

1 Journal: The Sport Psychologist

2 Publisher: Human Kinetics

3 Title: “Women are Cancer, you shouldn’t be working in Sport”: Sport Psychologists’ Lived
4 Experiences of Sexism in Sport

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8 Funding information: The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship,
9 and/or publication of this article.

10 Conflict of interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

22 Though sexism has been recognised as problematic in sport, its impact on female sport
23 psychologists in the UK has not yet been investigated. The purpose of this research was to
24 explore the impact of sexism and its influence on practice. Four semi-structured focus groups
25 were conducted, comprising 11 sport psychologists who worked in the UK. Thematic
26 analysis revealed four general themes: the environment, privileging masculinity, acts of
27 sexism, and the feminine. Participants' discourse suggests female sport psychologists are
28 impacted by sexism in their workplaces. Gendered power differentials, coupled with the low
29 status of sport psychology within sport, exacerbated the challenges faced by female sport
30 psychologists. This study contributes to the dearth of research on the impact of sexism on
31 sport psychologists. Suggestions are made with regards to implications for practice.

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“Women are Cancer, you shouldn't be working in Sport”: Sport Psychologists' Lived 34 Experiences of Sexism in Sport

35

36 Fink (2016) notes that sexism in sport is “commonly overt yet simultaneously
37 unnoticed” (p.2). Sexism in most sports is treated less seriously than other discriminatory
38 issues, such as racism or homophobia, and is ignored or laughed at, rather than receiving
39 condemnation (Fink, 2016). Hetero-patriarchal ideology is so deep-rooted in many sports that
40 it has become invisible to many and therefore remains unchallenged, and thus perpetuated
41 (Brackenridge, 2002; Cunningham, 2008; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). The central
42 issue is that privilege is invisible to those who hold it, and in most sports, those who hold it
43 are men (Kimmel, 2018; Krane & Waldron, 2020).

44 Women's experiences across a range of sport-based professions were explored the
45 Women in Sport's (WIS; 2018) survey on sexism and workplace sport culture in the United
46 Kingdom. The researchers highlighted the experiences women have working in this
47 environment. The survey reports that nearly twice as many women experience gender
48 discrimination in their workplace: 38% of women, and 21% of men. Similarly, 72% of men
49 stated that they felt that their workplace was fair and equitable to both genders, whilst only
50 46% of women said the same. This demonstrates a large discrepancy in perception and lived
51 experiences. A further survey from Women in Football (WIF, 2016; for reference, in the UK
52 'football' is the term used instead of the American 'soccer') documented that 61.9% of
53 respondents had been the recipients of sexist "banter", and that 14.8% had been sexually
54 harassed. Since the release of this survey, WIF has reported a 400% increase in reports of
55 sexual discrimination and harassment (Kelner, 2018). Perhaps this increase indicates that
56 publication of the WIF report has facilitated greater awareness and action regarding sexist
57 practices in the workplace. Whilst sport psychologists may have been respondents to these
58 surveys, their experiences are not identifiable from the data.

59 The problem of sexism is often oversimplified, and a reductionist approach is taken.
60 However, in order to understand the complexity of the gendered landscape of sport, it is
61 important to consider acts of sexism and hegemonic masculinity. Acts of sexism have been
62 categorised in the literature in two different ways: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism
63 (Glick, 2013). These are useful theoretical concepts to be able understand and categorise
64 sexist behaviour, however we must acknowledge that in lived experiences they may present
65 themselves in more nuanced ways. Hostile sexism is used to punish individuals who deviate
66 from prescribed gender norms and male hegemony (Glick, 2013; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001).
67 Benevolent sexism is used to reward individuals who comply with prescribed gender norms
68 (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). These two acts of sexism work hand-in-hand to ensure

69 compliance with traditional gender roles (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Glick, 2013).
70 Benevolent sexism is harder to recognise, as it often manifests as “compliments” or other
71 patronising behaviours (Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Glick et al., 2000; Roper, 2008). The
72 innocuous nature of benevolent sexism makes the perpetuation of sexism in the workplace
73 more challenging to eradicate (Glick et al., 2000). It is in the moments that women are
74 disempowered from confrontation through the use of benevolent sexism, that men are more
75 likely to interpret as not being sexist, and it is in those moments where allies are needed the
76 most (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014; Drury & Kaiser, 2014). The aforementioned data, and
77 further evidence that will be discussed below, reveal that the institution of sport is sexist
78 (Brackenridge, Murtrie & Choi, 2005). However, to date, we have little evidence of whether
79 acts of sexism have been experienced by UK female sport psychologists, and what the impact
80 might be.

