? 12-12:30pm	Body image and physical activity – what body image is, why it is a concern for adolescent girls, helping points, pilot study learning points, mentors self-reflections of own body concerns
Needs supportive counselling 1:30-3pm	Self-determination theory (SDT) and needs-supportive counselling – overview of SDT, motivation quality, needs-supportive strategies, example videos, mentors engage in reflective tasks in relation to their own behaviour
Needs supportive counselling 3:15-4:15pm	Role-plays – focus on the application of needs-supportive strategies using Zoom breakout rooms

Teaching and Training Programme
Day two

Behaviour change techniques 9:30 – 10am	Introduction, goal setting (process and outcome), action planning and self-monitoring – introduction of the techniques with activities to help mentors bring them to life.
Behaviour change techniques 10-11am	Role play of action planning – the mentors would observe a live role-play of the week one session between myself and another senior activity mentor. Opportunity to recognise the positive and improvement aspects following the role play examples and the activity mentors to engage in their own week one role play activity in pairs in Zoom breakout rooms
Behaviour change techniques 11-11:30am	Barrier identification and coping planning – introduction of these BCTs, what they are, the benefits etc for the mentors to understand

Behaviour change techniques 11:30am-12:30pm	Role play of barrier identification from week two through to 6 and the follow-up weeks (week 9 and 12) - the mentors would observe a live role-play of the week one session between another senior activity mentor and myself. Opportunity to recognise the positive and improvement aspects following the role play examples and the activity mentors to engage in their own week two role play activity in pairs in Zoom breakout rooms.
Behaviour change techniques 12:30-12:45pm	Question and answer and, home-work task - In the pairs they worked in during the morning, ask each individual to audio-record themselves doing 2 X 10/15-minute sessions: a) Week 1 session (action planning) b) Week 2 session (barrier identification) Then switch roles and record the sessions again (i.e. if they were practitioner first time round they are now the client). Ask them to focus on setting a "real" action plan tailored to the client's PA (as they won't have done week 0, will need to add some exploratory questions at start to determine what they'd like to focus on). Then over the next week complete the self-monitoring task for themselves. Facilitators to complete this task also (can contribute to observations for qualification).
Roles and responsibilities 1:3-2pm	Record keeping – explanation of what is recorded from the consultancy, what to track from the adolescent girls, weekly admin, data protection and security

Roles and responsibilities 2-3pm	Mental health awareness and safeguarding – responsibilities, referral and HERizon protocols with the inclusion of case study examples
Roles and responsibilities 3:15-4:15pm	Reflective practice – the importance of reflective practice and how to make it meaningful

Teaching and Training Programme	
Day three	
Reflections on home-work task 9:30-11am	Simultaneous 1-to-1 sessions where the students within my supervisory group engaged in their home-work task and my role was to listen to the audio-recordings and reflect on their delivery ahead of The HERizon Project main trial consultancy
Role play 11:30am – 12:30pm	Myself and the other doctorate student/senior activity mentor engaged in a live role-play of all aspects of The HERizon Project introductory session. The mentors were given the opportunity to engage in another role-play in pairs in breakout rooms and ask questions regarding delivery challenges.
Summary, FAQs and next steps 12:30-1:30pm	Any "what ifs" were covered, summary questions and any issues that were not spoken about (e.g., if a parent joins the call, if you can't get hold of a participant etc).

Teaching session one: Adolescence, girls and physical activity

Session 1 was initially teacher led, focusing on an introduction to the topic and teaching key content, but moved towards activity mentor interaction and discussion (see appendix one for an overview of the session PowerPoint slides). The session objectives were 1) to learn and understand the prevalence and relationship between adolescence, girls, and PA; 2) to recognise the facilitators and barriers to adolescent girls taking part in PA and 3) for the mentors to explore their own adolescent PA experiences. The session rationale involved introducing how the adolescent girls in the HERizon project may perceive PA in relation to motivators and barriers (Cowley et al. 2021; Dwyer et al. 2006). Presenting a general question to introduce the session "on average how many adolescent girls would you say are inactive?" enabled the mentors to share their thoughts and helped me to grasp the knowledge that they accrued (Snyder, 2003). Their answers highlighted that they had background knowledge on the inactivity of adolescent females; highlighting the importance of the HERizon project (Cowley et al. 2021). I began to address the mentors individually as they used the chat function to communicate their answers. This helped to build the teaching rapport and in-group social connection (Donnelly & McSweeney, 2008).

Presenting real life experiences of adolescent girls from the pilot trial aimed to foster the learning. The mentors were encouraged to share what main barriers and facilitators existed for girls engaging in PA (Dwyer et al 2006). One student highlighted a barrier as being "they might be embarrassed when exercising in front of others", which reflected her own experiences as an adolescent during PE at school. From the pilot trial, this was an apparent barrier for adolescent girls when exercising in front of parents or siblings at home (Cowley et al. 2021). As a facilitator I delivered in this way to create a sense of relatedness between the mentors' thoughts and experiences and the adolescent females in the main trial.

To encourage a learner-led approach following the group discussions and content taught, I divided the mentors up into pairs and opened the zoom breakout rooms for 10 minutes. The activity aim consisted of sharing and discussing their own experiences as an adolescent female engaging in PA. This included how active they were, their views of PA, what type of PA they did and the reasons they did or did not get involved in PA, highlighting any barriers or facilitators that they experienced. My role consisted of briefly "dropping into" a few of the breakout rooms to observe the discussion that was occurring. After the 10 minutes, the mentors returned to the main room where I asked, "how did you find that activity? Would anyone like to share their experiences?" Learner led- approaches give clients control and accountability over their own learning whilst the teacher acts as a facilitator (Iversen et al. 2015). At first, there was an awkward silence, but one mentor emphasised high levels of PA as an adolescent, engaging in gymnastics 5 times a week through enjoyment and routine, where-as another mentor said she would avoid PE at school because she was self-conscious. Highlighting a mixture of experiences displayed by the mentors, helped to solidify their learning, and begin to be aware and understand the type of experiences the adolescent girls may face during the HERizon main trial (Cowley et al. 2021). Additionally, reflecting on our own experiences as a practitioner can be beneficial in the development of empathy, highlighted as an important skill for the mentors to employ in their interaction with the project participants.

Teaching session two: Goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring

The learning outcomes for session 2 included 1) to learn and understand what goal setting is; including types of goals, such as SMART goals; 2) to recognise the importance of action planning 3) to learn and understand what self-monitoring is and ways to self-monitor. As the

HERizon project is underpinned by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 1985) it was crucial to discuss the behaviour change techniques (BCTs) in relevance to the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Michie et al. 2011). For example, providing the adolescent girls with autonomy to choose what outcome goal they want to achieve from the intervention (Locke & Latham, 2002). As the mentors had been taught about this the previous day (see Table 2), my aim focused on building upon their understanding of how to apply the basic psychological needs to the specific BCTs (i.e. goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring). Three examples of goals were displayed where I encouraged volunteers to formulate a SMART goal, this activity checked the students understanding. To consolidate the BCTs content discussed, the next activity consisted of performing a simulated role-play, with one trainee adopting an activity mentor role and the other being the adolescent female. The activity rationale consisted of listening to their client's PA background experiences to help set a SMART goal, an action plan and to discuss ways to self-monitor (Kanfer, 1970; Locke & Latham, 2002; World Health Organisation, 2019). In line with my teaching philosophy, it was key to teach the BCTs content and aim to consolidate the information in an active learning and practical way through role play and group discussion (McCullough & Munro, 2018).

Session three: Role play and feedback

This was the first of the mentor led role play sessions, which solely focused on the adolescence, girls and physical activity session of the HERizon consultancy. Again, there were three learning objectives to be met: 1) to observe a live role play action planning session between myself and another senior activity mentor 2) to recognise the positive and improvement aspects following the role play examples 3) to engage in an action planning role

play activity in pairs. This was a shared teaching session with another doctoral student from the MDT; my specific role consisted of asking open questions and facilitating the mentor's learning. Due to our previous HERizon consultancy experience, we engaged in a live role-play example of programme session one for 15 minutes for the mentors to observe. This was an adjustment to the original session outline, as in the session the previous day, mentors were struggling to grasp the needs-supportive communication as we hoped. Therefore, we felt it would be helpful to demonstrate an example of how the techniques may be used in the HERizon context. The mentors were asked to observe and make a note of any positives or improvements they could take from the consultancy role-play, including examples of needs supportive strategies, such as, meaningful praise and open questions.

In helping the mentors to observe a real-life example of what they will be required to deliver themselves, it was key to cover all sections of the session one structure as well as implementing needs supportive strategies, such as listening empathetically without judgement, providing a meaningful rationale etc (Teixeira et al. 2020). The purpose of the role play was not to provide a "perfect example", but it was a realistic learning opportunity for mentors to demonstrate their understanding by picking out what we did well and what we could improve on. This created opportunity for them to engage in critical thinking, increasing awareness of real-life experiences and build upon their competence.

To consolidate learning through a learner led approach, the mentors had the opportunity to go into pairs in zoom breakout rooms to practice their own simulated role-play. This consisted of 15 minutes each in the role as a practitioner and adolescent female. During this role-play, I waited in the main room with the other teacher until it was time for the group discussion as we decided that it was important the mentors felt comfortable, at ease

and not like they were being watched (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). As I did not join the breakout rooms to observe, it was important to gather feedback of their experiences during the group discussion. I asked the collective group and to individual pairs of how they thought the role-play went. The responses were mixed between still feeling uncomfortable not authentic, but also an increase in confidence in utilising the needs supportive strategies.

Session four: One-to-one reflection

The fourth session followed a different structure to the previous three. Prior to the training programme, all three senior activity mentors were placed with three trainee mentors to supervise and provide support for them throughout the training and main trial via weekly reflection meetings. Adopting a supervisory role allowed me to share my expertise and skills (Foltz et al. 2015) as well as acting as a quality control mechanism to ensure competent service delivery from the mentors (Watson et al. 2004). They were asked to engage in a 'homework task': to do an example role-play from session one with another mentor and to audio record it. Therefore, prior to this teaching session, I carefully listening to their audio recordings to pick out the positives and improvements ahead of the main trial (see appendix three). Identifying if the mentors adopted needs supportive strategies during the role play, would highlight their learning from the previous teaching sessions. The marking criteria evaluation included ratings of 'requires development', 'acceptable' and 'outstanding', as well as identifying strengths and improvements (see appendix four).

I utilised this marking criteria evaluation to determine the structure of the remainder of teaching session four. 1-to-1 basis thirty-minute sessions took place with each mentor to discuss through the role-play experience and feedback. In this context, feedback that explains

gaps in knowledge and understanding is able to increases the sustainability of learning beyond the immediate task (Glover & Brown, 2006) and contributes to progression maintenance (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). My first open question centred on finding out how the mentors thought the role-play went. Overall, the mentors indicated it had gone well, and they felt more confident compared to their first role-play experience. I went through strengths first, outlining my thoughts and played the audio clip back as evidence. I asked the mentors "is there anything that you thought you could improve on?", allowing them to reflect on which areas to work on before the main trial. For example, I played the audio clips and asked the students to recognise what could be improved before presenting my reasoning and support for progression (see appendix 3). This aimed to provide a sense of autonomy and competence for the mentors through gaining meaningful feedback and adopting an active learner role for their development (Teixeira et al. 2020). This provided a viable way to discover how much the mentors had learnt over the first two training days, gain verbal feedback from my teaching sessions and offer them support ahead of the main trial. After the 1-to-1 session, each student received a feedback sheet via email, with an opportunity to follow up with questions and thoughts (Byrne, Brown & Challen, 2010).

Session five: Outline of role play – introductory session

The final teaching session was shared with the other doctoral student in the MDT. We planned the final session together and delegated different sections between us both. For example, an outline of the introductory session explaining the role of the "activity mentor" was designed by us both but I delivered how the behaviour change calls will work. We both took turns being the activity mentor and participant, displaying flexible roles during the role play. The session duration was one hour and occurred immediately after the 1-to-1 reflection

sessions. The rationale of this final session entailed voicing the common themes of feedback that emerged from the individual reflections and to provide another opportunity to engage in role-play, but this time emphasising the introductory session. Prior to the session, I asked all students to write in the chat box one aspect that they have learnt from the home role-play task. This consisted of increased confidence levels, implementing needs supportive strategies and authenticity. The teaching session focused on the main trial introductory session and the objectives were 1) to explain how the behaviour change calls will work 2) to build rapport and get to know the client 3) to set personal goals for the programme.

To help consolidate the mentors' learning from their previous role-play experience and to introduce session one of the consultancy, myself and the other doctoral student engaged in another live role play and shared some 'perfect' examples of what the consultancy may look like. As session one would be the first call, the sole focus was around building a rapport with the client, discovering their PA background and perspectives then setting a project goal. Again, with the live role-play we asked the students to think about what positives and improvements stood out. The mentors had a final opportunity to go into breakout rooms, adopt the role as a practitioner and client to go through all three sections of session one. We waited in the main room again, not wanting to be a distraction or the mentors to change their behaviour. They were eager to share their experiences and progression in comparison to the previous role-plays. The feedback was favourably positive in relation to their own development as a practitioner, highlighting competence and confidence ahead of the main trial.

Evaluating teaching effectiveness

Evaluating teaching effectiveness was paramount to monitor the mentors' learning and my development as a neophyte teacher (Shao, Anderson & Newsome, 2007) through a mixture of verbal, written and self-reflection feedback from my supervisor and the mentors'. I created a qualitative feedback form that was sent to all mentors to evaluate my second teaching session (goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring as BCTs) (see appendix two for the template). This feedback form was based on my teaching consensus and consisted of the essential characteristics for neophyte teacher development (Bhowmik, Banerjee & Banerjee, 2013). The aim of this written evaluation was to check the mentors' learning progress and their honest perceptions of my delivery by including questions relating to the level of interaction, evidence-based content and body language (Arts, Jaspers, & Joosten-ten Brinke, 2016).

As this feedback was gathered after teaching session two, immediate implementation into my next teaching sessions was key to ensure fulfilment of the mentors' needs. The feedback included open questions with examples, such as "did the presenter check the observers learning? Give at least one specific example" where the mentors' responded questions where regularly asked, role-play was used and through group discussions. Additionally, the question of "what could need more improvement? Give at least one specific example" highlighted a common issue of going through the content too quickly at times so the mentors didn't have enough time to make key notes. To combat this area for improvement, during teaching session three I slowed down the pace of my voice, so that I did not rush over the content, and I had the opportunity to see if anyone had any questions. As part of the training programme, I gathered general written feedback. A section was dedicated to the psychology five session teaching component overall, the feedback was positive suggesting that the sessions were engaging, and a variety of learning methods were used.

As well as written feedback from the mentors' it was also fundamental to capture my supervisors' thoughts and perceptions of the same teaching session (goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring) and by using the same feedback form (see appendix two). My supervisor has been an experienced teacher for over 20 plus years so I highly valued her experiences of what she thought worked well and could be improved. It was highlighted that my delivery engaged the audience throughout and there was no element of feeling like they were being talked at. As well as, a clear and friendly delivery, well-structured session and a high level of adaptability by changing the wording of the question after no response. An element for improvement referred to not giving up too quickly when the audience do not respond to the question and be comfortable with silence. As effective teaching is oriented to and focused on students and their learning, I ensured this feedback from both my supervisor and the mentors was maintained and incorporated into my latter teaching sessions (Devlin & Samarawickreme, 2010).

Verbal feedback was fundamental during the mentor 1-to-1 teaching period in sessions four. The aim of this teaching session was mentor-led, allowing them to uncover what went well with the home-task role-play, any challenges and learning points necessary but as well as their teaching session experiences. This allowed them to take a proactive role in generating and utilise their own feedback to help with their learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). For example, one mentor emphasised that through observing the live role-plays helped to embed their understanding of adolescent girls' barriers to PA. All the mentors in my supervisory group highlighted that the content delivered was engaging, informational and relevant in helping to manage consultancy challenges and increase their competence.

Critical reflection

Reflecting in and on action during this teaching period helped to gather insightful learning points that have contributed to my personal and professional teaching development. The reflection consists of aspects that worked well, didn't work so well and skills I enhanced, postulating many positives and challenges that I encountered as a neophyte teacher within sport and exercise psychology. The reflections below are discussed in chronological order of the session delivery, critical learning points and my overall development through engaging in teaching.

Reflection one: Nature of the sessions

The nature of the teaching programme consisted of various facilitative and challenging factors. The first factor related to teaching on an online platform, Zoom, due to the Coronavirus lockdown 2.0 restrictions at the time of the teaching period. Initially, I felt nervous as I didn't know most of the mentors, but these feelings eased due to previous experience of teaching online to an unknown audience. Through teaching online, I experienced many awkward silences, challenges through building a rapport and online WIFI connection issues. During session one, to engage the students and to facilitate a group discussion I asked an open question of "what were your adolescent PA experiences?". I experienced my first awkward silence where no one answered. At this moment, panic and anxiety arose and I didn't know how to handle the situation, I felt uncomfortable sitting in silence, resulting in moving on to the next part of the session where I gave an example of my own. After my second teaching session, I attended a 1-to-1 progress meeting with my supervisor to discuss feedback from her observations of my second teaching session (see

appendix one). Highlighted were positive and challenging learning points to take forward to my next teaching sessions. Initially, I struggled to build a rapport with the mentors due to their quiet nature, and I didn't know most of them, so I found it difficult to connect through an online platform. The main learning point looked at finding an alternative and more effective method of coping with these silences, by elevating confidence to allow these awkward silences to occur and reflect-on-action how to rephrase the question. For example, "what PA did you engage in as an adolescent, for example dancing?". Postulating a direct, relatable and understandable question can diminish awkward silences and uphold perseverance (Le & Gorstein, 2019). This was put into practice during session three where I experienced another "awkward silence", but I stayed mindful in the moment with it. This resulted in a mentor responding to the question and I learnt that it's ok to experience negative emotions, such as panic and be comfortable with them (Ollin, 2008).

Reflection two: Adaptability to the students' needs

Being an adaptable and flexible teacher helps to fulfil the learners' needs of the teaching programme (Kuilt et al. 2001). The need to be adaptable was present after session three where the original session outline fostered change from observations and mentor progress. A meeting occurred with the relevant staff members to devise a plan. Initially, I felt frustrated and immediately reflected on questions such as "am I good enough to be teaching?" or "did I not deliver the content effectively?". This questioned my teaching competence and feelings of worry arose due to the limited account of time delegated to adapting this session content. To combat for these current feelings, I engaged in peer supervision with the other doctoral student. Peer supervision allowed me to share my concerns and emotions by connecting in an open space to someone who was experiencing the same situation (Akhurst & Kelly, 2006).

This reduced my worry and allowed me to adopt a clear mind addressing the next steps of planning. Through peer and supervision reflection meetings it became clearer as to why the session content needed to change, based on the mentors' needs for the HERizon main trial (Cowley et al. 2020). This supported my teaching pedagogy of providing a variety of ways of learning to encourage an active role in their own learning (Kalamas Hedden et al. 2017). Given we only had five days to plan and prepare the changed teaching session, this fostered organisation and determination to complete this to the best of our abilities. The benefits from this experience meant that the students' discovered a new and effective way of capturing the content. Even though it's important to follow a structured training programme protocol to ensure the content is covered, this experience highlights the importance of adapting teaching effectiveness of adapted to the mentors' needs at any timepoint to ensure effectiveness.

Reflection three: Co-teaching

Co-teaching was a requirement of the HERizon training programme, where myself and the other doctoral student in the MDT shared work and responsibility for instruction throughout the programme (Roth & Tobin, 2004). Both session three and five consisted of the planning, creation and implementation of delivery through co-teaching (see appendix 4 and 5 for reference). Initially, I felt like co-teaching would be a "safety net", as all the attention would not be just on my teaching and if I made a mistake or experienced a mind blank, the co-teacher would pick it up. Additionally, I had a strong working relationship with the other doctoral student (course peers for three years and worked on The HERizon Project pilot trial together). This fostered a safe and trusting environment to share experiences, opinions, challenges or concerns to design the most effective session to suit the mentors' needs (Chandler et al. 2016) and it was an insightful opportunity to learn from my co-teacher's

experiences. However, I felt like I had less autonomy over the session direction, the preparation and workload appeared to be longer (Bettencourt & Weldon, 2010) and it was difficult to schedule time to meet due to other commitments and from teaching online (Ginther, Phillips & Grinseki, 2007). As we were faced with only five days to change the content of session five and commit to other commitments outside of The HERizon Project (e.g., other consultancy work, part-time jobs etc), it meant that we both had to prioritise our time accordingly. This required high levels of adaptability, organisation and preparation as teachers to ensure the mentors' needs and programme criteria was being met (Butcher et al. 2006). However, I learnt that sometimes I preferred having the balance of working independently and being able to complete the preparation in your own time, as well as confiding ideas collectively during peer and tutor supervision to gain expert experience and feedback (Knowles et al. 2007); this approach is optimal for my future teaching experiences.

Conclusion

This teaching experience emphasised how delivering five teaching and learning sessions within the HERizon training programme helped to teach new knowledge and skills in preparation the mentors for their PA consultancy journey in The HERizon Project main trial. Throughout my teaching journey, I have enhanced my confidence and competence levels with teaching people I am unfamiliar with and increased my adaptability in challenging situations, such as dealing with awkward silences and changing the teaching content to fit the mentors' needs. Although I would describe myself as a neophyte teacher, clear progressions of the mentor's consultancy development throughout the role-play and teaching sessions were identified. The mentors identified higher confidence and self-awareness of how to create a safe and open environment for the adolescent girls to feel comfortable to open up, as well as the mentors sharing their concerns during supervision group reflections. This teaching

experience has been a steppingstone in introducing me to organising, creating, planning and delivering my own session content to take forward into future teaching opportunities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – overview of teaching session one PowerPoint slides

THE HERIZON
PROJECT

Day 1 – training

Thursday 3rd December 2020

Chiara Mansfield

Learning objective one
Learn and understand the prevalence and relationship of adolescence, girls and physical activity.

Learning objective two
Recognise the facilitators and barriers to adolescent girls taking part in physical activity.

Learning objective three
Apply your own adolescent physical activity experiences.

Adolescence, girls and physical activity

Click to add notes

On average, how many adolescent girls are inactive?

Breakout group activity

THE
HERIZON
PROJECT

10 minute activity

During your adolescence discuss:

How active were you?

What type of exercise/sport did you participate in?

What were the reasons you did/didn't?

Appendix 2 – individual feedback form, supervisor's observations from teaching session two

<u>Feedback form – individual teaching</u>

Presenter's name	Chiara	Observer's name	
Session title	Week 0 & 1 session plans, goal setting, action planning & self-monitoring	Date	4/12/20

Did the presenter communicate the learning outcomes and content clear and effectively?	Yes – explained which sessions C will cover and which E will cover and gave a good overview of the behaviour change call framework.
Were you as the observer engaged throughout the teaching session? **Give a specific example of how.**	Yes – lots of questions and engaged the audience throughout. Didn't feel like we were being "talked at".
What worked well in the session? **Give at least one specific example.**	Well-structured session that flowed. Clear and friendly delivery. Good use of personal example to bring action planning & self-monitoring to life. You showed you were able to adapt your delivery to the audience. E.g. Initially asked if they'd ever used action planning, but then when you realised this didn't get a response you re-phrased the question to ask if anyone knew what action planning was…(could see the "in-action reflection" occurring!).
What could need more improvement? **Give at least one specific example.**	Don't give up too quickly if you don't receive an initial response from the audience. Eventually someone will break the silence! Also sometimes people struggle with open questions, so rephrasing or giving a closed instruction might get more responses from the group, e.g. write an example of when you have used goal setting in the chat. Whilst it is kind to thank people, be careful not to fall into generic "thank you for sharing". The times when you reflected more specifically on what participants had said were more meaningful, e.g. "that's a really good point, because…

Are there any specific comments you would like to make on: pace and voice; structure and content; eye contact; group activities; discussion; timing; movement, etc	Good pace and clear voice throughout. Good eye contact, and friendly nature – also a professional background to your "zoom" set up. Timing spot on.
What professional skills were present? **Give at least one specific example.**	Showed capacity both to present clearly from slides, and to deliver in an interactive manner to engage the audience (not always easy online). Delivery seemed strongest when you perhaps felt "freer" / more relaxed – e.g. when you were reflecting on the pilot experiences during the post-role play discussion. Would be good to try and build on this strength throughout the rest of your teaching – e.g. concentrate on being "you".
How was research and/or professional experience used to inform this teaching session?	Presentation was informed by theory, links to basic psychological needs well explained. In the later session you gave examples from pilot to reinforce reflections from role plays.

Appendix 3 – student feedback form (template)

Feedback form

Presenter's name	Chiara Mansfield	Observer's name	
Session title	Day 2 - goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring & role play	Date	

Did the presenter communicate the learning outcomes and content clear and effectively?	
Did the presenter check the observers learning? **Give at least one specific example**	e.g. interaction, discussion etc
Were you as the observer engaged throughout the teaching session?	
What worked well in the session? **Give at least one specific example**	
What could need more improvement? **Give at least one specific example**	
Are there any specific comments you would like to make on: pace and voice; structure and content; eye contact; group activities; discussion; timing; movement, etc	Comment on at least one of these
What professional skills were present? **Give at least one specific example.**	e.g. teaching skills, confidence, communication etc

How was research and/or professional experience used to inform this teaching session?	(was subject knowledge demonstrated? If so, how?)

Appendix 4 – structure of co-teaching across the three days/five sessions

Training schedule

Day 3 – reflections on 1-1 role play
Thursday 10th December

Time	Zoom room 1	Facilitato r/s	Zoom room 2	Facilitato r/s	Zoom room 3	Facilitato r/s	Zoom room 4	Facilitato r/s
Reflections on home-work task	Simultaneous 1-to-1s (listen to audio-recordings and reflect on delivery) Then group sessions to reflect on each task as a whole							
9.30- 10.00	Mentor 1	CM (4)	Mentor 2	EW (4)	Mentor 3	IC	Mentor 4	PW
10.00- 10.30	Mentor 5	CM (4)	Mentor 6	EW (4)	Mentor 7	IC		
10.30 – 11.00	Mentor 8	CM (4)	Mentor 9	EW (4)				
11 – 11:15	BREAK							
11.15- 11.45	Group reflection on week 1 task (including self-monitoring)							CM/EW (5)
11.45- 12.15	Group reflection on week 2 task							CM/EW (5)
12.15- 1.00	Summary, FAQs and next steps Cover any "what if" issues we haven't already talked about, e.g. if a parent joins the call, if you can't get hold of a girl etc.							PW/EC

Action plan

- Send recorded reflection tasks to the mentors by **Monday 7th December evening**
- We then have Tuesday and Wednesday to reflect on these independently prior to the sessions on Thursday
- **Teaching sessions 4** – a 30-minute individual session with the students in the morning to reflect on their delivery (could listen to parts of the recording)
- 15-minute break before the group reflection task
- **Teaching session 5** – 30-minute discussion for the group reflection on the week 1 task and a 30-minute discussion for the group reflection on the week 2 task

Talk through logbook & ask to bring it each week

Example

I know you have probably received a lot of emails and this can be overwhelming but can I ask, have you had a chance to look through the logbook? This is a guide to support you throughout the HERizon programme. We will be working through the activities each week at these sessions and it is where you will be using the log to write in and tick off your activities. If you bring the logbook to the sessions each week we will look through what activities you did.

Role play – your turn!

Role play

- Working in pairs in your breakout room

- Based on your reflections, the week 0 content and example role plays Ella & Chiara have been through

- Have a go at practicing week 0 role play

- 15 minutes each (5 mins on each section) & then reverse the roles

Appendix 6 – 1-to-1 teacher feedback form to students

HERizon training December 2020

Audio-recording feedback sheet

Name:

Senior Activity Mentor: Chiara Mansfield

Key strengths:

1.

2.

3.

Areas for development:

1.

2.

3.

Any agreed actions:

1.

2.

3.

Appendix 7 – evaluation form of the students audio role play recordings

Mentor name:		Senior mentor completing evaluation:		Date:	

	Overall rating* 3 outstanding 2 acceptable 1 requires development	Strengths	Areas for development / missed opportunities
Adherence to session plan			
Reflections on week 1 - did they complete the worksheet?			
Explaining action plan – was it clear and accurate?			
Setting action plan – was the plan specific and did they write it down in the PA calendar?			
Home task – did they explain how to self-monitor appropriately?			
How well was the logbook integrated into delivery?			
Needs-supportive delivery			
Ask open questions to explore participant's perspective			
Listen empathically, without judgement			
Show interest and care for the participant			
Provide a meaningful rationale			
Encourage choice & self-initiation			
Help to ensure action plans are realistic and achievable			
Offer clear, relevant and constructive feedback			
Discuss options for social support*			
Explore ways of dealing with pressure*			
Provide opportunities for questions and ongoing support			
Overall evaluation (put a X in the appropriate box):	Competent (at least 2 in everything)		
	Further development needed (please specify and ask mentee to book a 1-to-1 with Paula to work on these areas)		

Important notes

- This sheet is for recording notes and to inform your feedback discussions. It is not intended to be shared with the activity mentors (please complete the audio-recording feedback sheet for that purpose).
- Once complete, please upload **this sheet** plus the **audio-recording feedback sheet** to your personal Google Drive so these can be accessed by Paula & Emma (please create a separate folder within your drive entitled "audio-recording task").
- Make sure you upload to your personal Google Drive and <u>not</u> the main HERizon drive – it is imperative that this is kept confidential and cannot be accessed by anyone other than you, Paula & Emma.

*These strategies may not be applicable for every session, so if there isn't any opportunity to explore these areas, just mark as N/A and treat it as a "2"

Appendix 8 – general HERizon teaching and training programme feedback form for students

HERizon training December 2020 – evaluation form

We would be grateful if you could share your views on what went well and how we could improve for future training sessions of this nature.

Q1. Overall how much have you enjoyed the HERizon training?

Please circle/highlight: 1 = not at all, 5 = very much

1   2   3   4   5

Q2. How "ready" do you feel to start the behaviour change calls?

Please circle/highlight: 1 = not at all ready, 5 = very ready

1   2   3   4   5

Q3. What did you find the most useful aspects of the training?

Q4. Were there any aspects or concepts you didn't understand, or are still unclear about?

Q5. How could the sessions be improved to help your learning?

2

Styles Pane

Q6. How did you find the audio-recording task?

Any further comments

Appendix 9 – feedback form one

Presenter's name	Chiara Mansfield	Observer's name	
Session title	Day 2 - goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring & role play	Date	4/12/2020

Did the presenter communicate the learning outcomes and content clear and effectively?	Yes, they included a slide within the presentation to highlight the key objectives of the session.
Did the presenter check the observers learning? **Give at least one specific example**	**e.g. interaction, discussion etc** To understand learning they regularly asked questions and used group discussion, the chat function was beneficial and allowed us to ask any questions.
Were you as the observer engaged throughout the teaching session?	Yes, the topic was interesting and the use of questioning, discussions and activities kept the session fun and engaging.
What worked well in the session? **Give at least one specific example**	The use of role play allowed us to practice in a safe and comfortable environment and provided us with feedback to learn and develop
What could need more improvement? **Give at least one specific example**	
Are there any specific comments you would like to make on: pace and voice; structure and content; eye contact; group activities; discussion; timing; movement, etc	**Comment on at least one of these** It felt like a safe and comfortable space where we could ask any questions, with no fear of judgement from others. The content and structure kept the session fun and engaging, the use of breakout rooms and role play also allowed for practice and group discussions
What professional skills were present? **Give at least one specific example.**	**e.g. teaching skills, confidence, communication etc** Good communication and confidence around the topic and speaking to a group were shown during the session, also they stuck to timings really well ensuring they provided sufficient time to allow for questions.
How was research and/or professional experience used to inform this teaching session?	**(was subject knowledge demonstrated? If so, how?)** Knowledge of the subject was demonstrated through the answers that were provided when individuals asked questions throughout the sessions. References to previous research was used throughout to highlight and support the session.

Appendix 10 – feedback form one

Presenter's name	Chiara Mansfield	Observer's name	
Session title	**Day 2** - goal setting, action planning and self-monitoring & role play	Date	4/12/20

Did the presenter communicate the learning outcomes and content clear and effectively?	Yes – the slides helped to make this very clear and going over the learning outcomes and the beginning and end of the session.
Did the presenter check the observers learning? **Give at least one specific example**	Yes – the week 1 role play.
Were you as the observer engaged throughout the teaching session?	Yes – especially through opportunities for discussion and use of the chat.
What worked well in the session? **Give at least one specific example**	The information was clear and concise made it easy to understand and the role play gave us opportunity to have a go ourselves and see what we found easy to incorporate into the session and what we needed to work on.
What could need more improvement? **Give at least one specific example**	Going through the slides very quickly as didn't always have time to make key notes.
Are there any specific comments you would like to make on: pace and voice; structure and content; eye contact; group activities; discussion; timing; movement, etc	I think the session was structured well as we learned the content of the call and then got to practice it and the timing of the session was good as it was long enough to learn then content and practice ourselves but no too long that we lost concentration.
What professional skills were present? **Give at least one specific example.**	Confidence, good communication between other presenting students, Emma, and Paula, and flexible teaching skills.
How was research and/or professional experience used to inform this teaching session?	Drew on experience from the pilot studies and explained and elaborated on the content on the slides.

Teaching diary

Introduction

Prior to commencing the professional doctorate my experience of teaching was limited. I had a small amount of engagement in preparing and delivering psycho-educational workshops during my Masters' placement at Be Strong, an exercise psychology experience centred on mindful eating and exercise behaviours. Thus, the purpose of this diary is to portray my teaching experiences encountered throughout my sport and exercise psychology professional doctorate journey, and how, through these diverse opportunities, I have developed as a teacher and trainer. In accordance with my teaching and training case study, the main talking point of this teaching diary is my engagement with The HERizon Project, where I designed, planned, delivered and evaluated five teaching sessions to a group of ten mentors. The diary also includes contrasting contributions from my insights as an educator at Rochdale football club academy (RAFC), specifically the aspect of my Academy Football Psychologist role where I delivered sport psychology education to support player's physical and psychological development. A vital part of my role involved the creation of a sport psychology programme for the academy U9s-U18s players, coaches, support staff and parents to help improve their performance, personal developments (i.e., dealing with pressure, wellbeing and broader lifestyle needs). While the HERizon project and RAFC were my two main applied teaching experiences throughout the doctorate, more recent teaching opportunities as LJMU sessional lecturer and a LJMU teaching fellow (maternity cover) are also drawn upon. During the 2021/22 academic year, I began my sessional lecturer journey at LJMU, where I had the opportunity to teach across level 4-6 on the Sport and Exercise Psychology undergraduate programme. My teaching varied from teaching large lectures to small seminars on core, exercise, and sport psychology modules. To enhance this teaching experience, I started a full-

time teaching fellow (maternity cover) role at LJMU in Psychology and Football during the 2022/23 academic year. The opportunity to expanding my academic teaching involvement has developed my ability to carefully design, plan and adjust existing lecture content, lead course modules, and deliver and evaluate my teaching, which has significantly amplified my personal and professional progress in this domain of competence.

