Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rqrs21

Towards a sportive agoraphobia of professional athletes

Martin Roderick & Hester Hockin-Boyers

To cite this article: Martin Roderick & Hester Hockin-Boyers (14 Jul 2024): Towards a sportive agoraphobia of professional athletes, Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2024.2378157

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2024.2378157

Published online: 14 Jul 2024.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN SPORT, EXERCISE AND HEALTH
https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2024.2378157

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Towards a sportive agoraphobia of professional athletes

Martin Roderick and Hester Hockin-Boyers

Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Durham University, Green Lane, Durham UK

ABSTRACT

In careers that span anonymity to public individual, the work of professional athletes is highly visible: anyone can observe and comment on what they do. Based on the accounts of 26 full-time, UK-based professional athletes from seven sports, eight female and 18 male interviewees, the object of this article is to examine the working lives of professional athletes and how, as they go about daily routines, they value and manage the fluid balance between privacy and social participation. The focus is on an emerging uneasiness with 'social' spaces, proposing the idea of a *sportive* politics of agoraphobia, examining the ways in which professional athletes cope with the highly visible aspects of their daily lives, importantly their fears of uninvited attention from strangers, people who are well-acquainted with past work performances and who possess personal information. The data indicate that professional athletes go about their daily routines unhesitatingly careful of where and how they can be vulnerable to personal intrusion and transgressing norms of interaction. Their strategies to cope with their 'being' in public involve a combination of conveying normalness, performing positive affect, and adjusting to being interpreted in public.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 9 December 2023
Accepted 5 July 2024

KEYWORDS
Sportive agoraphobia; professional sport; mental health; privacy versus social participation

Introduction

This article is about the daily relational encounters of people whose working lives are in the public eye: individuals who are routinely exposed to public scrutiny as they go about their personal and professional lives. While early studies of social elites tended to focus on politico-economic institutions and structures of power and influence, centring for example on elite individuals who 'live by being continually displayed' (Mills 1959, 4), more recently social scientists have commented on the way public figures in post-industrial society, including those who are well known for achievements at work, embody the twinned discourses of late modernity: neoliberal democracy and consumer capitalism (Andrews and Jackson 2001). Marshall (1997, xiii) argued in this connection that western liberal democracy represents a political system preoccupied with 'the personal, the intimate, and the individual'. What this means in the contexts of professional sport is that people are now privy to a wealth of personal information that encourages a parasocial faux intimacy, sometimes leading to obsession, with the daily lives of professional athletes (Rein, Kotler, and Stoller 1997). In this article, we argue that such imagined closeness has very real relational implications in terms of how these employees negotiate, experience, and lead their daily lives, the pragmatic effects of which have not been subject to empirical enquiry to date.

CONTACT Martin Roderick m.j.roderick@durham.ac.uk Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Durham University, Green Lane, Durham DH1 3LA, UK

Writing on public renown and distinction has tended to focus on the cultivation, manufacture, and marketing of public reputations (Marshall 1997), concentrating on cultural producers orchestrating processes of public familiarisation. The mediated nature of recognition and its manufacture however has been an overstated, structural focus in studies of public elites (Smart 2005), the effects of which have been to conceptualise space in terms of the fundamental reproduction of capitalism and the creation of commodities (Turner 2013). This structuralist line of argument is relevant but, we argue in this specific case, marginalises agency and a bottom-up, qualitative comprehension of the lived experiences of professional athletes. In this article, we explore the scale and intensification of such a consumerist panopticon, which can bear down upon those in the public eye, saturating aspects of their daily experiences both in and outside of the 'normal' boundaries of their working day, as they move between work, socialising, family commitments, and routine errands (Ferris and Harris 2011).

Studies of elite/professional athletes tend currently to concentrate attention on the rationalised spaces in which the production of athletic performances is situated: in this work the relationship between professional athletes and their workplace performances is prioritised and athletic 'career' achievements are habitually reduced to individual, physiological and psychological qualities (e.g. Beauchamp, Kamis, and Stull 2021; Wylleman, Reints, and De Knop 2013). Professional athletes are presented as *compliant* targets of invasive surveillance practices (Hatteberg 2018). Similarly, prominent qualitative studies have sought to understand athlete experiences in the context of 'what it takes' to progress to higher levels of competition (Battochio, Stambulova, and Schinke 2016), comprehending a 'rocky road' to athletic success (Collins and MacNamara 2012; Savage, Collins, and Cruickshank 2017). In all these various studies, an implicit performance-orientation enables an ideology to flourish unimpeded in which the things that athletes 'do', through their 'doing', come to construct and constitute identity: the manufacture and maintenance of performance therefore naturally strengthens the popularised idea of an *athletic* identity (Ronkainen, Kavoura, and Ryba 2016).

We agree with Douglas and Carless however that 'something is missing' (2013, 85) in terms of the subjective dimensions of experiences of well-being, and we contend that this applies to current understandings of elite athlete mental health, which often characterises the health of athletes in ways that reinforce, by *silent consensus*, the centrality of athletic performance. For example, even though studies of mental health warn of the dangers of domineering performance narratives (Carless and Douglas 2013), and how these may negatively affect a more holistic sense of athlete development (Poucher, Tamminen, and Kerr 2023), we feel studies in this field often – and simultaneously – employ process-reducing languages (Elias 1978), which entrap research conclusions in the (in)direct reproduction of an ideology of performance, only emphasising personal factors (e.g. injury, retirement) and a complex assembly of 'stressors', 'demands', 'environments' and how these all bear upon 'athlete' personhood. Thus, mental health research revolves round training and performance locations (Vella et al. 2021), linked to and by athletic systems (Poucher, Tamminen, and Wagstaff 2021), and we think by-passes consequential 'in-between' spaces, that lie beyond the 'sports system' but are commonplace and occur daily and in plain sight. In most studies of professional athletes, the everyday, non-performance experiences and hassles of life seem hardly ever to be brought to consciousness (exceptions would be Douglas and Carless 2015; McMahon and Penney 2013).

This article is preoccupied with these everyday non-athletic spaces, and the minutiae of athletes' *social* lives, laying prominence on face-to-face conversations, chance encounters in the street, fleeting but awkward situations, (un)easy entanglements, and self-consciousness. Athletes clearly have differing abilities to cope with the social aspects of their daily lives. For example, their fears of others' visual attention, and for all there exists a continuum of experiences of public exposure from the manageable to unmanageable (Ferris 2004; Rockwell and Giles 2009). Moreover, different social and material spaces (work, home, spaces of consumption such as pubs/restaurants/supermarkets) present multiple and unique challenges, that are rarely mapped out in research on the lives of public figures.

