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Identity

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Chapter Highlights

- *Whilst English professional football features large on the landscape of the contemporary sporting world, little scientific research has been carried out into the inner workings of its organisational settings*
- *Those scholars who have breached the inner sanctums of the professional game report a series of cultural norms based upon traditional working-class values, hyper-masculine “shop-floor” relations, and authoritarian managerial practices*
- *Some argue that the norms and values evident inside professional football are no different to those in a range of other all-male, working-class occupational locales*
- *Social theory allows us to analyse the constituent elements of footballing culture, the potential impact that this can have on identity formation, and how players negotiate and contest the cultural expectations placed upon them.*

Introduction

Social identity is a concept that has come to be much talked about within the orbits of social science, yet which has proved notoriously difficult to explain. Widely adopted across a range of contexts it is a term which is used to denote a variety of themes and ideas primarily regarding the relationship between the self and society, and the processes of identification that take place via everyday interaction. Of central interest to writers in the sociology of sport (and indeed beyond) has been the extent to which modern-day sports represent key sites for the formation of identities.

(Parker and Harris, 2009, p.1).

Within the field of social science the concept of identity has been explored by a range of scholars and in association with a variety of disciplinary areas (see Jenkins, 2008). Drawing upon the work of social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) whose influential book *Mind, Self and Society* was published posthumously in 1934, it is possible to gain insight into the fundamental principles of how identities are formed and how individuals present themselves in different social settings. Equally important to any discussion of identity construction are issues of affiliation and attachment. In terms of the formation of the self, for example, we must consider how and why people identify themselves in relation to those around them. Where wider processes of interaction are concerned, we must recognize that

identity is not solely about the self, but about how we construct ourselves in accordance with broader social processes through communication and negotiation. Together, all of these elements comprise the basis of identity formation (see Parker and Harris, 2009; MacClancy, 1992).

The social processes that guide our individual and collective identities are also heavily influenced by a broader range of issues relating to things such as race/ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality and religion. Locating this within a sporting context we can see how the practice and consumption of sport, physical activity and leisure shape our understandings of who we are and how others perceive us (see Harris and Parker, 2009). According to Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield and Bradley (2002), sport offers opportunities for the display of similarities between the identities of individuals and groups, whilst simultaneously providing a platform upon which notions of difference might be demonstrated. With all of these things in mind we may pose the following question: How might the study of sport aid our understanding of identity construction and how are individual and collective identities within sporting contexts represented and maintained?

As a site for social inquiry, professional football has been explored in relation to a plethora of issues and debates. Indeed, the global dissemination of football has given rise to a whole range of investigative studies including those focusing upon the construction and (re)presentation of identity construction. Central here have been analyses of: national identity and nationalism (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009; Tomlinson and Young, 2006; Vincent and Harris, 2014), race and ethnicity, (Burdsey, 2004; Cleland and Cashmore, 2014), and gender identity and sexuality (Caudwell, 1999, 2011; Harris, 2005; Jeanes, 2011). In this sense, football provides an avenue via which a range of identity-related questions can be explored. What, we might ask, can the professional game tell us about the formation of identities? How do individuals come to define themselves through participation in professional football? And how does football club culture shape the lives of those who frequent its occupational locales?

In order to address some of these questions, the present chapter seeks to utilise football as a lens through which to view identity formation in an attempt to provide an understanding of how elite players make sense of who they are and how they fit into the social world around them. Football clubs provide an ideal environment through which to explore the construction and maintenance of sporting identities and by drawing upon conceptual studies of professional footballing life the chapter examines the cultural norms which shape the way in which player identities emerge. Explorations of football club culture often give rise to discussions surrounding the concept of identity and, in particular, how a “preferred” or “expected” sense of self prevails within this occupational environment. To this end, the chapter also examines traditional power relations within the professional game and the structural codes and mechanisms via which “core” beliefs and values are promoted and

maintained. In turn, the chapter draws upon the work of social theorists in order to analyse the constituent elements of footballing culture, the potential impact that this can have on identity formation, and how players may contest the norms and values placed upon them. To begin our discussion, we turn to an exploration of some of the core beliefs that are present within that culture and how these might impact the everyday lives of players and those around them.