81 A formative and enduring definition of hegemonic masculinity, from Connell (1987),
82 conceptualises it as the notion of dominant masculinity that is built upon two pillars:
83 domination of women and hierarchical inter-male dominance. This type of masculinity
84 generally manifests with the following characteristics: ruthless competition, control and
85 dominance, a hierarchy of masculinities, a disinclination to show dependency or weakness,
86 an incapacity to express emotions other than anger, the devaluing and exclusion of femininity
87 and women, and stigmatisation of homosexuality (Brittan, 1989; Harris, 2008; Krane &
88 Waldron, 2020; Waldron & Krane, 2005). However, the understanding of hegemonic
89 masculinity conveyed by Lewis, Roberts, Andrew & Sawiuk (2020) offers a more layered
90 perspective:

91

92 while we accept the masculine concept as a framework to understand gender-related
93 norms, we reject the use of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type, or a
94 collection of toxic traits. Instead we are framing masculinities as multiple, fluid and
95 lithe and seen as positions held situationally, whereby practices and values espoused
96 in one context may be different from those of another (Jewkes et al., 2015). (p. 73)

97

98 Thus, whilst a framework is useful to conceptualise hegemonic masculinity, it is
99 acknowledged that it does not exist in a fixed way. Hegemonic masculinity has been linked to
100 the systemic power differentials between men and women in sport, most notably in work
101 pioneered by Brackenridge (2002). Sport is perceived to be a male domain and a prime
102 indicator of masculinity (Aicher & Sagas, 2010; Brackenridge, 2002; Wheaton, 2000). The
103 sexism endemic to sport is related to the under-representation of women and is causally
104 linked to how deeply entwined sport is with restrictive and toxic definitions of masculinity
105 (Anderson, 2008; Fink, 2016). Krane and Waldron (2020) state that:

106

107 Hegemonic masculinity, as reified in sport, has seeped into the fabric of sport
108 psychology whereby mainstream sport psychology organizations, through a
109 functionalist lens, support, and one may say institutionalize, hegemonic masculine
110 sport norms (p. 4)

111

112 Hegemonic masculinity discredits and dismisses the value of female voices (Beard,
113 2017; Drury & Kaiser, 2014), as articulated by Beard (2017): “you cannot easily fit women
114 into a structure that is already coded as male” (p.86). This was echoed by Roper (2008) who
115 reported female sport psychologists’ feelings of exclusion from not being “one of the boys”

116 and represents the only work to date explicitly addressing female sport psychologists’
117 experiences of sexism (p. 415). In sport, these discourses, and the construct of masculinity
118 itself, are made up of a highly constricting set of heteronormative criteria. Any discourse that
119 challenges “masculinity” is used for the purposes of punishment and seen as a threat (Adams,
120 Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Stapel & Noordewier, 2011). For example: “don’t play like a
121 girl”. Thus, masculinity is heteronormative as it is used as a way of socially policing
122 behaviour according to gendered categories (Chambers, 2003; Marchia & Sommer, 2019).
123 Conversely, normative versions of femininity are often rejected within sport (Masser &
124 Abrams, 2004). This might provide an explanation for the low status of psychology in sport
125 (Cotterill & Barker, 2013; Pain & Harwood, 2004), as it can be argued that the core skills of
126 psychologists align with perceptions of “femininity” (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Karniol, Gabay,
127 Ockion & Harari, 1998; Petrie, Cogan, Van Raalte & Brewer, 1996), which may be perceived
128 to challenge normative versions of “masculinity” (Anderson, 2008). Sport psychology in the
129 UK, as a discipline, has its origins in sport science, not psychology, meaning that sport
130 psychology carries an assumed positivist inheritance (Krane & Waldron, 2020). In this way,
131 sport psychology often embodies what has been referred to as agentic male features when
132 approaching practice, seeking to quantify, order, and control (Farnham, 1987). The reality of
133 practice however, is less ‘cut and dry’, whereby the sport psychologist is necessarily
134 embroiled in the complexities of the lives of those they work with, requiring sensitivity and
135 communality to create the practitioner-athlete relationship (Farnham, 1987; Katz &
136 Hemmings, 2009; Longstaff & Gervis, 2016).

137 Hegemonic masculinity, and its culture of emotional repression, has been linked to
138 depression and suicide in young men (Canetto & Sakinofsky, 1998; Connell &
139 Messerschmidt, 2005; Möller-Leimkühler, 2003; Payne, Swami & Stanistreet, 2008).
140 Furthermore, it poses harm to the physical and emotional well-being of both women and men.

141 Mental health issues have long been viewed in sport as being problematic, though there is an
142 emerging trend whereby these concerns are beginning to be viewed with more understanding.
143 Despite this, currently in sport there is a paucity of professional psychologists to support
144 athletes (Gervis, Pickford, Hau & Fruth, 2020; Moesch et al., 2018). To date, these issues
145 have not been connected with the enduring culture of hegemonic masculinity.

146 Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, power is viewed in a particular way,
147 whereby power is conceptualised as something that men have over women (Jewkes et al.,
148 2015). The language of sport is rife with references to power, which have many links to
149 gender conflict and hegemonic practices (Brackenridge, 2002; Messner, 1992). According to
150 Brackenridge's (2002) influential work, power is both structural and cultural. Structural
151 power is indicative of a hierarchy (Brackenridge, 2002). Hierarchical and structural
152 conceptualisations of power are engrained into the fabric of the sporting world, which results
153 in women being excluded from numerous positions therein (Carpenter & Acosta, 2000).
154 Moreover, men in sport are imbued with structural power that affords them the position of
155 'gatekeeper', which the female sport psychologist must then circumnavigate (Roper, 2008).
156 Cultural power is continuously negotiated and constructed through discourse (Brackenridge,
157 2002). This can manifest through, for example, relational patterns and verbal communication,
158 often characterised as "banter" (Roper, 2008; WIF, 2016).