So, this article offers an alternative and rarely considered focus, which necessarily distances its key purpose away from the relationship of an athlete to their athletic performance, with the intention of giving precedence to symbolic interaction that is performative and serves to define and maintain the *social selves* of professional athletes. And by *social self* it is meant here those individual aspects of professional athletes that have been created through social participation (Burkitt 1991), which shape the way they come to face communal life, and which contribute, however inexact, to a public figure consciousness. Using an interactionist paradigm, our focus is on the presence and social geography of athletes in social spaces, foregrounding the very nature of 'being' an athlete, of their existence, concentrating on the labour bound up with the performative, rather than the workplace 'doing' of performance. In what follows, we offer a new framework for understanding professional athletes' lived experiences moving through public space; fraught with a 'sportive agoraphobia', unremitting demands for emotional labour, and pressures to present an 'authentic' self.

So, the objects of this article are twofold:

(1) to examine how professional athletes experience their working lives in a highly visible occupation and how, as they go about daily routines, they negotiate the fluid balance between personal boundaries and social participation;
(2) to identify patterned responses to encounters with unknown others in various social and material spaces, analysing the ways athletes cope with public exposure.

Research methods

This article stems from a British Academy funded project examining the effects of public recognition on high-profile UK sports workers. Qualitative data were gathered via a semi-structured interview approach, designed to reveal the routine experiences of professional athletes in work and public spaces. Interviews were undertaken with 26 full-time, UK-based professional athletes, lasting between 60 and 120 minutes, from seven sports: eight female and 18 male athletes. In research encounters with participants, discussion centred on ideas related to the social relations of 'space', 'place', and 'identity'. What is ontologically interesting is that interviewees were asked initially to reflect on the matter of their experiences and perceptions of often fleeting public interactions and their individual effects. So beyond conventional workplace boundaries (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006), athletes were asked questions about the nature of social participation, the *affective* character of encounters, their perception of their need to engage, and the certainties of such tangible interactions. In addition, following four of these interview encounters, which took place in public settings (e.g. hotels, cafes), the lead researcher was also able to spend informal time with research participants in their locales for short periods for the purpose of gaining an affinity with the way they navigated social spaces and dealt, time-after-time, with unforeseen public engagement. While our basic aim was to capture the realities of social interactions for professional athletes in *public* spaces, and their experience of work role visibility, we came subsequently to recognise that athletes in public had, at any moment, to be ever mindful of the possibility for a diverse array of social interactions. Thus, epistemologically, our focus is not solely an explanation of how professional athletes come to deal with chance encounters *in situ*, we came to recognise that we were also interpreting an imprecise state of mental readiness.

Given the participants in this study were, to varying degrees, high-profile and publicly recognisable individuals, how best to preserve participant anonymity required careful consideration. In what follows, we provide data extracts delineating only basic demographic information. So, while thick descriptions of social interaction are presented, in accordance with research on public elites (Anthony and Danaher 2016), particular care was taken to avoid the dangers of deductive disclosure (Kaiser 2009): participants were assured that neither they, nor any club, or organisation with which they were involved, would be identifiable in project outputs. While Kaiser (2009) discusses how identities can be compromised in, for example, health research (Lawton 2001), by way of contrast our

discussions led us to reflect on the fact that, high-profile athletes are the focus of so much published writing, each day, and globally, that stories merge and commingle such that distinctive identifiers are hard to extrapolate. Even so, every effort was made to strip away employment-specific identifiers, mindful of the sensitivities bound up in the work experiences of professional athletes, their fears of being publicly revealed in an adverse fashion, and their understandable reservations of offering candid, personal accounts to an unknown researcher (Roderick and Allen Collinson 2020).

The selection criteria for research participants were that interviewees were current professional athletes, they had been written about in the UK national press, and that, while difficult to operationalise consistently, they were recognisable in the 'public eye'. Participants were recruited via previously formed UK-wide practitioner networks, as well by means of the generation of new contacts: sports are sites of routine labour movement. As the lead author is a former athlete and established researcher in the sociology of sport, new connections were made through a serendipitous expansion of existing networks, leading to fresh research opportunities. The lead researcher's positionality and social capital in these environments were also a factor in securing access to participants and providing a space in which they felt comfortable to open up about the challenges of navigating their lives in public.

All recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were subject to a dialectic process involving a non-linear mix of thick description, organisational analysis and theoretical interpretation oriented to the meaning of symbolic exchanges (Wolcott 1994). At first, each interview transcript was read in turn, and we recorded similarities between transcripts, relational associations coming from the data, including, at this point, noteworthy words, and phrases. This opening analysis allowed us to familiarise ourselves with the transcripts before we engaged in a more specific analytical organisation of the data and the consideration and interpretation of thematic categories. Having this oversight meant we had a broad contextual understanding of the data set and some key areas of tension before the coding process commenced. Codes were subsequently created as each transcript was reread and this interpretive coding process took time as, on multiple occasions, we went back through and reflected on the transcripts (Gibson and Brown 2009). Once we had coded all the transcripts, each code was reorganised according to interrelated sociological themes. Here, the respective insider/outsider positions of the first and second author proved valuable. As noted earlier, while the lead researcher is a former athlete and researcher within the sociology of professional sport, the second author is a relative 'outsider' due to being a newcomer to this field with little experience of the world of professional sport (as a spectator, player or otherwise). Often, we found that our disparate positions in relation to this field allowed us to interrogate and question otherwise 'taken for granted' knowledge and experiences we encountered in the data, which leant itself to greater analytical depth and rigour. Thus, we embraced an ontological relativism, which liberated our interpretive activities, the upshot being a reflective and searching research partnership, one that robustly enriched each stage of the analysis process. This trusting analytical partnership benefitted directly from our diverse academic histories and subjectivities precisely because our scholarly differences enabled a vibrancy and energy to flourish specifically in relation to our interpretive approaches to coding and data reading, considerations related to relational associations and importantly in terms of the article's structure.