Football club culture: Norms and values

The concept of identity is complex and multifaceted, yet it is widely acknowledged that individual identities are formed through a process of socialisation whereby individuals learn to adhere to the social norms present in their cultural surroundings. Socialisation is a process that provides individuals with the opportunity to learn to behave in ways that allow them to gain acceptance and status from significant others within their social group (Horne, Tomlinson, Whannel and Woodward, 2013). Central to this process is an acknowledgement of the norms and values that are attached to specific cultures, organizations and institutions.

Studies that have examined identity construction within professional football have sought to highlight how individual athletes become socialized through interacting with their peers, managers and coaches (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Parker, 1995, 1996a; Roderick, 2003). For footballers at the early stages of their careers, the recognition and adoption of a specific set of cultural norms and values is crucial to identity formation and to the attainment of professional player status. Andrew Parker's (1996a, 2001) analysis of traineeship in English professional football outlines the norms and values that encompass the life of young footballers, and the (largely implicit) behavioural codes to which they must adhere. A passion for the game, an unrivalled dedication to training, a forceful "will-to-win", an acceptance of work-place relations (i.e. authoritarianism and subservience), and the willingness to conform to the "official" rules and regulations of football club life are highlighted as key ingredients in the lives of young players. Collectively these values underpin a powerful set of cultural norms which are reinforced through interactions with peers, coaches and managers on a day-to-day basis. They also encompass the kind of "professional attitude" that is expected from young players (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Parker, 2006; Roderick 2006) which, in turn, is often associated with a series of desirable "character" traits (Parker, 1996a). The display of a good professional attitude and the formation of good character thus serves as a guideline for clubs in relation to the willingness of players to accept certain norms and values, and provides evidence of the construction of an identity that is closely aligned to the wider culture of the professional game (Roderick, 2003).

Whilst the majority of young players within football adhere to such norms, motivation to do so may vary (Parker, 2001). Moreover, attitudes towards club culture may fluctuate over the course of a player's career (Roderick, 2003). In this sense, we must acknowledge that

footballing identities are unstable, fluid and subject to change. Indeed, the construction of social identity within this context can be demonstrated through the shifting patterns of interaction between individual players and significant others (i.e. coaches, managers and fellow athletes). Cashmore and Parker (2003) note that the formation and maintenance of stable workplace identities, and the successful acquisition of a long-term career within professional football are largely established through 'heavily prescribed workplace behaviours' (p. 219) which, in a disciplinary sense, ensure that the required attitudes and character traits are established early on in a footballer's career. These behaviours provide the initial step to acquiring a sense of acceptance from significant others within what is, after all, a rather precarious profession (Roderick, 2006c).

Professionalism, character and workplace identity

The subcultural environment that surrounds professional football has a strong influence upon players' social practices and processes of learning (Christensen, Laursen and Sørensen, 2011). The concept of a good professional attitude within the everyday lives of footballers has historically constituted an acceptance of traditional and often mundane working practices (i.e. the cleaning of boots, the preparation of kit for senior players, the servicing of training equipment) and the physical rigours of playing and performing (Parker, 2000b). To adopt a good professional attitude within elite football, and to display an appropriate sense of professionalism, rests predominantly upon the ability of young players to adhere to a certain set of behavioural norms underpinned by the demonstration of moral character and a strong (and unquestioning) work ethic. Of course, it is not unusual for notions of professionalism to focus as much upon the formation of attitudes and behaviours as the acquisition of specific skills (Fournier, 1999). In football, coaches and managers often define a good attitude as that which spawns a work ethic that incorporates a particular emphasis on self-improvement. By displaying "professional" ideals, young players are often looked upon more favourably by managers and coaches thereby giving themselves a greater chance of success within the game – providing, of course, that they also demonstrate the required levels of technical competence and expertise (Cushion and Jones, 2006).

Despite the positive behavioural traits attached to displays of professionalism, unintended consequences surrounding the demonstration of a "good professional attitude" (specifically amongst youth footballers) have been identified. In their study of the subcultural environment surrounding elite youth Danish football, Mette Christensen and Aarhus Sørensen (2009) indicate that a strong adherence to the core values of professional club culture make it increasingly difficult for young players within this context to pursue any sense of educational progression. The ambition to succeed as a professional, the possibility of losing recognition within the team, and the potential threat of unemployment, all impact academic aspiration and attainment (Christensen and Sørensen, 2009). Other studies have similarly revealed that an interest in education, or the demonstration of academic ability, for young academy athletes

may potentially hinder their prospects of “making the grade” as professionals (see McGillivray, 2006; McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh, 2005; Parker, 2000a; Platts and Smith, 2009). Indeed, Parker (2000a) highlights how trainees in his study who demonstrated too much interest in academic work ran the risk of being chastised and ridiculed ‘by coaches and players alike, on account of their ambitious educational interests’ (p. 73). By seriously engaging with an educational trajectory, these trainees were seen by significant others to be forsaking their identity as (and commitment to becoming) dedicated professionals and, because of this, educational pursuit was perceived by many of those concerned as a barrier to professional player status.