Teaching style

Prior to The HERizon Project experience, I had no experience of teaching and possessed an unfulfilled teaching identity (Moore, 2012). I had no concept of my own teaching style, based on a limited understanding of self as a teacher, underpinning pedagogical knowledge, or student's preferred way of learning or learning styles. Through my engagement with large and small group teaching and discussion with more experienced teaching staff, I quickly began to recognise the importance of adopting flexible ways of teaching through teacher-led (instruction) and student-led (facilitative) approaches that could be used in different teaching contexts. As my teacher experience developed, I learnt that the environment in which you teach and operate in can determine your main teaching style, for example during large group lectures a more instruction-based approach may be effective to navigate the number of students present (Dwyer, 1996). In alignment with my evolving teaching philosophy, and that of my emerging approach to applied practice, I aimed to follow a more constructivist approach where necessary to allow students to foster autonomy and integrate their ideas and experiences into new knowledge. For example, asking the students to discuss in groups a sport psychology concept, such as critical moments, which were relative to their own unique experiences to discover how it is applied in the professional sporting world. While learning

new content was central for the students across all teaching environments in which I operated, my approach was based on providing control, accountability, and leadership in helping students and promoting them as "lifelong learners" (Hedden et al. 2017). To further integrate a constructivist approach, my delivery of this content in both small and large group environments i.e., through group tasks, role play, quizzes and presenting case study examples allowed for the students to engage in problem-solving through an inquiry and 'trial and error' based approach by working in collaboration with course peers (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

The teacher

Reflecting on my role as a teacher and educator generated many learning considerations. Collated below are three themes that I feel best capture my teaching experiences and my associated development across the doctorate: 'A self-belief journey', 'incompetence vs competence and 'adaptability masters learning'.

A self-belief journey

The journey towards belief in my own personal and teaching abilities has developed significantly. Having the confidence to believe that I do deserve to be teaching and I do have the sufficient knowledge and understanding of sport and exercise psychology to contribute to students' learning initially deemed challenging. During my first large lecture experience, the pressure "got to me", and I felt nervous, anxious and overwhelmed with the experience. This resulted in the supposedly 2-hour timescale lecture only lasting for 45-minutes. I spoke too quickly, experienced sweating and predominately read from the PowerPoint slides as I didn't feel confident without them. At this stage in my career, it wasn't "out of the ordinary" that

my self-concept, identity and self-esteem were all low due to limited experience of academic teaching (Michie, Glachan & Bray, 2001; Barlow & McCann, 2019). My teacher identity concerns made me feel like a "fraud" and I felt like I was practicing incongruently. Beginning my teaching experience online via Microsoft Teams due to the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak contributed to the feelings of anxiety, apprehension and fear of exposure when initially teaching online (Bennett, 2014). To combat the debilitative feelings, I occasionally found comfort, self-belief and less isolation when sharing a teaching session with another member of staff in comparison to delivering on my own (Bettencourt & Weldon, 2010).

Being transparent with my own teacher goals of placing myself in teaching environments that I previously found "fearful" i.e., delivering lectures to large cohorts has been central to building and sustaining self-confidence (Sadler. 2013), which forced me to push out of my comfort zone and initially request additional sessional cover hours. During the 2022/23 academic year, my lecturing role consisted of being a module leader and delivering six lectures and six seminars on relevant sport psychology topics to level 5 science and football students. At this point, my self-belief had progressed, and I approached a large group lecture in November 2022 with ease. Delivering lecture content, interactive group tasks such as case study scenarios and content quizzes, my confidence in my own teaching abilities ensured that the student group were engaged, and the lecture lasted approximately 1 hour 45 minutes. By recognising the role of controlling all emotions and negative thoughts that had subjectively limited my beliefs in teaching at higher education, I was able to be successful in creating a positive teaching environment and experience (Martin & Lueckenhausen, 2005).

Whilst initially teaching online, I found it challenging during my lone teaching experiences to engage the students, to unpick meaningful interaction and provide a range of innovative

teaching (Mishra, Gupta & Shree, 2020). Additionally, effectively managing awkward silences, building a robust teacher-student rapport and the disruptiveness of WIFI connectivity issues were also problematic experiences that I continuously faced (Gewin, 2020). I found ease when reflecting with my university supervisors as I had the opportunity to pose questions such as "what kinds of support are needed for effective online student teaching?" and "what should be done differently when teaching online to maximise student learning?" (Kim, 2020). Learning from the experience of my university supervisors and having the opportunity to engage in critical self-reflection about how I was feeling in that moment contributed to working through these initial challenges (Knowles et al. 2007).

An additional example of my self-belief progression was highlighted during my sessional cover experience during the 2021/22 academic year. The topic was self-determination theory and motivation in exercise psychology to a lecture hall of 200+ students. Part of the lecture rationale was to prepare the students for their upcoming exams, so there was opportunity to explore potential exam questions. Many students struggled to understand the purpose and explanation of the question that I asked. At this point I wasn't sure what the reason for this was and I felt a rush of emotions; negative thoughts began to appear, and my breathing and heart rate began to increase rapidly. I felt like the whole lecture theatre were "staring at me" as I pressured myself to communicate an alternative way to explain the exam question (Martin & Lueckenhausen, 2005). I began to question whether I am "good enough for teaching" and if these feelings of embarrassment and incompetence were worth it. By clearly talking through the graph, highlighting the key elements, and breaking down the question for the students it was clear that they appeared to have a better understanding of how to approach it. Through reflection-on-action, I realised situations I initially find "daunting" are never as

bad as they seem and in hindsight contribute to the growth of my self-belief that I do deserve to be in a lecturing role (Knowles et al. 2007).

In January 2020, when I first started my professional doctorate, I also started at Rochdale Association Football Club (RAFC), where I was required to deliver a psycho-educational workshop to the youth team players and coaches on an "introduction into sport psychology" within the first two weeks of being at the club. Although, I was eager to enhance their knowledge, my experience of working in football was relatively new, so worries and feelings of being judged circulated my mind. After the workshop, I received positive feedback about the interactive nature and engagement of the players. However, later in the week when I was at youth team player training one of the players came up to me and said that I seemed nervous. In the 2021/22 season post COVID, delivering psycho-educational workshops face-to-face was a more comfortable way of teaching, which was similar to what I had encountered in my academic LJMU delivery. Relative to how my "teaching" delivery had changed throughout my experiences at RAFC, my self-belief played a significant role in this adaptation. I acquired the self-belief to provide the players with accountability of co-delivering the workshop to suit their individual and team needs. For example, asking the players "what do you feel like would be most useful to focus on improving right now?" might not have been something I would have felt confident to do earlier in my teaching experience. Most of the players mentioned team cohesion and communication and it was important for the team to choose a leader to dictate and manage the workshop by developing a "strategy" to increase communication on and off the pitch. I concluded that not every psycho-educational workshop required the conveyance of standardised PowerPoint slides, videos and group tasks, and that opportunities to use alterative teaching approaches and techniques arose from having the confidence to try different tools. As a consequence of the variety of teaching

environments I have operated in, I have learnt to alter and develop my teaching behaviour to offer the "best" student experience I can. This includes speaking at a slower pace, in-depth lecture preparation, presenting concise lecture content, eye contact instead of reading from the PowerPoint slides and exhibiting diversity in learning activities to empower students to engage in active learning (Hativa, 2000).

My journey of self-belief has evolved immensely throughout my teaching experiences on the professional doctorate. This experience has taken me on a journey of self-discovery to uncover who I am as a person i.e., a confident, caring and empathetic individual and professionally, such as being passionate about helping and supporting others in education, adaptable to "challenging" situations and open to opportunities that may seem "fearful" initially. Continuing to work on my self-belief through further teaching opportunities will be beneficial to supporting students' learning needs and strengthen my teaching identity, and I am now hoping to be successful in securing a lecturing job in HE.

Building a competent teacher/practitioner identity

"What does it mean to be competent?" and "what does a competent teacher and applied practitioner look like?", were questions that I documented in my reflective diary. Feelings of anxiety and my lack of self-belief highlighted above contributed to my fluctuations in competence and incompetence. Inaccuracy of my own teaching judgement, for example, reading predominantly from the PowerPoint slides with limited eye contact to the students, failing to provide students with a mixture of learning opportunities and struggling to reach the recommended lecture time of 2 hours occurred (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Tod, Anderson

& Marchant, 2011). These feelings of incompetence led to over or underpreparing lecture content and sticking to "what I know" in terms of lecture delivery for comfortability and ease. Reflection guided my thought processing to understand that competence is deeper than "knowing" the content to deliver, it involves knowing the students' needs, values, learning and the population that you're teaching to maximise their learning. Observations of student engagement, such as emotional involvement with lecture material and levels of interaction and participation, students' marks and conversations with module leaders and colleagues have contributed to an increase in student knowledge (Collaco. 2017; Handelsman et al. 2005).

Feelings of incompetence came from my own internal feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of what a "perfect lecturer looks like", namely being a highly qualified and experienced sport and exercise psychologist, having many published research papers and plentiful applied experiences to support teaching. I was no-where near that, so how could I be competent? During the HERizon project and my sessional cover lecturing role, I was experiencing "survival mode" rather than "thriving mode", dealing with challenging thoughts around teacher competence (Carrilo & Baguley, 2011). I found myself relying on support from other members of the HERizon Project's multidisciplinary team to feel competent. For example, during the first co-teaching HERizon session, although I contributed to the lecture content, I didn't want to take the lead on the session. My delivery of initial youth team workshops at RAFC was with the educational officer present, and I often relied on his support when the room went quiet or disengaged students were distracting others. The idea of this is 'sink or swim' in my neophyte years of teaching occurred, instead of accepting that I am learning how to be a teacher and not every workshop or lecture is going to be amazing.

I began to learn how to approach my reflections authentically and honestly about how I thought the teaching was going. For example, these reflections included any challenges from the large and small group lectures, team psycho-educational workshops and online lectures, such as a lack of student engagement, level of student understanding obtained and room management to control any disruption. Although these reflections were important, what was equally relevant was my emotional and cognitive response to dealing with these elements of adversity. On Thursday 18th November 2021, I reflected on: "the room was loud, the players were becoming distracted with the group task, I walked around the classroom and asked them if the task was completed. Most of the players said that they didn't understand it. Feelings of worry emerged, no one was listening, and I didn't have control over the room. I asked everyone to return their focus to the front and I got ignored. At this point, the educational officer had to step in". To evidence the growth of my teaching competence, my reflection on Thursday 21st April 2022 was: "The players listened, I felt confident with the content that I was delivering, the workshop aims and how to manage the classroom if disruption arose. I truly felt like I understood the players and what their needs were on and off the football pitch. During the workshop I spoke to some of the players and asked how their weekend had been, and gathered their thoughts on their recent game, where I gained some insight into them as a person. For example, self-confidence, dealing with criticism, deselection and anxious thoughts around injury were captured as themes. The players were open with what they were currently finding challenging. The players were engaged through their body language, eye contact and contribution to the group activities".

During a more recent lecture delivered to Science and Football students, I experienced a similar scenario that encouraged me to reflect on my teaching competence. Monday 31stOctober 2022 was the final psychology lecture of the block for the second-year students

and I delivered a 2-hour lecture addressing mental health in professional football and a 2-hour seminar on assignment preparation (see appendix 1 for overview of the seminar). Later that evening I reflected on, "throughout the assignment preparation seminar, a fair few students had questions about what to include, how to structure the assignment, asked me to look over their assignment structure and what specific references to use. When I gathered this information from the students, I thought it would be useful to approach the answers with the whole cohort and to answer any additional queries. I felt a sense of connectedness, a level of respect and appreciation from the students as at the end of the seminar, comments about the usefulness of the assignment preparation were communicated". This reflection emphasises the authentic care and support that I offered to the students to foster learning and development, being consistent with previous research for effective teaching (Ramsden & Moses, 1992; Tigelaar et al. 2004).

Through the development of my teaching planning and delivery, I moved from providing just knowledge and information, such as reading from the PowerPoint slides to enhancing the construction of influential knowledge with an opportunity for the students to engage in critical thinking and problem solving (Harris & Alexander, 1998). This increase in competence formed a cluster of knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, and personality traits to construct relevant sport psychology knowledge as a teacher and disseminator (Mulder, 2014; Winterton, 2017).

Adapt, adapt, adapt…

Being mindful that I didn't want to fall into the lecturing "trap" as an applied practitioner, I fostered a greater sense of how to adapt my delivery to the sport setting and client population.

I also held a good understanding of when and how to be an adaptable teacher when student progress isn't clear, and how that helps to attend to and fulfil the learners' needs during teaching (Kuit et al. 2001). Adaptability was present during the HERizon Project after the third teaching session, as a lack of student progress encouraged the original session outline for session five to be changed (Cowley et al. 2022). To fulfil the students' learning needs, it was essential to modify my way of thinking about my teaching abilities and the support I could provide. In my reflective diary, on Tuesday 7th December 2021 I wrote "after today's session the students' learning was a little bit further behind what we expected… I began to think if any of the content that I delivered was clear enough and if the students understood. After the meeting with the other members of the MDT I began to talk more positively; I have the self-belief to support the students' learning and I will approach this in a calm rather than anxious manner (Martin et al. 2012; Turner. 2019). Although the HERizon Project training occurred over a short period of time and there was a "quick" turnaround, reflection on action helped me to approach the situation rationally and decide on an action plan to facilitate learning to combat what the students were finding challenging (Cropley et al. 2010; Knowles et al. 2007). Adaptability during this scenario required "stepping out of my comfort zone" and experiencing the unexpected, which was initially daunting to someone who likes to prepare in advance.

Similar experiences occurred as an applied practitioner at RAFC. I spent a considerable amount of time and care to develop a high-quality sport psychology programme for all key stakeholders at the club (e.g., the players, coaches, and support staff – **see appendix one**). This programme consisted of the structure of psychological support (i.e., 1-to-1 consultancy support and psycho-educational workshops with relevant topics and timescales). However, the nature of competitive football being a fast-paced environment i.e., last minute

rearrangement of games, cancelled training sessions and competitive periods during the season meant that the timing of the support I could offer fluctuated (Champ et al. 2012). Working in competitive sport settings is challenging, and for me this meant that my original plan and delivery of sport psychology support was disrupted. However, through observations at training and conversations with relevant staff and players this created opportunity to create and deliver psychological content based on these observations. For example, in November 2022, the RAFC youth team had consistently lost 4 games in a row, and I felt a "distance" and "disconnection" from the players and coaches. I used this as an opportunity to bring the players together in a workshop setting. During the first ten minutes of delivering this workshop content I began to gauge a sense that the players weren't finding it useful due to the lack of engagement. Thus, I decided to take the role of a facilitator to see how the players resolved this conflict between themselves. This involved moving away from the planned activities and workshop content and directing the focus on the players by asking "as a team, what do you feel is important for us to work on?" Through adopting a more player-led constructivist approach, the players initially found this uncomfortable and struggled to dictate which player should take the lead. As mentioned in my previous experiences with the HERizon Project and early academic teaching, I had learnt to deal with "awkward silences" at this point and saw their hesitancy and uncertainty as a resource to create an open space for the players take responsibility for their own development.

This silence led to three second-year players stepping up and voicing inconsistencies in the lack of hard-work and effort from the first-year academy recruits, which was causing a disruption in performances. For example, not chasing the ball, tracking their opponent back or passing accuracy. This 'critical moment' highlighted the importance of establishing clear and mutually agreed team values, roles, and responsibilities from all members of a

functioning team. The "team's" focus moved to the importance of building a connection on and off the pitch as well as embracing a "winning mindset". After both workshops, I could see and hear that the players were bonding and building a sense of connectedness i.e., planning activities together outside of football, going to the gym together and engaging in conversation during training. Reflection on action demonstrated my adaptability as an applied practitioner to attend to the players individual and team needs "during a critical moment" of pressure and consistent losses.

Closing reflection

Being in the present moment with my fears, acknowledging that the fears exist, when the fears are likely to arise and accepting my fears at face value has been a key learning experience through the world wind of teaching and disseminating theoretical and practical sport and exercise psychology content. The "fears" have arisen from the teaching incompetence, worries about being judged from others and not feeling good enough in my own teaching abilities. Initially, due to my lack of teaching experience, I felt a sense of disconnection when delivering workshop content to the youth team athletes in football. Possessing limited theoretical and practical knowledge of football and understanding of what "football culture" from a multi-disciplinary team perspective "looks like" contributed to these feelings. Thus, building the working relationship with players and coaches as well as feeling a sense of connectedness took further time to build, in comparison to lecturing sport and exercise psychology students as I had been an undergraduate student myself. Additionally, I felt a sense of "judgement" from students on the same sport and exercise psychology journey as my own, and when teaching thoughts of communicating incorrect information or being "found out" as a fraud with a lack of knowledge arose. I am immensely grateful for the

various teaching experiences I have been given, which has given afforded me the opportunity to display planning, creativity, and delivery skills in my applied and academic roles. Additionally, my experience of delivering in both an applied and academia setting have become to be some of my most enjoyable moments on the professional doctorate. At the start of my sport and exercise psychology experience I was more focused on just pursuing a career in applied elite football, due to passion for sport and my low level of self-belief, which prevented me from even considering the teaching route. As highlighted in my reflections, my confidence has grown significantly, but when teaching in new environments and to a new group of students, I still experience heightened levels of anxiety. The main difference for me now is the ability to control my feelings of anxiety and emotions when they arise, so my thoughts aren't overpowering or distracting my teaching. Part of my internal growth centred around placing myself in these situations I deemed as uncomfortable. Through approaching these teaching contexts with ease i.e., in control of my thoughts and emotions, I was able to focus on excelling in my career of academia (Tod, 2007).

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – overview of sport psychology support programme for all stakeholders at

RAFC across the 2021/22 football season
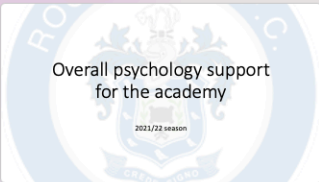
RAFC academy sport psychology support

2021/22 season

Chiara Mansfield

Overall psychology support for the academy

2021/22 season

Delivery method	Foundation phase	Youth development phase	Professional development phase	Staff/coaches
Introduction workshop	30 minutes - 1 hour duration Delivered to each age group (U9s-U12s) Activity based	30 minutes - 1 hour duration Delivered to each age group (U13s-U16s) Activity based	1 hour duration Delivered to each age group (U17s-U18s) Discussion based	2-hour duration Delivered to all coaches and staff (introduction from all staff)
Psychological profiling	During 1-to-1 consultation (intake phase)	During 1-to-1 consultation (intake phase)	During 1-to-1 consultation (intake phase)	N/A
Drop in check-ins at training	Dependent on demand at training	Dependent on demand at training	Dependent on demand at training	Conversational at training/office
One-to-one sessions	Yes, via online platform e.g., Zoom and arranged at training e.g. in the classroom	Yes, via online platform e.g., Zoom and arranged at training e.g. in the classroom	Yes, via online platform e.g., Zoom and arranged at training e.g. in the gym	Yes, conversational based at training or in the academy office
Workshops	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability	Based on demand, COVID restrictions and availability

Overall structure of sport psychology support to the academy in the 2021/22 season
Flexible to change/adapt

Parents – what will deliver

Psychological profiling – when and where. Different psychological elements for different age groups

Psychology support - players

2021/22 season

U9s to U16s

Psychology support - Goalkeepers

2021/22 season

Workshop or 1to1	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery timescale
Introduction workshop	Introduction into sport psychology, how it can benefit performance/well-being and key psychological aspects	All FDP and YDP (U9s-U16s)	September
The power of a routine and individual identity workshop	The importance of broadening your individual identity, adopting a routine, rituals and daily habits	All FDP and YDP (U9s-U16s)	January
Effective Communication and Self-belief	Effective vs non-effective communication, how to hold optimal confidence, strategies to improve communication and confidence	All FDP and YDP (U9s-U16s) FDP face-to-face (players and parents U9s-U12s) YDP zoom workshops (just players U13-U16s)	April
Common areas for 1to1 work are: performance profile, confidence, effective communication, dealing with injury, negative thoughts and motivation	Providing 1-to-1 psychology support. Players have an opportunity to be an active participant in their own development by engaging in self-discovery of their own attitudes and behaviours to implement positive change whether that's in their performance, well-being or within personal developments	Several number of individual players from U9s-U16s	August-ongoing

Overall structure of sport psychology support for the academy teams/players in the 2021/22 season
Flexible to change the delivery month
All workshops will include player-based discussion as a team or smaller groups, videos and strategies to implement

Split players into different positions – e.g., workshop with the GKs, attackers etc. – these areas may only be apparent for one individual group

All workshops will be thought-provoking to help players be aware and understand how they can develop/progress as individual players, involve in-depth discussions, individual work

Psychology support - Goalkeepers

Workshop	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery timescale
Goal setting & motivation	Psychological role as a GK, setting goals for the season, effective goal setting, individual and team goals. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	All U9s-U16s goalkeepers	September in the Bamford Lounge
Confidence and personality types	Understanding your own confidence, the role of self-belief, strategies for improving and maintaining confidence	All U9s-U16s goalkeepers	November in the Bamford Lounge
Dealing with challenges and expectations	Understanding their own challenges and expectations, mistake rituals, the role of parents in providing facilitative support	All U9s-U16s goalkeepers and parents	February in the Bamford Lounge

Overall structure of sport psychology support for the academy teams/players in the 2021/22 season
Flexible to change the delivery month
All workshops will include player-based discussion as a team or smaller groups, videos and strategies to implement

Split players into different positions – e.g., workshop with the GKs, attackers etc. – these areas may only be apparent for one individual group

All workshops will be thought-provoking to help players be aware and understand how they can develop/progress as individual players, involve in-depth discussions, individual work

Psychology support - players

Workshop and 1to1 focus	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery month
Introduction and emotional control workshop	Introduction into sport psychology, performance and wellbeing benefit, understanding your own emotions, performance and wellbeing impact and strategies to control emotions	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years including the head of education	September in the Bamford Lounge
Individual, player and team values workshop	Understanding your own values and beliefs in the team and individual football environment but also outside of football	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years. Including the manager, U18s coach and head coach	October in the Bamford Lounge
Managing adversity and setbacks workshop	Types of communication i.e., verbal and non-verbal Effective team and individual communication – facilitators and potential barriers	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years including the head of education	November in the Bamford Lounge
Effective communication workshop	What reflection is, why it is important, how to reflect effectively on and off the pitch	Youth Team all 1st and 2nd years including the head of education	November in the Bamford Lounge
Common areas for 1to1 work are: performance profile, confidence, effective communication, dealing with injury, negative thoughts and motivation, weight management	Providing 1-to-1 psychology support. Players have an opportunity to be an active participant in their own development by engaging in self-discovery of their own attitudes and behaviours to implement positive change whether that's in their performance, well-being or within personal developments	Youth Team	July-Ongoing face-to-face at training e.g. in the gym, the Bamford Lounge at the club or on zoom

Player led workshops - occurring weekly from March. 1st and 2nd year players will be given the opportunity to discuss areas for improvement – was scheduled to happen

Player 1-to-1s continued…

- 30 minute to 1 hour zoom or face-to-face (dependent on COVID restrictions) psychology consultation sessions
- Weekly sessions
- E.g. at training sessions in the classroom or gym environment
- Support with performance improvements, well-being and personal development
- Ongoing throughout the season
- Updated via Toot Toot

Player check ins

Workshop focus	Purpose and structure	Participants	Delivery block
Sport psychology, values and effective communication	Role & responsibilities of sport psych, individual values, psych strategies coaches can implement on the pitch to support players and effective communication between coaches and players	All – full time staff	2-hour Block 1 September
Common areas for 1to1 work/support via conversations at training are: effective communication, decision making, managing challenging players/situations, dealing with negative thoughts and emotions etc	Providing 1-to-1 psychology support. Coaches or support staff have an opportunity to be an active participant in their own development by engaging in self-discovery of their own attitudes, thoughts and behaviours to implement positive change whether that's in their coaching/expertise, well-being or within personal developments	All staff – based on the demand	July – ongoing Can occur at training, in the academy office

Overall structure of sport psychology support to the academy coaches in the 2021/22 season (subject to change due to time or CPD restrictions)
Part of the academy's CPD
All workshops will include coach-based discussions to share ideas and thoughts as well as psychological strategies coaches can implement on the pitch to support players

Scheduled: the reflective coach e.g. Reflective role as a coach
Meaningful relationships with other staff and players
Why is reflection important

Appendix 2 – overview of the seminar delivered to L5 Science and Football students.

Group task

5111SPFOOT: Current issues in Science and Football

GROUP TASK:
15 MINUTES TO MIND MAP WHAT YOU THINK THE MARKER IS LOOKING FOR

Assignment action planning

5111SPFOOT: Current issues in Science and Football

Based on the content you've learnt on this module, your knowledge of the assignment rubric, essay question etc

What steps do you require to take for the assignment?

Click to add notes

Research literature

5111SPFOOT: Current issues in Science and Football

Spend the next 15 minutes finding three pieces of relevant literature that you will use in your psychology essay and pick out the key information

Click to add notes

Systematic review

Mental toughness, Mental Hardiness and Resilience in football: a qualitative meta-study review of player and support staff experiences

Abstract

Mental toughness (MT), Mental Hardiness (MH) and Resilience are considered fundamental psychological constructs within football, which enhances individuals' levels of performance. The aim of this current meta-study was to critically evaluate the qualitative literature of these constructs within football from player and support staff experiences. Eleven studies were included after conducting a systematic search across four databases (PsychINFO, Web of Science, PubMed and SPORTdiscus). Part of the meta-study involved an exploration of the meta-method, meta-theory, and meta-data analyses to capture the researcher's honest interpretations of participant experiences of MT, MH, and Resilience. An inductive thematic analysis was implemented as part of the meta-analysis analysis, through creating new main and sub-themes to understand participants experiences, part of the meta-synthesis process. Resulting in three main themes: *Strong self-belief, ability to cope, managing adversity and Tough attitude* aligned with research question one. *Optimistic mindset* and *winning mentality* aligned with research question two and *Support networks* and *Environmental Factors* compromising research question three being constructs.

Introduction

Mental toughness (MT), Mental Hardiness (MH) and Resilience are believed to be fundamental attributes in athletes' performance and wellbeing enhancement in football. Plentiful literature focused on elite football has described possessing high levels of MT as a "requirement" to optimal performance and wellbeing (Gucciardi et al., 2008). A heightened sense of commitment, control and challenge helped hardy individuals to perform better whether that was technically or tactically on the pitch or experiencing a healthier physical and mental capacity (Atkinson, 2013). Resilience is identified as a paramount for peak performance as it exhibits a sense of life satisfaction and increased emotional wellbeing (Johnson et al. 2016). Although, much of the research identified below captures the significance of all three psychological constructs within football, unfortunately, the research fails to address a clear understanding and separation of the three and are often incorrectly used interchangeably.

Mental toughness (MT) is a profile of psychological characteristics most frequently cited as a significant contributor to sports performance enhancement (Orlick, 1998; Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffat, 2002; Jones; Hanton & Connaughton, 2002), including in football (Beswick, 2001; Jooste, Steyn & Van Den Berg, 2014). MT focuses on enhancing well-being, despite any stressors that may be positive (e.g., good playing form) and negative (e.g., competition pressure) that may arise (Gucciardi et al., 2009; 2008). Mental hardiness (MH) is a dispositional factor in preserving and enhancing performance and mental health despite stressful circumstances, such as during competition (Maddi et al. 2006). Resilience is a dynamic process of adaptation to adverse and unpleasant experiences (Masten, 2001) and a subscale of MT (Gucciard & Gordon, 2009).

MT is a personal ability to deliver consistently high levels of subjective (e.g. personal goals or strivings) or objective performance (e.g. race time, goal time) despite everyday challenges and stressors, including adversities (Gucciardi et al. 2017, Zeiger & Zeiger, 2018). The concept of MH was introduced by Kobasa in 1979, when finding the link between stressful life events and the onset of illness. Hardiness has been identified as an important personality construct within sport-specific situations (Sheard & Golby, 2010). Resilience is defined as an individual's ability to cope and recover from adverse emotional experiences and to adapt to stressful situations (Arthur, Fitzwater, Beattie & Bell, 2015).

MH is displayed in the 3C's model, which combines the three attitudes of commitment, control and challenge (Kobasa, 1979). Hardiness believes that accepting stress and adversity as a normal part of life for growth and development (challenge), stressful circumstances are meaningful experiences (commitment) and staying agentic in one's experiences to influence outcomes (control) (Maddi, 2008). The 3Cs of hardiness provide the courage and motivation to think, feel and behave in ways conductive to athletes reaching and performing at high levels of competitive sport (Sheard & Golby, 2010). More recently, the development of the 4Cs model contains the three attributes of hardiness, combined with the construct of confidence to form MT (Clough et al, 2002). Clough et al. (2002) added a fourth "C" as it is salient for sport performance. The first conceptual model of sports resilience outlined the resilience process; this is associated with the time of exposure to adversity and the influence of the sport situation on the athlete's life (Galli & Vealey, 2008).

The concepts of MT, MH and resilience all share similar attributes in their role for football performance and well-being. All three concepts are used interchangeably in sport (e.g.,

football; Gucciardi et al. 2010; Gucciardi. 2017; Wieser & Thiel, 2014) and are associated with positive psychology, featuring an aspect of being able to perform well under stressful conditions, an ability to bounce back from a challenging situation and a strive for the pursuit of performance excellence (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Galli & Gonzalez, 2016; Gucciardi et al., 2008).

There are specific characteristics that make up MT (Coulter et al., 2010; Jones et al. 2002; Thelwell, Weston & Greenlees., 2005) such as, acquiring self-belief, tough attitude, self-motivation, and perseverance. Additionally, there are seven hardiness characteristics, such as determination, self-belief, and control (Wieser & Thiel, 2014) and five attributes of resilience, for example, motivation, focus, confidence, control, and positive personality, which are essential for football excellence and well-being (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). The most collective characteristics between all three concepts are self-belief (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Gucciardi et al. 2009; Morgan, 2013), self-motivation (Coulter et al. 2010; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014) and a sense of control (Jones et al. 2002; Wieser & Thiel, 2014).

Research has identified MT as a "requisite quality", necessary to progress to higher levels of competition within football (Crust, Nesti & Littlewood, 2010). Adopting efficient elevated levels of MT led to continued improved performance in English Football League Referees (Slack et al., 2015). Additional research suggested that elite footballers who are committed, in control and positively challenged by difficult game situations, see game related stressors as manageable, improving performance and well-being levels by decreasing negative reactions to stressors (Atkinson, 2013). A study recognised that resilient players had well-established positions in their teams, accepted their injuries in positive ways and implemented adaptive behaviours and emotions during their rehabilitation (Johnson et al. 2016).

The development of MT in football is suggested to be a complex and long-term process in professional athletes (Bull et al. 2005, Connaughton et al. 2008) that incorporates multiple effective sporting and non-sporting support networks (Connaughton et al, 2010). Elite athletes, including footballers are more adapted to challenging situations and possess more hardy personalities, displaying the psychological development of players over time (Atkinson, 2013). The development of resilience in football is associated with maintaining a positive outlook on football performance as failure can facilitate players development (Mill et al. 2012). Factors that influence the development and maintenance of MT, MH and resilience are skill mastery, competitiveness, reflective practice (Connaughton, Hanton & Jones., 2010), access to an understanding social support network, shared attitudes, and behaviours (Morgan, 2013) and challenging environments (Atkinson, 2013).

The purpose of the current meta-study is to understand whether there is an overlap or significant difference of the psychological constructs of MT, MH and resilience within the football environment (e.g., Atkinson, 2013; Coulter & Thelwell, 2019; Johnson et al. 2016). As well as to understand the value of developing and sustaining MT, MH and resilience within football by considering the factors that perceive to influence the development and maintenance. The proposed rationale (s) will be adequately addressed through an in-depth qualitative meta-synthesis of the current research studies to offer a contemporary perspective and new ways of thinking ultimately increasing theoretical understanding and clarity around how these three psychological concepts are identified within professional football which has previously been effective when examining qualitative research in just MT development (Ronkainen, Wiltshire & Willis, 2022). By synthesising the data extracted from the included studies, we aim to focus on the following research questions:

1. How are MT, MH and resilience described by players and support staff within a football environment?

2. What role (e.g., performance and well-being) does MT, MH and resilience play within football or soccer?

3. What factors are perceived to influence the development and maintenance of MT, MH and resilience within football or soccer?

Methodology

Meta-study

A meta-study is an interpretive qualitative research approach, whereby researchers aim to construct and reconstruct knowledge about a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) through analysing the displayed content (Ronkainen, Wiltshire & Willis, 2022) and scrutinising the theory, method, and data analysis of research in both substantive areas within football. There are four components in which a meta-study exists: meta-theory, meta-method, meta-data, and meta-synthesis analysis explored below (Paterson et al. 2001). The researcher embraced the role of a meta-synthesist to capture current and project extended knowledge of MT, MH and resilience perspectives beyond surface level to see "where we are and where we are going" (Fuhrman & Snizek, 1990, p. 27). Utilising a meta-study aimed to guide the researcher towards new contributions considering the projected research questions to thoroughly understanding and clarifying the psychological constructs inconsistent in previous literature. In addition to understanding if the exclusion of MH research helps to draw coherent conclusions to sitting as a separate construct or appears merged into MT or resilience.

Philosophical assumptions

The current meta-study and use of thematic analysis is underpinned by the researcher's philosophical paradigm of epistemological constructivism to understand participants subjective experiences created from the current study findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; Demuth & Terkildsen, 2015; Avgousti, 2013). The relativist interpretivist ontological approach helps to understand participants multiple realities and the meaning given to MT and resilience within football. The researcher aimed to reveal how participants current experiences were reflected and constructed through their social worlds, understanding what knowledge is attached to each experience (Jewett, Kerr & Tamminen, 2019; Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012). From an ontological perspective, interpretivism helps to understand participants multiple realities and the meaning placed to MT and resilience within football (Creswell, 2003). Thus, the proposed research questions were postulated based on both ontological and epistemological position of the researcher (Demuth & Terkildsen, 2015).

Search strategy (including keyword development)

The key words were concluded through the main researcher hand searching relevant topics of interest after engaging in meetings with the supervisor and co-researcher. Initially, the researcher was flexible in the approach of mixing and matching key words, such as together or on separate lines in which the eligibility was created. The search strategy included three distinct term searches:

1) Mental Toughness OR mentally tough* OR Mental Hardiness OR Resilience in title and abstract

   AND

2) Football OR Soccer in title or abstract

   AND

3) Qualitative OR Interview* OR Focus group*

The initial search for these key terms occurred in May 2020 and the researcher spent time to discover the final search terms through a trial-and-error process to ensure a concise and consistent data reach across all databases. An additional search occurred in August 2020 after contacting Dr. Gucciardi as there is much research on MT from a quantitative lens, so the researcher was interested in whether any qualitative had been missed. A final search took place in January 2023, as although the researcher took some time away from the systematic review due to inconsistencies in the research team that were prevalent a meeting with the university's librarian yielded insights into considering a further database of ScienceDirect, however, no additional searches were included. The final four databases used were PubMed, Web of Science, SPORTdiscus and PsychINFO to determine the relevant and refined articles. Evidence of forward and backwards search strategies to ensure consistency of all included studies reached through the eligibility criteria. No manual search was conducted during this time.