The initial dominant and significant themes derived from raw data and subsequent coding processes were a product of what symbolic interactionists describe, foundationally, as the *dialectic of the self* (Burkitt 1991), in which, through internal dialogue, individuals reflect on and manage the image that others have of them. Typical of a classic interactionist stance therefore this article placed interpretive weight on thick interviewee descriptions of face-to-face social encounters, and forms of symbolic communication, gestures, demeanour, which are essential ingredients of athletes' social involvement. Data associations connected with athlete inhibitions, relationship worries, spatial apprehensions, spun round our thinking, with ideas coming in and out of preference, as we ultimately attempted to theorise the daily routines of professional athletes. Drawing insight from forms of abductive qualitative data analysis (e.g. Timmermans and Tavory 2012), our inquiry was not

limited to linguistic categories and expressions; rather, we noticed that many of the most interesting findings were about movement tentativeness, estranging encounters, and identity disorientations. Our interactionist interpretations allowed us to ponder the apparent struggles of athletes with the social geographies of their lives: cognisant of our collective intellectual biographies (Robertson 2002). The principal idea of a 'sportive agoraphobia' emerged from a continual reading and interpreting of *in vivo* themes identified in the data set, themes which relate to the way athletes manage their sense of being in public contexts, the overriding notion of which alluded to a sense of movement inhibition and spatial apprehension and athletes' recurrent demand to cope with these structural relations. The idea of a sportive agoraphobia is therefore an example of a heuristic tool that frames the discovery of an independent approach to comprehending the *relational intrusiveness* experienced by professional athletes: thus, this form of agoraphobia, a product of heuristic reasoning (Swedberg 2014), is an outcome of classic constructionism, a phenomenon essentially relational in nature.

In our discussion of findings, we focus initially on the way professional athletes encounter and grasp the informal rules of conduct between athletes and unknown members of the public and relations in public spaces. From this, two overarching thematic clusters are identified, which help us to introduce and expand on the idea of a sportive agoraphobia. To do this, we first focus attention on comprehending the politics of a sportive agoraphobia, before we then go onto explain athlete strategies for self-managing exposure. So, in what follows, we unpack each of these themes with illustrative quotations that produce an impression of how athletes strategise their 'being' in public.

Comprehending the politics of a sportive agoraphobia

The angst of unexpected advances, which are absent from the everyday lives of most people, prove a key source of worry for those who live their working lives in the public eye. We theorise this as a category of 'sportive agoraphobia', whereby professional athletes become highly vigilant and fearful of unexpected intrusions as they move through public spaces. While there is extensive clinical and psychological research on symptoms of agoraphobia (Asmundson, Taylor, and Smits 2014), which is most often seen and understood in the context of panic disorders (Craske and MacNamara 2013), this article is part of a broader attempt to address agoraphobia as a social condition with a range of root causes, one of which can manifest in anxieties around having a public profile.

The limited qualitative research that exists on the experiences of people diagnosed with a clinical form of agoraphobia indicates that they fear that their public selves, behind which private feelings are concealed, can suddenly become transparent (Capps and Ochs 1995; Davidson 2017; Holmes 2008). For professional athletes, whose working (and sometime private) lives are highly visible, encounters with unknown others are experienced as intrusive in that they create a constant sense of being observed. 'Sportive agoraphobia' is therefore borne out of an enabling and constraining politics of interactional norms (De Swaan 1981), which stem from an unease with, and at times a more profound anxiety related to, potentially faux 'intimate' gatherings situated in public spaces. These include face-to-face confrontational worries, as well as the existential threats connected with the potential for 'focused' encounters that feel uneasy and compel strategic interaction (Goffman 1972). The normative constraints experienced by professional athletes – particularly in *spaces of consumption* – relate specifically to the way they encounter the opinions of others and contend with boundaries of intimacy, navigate assumed knowledge, and meet role expectations, as the following sections demonstrate.

Encountering the opinions of others

A sportive agoraphobia has, as a central feature, the idea that professional athletes are unable to access and move through space like individuals living outside of the public eye. In discussing the experiences of people with agoraphobia, Carter (2002) refers to 'movement inhibition' to capture

the essence of an apprehension that results from suffers' awareness of a complex mix of normative behavioural constraints in *open spaces*, which impact their lives. An international rugby player offered a good illustration of the relational characteristics that frame *public* movement and engagement by referencing his wife's experience of always being questioned about *his* work, saying, 'everyone knows your business and that's where she finds it so strange. She'll go to things and people always ask her about me because they *know about me*'. He went on to make the following point when speaking about the nature of everyday exchanges about his employment status:

> Since moving to [club], interest in my contract, I thought, was pure harassment. Wherever I went it was, 'you staying?', 'you going?', 'what's happening?' It's like … your close friends might talk about it to you, and that's okay, but it's just, like 'randoms' who think they can ask me. It's just a bit strange. It feels like they think they have the right to know you.

This rugby player draws attention to the interdependence between the way in open spaces the personal is made public, revealing the porous and unstable boundary between sports performer and private person, and a *ready-to-handness* about professional sport as a topic of conversation. In this sense, professional sport is a form of employment that is conversationally 'accessible', and in which people have affective investments (Andrews and Jackson 2001).

Another rugby player made the point, typical of all athletes, that work performances and employment matters often comprise *the* central focus of interaction: 'I go around a lot of places and a lot of people don't recognise me but when people do, inevitably the conversation is only about one thing. The pressure is inescapable'. A footballer also made the point that,

> everybody has got an opinion on it, even though they have no level of expertise. It's that ingrained in our culture, and it's on every television screen and newspaper, that everybody forms an opinion … They think you should be doing something different, or you're great, or not so great, or you can't do this, but you can do that.

Emphasising the idea that athletes face up to the views of them and their work, a rugby player said, 'you speak at a club dinner, and everyone there wants to have an opinion of you, and they feel that you should just stand there and take it'. So, athletes are confronted routinely by people holding 'opinions', which can emotionally span from adoration to contempt (Smart 2005). In such interactions, people feel that it is reasonable to impose their view on a 'recognised other'.

For individuals diagnosed with agoraphobia, an emotional malaise results from *the thought of* being observed by and under the gaze of strangers (Davidson 2003). For sportive agoraphobics, their apprehension is much more about an unpreventable corporeal reality, more than *a thought*: in open spaces unknown others stare, take photos, interact directly, invade private moments, sometimes several times each day, and athletes must come to deal with this exposure of 'self'. Remarking on the ubiquitous nature of interactions in *public*, an international rugby player, who captures the crux of a sportive agoraphobia, said,

> the expectation was something that I've had to live with constantly … wherever you go in the shops … basically every move is scrutinised, and people would always talk about the rugby and the team and how things are getting on. … certain people can be very forthright in their opinions a lot of the time. You are basically dealing with that on a daily basis for a good number of years, and that brings its own pressures.