Whilst such research highlights the negative perception of educational provision within football, McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) indicate that in more recent years there has been an increasing expansion of educational opportunities open to professional players both young and old. That said, we should exercise caution when considering the level of educational engagement amongst young players given that clubs have historically been criticised for failing to adequately cater for their post-career needs. Moreover, previous research has indicated that despite the realization by youth trainees that few players graduate to the professional ranks, the majority fail to maximize the educational opportunities made available to them (Monk, 2000). Though, as we have seen, the emphasis on educational attainment has certainly increased of late, it is clear that there remain strong implicit messages within the everyday working practices of professional clubs that perpetuate a restrictive view of the value and worth of education per se (Monk and Russell, 2000).

Masculinity, ‘banter’, and shop floor culture

Intertwined with notions of professionalism are a series of heavily gendered norms, values and behaviours that are rooted in what is more widely recognized as the hegemonic (dominant and pervasive) masculine culture surrounding professional football (Parker, 2000b). Indeed, an acceptance of and adherence to these dominant patterns of masculinity is often considered a central component of youth trainee identity (Parker, 1996a, 2000b). Here young players are expected to buy into an institutional logic based upon a series of masculine codes that are commonly propagated within working class occupational locales through what Parker and others have called “shop-floor” language and interaction. For example, in his in-depth analysis of football youth traineeship, Parker (2006) indicates that, central to the enactment of everyday life within this context is the ‘stylised adoption of a sexually explicit and often highly derogatory vocabulary which ... [is] typically characterised by razor-sharp wit’ (pp. 695-696). In turn, a series of “unofficial” behavioural norms exist amongst young players which manifest themselves most clearly, Parker (2000b, p.61) argues, in the desire to embody the hyper-masculine practices of superstar status such as ‘fast cars, designer clothes, financial affluence, social indulgence and sexual promiscuity’; values that are inevitably shaped by the all-male subculture which footballers typically inhabit. The presence

of a series of both official and unofficial behavioural norms demonstrates the contradictory nature of the complex cultural environment which young players must negotiate (Parker, 2001). Added to this are issues of physical and personal integrity. Roderick, Waddington and Parker (2000) suggest that players who openly admit to injury face the prospect of taunts from fellow players; a practice which commonly fuels speculative “banter” around the sexuality of the individuals concerned. In turn, players who express anxieties around their physical fitness due to injury and/or ill-health may face the social stigma of becoming labelled idle and non-committal (Roderick, 2006).

For young players in particular, the safe negotiation of one’s own masculine prowess is an integral part of assimilating oneself into football club culture (Parker, 2000). Equally important are the lines of hierarchical control, authority and status that exist between players, managers and coaches (Embrey, 1986). Although it must be acknowledged that football cannot be accurately characterized by way of a single, all-encompassing cultural climate, research that has explored notions of authority and control within this context has provided vital clues as to how the professional game exhibits a commonly held set of managerial beliefs and practices and it is to a further examination of these that we now turn.

Managerial authoritarianism and control

Studies that have focused on identity construction amongst young professional footballers have indicated that, despite the more recent introduction of regulated and systematic approaches to player development, authoritarian workplace practices continue to feature large within the day-to-day routines of club life (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Kelly and Waddington, 2006; Parker, 1995, 1996a). Seamus Kelly and Ivan Waddington’s (2006) research surrounding managerial control within the professional game indicates that abuse, intimidation and violence are utilised by managers to enforce authority over players. Other studies have highlighted similar uses of power - and the subsequent lack of agency - experienced by young footballers in relation to issues concerning both personal and professional development (Daniel, 2004; Pitchford, Brackenridge, Bringer, Cockburn, Nutt, Pawlaczek and Russell, 2004; Thorpe, 2004). Cushion and Jones’ (2006) investigation into the subculture of youth football and the trainee academy setting indicates that such practices and values are ‘deeply rooted in the culture of professional soccer, with harsh, authoritarian, and often belligerent coaching behaviour viewed as a necessary aspect of preparing young players for the rigors of the [professional] game’ (p. 148). Further work by Cushion and Jones (2014) provides insight into the way in which young footballers may be inclined to demonstrate an unquestioning acceptance of subordination as a consequence of the fact that such behaviours are often seen as crucial to the establishment of a sense of legitimacy amongst peers, managers and coaches alike.