159 Current power structures within most sports invariably have the coach at the top of the
160 hierarchy (Aicher & Sagas, 2010; Brackenridge, 2002; Burke, 2001; Gervis, Rhind, Luzar,
161 2016). Other support staff, such as: physiotherapists, sport scientists, and strength and
162 conditioning coaches, have been added to the sports performance hierarchy with sport
163 psychologists being the last addition, and who consequently have the least power (Cotterill &
164 Barker, 2013; Pain & Harwood, 2004). Sport psychology as a discipline faces challenges in
165 terms of establishing credibility and acceptance within the sport and exercise sector (Cotterill

166 & Barker, 2013; Pain & Harwood, 2004). This is reflected by a paucity of full-time sport
167 psychology roles available, and a focus on short-term contracts (Barker & Winter, 2014;
168 Cotterill, 2017; Gervis, Pickford, Hau & Fruth, 2020). This is problematic for sport
169 psychologists not only due to the impact this has on job security and job clarity, but also
170 diminishing the power of practitioners (Cotterill, 2017). Consequently, female practitioners
171 may experience the dual effects of being both female and practicing an undervalued
172 discipline (Krane & Waldron, 2020; Whaley & Krane, 2012).

173 Change can only occur if the problem is noticed and acknowledged (Mason, 2002).
174 However, the majority of research into the professional careers of practitioner sport
175 psychologists have focused solely on the male experience (Krane & Whaley, 2010; Ploszay,
176 2003; Roper, Fisher, & Wrisberg, 2005; Simons & Andersen, 1995; Statler, 2003; Straub &
177 Hinman, 1992), with the exception of Roper's work (2002, 2008; Roper, Fisher, & Wrisberg,
178 2005). When investigating the lived experiences of female sport psychologists from North
179 America, Roper (2008) found evidence of gender bias, sexism, and discrimination.
180 Specifically, she identified that women had a lower status as practitioners than their male
181 colleagues. Moreover, they faced a range of sexist attitudes inherent to their sport cultures.
182 Roper's work was published twelve years ago, and begs the question: what has changed?

183 The above research provides some insight into the experiences of sexism by female
184 sport psychologists. However, the research does not explore whether sexism is a problem
185 experienced by female sport psychologists in the United Kingdom. Moreover, research to
186 date has not called into question how the intersection of gender with status as a sport
187 psychologist impacts practice. As such, this exploratory study investigates the lived
188 experiences of female sport psychologists in the United Kingdom, and the impact that sexism
189 has had on their practice. The research questions that guided this research were:

- 190 1. Do UK female sport psychologists have lived experiences of sexism?
191 2. What impact does sexism, if experienced, have on their practice?

192

193 **Method**

194 **Guiding Research Philosophy**

195 This study used a post-positivist approach, enhanced by feminist empiricism, as a
196 guiding research philosophy – as detailed by Routledge (2007). Post-positivism maintains
197 that the pursuit of knowledge through empiricism is the primary aim of any scientific enquiry
198 but rejects the notion of complete objectivity and predictability, which aligns with feminist
199 empiricism (Fox, 2008; Hundleby, 2011; Weiss, 1995). As such, it is accepted that “social
200 biases, such as sexism and androcentrism, pervade both science and society” (Routledge,
201 2007, p. 284), whereby “science and society” are representative of sport psychology.
202 Moreover, both post-positivism and feminist empiricism emphasise the importance of
203 reflexivity in the research process (Dupuis, 1999; Fox, 2008; Henderson, 2011; Hundleby,
204 2011; Intemann, 2010). Further, the aim of this study was to highlight sport psychology’s
205 existing structures that maintain inequality, in order to ultimately reduce gender bias, which
206 aligns with both feminism and post-positivism (Rogers & Kelly, 2011; Ryan, 2006).

207

208 **Participants**

209 There were 11 female participants, each was assigned a participant number from P1 to
210 P11 to maintain anonymity. All participants were accredited with the Health Care Professions
211 Council (HCPC). Participants had been practicing for between 2 and 25 years with athletes
212 who competed from semi-elite to world-class elite levels across a range of team and

213 individual sports (Swann, Moran & Piggott, 2015). Further, participants represented different
214 ethnicities, ages, and sexual orientations. However, due to the small number of female sport
215 psychologists currently practicing, the intersectional identities of the participants will not be
216 reported, to maintain confidentiality. In this instance, ethical consideration for the participants
217 supersedes the importance of intersectional analysis in feminist research.

218

219 **Procedure**

220 Purposive sampling was used to select participants through professional networks
221 (Patton, 2005). Participants were recruited based on the following criteria to ensure that the
222 information gathered was relevant to the study aims (Rhind, Scott & Fletcher, 2013): they
223 were female, and had a formal role working as a sport psychologist in the United Kingdom.
224 Prospective participants were emailed and informed that: “The purpose of this research is to
225 reveal lived experiences of female sport psychologists, to explore if and how sexism impacts
226 on their practice”. Consent was obtained prior to the commencement of any interviews.