Data collection

EndNote was used to export all the papers and remove any duplicates found, prior to screening and selecting the papers in Rayyan. This database is a web-tool designed to support systematic review researchers engage in a highly effective process of screening and selecting studies (Johnson & Phillips. 2018). During the first step of the selection process, the main researcher screened the exported papers within Rayyan (n = 140). This process consisted of a

comparison of the eligibility criteria to the title and abstract of each individual paper and to determine whether to place papers into the 'maybe' or 'exclude' category. The next step involved the establishment of trustworthiness and validity, where one member of the supervisory team began to screen a quarter (35 out of 140) of the papers. These were chosen on a random basis and assessed against the eligibility criteria. Initially, the title and abstract (including the topic) were reviewed using the outlined eligibility criteria but if the study could not be excluded on this basis, the full text was read and reviewed where the eligibility was not clear and concise. The decision for an included study occurred when both the researcher and co-supervisor independently agreed that each aspect of the inclusion criteria had been met after reading the full text.

A comprehensive approach was adopted using the PRISMA-P diagram as a framework to report the various phases of searching, screening, and identifying studies for inclusion in this qualitative synthesis (Moher et al. 2009). The diagram also outlines the number of studies that were excluded with identified reasons why. Examples being, either the football or soccer findings were not present separately, studies focusing on Australian or American football rules, qualitative data that failed to be presented separately and full text not being in English. Thus, exclusion of studies with these acknowledged factors was due to not fitting in with the posed research questions. Decision for the eligibility criteria was based upon population characteristics, written language, and the type of publication to ensure a highly specified sample of papers were chosen to best review the research questions (Tong, 2012).

Eligibility criteria

Inclusion criteria

The aim of the meta-study was to focus on research using only qualitative methods. Studies

were included if it was evident of: (a) soccer players or support staff, (b) currently or

previously involved in soccer or English football, (c) focus on MT, MH, or resilience, (d)

includes some qualitative data, either qualitative design or mixed methods if the qualitative

findings were presented separately and (e) the full text was available in English. No date

limitations were comprised.

PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram

Identification	Records identified through database searching: **SPORTdiscuss (22), PsycINFO (99), Web of Science (47) and PubMed (9)** (n = 177)	
Screening	Records after duplicates removed from EndNote (n = 140)	
	Records screened in Rayyan (n = 140)	Records excluded after title and abstract screened (n = 118)
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 21)	Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n = 10) Football/soccer findings not presented separately (n = 3) Studies focusing on Australian or American football/rules (n = 2) Critical review (n = 1) Qualitative data is not separate (n = 3) Full text not in English (n = 1)
	Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 11)	
Included	Studies included in final qualitative synthesis (n = 11) No extra papers were added.	

Figure 2. Study flow diagram of the screening process in EndNote and Rayyan.

Data Extraction

To contribute to the process of data extraction, the meta-study guidelines (Paterson et al. 2001) were adhered too as well as the SPIDER framework (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, and research type) was utilised to inform and standardise the extraction strategy. The method for assessing the risk of bias of individual studies was completed by the researcher and done at both study and outcome levels. A risk of bias graph is presented in appendix one and two.

Data-analysis
Meta-method analysis

The meta-method analysis involves the study of the epistemological soundness relative to current research and assessing ways the study's qualitative methodology influences the knowledge and findings (Lee et al. 2015; Paterson et al. 2001). Articulating philosophy in research, shapes how we formulate the problem area and research questions to determine the purpose of the topic area (Huff, 2009). The current meta-study has presented these methodological analyses in **Table 2** from each of the eleven included studies, which is consistent with the protocol of previous qualitative research (e.g., Ronkainen et al., 2016). Through understanding the research design and methods, including sampling and data collection procedures that the included studies have employed, and this allows for the researcher to explore how the use of specific methods have changed over time, assessing the

impact of these changes, and coherently evaluating the relevance of the findings (Massey & Williams, 2020; Paterson et al. 2001; Ronkainen, 2022). To support the notion of achieving a thorough methodological understanding a process to review the researcher's philosophical assumptions, purpose for data collection and analysis chosen and how the methodological approach aligns with the research evidence (Massey & Williams, 2020).

Meta-theory analysis

The purpose of meta-theory analysis is to critically appraise the theoretical framework and philosophical position reported in the included studies. It allows for critique and evaluation of sociological theory and an incentive for generating new theory aligned with greater cultural, social, historical, and political context (Pawson, 1989; Ritzer, 1991; Paterson et al. 2001). This appraisal makes way for the existing theory to be critically interpreted, judged, and advanced into new theoretical perspectives to suggest contemporary findings (Paterson et al. 2001). Specific commitment with epistemology is needed to understand the theory of knowledge especially within MT and resilience research (Culver, Gilbert & Sparkes, 2012; Holt & Tamminen, 2010; Ryba & Schinke, 2009). Although, these elements were extracted from each paper noting the depth, however, challenges arose when the researchers failed to coherently reference their inquiry, theoretical model, or method of analysis. You can see evidence of this in **Table 3.**

Meta-data analysis

The meta-data analysis consists of critically inspecting specific and generic properties of the data, such as the research design and methods used that impact the study findings (Paterson et

al., 2001). To conduct the meta-data analysis component effectively, the primary researcher read and re-read the included papers several times until the trends were clear across the data (Culver, Gilbert & Sparkes, 2012). Due to illness and inconsistencies within the research team, the papers were critically appraised solely by the primary researcher and within supervision collectively appraised to assess the multitude of social, cultural, and historical contexts regarding MT and resilience to pick up on any disconnections (Dluhy, 1995). The meta-data analysis process was utilised to conceptualised how and why these concepts emerge within football and what influence they hold to the development and maintenance (Paterson et al., 1999). The role of the primary researcher was to conduct this over a longitudinal period, for example, taking some time away from the meta-study and revisiting it to enhance critical review of conclusions obtained (Champ et al. 2020; McGannon & Johnson, 2009).

To complete the meta-data analysis component, an in-depth inductive thematic analysis was used to portray main, and subthemes created from the study data, which were reported considering meaning units (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2016). This analysis addressed patterns of meaning across the qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2016). As it was the researcher's first experience conducting a meta-study an inductive thematic analysis was chosen to systematically identify fundamental patterns in the data for the researcher to interpret the most meaningful themes (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Thematic analysis identifies two broad strands of effective work, consistent with the researcher's philosophical assumption, ontological realism framework which fits within the 'big Q' qualitative approach fully embracing a qualitative perspective to research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; Kidder & Fine, 1987). The main and sub-themes were identified aligning with the three proposed research questions, but the role of the researcher consisted of being proactive with their

choices of how engagement with the data will occur, for example, using semantic themes through inductive analysis there the content displayed itself guides the emerging analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes recognised with MT and resilience were combined rather than separated when attending to answer the research questions. The main and sub-themes followed a qualitative thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018**).** Structing the themes relative to each research question meant that the researcher could assess any discrepancies in the MT and resilience that previous literature has failed to uncover. A pen profile of these themes and subthemes was displayed below. The main themes for research question one: strong self-belief, ability to cope and tough attitude, research question two: *optimistic attitude and winning mentality* and research question three: *support networks and environmental factors* (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015; Terry, et al., 2017). The primary researcher generated these main themes, but a cross-sectional analysis was conducted with the secondary researcher to ensure transparency (Bowen & Wiersema, 1999). Analysing how different theoretical and methodological perspectives were used to interpret the relevant findings and how these approaches have contributed to the foundation and knowledge of MT and resilience were a priority (Ronkainen, 2016). Undertaking a meta-data analysis has provided the researcher to critically examine multiple accounts of MT and resilience to reveal the similarities and discrepancies among the studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988), as well as offer a critical interpretation of the included studies (Ronkainen, 2022).

Meta-synthesis

The final phase of the meta-study looks at amalgamating the researcher's interpretations of the findings from the meta-method, meta-theory, and meta-data analyses. The primary

purpose of a meta-synthesis is to move beyond what is descriptively presented from these components into a more enhanced interpretive account of the fundamental findings, assessing how these fit together and extend beyond what is currently known in the MT and resilience data (Paterson et al., 2001). The meta-synthesis aims to contribute to a more complete understanding of what meaning MT and resilience is placed within the football environment, through paying significant consideration to the methods, theories and data used to capture the current trends. Aligned with the three postulated research questions key main and sub themes emerged to formulate the results section.

Quality assessment tool

The 'enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research' (ENTREQ) was used as a tool to promote explicit and comprehensive reporting of the synthesis of qualitative studies. The tool includes 21 items grouped into five main domains: introduction, methodology, literature search and selection, appraisal, and synthesis of findings (Tong, 2012). The use of ENTREQ as a quality assessment tool serves to emphasise qualitative methods that have been effective in obtaining in-depth insights into participant's perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes, and in the context of this review generate a better understanding into MT and resilience (Paterson et al. 2001; Tong, 2012).

Table 3 – quality appraisal table with percentages of each attribute out of 100% including all sections of a research study.

Quality appraisal item	Percentage meeting criteria across studies

1. Are the research questions the synthesis addresses appropriate/outlined?	100%
2. Is the synthesis methodology or theoretical framework outlined?	27% (only three studies outline the philosophical/methodology
3. Was the search pre-planned or iterative?	100%
4. Were the eligibility criteria outlined?	100%
5. Are the data information sources and rationale presented?	100%
6. Literature search?	100%
7. The process of screening and sifting?	100%
8. Characteristics of included studies	100%
9. Number of studies screened and provided reasons for study exclusion	100%
10. Rationale and approach used to appraise the studies or selected findings	100%
11. Tools, frameworks and criteria used to appraise the studies or selected findings	100%
12. Whether the appraisal was conducted independently by more than one reviewer or if consensus was required	100%
13. Present results of the quality assessment, which articles were excluded based on the assessment and give the rationale	100%

14. Which sections of the primary studies were analysed and how were the data extracted from the primary studies?	100%
15. State the computer software used	100%
16. Identify who was involved in coding and analysis	100%
17. The process for coding of data	100%
18. How were comparisons made within and across studies	100%
19. Explain whether the process of deriving the themes or constructs was inductive or deductive	88%
20. Quotations for the primary studies to illustrate themes/constructs an identify whether the quotations were participant quotations of the author's interpretation	100%
21. Present rich, compelling, and useful results that go beyond a summary of the primary studies	100%

Trustworthiness and rigor

To ensure adherence and consistency of trustworthiness and rigor throughout this systematic review a collection of criteria was followed in light of the evaluation quality (Braun & Clarke, 2005; 2006). Although, inconsistencies in the research team were prevalent as previously mentioned (i.e., lack of communication from all members, illness, movement of job etc), which impacted the consistency of engaging in all components of the meta-study,

the main researcher still occupied regular supervision to control any biases. For example, interpretation of analysis took place numerous of times retrospectively by the researcher to ensure consistency in the data findings, which were discussed in supervision who was not a direct part of the research team (Bloor, 2001; Nayar & Stanley, 2015).

Results

Meta-method results

Table 2: the methodological characteristics of the eleven included studies.

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
(Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016)	Explore elite youth football coaches understanding of mental toughness and the methods used by them to develop it	UK	Not specified	12 elite youth football coaches (10 male, 2 female)	Not suggested	Semi-structured interviews	Content analysis	Pilot interview – necessary changes were made to the procedure and interview guide

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
								Iterative process After each interview, participants were offered a verbal debriefing
(Thelwell, Weston & Greenlees, 2005)	Defining mental toughness and examining the characteristics for mental tough	Australia	Not specified	6 male professional soccer players, 4 (past internationals) and 2 (current internationals)	Agreed to take part in the study	Semi-structured interviews (25-40 minutes)	Thematic analysis - Identifying themes from the research	Interviews were tape recorded and transcripts

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
	soccer players (study 1)							
(Johnson et al. 2016)	To understand the psychosocial features that characterise elite female football players who express a resilient behaviour during rehabilitation after a first-time ACL injury and	Sweden	Not specified	13 players from the Swedish women's elite football league. Based on 8 players displaying resilient behaviour. Aged between 25-35 years old.	13 players who experienced an ACL injury were approached and agreed to take part in the study.	In person interviews and video communication of players. Interviews were 25-65 minutes and were scheduled post-season and 6 months post reconstruction	Thematic content analysis of the player's narratives	Transcript of interview read several times to validate them against the identified themes. The first interview was intended to be a pilot interview

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Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
	reconstructi on							to test the interview guide but as no changes were made, the interview was included in the study.
(Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015)	The aim of this research was to provide some qualitative clarification regarding	Englan d, UK	Phenomenolo gy	7 male elite English youth soccer coaches	Purposeful sampling	Semi- structured interviews grounded in open questions, in person and at a venue of the	Interpretat ive phenomen ological analysis	The analysis was recurrent ly checked and revised by all

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
	the practices of talent identification as experienced and interpreted by pro coaches at a variety of levels in elite English youth soccer.					participant's choosing.		three authors until triangular consensus was achieved ensuring 'commitment and rigour'. Transparency and coherence of the participant's lived experiences.

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
(Cook et al. 2014)	The purpose of the study was to undertake an in-depth exploration of coaches' and support staff perceptions regarding MT and its development in the pressurised and distinctive sub-cultural milieu of an EPL soccer academy.	England, UK	Not specified	8 key staff responsible for a range of different roles in the development of young players	Purposeful sampling to select participants with in-depth subcultural knowledge, familiar with the ethos of the club	Semi-structured interviews. The interview guide/Qs were based on previous findings and recommendations from previous studies. An open, interactional approach to encourage an informal and conversational style	Thematic content analysis – analytic process inductive	Individual transcripts were returned for member checking and the interviewer met with each participant to ensure that both the raw data transcripts and analysis represent

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
								ed an accurate account of the views expressed in the interviews. Researcher triangulation
(Coulter et al. 2010)	The general purpose of the research was to explore MT in Australian soccer	Australia	Not specified	4 male coaches, six male players and five parents of the players	All coaches had agreed to participate, and the players were identified by the	Semi-structured face-to-face interviews (45-125 minutes), the interview schedule	Content analysis	The interview data was repeatedly read and listened to

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
					coaches through purposeful sampling of being the most MT in the game based on their own perceptions. Each coach's decision to identify a player who is MT is based upon his own insight of MT in soccer rather than making his	was constructed using a personal construct psychology adopted from Australian football coaches		several times. Independent researcher content analysed after the two researchers. Triangular consensus of data analyses.

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
					decision from fixed conceptualis ations of the construct. Parents interviewed if players agreed			
(Slack et al. 2014)	The purpose of the study was to gain a detailed understandi ng of MT in the context of elite football officiating	Englan d, UK	Not specified	15 English Premier League referees 12 were active and 3 were retired – select group referees	Invited to participate in the study and contacted via email and or telephone	Semi-structured re-interviewed (from 2012 study) face-to-face, occurred at training camp or on the phone, interviews consisted of	Inductive and deductive content analysis	Research er triangula tion – sequence of team meetings until a consensu s of all themes were reached.

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
						a series of open-ended, non-leading questions, Qs focused on MT		Member checking procedures to ensure accuracy of the findings. Each participant received a document outlining the results and each participant was asked to authentic
Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
								ate their findings.
Slack et al (2013)	The purpose of the present study was to identify factors perceived to underpin football officiating excellence	England, UK	Not specified	15 English Premier League referees 12 were active and 3 were retired – select group referees	Initially contacted via telephone or in person	Semi-structured in-depth interviews at select group training camp or location convenient for ref, Qs on ref's general involvement of referring, factors as a whole	Inductive content analysis	Pilot interviews with two EPL refs Member checking – accuracy of the transcript. Researcher triangulation involving a series of team

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
								meetings.
(Mills et al. 2012)	The purpose of the study was to examine the factors perceived to influence the development of elite youth football players at a critical stage in their progression to the professional level	England, UK	Not specified	10 expert development football coaches, full-time professional academy coaches	The coaches were recruited from professional Premier League and Championship clubs in England through purposive sampling to provide in depth and richness to the information gathered	Semi-structured interviews, interview guide was developed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the expert coaches' views, open-ended questions that enabled the coaches to reflect	Inductive and deductive content analysis	Trained extensively in qualitative methods and had previous experience with interview-based research Regular peer debriefing with research team

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
						broadly, in-depth authentic experience		Research triangulation Member checking – summary of results with the conceptual framework were sent to participants.
Slack. (2013)	The purpose of this study was to identify the factors underpinnin	England, UK	Not specified	15 EPL football referees 12 were currently active and 3	Agreed to take part in the study and used purposive sampling	Semi-structured interviews, guide similar to previous	Inductive content analysis	Member checking Researcher triangulation

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
	g officiating excellence as perceived by Select Group referees, a full-time, professional panel appointed by Professional Game Match Officials Limited to referee football matches in the EPL.			retired in the last 18 months		performance excellence literature (Greenleaf et al., 2001), open-ended, non-leading questions, "ice-breaker questions"		

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
Mitchell. (2015)	Two studies Study one: the aim is to critically explore the perceptions of practitioners in relation to: ideal player characteristics, working practices and environmental conditions created by practitioners within youth developmen	Study one: England, UK Study two: England, UK	Study one: not specified Study two: case study of one football club	Study one: 10 football clubs and 19 practitioners (8 Heads of youth, 6 youth team coaches, 2 head of education and welfare, 1 education and welfare officer and 1 centre of excellence physiotherapist) from 1 Prem club, 2 League two, 3 League one	Study one: access to participants was gained through a network of personal and professional contacts with the author and supervisory team Study two: previous engagement with the club during the 2012-13 season and granted	Study one: semi structured interviews following situational questioning to reveal values, experiences, relationships present Study two: case study, ethnography, fieldwork diary, interviews guided by Sparkes' (1998)	Study one: content analysis Study two: content analysis, field notes	Study one: pilot interview, critical reflection, member checking, saturation etc. Study two: notes were made after each session of analysis to constantl

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Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
	t programmes all of which contribute to players' identity. Study two: the purpose of this study was to gain the perspective from players themselves and how their experiences of a professional football environmen			and 4 Champions hip Study two: case study of one club with 4 players, 2 youth, 1 developmen t squad player and 1 senior professional – a championsh ip club	access to all academy staff, players and facilities. 4 players were originally targeted to capture critical moments faced during a season (purposeful sampling?)			y review the process Critical reflectio n Member checking

Study	Purpose	Setting	Methodology	Sample	Sampling strategy	Data collection	Method of analysis	Validity
	t has served to shape their identity. Also, how their identity allows them to cope (or not) with the critical moments experienced during their career trajectory.							

In coherence with previous reviews utilising qualitative research methods in sport psychology (Culver, Gilbert & Sparkes., 2012; Tod et al. 2011; Ronkainen et al. 2016), the most common form of research method across the qualitative MT and resilience studies included in the review is semi-structured interviews (n = 11). In two of the studies, semi-structured

interviews were also used in conjunction with either video communication of players (n = 1) and ethnography (n = 1). All studies were published in 2005 or later, with all but one published between 2010-2016, which is recent in the context of MT and resilience literature within sport psychology. Both studies that used either video communication of players (Johnson et al. 2016) and ethnography (Mitchell, 2015, which was highlighted in study two) were the most recent of all the included qualitative studies, which suggests that researchers are branching out to engage more varied methods (Ronkainen et al. 2016). Future research may conduct more qualitative studies around MT and resilience using a wider variety of methods or tools (i.e., focus groups, observations, or participant writing) to assess the impact of these constructs and gain in-depth data individually and collectively within the football environment.

Further qualitative methods, such as focus groups, ethnographic research of observations and longitudinal participant diaries or journals could enhance the credibility of the role of mental toughness and resilience within football. Previous research in sport psychology utilising participant daily diaries to document experiences during an emotional regulation intervention, highlighted that whilst reflecting on their behaviours, thoughts, feelings, fears, successes and obstacles, their self-awareness and rational decision making increased (Wagstaff, Hanton & Fletcher, 2013). Additionally, the use of weekly video diaries to allow athlete control of their own narratives of their senior to professional football transition enabled greater acceptance, patience, dealing with barriers to transition effectively and a greater level of adaptability (Swainston, Wilson & Jones, 2020). By addressing alternative qualitative methods to sport psychology, such as participant diaries and focus groups or in conjunction with the existing use of the studies methods, can subsequently

increase the participants self-awareness of their MT and resilience attributes to improve

wellbeing and performance levels (Wagstaff, Hanton & Fletcher, 2013).

A wide range of approaches were used for data analysis. These were content analysis

with a combination of inductive, deductive, or mixed (n = 8), thematic analysis (n = 1),

thematic content analysis (n = 2), field notes (n = 1) and interpretative phenomenological

analysis (n = 1). Mitchell. (2015) utilised both field notes and content analysis in study two

and just content analysis in study one. Other tools of analysis like narrative analysis,

grounded theory or discourse analysis may have added to the presentation and content of the

findings to offer a more enhanced interpretation. This review reveals that qualitative

researchers have generally explained what methods of analysis they have employed,

including in the studies where the non-reporting of paradigmatic and philosophical position

left the alignment between the data analysis method and the assumptions guiding the study

unreported (Ronkainen, et al. 2016).

The population setting in which the research studies were conducted ranged across

three different countries. Eight of the studies were carried out in the United Kingdom, two

studies were conducted in Australia and only one study took place in New Zealand. The way

in which the methods were employed displayed no direct differences between all cultures,

UK, Australia, and New Zealand. The methods of semi-structured interviews, focus groups

and video communication have allowed for in-depth research and advancements of MT and

resilience. These methods highlight the increased scope of MT and resilience qualitative

research within the United Kingdom being more accessible to athletes involved in football.

This places a higher emphasis on ingraining MT into athletes from a young age to help

manage the demands of the pressurised football environment i.e., the coaches' behaviour,

scholarship pressure and football being the most dominant sport to compete, play and watch in the UK (Champ et al. 2021). This systematic review presents a foremost limitation: a lack of populations studied to assess the extensive impact of MT and resilience in football. Further research in Western cultures (i.e., European countries of Italy, France, Germany, and Spain etc), non-European countries (i.e., Brazil and Mexico) and Eastern cultures (i.e., nations in the Asia and Middle East – Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar etc). The concepts of MT and resilience may not even be considered or recognised in some of these outlined cultures thus the westernised research cannot be transferable to these cultures. Understanding and capturing the value that all these cultures place on MT and resilience would be a useful research activity to uncover the practicalities of these concepts in the football environment.

Through understanding the purpose of a study and research method, the philosophical stance can be captured (Carr, 1994), acknowledging that different classifications of qualitative research paradigms exist to categorise the studies into post-positivist, critical realist, and interpretivist studies (Smith et al. 2012). Four studies adopted identifiable philosophical positions, namely interpretative phenomenology (i.e., Cook et al. 2014; Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015) cultural consensus (i.e., Coulter et al. 2010) and constructivist inquiry (i.e., Mitchell. 2015). Through in-depth and repetitive reading of the remaining seven papers that did not explicitly outline their philosophical perspective, four papers (Johnson, 2016; Slack, 2013, Slack et al. 2013; Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016) were all identified as fostering constructivism, two papers acknowledging interpretivist phenomenology (Slack et al. 2014; Thelwell et al. 2005) and one paper solely interpretivist (Mills, 2012).

Meta-theory results

Table 3: the theoretical frameworks and philosophical perspectives of the eleven included studies.

Study	Theoretical model/framework	Philosophical perspective
(Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016)	The theoretical process model of emotional abuse in sport (Gervis, 2009) – misuse of power culture of coaching	Not specified
(Thelwell, Weston & Greenlees, 2005)	Jones et al (2002) findings – framework for mental toughness	Not specified
(Johnson et al. 2016)	Constructivist narrative theory	The second author (who conducted the interviews) was grounded in social constructivism.
(Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015)	Pure phenomenology of Husserl (1973)	Interpretative phenomenological analysis to illustrate how professional coaches working in elite youth soccer identify talent by initially encouraging them to unpack their own conceptual models of talent itself.
(Cook et al. 2014)	Interested in analysing qualitatively how mental toughness 'plays out' in a	Not specified. Researchers had confidence in their interpretations of the

	specific sporting context, rather than prosing a new theoretical model of mental toughness. Own theoretical interests in order to develop deeper analytic understanding of the concept.	participants social and cultural world's.
(Coulter et al. 2010)	Personal construct psychology framework and subsequent research by Gucciardi and colleagues.	The philosophical assumptions form the basis for cultural consensus analysis in that a sample will hold a common "truth" that is derived from shared knowledge within their culture.
Slack et al. (2014)	Interview guide was derived from current MT literature (i.e., Coulter et al., 2010).	Not specified
Slack et al. (2013)	A semi-structured interview guide was developed from Greenleaf's (2001) performance excellence	Not specified
Mills et al. (2012)	Gagne's (2009) developmental theory and differentiated model	Not specified

	of giftedness and talent 2.0 was used as a theoretical basis for the study.	
Slack. (2013)	Mental toughness framework (Jones et al. 2007) Cornerstones Model of Refereeing Performance (Mascarenhas et al. 2005)	Not specified
Mitchell. (2015)	Study two: two methodological approaches were employed utilising ethnography	Study one: constructivist inquiry (Manning, 1997) Study two: constructivist approach

Presented in this meta-theory section are the theoretical frameworks and philosophical perspectives of MT and resilience studies (n=11). All eleven studies highlighted the need for a framework to choose a selected methodology, such as a semi-structured interview guide or a focus group schedule. Due to each study collating distinctive frameworks, it was difficult to determine which theoretical model or framework was most used. Two of the studies (i.e., Thelwell, 2005; Slack, 2013) both adopted the Mental Toughness framework postulated by Jones et al. (2007), which was created to understand the key attributes essential for top-level sport performance. Other frameworks included pure phenomenology of Husserl (1973) in

Miller, Cronin & Baker's (2015) study, emphasising the consciousness of experience in fully understanding MT. As well as Gagne's (2009) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent 2.0 (DMGT 2.0) to understand the natural gifted and talented abilities and the outcomes of these abilities in football athletes in Mills et al. (2012). This theoretical framework incorporates two types of catalysts in the athlete's developmental process of intrapersonal (e.g., physical, behavioural, and psychological attributes) and environmental (e.g., cultural, family, and social etc). Moreover, in Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis' (2016) study, the process model of emotional abuse in sport generated by Gervis (2009) helped to develop parallels between emotional abuse and MT development, for example, coaches' lack of care and suffocating obsession with hard work played a key role (Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). The personal construct psychology framework was utilised in Coulter et al. (2010) study suggesting that individuals develop personal constructs about how the world works based on their own experiences (Kelly, 1963), which draws similarities in the theoretical framework demonstrated in Miller, Cronin & Baker's (2015) and the researcher philosophy of social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Hay, 2015; Harper, 2011). The Cornerstones Performance Model of Refereeing encapsulating psychological characteristics of excellence (e.g., personality and game management skills, knowledge, and application of the law etc) postulated in Slack et al., (2013) study (Mascarenhas, Collins & Mortimer., 2005; McCaffrey & Orlick, 1989). There were three research studies that did not pose a specific theoretical model or conceptual framework due to the intent to explore how existing own theoretical interests, such as current knowledge and findings from previous research studies to develop a deeper analytic understanding of MT (Cook et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2016; Slack et al. 2014).

Meta-data analysis

For the meta-data analysis component, the researcher undertook a *thematic analysis* to group similar meaning units together from the included papers to generate patterns of data in the main and subthemes in response to the research questions to help the researcher make sense of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). The themes identified were conducted using inductive thematic analysis addressing the first and second order perspective to fully make sense of, describe and interpret MT and resilience in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To determine the saturation of the studied data no further methods of collection or analysis were used (Saunders et al. 2018).

Presented below is a summary of the created themes and subthemes depicted from the 11 included studies in the light of a thematic analysis. The themes identified from both the MT and resilience literature are presented in coherence with each research question with relevant verbatim quotes, participant identifies and page numbers where necessary. Initially, the systematic review aimed to capture all MT, MH, and resilience, however, after narrowing down the papers no included studies measured MH from a qualitative stance. It is suggested in previous literature that MT and resilience are closely linked acknowledging resilience as a subtheme of MT (Bull et al. 2005; Lough, Earle & Sewell, 2002; Middleton et al. 2004) or simply a separate construct. Themes were generated based on the participants football and personal experiences and subthemes are displayed in 'italics' to help capture the findings. The way in which the findings are presented is relevant to the three postulated research questions addressing how MT and resilience are conceptualised, factors influencing performance and wellbeing and how the psychological constructs are developed and maintained. This meta-study goes beyond previous literature findings to add understanding of both MT and resilience as separate, combined or subtheme paradigms (Paterson et al. 2001). The meta-study utilised inductive thematic analysis to present the main themes with

representative verbatim quotes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There were seven main themes with subthemes generated with relevant meaning units (MU) displayed. Research question one a) strong self-belief, b) ability to cope and c) tough attitude. Research question two d) optimistic mindset and e) winning mentality and research question three f) support networks and g) environmental factors. Although, some similarities were present with the themes throughout this meta-study, the researcher read and re read the included papers to decide on seven main themes aligned with the postulated research questions.

Research question one – how are MT, MH and resilience described by players and support staff within a football environment?

Strong self-belief

This theme reflects consistently on how MT and resilience are conceptualised and described within the football environment. Participants emphasised the necessity of acquiring a strong level of self-belief in their own skills and abilities to achieve optimal wellbeing and performance. Specifically, two subthemes emerged: confidence in one's own ability (MU = 6) and play without fear (MU = 2).

Confidence in one's own ability (MU = 6). This sub theme uncovered the significance of having confidence in your own skills and abilities regardless of any adversity that may be demonstrated. You can be recognised for your talent from the coaches, teammates, and spectators but what really matters is the confidence that players signify to themselves and admiring that they are one of the "best" on the pitch (Johnson et al. 2016; Mills et al. 2012). Injury can be seen as a traumatic time during players career, and attaching

a layer of self-confidence during this critical time is essential when returning to play during and post injury rehabilitation:

"I don't know. I was probably prepared for the operation and a long rehabilitation. I was organised already from the start. I told my physiotherapist to book a time with the doctor to arrange for the operation. Everything was progressing as it was supposed to. No problems at all" (participant from Johnson et al., 2016)

As well as the critical moment of injury, another rare but exciting opportunity comes from having the chance to train and potentially play with the first team:

"He went [to senior team training] And took the session over because he's so confident in what he does. Is having belief in your ability. You've got to be able to say "Well I'm one of the best and I'm going to show 'em" (participant from Mills et al. 2012).

We understand that resilience doesn't necessarily require the individual to be positive about the negative situation like MT researchers might but rather than pursuing the ability to "bounce back" from performance, environmental or personal challenges (Cook et al., 2014; Johnston et al., 2016). Acquiring confidence in any given situation that you can or cannot control by showcasing skills and adopting a "mind over matter approach" sets successful players, referees, and coaches aside. Literature extrapolates that confidence can be experienced when individuals have a deep spiritual connection to who they are, allowing them to perform to their true authentic self and using their values and confidence to guide performance (Nesti, 2010; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). Consistent with Premier League referees who attach a deeper meaning to what they're doing and how committed they're to

their role on and off the pitch seemed crucial with displaying confidence when making "in the moment" challenging decisions, managing criticism, and positively dealing with the pressure to perform (Slack. 2013; Slack et al., 2013; Slack. 2014).

"I know that I can referee these [EPL] matches because I have refereed these matches well before. I've done them many times and that just breeds confidence. I say, 'I've already done that type of match and I'll bank that one' ... and you just sit down and think I've refereed some big matches" (participant from Slack et al. 2014)

Displaying the ability of being confident not arrogant in ones' own ability was essential in Premier League referees being captured is a significant MT attribute supporting the participants refereeing excellence undetermined whether they experienced a successful game or not:

"It's the belief in your own ability to deal with particular situations when refereeing . . . It's not a case of going all scatty [absent-minded] about things and thinking I'm not sure about this, I'm not sure about that, it's actually thinking I know what I'm doing here . . . You have to go 100% with your convictions, then that's trusting yourself. Is just the belief that you can do the job [English Premier League refereeing] (participant from Slack et al. 2013)

Acquiring the self-confidence allows the Premier League referees to stay focused and use their previous knowledge and expertise that they have regarding the role within the best interest. Confidence in literature from a theoretical framework stance and from practical research findings has been found to drastically decrease individuals' confidence levels and increase layers of anxiety based on external pressures, uncertainty about what decision to make in the moment and conflicting internal thoughts or external opinions, such as spectator

or coach feedback (e.g., the Inverted U Theory Krane, 1992, the Catastrophe Theory, Fazey & Hardy, 1988). Additionally, players seen as persevering with their current injury was not just a physical challenge but psychological struggle managing unhelpful thoughts and emotions during the rehabilitation period. Clear thinking and action planning were essential to organise oneself daily and plan for a return of play. For example, devising a clear plan of regaining full fitness to play in the Champions League six months post operation feeling physically and mentally ready was key (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2016). Visually recalling memories of successfully completing rehab from previous injuries contributed to a positive outlook on return to training (Johnson et al. 2016):

Play without fear. The notion of this subtheme captured players positively coping with a variety of intensively pressurised situations in the Premier League and professional game. As football is a fast-paced and unpredictable environment, injury, deselection, and criticism forces players to quickly adapt to the professional environment to function effectively (Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016; Mills et al. 2012).

"You've got to be able to bounce back from disappointment. Can they handle the harshness of getting dropped, being injured, bad refereeing decisions, making mistakes on the pitch? You've got to be so resilient you've got to have the skin of a rhino". (Participant from Mills et al. 2012).

"The pressures to get a pro contract, the pressures at to own your own shirt, the pressures are the [senior team] manager calling you over to train with the first team and first impressions count. It's a pressure cooker... can they handle that?" (Participant from Mills et al. 2012).

These two quotes in particular highlight just a few of the mentally and physically challenging encounters that players face every day. The important of utilising the physical mind in a way to see that the only competition is yourself and although there are many external pressures and components that players can't control, resilience is concerned with being self-aware, focused, adaptable and display the willingness to put in the hard work when faced with these pressures as such. Looking more closely into practical examples when on the pitch one participant highlighted the fears associated with taking a penalty kick during a highly competitive game. Often it might be perceived that staying quiet or "not taking one for the team" goes unnoticed especially if players are already aware of those teammates that have vast experience have taken a penalty so potentially think that sitting back or saying no is ok, but coaches tend to make observations and identify who is willing to put themselves in uncomfortable positions and display mental toughness to support their team:

"For me, the not wanting to take one, says it all. Because yunno someone who's mentally tough will just go, go on, I'll have that!" (Participant from Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016).

Something as quick but seen as critical within football games, such as taking a penalty can ultimately determine whether the player is perceived as meant a little for not. Conversely, it was recognised that all players probably do experience a level of fear, anxiety and nervousness of taking penalties so it can be seen as the norm but acquiring the mentality of 'I'll do it anyway' appeared to contribute to the adherence of MT:

"They are scared of it, but they have challenged it" (Participant from Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016).