The pervasive presence of authoritarianism within professional football is not something that players must simply endure but one which they must also respond to in a positive manner. Although (on the face of it) young players may be accepting of verbal chastisement and physical punishment, feelings of anxiety, isolation and occupational uncertainty are commonplace within professional football (Parker, 2006). Similar to other workplace environments (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Piderit and Ashford, 2003), such feelings can create a culture of silence whereby players are unwilling to voice their concerns for fear of the impact that this might have on their career progression. Indeed, the hierarchal structure and organizational characteristics that serve to promote an authoritarian/subservient culture within football clubs is built upon the assumption that young players in particular are unlikely to express their discomfort with such practices due to their lack of credibility and presence within their respective organizations.

Despite the adoption of a more standardized approach to youth development in English professional football, differences in organizational practice are evident from club to club (Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson, 2010). Although traditional authoritarian approaches to management still appear prevalent throughout the game, measures have been taken to ensure that abusive behaviour is eliminated. The development and implementation of codes of conduct for players and coaches, the adoption of reflective diaries for monitoring development, the introduction of Education and Welfare Officers in academy settings, and the management of player conduct have all been introduced in order to facilitate the holistic development of young players (Brackenridge, Bringer, Cockburn, Nutt, Pitchford, Russell and Pawlaczek, 2004). Yet notwithstanding the potential advantages that these changes bring, it would appear that athletes themselves have seldom played a part in consultations concerning such change, once again demonstrating the lack of agency surrounding the lives of young players (Pitchford et al., 2004).

As we have seen, the literature surrounding youth development in English professional football provides some indication of the cultural norms and values that are present within this context and how these serve to shape and influence the working lives of young players. However, it would be naïve to assume that all players readily accept the imposition of such norms or that identity construction within this environment is devoid of resistance or contestation. Indeed, it is to these issues that the final section of our discussion turns.

Sustaining, resisting and contesting identities

It was a wretched environment, which I compare ... to an open prison, at least as far as I was concerned. And yet my years with Wolves [Wolverhampton Wanderers] were the most satisfying of my career. This is no contradiction, I loved the club, but not the managerial dictates and petty forms of discipline imposed on us, the players.

(Dogan, 1980, p.3).

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. Prisons serve as a clear example, providing we appreciate that what is prison-like about prisons is found in institutions whose members have broken no laws.

(Goffman, 1961, p.11).

Taken at face value these two statements appear poles apart. One is a personal reflection on professional footballing experience; the other an extract from the opening paragraph of a sociological best-seller. The only obvious similarity between the two is that both make reference to prison settings, or more accurately, both use analogies concerning 'prison-like' conditions in order to illustrate further their descriptive aims. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals a deeper connection in that evident here also are aspects of commonality which, in terms of organizational procedure, suggest that just as the everyday features of "total institutional" life constitute some form of personal "restriction" and "closure", so too do the disciplinary and managerial dictates of professional football (Parker, 1996b).

As we have seen, the presence of clear cultural values perpetuated throughout the working lives of professional footballers, alongside the "closed" nature of the game's institutional settings, provides an environment in and through which a preferred sense of self can be defined and an "ideal" character, or identity (suitable to that cultural environment) promoted. Drawing upon the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-1982), Parker (1996a, 1996b) demonstrates the "enclosed" atmosphere that envelopes the working lives of young professional footballers, by illustrating the highly routinized and somewhat segregated nature of their everyday existence (see also Gearing, 1999).

Of course, in reality, it would be misleading to suggest that Goffman's (1961) work on total institutions is directly relevant to English professional football. For one thing, his analysis relies heavily upon establishments which revolve around involuntary membership, and for another, his findings make no specific reference to sporting contexts. But in terms of the wider

conceptual inferences which Goffman (1961) makes concerning the range of institutions within our society and the varying degrees of “totality” which they exhibit, his work serves as a useful theoretical vehicle through which comparisons to working relations within English professional football might be drawn.