227 Four semi-structured focus groups were conducted, where the primary researcher
228 moderated and led the discussion. Each focus group was created in accordance with
229 participants availability. The role of the moderator was to ask the questions stipulated in the
230 focus group guide, prompt participants for further information when they deemed it
231 necessary, and to steer the conversation if it drifted too far. A semi-structured format was
232 chosen to ensure that certain topics were discussed, but that sufficient space was given for
233 participants to discuss freely. Focus groups allow for the understanding and evaluation of
234 differences and commonalities between members of the same group, in this case: female
235 sport psychologists. Further, by using focus groups, the emphasis was placed on the
236 conversation between participants, rather than each individuals’ personal narrative, which

237 became fragmented through the natural flow of conversation. Consequently, the data was
238 reflective of the interchange had in conversation by participants.

239 A focus group guide was prepared in advance, questions were developed by the
240 researchers in response to the literature and personal experiences. Participants were asked
241 questions designed to evoke their experiences of sexism in sport, such as: “have you
242 experienced sexism?”, “how has sexism affected you professionally?”, and “do you think that
243 we, as sport psychologists, challenge the existing macho culture?”

244 Prior to commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained. Contact with
245 participants was initiated by email, wherein the main purpose of the study was explained.
246 Written informed consent was gained from all participants prior to commencing the study,
247 where they were informed of the confidential and voluntary nature of the study, from which
248 they could withdraw at any time. Furthermore, all participants agreed to review the verbatim
249 transcription of the focus group. The focus groups were held via Skype and in person, were
250 audio recorded, and each focus group lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes. There were
251 three focus groups of three people and one group of two people due to a last minute drop out.
252 At the start of each focus group the following steps occurred: participants were welcomed
253 and introduced to each other, though in all but one case they knew each other; they were
254 reminded of how their data would be used; the topic was introduced, and participants were
255 reminded to allow each other to speak one at a time.

256

257 **Data analysis**

258 Reflexive thematic analysis was used to evaluate the qualitative data gathered from
259 the focus group. Reflexive thematic analysis is recognised as being theoretically flexible and
260 has been used in conjunction with focus group studies, post-positivist studies, and research

261 underpinned by feminist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Braun & Wilkinson, 2005;
262 Jenkinson, Kruske & Kildea, 2017; King & Ussher, 2013). Thematic analysis is a valuable
263 tool for understanding common and divergent elements across several cases, which was of
264 particular interest in this study (Riessman, 2008). The conversations were transcribed
265 verbatim and analysis followed the procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), who
266 propose a six phase approach to thematic analysis: 1) familiarisation with the data (this
267 includes transcription), 2) generating the initial codes (involving data reduction and
268 compilation), 3) searching for overarching themes 4) reviewing and refining the themes, 5)
269 naming and defining the themes, and finally 6) constructing the report. Negative case analysis
270 was also used to gain a holistic perspective of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally,
271 a combination of inductive and deductive analysis was used to generate a full picture of the
272 data. Deductive coding was grounded in the theoretical understanding of the core concepts of
273 hegemonic masculinity, and acts of sexism.

274

275 ***Reflexivity***

276 Reflexivity is considered to be a key factor in feminist, post-positivist, and qualitative
277 research practice, and is a core component of reflexive thematic analysis (Alvesson &
278 Sköldberg, 2009; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2019; Fox, 2008; Ryan, 2006; Tracy,
279 2010). It is a mode of self-practice that enhances the researcher's awareness of their position
280 within their research (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity is of particular importance given that the two
281 authors are both female sport psychologists who have experienced sexism in their
282 workplaces, and as such bring the expertise of their lived experiences to the analysis.

283 Finlay's (2002) conceptualisation of reflexivity proposes five variants of the reflective
284 process which were used by the researchers: (i) introspection; (ii) intersubjective reflection;

285 (iii) mutual collaboration; (iv) social critique; and (v) discursive deconstruction. Both
286 researchers discussed frequently the products of their introspection and intersubjective
287 reflection, aiming to ensure that they were aware of how their experiences of sexism
288 impacted the ways in which they responded to the data. Analysis was conducted jointly by
289 the two researchers, and then further evaluated by four additional female sport psychologists
290 as a function of mutual collaboration.

291

292 **Discussion of Results**

293 Analysis of the data revealed four general dimensions: the environment, privileging
294 masculinity, acts of sexism, and the feminine. Each general dimension is comprised of
295 higher-order themes and further lower-order themes. Each general dimension is discussed in
296 detail in relation to current findings and existing literature.

297

298 **The Environment**

299 The general dimension of The Environment revealed four higher-order themes: the
300 discipline of sport psychology, male-dominated professional sport, mixed-gender
301 professional sport, and mixed-gender Olympic sport (see Table 1). Sport psychology as a
302 discipline is still in flux with respect to defining its role and practice. This was highlighted in
303 the lower-order theme ‘doing ‘male’ sport psychology’, whereby participants noted that there
304 was a particular conceptualisation of the way that sport psychology ‘should’ be practiced.
305 Specifically:

306

307 ...the group of men who are the sports psychologists who hang on to this notion that
308 sport psychology is about performance not about, you know it's about measurement.
309 It's about science it's about all of those men type things. It's not about the skills of
310 communication, it's not about counselling, because that's the airy-fairy girly stuff isn't
311 it, and we're sports psychologists. And I think that some of the things in terms of how
312 we practice and what we believe to be the job of the sports psychologist I think it
313 allows male sports psychologists who adopt all of that hyper masculinity as being the
314 norm because they've all grown up in that environment so it's normalised, so it allows
315 them to be psychologists without the kind of emotional labour bit attached to it. (P11)

