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## **Abstract**

Traineeship within English professional football (soccer) has attracted much attention in recent years yet few studies have explored in any real depth the everyday workings of trainee footballing lives. This paper features the findings of two small-scale qualitative studies of football traineeship both of which were carried out at high profile English professional football clubs, one in 1993-94, the other in 2010-11. The paper uncovers the nuances of trainee experience in line with a series of theoretical assertions surrounding organisational discipline and control. It concludes by suggesting that whilst debate surrounding the design and delivery of traineeship within professional football has intensified over the past two decades, little appears to have changed with respect to the fundamental dynamics of organisational regimen.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research, social theory, English professional football, youth development, Erving Goffman.

## **Introduction**

Perhaps one of the most striking features of the biographical writings of English professional footballers over the years has been the somewhat restrictive nature of their occupational culture and, in particular, the claustrophobic atmosphere which players themselves document as being part and parcel of their everyday lives. In this paper we trace the conditions and consequences of this restrictive ethos for trainee professional footballers. We analyse player experiences within the context of (historical) sociological literature around the nuances of broader organisational life and, more specifically, in relation to the offerings of Erving Goffman in his 1961 classic *Asylums*. In so doing, we demonstrate how sociological analyses of organisational structures can be used to make sense of the everyday experiences of those who inhabit elite sporting locales. As our empirical basis, we use ethnographic data gleaned from two high profile English professional football clubs. Though these data sets were obtained almost 20 years apart (one in 1993-94 and the other in 2010-2011), our intention is to show how, despite claims to the contrary, some aspects of professional football club culture have changed little in the intervening period and that highly restrictive mechanisms of organisational control remain at the heart of this particular elite sporting enclave.

Utilizing the key conceptual themes put forward by Goffman (1961), and supplementing our analysis with the work of other social theorists around notions of organizational control, the paper seeks to demonstrate how aspects of ‘totality’ may be exhibited in relation to methods of institutional entry, discipline and surveillance. By examining matters of both human identity and strategic practice (Watson, 2011), our intention is to bridge the gap between an explication of the social structures of the institutions under consideration and the mundane intricacies of interaction that occupy the everyday lives of their inhabitants. By adopting this kind of theoretical approach, we aim to provide a better understanding of how elite sporting the organizations operate and the manner in which institutional values are acquired, ‘lived’ and

displayed through interaction, identity (re)presentation and consistent conceptions of ‘self’ (Burns, 1992). Building upon an emerging, yet sparse, body of literature (see Brown and Coupland, 2015; Day, Gordon and Fink, 2012; Lok and de Rond, Author, 2016), our work seeks to contribute to the growing argument that sport offers a useful and relevant lens through which to explore aspects of organizational culture. As Day et al., (2012: 399) argue, “Sport offers a type of controlled “living laboratory” to study individuals and groups ... this laboratory is life simplified”. Thus, our findings further demonstrate the relevance of such contexts in relation to informing understandings of the interdependency that exists between institutional structures, social actors and the manner in which values and behaviours guide, shape and/or restrict aspects of human agency. Furthermore, through the deployment of multiple theoretical perspectives and ideas, our work extends existing scholarship in a field where less pluralistic/eclectic approaches have been the norm (see Brown and Potrac, 2009; Cushion and Jones, 2006; McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005; Monk and Olsson, 2006).

### **Goffman, ‘Total Institutions’ and football**

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

(Doogan, 1980: 3).

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an

appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. Prisons serve as a clear example, providing we appreciate that what is prison-like about prisons is found in institutions whose members have broken no laws.

(Goffman, 1961: 11).