For Goffman (1961, p.15) all institutions (i.e. social settings where groups of people collectively adhere to a defined set of norms and values) provide something of a ‘captive world’ for their members and, as such, display what he calls ‘encompassing tendencies’. Depending on the official aims of each institution these tendencies, Goffman (1961, p.15) argues, diversify and fluctuate in severity. Primarily, his concerns are towards those institutions which demonstrate a high degree of totality in that they construct an obvious barrier to “social intercourse” for their “inmates”. What Goffman (1961, p.15-22) is quick to point out however, is that the institutional features he discusses are not exclusive to total institutions, nor are they shared by every one of them. Rather, for him, the hallmark of total institutional character is the ‘intense’ presence of a number of items from within a common ‘family of attributes’ relating to issues of closure, rationalization and bureaucracy (see also Burns, 1992; Foucault, 1977).

In terms of social restriction, life in and around professional football may be considered relatively low on “totality” in comparison to the kind of institutions upon which Goffman’s work is based. Yet, in an everyday sense, football clubs are not places that people can simply walk in and out of at their own discretion. They do have some element of closure, very often displaying perimeter walls or fences, for example, which offer protection against intrusion. Indeed, despite the benefits of public appeal, many teams choose to go about their everyday business amidst an atmosphere of relative seclusion in an attempt to keep the personal lives of players, and their training activities, away from the public and media gaze (see Tomlinson, 1983). Such practices inevitably mediate an air of discreteness, as do those of social restriction and residential isolation which have often accompanied notions of “apprenticeship” within the professional game. By adopting a restrictive approach to trainee socialization some football clubs have come to engender their own ‘encompassing tendencies’ which, in resembling the operational characteristics of a host of other institutional establishments, allow them to fall into one of the five “rough groupings” within which, Goffman (1961, p.16) suggests, the total institutions of our society can be classified. Whilst elements of this broad nomenclature deal with organizations as diverse as orphanages, hospitals, prisoner-of-war camps and monastic retreats, Goffman’s (1961, p.16) fourth category is concerned primarily with those institutions, ‘... purportedly established the better to pursue some work-like task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds ...’. Examples cited by Goffman (1961) here are army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps, and colonial compounds - a group which, for the purposes of the present discussion, also accommodates

the rule-bound (and often residential) confines of youth traineeship within English professional football.

Individuals within a range of occupational contexts seek to adhere closely to the values of their organizations, both for purposes of personal gain and the collective good of the organization itself. However, all institutions contain what Goffman (1961) refers to as an “underlife”, that is modes of social interaction that are contrary to the dominant aims and ideals of the organization which thus constitute a form of resistance (Manning, 2008). Literature examining resistance within sporting contexts predominantly focuses upon the power relations that exist between coach and athlete. Traditionally, scholarship within this domain has sought to exemplify the role of the athlete as a passive or docile “other”, one who identifies with, and strictly adheres to, the dominant cultural norms and authoritative behaviours of the coach (Jones, Glintmeyer and McKenzie, 2005; Manley, Palmer and Roderick, 2012; Johns and Johns, 2000; Shogan, 1999, Williams and Manley, 2014). This is not to say that athletes do not possess or demonstrate any form of agency, or the capacity to appropriate a mode of power that resists occupational identities bound by authoritative/subservient structures. Resistance to dominant power relations within elite sport have taken many forms and can be displayed through subtle modes of interaction that seek to subvert, challenge or distance individual conceptions of “self” from the overarching values in place. As we have seen, research has indicated that the use of humour or scornful cynicism has been adopted by athletes to question authority and to resist instances of domination (see Parker, 2006a; Purdy, Potrac and Jones, 2008; Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009; Potrac and Jones, 2011). In addition, the perceived physical capital or sporting prowess that individual athletes possess provides a sense of empowerment and capability to challenge or reverse decisions that are imposed by organizational hierarchies (Purdy et al., 2008). In this view, coaches are made aware that an authoritative statement seeking to discipline or exclude athletes who engage in resistant behaviours can be met, in some sporting cultures, with behaviours which further disrupt the organization hierarchies in question (Lok and de rond, 2013).