Ability to cope

Coping with internal and external pressure

The next theme of *ability to cope* closely captured coping with internal and external pressure (MU = 5) and managing adversity (MU = 4). Coping with internal and external pressure was commonly prevalent for Premier League referees. The ability to cope was dependent on regaining control over their internal thoughts and emotions (e.g., frustration) which ultimately influenced self-belief and response to behaviours, such as feeling calm when dealing with media criticism (Slack, 2013; Slack et al. 2013; Slack, et al. 2014). Mistakes made would headline across the world with an immediate effect, companied with backlash from both the media and fans after the game. As well as players and managers quickly following referees down the tunnel at half-time to question decision:

"At the [English] Premier League level there's all the media. Not just the back pages of the papers [written press] but 24- hour TV programmes. You know that any fundamental mistake doesn't just make the headlines in National [British] papers, but the headlines across the world. By Saturday night at 7.00 p.m. that mistake will be shown all across the world" *(participant from Slack et al. 2014)*

"You need to be mentally tough because the criticism you get from the media is not always positive. No one likes to hear or read negative comments about themselves. There's nothing worse than reading headlines saying 'you should've done this, you should've done that' . . . Because it's not just the one man and his dog that reads the newspapers, it's everybody in the

British Isles and sometimes the world. So there's a big pressure and a big demand from the media side of things" (participant from Slack et al. 2013)

These internal and external pressures meant that the referees had no choice but to display MT as a 'way of coping' with these pressures but also to protect their jobs in football, wellbeing, family, and performance (Slack et al., 2013; Slack et al., 2014). Relevant for understanding how to handle perspectives from the media in a healthy way which could result in criticism and deselection if decisions go against the greater good (Cook et al., 2014; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2016).

Managing adversity

Interestingly from the quote illustrated above dealing with this criticism from the media that was out of the referee's control determined how mentally tough they were perceived but was also seen as a factor for displaying high resilience especially communicating bouncing back from mistakes through managing adversity and setbacks:

"Yes, you've made a mistake but then you have to be able to bounce-back from that [performance] and put it to one side. So it's about having that resolve . . . It's having a positive frame of mind and maintaining a positive frame of mind for your next game . . . That has got to be one of the most important things certainly within a high-profile environment that we're in; refereeing in the [English] Premier League" (participant from Slack et al. 2013)

Acquiring MT and resilience cannot just be seen as a professional attribute to high performance but assessed in the ability to cope in life outside of football. For example, the control of emotions during the game when managing opponent's physical strength and tactical ability (Coulter et al., 2010) but also balancing family life, travel commitments and

moving to a different country on a short-term basis (Slack et al., 2014). Although much of this literature highlights the ability to cope as a crucial entity, many studies fail to imply how this is conceptualised across time periods during the football career. Unlike Coulter et al., (2010) and Slack et al., (2014) who emphasise the importance of acquiring an ability to cope in maintaining success with the sport culture and athletic self.

Research question two – what role (e.g., performance and well-being) does MT, MH and resilience play within football or soccer?

Research question two incorporates two main themes of optimistic mindset and winning mentality to increase the reader's understanding of the performance and well-being role both MT and resilience hold in the football setting. Firstly, obtaining an optimistic mindset requires individuals to generate a positive outlook on life (MU = 5 Cook et al. 2014; Coulter et al. 2010; Slack et al. 2013; Mills et al. 2012) and reach life satisfaction (MU = 3).

Optimistic mindset

From a psychosocial perspective, maintaining an optimistic and helpful frame of mind was imperative mid performance mistakes or during opposing decisions, such as losing a game when distinguishing between a strong sense of MT and resilience. Moreover, these psychological constructs are equally fundamental when dealing with criticism post-match to determine individuals' mindset when transitioning into the next match (Mills et al. 2012; Slack et al., 2013).

"Yes, you've made a mistake but then you have to be able to bounce-back from that [performance] and put it to one side. So it's about having that resolve . . . It's having a positive frame of mind and maintaining a positive frame of mind for your next game . . . That has got to be one of the most important things certainly within a high-profile environment that we're in; refereeing in the [English] Premier League".

The fast-paced, ever-changing, and challenging Premier League environment that referees operate in signify that mistakes cannot be dwelled on for too long post-match. Developing a coping mechanism to efficiently deal with and "recover" quickly from adversity had to be an established part of referees' post-match structure. Making the mistakes is not communicated as a negative thing, although portrayed negatively in the media in high pressurised environments, it's the ability to accept that mistakes happen, such as making an incorrect refereeing decision regarding a goal or not awarding a card for a foul (Slack et al. 2013; 2014). Going into each game with a new plan, mindset and pre-performance routine rehearsing their refereeing abilities is evident for strong MT and resilience.

An optimistic mindset incorporates delayed gratification and directing your focus onto what you can control. It's common for football players to compare themselves to opponents or teammates challenging for their position, who are stronger, faster and bigger. Once these players begin to focus on what can be controlled, their positive thinking, their game begins to change:

"When I was 14 and playing against 17 or 18 year olds that were stronger and quicker, I was able to get through by sticking to a lot of positive thoughts like ''its ok. I am younger, and in

a few years time physically I'll certainly be up there battling with them. Physically, I'll be the same as these guys are now. Given time, I'll be competing with them" (Coulter et al. 2010).

Obtaining an optimistic mindset does not have to be secluded to improvements in performance. Those who portray a robust level of MT or resilience when dealing with an injury demonstrate the need to "stay positive" and "keep their head up" to live a satisfied life during this critical period (Johnson et al., 2016; Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2016).

"I didn't take it very hard. When I received the diagnosis, I was prepared. I had a positive attitude to the healing process and future opportunities to handle the injury." Yet another player said, "It has been a process to understand, to permit myself to be sad. I have accepted this now."

Accepting that experiencing injury within football is almost inevitable, thus, maintaining an optimistic mindset when approaching rehabilitation can help to achieve broader life satisfaction (Johnson et al. 2016). It is not a surprise that ACL injuries predominantly take up colossal amounts of time, focus and energy but thus, heightened resilience levels ensure that individuals remain satisfied and appreciative of life in general. For example, improved social relationships, emotional wellbeing and injury recovery is magnified because of this.

Winning mentality

Winning mentality captured three subthemes; managing expectations, pushing boundaries and sacrifices, which were prevalent in (MU = 7) as requisites for successful performance, wellbeing, and life-work balance but employing MT and resilience.

Pushing boundaries encapsulated the idea of being realistic with your current knowledge base, talent and abilities but acknowledging avenues of when to step out of your comfort zone and "stand above the rest". Premier League referees reflected on what opportunities are potentially attainable given their current skill set. For example, understanding that refereeing at the World Cup Final isn't possible prior to obtaining experience from the UEFA cup, which is more physically and psychologically realistic. Managing expectations in this manner encouraged referees to foster MT and open-mindedness at what is currently achievable to allow for optimal performance (Slack. 2013; Slack et al. 2013; Slack et al. 2014).

"I won't referee a [Federation of International Football Associations, FIFA] World Cup Final, but there's no reason why I can't push for the next best thing which would be the UEFA [Champions League] Cup Final. So just being realistic to know that you've got those targets and it's important to know that. I think that's vital having those short, medium, and long-term goals" (participant from Slack et al. 2013).

Pushing boundaries does it just have to relate to the internal competition that Premier League referees have with themselves it can also relate to the nature of competing against each other to referee in the best possible games. Carrying the personal tray of being highly competitive may help the referees to adopt that winning mentality and perform the best as they possibly can:

"There are only 16 [EPL] referees this season [2010–2011]. As the Select Group, we are all very competitive and determined guys... We are all want to referee The FA Cup Final, The Football League Cup Final, [The FA] Community Shield, The FA Trophy, and The FA Youth Cup. So there are all those things to aim for and you want to be in pole position" (participant from Slack et al. 2014).

Additional findings identified that pushing boundaries displays true mental strength to keep up with the continuous expectations to win and perform to the best of your ability at an emotional, tactical, and physical level (Mitchell. 2015).

"Everyone thought I was going to quit because it was so hard for us. I grinded through it and knuckled down and just realised that this is how it's going to be. This is professional [football]; it's an adult game now. I grew instantly really. But I always had a winning mentality, that's one of my biggest assets. I was always a fighter as a kid because I was quite small and I had to fight on the pitch and obviously on a school playground as well." (Mitchell. 2015).

Sacrifices relates to investing in yourself through consistent discipline on and off the pitch, setting appropriate goals and acquiring the ability to problem solve (Cook et al., 2014; Mills et al. 2012; Slack et al. 2013; Slack et al., 2014). To conserve MT, performing at a high level requires personal and professional sacrifices that may unfavoured cultural and social norms, for example, missing out on social events, spending time travelling and away from family and friends and, taking a step down in a career path with higher monetary rewards to pursue a career in football (Slack et al. 2014). Growing up and pursuing a career or interest that one is passionate about requires periods within one's life to feel quite isolating, lonely and can bring about experiences of struggle.

Research question three - what factors are perceived to influence the development and maintenance of MT, MH and resilience within football or soccer?

Support networks

Support networks appeared to be a concurrent and relevant theme throughout (MU = 7) seven of the studies (e.g., Slack et al. 2013; Slack et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2016) as mostly a helpful entity to foster both MT and resilience. Firstly, support from inside of the sport came from each other (i.e., between Select Group referees and teammates supporting each other through injury rehabilitation) by feeling comfortable to call each other in times of need and to openly discuss challenges in training, performance, and life in general as a "pick me up" to connect through similar experiences (Johnson et al. 2016; Slack. 2013; Slack et al. 2013).

"Our coach has been really good; he has listened to me and often asked how I felt and so on" and "The coach pushed me to train harder on my own. It was great to feel that engagement from him." (Johnson et al. 2016).

These individuals valued support networks highly when going through a challenging critical moment. Relatedness of similar situations created empathy. Consistent with women football players, who recognise the significance of appreciating supportive teammates and physiotherapist when adversity is present, for example, dealing with an injury and challenges in general life (Johnson et al. 2016). Like support outside of the sport from close family members (i.e., mother, father, and partners), who make not necessarily be able to completely relate to specific sport challenges but are "always available" and attentive with advice when essential. Partners tend to directly experience the challenges and mishaps of those working in football thus positive and encouraging self-talk is key during these times.

"My Mom has been like a rock in a storm. She has al- ways been there and been attentive to me, not necessarily giving loads of advice and that kind of thing; she has just been available." Johnson et al. (2016).

For example, one of the PGMOL referee's partners said, "look what you've got to do is just go out and referee", which gave him the motivation to perform his job to the best of his ability (Johnson et al. 2016; Slack et al. 2013; Slack et al). Having a sustainable support network in and out football is fundamental to contribute to emotionally, psychologically, and physically when adversity arises helping to build MT and resilience to perform successfully.

Environmental factors

Environmental factors were the final main theme for the development and maintenance of MT and resilience, which appeared to be visible for (MU = 3) studies. Plenty of these studies communicated the significance of a challenging but supportive environment as well as character building which subsided as frequent sub-themes.

A "tough" environment from a physical and psychological lens allowed for player growth and the space to push out of their comfort zone. However, only functional changes were made if the players were consistently supported from relevant coaches and support staff during the process (Cook et al. 2014) with consistent findings from Gilbourne & Richardson, (2006) emphasising the need for a caring and supportive environment to see progression.

"I'm a great believer in a tough environment, tough in the sense that you know they need challenging, need pushing out of their comfort zones, you have to have a degree of stress but they've got to be supported through". (Participant 1) (Cook et al. 2014).

The foundation of the football environment requires focus on providing the psychologically safe space and tools for players to solve their own problems to build their own emotional intelligence rather than offering the solutions directly (Cook et al. 2014; Mitchell. 2015). It was normal for these players to feel uncomfortable during this growth process especially if experiencing deselection, injuries, family demands etc were prevalent. Coaches that fostered an environment that views failure as a fundamental and positive rather than a construct to avoid, recognised the appreciation of learning, navigating mistakes with ultimately facilitating development (Mills et al. 2012).

"I think the most important element is the environment . . . that is the real key. There's 40 academies in the country; they all operate under the same criteria; it's all stipulated that you must have a certain number of staff with certain qualifications etc. So why is one better at producing players than another? It all comes down to the people and creating the right environment". (Mills et al. 2012)

Additionally, character building insinuated that players and coaches experienced a degree of bullying, intimidation, and humiliation unexpectedly in the football environment. Again, this was common behaviour and was seen as who could successfully manage the mental challenge to build resilience and MT. This character building most frequently started from young school years and became a part of players identity, helping them to either adapt to the role of a professional football coach or the role of a professional football player by wanting to

prove everyone "wrong" through dealing with consistent banter to develop and shape their identity (Mitchell. 2015; Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016).

"You've got to be top dog. You don't want people... especially the school I went to, it was rough. Yes, you had to be mentally strong at our school. There was a lot of bullying and intimidation I would say." Mitchell. 2015

Discussion and meta-synthesis

The aim of a meta-synthesis is to produce a new interpretation of MT and resilience through analysing the methods, theory and data presented from the research of others (Ronkainen, 2022). A meta-study has been found to assist the progression of theory from multiple empirical studies (Reyes et al. 2020). The new interpretations discovered by the researcher will be communicated in alignment with the initial postulated research questions to add contemporary understandings to the research field (Paterson, 2001).

To critically assess meta-theory, considerations to ontological, epistemological, and theoretical underpinnings were judged (Massey & Williams, 2020). A small number of qualitative reviews in the meta-study displayed their philosophical assumptions, (n =3) Miller, Cronin & Baker (2015), Mitchell. (2015) and Johnson et al (2016) and theoretical framework, emphasising a confusion in their research paradigm (n = 8). Although, the eight studies inadequately communicated their philosophical assumptions at times their theoretical and methodological positioning was briefly indicated (see Table 2) (Massey & Williams, 2020). Resulting from this the current researcher could make assumptions based on

theoretical knowledge as to what philosophical stance was taken in the reminder of the studies.

Outlined in previous literature were four pillars of MT signified by coaches in the football environment: coping with pressure, a strong self-belief, focused concentration, and sustained motivation (Jones & Moorhouse, 2007). Two of these MT pillars put forward by Jones & Moorhouse (2007) were consistent with the findings from this systematic review (e.g., coping with pressure and a strong self-belief). Aligned with research question one, of describing and conceptualising MT and resilience in the football environment, it's clear that MT is extensively used but rarely understood (Jones, 2002) as a variety of psychological constructs are used to describe MT as a personality trait (Kroll, 1967; Werner, 1960; Werner & Gottheil, 1966) and an innate state of mind (Gibson, 1998). Consistent with previous research, participants who were "resilient" and "mentally tough" attained success in football when bouncing back from setbacks, dealing with pressure, and sustaining a strong level of self-belief to achieve (e.g., Johnson et al. 2016; Slack et al. 2013; 2014). However, this only seemed evident in those participants who had a strong sense of self. As self-belief is consistent with extensive previous literature in football (e.g., Gould et al. 1987; Gucciardi, Gordon & Dimmock., 2008; Gucciardi et al. 2009; McCarrick, Wolfson & Neave, 2020). As some of the current qualitative research failed to capture the theoretical and methodology framework, it is argued that findings may be influenced by researchers' bias and personal subjectivity to inform the data providing a distortion in the study results (Polit & Beck, 2014; Thorne, Stephens & Truant, 2016), so the extent as to which MT and resilience is described may be subjective to researcher knowledge of the constructs.

Participants who understand who they are and connect to their authentic self, discovered competence, task mastery and successfully overcame conflicts (Brown, 1998). Typically, this sense of self is formulated by earlier childhood experiences and previous exposure to the meaning of MT and resilience (e.g., Aber et al., 1989; Mikulincer, 1998; Rogers, 1954). Participants encountered a vast amount of physical and psychological stressors, from returning to play from an injury (e.g., Johnson et al. 2016), media and fan criticism and refereeing a Champions League Final (e.g., Slack. 2013; Slack et al. 2013; Slack et al. 2014), and making one mistake during a game (e.g., Mills et al. 2012), but MT and resilience were present when participants fostered a high sense of self-concept. Strong self-belief, the ability to cope and displaying a tough attitude was personal and unique to the participants, but how participants viewed themselves in the amidst of these critical moments regardless of the context in which these occurred.

Aligned with research question two, the current research fosters new interpretations and insights emphasising the role of psychological wellbeing (Cook et al. 2014; Coulter et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2016; Slack et al. 2013; Mills et al. 2012). Literature of that with MT and resilience relies heavily on the influence of performance and to achieve success the participants need to perform to a high professional standard, managing media and fan criticism during a game however, this does not necessarily indicate that a healthy and positive wellbeing level. Evidence from the current literature illustrates an optimistic mindset, prioritising psychological and emotional well-being during a critical injury, Johnson et al. (2016) looked at injured female football players who were "resilient" adopting an optimistic mindset. These participants accepted their injuries in a positive light through prioritising well-being, satisfaction, and their whole self. Additionally, from a psychosocial perspective, sustaining a positive frame of mind during the game when decisions are and aren't going

your way and accepting these "in the moment" such as making mistakes or receiving criticism decided whether MT and resilience was present in the next decision or game (Mills et al. 2012; Slack et al., 2013). Self-acceptance is found to mediate between perfectionism and depression (Flett et al. 2003), closely linked to self-compassion and a healthy self-attitude to understand well-being (Neff, 2003) and positive psychological functioning (Allen & Leary, 2010). Thus, accepting yourself as who you are not only strengthens MT and resilience, increased performance, but participants achieved a positive sense of psychological wellbeing. Winning mentality has been captured in football as achieving success in a fast-paced and competitive environment (e.g., Coulter et al. 2010; Mills et al. 2012; Wieser & Thiel, 2014 etc) With evidence from Slack et al. (2013; 2014) signifying that healthy competition other Select Group referees is fundamental for optimal performance. However, new interpretations indicate that acquiring a winning mentality is not secluded to performance success as making sacrifices with social events, family and friends contributed to broader lifestyle choice that helped participants to become a better version of themselves.

To understand the meta-theory frameworks postulated when taking a broader perspective of resilience and wellbeing, the use of the social constructivist narrative theory and personal construct theory is illuminated. Personal construct psychology (PCT) and social constructivism complement each other with similar philosophical foundations, such as capturing storytelling unique experiences (Mancuso. 1996), with individuals' "truth" being a product of social interactions (Burr, 2015). Johnson et al. (2010) utilised the social constructivist narrative theory which allowed for an understanding of wellbeing and resilience through a cultural, social, and historical lens of individual identity (Adams, 2006). However, a limitation questions whether the data saturation is robust enough, although players stories communicated personal experiences relative to their injuries, the injuries

occurred 6 months prior potentially questioning the credibility. PCT may be a useful avenue to fully understanding participants strong beliefs and personal constructs central to wellbeing, (Kelly, 1955; 1970), with evidence of this theory from Coulter et al. (2010).

Research question three compromised factors that contributed to the development and maintenance of MT and resilience within the football environment, encompassing support networks and environmental factors (Cook et al. 2014; Mills et al. 2012; Mitchell. 2015). Participants spoke equally regarding the important of inside and outside of sport support networks that help manage critical moments from a personal and professional level. Strong connections with peers, parents, and significant others outside of sport were "always available", "attentive with advice" and "provided self-talk". Participants appreciated the safe space to voice and share frustrations with, helping to manage critical performance, personal and lifestyle moments (e.g., Johnson et al. 2016; Owusu-Seyeke & Gervis, 2016; Slack. 2013; Slack et al. 2013; 2014). Previous evidence is looked at the significance of coaches, parents, and peers providing support to contribute to psychosocial development for adolescent athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), with the quality of social support that athletes receive benefitting recovery from injury, self-belief, and performance (Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Holt & Hoar, 2006; Rees, 2007).

Moreover, a challenging and supporting environment was a fundamental part of the participants identity in fostering MT and resilience, however, these psychological constructs were only preserved if the support from coaches was there. This is consistent with previous literature highlighting that support from coaches, a strong interpersonal relationship, positive and informational feedback and autonomy supportive engagement styles resulted in successful developmental outcomes (Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Although the need for

character building is associated with both MT and resilience in the literature (e.g., Coulter et al. 2016; Eubank, Nesti & Littlewood, 2017 etc), the way in which the participant perceives bullying intimidation is unique and personal to their previous experiences. For example, this could have been ingrained from participants childhood identity or childhood trauma. Character building is essential to be present in a supportive environment otherwise participants can interpret MT and resilience as 'pressure', 'negative' or 'deliberative' two performance and well-being. Considerable care and attention to participant 's personality traits and responses is essential, for example coaches or others within the football environment should be mindful in how players react or respond to feedback, pressure etc. the way in which participants perceive themselves and identify with their self-concept, for example, judging "what it means to be a footballer" and "what it means to be mentally tough and resilient" is highly dependent on the environment in which the participant operates consistent with organisational culture research in football (e.g., Champ et al. 2020).

Miller, Cronin & Baker (2015) postulated the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis underpinned by pure phenomenology of Husserl (1973), which tells the story of whatever is immediately provided to individuals' consciousness. Experienced solely from individuals' unique, personal, and authentic perspective. This research paradigm falls under social constructivism by illustrating how professional coaches working in elite youth soccer identify talent by initially encouraging them to unpack their own conceptual models of talent itself in their own social worlds (Giacobbi, Poczwardowski & Hager, 2005). Like that as mentioned in (Johnson et al. 2016) where the second author was well equipped in qualitative methods and social constructivists narrative which allowed the researcher to encapsulate the way in which individual participants identities were grounded in cultural and historical forms of language. Although it was the second author that proposed this research paradigm, this

was the author who conducted all the semi structured interviews and the first author helped with the thematic content analysis. Coulter et al. (2010) outlined the use of personal construct analysis which aims to understand individuals personal and unique perspective to what is happening in their personal world using an individualistic approach (Kelly, 1955/1991). As the personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) as pragmatist underpinning there is an appreciation to the individual and social world (Butt, 2001), sharing similarities are shared to that of Johnson et al. (2016) and Miller, Cronin & Baker (2015) where the researcher attempts to critically appreciate what meaning participants attach to MT and resilience within experiences of football performance. Similarly, both Slack. (2013) and Slack et al. (2013) postulated lower and higher themes for factors underpinning football officiating excellence. Denzin (2009) outlined a specific quote of in-depth descriptions giving context to individuals experience, meanings that organised the experience and uncovering the experience as a process, suggests that personal constructivism (PCT) helped to understand referees' social worlds regarding what was deemed as excellence with football officiating and these experiences were unique and personal (Hay, 2016). As the research proposed by Slack (2013) and Slack et al. (2013; 2014) was based on phenomena that has already been explored by that of Jones et al. (2002) around MT it's clear to say that grounded theory was not used.

The current meta-study does not come without limitations regarding the process, design, and analysis. A practical challenge was present throughout the systematic review engagement due to inconsistencies with the research team that could not be controlled (i.e., illness), which meant towards the middle and latter of the data extraction and write-up the main researcher received limited support. Due to this lack of support, the challenge regarding understanding and obtaining knowledge of an effective meta-study synthesis was impact. Critical reflexivity and the way data interpretation and synthesis occurred could be subject to

a lack of critical depth resulting from this (Newton et al. 2012). Although the main researcher conducted a thematic analysis on the data of the included studies aligned with the three postulated research questions, reflection-on-action allowed the researcher to consider whether this type of analysis allowed for critical depth to be reached in alignment with personal philosophical assumptions where narrative analysis may have been more viable (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Additionally, reflexive thematic analysis emphasises the significance of the researcher's subjectivity and consideration to the reflexive engagement or theory, methods, data, and interpretation to synthesise efficiently through creativity may have diminished the impact experience compromising the inconsistencies with the research team (Braun & Clarke, 2021; 2019a; 2019b; Braun et al. 2019a; Terry et al. 2017). Eight of the included studies failed to present their philosophical position thus difficult to understand the connection between the researcher's philosophy of practice and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research rationale and focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is fundamental to adequate data evaluation (Massey & Williams, 2020; Paterson et al., 2001; Ronkainen, 2022). However, using a critical appraisal tool ensured consistency with the study ratings as it meant that more suitable criteria was applied to the literature search and when the research findings were interpreted it meant that these were less influenced by personal biases and subject-specific knowledge (Crowe, Sheppard & Campbell, 2011).

From an applied implication perspective, this meta-study provides proactive and relevant understandings to how both MT and resilience can be applied to the football environment to help facilitate the language used, the working relationships (e.g., coach-athlete, athlete-athlete etc) and positively influence the organisational culture of how both these psychological constructs are perceived to help enhance player development (Champ et

al. 2020; Mills et al. 2012; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015). Focusing on the role and significance that both MT and resilience play and continue to play within football, it appears beneficial that creating an optimal environment in which all stakeholders that function within have a greater understanding of how these constructs are conceptualised, the role that they play with wellbeing and performance and the factors which hinder or facilitate the development and maintenance is critical. This knowledge and understanding can be enhanced through education from relevant sports psychologists within football even to determine the language used when communicating what a "mentally tough" or "resilient" individual "looks like". Integrating psychological interventions or the use of empathetic language through a counselling approach is fundamental when communicating to others to assist with the development and maintenance of MT and resilience in individuals (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017; Wylleman et al. 2009). To conclude, the present meta-study aimed to critically evaluate the qualitative research of MT, MH, and resilience within football from player and support staff experiences, aligned with the postulated research questions. The meta-study displayed a critical insight into understanding and development of the psychological constructs, however, although, the initial proposal of the review consisted of MT, MH, and resilience, it was found that MH failed to come up in the literature from a qualitative lens. It appears that theoretical and practical work is moving away from "mental hardiness" as a contemporary characteristic to use within football. The meta-synthesis offers many avenues of additional research, from a practical and theoretical lens to implement relevant education and understanding of MT and resilience in the football culture.

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Empirical paper 1

Identity and lifestyle transformation experiences in attendees of an exercise support group – a narrative inquiry.

Abstract

The aim of the current research was to explore identity and lifestyle transformation experiences in attendees of an exercise support group ('Be Strong') using narrative inquiry. Intervention programmes to tackle physical inactivity (PA) have been shown to be effective in the short-term, but further implementation of lifestyle support groups is needed to help sustain long-term PA levels (Dun, Andersen & Jakicic, 1998; Wu, et al. 2011). The current established lifestyle support group experiences were assessed through an evaluation of individual identity and lifestyle transformations encompassing individual well-being, weight loss, exercise and nutrition as well as support to all areas of life. Findings captured two narrative structures of *previous and current experiences* as well as three narrative features of *self-exploration, diet vs lifestyle culture* and *multiple identities*. While evaluation of an established lifestyle support group of this nature provides sufficient evidence for its effectiveness, future recommendations should consider additional population groups to assess, the qualities required of staff recruited to implement the support, and the delivery of autonomous supportive strategies that are essential for individual lifestyle and identity transformation (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2015; Hodge, Henry & Smith, 2014; Lyon et al., 2012; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Mallett, 2005).

Introduction

NICE (2018) and Public Health England (2022) guidelines have widely contributed to the gradual increase in health care professionals promoting the formation and adherence to healthy exercise behaviours. The professions of GPs, health specialists and psychologists (health, clinical and sport and exercise) have been encouraged to offer lifestyle support groups to promote healthy exercise or physical activity (PA) behaviour (WHO, 2018). Lifestyle is a way of living based on patterns of behaviour that guide individuals' health levels, such as engaging in a weight loss journey (Toft et al., 2022), personal characteristics, such as a change in identity, wellbeing, environment, and social interactions, which play a key role in lifestyle change (WHO, 1998; 2000). Engaging in regular exercise is considered an essential part of contemporary health and lifestyle promotion efforts (Anderson & Cychosz, 1994).

PA is any bodily movement that is produced by skeletal muscles, that requires energy expenditure. Exercise is a subcategory of PA that is planned, structured, repetitive and aims to maintain one or more components of PA (World Health Organisation, 2018) (WHO). In the UK, the PA guidelines for adults aged 18-64 years old is at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity PA, vigorous intensity aerobic activity or a combination between the two; as well as including two days of muscle strengthening activity per week, with the probability of attaining psychological and physiological advantages (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2019). However, in the current Western society 'inactivity' can be seen as a public concern, leading to, in some instances, obesity (Rossing et al. 2016). Research has focused on intervention programmes to tackle the inactivity levels in Europe, which are consistent in the

short-term but further implementation of lifestyle support groups is needed to help sustain long-term PA levels (Dun, Andersen & Jakicic, 1998; Wu, et al. 2011).

Obesity is correlated with joint problems, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and in some cases mortality (Finer, 2006). Regular PA is positively associated with weight loss and control (Kirschenbaum, 1992) and moderate levels of physical activity also appear to be protective against early mortality (Blair et al., 1989). Familiarisation of the physical benefits of exercise, for example lower blood pressure, increased cardiovascular health, and a slower resting heart rate is encouraged by doctors and medical staff (Nystoriak & Bhatnagar, 2018). Conversely, there is a current ever-growing emphasis on the advantages that exercise brings to individuals psychological and mental health, for example 'feel good' experiences, higher well-being, and increased self-esteem (Geus & de Moor, 2008). For individuals to achieve these positive psychological benefits, social support can be seen as a tool to facilitate the reduction in weight loss and make the process more enjoyable.

Social support refers to the care, respect and help from key people in the individual's life, including emotional, informational, and instrumental support (Cohen & Matthews, 1987; Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007). Additionally, social support is positively associated with exercise behaviour adherence (Marquez et al. 2016; Krause et al. 1993), with research maintaining this as individuals' adherence to group exercise programmes was primarily due to social connectedness (Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016). There is a moderate effect on exercise behaviours by indirectly increasing compliance, engagement, and sustainability to PA (Carron, Hausenblas & Mack, 1996) and during interventions contributing to successful and long-term weight loss maintenance (Lemstra et al. 2016; Ufholz, 2020). Social support can occur from an individual friend, partner, family member or collectively as part of a lifestyle support group.

Lifestyle support groups offer a safe space for everyone to share experiences of similar lifestyle journeys, seek sufficient advice (i.e., tips for losing weight) and feel a sense of connectedness to the group (Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016). For many, when starting a journey of weight loss and PA, lifestyle support groups are key to reduce any physical or psychological barriers. Barriers for PA engagement can include the weather constraints, motivation, social cues, physical injury, or illness, prioritising time and dealing with unhelpful thoughts or emotions in which lifestyle coaches can provide support to reduce (Venditti et al. 2014). Previous literature covers structured interventions on exercise, weight loss and nutritional behaviour that has been solely created for research purposes, for example, short-term 6–8-week intervention groups compared to a control group (e.g., Jakicic et al. 2001). Theoretical and practical evidence of established weight loss groups in the UK (e.g., Barnett, 2018; Coe et al., 2019; Dansinger et al. 2005; Rippe, 2004) is described in the literature as helpful when supporting individuals referred from their GP or the NHS (Morgan, 2005; Pavey et al. 2011; Rowley. 2019). However, research is yet to explore identity and lifestyle support from a holistic perspective, rather than weight loss specifically. One practical example, is Be Strong, founded in 2016 to increase physical, social, psychological, and emotional attributes that are fundamental to sustaining a healthy life.

A fundamental component of group-based lifestyle transformation programmes is their evolution of their identity. Identity is defined as how an individual sees themselves (i.e., describing their self as unique and distinctive) (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997, p. 206). Our identity is not just secluded to who we think we are but offers us a robust sense of embodiment of existing in the world (Rossing, Ronglan & Scott, 2016) and we can uncover those who are physically active or inactive based on identity formation (Fox, 1997). Understanding

individuals' role-identities helps place meaning and value to past behaviour and provide direction for future behaviour, which might be to formation healthy lifestyle habits with PA and nutrition (Anderson et al. 1995). Lifestyle support groups can play a vital role in the evolution of identity with increased knowledge (Carraro & Gaudreau, 2010) and social engagement with others on a similar path (Rossing, Ronglan & Scott, 2016).

The self is thought to be organised into multiple parts or identities, each representing the self, which is situated in the context of a particular role (i.e., self as mother, self as friend, self as a runner; Burke & Stets, 2009; 2023 revised; Stets & Burke, 2003). Adopting a runner identity requires social recognition and connectedness to fit into cultural norms and society's understanding of being disciplined into having a better shape (Busanich, McGannon & Schinke., 2014). Individuals can vary in the strength of their endorsement of a given identity (Ryan & Deci, 2003). This strength of endorsement influences the probability that behaviour will agree with identity-related expectations (Stryker, 1980). With exercise this can include the number of minutes that an individual exercises (e.g., Houser-Marko & Sheldon, 2006), the frequency of weekly exercises (e.g., Strachan & Brawley, 2008) and the number of weeks of exercise participation (e.g., Anderson et al. 1998).

Furthermore, identity plays a key role in lifestyle change and weight management through positive body image, job competency and physical power (Greaves et al. 2017; Odgen, 2010b; Sarlio-Lahteenkorva, 1998). A gradual shift in participants identity occurred following weight loss maintenance from restriction to liberation in themselves. These individuals adopted a more positive body image moving away from weight and shape fixation to heightened self-esteem relating to other elements of their identity (Odgen, 2010b). Research identified individuals frequently experienced discomfort and a loss of carefree thinking when recalling

when they were previously overweight due to a societal obsession with being thin (Greaves et al. 2017).

As highlighted above the current literature postulates limited research on the role of individual identity and the influence of lifestyle transformation from those individuals who attend an exercise support group. Thus, the current research aims to attend to this gap presented in the previous literature by answering the following three research questions:

1. How does the identity of previously inactive individuals evolve through participation in a group-based lifestyle transformation programme?
2. What factors contribute to the evolution of identity? (i.e., how does the lifestyle change process affect identity?)
3. What role does identity play in participants' engagement with health behaviours? (i.e., how does identity affect the lifestyle change process?)

Methodology

Philosophical assumptions

The current narrative analysis is underpinned by the paradigmatic perception of epistemological constructivism allowing the researcher to understand participants subjective experiences functioning in the 'Be Strong' environment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Attempting to understand each participant's internal (e.g., unhelpful thought processes regarding the self) and external (e.g., other's direct judgements) worlds relative to their work, family and PA experiences ameliorated to determine which narratives are being

communicated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12; Guba, 1990, p. 17; Wolcott, 2008a). Through utilising interpretivism and subjectivism, the researcher anticipated to reflect on how participants current experiences aligned with how their social reality is constructed, how it can be known to the social world and what knowledge is attached to their experience (Jewett, Kerr & Tamminen, 2019; Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012). Like previous research, narrative analysis was explored to understand "how" the participants individual stories were told through their use of language and "why" these stories were told through interpretations from the researcher relative from the social worlds (Riessman, 2008; Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012).

Sampling procedure

The type of sampling methods that were used was convenience or voluntary response sampling. The researcher implemented this type of sampling mainly based on the ease of access and not wanting to choose participants based on who the researcher knows or through a gatekeeper. This could have potentially created a bias for the research study. A social media advert and a recruitment email was sent out to all the Be Strong members outlining the nature of the study and through asking the members to volunteer themselves based on the study eligibility. Initially, fourteen participants came forward by commenting on the social media post and sending an email to the researcher highlighting their interest of participating. Unfortunately, two members were excluded due to being Be Strong online members only.

Pilot study

To determine the feasibility of the study research design, a pilot study was conducted with an individual of the general population that was intended to be used in a larger scale study (Leon,

Davis & Kraemer, 2011). Pilot studies are a useful tool to help define your research questions and identify modifications that are needed in the design of the larger study, for example the flow of questions and timing of responses (Thabane et al. 2010). This participant was not a member of Be Strong but was known to the researcher and underwent an identity and lifestyle transformation. Therefore, the interview questions were adapted (see appendix one), for example, the questions focused on their exercise journey from attending the gym and other exercise activities rather than Be Strong experiences. This semi-structured interview was conducted on Microsoft Teams and lasted for approximately 57 minutes. None of the interview questions were changed, however, the researcher was mindful of when questions or probes required to be adapted based on participants responses.