Taken at face value these two statements appear poles apart. One is a personal reflection on professional footballing experience; the other an extract from the opening paragraph of a sociological best-seller. Whilst both use analogies concerning ‘prison-like’ conditions to illustrate their descriptive aims, closer scrutiny reveals that evident here also are inferences which, in terms of organisational procedure, suggest that just as the everyday features of ‘total institutional’ life constitute some form of personal ‘restriction’ and ‘closure’, so too do the disciplinary and ‘managerial dictates’ of professional football. Utilizing the key conceptual themes put forward by Goffman (1961) on organisational restriction and control, this paper examines the daily routines of football traineeship at two high profile English professional football clubs - Colby Town and Valley FC<sup>1</sup> - within the context of ‘total institutional’ life. It demonstrates how professional football may be seen to exhibit aspects of ‘totality’ in relation to its methods of institutional entry, discipline and surveillance. In considering the specific relationship between Goffman’s (1961) assertions and the processes of recruitment, initiation and occupational socialization traditionally associated with football apprenticeship, we explore issues of work-place subservience and menial labour in an attempt to construct a conceptual and theoretical analysis of football youth traineeship over the last two decades.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to preserve anonymity, pseudonyms have been used throughout.

Of course, it would be naive to assume that Goffman's (1961) work on total institutions is directly relevant to English professional football. For one thing, his analysis relies heavily upon establishments which revolve around involuntary membership, and for another, his findings make no specific reference to sporting contexts. But in terms of the wider conceptual inferences which Goffman (1961) makes concerning the range of institutions within our society and the varying degrees of 'totality' which they exhibit, his work serves as a useful theoretical vehicle through which comparisons to working relations in English professional football might be drawn.<sup>2</sup>

For Goffman (1961:15) all institutions provide something of a 'captive world' for their members and, as such, display what he calls "encompassing tendencies". Depending on the official aims of each institution these 'tendencies', Goffman (1961:15) argues, diversify and fluctuate in severity. Primarily, his concerns are towards those institutions which demonstrate a high degree of totality in that they construct an obvious barrier to "social intercourse" for their "inmates". What Goffman (1961:15-22) is quick to point out however, is that the institutional features which he discusses are not exclusive to total institutions, nor are they shared by every one of them. Rather, for him, the hallmark of total institutional character is the "intense" presence of a number of items from within a common "family of attributes" relating to issues of closure, rationalization and bureaucracy (see also Sykes, 1958; Wallace, 1971; Foucault, 1979; Burns, 1992).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a condensed version of this particular part of our discussion, see Author and Author (2016). Sections of this paper have previously appeared in unpublished form (see Author, 1996a, 1996b).

<sup>3</sup> As Burns (1992) has pointed out, a strong semblance exists between the work of Foucault (1979) and that of Goffman (1961), despite the fact that both writers appear to have been unaware of each other's academic pursuits.

Of course, in terms of social restriction, life in and around professional football may be considered low on ‘totality’ in comparison to the kinds of institutions upon which Goffman’s (1961) work was based. Yet, in an everyday sense, football clubs are not organisations which people can simply walk in and out of at their own discretion. Despite the benefits of public exposure, many teams choose to go about their business amidst an atmosphere of relative seclusion in an attempt to keep the personal lives of players and their training activities away from the public and media gaze (see Tomlinson, 1983). Such practices inevitably mediate an air of discreteness, as do those of social restriction and residential isolation which have often accompanied notions of ‘apprenticeship’ within the professional game (see Author, 1996a). By adopting a restrictive approach to trainee socialisation some football clubs have come to engender their own ‘encompassing tendencies’ which, in resembling the operational characteristics of a host of other institutional establishments, allow them to fall into one of the five “rough groupings” within which, Goffman (1961:16) suggests, the total institutions of our society can be classified.

Whilst this broad nomenclature deals with organizations as diverse as orphanages, hospitals, prisoner-of-war camps and monastic retreats, Goffman’s (1961:16) fourth group or category is concerned primarily with those institutions, “... purportedly established the better to pursue some work-like task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds ...”.

Examples cited by Goffman (1961) here are army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps, and colonial compounds - a group which, for the purposes of the present discussion, also accommodates the more specific residential and rule-bound confines of youth traineeship at Colby Town and Valley FC.