The manifestation of resistance to dominant ideals that encapsulate notions of “professional attitude”, “character” or “preferred identity” within football clubs may also be expressed in verbal and physical form (Cushion and Jones, 2006). For example, evidence of such resistance amongst youth players is provided by way of their disregard for official expectations around educational attainment, often displayed through a lack of engagement and attendance at educational institutions (Christensen and Sørensen, 2009; McGillivray, 2006; McGillivray et al., 2005; Parker, 2000a; Platts and Smith, 2009). Whilst truancy may be perceived as a mode of resistant behaviour within this occupational context it also demonstrates a strong reaffirmation of workplace identity, adhering closely to the anti-intellectual culture that has historically been associated with professional football (Parker,

2001; Thompson, Potrac and Jones, 2013). In addition, outward displays of resistance have been highlighted through an overt rejection of the core values attached to the “keen” and “hardy” work ethic often associated with a good professional attitude. This has been most commonly displayed through the adoption of a *laissez-faire* (i.e. carefree) approach to training and the withdrawal of “best efforts” in attempt to acquire a sense of control amidst a culture dominated by managerial authoritarianism (Parker, 1996a; Cushion and Jones, 2006). Further forms of resistance have been witnessed through subtle displays of dis-identification (a mechanism often administered through modes of cynicism, humour, scepticism or irony) that seeks to create a sense of social distance, allowing subjects to resist occupational values and acquire a feeling of relief and empowerment from the burden of adhering to predefined roles associated with the organization’s culture (Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Roderick, 2006, 2014). This particular mode of resistance adopts an understated persona, seeking not to overturn or alter existing conditions, but to undermine organizational power relations through subtle forms of subversion or resistance (Fleming and Sewell, 2002) – practices which have been reported within various occupational cultures (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 1988, 1992, 1994; Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Willis, 1977). In addition, resistance to occupational norms and values surrounding the social lives of footballers have been displayed through more general ‘rule-breaking’ behaviours (e.g. excessive drinking) and social acts which run the risk of been captured and disseminated through mainstream and social media for the general public to consume (Parker, 1996a).

To suggest that professional footballers are constrained by their occupational identities to such an extent that they have little or no room to resist workplace practices and values would be an oversimplification of identity (re)presentation. As the work of Nikolas Rose (1997, p. 140) indicates, individuals are not to be considered ‘unified subjects of some coherent regime of domination’, but as human agents possessing the capability to negotiate a varying range of personas across a variety of differing practices. To draw once more from the work of Erving Goffman (1959) we may suggest that identity (re)presentation is a carefully managed process, one that encapsulates a mode of “performativity” whereby individuals display a multitude of differing “fronts” (selves) to conform to a range of social (and organizational) roles. That is, within any given culture identities are managed so as to promote the appearance that individuals are adhering to the normative practices (i.e. the accepted norms and values) of the group or organization, whilst simultaneously possessing the capacity to engage in behaviour contrary to the dominant norms in play. This is what Goffman (1959) aptly terms “back stage” behaviours which encapsulate the engagement of individuals in practices which are removed from and resistant to the “normalizing discourses” of their host organization (Pullen and Rhodes, 2013). As we have seen, throughout the everyday working lives of professional footballers such behaviours can manifest themselves in the form of scepticism towards (or a dis-identification with) the official and/or unofficial rules of club culture and are deployed not only to undermine dominant cultural norms but to safeguard key

aspects of their identities from exposure to the disciplinary and regulatory measures routinely imposed by coaching and management staff (Roderick, 2014).

Despite the fact that some players routinely display elements of resistance to the dominant norms and practices of professional footballing life, an adherence to the cultural expectations enforced by clubs is necessarily in their best interests if they wish to remain in employment. As Goffman (1983) notes, when interacting within an array of institutional or social settings individuals may become dependent upon the maintenance of order and the display of compliance to conformity. Thus, to secure favour, and to ensure longevity within the professional game, it seems that individual players must, at the very least, demonstrate an adherence to the prevailing values and normative behaviours of professional football culture, whilst at the same time maintaining a wider sense of self both inside and outside of their occupational milieu (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Roderick, 2006b, 2006c, 2012, 2014).

Conclusions

It has been our intention throughout this chapter to consider issues of identity in professional football and the way that identity formation amongst players might be impacted by the norms and values evident within football club culture. In particular, we have explored the experiences of young players and how these norms and values might manifest themselves in the kinds of behaviours that they may exhibit and the kinds of aspirations that they may hold in terms of career trajectory, educational progression and social interaction. In so doing, we have examined a selection of theoretical perspectives concerning organizational culture and power relations and considered the extent to which identity formation may be a product of the institutional practices and social interactions which professional football clubs promote. In turn, we have argued that amidst the authoritarian confines of this organizational culture identity remains a negotiated and contested concept and one through which resistance to dominant norms and values is evident via a range of explicit and implicit workplaces practices.