Interview guide and procedure

The researcher conducted 12 semi-structured interviews remotely via Microsoft Teams. Although participants were presented with the option to complete the interview face-to-face at the Be Strong office or remotely, all chosen Teams due to time, work, and family constraints. A brief overview of the relevant study context (i.e., interview logistics, confidentiality, and protocol) were provided with an opportunity to seek clarification and ask questions prior to the study beginning. A self-developed demographic questionnaire was administered to gather background information about participants (i.e., how much weight lost at 'Be Strong', current fitness levels etc.) which can be referred to in **Table 1**.

As the researcher previously held an applied role within the 'Be Strong' organisation for approximately three years, a working rapport was already established, with four of the members (these members have attended psycho-educational workshops that I have delivered

in my previous applied role), but the working rapport with the remaining eight members was gained during the interview process. The demographic questionnaire and first two introductory interview questions allowed the researcher-participant relationship to be established and to gauge an insight into the participants previous experiences with exercise and 'Be Strong'. For example, "can you start off by telling me about your experiences with 'Be Strong'?" and "identity is the way we see ourselves; how would you say you see yourself in relation to exercise?" The interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational style and the participants were asked to explore their identity evolution in line with their attendance at 'Be Strong'. The interview questions were created based on previous established interview guides to help capture the participants identity evolution and lifestyle experiences. The researcher's knowledge with delivering interviews and exploring experts' thoughts and opinions on a particular phenomenon helped to uncover effective interview questions (Brinkmann, et al. 2008). To build the researcher-participant rapport and gain in-depth responses of the studied phenomenon two broad, open-ended introductory questions were implemented. The main body of the interview questions were designed in association to the three research questions with additional research probes. The participants topic experiences emerged by presenting the interview questions in this format.

Participants

Utilising the results from the demographic questionnaire and to provide a brief personal context of the participants who were involved in the study, a table was created (see Table 1 below). To ensure confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym, visible in the table. All participants were over the age of 18 and members of 'Be Strong' for approximately one to five years (an average of 2.5 years), their age range varied from (21-60+ years of age), gender (Male

= 1 and Female = 11), employment status (employed for wages or retired) etc. Participants were from different activity levels and backgrounds, ranging from being highly inactive/sedentary to competing in external sport, marathons, and fitness outside of Be Strong. Following UK COVID lockdown (s) and other unforeseen circumstances, the number of face-to-face Be Strong members have declined, thus employing volunteer sampling to the direct Facebook group and via email helped to recruit the desired members.

Table 1: demographic characteristics of Be Strong participants who were interviewed for the current research.

Demographic table						
Participant name (s)	**Age range**	**Gender**	**Height**	**Weight when starting Be Strong (optional to share)**	**Current weight (optional to share)**	**Employment status**
Participant 1 Jeff Gordon	40-49	Male	181cm	93.4kg	73.2kg	Employed for wages
Participant 2 Daisy Gill	50-59	Female	5ft 8.5 inchs	10st 8lbs	10st 10.5lbs	Employed for wages
Participant 3 Ruby Leaf	21-29	Female	5ft 7.5 inch	15st 7.5lbs	15st 8lbs. (lost 3.5 stone and gained it back over lockdown)	Employed for wages
Participant 4 Kate Denton	50-59	Female	5ft 7 inch	15st 13.75lbs	11st 12lbs. has been 10st 6lbs	Employed for wages
Participant 5	60+	Female	5ft 2	11st 12lbs	10 stone	Retired

Lucy Paige						
Participant 6 Becky Ashworth	60+	Female	5ft 7	13st 5lbs	11st 8lbs	Retired
Participant 7 Sarah Fletcher	50-59	Female	5ft 5	11st 6lb	9st 11lb	Employed for wages
Participant 8 Jessica Guy	40-49	Female	5ft 5	12st 12lbs	12st 6lbs	Employed for wages
Participant 9 Olivia Hanton	40-49	Female	150cm	11st 2.5lbs	9st 12lbs	Employed for wages
Participant 10 India Patton	50-59	Female	5ft 7	17st 9lbs	16st 10lbs	Employed for wages
Participant 11 Amelia Wood	40-49	Female	5ft 7	16st 7lbs	15st 2lbs	Employed for wages
Participant 12 Kelly James	60+	Female	5ft 6	12st 2lbs	10st 7lbs	Retired

Data analysis

The semi-structured interviews were analysed using inductive narrative analysis prevalent in much early qualitative research (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Dey, 1993). This process consisted of the researcher reading the interview transcriptions repeatedly allowed for the researcher to

immerse themselves into the research data (Janesick, 1998) and discover a deeper understanding of the participants, opinions, perspectives, attitudes and behaviours of their identity and lifestyle transformation (Frank, 2012; Nassaji. 2015). An interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to accept that knowledge is interpreted, and realities are understood to make sense of each storyline (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and gain further depth through seeking participants experiences of a particular social context (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Additionally, this process involved narratively coding the most imperative possible themes related to the self, identity, and lifestyle support into three distinct narrative features: *self-exploration, diet vs lifestyle culture and multiple identities.* The primary researcher, who had used narrative analysis in previous research, analysed all semi-structured interviews to understand how the story was being communicated and the product of the story being told (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Each category identified was examined across time by the lead and co-researchers. Member checks were conducted so participants had the chance to check or add a comment to their original transcripts. Analyses of the transcripts followed procedures from a general narrative, analytical method framework (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Thus, the role of a storyteller was used to distinguish three explicit storylines that constructed the 'Be Strong' members lived experiences through understanding their authentic worlds (Bamberg, 2020; Smith & Sparkes, 2008)

Trustworthiness and rigor

Using a combination of criteria is essential to evaluating the trustworthiness and quality of qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Firstly, triangulation offered credibility to the qualitative research analysis, and the emergent storylines were monitored by the researcher and

one supervisory researcher (McDougall, Nesti & Richardson, 2015; Patton, 2002). Member checking was undertaken through each participant from Be Strong being sent a copy of their transcript verbatim. Participants were provided with the opportunity to illuminate, reflect, and expand on any information said during the interview (Patton, 2002), and to retrospectively elaborate on the researcher's analysis (Bloor, 2001). The member checking helped to gauge a fuller understanding of the participant's lived experiences and to control any potential researcher bias (Loh, 2013). Moreover, integrity was displayed through the research design and procedures (e.g., semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis) to help support the research goals (i.e., to explore the identity and lifestyle transformation) through understanding the researchers' approach to narrative inquiry (i.e., the study phenomena is socially constructed, and the interviews were an opportunity to explore lived experiences). Research fidelity (rigour) was captured through in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences provided by participant's quotes, many of which exemplify internal experiences that would have been difficult to observe.
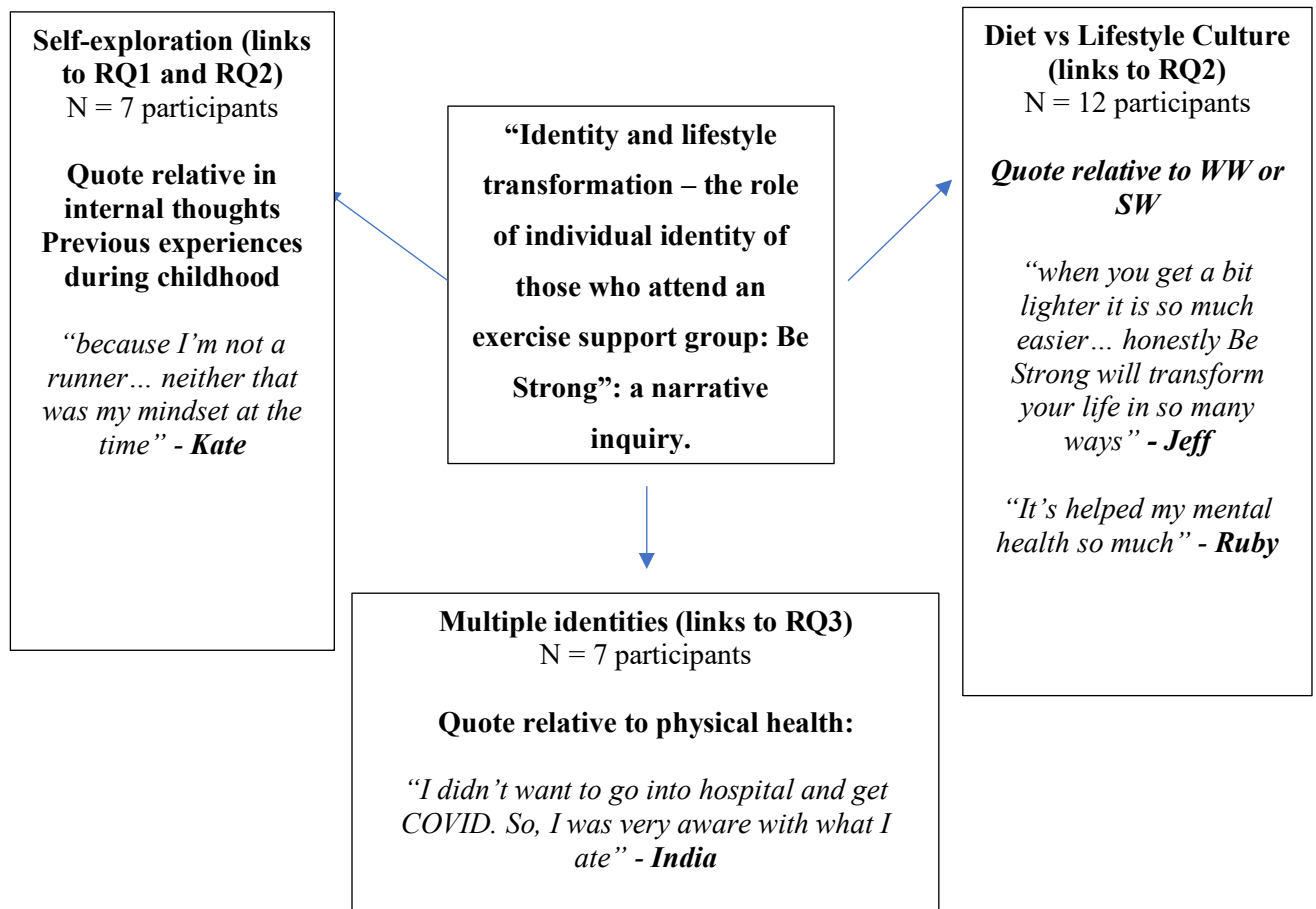
Results

Self-exploration (links to RQ1 and RQ2) N = 7 participants **Quote relative in internal thoughts Previous experiences during childhood** *"because I'm not a runner… neither that was my mindset at the time" - **Kate***	**"Identity and lifestyle transformation – the role of individual identity of those who attend an exercise support group: Be Strong": a narrative inquiry.**	**Diet vs Lifestyle Culture (links to RQ2)** N = 12 participants ***Quote relative to WW or SW*** *"when you get a bit lighter it is so much easier… honestly Be Strong will transform your life in so many ways" - **Jeff*** *"It's helped my mental health so much" - **Ruby***

Multiple identities (links to RQ3)
N = 7 participants

Quote relative to physical health:

*"I didn't want to go into hospital and get COVID. So, I was very aware with what I ate" - **India***

Figure 1 – *a pen profile illuminating the three narrative features, relevant quotations and aligned with the research questions.*

The semi-structured interviews disclosed meaningful and personable responses relative to participant's identity and lifestyle transformation experiences and demonstrated coherence with Smith & Sparkes (2008) qualitative narrative analysis through adopting a psychosocial standpoint. Communicating the participants current life story in a coherent and positive way, the researcher acquired the cognitive ability to draw upon significant connections of the

participants past, present and anticipated future directions in which three storylines were formed (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Thorne, 2000). Narratives are important in and for the construction of identity, and sense of self as self can mean different things to different people. Thus, the researcher's aim committed to accurately exploring the phenomenon in a storytelling way on "emotionally witnessing an embodied life" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 282). These storylines were *self-exploration, diet vs lifestyle culture and multiple identities,* which clearly illuminate each participant experience of the significant identity and lifestyle insights when immersed in an exercise group environment.

Self-exploration

Self-exploration encapsulated the first narrative as a vehicle for the participants to discover their honest and authentic self. Seven participants began to describe how feelings of confusion and a sense of disconnection resulted in a loss of identity, self-purpose and lacked an understanding of how to sustain a healthy lifestyle, specifically weight loss in the first instance. Be Strong fostered a journey of curiosity to build and recognise their sense of self to create and live an authentic life (i.e., healthy choices with nutrition, exercise, career, and family):

*"What did my mind actually need? Was it always to go out and do a run? And actually what would happen if I didn't do a run? Sometimes that self-sabotage kicked in and I do know that I was highly critical of myself saying that I can't do something. So if I've not been like for a while, well, I just I won't go again. And I think you can easily get out of things currently if you haven't created that habit, and you lose a bit of confidence as well" – **Daisy Gill**

Participant two expresses the fundamental role of self-reflection as an avenue to begin to understand the self. This inner dialogue can sometimes be difficult to comprehend and distinguish what the mind and body needs to live a healthy and authentic life. Initially, unhelpful thoughts processes overpowered participant two's ability to separate excuses for exercising with the substantial gain on her physical and psychological health. A robust purpose is crucial in managing unhelpful thoughts on good and bad days when we don't feel like exercising, Be Strong helped to capture and instil this purpose.

Part of living authentically requires a strong connection to your inner values and formation of your identity. Sometimes holding a fragile perception of the self can be easily influenced by opinions of others and impact your internal self-belief:

"I feel like a bit of a pretender, erm, like I shouldn't kind of really be there because I'm the fat kid from school who did everything absolutely everything to avoid PE… I still experience it a little bit now so when I first joined it was there definitely… but I felt like people were probably thinking that in their own heads like "look at the state of this one here" – **Jeff Gordon**

This participant highlights not only a misalignment between his current and past identity but evidence of suppressing this identity from his childhood experiences. Switching between these two identities meant that Jeff found it extremely difficult to accept the growth of his identity and could not help but revert to his unhelpful past identity of being "the fat kid at school" as it was a great part of his childhood experiences. Resulting in confusion about *who he was* these unhelpful thoughts and visualisations of his past self were blurring who he is (e.g., an active person who has lost X amount of weight, with a strong identity with running).

Part of living authentically and in coherence to your inner values compromises your identity and how you view the self. Sometimes having a fragile perception of the self can be influenced by others and cause a lack of function on one's self-belief. Re-discovering yourself through attending groups with similar values and goals can help step outside of your comfort zone to try new things in comparison to being in environments where you may not feel fit you:

"Before I joined Be Strong, I was quite shy when I was at university, I wouldn't enjoy going out and I wouldn't enjoy spending time with other people. I wasn't chatting with new people. When I joined Be Strong, I've got to know a lot of different people. I've actually had two jobs from it. I've learned a lot about myself, like confidence wise and I've just started to understand my triggers for why I behave in certain ways" **– Olivia Hanton**

Participant nine reflects on two current environments with her university studies and exercise participation. She felt "out of place" at university as there were individuals on different paths and with different attitudes towards university which didn't align with participant nine. For example, she didn't want to go on a night out and meet new people, which is what the university culture is postulated to be but instead just go to university to attend all lectures and progress with her studies. It comes as no surprise that several participants interviewed felt more at ease and were allowed to act authentically when they were in the Be Strong environment. Due to Be Strong being described as a relatable, warming, and connective environment created a space for participants to make decisions to live a courageous life not just with challenging themselves with exercise but also life changing decisions with work:

*"The biggest impact internally has been work, to be honest. When I first started with Be Strong, I had a company with a friend of mine, everything was cool, everything was fine… we decided to go our own… well he left and I've carried on and previously I would have been you know like hmm, I can't really do this on my own. I was full of self-doubts". – **Jeff Gordon**

Beginning to identify the journey of the self isn't just related to how these participants feel and think about their physicality, their daily thoughts or body image but also more broadly with the behaviours that they engage in to make courageous decisions with their career. Participant one reflects on the skills that he acquired from his engagement with 'Be Strong', such as self-belief, self-knowledge, motivation, and organisation to be able to make those relevant action plans to continue his business on his own. Part of engaging in self-exploration reflection, requires honesty and taking ownership of your life projects for the greater good (Ronkainen & Nesti., 2017). Additionally:

*"When you feel in doubt, which well was a big part of me at the start of my Be Strong journey, you're probably not as motivated… I don't have the confidence to do it… I think I'm more motivated and more active now that I am actually more motivated in my job" – **Ruby Leaf**

Again, this is a significant critical moment in participant's three career that an increase in exercise adherence led to increased motivation in achieving a promotion and fully stability in her job. It is evident from this first storyline that creating an opportunity for the self to be explored, challenged, magnified and work on has helped to uncover seven of the participants capabilities and potential for discovering their authentic self.

Diet vs lifestyle culture

Interestingly, this narrative was communicated quite firmly from all 12 participants during the interviews. The participants previous experiences with either two or both well-known weight loss groups in the UK. Midst the engagement during this group sessions, participants were drawn upon the experiences of the group founders and lacked their own perspective of *"what was deemed healthy for weight loss"*. It was only until after leaving these groups that most of these personal experiences were viewed in a negative light as participants began to understand themselves more, such as what food and exercise suited their individual needs. Without recognising the long-term impact of developing an unhealthy relationship with food whilst focusing on the short-term benefit of eating moderately less. All participants communicated the disconnection and unrelatable culture that these weight loss groups were providing, through generalised weight loss goals and a sense of inauthenticity of genuine weight loss transformations:

"I think with that particular group, I just followed the book for a long time. It was just not for me I was looking at how many points where for me and the food. I just followed that because I didn't have an understanding of food. I would just say that I found it fun because you were counting points or sins, which are really calories aren't they. I didn't find this easy to follow up, because you're limiting what you eat… you can't eat carbs and lose weight, that was the mindset… it was never successful for me… at Be Strong I found the community spirit is better".
– Ruby Leaf

It's not a surprise that these groups are more focused on the diet culture rather than support due to the scale of people that engage with the programme across the United Kingdom, United States of America and beyond. Although, Be Strong, Weight Watchers and Slimming World are all established programmes, the latter two are more widely known as Be Strong has been

founded on a much smaller scale. It is common for the diet culture to be focusing more on foods that are "bad" for you instead of portraying the message that all foods are necessary in moderation. From a social constructionist perspective, disordered eating and unhealthy patterns with food and exercise is the product of social exchanges through exposure of inconsistent messages around these behaviours (Busanich, McGannon & Schinke., 2014). Understanding how participant three views her body image appeared consistent with her current thoughts and emotions as she displayed a negative view of the self, for example, "I didn't like looking in the mirror and how my jeans felt" (Busanich, McGannon & Schinke., 2014; Markula et al., 2008; McGannon & Spence, 2010). She felt unsupported and unheard in these diet culture environments, which is the opposite to what Be Strong offers:

*"So, Be Strong was that sort of motivational aspect to it, that sort of solution to things and it wasn't just a case of this is what you've got to do, giving you the things, giving you the tools to submit those decisions yourself rather than giving you a meal plan and off you go to do it. So, you don't really learn anything about it". – **Kate Denton**

Here highlights the openness and trustworthiness of the Be Strong environment where it was evident that all 12 participants were accustomed to interaction and seeking support through their own lens. This support was in a shared and meaningful way to help each other identify appropriate solutions through learning and trial and error rather than a "one-way fits all" approach. Participant four expresses the fundamental requisite for an autonomous-supportive environment presenting tools, such as social support and mental skills training techniques (i.e., positive self-talk, visualisation etc) to facilitate lifestyle change. Previous literature suggests that this shared and supportive culture is described as an autonomously supportive (Mossman et al., 2022) by supporting the benefits of satisfying autonomy, competence and relatedness for

optimal motivation, well-being, and performance (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2019; Slemp et al., 2018; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Learning about why participants have not been successful in maintaining exercise or nutritional goals in the past potentially relates to a lack of understanding of who they really are and what support is available around them, which during previous weight loss support group experiences was greatly insufficient. Acknowledging the usefulness of this support and development of problem-solving tools contributes to shared practice between members. Be Strong provides choices under knowledge and instruction, a rationale for exercise behaviour engagement, acknowledgement of feelings and perspectives with non-controlling feedback consistent with facilitative sport environments (Be Strong, 2023; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). A supportive environment also offers the space to un-learn and re-learn behaviours due to a shift in identity:

"So, I'm back to where I started but I've started with a better mindset than the first time I started because now I know that I can do it. I believe in myself and the methods and now that I don't need to like kind of exercise to like to compensate my calories now because I know what I can eat, when I can eat it and what worked for me last time". – Olivia Hanton

It was clear that participant nine initially struggled with her unhealthy relationship with food prior to making the courageous leap to join Be Strong. Through acceptance and openness to learning in this supportive environment participant nine was able to unlearn behaviours that were no longer serving her, for example, exercising after eating a "cheat meal" or overeating without judgement, instead of allowing these behaviours to negatively impact her mood. By doing this she began to take some time away from the Be Strong environment to reflect on herself and then re-join and begin to re-learn behaviours that fit into her lifestyle appropriately. Here illustrates the significance of connection and relatedness in a lifestyle support group,

where individuals feel comfortable and at ease to "mess up" (e.g., miss exercise sessions or overeat due to personal demands) and still feel supported. During the time participant nine spent away from the Be Strong environment, although she wasn't attending the face-to-face group settings, she still felt a "part" of the community and kept in contact with the founders and members to lean on for support. The Be Strong culture not only provides a non-judgemental atmosphere to take "breaks" during personal circumstances but also helpful tips and experiences when members decide to stay immersed in their environment but require direct support:

"I've shared certain tactics that I might have used and that accountability a couple of times I've mentioned that I didn't wanna come to Be Strong… I think sharing not just ideas and strategies but feelings that maybe it's ok to not be ok sometimes whatever it might be… definitely those check ins, chatting to people, sharing ideas and being encouraging has helped others and myself". – Daisy Gill

Long-term and reputable members of Be Strong were viewed as role models to the present and upcoming members. A sense of relatedness was created as the founders were viewed any different or higher in power than members linking to the supportive culture fostered (Ryan & Deci, 1985; 2005; 2017). Three participants spoke proudly regarding being a part of the "furniture" but discrepancies in whether the self, viewed this as positive or detrimental was dependant on their current life experience. For example, *participant one* regarded himself as a perfectionist, adding internal pressure to always be performing to his best and in competition to himself. If his self-belief was high, he viewed this as being a relevant role model to inspire others and himself, such as completing a 10k run. Thus, if he was going through a challenging, critical timepoint in his life with work, his perceptions were detrimental to 'beating himself up'

if he didn't reach a certain time on his 10k run. Overall, the members genuinely thrived from owning the role of being a Be Strong member and used it as a positive and encouraging platform to support each other midst of critical life experiences. Through personal trial and error, build a 'toolbox' of helpful strategies and methods that have worked for them overcoming health, work, and family related barriers previously. For example, a lack of self-belief or self-concept, low body image perceptions, work-life balance, boredom with exercise routine and a lack of self-motivation or discipline (Bantham et al., 2021; Cowley et al., 2021; Patay et al., 2015). The authentic Be Strong identity and internal group social bubble not only provided the participants access to expert knowledge and practical experience associated with relevant lifestyle change but the psychological skills, opportunities, and support to stretch beyond their comfort zone (e.g., social networking and monthly exercise challenges).

Multiple identities

The latter storyline captured from the interviews focused on the idea of participants obtaining multiple identities within their life. Shifts in identity occurred frequently relative to work commitments, family dependants (e.g., younger children) and social life events. Paying significantly more attention to 'some' identities and neglecting others meant that participants struggled to adopt a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Seven participants appeared to centre their nutrition and exercise adherence around their family commitments. Barriers relating to finance and time are a common predictor for neglecting the self and managing multiple identities, for example, to buy, prepare and cook separate meals for themselves and their children or partner didn't seem feasible especially if their children were "fussy eaters". One participant communicated how she didn't consider herself or self-care practices as a priority when her children were living at home, however, this shifted during her retirement phase:

"but through workwise and family situations I never had time to go. So, when I retired, I had a lot more time on my hands… you know that your job is to do this and you're on a time limit and other people are depending on you… just looking after yourself isn't number one, when you're working and you're busy… how we look after ourselves have changed, because nobody wants to get ill now". – India Patton

Be Strong on average has many middle aged-older women who attend the group, so as it was important to study the influence of lifestyle including careers, it was also key to understand how the identity of those individuals shifted. Participant 10 began to recognise the art of taking time for self-care and prioritising her best interests to live a healthier life. As we get older, we are susceptible to more diseases and ill-health conditions (NHS, 2023). She also illuminated to the idea that the COVID-19 pandemic made her realise how significant our health is due to losing friends and family close to her. Knowing that looking after her health is within her control which is why she is dedicating more time to making healthier food choices and engaging in regular daily exercise. She went from only exercising when "she felt like it" to habitually going on a morning walk before she starts her day and if she doesn't go on that walk then her emotional well-being is impacted, and her day is disrupted greatly. This is a prime example of prioritising healthy, habitual behaviours to benefit the needs of your own especially when it's something that you haven't done for much of your life.

"When I was coming up to being 40, I was going through a really bad health point of view, my hips were failing so I had to get hip surgery… the sitting in a chair, that's not what I want to be and you know I didn't want my children that were like 23 and 25 going into their main adult

*life thinking that we've not really done things. I wanted to be that mother who influenced them with sports and exercise and doing things more for themselves" – **Kate Denton***

India Patton communicated the uneasiness of her COVID-19 lockdown experiences and the impact on her physical health. The uncertainty of when her operation would be to remove her gallbladder contributed to feelings of worry and stress. The value on her physical health encouraged a shift in her psychological wellbeing and engagement with eating behaviours. She was forced to look after herself by working collectively with Be Strong to maintain a healthy nutritional plan:

*"I had gallbladder trouble… I was waiting to have my gallbladder removed. Of course, there's no operations or anything, nothing, there's nothing going on. So, I had to be really careful with what I ate and that was the frightening thing, because I knew I didn't want to go into hospital as an emergency. I didn't want to go into hospital and get COVID. So, I was very aware with what I ate." – **India Patton***

Predominantly, members of the Be Strong community join for physical health reasons and participant four clearly expressed her vast concern that her hip injury would stop her for living her own life and fulfilling the need to be a supportive mother and partner. Participant four is one of the many who receive the devastating news that they won't be able to engage in sufficient exercise due to an injury, but she didn't want to believe what the doctor consultant had told her. She was determined to change her mindset and begin to gradually partake in exercise post her new hip replacement, which was made possible through her interaction with Be Strong. Self-talk brought about internal questioning of "what's the point getting a new hip, if I'm not able to use it" created a sense of hope and optimism that she doesn't have to give up

exercising if she's mindful of the intensity of exercise she's engaging in. When it comes to engaging in exercise, looking after our physical and psychological health is fundamental to help with coping. Viewing her hip replacements in this way assisted with receiving and providing support to her family that belief is key to living a healthy lifestyle (Finer, 2006; Nystoriak & Bhatnagar, 2018). The way that participant four navigated her identity was through seeing herself as a supportive mother and partner as well as valued member of the Be Strong community to inspire others, prevalent with similar experiences from participant six below:

"My exercise identity? Well, you know I've never really done a HIIT class before I came to Be Strong… you know there are many different types of exercise really aren't they. I would have done, you know to keep fit and probably back in the day legs, bums and tums as well. I really like classes because it's high intensity and this sounds really bad, but it's done and dusted. Because you do it and it's done in 25 minutes and it's convenient to be a busy mum, like you've got your exercise in, you've got your steps in and then I can get things done around the house".
– Ruby Leaf

Part of successfully managing these multiple identities comes from being open to exploring alternative options of how best to navigate 'spare time'. Participant three speaks about how it's not always feasible to exercise and go on a walk for an hour every day consistently with her priority relates to duties as a mother. However, incorporating some form of bodily movement and/or exercise (e.g., a 25-minute HIIT session) helps to maintain her physical and psychological health and sustain exercise as part of her identity. This storyline expresses barriers, threats, and benefits to steering multiple identities but being the pinnacle to fostering personal meaning and authenticity in oneself (Nesti, 2010; Ronkainen et al., 2013; 2015).

Discussion

The current study's primary purpose set out to capture the role of identity and individual lifestyle transformation of those who attend a lifestyle support group, 'Be Strong'. Findings encapsulated copious attributes specifically unique to individual 'Be Strong' experiences, such as the creation of a supportive culture for encouraging long-term, sustainable behaviour change. Two narrative structures were generated of previous and current experiences and three narrative features 'plots' underpinned the initial research questions postulated *self-exploration, diet vs lifestyle culture and multiple identities* to elucidate personal understandings of the participants social worlds (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Self-exploration captured the Be Strong journey to progressing towards authenticity. The diet vs lifestyle culture narrative insinuated 'toxicity' of wider diet groups and Be Strong as a supportive community. The final narrative of multiple identities encapsulated various 'hats' participants shifted between to fulfil their identity and lifestyle transformation. It is fundamental to note that although social support was not captured as a distinct narrative, it was a finding consistent to previous literature, but a concurrent theme throughout all three narratives (e.g., Golaszewski et al. 2022; Rackow, Scholz & Hornung, 2014).

The first narrative *self-exploration* aligned with research question one and two explored participants unique experiences of an individualised and unique 'Be Strong' journey, signifying the evolution of their inactivity to current PA levels. This evolution encompassed participants shift in identity and finding authenticity, enhancing self-belief, and possessing specific coping mechanisms for dealing with childhood 'trauma' arose from this narrative feature. Consistent with previous research, developmental psychologists suggest that self-esteem appears to progressively fluctuate across one's lifespan, on average being

higher in men. During adolescence, self-esteem declines for women, then begins to gradually increase with age until experiencing a rapid reduction in older age (Damien & Robins, 2011; Orth, Robins & Widaman, 2012; Robins & Trzesniewski. 2005). Relevant to participant Ruby Leaf who discussed a low self-belief when at university, infrequent engagement with PA and an increase in weight. Lucy Paige and Becky Ashworth communicated higher self-belief in oneself once retiring with the flexibility of time to prioritise healthy exercise behaviours. However, findings from this current study looking at fluctuations with self-belief relative to revisiting childhood experiences, contrasts to that of developmental psychologists who suggest that those who have greater self-esteem at one point in their life tend to maintain this years later (Damien & Robins, 2011; Orth, Robins & Widaman, 2012; Robins & Trzesniewski. 2005). This signifies that due to how individuals perceive their identity based on their current circumstances, influences their level of self-belief and this can be unexpected in nature. Self-efficacy is strongly linked with PA (McAuley & Blissmer, 2000), with the social cognitive theory suggesting that individuals who believe that they can cause events may lead more active and self-determined lives (Bandura, 1977).

Additionally, part of working towards your authentic self, arises from unlearning and relearning certain behaviours to discover what you truly value and enjoy. 'Be Strong' being recognised as a 'support group' encouraging members to discover authenticity through meaningful exercise engagement and interaction between members. Extensive research seeking social support from those with extensive knowledge and experience of their personal self, such as what habits work or do not work for them, what types of exercise fit into their lifestyle goals and preferences etc and those undergoing a similar lifestyle journey has been found to increase exercise adherence (Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016; Lemstra et al. 2016; Ufholz, 2020). The social identity theory supports the increase in self-esteem and providing

individuals with a sense of who they are based on their group membership with belonging to the lifestyle support group consistent with Be Strong (Hogg, 2016; Huddy, 2001; Tajfel, 1979). Individuals may define themselves as "exercises" but instil their unique understanding as to what it means to be an exerciser (Strachan et al. 2017).

Self-exploration also looks at how participants supressed their 'past' identity of when inactive and the role it plays on their current self (e.g., known as the 'fat kid' in school). Due to participants not fully dealing with how this identity made them feel, it was clear that suppression took place as a way of 'coping' with unhealthy behaviours. Participants with previous eating disorders experienced similar 'threats' to their identity, those who suppressed their weight were more likely to engage in compulsive exercise with anxieties about returning to an eating disorder (e.g., Gorrell et al. 2020). The Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that past behaviour can have a direct effect on future exercise behaviour, explaining the 'flashbacks' of inactivity in childhood and a lack of self-belief in adulthood PA behaviour (Norman, Conner & Bell, 2000). Copious research supports the notion of utilising mental skills training techniques, such as visualisation of a pleasant exercise experience as a coping mechanism to implement more positive attitudes of the self (e.g., Andersson & Moss, 2011; Markland et al. 2015). Mindfulness can support individuals by focusing on the present moment and through acceptance of 'past' and 'current' identity structures. (Creswell. 2017; Neace et al. 2022). This evidence from a past identity experienced within childhood, demonstrates how unhelpful thoughts of the self can 'stick' and reappear years later. Furthermore, this outlines how the uniqueness and complexity of current participants PA, nutrition and lifestyle behaviours can contribute to a shift in their identity structure. However, the Transtheoretical Model of Health Behaviour Change fails to consider this complexity. Individuals can engage in a consistent exercise routine but still experience limiting self-

beliefs, which are detrimental to their identity, as displayed by Jeff (Adams & White, 2004),

thus, this does not support that, the stages of change postulated within this model lead to a

particular outcome (Nigg, 2001; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

The second narrative feature *diet vs lifestyle culture* generated a clear story

incorporating lived experiences of established weight loss groups (Barnett, 2018; Coe et al.

2019 Dansinger et al. 2005) and 'Be Strong' as a lifestyle support group. Evidenced from the

weight loss groups, all twelve of the participants communicated a lack of social support and

psychological strategies (e.g., goal setting, routine structure, support with unhelpful thoughts

etc) for changing their life. Instead, a structured diet plan, emphasising food that could or could

not be eaten, which participants struggled to fit into their current lifestyle goals was offered.

Although, the primary focus of these established groups is weight loss, research identified only

small improvements in overall population health and reduction in obesity compared to current

practice, highlighting the effectiveness on a larger scale (Cobiac, Vos & Veerman, 2010). This

research supports the current participants experiences of encountering weight loss described as

a "yo-yo" of short-term success. It was clear that engagement with weight loss support groups

contributed to this development of unhealthy habits and a poor relationship with food and

exercise. However, this research also provides contrasting evidence, suggesting that the dietary

counselling and exercise advice provided barriers of time, travel, and cost demands for the

participants and thus ineffective to weight loss outcomes (Cobiac, Vos & Veerman, 2010). 'Be

Strong' illuminates expert knowledge, support, and advice as facilitative to a support

environment for lifestyle change.

The primary focus of established groups is weight loss (Madigan et al. 2014), it is

suggested that the presence of mixed messages when attempting to lose weight in these settings

conflicted with the cultural environment if not supportive in nature (Diaz, Mainous & Pope, 2007). Thus, the development of unhealthy habits, a poor relationship with food and short-term weight loss occurred before joining 'Be Strong' was consistently evident. Participants highlighted that there was uncertainty as to whether the group leaders had lost weight themselves or transformations were 'real', however, one of these established weight loss groups suggests that group leaders being carefully selected who have successfully lost weight themselves (Avery, 2018). Another weight loss group illuminates that acquiring an active role in social support is crucial for weight loss, consistent with Be Strong (Avery, 2018). The way that weight loss groups are described in the literature is structured diet plans based on a 'points system', follow a healthy low fat diet plan called 'Eat Yourself Slim' or given incentives, such as free attendance when target weight loss is achieved (Avery, 2018). The nature and structure of this environment is far away from the philosophy and values of 'Be Strong'. Thus, through maintaining a supportive and psychologically safe environment, the current participants recognised that an unhealthy relationship with food and PA was developed resulting from attending these groups.