### **Discipline, authority and rationalization**

Aside from issues of closure, for Goffman (1961) the central feature of total institutions is that they create a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating those areas of everyday life concerning sleep, work and play. Whilst in modern society these spheres occur, Goffman (1961:17) argues, "... in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an overall rational plan", within total institutions, such common-sense images of separation are dismantled. As Goffman (1961) proceeds to point out, such establishments ensure that not only is every aspect of life conducted in the same setting and under the same authority, but in addition, all activities are carried out within the context of collectivity or 'batch living', where institutional members are treated alike and expected to do things together. Moreover, Goffman (1961) states, total institutions operate along tightly organized pre-arranged schedules, which, in constituting formally imposed sequences of action, serve to represent an overall rationalization of individual activity in accordance with hierarchically determined institutional objectives.

In terms of those total institutions which operate in line with a predominantly 'work-like' ethos, one of the most explicit examples of such behavioural co-ordination and regulation is to be found within the organizational routines of military practice, a factor clearly established by Hockey (1986). Utilizing the work of Goffman (1961), Hockey (1986) highlights the authoritarian and rationalized nature of military existence whilst constructing a critical evaluation of occupational socialization within this sphere, illustrating the pervasive impact of hierarchical surveillance, discipline, and subordination upon the lives of young recruits in the British army. By the same token, it is our contention that Goffman's (1961) findings are applicable to life within English professional football. Indeed, if we take as our point of reference the fact that football 'traineeship' in England has been historically replete with images of physicality, discipline and subservience, the relationship between methods of



recruitment and training within the professional game and those within military (and/or broader total institutional) environments takes on increased resonance (see Author, 1995; Taylor and Ward, 1995). As is the case within military settings, many of the institutions to which Goffman (1961) refers operate in accordance with the general principles of bureaucracy. Insofar as professional football clubs function around structures of hierarchical command, they too sit comfortably amidst Weber's (1947, 1978) wider notion of bureaucratic organizational control, within which elements of discipline, authority and rationalization are necessarily present and it is to a discussion of these and related issues that we now turn.

### **Institutional admission and civilian role dispossession**

Writing of the way in which individuals become socialized into the routines of organizational practice, Van Maanen (1976) has argued that on entering any institution people must learn the values, norms and behaviours which will ultimately facilitate their continued (and successful) participation within that setting. However, because individuals possess prior experiences of alternative institutional contexts, the processes involved in organizational socialization, Van Maanen (1976: 68) goes on to state, necessarily imply that a person may also be "... forced to relinquish certain [other] attitudes, values and behaviours", in order to achieve his/her (new) institutional goals. In a similar vein, Berger and Luckmann (1976: 158) discuss the notion of 'secondary socialization', which, in their terms, comprises a situation whereby social actors enter institutional 'sub-worlds' or 'partial realities' where they find themselves in a position which requires them to gain 'role specific knowledge' in order to function appropriately in their new-found surroundings. Such processes would seem relatively straight-forward. Yet, in agreement with Van Maanen (1976), what Berger and Luckmann (1976: 160) point out is that issues surrounding personal familiarisation are only one part of this decidedly adaptational scenario.

The formal processes of secondary socialization are determined by its inherent problematic: that it always presupposes a preceding process of primary socialization. That is, secondary socialisation cannot take place until the previously formed self and internalized world is dealt with. This presents a problem simply because the already internalized reality has a tendency to persist and re-emerge. Whatever new things are now to be internalized must somehow be superimposed upon this already present reality. There is, therefore, an issue of inconsistency between old and new internalizations.

What for Berger and Luckmann (1976) constitutes 'present reality', for Goffman (1961: 23) indicates the existence of a "presenting culture" - a taken-for-granted combination of activities derived from the familiarities of a "home-world", and structured around the everyday occurrences of normal civilian life. In terms of total institutions, recruits arrive at establishments, Goffman (1961: 24) argues, with conceptions of themselves constructed around the "stable social arrangements" of their "home-worlds". But, by the fact that such conceptions represent a well-developed civilian frame of reference, they are, Zurcher (1967) claims, often incompatible with the detailed objectives of incarceration and thus form an inhibiting obstruction to the efficient operationalization of institutional aims. It is for this reason, Goffman (1961: 24) declares, that upon total institutional entry 'inmates' are subjected to rituals of initiation, degradation, and "mortification", which, in stripping elements of previous (emotional and psychological) support from the individuals concerned (i.e., those associated with the comforts and familiarity of home-life), allow recruits to become more pliant in the hands of their new masters (see also Wallace, 1971).