Of course, we recognize that there are many additional ways in which the construction of identity might be explored within the context of professional football. For example, scholars and empirical researchers may wish to examine notions of identity formation from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. These kinds of investigations may necessarily stimulate discussion around the nuances of conceptual application and may seek to examine a series of wider social variables. Studies on identity formation amongst elite female footballers are, to date, relatively few and far between and as such represent a key area for future investigation. Likewise, in-depth analyses of identity formation within a broader range of sporting locales will inevitably help scholars to think more critically about how individual and collective identities are constructed, represented and maintained. In turn, such work has

the potential to locate identity formation as a more central topic of conversation within sport studies as a whole.

FOOTBALL RESEARCH IN ACTION

Title of the Research: Narratives of Identity Among Former Professional Footballers in the United Kingdom, by Brian Gearing.

What are the goals of the research?

The preliminary aim of this research was to understand how professional footballers in the United Kingdom (UK) coped with the challenges of establishing a new identity, or notion of self, following retirement from the game. Through the acquisition of personal accounts, the research attempts to acquire insight into the occupational experiences of former players and the core values associated with the culture of professional football. By drawing on the life-stories of these players, the research seeks to illustrate the difficulties associated with transitioning into post-sport retirement and the challenges connected with the establishment of new narratives of self that are far removed from the culture of professional football.

Why was the research relevant?

Gearing's work provides one of the first sociological inquiries into issues of retirement, ageing and identity negotiation surrounding the occupational context of UK professional football. Indeed, the immediate and long-term social and psychological difficulties attached to retirement had previously received sparse attention in relation to the working lives of professional players. Gearing's research exposes the difficulties in transitioning from a position of "stardom" to that of relative obscurity. By obtaining the life-stories of those who had experienced differing levels of success within the professional game, insights into the construction and reconstitution of identity amongst those moving from a career in football to positions of uncertainty were acquired. Moreover, the occupational lifespan of professional footballers is unusual in that retirement often comes at a relatively early age. Indeed, research examining retirement amongst those leaving a profession in their mid-thirties is relatively uncommon, and thus Gearing's work provides insight into a unique population. By highlighting the challenges associated with the forging of new identities outside the cultural milieu of professional football, Gearing's research also raises awareness of a number of broader issues concerning personal health and well-being.

What methods are used?

Sample: Gearing sought to acquire data from a group of 12 former players with varying levels of involvement in the professional game; 9 of whom had pursued their professional careers at an English Third Division club (now 'Sky Bet League One') either in the 1940s, 50s or 60s.

The remaining three participants had played for First Division clubs (now the 'Barclays Premier League') and had enjoyed far more illustrious careers. The ages of the participants ranged from early 30s to early 70s. At the time of the research the majority of interviewees were in their 40s and 50s and remained in employment across a range of occupations, whilst those who were older had entered semi or full retirement.

Interviews: Gearing's research places emphasis on acquiring knowledge surrounding players' careers and their experiences upon leaving professional football. Gearing also utilised accounts of the interviewees' lives that had featured either in published autobiographies or national newspapers to further interpret their experiences. Interviews were framed around a range of theoretical and conceptual ideas that sought to understand both the institutional structure that helped forge the occupational identities of his participants (namely the occupational culture that encompassed the working lives of those concerned), and the practices through which narratives of self were enacted, an aspect that was captured predominantly through the biographical and autobiographical accounts provided within the interviews.

What were the main arguments?

Due to the distinctive occupational culture surrounding the world of professional football, Gearing argues that a particular type of identity had to be adhered to and displayed throughout the everyday working lives of his participants. Retirement is framed as a significant challenge as is the search for a 'post-football identity'; one that is far removed from the occupational ideals, workplace routines and cultural values prevalent within the professional game.