Another rugby player, who also outlined the pervasive character of interactions with club fans, made the additional point that, 'it was getting to the boundary of where you were having semi-intimate conversations with people you've never met before'. A sportive agoraphobia is theoretically situated therefore at the structural intersection of antagonistic social forces, borne out of the laborious struggles of professional athletes to withstand a public's *right to know* versus their *right to privacy* (May 2019).

Meeting role expectations in spaces of consumption

How professional athletes experience sporting agoraphobia is also somewhat shaped by their movement through different social and material spaces. Significantly, spaces athletes referenced in interviews were typically *spaces of consumption* – bars, shops, petrol forecourts, restaurants, and supermarkets (Davidson 2001). In interviews, athletes referred often to the normative expectations bound-up in purchasing food and drink – being seen to consume certain 'non-nutritious' products for example – yet it is apparent that these places are also where the humanness of athletes can be consumed by a public who crave an intimacy with 'the personal'. At the level of the individual, athlete voices speak of denial, inauthenticity, the superficial, while at a structural level their voices reflect the realities of commodification and emotional labour in late capitalism.

Within spaces of consumption, professional athletes are required to negotiate and attempt to enforce boundaries between themselves and a public who are primed to commodify and consume them. These boundaries can be material – literally obscuring oneself in efforts to avoid unwanted intrusions – as this athlete outlines:

> I sometimes go to the pub . . . I very much sit round the corner or sit round the back. Not because I didn't want people to say, 'he's drinking', 'he shouldn't be drinking' . . . but I would be very self-conscious and like people often come up to me and say, 'I hope you're drinking lemonade'.

Or importantly boundaries relate to 'self' protection, the boundary between sports performer and private person. This same athlete went on to make the point that,

> Sometimes you've got to say the right things when you want to say other things. When it comes to the press you can't be too honest. Otherwise, that'll just open a can of worms for everybody . . . but when it comes down to the public you have to *toe the party line*.

So, more than a requirement to think differently about physical movement, these data indicate that, at all times, athletes must be mindful of, not just where they go, but the significance of 'front region' interaction (Roderick and Allen Collinson 2020). Fans, in contrast, for whom an alternative set of interactional norms exist, are afforded a level of impertinence towards professional athletes they meet in-person – an affordance that sits in contrast to research on the social order characteristic of 'relations in public' among the unacquainted (Goffman 1972). The following quote, from an international athlete, captures something of the essence of this impertinence – at times brazenness – encountered by 'familiar' athletes in spaces of consumption:

> . . . you're sitting in restaurants, and you get, 'I hope you're not having dessert!'. People would say stuff like that. And I was never rude or, I would just give them a wry smile and say, 'you're out treating yourself today?'. You never know. Just a little one-off comment to diffuse the situation . . . I found that it just became part and parcel of what it was.

'Forced' civil interchanges are more than mere responses to effrontery on the part of athletes but are also a recognition of an economic exchange between athlete and fan and a presumption of athlete faithfulness and obligation to the vocation (Douglas 2014). An international footballer hints at how players can be made to feel beholden to club fans, as symbolic possessors of club interests, in the following way:

> I was with a player, and we had just landed, we lost a game two-nil, and went to Tesco, and, we had two days off . . . I'm not a big drinker at all, but I think I bought six beers, and a guy said, 'after a performance like that, I can't believe I am watching you two buy alcohol'.

In this regard, a sportive agoraphobia encompasses a vocabulary of psychic troubles and expectant feelings that originate from transformations of boundary management, which are felt particularly acutely in spaces of consumption.

Athlete strategies for self-managing exposure

Having described how the daily movements of professional athletes are inhibited by the nature of normative, behavioural expectations, expectations they encounter routinely in exchanges with unacquainted others, we now outline their strategies for self-managing exposure. While professional athletes spend each day in perpetual proximity to threats to self (Douglas 2014; McMahon and Penney 2013), their strategies to protect their social selves can involve a combination of submerging of individuality, a process that promotes inauthenticity, and an internalised appreciation of their liminal private/public existence.

Although being recognised from a distance is not necessarily a reason to be anxious, there exists for athletes a routineness to 'local' identification and acknowledgement that can take a psychic toll. In the following sections we examine the way that athletes seek to protect themselves from their perception of the social perils of working and existing under the eye of a hyper-attentive and critical public world. So, professional athletes' strategies to cope with their 'being' in public, their responses to over-familiarity, involve a combination of conveying normalness, performing positive affect, and acclimatising to being interpreted in public. These strategies can be viewed as 'DIY' tactics for managing sportive agoraphobia and the toll this takes on professional athletes' wellbeing.

Conveying normalness

For all athletes, a level of routine public exposure is unavoidable. As a consequence, professional athletes are required to somewhat paradoxically *work on* conveying a sense of normalness in the face of their unusual and highly visible lives. Becoming invisible (in plain sight) is not possible: professional athletes attract attention. But becoming a part of an unexceptional element of what routinely unfolds – conveying normalness – is one means by which athletes can manage social relations and self. For example, this athlete speaks to his efforts to make his presence in day-to-day life routine and uneventful. In doing so, he hopes to enable a transition from social distinctness and his attendance representing a 'big deal', to a degree of normalcy and perhaps in doing so he becomes less noticeable:

> Listen, I try to stay as nice to people as I possibly can. Day-to-day life is when I go to the school, and things like that, and after that first little, '[footballer's] at the school', and the kids want all the autographs and the pictures, and the parents want to talk to you. After that first month, then it's just, there's my daughters, two daughters in the school, and there's her dad. No *big deal* anymore.

The athlete draws a distinction between his work role, including the labour involved in sustaining fan advances and signing autographs, his role as a father, and what, in the following quote, he refers to as being a 'normal person'. In relation to dealing with unwanted attention he explains:

> . . . [teammates] who say, 'I don't want to do that', 'I can't be bothered with this', they find it more difficult to deal with. They see it as more of a chore or a hardship rather than an opportunity to go out and make people see that you're actually just a *normal person*.