It is important to stress at this point that such role-stripping procedures do not necessarily equate with issues of personal ‘mortification’ and degradation in the universal sense that Goffman (1961) portrays. Alternatively, there is evidence to suggest that such practices may serve to reinforce notions of institutional identity, loyalty and commitment for those concerned and provide some kind of positive group focus (Mouzelis, 1971). In general, however, such practices appear to follow a particular pattern of application which, in eroding one’s self-determination and esteem, reduce also the potential for personal and collective resistance amongst groups of inmates. This pattern, Goffman (1961:23-51) argues, constitutes an overall process of ‘admission’, and may include facets of personal (i.e., cosmetic) modification, the assignment of identity symbols and specific living quarters, and the inculcation of certain rules and values. It is the historical markers of institutional admission within English professional football with which we are concerned. However, prior to the presentation of our empirical findings, it is to the details of the research process that we initially turn.

### **Context and method**

Colby Town is an English professional football club which is situated on the outskirts of a large conurbation renowned for its industrial history and manufacturing roots. Since the 1960s the Club has enjoyed increasing on-field success and during the 1980s and 1990s built a formidable reputation for the development of young players. During the 1993/94 season it supported a squad of 20 youth trainees and a professional playing staff of approximately 35. Of the young players at the club, eight were first-year trainees, eleven were second-year trainees, and one individual, although officially recognised as a full-time professional, was eligible for youth team selection on account of his birth date. All of the Club’s youth team players were of white, British origin. First years were between the ages of 16 and 17 and had arrived at Colby on their exit from compulsory (state) education. Accordingly, second years were embarking on their

second full year of paid employment after leaving compulsory education, and were all between the ages of 17 and 19. Trainees were interviewed at least twice over the course of the research period, which lasted for the duration of the 1993/94 season—from early July 1993 until May 1994. Interviews were also conducted with various members of club staff, i.e., youth team coach, Education Officer, trainee (residential) hostel proprietors, and the college tutors directly involved with Colby trainees on Further Education day-release courses. **Interviews were supplemented by participant observations 3-4 days per week either at the Club itself or in the Further Education environments that trainees frequented.**<sup>4</sup>

Valley FC is an English Premier League football club which is also located on the periphery of a large city with links to a strong working class heritage built upon manufacturing industry. The Club boasts significant support within its locality, the hallmarks of which are grounded in notions of loyalty, pride, passion and commitment, characteristics routinely promoted amongst its youth trainees. Over the course of the 2010-2011 football season, 16 of Valley FC's Under 18 (U18) Academy were interviewed along with members of the Club's coaching, managerial and sport science support staff. Interviews were accompanied by non-participant observations of training sessions throughout the season. All youth trainees interviewed had been offered a formal two year 'scholarship', training full-time at the Club and representing the Academy in competitive games at weekends. To this end trainees received a wage from the club but remained in full-time education, enrolled onto educational programmes facilitated within the confines of the Academy itself. Geographically speaking, the majority of trainees were from the surrounding locality and resided with their families, with only three interviewees living in 'digs'<sup>5</sup> at the time of the research. Many of the players interviewed had been with Valley FC

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<sup>4</sup> The research at Colby Town was carried out by the first author.

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of English professional football, non-familial and/or rented/temporary accommodation is often referred to as 'digs'.

Academy from a very young age, and all had a strong desire to remain at the Club on full-time professional contracts.<sup>6</sup>

The premise of both pieces of research was to understand how aspects of organizational structure impacted the personal and professional development of the young players concerned.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, both projects sought to examine how youth trainees negotiated identity construction within the workplace by acquiring in-depth insight into their subjective experiences of occupational life. Both researchers adopted an interpretivist epistemological stance in order to capture the experiences, values and interactions of the respective trainee cohorts and a line of situational questioning was incorporated into interview schedules in an attempt to uncover the social realities of institutional existence (Bryman, 2015; Crotty, 1998; Mason, 2002). The collection of observational field notes helped both researchers to adopt a self-reflexive stance towards data analysis and, via triangulation, to portray a comprehensive representation of the organisational cultures at hand (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2011).