Accompanying evidence from a group-based lifestyle-integrated functional programme accentuated the significance of social support from peers with enhanced learning. This support fostered implementation of new movement and exercise habits that participants enjoyed and positive outcomes of behaviour resulting from specific individualised feedback (Reicherzer et al. 2021). Although these findings have not been captured from a lifestyle support group, it still provides sufficient evidence for the role of social peer support for an individual perspective as well as a nurturing and supportive environment. Supporting evidence for weight loss groups in the US found this group environment useful for alleviating therapeutic thoughts, feelings and perceptions when overconsumption is a consequence of their weight loss journey (Moisio &

Beruchashvili, 2010). However, contrasting evidence has suggested that weight loss groups fail to provide the psychological flexibility in the environment, but perceived rule complexity was found to be the strongest factor associated with an enhanced risk of quitting the cognitively demanding weight management programme (Mata, Todd & Lippke, 2010). 'Be Strong' participants emphasised the benefit of having a safe space to share certain challenges and 'blocks' in their journey as a requisite to identity and lifestyle transformation. Part of this 'safe space' is supported from previous organisational literature showing that it is ok to have "bad days" as we are "human" (Mata, Todd & Lippke, 2010).

The third narrative feature encompassed *multiple identities* and participants expressed balancing several 'hats', such as identifying as a mother and a wife, working a full-time job, daily household duties and attempting to schedule time to exercise. Evident that these participants struggled with maintaining a balance of these multiple identities, participants would prioritise their family's needs first, such as cooking meals every evening and encouraging them to exercise. When the female participants retired, pressure elevated, and the priority shifted to taking care of themselves first. This was due to children being grown up and moving out, more free time from work commitments and flexibility with cooking their own healthier meals, scheduling self-care activities (e.g., a morning walk or mindfulness practice) and attending exercise classes during the day. Supported by developmental psychology literature of emerging adulthood, as adults grow older their life experiences dramatically change through cultural construction (Arnett, 2000; Schlegel & Barry, 1991). Additionally, the role of cognitive, physical, and social factors can play a mediating role of multiple identities.

Social support was beneficial for women who were a part of multiple identities, for example, access of social support from partners, family, and friends best placed women than

others to negotiate constraints that inhibit leisure participation (e.g., looking after their child Brown et al. 2001). Although, plentiful research has identified barriers for women in exercise and new mothers increasing due to children and a lack of time (e.g., Groth & David, 2009; Lovell et al. 2016; Raspovic et al. 2020) participants from 'Be Strong' highlighted ways to overcome these challenges to improve their physical and psychological health, "it sounds bad, but a 20 minute HIIT workout helps to get it over and done with", proving significant as more than two-thirds of mothers in a study were inadequately active in their leisure time for health benefit (Brown et al. 2001).

The role of multiple identities has been found to be challenging for women during their peak adulthood and smooth in retirement, however, evidence has looked at men balancing their identities well during adulthood but struggle into retirement. Research looking at both genders found supporting evidence for exercise engagement and health behaviours post retirement that familiarity and enjoyment of activities were implicated in the maintenance and continuation of activities at post-retirement adjustment (Earl, Gerrans & Halim, 2015). Retirement frequency was high in light exercise (e.g., walking) and vigorous exercise (e.g., aerobics and tennis) frequency were high as 87.2% had positive well-being (Lee & Hung, 2011). Results demonstrating changes in health behaviours occur upon retirement and may be a fundamental mechanism through which the latter affects health (Celidoni & Rebba, 2017), also supports active aging as supported by World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002).

Overall, the findings provide general support and effectiveness for lifestyle support groups as well as the body of literature around identity and lifestyle transformation. The current study identified three storylines, which clearly highlight the individual participant, the culture, and the individual roles within the Be Strong environment, which may contribute to several

implications on research and society. The identified storylines captured fit in with the three outlined research questions relative to the exploration of identity, factors that contribute and role with health behaviours on lifestyle change. The use of narrative analysis provided optimal strengths through revealing the quality of connectedness to oneself and 'Be Strong' as a motivational lifestyle group and glorifying the complexities and barriers in life within this transformational environment.

The limitations of this research study are relative to the sample, population, design, and data analysis. Much of the previous literature has expressed the attendance of support regarding weight loss (i.e., personal training or weight loss group sessions) is predominately women who are more open to reaching out for emotional, physical, and social support to help achieve their lifestyle goals (Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016; Lemon et al., 2009). Thus, it is not uncommon that many of the research participants were female (11 females and 1 male) and over 75% of the Be Strong group members are also female. Thus, a research limitation lies in the differences of gendered responses or experiences, particularly relative to the multiple identities' narrative. The role of being a mother and balancing a career demonstrated guilt and great difficulty in prioritising their own lifestyle needs whereas the males' experiences were marginally different. Additionally, as a volunteer sample was implemented, recruitment was dependent upon who was available at that given time, and since recruitment occurred during the summer holidays, it is not a surprise that more female participants engaged in the interview process. Although, this sample was an accurate representation of the 'Be Strong' group, to understand fully the extent of gender differences of seeking, attending, and engaging in lifestyle support and speaking about their experiences further research is necessary. Critical reflexivity in qualitative research can contribute to the research findings through our personal perspectives and assumptions of our social worlds (Palaganas et al. 2017). For example, my

applied position within 'Be Strong', previously delivering psychological support to transferring to a researcher role meant that participants are more obliged to reflect positively on psychologically changes.

Furthermore, the research study was exclusively conducted with a singular lifestyle support group, which was known to the researcher, in the North-West of England, United Kingdom (UK) and established in 2016. The limitation here lies with the difficulty of transferability to future lifestyle support groups or populations in other regions or cultures. As well as only addressing one lifestyle support group, Be Strong's members are predominantly middle to (40-49) late aged (60+) thus, it would be useful to examine the impact identity and lifestyle transformation of early and late adulthood for similarities, differences or further understanding to why the ratio is inconsistent. Additionally, the study's population centred on face-to-face members, but since the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, 'Be Strong' had no choice but to move the services online. There may be a potential gap within this timeframe as due to this way of living, a vast number of members who were attending face-to-face pre COVID-19 decided to continue with 'Be Strong' remotely due to family and travel demands. Interaction with these online members during the researcher's applied practical experience, provided distinct evidence that social support from an online platform (i.e., additional resources and a Facebook group) was a fundamental attribute for these members success.

This study postulates several theoretical and practical implications. While caution is taken not to offer definitive recommendations to a broader societal level based on a one-off interview with these 'Be Strong' participants, the findings do provide practical suggestions that may be useful for future founders of lifestyle support groups to consider, such as the processes to planning and implementing autonomous-supportive strategies for individual lifestyle change

(Hodge, Henry & Smith, 2014; Lyon et al., 2012; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Mallett, 2005). For example, providing autonomy and choice to PA and nutrition, non-controlling but competent feedback to aid learning and the avoidance of unhelpful criticism (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2015). Valuable insights into many personal, physical, and psychosocial attributes are captured from the current study findings which provide an avenue for exercise psychologists to produce incentive knowledge and guidance in these environments. For example, managing unhelpful thoughts around body image, family circumstances and lack of enjoyment with careers to improve emotional wellbeing (Zucchelli, White & Williamson, 2020). This scope of exercise psychology can complement the work of "lifestyle coaches" through recognising the importance of understanding and practising emotional intelligence, especially if their own identity and lifestyle journey resonates with that of the members. This self-disclosure and experience can contribute to trust and rapport building to best support its members (Chan & Mallett, 2011).

Through adopting a narrative perspective during this research study has allowed for the potential of making a positive contribution to psychological research in exercise. For example, narrative research has relied on individualised stories that are verbally communicated through experience, which can provide insightful inferences into participants authentic self. However, consideration of other perspectives, such as written, visual and kinaesthetic narratives as additional forms of story-based material could enhance participant stories with a fuller understanding to this true self (Smith & Sparkes., 2009). As well as considering other types of inquiry being autoethnography, phenomenological inquiry or grounded theory, which may reveal additional insights. These further insights may come from an examination of emotional well-being and performance narratives from a different viewpoint, for example, a balanced gendered perspective to specially understand factors that may impact identity (i.e., body image,

gendered role and demands of being a mother etc), which were clearly evidenced in the findings might uncover gendered meanings around identity to frame these experiences (Busanich, McGannon & Schinke, 2014).

The current research study postulates that achieving personal authenticity and undergoing a lifestyle transformation is greatly reliant on immersion into a supportive environment where duty of care is central. Whilst the development of long-term, sustainable interventions and additional support groups would be necessary to foster healthy behaviour change, the foundations on how these groups are build would determine the effectiveness. For example, a great indicator to sustainability relies on employment of staff who have also endured similar lifestyle experiences from a physical (i.e., weight loss, adoption of healthy habits and dietary changes etc) as well as the relevant psychological attributes (i.e., honesty, empathy, openness, active listening skills etc). These characteristics help individuals to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness for maintainable lifestyle change (Chandler et al., 2016; Hanton, Mellalieu & Hall, 2004; Matosic, Ntoumanis & Quested, 2016). Additionally, requisites may be dependent upon personality traits (relative to the big five personality traits) of those who run lifestyle support groups. The founders of 'Be Strong' offer great flexibility and creativity in their approach to individual needs with co-producing tailored programmes, for example, exercise for new mothers and the weekend tracking plan. Those higher in openness and agreeableness but low in neuroticism may be more suitable for working in these environments to offering a warmer, non-judgemental, and empathetic approach (Chandler et al. 2016; Filion, Munroe-Chandler & Loughead, 2021).

As this research study provides clear and robust evidence to for the importance of lifestyle support groups, the findings are not comparable to the same scale for other existing

groups that contribute to weight loss or lifestyle change but still imply adequate implications for future research and practice. For example, these lifestyle support groups can be highly beneficial when referring clients from GP services for physical health (e.g., obesity and high blood pressure) as well as in conjunction with psychological health (e.g., engaging in social environments and exercise to improve mood, isolation, mental health, and emotional wellbeing Taylor. 2014). Working in alliance and close connectedness with GP surgeries and Public Health may increase the validity and exposure of support that's available from a more holistic rather than direct standpoint that we're already familiar with (NHS, England, 2022).

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

The current research provides a comprehensive and valuable approach to exploring individual experiences of lifestyle behaviour change and facets of shifts in identity. Although, there is existing theoretical and practical evidence of weight loss groups within the UK (Barnett, 2018; Coe et al. 2019; Dansinger et al. 2005), little has been discussed regarding support with individual identity and lifestyle transformation. Thus, the current study findings add fundamental insights regarding the effectiveness of sustainable lifestyle support groups to assist with individuals' personal experiences with exercise, nutrition, weight loss, identity, family, and work demands. To fully understand the extent of the sustainability and effectiveness of the current findings, future theoretical and applied work is necessary with 'Be Strong' on a longitudinal basis, potentially incorporating work from applied sport and exercise psychologists. Additionally, considerations of other population groups, regions, and cultures with support from Public Health England and the NHS may be necessary to formulate similar lifestyle support groups within the UK.

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Appendix 1 – interview schedule mapped onto the rationale and research questions

Interview schedule mapped onto rationale and research questions

Rationale	Research question	Main question (s)	Additional questions/probes	General probes
Practice need – reduce the likelihood of inactivity in the UK. Recognising the importance of the formulation of lifestyle support groups to encourage and assist individuals with healthy exercise and lifestyle behaviour (WHO, 2018; Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016). **Research need** – the majority of previous research addresses structured interventions (i.e., a 6-week programme) with limited evidence of inactive individuals' identity change from group-based lifestyle transformation programmes.	**AWARENESS** Research question one How does the identity of previously inactive individuals evolve through participation in a group-based lifestyle transformation programme?	Introductory questions Could you start off by giving me a brief overview of your experiences at Be Strong (when you first joined to where you are today?) Identity is about the way we see ourselves. How would you say you see yourself in relation to exercise? First main question Talk me through how you feel your exercise identity has changed whilst you've been at Be Strong?	Could you expand on your experiences at Be Strong? How long have you been at Be Strong? Are these experiences positive or challenging? Level of support? Overall view of your Be Strong experience? What was your identity like when you first joined Be Strong? What is your identity like now? Could you tell me when do you think it changed? How did you know that it changed? Did you find this process positive/challenging? How are you maintaining your identity?	Can you expand on your answer? Could you expand on your experiences at Be Strong?
Practice need – Recognising the importance of attending to individuals' identity levels and the formulation of lifestyle support groups to encourage and assist individuals with healthy exercise and lifestyle behaviour (WHO, 2018; Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016). **Research need** – the majority of previous research addresses structured interventions (i.e., a 6-week programme) with limited evidence of inactive individuals' identity change from group-based lifestyle transformation programmes.	**EVOLUTION** Research question two What factors contribute to the evolution of identity? (i.e., how does the lifestyle change process affect identity?)	Second main question What do you think it was that led your identity to change over time?	How have your thoughts, emotions and behaviours related to exercise changed? Family, friends, Be strong staff/peers Internal influences/mindset Social support Psychosocial influences i.e. self-esteem, body image/acceptance Other factors i.e. weight loss, nutrition	Can I ask you to give a specific example?
Practice need – Recognising the importance of attending to individuals' identity levels and the formulation of lifestyle support groups to encourage and assist individuals with healthy exercise and lifestyle behaviour (WHO, 2018; Farrance, Tsofliou & Clark, 2016). **Research need** – the majority of previous research addresses structured interventions (i.e., a 6-week programme) with limited evidence of inactive individuals' identity change from group-based lifestyle transformation programmes.	**ROLE** Research question three What role does identity play in participants' engagement with health behaviours? (i.e., how does identity affect the lifestyle change process?)	Third main question Now, let's reverse this and think about this from the opposite side. How do you think your identity has influenced how you engaged with Be Strong?	What influences occurred during the Be Strong sessions? Were these positive or challenging? What influences did you encounter at home on your PA behaviour i.e., family life, work environments, social events? What about on other health behaviours?	Why do you think this is? Could you explain further?

Appendix 2 – interview questions and probes

Be Strong interview questions.

Title: "Identity and lifestyle transformation – the role of individual identity of those who attend an exercise support group: Be Strong"

Hi, before we begin the interview, I am just going to outline a few key things. The aim of this research study is to explore the role of individual identity of those who attend an exercise support group, in this case is Be Strong. This consists of addressing individual experiences and factors contributing to an identity and lifestyle transformation. The interview will last for approximately 45 minutes to one hour. You are free to not answer questions if you feel uncomfortable and free to withdraw at any given point without it affecting your rights. You name will not be mentioned but a substitute name will be used instead to protect your identity.

You will be asked various questions about:

- Your Be Strong journey
- How your identity has changed over time
- Your experiences of your lifestyle transformation

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin the interview?

1. Could you start off by giving me a brief overview of your experiences at Be Strong (when you first joined to where you are today)?

That sounds like an insightful journey (add some personal reflective responding here)

2. Could you expand on your experiences at Be Strong?

3. Identity is about the way we see ourselves. How would you say you see yourself in relation to exercise?

Can you elaborate on how this impacts your lifestyle?

4. How would you say your identity has changed?

5. How have your thoughts, emotions and behaviours related to exercise changed?

6. How does your identity link to the way you think and feel about exercise?

7. Research indicates that identity plays a key role with body image, self-efficacy, exercise, nutrition and weight loss. What factors have played a key role in your lifestyle and identity change?

Could you discuss more about these factors… (pick up content from the answer)

Empirical Paper 2

The interdisciplinary team, exploration into the connectedness of academy football coaches

Abstract

The aim of the current research study was to explore both successful and unsuccessful experiences of football academy coaches when engaging with interdisciplinary connectedness. These personal experiences were captured through a qualitative lens by conducting seven semi structured interviews and analysing fourteen stories using narrative analysis. Elite sport environments can be known as socially complex, conflicting, volatile, and power driven (Cruickshank & Colins, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; 2015; Nesti, 2010) emphasising the significance of coaches to work collaboratively with the wider support team to facilitate a successful academy culture (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012). A vast majority of the previous literature has addressed the multi-disciplinary team approach for coaches operating in a football environment with little focusing on the interdisciplinary connectedness (Kelly et al., 2021; Mills. 2023; Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015). Findings were presented as two narrative structures of successful and unsuccessful experiences and submerged within these were three narrative features of *(Un) appreciation of other disciplines, influence of power and hierarchal structure and misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice.* Whilst this research study was one of the first to address the influence of successful and unsuccessful experiences of multidisciplinary connectedness future recommendations should consider all stakeholders operating within a football academy such as individual support staff (e.g., performance analysts, sport science and psychology staff as mentioned in the research) with an insight into combining these perspectives from a collective organisational narrative

story to truly gain a critical understanding of the research findings (Nesti et al., 2012; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015; Parnell et al., 2021).

Introduction

The popularity of football is prevalent in the United Kingdom (UK), being played daily by millions of children across the nation who are eligible to join football academies as early as 7 years old. The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) was developed in 2011 as a long-term strategy focusing on increasing the number of homegrown players in the UK and building the connectedness with the club's organisation (Lewis Report, 2007; Mills et al., 2012; The Football Association, 2023). Professional UK football academies are required to adhere to the EPPP as a vehicle to supporting player development through the foundation development phases (FDP), youth development phase (YDP) and professional development phase (PDP), enhancing the football culture cohesion to assist this (Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016). Coach implications of increased time dedicated for players to play and be coaches, enriched quality of coaching provision, quality assurance and the application of an effective measurement system determines the successfulness of interdisciplinary connection (O'Gorman et al., 2021; The Premier League, 2011, p. 29). The Elite Coaching Plan (ECP) established in 2020 aimed to create a world-leading coaching development system which can be operated at an effective interdisciplinary level fostering a positive coaching environment at academy and first-team level (The Football Association, 2023). Some examples include promoting a culture of world-leading insight, research and innovation as well as building an inclusive and diverse workforce across the professional game.

Professional academy coaches support with players tactical, physical, technical, and psychosocial factors relevant to performance and wellbeing. Specifically in England, professional youth football is considered as a highly pressurised environment to work and play in with the direct focus on building success as expressed in the literature (e.g., Haugaasen, Toering & Jordet., 2014; Mills et al., 2014, etc). Research suggests that coaches deal with a heavy combination of organisational and performance stressors, such as interpersonal relationships and conflict, a lack of support, work overload and competitive anxiety, which hinder decision making, focus and job performance (Arnold et al., 2019; Frey., 2007; Thelwell et al., 2008). Many modern-day football coaches have been immersed into the competitive environment from a young age where associations of masculine dominance were consistent. Young male footballers' identity and body is constructed to align with the hegemonic perspectives of masculine embodiment considered as cultural norms (Magrath, 2017). Experiences from as early as the 1980s of hegemonic beliefs suggested that men's behaviours are restricted and standards of masculinity are embedded (Connell, 1995). These beliefs have been sought to establish successful performance outcomes and the maintenance of the masculine football culture determining how coaches may operate (Champ et al. 2020).

Culture has been identified as the most prominent contributor to organisation successfulness (Bloom, Stevens & Wickwire, 2010) especially in sport organisations (Bell-Laroche et al., 2014). Research has previously focused on the role of players as the major population rather than from an interdisciplinary coaches' perspective with limited evidence on their connectedness. The influence of connectedness illuminates as the association of the interdisciplinary team relationship (Tribolet et al., 2022) thus a key contrast in understanding the depth of a culture, which is achieved when it becomes embedded in everything the group

does (Schein, 2010). All individuals within that culture are required to believe in and be involved in the creation of values agreed by the interdisciplinary team (Barker, 1999; Maitland, Hills & Rhind, 2015). However, elite sport environments can be known as socially complex, conflicting, volatile, and power driven (Cruickshank et al., 2014; 2015; Cruickshank & Colins, 2012; Nesti, 2010), and anything that is not clearly shared in by all group members tends to land outside of the sporting culture and described as a 'temporary' blip to be handled out on the road to unity (McDougall et al., 2020). A shared culture is identified as a fundamental way of working more effectively to engage in purposeful discussion and reflection to foster coach connectedness (Bickley et al., 2016). Previous work has shown that individuals need to relate, connect, and belong as a "team" to understand how others influence our experiences and behaviours in the group setting (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dawit, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Nathan et al., 2010; Westre & Weiss, 1991). It is evident from this section that creating a meaningful culture within academy football is vital to interdisciplinary practice.

Football academy coaches are highly placed within the social hierarchy of the club and are uniquely positioned to reinforce the culture (Pennington. 2017; Schroeder. 2010; Vaughan et al., 2021). The football culture is a dynamic procedure with shared values, belief, philosophy, and goals of how the organisation is ran successfully (Fletcher & Arnold., 2011; Schroeder. 2010). Social hierarchy cultures, known bureaucratic and internally generated may have effective leadership but the rigidness can lead to a loss of organisational identity and purpose (Daher, 2016), potentially leading to an adverse effect on performance (Ogbanna & Harris, 2000). The essence of a coaches' role is to develop a "team culture" or a psychosocial environment to help achieve optimal performance (Martens, 1987. P. 33). Interpersonal, in-group (e.g., one coach and all other coaches) conflict can lead to negative

impasse and movement away from a collaborative interdisciplinary approach (Reid, Stewart & Thorne, 2004). To facilitate a successful team culture, it is imperative for coaches to work collaboratively with the wider support team (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012). As coaches play a vital role concerning the development of the culture, players, and interdisciplinary relationship, addressing the influence of connectedness within the interdisciplinary function would contribute to these factors and the effectiveness of talent identification (TI).

TI is a crucial component of academy football, in line with the EPPP to identify and select talented players (Mustafovic et al., 2020). TI can be defined as the process of recognising current players within an academy structure who may have the potential to become elite players and progress into the club's first team (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Reilly, Bangsbo & Franks, 2000a). Interdisciplinary links between football coaches, performance analysts and external scouts help to undergo TI by utilising their expertise to prepare and identify high performance players, highlighting the significance of staff connection and communication (Reeves et al., 2018). The process of TI considers physical, physiological, psychological, and sociological attributes of players as well as technical and tactical skills and, the relative age effect that align with the football academy's organisational structure (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Sarmento et al. 2018). Research has suggested that it is common for talented athletes to present challenging behaviours that have a great influence on their athletic development and functioning of others in a multidisciplinary team, for example, failure to access coaching support or engage with programme rules, which can directly impact the interdisciplinary connectedness of coaches (Bickley et al., 2016).

As expressed in the introduction, copious research captures the role of both coaches and sport medicine staff adopting an interdisciplinary approach but generally focused on the

theme of player development through TI (e.g., Reeves et al., 2018), group cohesion (e.g., Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) and the 5Cs (e.g., Harwood et al., 2008). Moreover, as the previous research highlights the significance of connectedness as a psychological construct, the aim of the current study is to attend to the gap in football academy coaches' interdisciplinary connectedness through exploring both successful and unsuccessful stories in which this occurs and devising a stronger understanding to the significant role of interdisciplinary within academy football.

Methodology

Philosophical assumptions

The current research study adopted narrative analysis underpinned by concurrent epistemological and ontological philosophical assumptions. Epistemological interpretivism and ontological subjectivism allowed the research to perceive interdisciplinary connectedness as a social phenomenon that is created through individual social experiences of their existence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Spencer, Pryce & Walsh, 2014). Narrative inquiry allows the qualitative researcher to evaluate participants multiple realities and capture through in-depth stories through personable participant language (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, constructing and interpreting how participants current experiences align with their social reality and what knowledge is devoted to these experiences was achieved. For example, by collecting successful and unsuccessful stories, we were able to understand the meaning ascribed to experiences through a social and contextual lens (Jewett, Kerr & Tamminen, 2019; Lal, Suto & Ungr, 2012).

Participants

Participant demographic information			
Name of participants	Age group	Experience level	Qualifications
Participant one (e.g., Ben Jones)	18-25	U13s coach. Previous U10s	UEFA B coach qualification
Participant two (e.g., James Howard)	25-30	U18s coach and PDP led. Previously, YDP lead, U16s coach	UEFA A coach qualification
Participant three (e.g., Reily Wright)	31-45	FDP lead/U9s coach and Head of Operations.	UEFA A coach qualification
Participant four (e.g., Blake Gorton)	25-30	Head of Academy coaching	UEFA A coach qualification
Participant five (e.g., Kevin Smith)	31-45	PDP lead coach	UEFA A coach qualification
Participant six (e.g., Trent Johnson)	31-45	Lead Transition Phase Coach (U11-U13)	UEFA A coach qualification
Participant seven (e.g., Anthony Lewis)	31-45	U10s coach as well as Head of Operations	UEFA B coach qualification

Seven male participants were recruited for this current research. The participants were

football academy coaches from two academies in the United Kingdom. The academies were

either in category two or three and operated in line with the EPPP and UEFA rules and regulations, such as an UEFA A or B coaching qualification (O'Gorman et al. 2021). The academy coaches were all working in a full-time coaching role within the academy apart from one who was full-time Head of Operations and a part-time U10s coach. Three coaches resided with the category three academy and the other four coaches working in the category two academy.

Sampling procedure

Convenience and volunteer sampling were used in this research study based on previous working connections both the researcher and supervisor had at the football academies. Recruitment bias was minimised through choosing this sampling type as all academy coaches had an equal and fair decision to participate. Initially, a recruitment email was formulated and distributed to all the coaches at both football clubs with relevant study information sheets attached. The potential participants were then asked to volunteer or exclude themselves based on eligibility criteria. The study looked to recruit a total of ten coaches across the two football academies (an equal 5 participant from each club sample).

Pilot study

To generate the feasibility of the study research design and anticipated interview questions, a pilot study took place with an individual from the public who works in a business rather than football sector, still intended to be used in a larger scale study (Leon, Davis & Kraemer, 2011; Malmqvist et al. 2019). Postulating a pilot study seemed beneficial to define the current research questions and recognise any visible changes needed in the chronological

design of the qualitative interview questions (Thabane et al. 2010). The semi-structured interview was conducted on Microsoft Teams and lasted for approximately 51 minutes exploring successful and unsuccessful interdisciplinarity experiences in their job role. The participant was not a staff member of either football clubs but was known to the researcher and had been immersed into an interdisciplinary environment for six years in her current job role. As a result, the interview questions were adapted slightly (see appendix one) to suit the participant's personal interdisciplinary experiences thus, the interview probes were not football specific, but the researcher was mindful when and how questions required to be adapted subjective to the participant response.

Interview guide and procedure

The researcher conducted seven semi-structured interviews remotely via Microsoft Teams. Although the participants were offered the choice to engage in the interview face-to-face at the club office or remotely, due to commitments, (e.g., a time constraints, work, and family), all the participants chose Microsoft Teams. An overview of the interview logistics (e.g., the approximate duration, audio recording, question, and topic focus as well as confidentiality understanding) were clearly communicated to each participant with an opportunity to seek further clarification if needed. A self-developed demographic questionnaire (refer to appendix) was administered prior to each participant took part in the interview. Although, the research was aware of some participants background through a previous establishment of rapport, the purpose of this questionnaire still captured all participants information (i.e., their age, gender, specific job role and duration in the role at their current academy). This key information can be accessed in table two.

As mentioned above, a working rapport was established with five of the participants from one football academy as the researcher worked there for 2.5 football seasons. Other participants sought to build a rapport during the interview itself (those from the second football academy). To contribute to this development, information obtained from the demographic questionnaire and introductory interview questions (e.g., a brief overview of these academy coach role from qualification to current). Discovering this personal but fundamental information initially, provided an avenue for the researcher to explore participants successful and unsuccessful experiences of interdisciplinary work, beginning to understand the relevance of connectedness. Postulating questions such as "can you discuss an experience of when you have engaged in successful interdisciplinary work?" The interviews were planned to be conducted in an informal and conversational style to ensure the participants felt at ease to explore these experiences in depth.

Data analysis

Narrative analysis was used to analyse the data, the researcher adopted a storytelling lens of both the successful and unsuccessful experiences of interdisciplinary connectedness of the academy coaches. To consider the way in which the stories were told, a beginning, middle and end was considered. The beginning of the story captured the context in which the successful and unsuccessful experiences were described by the participants, the middle of the story looked at the conflict which arose, and the conclusion was the end of the story (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; 2009).

Quality criteria trustworthiness and rigor

To consistently portray trustworthiness and rigor in this research study a combination of criteria was adhered to regarding the quality of evaluation (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Member checking was obtained to additionally increase the trustworthiness as each coach from both football academies were sent a copy of their transcript verbatim and provided with the opportunity to illuminate, reflect, and expand on any information said during the interview (Patton, 2002) with a chance to retrospectively elaborate on the researcher's interpretation of analysis (Bloor, 2001). By fully engaging in this member checking, it helped to eliminate any potential researcher bias, especially as the researcher previously provided psychological support in one of these academy settings. Not only did the researcher control and view the research data that was in front of them rather than accidentally bringing interpretation from practical experiences, but this was confirmed from the participants as to whether transcripts and interpretation aligned (Loh, 2013; Motulsky, 2021).

A working rapport was previously established with three of the participants interviewed from one of the football academies as the researcher worked in an applied role for 2.5 football seasons (January 2020-June 2022), which is seen as an additional lens of researcher bias. Being a previous 'insider' with a practitioner role provided great benefit of participants begin open, honest, and comfortable to share successful and unsuccessful experiences (Champ et al. 2020). Although this perceives limitations, an ethnographic researcher with a dual role encounters potential threats to identity, inadequate feelings of acceptance and challenges to confidentiality. Thus, supervisor support and adequate qualitative research training and education was imperative. For example, consistency with interview questions and refraining from informing interviews dialogue with reflections from

practical experience (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Champ et al. 2020; Darpatova-Hruzewicz & Book, 2021).

Integrity is another vital concept to enriching research trustworthiness, evident through the current research design (e.g., semi-structured interviews) and procedures (e.g., the notion of narrative analysis) presented in-depth to aid the support of outlined research goals (e.g., exploring successful and unsuccessful experiences demonstrating interdisciplinary connectedness). This approach was dependent upon understanding the researchers' approach to narrative inquiry of how participants experience of interdisciplinary connectedness are socially constructed through perceptions of their existing lived experiences as a coach (Harper. 2011; Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). To support and enrich the current study rigor level, research fidelity was discovered through in-depth descriptions of lived experiences from a retrospective communication and exemplified in the quotations of the participants actual words presented, which for sure would have been challenging to objectivity observe and measure (Arnold et al., 2019). This supports the notion of confirmability that the current research findings are supported by participants personal responses not the researchers' own interests and motivations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Results

Table 2: the participant's name, background experience and current role within football.

Context of the academy football coaches		
Name	**Background**	**Current role**
Participant one Ben Jones	Volunteer experience Academy EIS development programme. Full-time role. Previous U10s coach in the same academy.	U13s coach in Foundation Development Phase Part-time staff member at the academy but full-time in the EIS development role.
Participant two James Howard	Volunteer experience U18s academy scholarship football player. Didn't make it professionally. Previous YDP level and U15s/U16s coach in the same academy.	U18s coach and Professional Development Phase Lead Full-time staff member in the academy setting.
Participant three Reiley Wright	Volunteer experience. Whilst working full-time in the Academy EIS development programme.	U9s coach and Foundation Development Phase Lead Full-time staff member in the academy setting.

	Head of Education role full-time whilst part-time U10s coach.	Also, the head of operations.
Participant four Blake Gibson	Volunteer experience. U18s academy scholarship football player (different academy). Didn't make it professionally. Injury. Coaching experience in America.	Head of Academy Coaching Full-time staff member
Participant five Kevin Smith	Volunteer experience at multiple clubs.	Professional Development Phase Lead Full-time staff member
Participant six Trent Johnson	Volunteer experience.	Foundation Development Phase Lead Full-time staff member

Participant seven Anthony Lewis	Volunteer experience in the current and previous football academies.	U10s coach and Head of Operations Full-and part-time staff member

Table 3: individual narratives of successful experiences for football academy coaches

Individual narrative stories from all academy coaches – successful experiences			
Name	**Context**	**Conflict**	**Conclusion**
Participant 1	U10s coach dealing with a 'difficult' player in the team. Struggles to control his emotions during training and game situations, for example, aggressive communication and frustration when making mistakes.	U10s coach unable to control the player's behaviour. impact on his teammates and this leads to complaints from parents of the player's behaviour. The player is at danger of being released. The U10s coach seeks support from the psychologist and FDP lead coach.	Collaborative approach with U10s coach, FDP lead, psychologist, and safeguarding officer to support player. This season the player is now deemed as gifted and talented. Moved to U11s. Effectively control his emotions. Successful interdisciplinary work of staff connectedness.
Participant 2	Focusing on development of person before player.	Frustration for the PDP coach, Head Coach and	The player moved to America for a player

	Worked with academy manager and other PDP coach. U18s player. Unsuccessful with scholarship.	Academy Manager at the time of experience as player was not performing well.	scholarship opportunity but ended up finding a passion for a career in dentistry. U18s/PDP lead coach deemed this as a successful experience of 'personal success' which does not have to be just a career in football.
Participant 3	As part of the FDP coaching qualification it was a requirement to complete a case study on one player to address the four corners. As he was an U9s coach, an U9s player was chosen and looked at over the course of the season. The rationale for choosing the player was	The FDP lead found it difficult at times to navigate the working rapport with all staff members. For example, miscommunication between the members. At times the analyst "forgot" to provide videos highlighting the U9 players performance.	The player in question experienced significant improvements in all four corners (e.g., physical, psychological, tactical, and technical).

	due to challenges with behaviour.		Effective interdisciplinary work with psychologist, U9s coaches, performance analyst to address the four corners.
Participant 4	Working with the performance analysts in academy to increase knowledge regarding roles and responsibilities.	Coaches role prior to employment of analysis was to engage in the analysis aspect to support player development. Potential over play of boundaries and expectations of roles.	Learning analysis knowledge. Analysts learning coaching knowledge. How both complement each other and fit into coaching or analysis practices.
Participant 5	Engaged in a challenging but supportive environment working with player care, psychologist, and parents. Helping	Frustration from player (s)	Open communication and honesty about what decisions to make and which staff

	player to control their emotions.		member is best to go to for advice.
Participant 6	Working with performance analysis to create a match report.	Long-term season process. Potential difficulty with moving away from the negative culture and football environment last season. Struggle to buy in.	Improved interdisciplinary communication and connectedness
Participant 7	Spoken about the broader consistency of communication and support from other disciplines e.g., performance analysis, player care department, other coaches.	Miscommunication and voice not being heard all the time due to part-time coaching role.	Improving people and player development. Reality is that most of the players won't make it in football. Developing them as whole people to progress in football, school, career, university etc. 'well rounded players'

Table 4*: individual narratives of unsuccessful experiences of football academy coaches*

Individual narrative stories from all academy coaches – unsuccessful experiences			
Name	**Context**	**Conflict**	**Conclusion**
Participant 1	Decisions regarding deselection and end of season release. Four players in question struggled with dealing with criticism. Feedback on PMA wasn't consistent with end of season decision.	Both U10s coaches felt unsupported by the phase lead and head of academy coaching. Lack of communication and knowledge about what to do.	Ineffective communication with parents. Confusion with the decision being made for their son. Breakdown of relationship with coaches.
Participant 2	Working with overweight U18s player, psychologist, academy manager and sport science staff.	Lack of communication with staff and adherence from player during training.	Inconsistent weight loss and gain. Poor and slow performance. Injury prone. Impact on team performance.
Participant 3	Broader work with full-time academy staff. For example, sharing ideas, making player decisions etc.	Imbalance of staff hierarchy. Not feeling listened to. FDP not deemed as important as YDP and PDP.	Not being honest or open with sharing ideas with staff. Fear of rejection. Not

			communicating as much.
Participant 4	Working with the sport science and strength & conditioning team.	Imbalance of communication from full and part time staff. Disconnected with what is going on with the sport science team and the extent of what responsibilities are within their role.	Mixed messages and support to players from coaches and sport science staff. Misalignment with working towards the academy's philosophy. Sessions aren't delivered consistent with each discipline.
Participant 5	Working with the sport science staff.	Complexity of head of sport science way of working.	Clash of personality traits and previous experience with staff.
Participant 6	Working with other disciplines. Specifically, the head of coaching. He had previously worked in professional football (higher category club than current academy).	Complexity of head of coaching way of working. Freedom to work in his own way. Not compliant with academy's philosophy and values.	All disciplines working in silo and independently. Expertise and knowledge are there. MDT level. Potentially "too scared" to share ideas. Lack of

		Disconnection with other disciplines.	communication. Negative impact on player development. No interdisciplinary connectedness.
Participant 7	Working with sport science staff in the FDP.	Limited communication and alignment with FDP player development aims. Working demands. Different priorities of staff.	Sport science support more general to FDP. Specific to PDP. No or limited input from FDP staff into the sport science programme.