A strategy for conveying normalness does not lead to social invisibility. The risk is that athletes inadvertently invite *low-level* attention, but attention, nonetheless. Similarly, below, a rugby player indicates that by being 'out' in public, frequenting public spaces, people get used to their being present:

> I was very conscious of the fact that people would be judging me . . . You hear a lot about professional athletes who don't go to places because they don't want to be recognised or, as they would say, be asked questions. I've always kind of gone the other way from a very early age that actually I've never shied away from being in public places . . . So, I actually found at [hometown] that it's a lot easier for me . . . I actually felt like I just became, people would go, 'Hi [name], you okay?' I think because I became like a familiar face in and around places and didn't shy away from going to places that it became a lot easier for me.

This athlete considered engaging with unknown others as an opportunity to convey his normalness. He went on to say,

> I don't think there's a school or an amateur club within the town that I have not been to or handed out trophies or certificates or spoke to at awards. I think that helps, you know, that familiarity . . . makes you more accepted, makes people probably accept *you* a bit more.

Unlike employees, who are not customarily recognised for their job role, professional athletes cannot deflect and treat everyday encounters with a civil indifference of the kind interactionists examine (Goffman 1967). But, as the rugby player indicates, they see an approach in which they project a sagacious attitude as one that allays fears of public shaming and leads to an ill-definable 'acceptance'.

Athletes occupy incongruous social positions: they deal with the matters of day-to-day living – shopping, running errands, childcare – like anyone else, yet are observed doing so. The scrutiny their daily activities receive, how they conduct themselves in public, can also come to be circumstances that simultaneously threaten the composition of their social selves, wresting from them a sense of control (Douglas and Carless 2015). Although objectifying looks can bring for individual athletes an awareness of their separate existence, thus a 'look' of recognition from others may solidify an athlete's athletic sense of self, reinforcing the idea of their being a *big deal*, this 'look' may also alienate the very foundations of their self-identity and lead daily interaction, specifically the art of conveying normalness, to feel like a form of labour. So, athletes try to be 'normal', go about daily life in an uninterrupted manner, but when someone makes contact, they *perform positive affect*.

Performing positive affect

Irrespective of the murkiness of defining *real feelings* towards others, professional athletes are compelled to present *positive affect* (Ahmed 2004). They perform in ways intentionally fitting – some refer to 'toeing a party line' – in social encounters to protect their workplace self-image, public persona, and to avoid the threat of a spoilt self-identity, irrespective of how false the identity is, and how much effort is involved in its production. All athletes talked about presentation of self, specifically emphasising the notion of an active presence and a performative front (Sheane 2012). An Olympic swimmer offered a typical statement:

> I'm really good at it, you know, I can give the perception that absolutely yes, everything is absolutely fine. I don't think it's a healthy thing to do, I think you know, you should be perfectly comfortable and be honest with everybody. And it's part of that, you know, not wanting any leakage out of any compartment that we're in. We don't want to, I don't want to get found out that I'm feeling like this.

While this swimmer spoke about the emotional labour bound up in appearing to be 'fine', an international cricketer emphasised additionally the need to *work on* the presentation of a positive, disarming demeanour. He said,

> . . . you make a conscious effort, because I like to think I am polite, or give people time, but you do know that when they're talking about your cricket, or you're there as a cricketer, you have to be extra nice . . . Even if you don't like some of the people you speak to, you just have to be nice.

Another international cricketer made a similar point, and referenced the idea of making a deliberate effort in respect to workplace identity:

> It's almost like you put on a bit of a . . . not a show, but you put on a perception of yourself to, almost be *the cricketer* . . . you make a conscious effort if someone speaks to you to, you know, be polite back, or if someone wants something signed, a shirt, or something, you try your best to do it . . . So you're always thinking about probably the impact it has on *your image*.

An 'image' is something that professional athletes – for whom work performances are always public affairs – must work on: a form of emotional labour. Studies of emotional labour

however tend to focus on relations to and with paying customers, emphasising a work role obligation to present the 'company face' in defined workspaces, including spaces of consumption (Hochschild 1983). Yet for professional athletes the sense of interactional obligation and duty relates to their 'vocation', professional sport, not solely an organisation or employer, and thus is not so confined to specific bounded employment spaces and times. Making people think you are 'okay', appearing to be a 'nice' person, and bothering about the 'image' you project are all part of this labour process of public appearance, one that augments and reinforces the character of inauthenticity for professional athletes. In this way, athletes' performances of positive affect more closely align with feminist writing on the emotional labour performed by women, for whom performing positive affect is also not confined to the workplace but is demanded in everyday interactions and in the private sphere (Hochschild 1989).

So, an athlete may feel their public image is inauthentic in relation to how they feel about themselves, and who they feel they are, but nonetheless managing their public image – for some 'a persona' – presents a very real sociological problem because in part this is in fact how people view them and understand who they are. They must attend to the management of their public image because, to paraphrase WI Thomas (1927), if people define your public persona as real, it is real in its effects on your sense of self. One athlete made the point that, 'I don't think there's any getting away with it, but it's getting to understand that how you manage your image, and your reputation is what ultimately will define you as a person'. The self-management of public image is foregrounded, coming to define 'you', the athlete, as a person: thus, this meaningful, focused interaction exists at the intersection of image and authenticity, public persona and private self.

As the following quote demonstrates, there is an interesting conflation in the data of athlete and normal person. In the context of performing being 'extra nice', this athlete makes the following point, 'I'm not sure if that's right or wrong, because is that who you are, or are you just portraying someone that you want that image to look like?' The quote alludes to a form of management – niceness as a form of labour – but specifically here to a separation between a self ('you') who must work to produce the 'someone', the fitting 'image', the anticipated work role. The language employed by these athletes, their careful use of pronouns, speaks centrally to self-management and has strong neoliberal connotations. Athletes manage a persona, a work image of 'who they need to be', yet this is not necessarily an authentic image. Even so, the work persona can also be a valued and externally validated asset (Douglas 2014). These data point to the active portrayal of an outward image, a performativity; the idea of an image to be conscious of; the potential difference between the image and self; and to a sacrificial, yet economic exchange. In other words, their being in public and typical interactional exchanges are asymmetrical to the extent that an element of the personhood of an athlete is laid bare – augmented, compromised, and extracted – and professional athletes must grow accustomed, mentally, to this possibility.