Interviews across both projects lasted between 30-90 minutes and took place either on club premises or in private venues with participants. All were audio recorded and transcribed in full. The questioning style during interview was open-ended and, where necessary, further probing took place to clarify responses. Discussions focused on a range of issues surrounding the lives of trainees: their career histories, footballing ambitions, lifestyle behaviours and familial/relational networks. In line with conventional practice concerning processes of

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<sup>6</sup> The research at Valley FC was carried out by the second author.

<sup>7</sup> Though unconnected in terms of formal planning and design, the initial project (see Author 1, 1996) acted as a catalyst to the latter (see Author 2, 2010) in the sense that, as part of its overall remit, the latter examined the changes that had taken place within English professional football traineeship since the former had been undertaken.

respondent validation, all participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcribed accounts for accuracy (Bryman, 2015).

Data were originally analysed through similar processes of open, axial and selective coding that facilitated the presentation of participant experiences from their own perspective (see Charmaz, 2000, 2014). This took place in four stages. Firstly, transcripts were read in full to gain a comprehensive overview of the data. Secondly, each transcript was individually coded and indexed whereby a capturing of the different aspects of participant experience took place. Thirdly, these experiences were then categorised into a number of over-arching topics. The final stage of the analysis involved the formal organisation of these topics into three generic themes in accordance with which the initial findings were structured (in the two separate studies). For the purposes of the present paper, the authors returned to their original work with the intention of delineating similarities from their initial findings and to re-analyse these in light of the theoretical issues outlined above. This resulted in the emergence of three further conceptual themes around which the remainder of our discussion is structured. These comprise: (i) identification and identity; (ii) autonomy and accountability; and (iii) discipline and authority. Prior to our detailed consideration of these themes, we present an overview of admission and initiation within the two research settings.

### **Admission and initiation in English professional football**

Admission and initiation at Colby Town and Valley FC constituted a formal programme of occupational induction which, via the instruction of managers and coaches, quickly familiarized first year trainees with the most salient aspects of club life (i.e., daily routine, individual duties, chain of command, health and safety, etc.). During their initial days of institutional exposure an inculcation of workplace values took place whereby the stringent

expectations of club culture were transposed onto the relatively relaxed ‘presenting’ features of the ‘home-world’ experiences of trainees. Admission procedures played a key role throughout this period, amounting to what, in military terms, has been described as a process of de-civilianization (Hockey, 1986).<sup>8</sup> Representing something of a ‘reality shock’ (Dornbusch, 1955; Wheeler, 1966; Van Maanen, 1976) in comparison to the comforts of familial existence, this overall system of institutional ‘initiation’ severely challenged various aspects of trainee life both at Colby Town and Valley FC. Although, as we have seen, the application of admission techniques may elicit a varied ‘inmate’ response, the pattern of occupational socialization carried out with trainees at both clubs followed a somewhat self-defacing and ‘mortifying’ ethos based largely around notions of ‘image modification’. In turn, because the majority of trainees saw the characteristics of occupational entry more as a process of social curtailment and self-degradation than one of personal enhancement, they too attached negative inferences to the procedures which collectively made up their introduction to club life. Overall admission exhibited many of the total institutional features mapped out by Goffman (1961), and may be crudely defined in relation to processes of ‘role dispossession’ as described by others (see also Zurcher, 1967; Hockey, 1986). Our intention in the following section is to present a more detailed picture of how these forms of role dispossession manifested themselves amidst the daily routines of trainee lives.