Gearing utilises the accounts of his interviewees to illuminate the core values attached to the culture of professional football in a bid to demonstrate how and why retirement has such a strong impact upon players' constructions of self. Such values are associated with a highly routinized and disciplined lifestyle, a restriction of autonomy and individualism, and a facilitating culture that eliminated the capacity to think for oneself. Whilst routine was integral to the everyday footballing experiences of the interviewees, they existed within a highly unpredictable and unstable working environment, whereby they felt that every aspect of their playing performances was scrutinized by the public (fans), peers, coaching and managerial staff. Gearing further argues that the high level of intensity and the emphasis upon risk-taking and success embedded within the culture of professional football provided players with an "otherworldly" experience, acquiring a sense of ecstasy and euphoria that was often compared to the experience of drug addiction. Coupled with traditional masculine working class values, this particular cultural environment promoted a strong sense of camaraderie amongst players, bonding them together through their shared experiences of transition from adolescence to early adulthood.

Thus, central to Gearing's theses is the notion that the strong cultural values and behavioural norms which his participants experienced during their time in the professional game, provided a "gravitational pull" for many players making it increasingly difficult for them to come to terms with the loss of their identities as footballers. Many retirees voiced their concerns over relinquishing an identity that was so closely influenced by, and aligned with, their playing careers. Gearing also refers to a "social clock" within professional football; an informal timeline that denotes the expected length of a player's career. It was anticipated by the majority of his respondents that their footballing careers would last until they reached their early 30s, yet due to the unpredictable nature of the profession, many did not attain this milestone. Whether due to injury or managerial decision, those who had retired even earlier from the game had found it increasingly difficult to fashion an identity that was disconnected from the world of football, and in some instances some were unwilling to do so.

Despite the difficulties associated with forming a sense of self detachment from the game, Gearing argues that those who successfully established "post-playing identities" sought to do so through relating to less well-defined aspects of their self-image, such as the "family man" or a "good work colleague" within their new/chosen profession. Regardless of success, having had a career in professional football was deemed by interviewees as the pinnacle of their lives. Drawing upon past experiences and reflecting upon previous memories provided recently retired respondents with a sense of pragmatism concerning life after football and an acceptance that an important aspect of their lives was now over.

And the conclusions or key findings?

Reminiscing about the past became a positive factor amongst ageing retirees once they had been able to successfully negotiate a new identity post-playing career, and provided evidence to support the notion that narrative is important in the processes of identity construction and reconstruction. Gearing argues that recalling past experiences allowed his respondents to give meaning to their current lives and to strengthen their individual identities. However, it became increasingly difficult for the former players whose careers had ended abruptly to renounce their identity as a professional footballer and to re-negotiate a differing sense of self as they had been denied the opportunity to "live out" their ambitions. In addition, Gearing reinforced the importance of culture in relation to the formation of specific identities and the difficulties in transitioning away from a particular sense of self once participants had left the world of professional football. Here Gearing's research solidifies the importance of examining identity construction and reconstruction with reference to social theory that addresses the cultural arrangements of a particular occupational environment, and how the presence of strong social norms and values may impact upon the ability to successfully negotiate a new sense of self upon entering retirement.

What are the strengths of the research?

The strengths of the research are predominantly associated with the unique data set obtained. Through the use of biographical interviewing the work provides a series of personalized accounts of the key challenges associated with post-football retirement and the processes of forging and renegotiating new identities upon exiting the sport. By addressing such concerns, Gearing's work also attempts to situate strong empirical evidence amidst a theoretical backdrop that considers both the importance of structure (that is the institutional culture of the clubs), alongside the importance of capturing an intimate expression of self as constructed through particular narrative exchanges. Moreover, the difficulties that the former professional players expressed upon navigating their transition into retirement still resonates with contemporary examples. This highlights a further strength of the research, demonstrating the importance of such work when attempting to understand the challenges that current professional footballers encounter upon facing career termination, a relatively uncommon experience outside the realms of elite sport.

Do you think there are any weaknesses?

Whilst the work provides a range of experiences surrounding retirement, highlighting the core values attached to footballing identities and the inevitable difficulties in transitioning from one occupational sphere to another, the research could be considered dated. Many, but not all, of the reflections surrounding player experiences are taken from those who had competed in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. With heavy investment from multi-national corporations and a growth in the global sports-media, the modern professional game has altered markedly since the time that many of Gearing's interviewees were playing and in this sense, contemporary experiences of retirement from professional football could be considered radically different to those described, especially in relation to the economic realities of pre and post-retirement. However, Gearing does acknowledge such weaknesses highlighting the differences in the economic circumstances of his respondents compared to those of modern-day players.

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