Adjusting to being interpreted in public

There exists a moral social order to which athletes are sensitive. They recognise the role demands others have of them and react to uninvited engagement, wherever it is encountered, in a fashion that befits expectations: they cannot be seen to ignore a powerfully experienced sacrificial attachment to their profession (Douglas 2021). Thus, in social interaction athletes suppress attitudes, emotions, and behaviours, which might discredit them or lead them to stray outside the combined performative efforts of their occupational community (Roderick and Allen Collinson 2020). In public contexts, athletes can nevertheless be heroised and have performative elements of their workplace *identity* amplified, but this external bolstering might simultaneously alienate a sense of authenticity and leave them existentially isolated. Professional athletes all understand however that little empathy awaits in such repressive, public spaces and, thus, the upshot of movement inhibition, a careful self-management of space, is a resultant *sportive agoraphobia*.

Athletes are interpreted on various levels: their athletic performances, as role models, and their subjective personhood, and so the economic and vocational privileges that so often foreground dominant discourses connected with professional sport rarely signal amplified freedoms (Douglas 2014). Interview data indicate that there's nothing liberating about making it in professional sport or about their being a public figure. An international athlete, talking about two friends and teammates, invites a comprehension of the spatial world to which they acclimatise. He said,

> . . . they have to live their lives by not being able to go to the supermarket, by having to go everywhere with a hoodie up. Or avoid public arenas, not live a normal life, by not going to a bar or a restaurant, by constantly checking and double-checking who is in and around them. And constantly having their lives interrupted by well-meaning people, but people all the same, who often would interrupt a meal to ask them for an autograph.

This interviewee points to the paradox professional athletes face. When they enter public spaces, typically spaces of consumption, they are compelled to accept an asymmetrical position and, oftentimes, abandon hope of self-authenticity. In terms of living a 'normal life', however ill-defined that phrase can be, professional athletes do not experience privilege: feeling like they cannot evade public scrutiny is extreme and produces deep emotion. Thus, a hyper-visibility is mostly framed negatively, as the following athlete indicates:

> But you do realise when you're away and people recognise you . . . you can't really slip up, you have to be really careful about what you do when people are out there watching and waiting for you to slip up . . . It takes quite a lot of energy, because there's a real high-profile, like, there's so many demands at a time.

Mentally adjusting to being interpreted, keeping people physically and spiritually at arm's length, draws on a combination of interactional deference and demeanour and accommodating the notion that the 'job' part of professional sport is being observed (Goffman 1967). A form of emotional 'energy' of professional athletes is thus bound up managing self-exposure and in a process of depersonalisation, what they would typically recognise as the production of an 'alter ego'. In this connection an athlete said, 'this alter ego came in . . . I just told people what the party line was'. Another athlete said, 'I would walk around town with this alter ego'. A sense of depersonalisation and emotional dissonance is brought about by and experienced as a consequence of the fluid, permeable boundaries of an athlete's sense of self, and the fact that it is their *athletic* identity that takes interactional precedence:

> The people who just know me as a rugby player that's the bit that . . . Yes, I tell them what I think is appropriate. So then, be it friends or, you know, people you meet along the way, I think you decide, well I decide pretty quickly whether they just want to talk because of rugby or whether they actually see me as *a person.*

Adjusting to being interpreted by 'ordinary people' as a public commodity, someone who can be commented on in uninhibited ways, and recognising that your work has a spiritual and economic value in the view of unknown others, is part of the work role in professional sport. For athletes, social boundary fluidness stems therefore from a structural intrusiveness, an expectation they come to comprehend as an occupational and personal reality. In other words, athletes realise that they must face up to an unrelenting, unrestricted scrutiny, as outlined by this experienced athlete, even though, in this specific case, their broader understanding of alternative occupational lives feels misguided:

> . . . with a nine to five job, as soon as you leave you don't take anything home with you. It's not written about at nighttime; it's not written about in the morning. You don't start getting analysed by everybody . . . you can shut the door at five and that's your job done whereas you don't have every newspaper, every TV analyst, every writer criticising what you've done, right or wrong. I think professional sport; everyone's an expert on it. It can get on top of you.

Athletes are constrained to cultivate an acceptance of their circumstances, a tolerance for public exposure. If not anxiety or panic, as a visceral reaction to feeling a relational

suffocation, athletes acclimatise to judgement and an asymmetrical moral social order. Any failure, or inability, to manage social spaces can have profound emotional implications – a sportive agoraphobia – for individual athletes. The structure and production of social space for some athletes traps them, robs them of aspects of personhood, and so sportive agoraphobia becomes the lived reality for professional athletes in the public eye.

Conclusion

The original contribution of this article is to introduce the conceptual idea of a sportive agoraphobia, which is characterised by a watchful predisposition brought about by an ever-present potential for a 'look', and specifically civil, occasionally uncivil, but always unsolicited engagement. The notion of a sportive agoraphobia developed as an idea interpreted from the multiple ways athletes storied everyday encounters: stories offering vivid descriptions of a taxing alertness to, and apprehension of, 'social' spaces. For athletes, lived spaces must all be managed, and are experienced as relentless environments that simultaneously compel and constrain interactional involvement. Athletes come to be conscious of their familiarity and renown, and how physically they take up and occupy social spaces. Their sense of being in the world thus involves a qualitative measurement of public locales, surveying spatially for 'danger' signs: professional athletes can take little about the geography of their lives for granted, the upshot of which is a residual existential disquiet – a sportive agoraphobia – in relation to a sense of place and disruptions to daily movements. Thus, interpreting the nature of working lives in professional sport in terms of the social relations of space, and an alertness to norms of *public* engagement, brings to the fore different types of insights into psychic disorders that lie beyond the reach of individualistic, mini theories related to performance 'demands' (Schinke, Si, and Moore 2018), injury (Putukian 2016), and of 'losing one's identity' (Menke and Germany 2019). So, the emergence of the idea of a sportive agoraphobia, as a heuristic device (Swedberg 2014), offers up for critical attention the question of who athletes are, not what they do and how they do it, and its role in the broader construction of athlete *social* selves.