316

317 This quotation demonstrates the conflict present between the 'soft skills', or 'feminine
318 skills', inherent to being a practitioner psychologist, and the 'hard skills', or 'masculine
319 skills', of performance enhancement that can be measured, and echoes the arguments made
320 by Krane and Waldron (2020). In this way, Participant 2 conceptualised the role of the sport
321 psychologist as being: "*So we kind of – we're the holder in the sense of that vulnerability that*
322 *secret the stuff that they're not showing to the rest of the world*". Participant 4 furthered this
323 idea by noting that she had experienced open hostility towards the 'soft' skills inherent to
324 psychology: "*the first team director of rugby will not allow a psychologist in, even though*
325 *his players are crying out for it, because it we'll make them weaker. She will make them cry*".

326

327 [Table 1. General Dimension: The Environment]

328

329 Most participants referred to the marginalisation of their discipline within sports
330 institutions because of their 'lower status' in comparison to other staff members. They

331 explained that they perceived sport psychology to be the “*bottom of the pile*” (P1). This had a
332 significant impact on the practitioners as they felt that they had less agency and credibility as
333 a result. Participant 5 states that “*Psychology as a discipline is not highly regarded*”. This
334 supports the literature that suggests sport psychology still does not have equal standing to
335 other roles within sport (Cotterill & Barker, 2013; Pain & Harwood, 2004). This is made
336 particularly evident through the following interchange:

337

338 *P4: “I could be a psychologist I just don't have the time to do it”. The number of*
339 *times I've heard that.*

340 *P5: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. So sad.*

341 *P4: Yeah. This took me seven years, but you could actually do this.*

342

343 Indeed, this perspective was also encountered by Participant 2: “*A physio who worked*
344 *in professional football said I've read a book on mental toughness and psychology I don't*
345 *need a psychologist to help me do that*”. The sense of entitlement possessed by other staff
346 members, and the clear power discrepancy between sport psychologists and other
347 organisational roles resulted in many participants feeling that they were less able to denounce
348 sexism, particularly in relation to coaches who were generally men:

349

350 *I found it easier with the players because we have more power. So it's easier to call*
351 *them out. With coaches, higher management, other members of staff, it's then knowing*
352 *the right way to do it... I've got used to it now, but it's that shock that you just can't*
353 *believe someone has actually said that (P3).*

354

355 Moreover, coaches were seen to occupy a position of significant authority and
356 influence in the sport organisations the participants worked in. This placed them higher in the
357 hierarchy than sport psychologists and presented difficulties for sport psychologists seeking
358 to renounce sexist practices. This supports the research by Brackenridge (2002) and Burke
359 (2001) and indicates that little has changed with respect to the power of the coach.

360 The gender balance in the environment played a significant role in determining the
361 practitioners' experiences of sexism. Participants who had worked in a range of different
362 contexts noted that in their experience, mixed-gender Olympic sport was the most inclusive
363 and accepting of them as female practitioners. In stark contrast, the male-dominated
364 professional sport environment was perceived as possessing the most barriers to the inclusion
365 of women and produced the most sexist behaviours.

366

367 **Privileging Masculinity**

368 The general dimension of Privileging Masculinity encompassed the higher-order
369 themes of: culture, behaviours, and maintenance (see Table 2). The culture was
370 conceptualised by participants as one that glorified machismo, whilst simultaneously
371 vilifying and eradicating femininity. This is made evident through an anecdote Participant 4
372 shared:

373

374 *The other day I was in the academy, and one of the guys – the senior academy players*
375 *made a joke about rape, and at that point I step in and say that is – that's highly*

376 *inappropriate. You can't do that. Never, ever, ever joke about rape whether I'm here*
377 *or not... they don't – they don't want to have to change.*

378

379 This is a phenomenon that the literature has extensively documented (Anderson,
380 2008; Fink, 2016; Wheaton, 2000). Most of the participants noted ever-present female
381 dismissal whereby participant 5 recounts being told that “*women and sport don't belong*
382 *together*”. Membership to the ‘Boys Club’ and an intense focus on versions of machismo
383 were also mentioned:

384

385 *You do feel in the sort of – the professional sports side of things is very much a boy's*
386 *club. So that, that is definitely a barrier as a woman, because I don't have that same*
387 *network and I think along those lines is that in in in that environment it is a very*
388 *'laddy' environment (P4).*

389

390 This lends support to the findings of Roper (2008) and demonstrates the similarities
391 between experiences of women in the UK and North America.