As part of the data analysis, a narrative perspective was utilised to portray the narrative plots aligned with successful and unsuccessful experiences of academy coaches discussing interdisciplinary connectedness. The results section will be divided into three narrative features comparing successful and unsuccessful experiences combined and these are: *(un) appreciation of other disciplines, power and hierarchal structure and misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice.* The participants experiences fitted into one of these three narrative features and the interpreted stories followed a similar structure. The structure highlighted consisted of a beginning, middle and an end, more specifically focusing on the context, conflict, and conclusion of the successful and unsuccessful experience. A particular

emphasis on whether the conflict was overcome or if specific action plans were put in place to help resolve (e.g., working closely with the sport science department next season to offer a specific FDP programme). At the beginning of all stories the participants highlighted a behaviour coherent with a certain goal. Relative to the previous example mentioned, the middle point of the story explores the conflict encountered (e.g., a lack of communication and misalignment of practice) between the FDP coach and the broad support that the sport science department could only provide. Amid this experience, it was clear that participants experienced adversity when attempting to function at interdisciplinary level. Although, both successful and unsuccessful experiences encountered conflict or adversity, participants communicated the successful stories to be prosperous and positive when overcoming the conflict, which resulted in interdisciplinary connectedness. Conversely, during the unsuccessful narrative stories, participants were both eager and anxious to explore the ineffective outcomes experienced. Both experiences commonly discussed action plans for future practice heading into the next football season. To bring the participants retrospective and current experiences to light, the researcher attempted to interpret their feelings, thoughts and meaning attached.

(Un) appreciation of other disciplines

The positivity in participants stories tended to overall explore the appreciation of working with other disciplines adapting knowledge and expertise. It was common that participants who had previously acquired experience from either a full or part time role, for example, an U10s coach progressing to an FDP coach or FDP coach transitioning to a Head Coach role. However, it was interesting to discover that the participants who openly discussed the appreciation of other disciplines, spoke highly of the sport psychologist and performance

analysts. During the participants successful stories, it was evident that these coaches engaged in relevant and consistent communication with the psychologist and performance analysts when expressing their stories of player development:

"this player was really, really struggling with one of his lifestyle at home and his emotions… but this is going back a few years now and I'm sort of dealing with like on and off the pitch because I don't think his lifestyle was that great at home and came into football and sort of took a lot of emotion out into that training session… a bit reckless… a little bit of the older generation acting as in more of his father and looking after him just checking up on him, making sure he's ok… he just sort of had lots to deal with as a kid and also as a group of staff dealt with that as in we could help him and give him the support he doesn't have at home or as much as we can… he did really well… the penny dropped for him and he ended up going to America, got a scholarship and now he's working out in America full time… so, he's done really, really well and that's sort of not just a success on the football pitch but success off the pitch… and just helped him as much as we could… and even like giving him lifts home… so we go pick him up from his house, then go to the game… that helped and definitely the medical team and so someone just to speak to as a psychologist point of view" **James Howard**

"So, I sat down with a player, it was on Monday and so at the end of the season, we asked the players to put together their best bits so their best highlights of the season. So, they then get sent into the analysts and ourselves. We kind of check them over and then me and him had a one-to-one meeting just around his performance this season… it's a good kind of conversation starter as well to go down the route of different things. So, we sat down just like me and you are right now, we went through his clips and what was good about it, start

questioning, start digging a little bit deeper what we were thinking around this certain action… help us to then go in kind of delve a little bit deeper into the clips he put together… how do you think you overall did this year… found challenging and what your goals for the next 18 months to two years" **Blake Gorton**

"Working with different departments is really beneficial to me as a coach because it's not just putting a session on for the sake of it, you know… you're putting on the session to what's best for the players and you might work on one specific area at a time… I think it has helped me as a coach to view things differently" **Reily Wright**

Conversely, when participants began to discuss their unsuccessful encounters, a common narrative shifted to the sports science staff within the academy setting. Plentiful strands of adversity revolved around a lack of communication, conflict between separate departments and a lack of honesty and trust. As a result, a broader challenge of misalignment with both coaching and sport science boundaries and practices appeared to influence player development:

"From a sports science point of view we would welcome a little more involvement in the development of the programme… So what we feel from our experiences of young people with particularly, from the backgrounds of coaches who were working in the foundation development phase… a lot of us have worked within schools across multiple sports development of young people I think we could add some real value to that… in terms of developing the programme and having more involvement. I think that it would give coaches in general within the foundation phase a little more ownership of the and help them buy into the programme a little bit more as rather than actually the players being with the sports

scientist for the next half an hour or the first 15 minutes of the session… I think if we had more buying in, it would potentially support us… I think with the foundation phase we can start to develop our relationships with the sports scientists and actually use that time to support them with the things that they are doing and help us see things that we might not actually see you know when we are engrossed in the session" **Anthony Lewis**

"a lot of change for him in his department is missing staff members and then couldn't fill those roles in... we've had three members of staff; full time sports scientists have kind of come in it's not been for them and then they've gone within a month or two… so it's been quite a difficult one. So, it's understanding that I'm not trying to take things off you or claim I'm the expert I'm trying to help you… but your job is to get individual players through and be physically ready and it'll be a lot easier and a lot more concise and specific to what they need. It will also help you as well so you're not going to have to manage a group of 30 where it's quite a general session. And to be honest it's the same for me as a football coach is what I tried to kind of say well if I'm coaching 30 players they're not going to get as much detail as if I'm splitting off another coach and I'm just focusing on 10 players" **Kevin Smith**

Reflecting on the inconsistency of this approach, some appreciation for the sports science team had come to the surface, especially when adopting a proactive approach heading into next season to work more at an interdisciplinary level. Currently, this appeared to be a working in progress and the challenge lay in all disciplines to work interdepartmentally:

"How was successful interdisciplinary in light of our identity shown and can that be supported by support science? Then can obviously analysis pull that together so every week now… what we do is we've got the same report. So, we're looking at the same things all the

time. So, the fluidity throughout the age groups is the same. So, the messages are the same. It's clear… that's obviously pulled together by the analysis team, but with an input from ourselves and sport science, so it all comes together as a match report and then that's reflected back to the players after the statistical bit… data of shots on target… and then the sport science bit of like data how far we've ran in high intensity sprints… so that becomes like a staple of our weekly reflections" **Trent Johnson**

"I would say relationships between the departments obviously coaches will have their role force and what they want to try and do with the player... One of the key conversations I think you might come across a particular within football is between the sports scientists and coaches is that coaches all want one thing… sports scientists will be wanting to manage minutes they might want to be supporting with the gym and that might take time away from what players do on the pitch and it's quite difficult to find that balance specially like I said when we're working with a quite stretched team" **Anthony Lewis**

Influence of power and hierarchal structure

The next narrative feature that incorporated both successful and unsuccessful experiences of the coaches revolved specifically around the influence of power and hierarchical structure that is in place within academy football. This narrative appeared to be prevalent across both academy organisations. It was evident that there was not only a divide between the full and part time staff across the clubs but even between the coaches specifically. For example, the FDP staff typically emphasised inconsistent communication, lack of honesty and trust at times, with the dominating individual usually being the academy manager, head coach or PDP lead:

"come together as a team and I don't feel like we can be open and honest with each other to share with each other and try and support one another like have you thought about this have you thought about that I think sometimes when there is a dominating person or character or voice people tend to just shut up you know adult plan to be open and that impacts the staff development… it's quite challenging when you're having a conversation and the individuals are looking through the lens of the players potentially scholars as well you've gotta look at them through the lens the foundation phase players their kids they're still in primary school you know they're not the finished article but are we putting things in place to develop them and lead them up to that? I think sometimes that is something I've been really challenged with." **Reily Wright**

"So in terms of how the analysis works in the foundation phase when I'm at the start of each block so we work in 12 week blocks that are split into 4 three week blocks. At the start of each three week block the players will be given a video that is around the topic probably around two or three minutes that sent out to the group to the parents and put on huddle that's them reviewed at the back end of the three weeks with examples of those players doing it it's quite a soft introduction to analysis... It's more about coming in enjoying themselves playing lots of football and playing lots of game and then where we can add in with the sports scientists and analysis there is an added bonus" – **Anthony Lewis**

Reily and Anthony demonstrate the importance of acting within the organisation's values "learning to love the game" for the FDP players rather than seeing them as assets to progress towards the PDP, gaining a scholarship and receiving a professional contract.

Few coaches struggled to communicate effectively and navigate player decisions, such as game deselection and during the release period at the end of the season. Part time coaches explained how they felt let down, unsupported and left in the "dark" with decisions that required additional staff support:

"Yeah it was the worst time my life last season… all players we had a decision to make and there were four players that me and the other coach at the time who was there were kind of voicing out where these four players were really struggling… we were being open to the phase lead but they didn't take any action to it… so when it came to the end of the season we had to have the conversation with the players where they we're not being offered a contract. It was hard… we didn't particularly get help we were just put on the spot… We kinda needed help with the PMA with the players that were struggling, to know what type of language we use for them as it was difficult to communicate. Especially so the players know that they are struggling, but we didn't get any help so that when it came to the conversation with parents it kinda just kicked off as there was a lack of consistency with the communication" **Ben Jones**

Although starting off with a part-time role in academy football displayed perveance and devotion to the sport when progressing to full-time occupation (part of the success), it was clear that there was a divide between those coaches who had advanced levels of experience in the setting:

"It can be quite challenging sometimes when there's older people who are more experienced people and have high quality and stuff like hierarchy where you feel like you're not respected your own opinion is kind of not well received and maybe not even received at all… why even

try why even bother potentially and then obviously it has an impact on player development and also and impacts on the staff" **Reily Wright**

The successful experiences surrounding the hierarchical structure centred predominantly around the awareness, mindfulness and need to support each other regardless of whether these were full or part time staff. For example, the coaches who emphasised with the part time staff tended to understand that their priority did not always centre around football. Contributing to this understanding and awareness meant that coaches could rely on each other for support, such as running late for training or not previously planned the coaching session and in hindsight led to successful interdisciplinary work:

"It's the little things I understand you and what time you gonna be in... well if I'm going to be in half an hour before the session I'll do that so you're not rushing around… do you want me to get your equipment for you? Do you need me to come and deliver part of your session for you? Do you need me to have a conversation the strength conditioning coach? You know it's just the little things to make sure we're all working in line with each other and that is planned and prepared" **Blake Gorton**

Misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice

The narrative feature of *misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice* highlighted the limited knowledge and understanding of what differences lie between multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary work. As a result, the coaches in both academies tended to work in silo instead of interdepartmentally:

"We just started to get players in that was already signed and people didn't know they were getting signed. It was like corridor conversations that were happening that allowed people to decide whereas actually before if there had been an interdisciplinary approach… like can you present why or why not this person should or should not be here, decide from each department separately and they will come together and discuss it as a group… we signed that player now and you're like well no ones even seen him play so I think it just became a bit of a miscommunication mess so people working in silo even in their own departments not even like with other departments it was people in their departments that were just working in silence suffered for about a whole year probably 6 to 8 months of people just working too much in silo. Within even their own department even allow interdisciplinary work to happen because of a clash of personality but the initial bit was the recruitment of staff I'd guess that was the biggest failure" **Trent Johnson**

It was almost an effective reflection tool for the coaches to become aware of these unsuccessful experiences that are currently happening or previously happened. Most of the coaches had spoken about these unsuccessful experiences typically when player development was disrupted. Additionally, unsuccessful multidisciplinary work led to a misalignment with the broader organisational structure and culture of staff:

"Culture and dynamic that can kill the environment if it's the wrong person in there because the lots of Chinese whispers a lot of whispering behind closed doors and phone calls and trying to change or trying to do the right thing but wanting to go in a different direction and change the culture… change the environment and then that changes the players mindsets then they see cracks in the staff and ultimately it doesn't help the players because they saw to see one staff member going this way another staff member going another way" **James Howard**

It's not uncommon the power that one individual can influence the rest of the staff culture, such as implementing different coaching practices and the culture in which they operate in. A new head coach at one of the academies was offered flexibility within the framework. Work became aligned with his philosophy and ways of working and it quickly seemed to create tension, conflict, and disagreement between the staff:

"It was the biggest failure for me was last season as a whole in the culture disappear really based upon people's personality… but I'm not gonna name names obviously but we appointed somebody in the key role that was the head of coaching before me... I don't think he was right and I don't think the guidance for him was right either so not necessarily just him but everyone's got to take the blame for that guidance for him he was given the keys basically to do what he wants" **Trent Johnson**

"he just came in all guns blazin' and this is what we do, this is what we do and it was a complete change for us, changing the programme, changing our mantra, changing the way we operate and he was allowed to do that... on reflection of the staff what we did say is like when people come in with their new ideas can we challenge them... it's not always the way things were done we need to get better... I saw the biggest value for me was the recruitment of staff as well as the recruitment of players... because of staff and new integration of interdisciplinary people doing their own thing" **Trent Johnson**

On the other hand, those coaches that explored the successful experiences illustrated a story around interdisciplinary connectedness through the creation of a psychologically safe environment allowing players and staff to make mistakes or errors as well as utilising the

knowledge and understanding over disciplines to help with the foundations of their own practice:

"I mean from my own experiences of going through sort of teaching coaching for a number of years you learn to understand younger players but I'm not professing to be an expert in that and we do have some very good people in the academy… who are able to sort of support with that. We've got a great education and player care team that are able to work and offer advice towards the coaches on how to deal with certain situations, how we might support players sometimes and how we might let them struggle… I think that's really important as well to help them and understand individuals of why they might need us to come in and help them" **Anthony Lewis**

"So, we were all on this, we will all play it on the kind of pathway and how we did if it was used for his ILP… we covered all four corners. So, as a team we would all play on what his ILP was and wasn't doing and just to support that… checked in regularly, whether that be one-to-ones or you know, small groups or but be during the day at training and what not but it comes from you always talking about what's working well and what's not… what have we tried? What we think might work? Does he do his individual learning plan each weekend? Because you might be doing something now but has he had chance to consolidate it? Do we need to move onto further stretching and challenging or do we just stay with it to ensure he is consolidating in the long term?" **Reily Wright**

It's evident that the current research findings share similar stories and perspectives in relation to the successful unsuccessful experiences regardless of which football academy in which

these participants operate. There is a combination of three narrative features that encompass the participants journey from beginning, middle and end.

Discussion section

The current study aimed to explore and understand the successful and unsuccessful experiences of academy football coaches' interdisciplinary connectedness. Built upon previous literature exploring interdisciplinary with talent identification, this study provides theoretical and practical distinctions of MDT approaches for football coaches (Kelly et al., 2021; Mills. 2019; 2023; Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015). Findings were presented as two narrative structures of successful and unsuccessful experiences and three narrative features of *(Un) appreciation of other disciplines, influence of power and hierarchal structure and misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice* in which participants told a story of their experiences from the beginning, middle and end (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

(Un) appreciation of other disciplines

In both successful ad unsuccessful stories illuminated an unappreciation for sport science disciplines and an appreciation for performance analysis and psychology departments. Coaches who developed an appreciation and incorporated psychological principles within their practice experienced success with the rebuild of a coaching programme, achieving national championship level (Voight & Carroll, 2006). Supporting the notion within the current research the value of working with psychologists when assisting with player development (e.g., player behaviour and family influences on performance levels). On the contrary, it is common for personal experiences with psychological support to contribute to

the lack of 'buy-in' or unappreciation of working with this discipline, such as the stigma within competitive sport and openness of using the services (Zakrajsek, Martin & Zizzi, 2011). As well as coaches believing that their own psychological understanding is superior to a qualified sport psychologist (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014). The current study illuminated a full appreciation of how psychological principles can complement football coaching practice in supporting player development and broader interdisciplinary connectedness.

A clear appreciation for the role of performance analysts was evidence by encouraging players to identify their successful and "room for improvement" areas when watching video footage their game highlights. For coaches, understanding how analysis can benefit their coaching practice, such as which areas of the game for analysts to video or "break down" for players to work on complimented successful interdisciplinary work. Clear in previous literature with coaches appreciating the importance of video footage for the opposition and reviewing collectively their own team's performance (Andersen, Francis & Bateman, 2021). Performance analysts valued an open, honest, and non-judgemental space with coaches to work effectively (Bateman & Jones, 2019), with over 50% of football coaches appreciating analysis tools to impact coaching philosophy and player KPI's (Wright, Atkins & Jones, 2012). This is also reflected in TI research between football coaches, performance analysts and external scouts to and identify high performance players (Reeves et al., 2018).

Thus, an appreciation and unappreciation for sport science staff (i.e., strength and conditioning coaches and physiotherapists) was highlighted. Further "buy-in" from the sport science staff of the contribution from the academy coaches to enhance the quality of the

player programme was needed. The EPPP guidelines identify S&C as a compulsory and critical role in football (Springham et al. 2018) but previous evidence illuminating the challenge of coach 'buy-in' to sport science research (Fullagar et al. 2019), contrasting to the current research were coaches emphasised the desire to understand and include sport science. A robust pool of literature suggests that there is a gap between sport science and coaching practice. The discipline of sport science follows medical procedures and thus is not always aligned with the complexity of problems that coaches face (Coutts, 2016; Sands, 1998; Sarmento et al., 2017). Additionally, coaches believe that sport science can contribute to their coaching, but new ways of working are usually from other coaches (Reade, et al., 2008), due to coaches acquiring less understanding of the sport science domain (Brink et al. 2018). In the current study a coach specified "I'm not trying to take things off you or claim I'm the expert, I'm trying to help you" **Kevin Smith** highlighted frustration from coaches to try and understand the role of sport scientists, but this integration is usually poor and a barrier to engagement (Martindale & Nash, 2013). Understanding and appreciating the professional roles as well as how the individual personality qualities, such as self-belief, working relationships, empathy, openness, trustworthiness, and honesty may inform the practical and interdisciplinary work is vital for transparency (Chandler et al., 2016).

Influence of power and hierarchal structure

Elite sport environments are cultivated as complex, power driven, conflicting and volatile environments to work in (Cruickshank et al., 2014; 2015; Cruickshank & Colins, 2012), especially professional football (e.g., Nesti, 2010). The current research demonstrated a disconnection and an intense sense of conflict between various roles within the academy, such as full and part-time roles and hierarchical positioning within the club (e.g., an U10s

coach, the FDP lead and academy manager), which created unsuccessful interdisciplinary connectedness. For example, evidence of who had power over the final decision as FDP coaches sometimes felt like "opinions or ideas were not considered or often disregarded" and experience "less of a voice" due to final decisions favouring the production of first team players. These coaches felt frustrated that there was no flexibility within the framework of their coaching practice to be authentic within their role as a coach due to voices from staff in these positions of power (Bachkirova, 2016). Evidence of authoritarian dialogue is created and maintained in youth football by structuring the coaching context (Cushion & Jones, 2006), regarded as expert power (Koslowsky & Schwarzwalk, 2001). Relative to managerialism, structures within an organisation are often governed by individuals who have a high degree of power (Combs & Skill, 2003; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1989; Grabke-Rundell & Gomez-Mejia, 2002) suggesting that football coaches who exert this power and influence may be more likely to decide on the selection and deselection of players (Inoue et al. 2013). This is supported by the current research as an U10s coach **Ben Jones** emphasised the lack of control and support from the FDP lead and Head Coach when providing player feedback and making end of season decisions with which players to keep was not considered. Additionally, **James Howard** was confident with his decision of players to progress to the first team, however, the first team manager disregarded his choices. Illuminating the organisational structure of power that can lead to coaches not practicing authentically with their individual coaching role and contributes to moving farther away from interdisciplinary connectedness (Inoue et al. 2013).

Misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice

The current research study evidently highlighted the lack of knowledge and understanding between the difference of MDT practice and interdisciplinary team connectedness, which is unclear in the previous literature (Kelly, et al. 2021; Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015). Coaches in the current study emphasised that coaches, sports science staff, performance analysts etc were completing this job to a high professional standard, however, during the time point of COVID-19 these experts were working in silo. This is consistent we've experiences from sports psychologists highlighting but the most common culturally driven challenges were interdepartmental communication problems (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014). Working outside of the interdisciplinary staff team and the culture is associated with miscommunication and incorrect decision making (McDougall et al., 2020). One coach outlined the loss of communication between collaborative decisions negatively impacted player development. Employing sport psychologists on a volunteer, part or full-time basis is not uncommon within football and may be beneficial to assess and regulate the interdisciplinary connectedness between staff members (Dean et al., 2022; Nesti, 2010). As well as contributing at an organisational level to work in alliance with the UEFA and inform the EPPP educational programme. Coaches are willing to demonstrate interdisciplinary connectedness through motivation to find and implement new ideas into their sports programmes, such as sport science (Reade, et al., 2008). As well as other disciplines within the football academy environment, interpersonal and in group conflict was also evident move in the current study. For example, **Trent Johnson** identified that when the new Head Coach came into the academy, he was provided with flexibility within the framework to change coaching practice this led to conflict, consistent with previous literature of in-group conflict leading to negative outcomes and a drive away from interdisciplinary connectedness (Reid, Stewart & Thorne, 2004). However, contrasting evidence from the current research identified looking at culture change signified the importance of a two-way interaction and power flow

with support staff, continuously acquiring and integrating support staff perception was vital, such as S&C which contributed to best practice. Regulated by the group rather than imposed by the manager "singing from the same hymn sheet" demonstrating effective interdisciplinary (Cruickshank, Collins & Minten. 2015).

Examples being, learning from past experiences, seeking critical learning points through trial and error in practice and working collaboratively in an MDT context was evident (Jasper, 2006). Additionally, a literature review addressing a reflection of practice (coach and support staff perspectives) requires consideration from the individual, experience itself and environment in which these individuals' function (Mills. 2023). Thus, an MDT approach being a requisite of professional football academies effective work guided by the FA in alignment with the EPPP to deliver a holistic approach (Buraimo, Simmons & Szymanskimay, 2006) to help understand why coaches struggle to function at an interdisciplinary level. The current research stresses a suffocation of MDT work from an individual standpoint, such as during the COVID-19 lockdown, all completing their work in line with their expertise but is responsible for the explanation of the current *"unsuccessful"* narrative stories throughout. Through coach education and additional research regarding how interdisciplinary is defined, conceptualised, and understood within football would potentially help to move away from the norm of working at a multidisciplinary level and become more connected as coaches personally and professionally at an interdisciplinary lens.

The current research study capsulates a variety of limitations surrounding the sample used, design and data analysis which is consistent within qualitative research. The first limitation regarding the sample used falls heavily around the sample number of participants used. Although, relative to information power, a true, fulfilling, and in-depth qualitative

approach can be reached with a smaller sample, there were still some inconsistencies prevailed, such as the recruitment of solely male coaches and most of the participants were in hierarchal influences of power within the academy (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016). To increase research saturation, additional research may capture the female coaching population, first team football coaches and a spread across copious football academies in the UK or cross-culturally would be necessary to understand the depth to interdisciplinary connectedness (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Although, all participants were currently in a full-time position within either academy, one participant had an additional part-time U10s coaching role in the FDP and highlighted distinction in his experiences, such as input to the weekly phase meetings and contribution to the programmes of other disciplines. Thus, could be potentially provide further depth to the qualitative nature of interdisciplinary by understanding the role and impact of both full and part-time coaches operating within football academies. Moreover, addressing a sample of first-team coaches may be beneficial into understanding the connection and fluidity of club's values and philosophy compromising academy level staff, the process of player development specifically towards the PDP and whether decisions and practices are consistent with that the first team are looking for. For example, during one of the interviews the PDP coach specified close work and huge improvements in five PDP players during their scholarship, deemed as a "success" and the first team manager failed to offer any of them a professional contract. Therefore, exploring the interdisciplinary of within academy staff and across first-team staff relative to broader organisational football culture (e.g., Larsen et al. 2020; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015).

Although, the current research had a clear rationale, philosophical understanding and addition to previous research, as there are four types of interviews used in social sciences (Alshenqeeti, 2014), an alternative method of data collection could have been considered,

such as following up with an open-ended (unstructured) interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) as here the researcher may have been more "keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on various issues" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136), providing additional flexibility to how the stories unravel. Moreover, focus group (s) considered as an innovative research method, which fosters a sense of interact and debate and may be useful to compromise all coaches may have been a useful step to reach further critical depth (Acocella, 2012). To add to this limitation, many of the successful and unsuccessful experiences heavily spoke about the contribution and relationship with other staff therefore being seen as a one-sided claim. The extent to which these claims are true or exaggerated especially looking at retrospective data may have been influenced by hierarchy of power stereotypes of coaches as well as subjective opinions and interpretations of the work of coaches' perspective, thus the environment and nature of these responses may differ in a focus group setting (Abdel Latif, 2019; Parry, Thompson & Fowkes, 1999).

Moreover, the notion of critical reflexivity also falls under the limitation of the current research study. As the researcher only began to understand their philosophy of practice towards the latter of completing this empirical research reflection on action allowed the researcher to engage in critical reflexivity only briefly as opposed to understanding this earlier on in the study will have provided a consistency of producing knowledge in the socio-political and cultural context in more depth (Palaganas et al., 2017). Thus, one of the challenges with reflexivity revolves around research as managing their emotions of the research participants, it can be difficult to detach from the successful and unsuccessful experiences explored especially as the researcher was a fundamental part of one of the football academies from a practical sense and it is outlined that detachment can be all realistic and be detrimental to the research process (ter Riet, 2012). Due to the early stages of the

researchers' development, it can be difficult departmentalise between view and the interpretations of the research participants findings in more of a positive light than anticipated (Jootun et al. 2009, p. 45). As communicated this limitation will have been decreased if the researcher had an earlier understanding of their epistemology and ontological research approach, providing a greater appreciation of the connection between the methodological and personal research philosophy and values (Ackerly & True, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2013; Palaganas et al., 2017; Yilmaz. 2013). My role within the research can influence the findings through my personal assumptions and perspectives of my own social world (Palaganas et al. 2017). For example, being a trainee practitioner who has previously worked in an applied space at one of these academies and my university supervisor currently working at the other could have led to dishonesty of experiences in participants responses. The coaches may have only been inclined to share successful experiences with involvement of a psychologist rather than unsuccessful. Most of the coaches that I had worked with at RAFC explored positive and successful stories as well as at Fleetwood although I had not previously been involved, highlighting critical reflexivity potentially posing as a limitation for the current research.

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

The current research study offers an insightful and contemporary approach to cogitating successful and unsuccessful experiences of interdisciplinary connectedness in football academy coaches. Findings outlining the appreciation of other disciplines, the influence of power and hierarchy as well as understanding differences between MDT and interdisciplinary show great significance for this topic area. Previous theoretical and practical findings focus heavily on the understanding and implementing of multi-disciplinary work within football (Kelly et al. 2021; Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015) but little has been explored around

interdisciplinary. It is clear from the findings and this unbalanced amount of previous research of multi-disciplinary that 'interdisciplinary' is often confused and blurred, from a cultural organisational perspective within football. To capture the imperativeness of interdisciplinary connectedness fully, this research postulates many fruitful directions that go beyond just football academy coaches' perspectives (e.g., support staff also). Considerations of additional populations, such as other academies, first team and women's football as well as support staff will capture a well-rounded approach of football organisational culture and the notion of interdisciplinary as a fundamental entity. A fruitful direction for future research may address how sport psychology practitioners can apply strategies and support to move towards successful interdisciplinary connectedness. As based on the current research findings, it appears valuable for practitioners to work at an organisational cultural level to contribute to this interdisciplinary connectedness within and between disciplines to positively facilitate football policy and culture (Champ et al. 2020; Henriksen, Storm & Larsen, 2017).

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – interview schedule with questions and relevant probes for the conducted interviews.

Interview schedule

Hi, before we begin the interview, I am just going to outline a few key things. The aim of this research study is to explore your successful and unsuccessful experiences as a coach working as part of an interdisciplinary team.

The interview will last for approximately 45 minutes to one hour. You are free to not answer questions if you feel uncomfortable and free to withdraw at any given point without it affecting your rights. Just to make you aware, the interview will be audio recorded and then transferred to an M-Drive password protected account before being permanently deleted when the interview has been transcribed. Confidentiality will be maintained as your name will not be mentioned but instead pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and if you mention any third parties also. Anyone from the club will not be mentioned or identifiable.

Introductory questions

- Could you start off by giving me a brief overview of your experiences as a coach and at Fleetwood football club academy (when you first joined to where you are today?) when you first started coaching

What was it about this experience that helped?

- Interdisciplinary is the integration of knowledge, strategies and methods from different disciplines to work effectively. For example, you work with physiotherapists, psychologists and analysts...

Question 1

Can you talk about an experience/an example of when you have engaged in successful/positive interdisciplinary work? For example, when you feel like you've worked well as a team / as well as other members?

- What impact did this have? Internal impact on your development? External development on players?
- What is your knowledge on other roles within the academy? A lack of understanding about other roles?
- What factors contribute to this success?
- What does success look like to you?

Question 2

Can you talk about an experience of when you have engaged in unsuccessful interdisciplinary work? For example, when you feel like you didn't work well as a team / as well as other members?

Probes/additional questions
- What impact did this have?
- Internal impact on your development?
- External development on players? Parents?
- Has this caused any conflict with other staff members? Did you agree on the decision?
- Challenges with your role and responsibilities? Confidence with decisions?
- What factors contribute to this conflict? How do you overcome these challenges?

Question 3

How important is interdisciplinary connectedness?

Any additional questions or comments?

Research commentary

Introduction

This research commentary documents several of my key research experiences whilst on the professional doctorate, with insight into how the skills and knowledge developed in both my undergraduate and MSc postgraduate degrees and enhanced during the doctoral journey (e.g., data collection and analysis in major project contributions). I have sought to provide a chronological account of how my engagement with the research process, highlighting evidence of scaffolding has contributed to research competence (Calvo, 2015; McGarr & Moody, 2010; Whitehead et al., 2016). I will discuss my research philosophy, alignment of research topic choice, challenges faced and overcome, as well as embedding critical learning points throughout (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). I also reflect on future research projects and specific collaborations I would like to engage in after professional doctorate completion.

Research Knowledge and Experience

Reflecting on my previous university education in second and third year of undergraduate study, I took an interest in qualitative research. I always 'struggled' with quantitative data throughout my undergraduate studies. While I persisted with learning how to conduct quantitative statistical analysis and analysing and interpreting specific data from graphs or figures, this was not my preferred or aligned method to gather a rich understanding of sport psychology experiences and topics that were of interest to me.

"Qualitative data just made more sense to me. I am passionate about exploring individual's in-depth experiences around a topic of interest and utilising qualitative measures such as interviews helped me to understand individuals' social worlds"

Philosophical assumptions

Understanding my philosophy of practice (e.g., inner core values, assumptions, and beliefs) has offered great insight into determining my research paradigm to help provide meaning and purpose for the way data is collected, analysed, and presented (Creswell & Poth. 2013; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). From an ontological stance, operating at a subjective, relativist and interpretivist paradigm has enhanced my understanding of research participants multiple realities and the meaning given to a phenomenon, for example, MT, resilience, identity/lifestyle transformation and interdisciplinary connectedness. Adopting an interpretivist epistemology allows for connections to be made to understand how participants responses are expressed through the language used. This is evident through qualitative methods of in-depth, semi-structured interviews utilising thematic and narrative analysis to make sense of how participants current experiences are reflected and constructed through their social worlds, by understanding what knowledge is attached to each experience (Avgousti, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Demuth & Terkildsen, 2015; Jewett, Kerr & Tamminen, 2019; Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

Already, I have a vast amount of experience utilising qualitative semi-structured interviews, from my first piece of independent research at undergraduate level looking at "exploring transition experiences of male footballers from community to semi-professional level, a lifestyle perspective", followed by my masters' dissertation titled "Culture before

identity – a qualitative approach with national football team players". This research sparked my passion for implementing qualitative research methods, which have enhanced several of my skills (e.g., critical analysis, data collection, creativity, and intuitiveness etc; Eklund et al. 2011; Strean, 1998). By effectively understanding the research process I can conduct research authentically, aligned with my philosophy of practice to add to the field of sport and exercise psychology. For example, my research findings below, have not only helped me to make sense of the studied phenomenon but enlighten applied practice work through informing organisational policy and culture (e.g., McDougall et al. 2020).

"I would say from this point my passion and interest for conducting research within football was enlightened. I was excited to work collaboratively with other researchers to eventually publish this piece… it sparked my interests of conducting further research in football on the professional doctorate".

Professional Doctorate Research Journey

In this next section of the research commentary, I reflect on my engagement, learning and application of qualitative research on the professional doctorate. These reflections are specific to the systematic review, empirical paper one and empirical paper two and will embed critical learning points throughout.

Systematic review – the research process

The aim of the systematic review was to explore how Mental Toughness (MT), Mental Hardiness (MH) and Resilience understanding how these constructs are conceptualised,

acknowledging what role (e.g., performance and well-being) and the factors that perceive to influence the development and maintenance these terms in football/soccer through a systematic review lens. Practice informed research sparked the idea of my review, where I would hear coaches repeatedly used the terms MT and resilience on the pitch such as, "he's not mentally tough to deal with the pressure of the game" (Sheard, 2010; Cook et al. 2014; Slack et al. 2014) being perceived negatively and highlighted as a weakness (Coulter et al. 2010). MT, MH, and resilience have been widely researched over the years in football, thus, I was interested in making sense of and synthesising the previously established data to offer insights into new ways of thinking, which seemed appropriate through a meta-study lens (Paterson et al., 2001).