The article also makes an empirical contribution, which extends knowledge regarding the liminal public lives of high-profile elites. In the specific case of professional athletes, their strategies for managing their social selves are essential to producing in unknown others a state of mind that, if possible, avoids intimacy and deflects criticism. Our focus here has been on everyday social spaces in athletes lives that are not customarily conceptualised as meaningful: so, a focus on these seemingly unconnected, 'in-between' contexts, raises for consideration what we see as the tendency to process-reduction – the separation of interrelated things into individual components – evidenced by the character of a restrictive language, which for example prioritises 'demands', 'stressors', and 'environments'. This sociological research in contrast says something about the material (not solely existential) impact of how a relational mindfulness impacts on 'unremarkable' geographical mobility and a sense of how – behaviourally – athletes work to over-present their selves (Carless and Douglas 2013). We find therefore that studies of the mental health of elite athletes tend to employ a language that reflects disembodied ideas, torn from the roots of human agency, simultaneously marginalising the conscious, non-stop forming of a relational unity with people in public spaces. A unity that is compelled by the instrumental need for athletes, who attach significance to the consequence of interactional rituals, to over-communicate gestures which, while psychologically *burdensome*, reinforce desired public interpretations of them. Thus, sidestepping the study of everyday social circumstances, unfamiliar to, unfashionable with, predominant studies of athlete mental health (e.g. Rice et al. 2016; Vella et al. 2021), separates out every day social interaction that takes place for athletes in liminal public/private spaces (Roderick and Allen Collinson 2020).

The data set speaks additionally to a contemporary paradox, privacy set against social participation, that raises a question of the value of privacy for such highly visible employees (May 2019; McCarthy and Edwards 2001). The *moral* life of the notion of 'the personal' for highly visible workers, like professional athletes, in the context of a consumerist panopticon cannot

however be defined in terms of unaware, normalised self-disciplining, but more adequately as a largely non-resistant, amenable but often cynical aligning of language, emotion, and disposition. Our hope is for scholars of high-level athletes to comprehend that the personal transition of professional athletes, from private person to public commodity, is an energy depleting one, physically and ontologically, which removes and consumes freedoms and chances for self-realisation, and renders meaningless the idea of workplace boundaries. There is also a need to re-examine how discussions of 'privilege' are framed in contemporary discourse and in relation to elite athletes in particular. While we have somewhat explored this theme in the findings above, future research might conduct a more focussed exploration of privilege, in the contexts of the existential pressures high profile individuals face. The personal troubles of professional athletes offer a lens on an (ir)rational structural preoccupation with elite figures, exposing a preparedness to compromise the personal space of well-known others, a sacrifice with which most 'ordinary' employees would individually take exception (Baghai 2012). The data therefore add further weight to questions concerning the importance of privacy as a fundamental element of human well-being and its value to the quality of mental health for highly visible workers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the British Academy [RF200102].

Notes on contributors

Martin Roderick is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Durham University. His published research to date has examined the ways in which the social identities of young, elite and professional athletes develop, and interrogated the fashion with which their identities are contoured by structural aspects of their lives. His current research focuses on problems associated with work and careers in professional sport, specifically issues connected to family life, work–life balance, athlete well-being, and the wider organization of labour in professional sport.

Hester Hockin-Boyers is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Durham University. Her current research seeks to better understand how individuals who struggle with eating disorders can engage with exercise in ways that are supportive to their mental health and wellbeing. Her research interests more broadly cohere around physical culture, feminist theory, eating disorders and digital spaces.

References

Ahmed, S. 2004. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22 (2): 117–139. https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117.

Andrews, D. L., and S. J. Jackson. 2001. "Introduction: Sport Celebrities, Public Culture, and Private Experience." In *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity*, edited by L. Andrews David and J. Jackson Steven, 1–19. London: Routledge.

Anthony, A. K., and W. F. Danaher. 2016. "Rules of the Road: Doing Fieldwork and Negotiating Interactions with Hesitant Public Figures." *Qualitative Research* 16 (4): 392–410. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794115587392.

Asmundson, G. J., S. Taylor, and A. J. Smits. 2014. "Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia: An Overview and Commentary on DSM-5 Changes." *Depression & Anxiety* 31 (6): 480–486. https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22277.

Baghai, K. 2012. "Privacy as a Human Right: A Sociological Theory." *Sociology* 46 (5): 951–965. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512450804.

Battochio, R. C., N. Stambulova, and R. J. Schinke. 2016. "Stages and Demands in the Careers of Canadian National Hockey League Players." *Journal of Sports Sciences* 34 (3): 278–288. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2015.1048523.

Beauchamp, P., D. Kamis, and T. Stull. 2021. "Achieving Mental Health and Peak Performance in Elite Athletes." *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 44 (3): 347–358. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2021.04.002.

Burkitt, I. 1991. *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*. London: Sage.