392

393 [Table 2. General Dimension: Privileging Masculinity]

394

395 Analysis revealed two main behavioural elements of privileging masculinity: extreme
396 emotional constriction, and assumptions of normative femininity. On the subject of extreme
397 emotional constriction, participants 1, 2, and 3 reflect:

398

399 *P2: anger is an acceptable emotion whereas sadness, or disappointment or fear-*

400 *P1: The whole wonderful spectrum that women have access to-*

401 *P3: Well this is where working with those little under 8's is amazing. We went "how*

402 *did you feel when that happens?". They were like: "sad". "How- how did you feel*

403 *about this?" And they said, "Oh I was really scared". They say that they were sad,*

404 *and they were scared, but at some point between then and then being 16-*

405 *P1: Now you have to be a man*

406

407 This suggests that some masculinities, as experienced by our participants, were
408 centred on behaviours that should not be done, rather than those that should. Emotional
409 literacy is therefore at odds with male hegemony, which aligns itself with extreme emotional
410 constriction (Brittan, 1989; Cejka & Eagly, 1999). Most of the practitioners noted that their
411 behaviour was compared against assumptions of normative femininity:

412

413 *Considering that it's, it's such a male heavy, you know, environment that becomes*

414 *even more of a problem because, you know, being in touch with your beliefs your*

415 *emotions your you know that side of things, that's problematic for a lot of men to*

416 *wrap their heads around... athletes think that there are things that a female*

417 *practitioner wouldn't, we won't know, or you know they're just going to talk about*

418 *emotion and all the fluffy stuff around it. (P5)*

419

420 Participant conceptualisations of the maintenance of privileging masculinity are that it
421 may be sustained by normalisation: “*Group striving towards an idealised masculine self that*
422 *is so firmly entrenched in the media, the people they're surrounded with, and the way*
423 *masculinity has been performed in the past*” (P1), and conformity: “*in order to be successful,*
424 *the only way to do it is like a man*” (P11). However, one participant represented a different
425 approach to the normalisation of sexism in sport: “*I'm not sure to be honest how much of that*
426 *is also about the person's character. Because maybe it's also about what you accept to be*
427 *sexism or not*” (P8). This may represent a concerning phenomenon, whereby denial of sexism
428 leads to the normalisation and acceptance of hegemonic masculinity in the workplace. This is
429 further evidenced by this participant, who went on to state:

430

431 *For instance, I work with people before who had a real problem in the environment*
432 *and found it pretty offensive and really didn't get on with it. And I think things that she*
433 *felt were completely unacceptable examples of sexism to be honest they didn't fuss me*
434 *that much. It's a bit the same, it's a throwaway comment and I would tend to respond*
435 *to it by kind of taking the piss out of it. Yeah you're used to, kind of, if they take the*
436 *mickey out [make fun] of me for being woman it's like I'll say something back...I think*
437 *she [sport psychologist colleague] thought everything was about the fact that she was*
438 *a woman whereas a lot of it- I thought it's just because some of the people we work*
439 *with are a bit big headed and have huge egos and they like to shout people*
440 *down...whereas I was like, it's working with difficult people, and you're always going*
441 *to have to do that, to her it said something about the whole culture of the*
442 *organization. I think it kind of leaves you with quite a different sense doesn't it? A few*
443 *difficult people versus misogynistic culture. I think one's probably more OK than the*
444 *other.*

445

446 This would seem to be indicative of ‘victim blaming’, whereby the issue is perceived
447 to be only the problem of the person experiencing the sexism (Cortina, Rabelo & Holland,
448 2018). Participant 8 demonstrates a reluctance to challenge organisational norms, showing
449 how the culture of hegemonic masculinity works to undermine women’s lived experiences,
450 even to themselves. An understanding of why participant 8 responded in this way is provided
451 by participant 9 who, in response to the question “how has sexism impacted your practice?”
452 replied:

453

454 *I would say it was more implicit to start with, and although I noticed it I think*
455 *because the era was different. I was at a different stage in my career and I was very*
456 *much going to wanting to fit in and so I tended to just see it- I think I downplayed it to*
457 *myself and I wanted to just see it as something I needed to accommodate and*
458 *overcome. I had to work harder to prove, I believed anyway, to prove myself credible*
459 *to work in professional male sports.*

460

461 With the benefit of hindsight and self-awareness, she is able to recognise her own
462 actions as being a contributing factor to the maintenance of sexism. The problem with this
463 interpretation is that it leaves the organisation and its culture untarnished, and therefore with
464 no impetus to change.

465

466 **Acts of Sexism**

467 The general dimension of Acts of Sexism included the higher-order themes: hostile
468 environment, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism (see Table 3). All the participants in this
469 study recounted acts of sexism in their workplaces. These recollections serve to illustrate the
470 sexist practices that have a direct influence their work and well-being.

471

472 [Table 3. General Dimension: Acts of Sexism]

473

474 All participants remarked on the inherent hostility of the sport environment towards
475 them. They noted that the environment was engineered in a way that deprived them of space,
476 facilities and legitimacy. The practitioners' perception of their own legitimacy were regularly
477 brought into question, and served to undermine their worth:

478

479 *I probably would have to sell my experience more and my legitimacy in a space than*
480 *I've seen male colleagues have to do... I do think that sometimes I have to- would*
481 *have to affirm my status more in order to gain respect (P10)*

482

483 Further, they commented on how they were often in positions whereby they could not
484 access facilities as easily as their male colleagues. For example, many of the participants
485 remarked on an occasion where the basic need of a toilet was either denied or made
486 challenging to access: *"They've changed the ladies toilets into another boys changing room... clearly they didn't think there might be female staff who would need them."* (P3). In this way,
487 the enmity of the environment is invisible to the male majority and supports Kimmel's (2018)
488 observations. Another type of environmental hostility that was noted by most of the
489 observations. Another type of environmental hostility that was noted by most of the

490 participants was the scarcity of instances where female kit is offered. Nearly all the
491 practitioners' spoke of the profound discomfort they felt wearing kit that did not fit them
492 because of basic gendered physiological differences: "*It isn't designed with a female in*
493 *mind*" (P9).