Empirical paper one – the research process

The aim of the empirical paper one sought to understand individual's identity and lifestyle transformation experiences of those who attended a lifestyle support group, Be Strong. At the point of conducting this research, I had already completed an applied case study in exercise psychology and had been working in an applied exercise psychology space for three years prior (Be Strong specifically), again practice informed research. From exploring cultural identity at MSc level, I was eager to understand how individuals' identity shifts when weight loss occurs and how this shift influence their lifestyle. Much of the previous research addresses weight loss from an intervention perspective (e.g., Ahern et al. 2011; Cobiac, Vos & Veerman, 2010), with limited evidence addressing an in-depth qualitative evaluation of a lifestyle support group. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews on Microsoft Teams, using purposeful sampling to capture participants current experiences. analysing the data through a narrative lens uncovered two narrative structures of previous and current experiences with

three main narrative features of *self-exploration, diet vs lifestyle culture and multiple identities* to elucidate personal understandings of the participants social worlds. Although, social support was not found to be a distinct narrative feature, it underpinned all three plots throughout.

"Since starting the professional doctorate, I've always said that I wanted to conduct an empirical piece of work looking at an evaluation of Be Strong! My appreciation of working in exercise psychology as an applied and researcher practitioner came from my master's placement experiences!"

Empirical paper two – the research process.

Empirical paper two illustrated *"the interdisciplinary team, exploration into the connectedness of academy football coaches"* aimed to explore both successful and unsuccessful stories in which this occurs and devising a stronger understanding to the significant role of interdisciplinary within academy football. With much of the literature focusing on the multi-disciplinary team approach for coaches operating in a football environment, little has captured the role of interdisciplinary connectedness (Kelly et al., 2021; Mills. 2019; 2023; Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015). I sought football academy coaches from two football academies in the UK, conducting 7 semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams to uncover individual successful and unsuccessful stories in which interdisciplinary connectedness occurred. Findings were presented as two narrative structures of successful and unsuccessful experiences and three narrative features of *(Un) appreciation of other disciplines, influence of power and hierarchal structure and misalignment of MDT or interdisciplinary practice.*

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Systematic review – critical learning points of research informed practice.

"My systematic review has turned out to be one of the most challenging but exciting pieces of work that I've conducted!"

I wanted to start this section with a quote from my reflective diary summarising my experiences with the systematic review process. Although, this piece of research has been the most challenging relative of inconsistencies with the research team, lack of knowledge and understanding of a meta-study etc. I have progressed extensively in terms of personal and professional development in how I overcome these aspects of adversity to move towards being a competent researcher. For example, enhancement in my adaptability and time management skills underpinned this research process (Jarvis, 2006). I struggled to balance this piece of work on my own and it was after revisiting the review in August 2021 that I realised my time management skills were poor as I was not prioritising the review. However, I have learnt that securing time, such as three days to focus on the systematic review when I had to revisit it allowed me to spent time to understand the meta-study process, re-read the included papers and reflect on what sections I was struggling with. When inconsistencies with the research team occurred, I was quite secluded with my thoughts and feelings regarding the process instead of reaching out for support I decided to focus on other aspects of the doctorate, such as the empirical paper one, teaching, consultancy etc that I had more of an understanding of. To be a competent researcher, I have learnt that being open and expressing how I feel to myself through reflection, my course peers and supervisors helped to overcome the current challenges (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010; Foltz et al. 2015).

"I knew what a systematic review entailed but I was unsure about what a meta-study even was. I kept ignoring my systematic review, eventually I reached out to my supervisor to ask for feedback on what I had written and asked for support on how to write a meta-study section… finally, I started to grasp what it was, and I felt competent with continuing to write it"

This piece of research and reflecting on the doctorate programme is where I needed to show the most resilience (ironic with the review looking at mental toughness and resilience). There were times I wanted to give up and change my topic but no matter how long this research process took me, I persevered, positively adapted to stressful situations (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013) and 'bounce back' from stressors of interpersonal demands, such as a lack of support (Fletcher et al. 2011), burnout (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) and emotional struggle (Van Der Merwe, 2019) to complete the review. The whirlwind of emotions has contributed to dissatisfaction with the systematic review process to enjoyment with proactively planning for future research collaborations with my colleagues to conduct a meta-study in exercise psychology.

Empirical paper one – critical learning points of research informed practice.

For empirical paper one was the first piece of research that I conducted in the exercise psychology space. It was the first empirical paper for the professional doctorate being practice informed research. This research was different to of that I had conducted before due to being an evaluation project on an established lifestyle support group. Through undergoing this process, I learnt a lot personally and professionally as a researcher, such as attention to detail, the ability to plan, organise and evaluate the programme. I was required to identify,

analyse and think creatively. Narrative analysis allowed me to think more deeply and in a complex way to understand participant's social worlds (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; 2009). Evaluating the Be Strong lifestyle support group and programmes offered have provided the opportunity to capture authentic lived experiences of twelve participants to portray the insightful and fascinating work taking place to help change individuals' lives. Additionally, as my role at Be Strong initially started off in applied consultancy, when beginning the empirical paper one study, it has transitioned to a research role. Thus, providing an opportunity to present findings back to Be Strong, conduct further research in the exercise psychology space collaboratively and most importantly heightened my competence with future research.

This empirical project has informed my theoretical research, applied and teaching experience in exercise psychology through several ways. For example, my awareness, attention to detail and openness to pick up on when individuals may need support, such as dealing with multiple identities, identity of the self and unhelpful thoughts associated with this. I am currently working in a 1-to-1 consultancy space supporting exercise psychology individuals with lifestyle support needs. There are also opportunities to present these findings at 'Be Strong', conduct longitudinal research, such as interviewing more members or the same members over a longer time period and contribute to that of sporting contexts, such as supporting lifestyle, exercise and nutritional needs as this is important to create a well-rounded athlete. This demonstrates clear level of competence as a researcher.

Empirical paper two – critical learning points of research informed practice.

As empirical paper two was the latter piece of research conducted, I have recognised significant progress in my ability to navigate and collect data. For example, through understanding my research philosophy, gap in research and "golden thread" for the study rationale, during the data collection phase I was felt confident to be flexible with the interview questions postulated without feeling like "the interview wasn't going to reach the 45-minute average". This research competence and self-belief has greatly increased in comparison to empirical paper one where I solely relied on a structured set of interview questions to feel competent. Not only did my feelings of anxiety, worry and unhelpful thoughts ease prior to conducting these interviews, I was also ok with "awkward silences" during the interview whilst participants were thinking of a response without feeling like I needed to move on quickly (Tod, 2007). Postulating only two interview questions meant that I needed to be proactive and adaptable to participant responses in the moment, all interviews ranged from 45-52 minutes illuminating in-depth data. It felt natural and easy to build a researcher-participant rapport as the interview questions were simple but effective, with no confusion for the participants to understand. Reflecting on the data collection process has provided great insight into creating coherent qualitative interview questions and has given me the self-belief and competence to facilitate a large focus group intended for this research.

Although, I have utilised narrative analysis at MSc and doctorate level (empirical paper one), I have recognised marginal growth in my ability to apply and critical interpret data (Shiraev & Levy, 2020). Postulating two narrative structures of successful and unsuccessful experiences football academy coaches' interdisciplinary connectedness allowed me to formulate narrative features to tell a critical, detailed story to understand the academy

coaches' social worlds (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2016). I have learnt to control researcher biases' prevalent from applied practice as I worked at one of the football academies for 2.5 football seasons, through controlling these biases' data has been interpreted at an open, honest, and critical level. Additionally, this research has enhanced my understanding of multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary work through capturing participants social world views of this work within practise and conducting extensive reading to encapsulate the distinction. Especially significant whilst reflecting on my applied experiences of navigating an MDT working team (see case study three), highlighting competent research-informed practice. Conducting research to understand the multifaceted top-down approach of organisational culture and importance of staff working interdepartmentally has allowed me to pay attention to detail as these findings have not previously been recorded in previous research. To capture the research-practice connection, I have not only enhanced insights for future applied work within football and enrichment of the student experience with teaching but engage in coach education to present the research findings at both academies to inform future policy.

"Although, I was gutted that data collection did not take place before I left my applied role at Rochdale Football Club Academy, reflecting, maybe it was for the best. Since then, I have learnt a vast amount regarding my aim for the project, what additions it would be adding to the literature (in this case initially, it was unclear) whilst discovering who I am as a researcher and what I stand for! I'm confident that this empirical research I have completed, since understanding my research philosophy will attend to the gap in literature of interdisciplinary connectedness with exciting next steps for future research"

Future plans as a researcher

This research commentary illustrates the research process engagement of the systematic review, empirical paper one and two with critical learning points to help fulfil research competence through reflection (e.g., Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Engagement in this research process has enhanced my self-belief, critical attention to detail and a vast number of research skills. Consideration of a one-, two- and five-year plan will further enhance my research competencies. I acquire experience of supervising both undergraduate and postgraduate students with their major projects during current full-time lecturing role at LJMU. In May 2023, I will be attending my first European conference in Groningen, Netherlands, the World Congress of Science and Football and my goal is to attend and present an empirical piece of work at the DSEP conference in November 2023. Both experiences will augment my research experience through further networking, education, and collaboration purpose. Thus, I'm both eager and passionate continue my journey as a researcher and enrich the student research experience through applying for a permanent full-time role in the new 2023/24 academic year at LJMU.

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Reflective practice commentary

Revealed below is a meta-reflection commentary clearly summarising my applied consultancy, research, and teaching and, training experiences on the sport and exercise psychology professional doctorate. This commentary compromises a fruitful journey of critical learning experiences that have not only shaped my current personal and professional development but provide insight into continuous future practices post Sport and Exercise Psychology registration (BPS, 2018). Here I will present an intuitive journey overseeing how all experiences blend and intertwine to form an authentic and honest representation of who I am through a story of three emerging of *applied consultancy, teaching, and research* experiences. All narratives will address a beginning, middle and end to capture the 'golden threads' throughout my meta-reflection experience (e.g., Smith & Sparkes, 2009). It was fundamental to understand what a meta-reflection process is; by reflecting on a synthesis of personal reflective accounts throughout my personal and professional experiences, such as decisions in practice, reflecting upon the enhancement of personal qualities (Chandler et al., 2016; 2016; Wadsworth et al., 2021). The meta-reflection commentary is presented in a structural way of addressing authentic self-reflections and purposeful communications as meta-reflection (e.g., reflection as thinking) which occurred with all three of my supervisors (e.g., Bengtsson, 1995; Bevins et al. 2011; Thorpe & Garside, 2017). The reflections within this meta-reflection commentary utilised the same theoretical framework as highlighted in the ***reflective practice log*** which is the Gibbs Cycle (1998) reflection model. To uphold the four competencies, it was crucial to engage in critical reflection. Knowles & Gilbourne, (2010) was one of the foundation of papers that helped me to understand what critical reflective practice might mean and I began to look at experiences within applied, teaching and research

from a reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action perspective to reach this critical depth
Schön (1983).

Applied consultancy experiences.

Sport (football) psychology:

As highlighted in the introduction the first theme encompassing my applied consultancy
experiences from football and exercise psychology are presented from the beginning, middle
and end of my Professional Doctorate journey. I first started my applied role as Rochdale
Football Club Academy (RAFC) in January 2020 and this reflection came after an U14s
Tuesday evening training session. It was one of the first opportunities, but I had to observe
the Academy players in training and meet some of the wider staff within the Academy (e.g.,
the physiotherapists, strength, and conditioning coach etc). I experienced one of the first
ethical and practical challenges as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist working in an
applied space, with being a female in a predominantly male football environment (Goldman
& Gervis, 2021).

"I was having a conversation with the strength and conditioning coach who was asking me
about what sport psychology is and why I'm here. I confidently explained to the coach the
already exciting and flow of ideas I had based on the few conversations and observations I
made in the hope to provide an insight into the player development… straight away I felt
shutdown and a cloud of negative criticism came my way. In the space of 90 seconds, a
received a few responses of "we don't need a psychologist, what are you even doing here…
have you even played football before… what do you know about football?" in that moment I
just laughed it off and continued to positively express the need for sport psychology".

I came away from that conversation feeling quite annoyed and surprised by the judgements towards me and psychology within football. No amount of literature around the challenges of the "buy-in" with psychology could prepare me for what I experienced in the real world. I did not expect to be in this uncomfortable situation during the first week of attending training at RAFC. I started to question myself, "is that what all players and staff think about psychology?" and is that was everyone thinks about me being here?". I felt so overwhelmed and decided to remove myself from the situation by quickly walking towards the side line of the pitch to sit and "try" to make sense of what had just happened. Part of me did not want to believe what had just happened and the other part of me was confused. I got my little notebook out and started to write down how I was feeling. Two days later I met with my supervisor to discuss this before I attended another training session that evening. For the whole hour I talked through my reflections I made, challenges I experienced and the way that I dealt with these "in the moment". It did make me question the culture in which I would be working in and if I wanted to continue being a part of it, but I was reassured that although not acceptable, some of the comments made is due to a lack of knowledge and understanding around psychology and not to be taken personally towards me. We also considered that I had not met all the academy staff members that I would be working in so having the opportunity to reflect on this experience early on in my placement journey was useful to plan for similar encounters in the future.

"One of the elements of this encounter in particular but we discussed during supervision was around having no practical experience with playing football. Sure, I had grown up playing sport and to a county level with basketball, so I understood the demands of playing to a high level and I hold an adequate amount of football knowledge, but I've never played football

before. Maybe I won't be able to build a strong working rapport with both the staff and the

players because I haven't experienced it first-hand".

The notion of self and meta-reflection to make sense of these critical moments made me realise how important being honest and authentic to myself during my placement was. When I made decisions that were not aligned with who I was my self-perception and identity felt threatened and I struggled to make sense of them (McEwan, Tod & Eubank, 2019). What I realised was that I do not need to "pretend" that I have played football before just to "fit in". I will never be able to relate to the players with football experience and that is ok. My role is to provide psychological support, to assist with the person and player development at the club. Engaging in regular supervision increased my self-awareness and allowed me to be mindful of how I was reacting to the responses of others'. For example, at this point I was very self-critical about "being a woman" working in football and delivering psychology as it was fairly new to the club (Goldman & Gervis, 2021).

Exercise psychology:

One of my first applied 1-to-1 consulting experiences in exercise psychology came towards the latter of my first year on the professional doctorate, with The HERizon Project. At this point I already had a considerable amount of applied 1-to-1 consulting experience in sport, but this was the first time I was delivering this to an applied exercise psychology population. The delivery of this psychological support depended on the philosophical approach of my supervisor (a requisite of the HERizon project) of needs supportive counselling. I engaged in formal training over a 3-day period to establish my understanding and knowledge of this approach. During the main trial, it was evident that one of the participants had a history of

previous mental health issues, in which she received support from a therapist for a period. I was aware of this prior to the consultancy sessions starting. During one of the sessions, she suggested that she felt low and did not feel like exercising. Below is an example from my reflective diary throughout this period:

"I froze. I didn't know what the best way was to respond. My immediate response was to ask how she was feeling and why she felt that way, but I didn't know if it was best to just carry on with the session structure as planned as she'd completed all of the exercises the week before, so this was quite unexpected, and I didn't know how to deal with it in this moment"

Immediately after the session, I contacted my university supervisor as I felt confused as to whether the support I provided was "useful" or even helped. A conversation on the phone was scheduled for the following morning. We decided that I should keep a mental health log to monitor these, and any further comments made. It was important to continue reflecting with my supervisor and consider a referral if necessary. Feeling like "I didn't know what to say" and "I'm not sure with what I said it if it was right or even helped her" is consistent with many trainee practitioners' who experience anxiety and worry as to whether they have best supported their client (Tod. 2007). It comes as no surprise that trainee practitioners therefore adopt a rigid "expert" approach with the need to solve the "problem" straight away during service delivery (Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009). Meta-reflection validated that my responses during consultancy aligned with the needs supportive counselling approach, as I asked a reflective question such as:

"Can I ask, what is contributing to your current experiences of feeling low?... thanks for sharing this [client name], I can imagine how difficult this is for you".

Sport (football) psychology:

The next applied consultancy reflection came towards the latter of my RAFC placement experiences. I was experiencing a combination of unhelpful emotions, like being overwhelmed, anxiety and worry but I tried to interpret them in a facilitative way to be open to a new consultancy challenge:

"I felt like there was nothing more I could do at the academy; I had been there for 2.5 seasons now I felt like I wasn't progressing as a person or a practitioner. I spoke to Martin, my supervisor about this and concluded that it was the right decision for me to leave the club at the end of this season and seek a new and exciting opportunity in a different area of sport or exercise. In all honesty, I felt tired, I felt overworked and to some extent felt underappreciated, I just was not enjoying my work in football anymore".

It is not uncommon for trainee sport and exercise psychologists to feel this way when the get to a certain timepoint in their development (e.g., Pocwardowski. 2019; Waumsley, Hemmings & Payne, 2010). At this time, I was considering leaving this role for a while as it was clear that I was not making further professional progress. For example, time constraints, freedom within my delivery and being the only member of staff providing psychological support, so it was difficult "critically reflect" on my decision making. Not only that, from a personal perspective, I felt like I was "losing myself" and not being authentic, which took a major influence on my well-being and mental health. I mentioned this to Martin during supervision meetings (Martin, Quartiroli & Wagstaff, 2022). It took me a while to feel comfortable and confident with whether I was making the right decision to leave as I was not

transferring to another organisation to deliver psychological support. This was one of the main reasons why it did take me so long to leave the role, as I was relying on this employment for consistent service delivery. I felt a sudden urge of guilt that I was leaving the academy players that I was currently supporting 'hanging', especially if I was to leave during mid-season. It all came down to avoiding the final conversation with the academy manager and in the back of my mind I knew that it would be a challenge for the club to 'fill my role accordingly'. Displaying a duty of care for the players and staff during my role was also carried over with transitioning out of the role. I felt responsible to support the club with finding a replacement, who was competent with supporting the players and be confident that the service delivery was effective. However, on this reflection, it was clear that I was not prioritising my own interests or even engaging them at all. I believe that this was because of the lack of self-belief and understanding of myself (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004).

"I was ready to put myself first. I was ready for a new challenge in applied consultancy. I knew that due to my current experiences, but I didn't want to go straight into another organisation to provide psychological support, but I was willing to continue supporting athletes all those that participated in sport from a 1-to-1 consulting basis".

Exercise psychology – private practice client:

From first providing service delivery in an exercise space from The HERizon Project, in July 2022 I had recently spoken to one of the personal trainers at my local gym. It was important to note that at this timepoint, I was already offering 1-to-1 consultancy support from a private practice lens. The personal trainer highlighted that one of his clients may need some

psychological support with her exercise behaviours. After gathering some brief background information about her, a couple of days after I met with this "potential client" and an intake session happened. She spoke about some critical moments that had previously and recently occurred in her life and disclosed that she was currently living with an exercise addiction (McGrane, et al., 2015). The intake call took around 45 minutes. During this intake call I was mindful of several comments that Kate was presenting to me, around her exercise addiction, such as over exercising every morning and evening, feeling like she had not exercised enough that day, and turning to exercise during the COVID-19 lockdown when she was diagnosed with depression. Whilst paying attention to what Kate was saying, I made a mental health log to try to make sense of these comments, however, if this situation occurred earlier in my doctorate training, I would have felt obliged to try and solve her problems straight away. Being patient and listening to what Kate was currently experiencing allowed me to pick up on comments made in the needs analysis session (s). I did not feel obliged to jump in provide all the answers. I experienced lower feelings of anxiety and an increase of self-belief through acting with Kate as opposed to "fixing the problem" (McEwan, Tod & Eubank, 2019). Using this session to build the rapport with Kate, understand her history and goals, set expectations and establish ethical boundaries (Keegan, 2010; 2015).

"I was mindful of how [client name] was feeling, I provided the open and safe space for to express how she was currently feeling, which was communicated in a chronological way of where this first started. I actively listened to [client name] to try to make sense of what was being said and going on in her current social world"

After this intake call, I immediately contacted my university supervisor to discuss the comments Kate had made and whether it was in her best interests to continue providing

support. I was open and honest with my supervisor suggesting that I felt like I could continue to support Kate moving forward with exercise behaviours, such as creating a healthy relationship with exercise and exercising her positive well-being. Discussions of a potential referral to a local clinical therapist occurred and my awareness of the signs and symptoms with mental health were concurrent. Partly due to supporting a referral to an external therapist at RAFC (refer to case study three) and through attendance of CPD webinars on mental health in sport and exercise. Additionally, awareness of the key competencies and boundaries in applied practice, such as compliance with legal, ethical, and professional practices for self and others, including HCPC's standards of conduct, performance and ethics was vital to make the correct decisions ethically for myself and if support continued for Kate (BPS, 2018).

The start of my teaching experience:

One of my first teaching experiences ended up becoming the main discussion point in my teaching and training case study, The HERizon Project. As this was at the start of my teaching journey, it did not come at a surprise that I experienced many challenges and learning points that have contributed to my growth as a teacher to this day. For example, student silence and disengagement. During the second teaching session, I asked the students an open question, but I did not receive a response. It was silent. Straight away my default response to move onto the next slide and pretend that it did not happen:

"I was nervous, I was embarrassed, and I didn't know what to do in that moment. By providing the students with the answer quickly and moving onto the next slide I was hoping that everybody didn't notice"

One of my supervisors was observing in this teaching session (as it was part of the HERizon Project training days) and it provided an avenue for discussion during our next supervision meeting. My supervisor asked me how did I feel during that moment and wanted to find out as to why I moved on so quickly as soon as I asked the question? I responded but I felt quite uncomfortable and embarrassed that nobody had answered. I took myself back to experiences as a student sitting in a lecture where the lecturer would ask questions, and nobody would respond. I placed myself in my lecturers' shoes with how they must have felt. After providing the answer to the students and moving on I felt safe, I felt comfortable, and I felt like this was the best way to deal with this moment at the time. Supervision allowed me to explore and understand alternative ways to encourage student interaction, especially when there is silence within those moments. For example, by staying with that experience and those feelings in silence to give the students an opportunity to answer would be an alternative option. Considering that students may need a couple of minutes to think about how to respond, but if this was not the case, I could have provided an alternative way to ask the question. As I asked a broad, open question, a closed question could have fostered a quicker response followed by asking for justification.

Teaching in a large lecture hall:

Later in my professional doctorate, I acquired a paid role at LJMU *sport and exercise psychology sessional cover,* where I picked up teaching sessions across the L4-L6 on the undergraduate programme. Part of this role consisted of teaching a group of 150-200 second year students on exercise motivation in a large theatre lecture hall. A similar experienced occurred as prior, I asked the students an open question regarding the self-determination theory (SDT) and not one student responded (SDT Ryan & Deci, 2005; 2008). The room was

silent. Initially (again!) I felt uncomfortable and just wanted the ground to swallow me up as so many pairs of eyes were just staring at me. It took me a couple of seconds to compose myself, but I did feel like I adopted more of positive approach:

"It was just silent. You couldn't hear a pin drop. At this point I just wanted the ground to swallow me up. I took a couple of seconds to breathe I think I took two breaths in an hour and during that time I visualised what I wanted to do. The lecture hall was split up into three sections so from that point I communicated the question in a different way that was more accessible for the students (I gave the students three options) ... At that point I asked someone to respond from all three sections of the lecture hall and I made it clear that I wasn't moving on from the question until I had a response from each"

The progress that I have made with teaching clearly demonstrates my perseverance and self-belief in my teaching abilities (Sadler, 2013). I felt proud that I managed to think on my feet and control this large lecture hall during the amidst of this silence. Although, it took a couple of minutes for the first section of students to give an answer, I felt comfortable in that moment. During supervision I reflected on this current and previous teaching encounter, paying close attention to my feelings when presented with silence. I could feel the nerves, anxiety and increase in heart rate "taking over" during both encounters but what helped was focusing on my breathing to refocus and offer an alternative to giving the students the answer straight away.

Teaching the towards the end of semester two/focus group lecture:

This teaching experience occurred towards the latter of my full-time lecturing role at LJMU, during the last lecture that I delivered to Level 5 Sports Psychology undergraduate students in semester 2 specifically on focus groups. I taught this group of students at Level 4 and during semester one in Level 5 on various modules, so a teacher-student rapport had already been established. I would say that the students were familiar with my teaching style, and I was aware of collectively (and individually) of their engagement during my lectures. I delivered content from PowerPoint slides to support the students with their upcoming qualitative analysis (e.g., understanding focus groups) assignment. At this timepoint, I was mindful that delivering from PowerPoint slides felt like I was being incongruent with my values and beliefs as I was solely depending upon using a teacher-centred model of instruction (Goodlad, 1984; Knapp & Glen, 1996).

"Something just didn't feel right. I was delivering from the PowerPoint lecture slides which I know is essential for the students upcoming qualitative assignment but it just doesn't feel natural to me anymore. I have taught this group of students numerous times over the course of the last two years so I feel like I have a strong working rapport with the majority of them"

"I think this calls for a trial and error approach to start to integrate teaching strategies and methods that fit more within my philosophy of practise for example, unstructured student discussions around the topic area. It was time to start taking that leap we've been teaching to challenge myself and grow into the pedagogy that's congruent with who I am"

Whilst this was a consideration for future teaching delivery and something that could not be changed immediately from one teaching session to the next, speaking to my supervisor about

how I felt during that lecture helped to understand how I can bridge the gap and move towards authentic teaching. My supervisor posed a question of, "can you still be congruent with where you are with teaching?". I took a few seconds to consider that question and think about where I currently am with my teaching journey. Similar to my applied work, the context in which I teach, such as a small group of masters' students compared to 200+ second-year undergraduate students where the delivery will be different. There were still times that I felt nervous during lectures, especially if I was delivering core psychology (that is not my expertise). In a matter of fact, I particularly noticed that these feelings of anxiety and incompetence tend to arise when I deliver on the core psychology modules. I struggle to teach core developmental, social, and cognitive psychology that is not related to sport or exercise, so when planning these lectures, I try to incorporate examples that can be applied to the sporting world. My supervisor shared similar experiences of teaching a social psychology and individual differences lecture where he also did not know much of the content. By understanding his approach to delivering the lecture and how it aligned with his own practice philosophy helped with congruence. His experiences have provided me with an insight of aligning my own teaching pedagogy and feel confident with teaching in the future.

"This supervision has given me hope. It's gave me the understanding and the confirmation but my experiences are valid and I am continuously learning how to grow and become a better teacher to enrich the student experience. I'm excited to see how I will continue to progress as a lecturer moving forward"

My biggest learning experience with teaching so far is that it's ok to be vulnerable, to have the self-belief in myself and continue to strive for authenticity (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; McEwan, Tod & Eubank, 2019).

Research experiences

As part of my meta-reflection experiences, I want to illuminate some critical learning points the I have encountered throughout my engagement with research on the professional doctorate. This section will finish with a 1000-word summary and brief overview of my practice philosophy relative to the three applied case studies.

Systematic review:

The systematic review was one of the first piece of research assignments that I started as I knew that it would be the most difficult and the longest to complete. This reflection focuses particularly on the initial phases of deciding on which topic to focus on. I was unsure whether I wanted to conduct this review within football or exercise psychology, so I began to explore some topics that I was interested in, such as competitive anxiety, exercise motivation etc. One of the first steps that would help me to narrow my review topic down involved conducting a literature search on the systematic reviews that had already been established as well as gather an understanding of the areas yet to be looked at. I spent a considerable amount of time to conduct a thorough search and I still could not find a gap in the existing literature:

"I was eager to start the systematic review process early as I knew that it would be the assignment that I would struggle with the most. I was currently experiencing a lot of anxiety I'm worried around the uncertainty of conducting this systematic review. I was searching for what felt like hours and even days, but it felt like I wasn't getting anywhere".

After becoming overwhelmed with this process, I reached out to my main supervisor, and we discussed some alternative ways to help narrow down a topic of interest. My supervisor suggested to look more broadly at my current applied consulting experiences. I delved into what was currently happening at RAFC. I revisited my reflections and paid close attention to a recent encounter that involved the academy manager and coaches use of language to the players of mental toughness and resilience. A lot of research had been explored around these psychological constructs but a systematic review in football was yet to be completed. I shared these interests with my supervisor, and we began to build a protocol for the review:

"At the time of deciding on a phenomenon of interest it was based solely on my applied practitioner experiences (practice informed research). I wasn't sure whether this was the right decision, but I was keen to discover what these elements mean in football".

Here, it is evident that I was unaware of my research philosophy of practice, and I was solely depending upon current applied experiences to inform my research. It comes as no surprise that when trainee practitioners experience incompetency and incongruence in their consulting practice philosophy that this correlates into the research space too. I was introduced to the basic of philosophy, such as what philosophical assumptions and research paradigms underpinned quantitative and qualitative research, but I did not know what that looked like for me yet (Creswell & Poth, 2013).

Researcher philosophy:

The awareness of who I am as a person, a practitioner, a teacher, and a researcher only came to light at the beginning of 2023 during supervision, which was towards the latter of my

professional doctorate journey. It was this point there I began to connect all these identities up and started to make sense of my own social world…

"It was finally starting to come together. It was like I had these separate jigsaw pieces and I finally began to make the connections about who Chiara was and what it meant to be a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. I felt so relieved but this discovery was coming to life and I appreciate the support from my supervisor that helped me to understand and come to terms with this"

I was in the middle of conducting my empirical paper two when these identities started to align, I was finding enjoyment with engaging in research and I was able to find purpose for conducting and (potentially) publishing research from my professional doctorate. Since my undergraduate studies I have always enjoyed exploring qualitative research, but now understanding which ontological and epistemological position I connect with has helped with this alignment and how I view research, especially data findings for empirical paper two:

"Ever since undergraduate level I have always favoured towards qualitative data it's only now that I can understand why I gravitate more to this approach… I align with interpretivism, which explains why I've conducted research using thematic and narrative analysis… by utilising ontological realism and epistemological constructivism, as a researcher it helps me to understand and interpret participant social worlds. For example, how are individual experiences socially constructed and how do these individuals really see the world?"

This final reflective piece attempts to illuminates the growth of my practice philosophy, using my applied consultancy experiences (the three case studies that I submitted) as a vehicle. This awareness of my applied practice philosophy helped to draw philosophical parallels for my teaching and research work. By capturing these "identities" aids congruence and consistency with the work I do as a sport and exercise psychologist.

All three-case study reflective accounts represent sport, exercise, wellbeing, personal and performance needs with adolescent individuals. There is evidence of my personal and professional growth, such as an increase in self-belief and self-awareness to best cater for individual client needs and since understanding my practice philosophy my work is more congruent. Throughout this reflective account I will be taking the reader on a journey of my developments and challenges from case study one through to case study three, including critical learning points and considerations for future practice.

Case study one occurred towards the end of my first year on the professional doctorate and it was the first consultancy experience in exercise psychology. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, this opportunity was part of a PhD home-intervention project to help increase female adolescent PA levels during the COVID-19 UK lockdown and the psychological support was a small but valuable part of the project shared with other trainee sport and exercise psychologists (Cowley et al., 2021a). As a project requisite it was expected to deliver in a needs supportive counselling way through training from my supervisor (Cowley et al. 2021b; Texieira et al. 2020). For the project and delivery of psychological support to the adolescent females looking to increase their PA adherence, understanding the fundamentals of the needs supportive counselling approach from theory to practice meant that I was obligated to follow my supervisors' philosophy rather than my own.

However, towards the end of the project, an opportunity to deliver two coping strategies to support the adolescent females after the intervention arose. At this point, an understanding of my practice philosophy would have been fundamental to choose strategies that were congruent and authentic with the way I work. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding and awareness led to choosing two strategies; mindfulness and positive self-talk based on my own previous delivery soundness without considering the philosophical distance between the two. Regular supervision to reflect on my practice philosophy, including my rationale for this consultancy decision occurred. My supervisor would encourage me to reflect on my understanding without questioning my current competence levels (Hutter et al. 2015; Knowles et al. 2007).

Case study two was chosen based on my applied consultancy work at RAFC with an U14 academy player during my second season working at the club. Harry's father and team coach approached me on separate occasions to discuss his current decrease in performance and low confidence levels during competition. Although, exploring Harry's confidence and impact on performance was the initial consultancy focus, an unexpected shift resulted in him wanting to quit football altogether as he just was not enjoying the game. I was not sure with how best to support Harry and I felt philosophically challenged at this point. As the season went on, he became disengaged with the support that I was providing, and his parents were unsure with how best to support his GCSEs and potential transition out of football. If I am completely honest, I thought that during this consultancy I knew what my practice philosophy was, but retrospectively looking back, I had only considered part of what my philosophy looked like in practice (Knowles et al. 2007; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). For example, my understanding of theoretical orientations, the consultant

role and mode of practice was clear, such as, using REBT in a practitioner-led way and enhancing Harry's well-being and performance as part of the intervention goals was clear. However, this understanding is somewhat "invalid" if my internal and stable core beliefs and values were missing, which they were (Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011; Poczwardowski et al., 2014; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004).

Case study three also took place at RAFC with a U18s player but the focus was supporting Jorge with weight management. This support consisted of his emotional wellbeing, exercise, sporting, and broader lifestyle challenges (Lindsay et al. 2007) whilst navigating working collaboratively in an MDT. I struggled to determine who the client was as I was working with Jorge, the academy manager, the S&C and at times, the physiotherapist (Sharp & Hodge, 2011). I adopted a practitioner-led approach whilst delivering CBT as Jorge had a limited understanding of how to change (Beck, 1963; Cushing & Steele, 2012; Luiselli, 2012). Again, at this time of consultancy, I was unaware of my practice philosophy, which would have helped me to manage boundaries and expectations with the MDT coherently so we could have all best supported Jorge with his weight management, wellbeing, and performance needs.

Conclusion

This reflective account has documented the development and growth of my practice philosophy throughout my professional doctorate journey. I am aware that this is a life-long process, but in the process of writing it has, for me, highlighted what is at the heart of my authenticity as a person and practitioner. I am now reflecting at a deeper ultra-critical level (e.g., Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010) to understand who I am and how my internal and stable

beliefs and values mirror in practice but also with my behaviours in general life. My beliefs that i) growth requires empathy and connection, ii) empathy in the working relationship needs to be central, iii) adverse scenarios provide an opportunity to grow, change and develop, iv) the past influences the present, v) a desire to help individuals develop as a person and a performer and vi) personal disclosure helps at times with empathy are supported by trust, compassion, empathy, and growth as my core values (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). Now, this understanding allows me to establish the practitioner-client rapport and deliver support authentically through a flexible mode of practice way, dependent upon the context (Chandler et al., 2016; Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011), and to do it with confidence. Although, not concrete but ever-growing, exploring who I am at a much deeper level, allowed me to be vulnerable and honest about the impact of my personal experiences. This vulnerability has begun to compliment the way I approach, practice, and evaluate the sport and exercise psychological support I offer at a more authentic and credible level (McEwan, Tod & Eubank, 2019). Achieving a deeper understanding and appreciation of my beliefs and values by the end of this professional doctorate journey has allowed me to reflect on previous consultancy intervention and theoretical orientation choices to learn how to be authentic with these decisions in future consultancy. I am a better practitioner for it.

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