Capps, L., and E. Ochs. 1995. "Out of Place: Narrative Insights into Agoraphobia." *Discourse Processes* 19 (3): 407–439. https://doi.org/10.1080/01638539509544925.
Carless, D., and K. Douglas. 2013. "Living, Resisting, and Playing the Part of Athlete: Narrative Tensions in Elite Sport." *Psychology of Sport & Exercise* 14 (5): 701–708. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2013.05.003.
Carter, P. 2002. *Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia*. London: reaktion Books.
Collins, D., and A. MacNamara. 2012. "The Rocky Road to the Top: Why Talent Needs Trauma." *Sports Medicine* 42 (11): 907–914. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03262302.
Craske, M. G., and G. Simos. 2013. "Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia." In *CBT for Anxiety Disorders: A Practitioner Book*, edited by Gregoris Simos and G. Hofmann Stefan, 3–24. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
Davidson, J. 2001. "Fear and Trembling in the Mall: Agoraphobic Women and Body Boundaries." In *Geographies of Women's Health*, edited by Isabel Dyck, Nancy Davis Lewis, and Sara McLafferty, 213–230. London: Routledge.
Davidson, J. 2003. "'Putting on a face': Sartre, Goffman, and Agoraphobic Anxiety in Social Space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (1): 107–122. https://doi.org/10.1068/d45j.
Davidson, J. 2017. *Phobic Geographies: The Phenomenology and Spatiality of Identity*. London: Routledge.
De Swaan, A. 1981. "The Politics of Agoraphobia: On Changes in Emotional and Relational Management." *Theory & Society* 10 (3): 359–385. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00179269.
Douglas, K. 2014. "Challenging Interpretive Privilege in Elite and Professional Sport: One [Athlete's] Story, Revised, Reshaped and Reclaimed." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health* 6 (2): 220–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2013.858369.
Douglas, K. 2021. "'And I Dedicate This Win to . . . ': Performing Grief in High Performance Sport." *Journal of Autoethnography* 2 (3): 334–344. https://doi.org/10.1525/joae.2021.2.3.334.
Douglas, K., and D. Carless. 2013. "A History of Autoethnographic Inquiry." In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony. E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, 84–106. New York: Left Coast Press.
Douglas, K., and D. Carless. 2015. *Life Story Research in Sport: Understanding the Experiences of Elite and Professional Athletes Through Narrative*. London: Routledge.
Elias, N. 1978. *What Is Sociology?*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Entwistle, J., and E. Wissinger. 2006. "Keeping Up Appearances: Aesthetic Labour in the Fashion Modelling Industries of London and New York." *The Sociological Review* 54 (4): 774–794. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2006.00671.x.
Ferris, K. O. 2004. "Seeing and Being Seen: The Moral Order of Celebrity Sightings." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33 (3): 236–264. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241604263585.
Ferris, K. O., and S. R. Harris. 2011. *Stargazing: Celebrity, Fame, and Social Interaction*. London: Routledge.
Gibson, W. J., and A. Brown. 2009. *Working with Qualitative Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Goffman, E. 1967. *Interaction Ritual*. New York: Doubleday.
Goffman, E. 1972. *Relations in Public*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Hatteberg, S. J. 2018. "Under Surveillance: Collegiate Athletics As a Total Institution." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 35 (2): 149–158. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2017-0096.
Hochschild, A. R. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hochschild, A. R. 1989. *The Second Shift*. New York: Penguin.
Holmes, J. 2008. "Space and the Secure Base in Agoraphobia: A Qualitative Survey." *Area* 40 (3): 375–382. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00820.x.
Kaiser, K. 2009. "Protecting Respondent Confidentiality in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Health Research* 19 (11): 1632–1641. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309350879.
Lawton, J. 2001. "Gaining and Maintaining Consent: Ethical Concerns Raised in a Study of Dying Patients." *Qualitative Health Research* 11 (5): 693–705. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973201129119389.
Marshall, D. P. 1997. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
May, V. 2019. "Personal Life in Public Spaces." In *Sociology of Personal Life*, edited by Vanessa May and Petra Nordqvist, 144–154. London: Macmillan.
McCarthy, J. R., and R. Edwards. 2001. "Illuminating Meanings of 'The private' in Sociological Thought: A Response to Joe Bailey." *Sociology* 35 (3): 765–777. https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038501000396.
McMahon, J. A., and D. Penney. 2013. "(Self-) Surveillance and (Self-) Regulation: Living by Fat Numbers within and Beyond a Sporting Culture." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health* 5 (2): 157–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2012.712998.
Menke, D. J., and M. L. Germany. 2019. "Reconstructing Athletic Identity: College Athletes and Sport Retirement." *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 24 (1): 17–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2018.1522475.
Mills, C. W. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Poucher, Z. A., K. A. Tamminen, and G. Kerr. 2023. "Olympic and Paralympic athletes' Perceptions of the Canadian Sport Environment and Mental Health." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health* 15 (5): 636–653. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2023.2187443.

Poucher, Z. A., K. A. Tamminen, and C. R. Wagstaff. 2021. "Organizational Systems in British Sport and Their Impact on Athlete Development and Mental Health." *The Sport Psychologist* 35 (4): 270–280. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2020-0146.

Putukian, M. 2016. "The Psychological Response to Injury in Student Athletes: A Narrative Review with a Focus on Mental Health." *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 50 (3): 145–148. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-095586.

Rein, I., P. Kotler, and M. Stoller. 1997. *High Visibility: The Making and Marketing of Professionals into Celebrities*. Chicago: NTC Business Books.

Rice, S. M., R. Purcell, S. De Silva, D. Mawren, P. D. McGorry, and A. G. Parker. 2016. "The Mental Health of Elite Athletes: A Narrative Systematic Review." *Sports Medicine* 46 (9): 1333–1353. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-016-0492-2.

Robertson, J. 2002. "Reflexivity Redux: A Pithy Polemic on 'Positionality'." *Anthropological Quarterly* 75 (4): 785–792. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2002.0066.

Rockwell, D., and D. C. Giles. 2009. "Being a Celebrity: A Phenomenology of Fame." *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 40 (2): 178–210. https://doi.org/10.1163/004726609X12482630041889.

Roderick, M. J., and J. Allen Collinson. 2020. "'I Just Want to Be Left alone': Novel Sociological Insights into Dramaturgical Demands on Professional Athletes." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 37 (2): 108–116. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2019-0135.

Ronkainen, N. J., A. Kavoura, and T. V. Ryba. 2016. "Narrative and Discursive Perspectives on Athletic Identity: Past, Present, and Future." *Psychology of Sport & Exercise* 100 (27): 128–137. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2016.08.010.

Savage, J., D. Collins, and A. Cruickshank. 2017. "Exploring Traumas in the Development of Talent: What Are They, What Do They Do, and What Do They Require?" *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 29 (1): 101–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2016.1194910.

Schinke, R. J., N.B. Stambulova. G. Si, and Z. Moore. 2018. "International Society of Sport Psychology Position Stand: Athletes' Mental Health, Performance, and Development." *International Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* 16 (6): 622–639. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2017.1295557.

Sheane, S. D. 2012. "Putting on a Good Face: An Examination of the Emotional and Aesthetic Roots of Presentational Labour." *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 33 (1): 145–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X11427588.

Smart, B. 2005. *The Sport Star: Modern Sport and the Cultural Economy of Sporting Celebrity*. London: Sage.

Swedberg, R. 2014. *The Art of Social Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thomas, W. I. 1927. ""The Behavior Pattern and the Situation." *Publications of the American Sociological Society* 22:1–14.

Timmermans, S., and I. Tavory. 2012. "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 30 (3): 167–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914.

Turner, G. 2013. *Understanding Celebrity*. London: Sage.

Vella, S. A., M. J. Schweickle, J. T. Sutcliffe, and C. Swann. 2021. "A Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis of Mental Health Position Statements in Sport: Scope, Quality and Future Directions." *Psychology of Sport & Exercise* 55 (July): 101946. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.101946.

Wolcott, H. F. 1994. *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation*. London: Sage.

Wylleman, P., A. Reints, and P. De Knop. 2013. "A Developmental and Holistic Perspective on Athletic Career Development." In *Managing High Performance Sport*, edited by Popi Sotiaradou and Veerle De Bosscher, 159–182. New York, NY: Routledge.