494 The experiences of the sport psychologists in this study also support the literature on
495 hostile sexism in sport (Fink, 2016), and indicates that female sport psychologists do
496 experience this in their workplaces. The lower-order themes were: challenging expertise,
497 using femininity as punishment, sexual harassment, misogyny, exclusion, and dismissing the
498 female voice. Seven of the participants noted experiencing blatant misogyny in their
499 workplaces, all of whom worked in professional male sport.

500

501 *P4: the manager told me once that women are 'cancer'-*

502 *P5: Ayyy. What?*

503 *P4: You shouldn't be working in sport, you're just here to shag the players-*

504 *P5: Nice.*

505 *P4: If I argued against a point, which you kind of have to do quite a lot, it was: "ah,*
506 *are you on your period? Are you grumpy today? Is it that time of the month?" Stuff*
507 *like that. I had one football club where a coach wouldn't even say good morning to*
508 *me because he didn't think that as a woman I was supposed to be in that environment.*
509 *You know I'm very much supposed to be in the canteen making the teas, you know, I'm*
510 *not supposed be in the same space*

511

512 Conversely, the participants who worked in mixed-gender sports reported fewer
513 instances of sexist acts in these environments. This supports Anderson (2008), who observed
514 that misogyny flourishes in homosocial environments. The above quotation also highlights
515 the lower-order theme of ‘femininity as punishment’, whereby being female was used as
516 ammunition for punishment of anyone who challenged normative behaviours, aligning with
517 the findings from Adams, Anderson & McCormack (2010)

518 Several female participants referred to a sense of entitlement possessed by some of
519 their male colleagues to dismiss their voices: *“he stood up, he felt entitled to say that in front*
520 *of everybody, to call me out, to challenge me, when I'm about to deliver expert knowledge*
521 *and I am the expert in the room”* (P2). The assumption that gender negates knowledge was a
522 reality that the female participants were exposed to on various occasions. They postulated
523 that this was due to the systemic and organisational empowerment of men in sport, over
524 women, thus positioning men, unchallenged, at the top of the organisational hierarchy
525 (Brackenridge, 2002; Messner, 1992). The power differential that exists between men and
526 women means that male voices were more greatly valued than female ones (Beard, 2017;
527 Drury & Kaiser, 2014), a sentiment echoed by participant 2: *“if a man was called out by*
528 *another man for being sexist it would have a bigger impact than a woman”* (P2). All
529 participants noted that male voices carried greater weight behind them, where in contrast
530 female voices were easily overlooked or dismissed.

531 Benevolent sexism was also found to be problematic for the participants, which is
532 unsurprising given that hostile sexism and benevolent sexism work in tandem (Glick, 2013;
533 Glick & Fiske, 1996). The participants reflected that benevolent sexism had manifested itself
534 in their lives in the form of: inappropriate familiarity, objectification, patronisation, assumed
535 fragility, and assumed domesticity. Inappropriate familiarity manifested itself in different
536 ways, Participant 3 noted unsolicited comments on their appearance: *“... he said "Alright*

537 *sweetheart! You look like you've lost weight, looking good!" in the middle of the workplace."*

538 (P3). These comments serve the purpose of 'rewarding' women for conforming to
539 stereotypical gendered expectations (Glick, 2013). Five of the practitioners also reported
540 being objectified:

541

542 *I might have been treated as a little- I don't know, again this is where that slight*
543 *benevolent but still deeply sexist thing- but as brightening up the environment or*
544 *being something 'nice'. (P9)*

545

546 This is indicative of both the insidious nature of benevolent sexism, and the need for
547 male education around distinguishing between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (Drury
548 & Kaiser, 2014). Benevolent sexism maintains gender inequality, which may at face-value
549 appear acceptable, but needs to be recognised by men as: restricting, condescending and
550 unfair (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). As Participant 2 states: "*So again we are hindered, but in the*
551 *things that are insignificant. The seemingly innocuous creates an awful lot of problems"*.

552 This illustrates the difficulty benevolent sexism places on women, whereby responding to it
553 as the sexism that it is, would be perceived as socially unacceptable. There were
554 consequences to both hostile and benevolent sexism, expressed here by Participant 1 who
555 expounded on the emotional toll that acts of sexism had on their emotional well-being: "*I*
556 *kind of went to that place of 'freeze' because I was so humiliated and most of my attention*
557 *was focused on not going red and not looking embarrassed or ashamed or upset"* (P1).

558

559 **The Feminine**

560 The general dimension The Feminine was comprised of the following higher-order
561 themes: managing femininity, women's power, psychologist as 'mother', and assumptions of
562 promiscuity (see Table 4).

563

564 [Table 4. General Dimension: The Feminine]

565

566 Participants recounted that in the workplace they had to monitor and construct their
567 femininity, essentially: 'do gender', in an environment which does not view femininity
568 positively:

569

570 *And men never have that problem, they just rock up. And it's like how do I present*
571 *myself? What is the image that is going to be the most palatable and the most*
572 *acceptable to a load of coaches who are then going to take me seriously? (P11).*

573

574 Further, Participant 4 noted that what other women wear could also affect how men
575 judge her:

576

577 *P4: ...she turned up in the most inappropriate dress I have ever seen in my entire life.*
578 *I'm talking, like, her tits were out, dress just about came to the bottom of her bum. It*
579 *was skin-tight and she had like massive heels and like, caked in make-up, and*
580 *strutting around. And she just- I just- I just wouldn't- I wouldn't wear that anywhere,*
581 *but I certainly wouldn't wear in that environment. And it really annoyed me because I*

582 *understand she should be able to wherever she wants. But when- when someone like*
583 *that dresses in that environment not that it perpetuates this- or this belief that we're*
584 *just there to shag the players.*

585 *P5: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it sort of undoes everything that you've done.*

586 *P4: And equally I'm annoyed at myself for getting annoyed at that now because it's*
587 *like well why can't-*

588 *P5: Why can't she? Why shouldn't she?*

589

590 In this way, the individual actions of each woman are attributed to all women. The
591 practitioners found that balancing their own professional identities with the aesthetic
592 expectations of the organisations they worked in to be frustrating and tiring. Thus supporting
593 Roper (2008), who also found that her participants deliberately 'managed' their gender.

594 In these focus groups, it was found that female sport psychologists were assumed to
595 inhabit either the 'mother', or the 'promiscuous woman' stereotype. The lower-order theme
596 of 'psychologist as 'mother'' emerged, whereby the practitioners were imbued with maternal
597 qualities, as this was how their role was often constructed:

598

599 *I have seen the, the notion that "ah the psychologist is there to give the cuddle" or*
600 *that mumsy nature of like a woman in that role because people need a shoulder to cry*
601 *on (P10)*

602

603 The conceptualisation of the psychologist as ‘mother’, serves as a direct conflict to the
604 idea of ‘male’ performance-orientated sport psychology. In contrast to this, practitioners also
605 noted being cast as ‘promiscuous’, where it was assumed that their only intention was to
606 “*shag the players*” (P4).

607

608 **Implications for practice**

609 The lived experiences of the participants in this study clearly demonstrated that power
610 discrepancies between men and women, and the low status of sport psychology as a
611 discipline, resulted in challenging and difficult working environments. Participants shared
612 their experiences which illustrated the current state of sexism in sport in the UK as being
613 insidious. Being both a woman and a sport psychologist was perceived to have a negative
614 impact on their working lives. In this way, occupying the positions of both ‘woman’ and
615 ‘sport psychologist’ compounds the difficulties of practicing within sport in the UK. The
616 participants were affected by the culture of hegemonic masculinity that flourishes because of
617 systemic power differentials and the hyper-masculinised sporting environment, thus
618 supporting previous literature (e.g. Anderson, 2008; Fink, 2016; Krane & Waldron, 2020;
619 Roper, 2008). In turn, hegemonic masculinity was shown to create fertile ground for acts of
620 sexism that serve to further undermine female sport psychologists.

621 This study both contributes to the larger conversation on sexism in sport and focuses
622 on how this situation specifically affects female sport psychologists. It raises issues around
623 discussing the impact of sexism on practice as an ethical issue, as this is currently absent.
624 Moreover, it lends support to the idea that equal female representation in more sports would
625 be of enormous benefit (Anderson, 2008). Movements such as the Everyday Sexism Project
626 and the #MeToo movement are creating social change with far reaching ramifications. The

627 #MeToo movement has begun to address the issue of sexual exploitation in sport, however
628 there has been no unified reaction to sexism in sport specifically, let alone within the
629 governing bodies of Sport Psychology in the UK that inform and regulate practice. Until the
630 issue is addressed, little progress will be made.

631 With the above in mind, this study makes the following recommendations:

- 632 • Women's voices should be represented in all Sport Psychology professional bodies in
633 the UK, namely: BASES and the BPS. Further, it is incumbent on these professional
634 bodies to denounce the systemic inequality prevalent in sport, even in the absence of
635 women.
- 636 • The profession should consider how Sport Psychologists might report incidents of
637 sexism, and where they might receive support after these occurrences if the
638 institutions they work in will not do so.
- 639 • Sporting institutions, and indeed other Sport Psychologists, need to be held
640 accountable if they create environments in which sexism is permitted to flourish.
641 Currently there is no mechanism to do this, which contributes to the perpetuation and
642 tacit acceptance of the male-dominated status quo.
- 643 • Sport Psychology should embrace the 'soft' side of Psychology and ensure that all
644 potential Sport Psychologists are taught these skills. Sport Psychologists should not
645 be allowed to practice without demonstrating these core competencies of
646 psychological practice.
- 647 • Sexism should be taught as an ethical issue at postgraduate level and included as an
648 issue of concern in supervised practice. Education should be provided to lecturers and
649 supervisors to enable this where needed.

- 650 • Because in sport, men and maleness are held up as the “norm”, they are not required
651 to change. Thus, for the status quo to transform it is critical that male sport
652 psychologists, and indeed all men in sport, call out sexism wherever they see it.

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