### **Identification and identity**

Changes regarding personal demeanor were distinctly evident during first year initiation at Colby Town. On the first morning of pre-season training, trainees were presented with

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<sup>8</sup> For further examples of de-civilianization see: Brotz and Wilson (1946), Hollingshead (1946), Stouffer (1949), Zurcher (1967) and Arkin and Dobrofsky (1978).

individual squad numbers and personalized items of club 'kit'. This collection of work-place clothing and its accompanying accessories clearly distinguished youth team players from other staff members. The training kit issued to professional players adhered to the trend of general club colours, whereas trainee attire provided a stark contrast. Trainee 'kit' comprised a tracksuit, a water-proof training/over-suit, two pairs of shorts, one sweat-shirt, one polo-shirt, one pair of tracksuit bottoms, a towel, a pair of training (football) boots and a pair of match-day boots (to be worn only for official games). Colour coded accordingly, club socks were laundered daily and distributed by first year trainees to all players each morning. All other items of club kit were also laundered within the club by auxiliary staff. It was made clear at the outset by Youth Team Coach Terry Jackson that certain elements of kit were to be worn at specific times; tracksuits were for match-days only and no item of kit was to be worn outside the confines of the Club itself. In addition, when trainees entered the Club restaurant for lunch, a strict combination of polo-shirts and track-suit bottoms was stipulated. On a more personal level trainees were also schooled on the requirements of daily communication. Individuals were instructed to politely acknowledge professional players, coaches and senior club officials at all times and to refer to the first team manager as 'Boss', thereby demonstrating their recognition of authority, subordination and deference. Conversely, and again in line with military practice, trainees were addressed in relation to their inferiority (see Dornbusch, 1955; Zurcher, 1967; Lovell, 1969). They were known to other club personnel as the 'kids' or the 'boot-boys' - labels which were not only an indication of their youth, but a frequent reminder of their subordinate position in relation to the Club's hierarchy.

There were instructions concerning personal appearance too. Trainees were expected to be clean-shaven during working hours, and were required to keep their hair 'reasonably short' All of which was a far cry from the relaxed nature of their amateur footballing days and their



‘home-life’ experiences. Little wonder then that for first year Nick Douglas, Colby Town appeared more like an army camp than a football club:

As soon as you come down here [to Colby] ... it’s been a lot different to what I expected. It’s pretty much like being in the army I think. It’s really regimental ... all a bit silly ... I think you can do without all the rules we have to abide by ...

In addition, youth team coach Terry Jackson wasted no time in pointing out individual violations towards the required standards and issues with personal appearance:

Today some of the boys were told to have their hair cut. Damien was told by Terry, “If you don’t get yours cut, I won’t play you [in the Youth Team game] on Saturday”...

(Fieldnotes, Colby Town).

Hair has been an issue this week. On Wednesday Terry [Jackson] told Robin [Hindle] to get his hair cut ... when we were warming up [in training]. Today Damien [Blackwell] was in the Reserve Team changing rooms when Terry approached him after lunch telling him to do the same. He made him pull [the fringe of] his hair down to his eyes ... He did the same with Pete Mills and Robin. Damien had the longest hair in Terry’s opinion, and thus had to have it cut. Damien wasn’t happy, “I bet there’s someone else out of us lot whose got longer hair than me”. “Who?”, asks Terry. “Paul Turner”, replies Damien. “Right Turner”, Jackson orders, “get yours cut as well - enough said”.

(Fieldnotes, Colby Town).

In a similar vein, coaching staff at Valley FC placed specific emphasis upon the personal demeanour and social skills of their young recruits, in an attempt to instil a particular ‘attitude’, or ‘way of being’. Valley FC’s (Youth) Academy Manager, Henry Webb, described how this notion of ‘attitude’ was intentionally shaped from the outset:

... [W]e work hard on the social aspects, you know, when the boys are in the Academy, how they conduct themselves, how they dress, what they wear, how they interact with other adults ... Basically, you know, encouraging the boys to interact, but more importantly knowing how to interact with adults and other members of staff.

Additionally, punctuality, politeness and a friendly and approachable demeanour, both within and outside of Valley FC, were established as preferred behaviours. Discipline was partly determined through the implementation and monitoring of routine menial tasks and chores (or ‘jobs’ as they were widely known) undertaken by each trainee. Academy coach, Graham Kidd, reinforced his role as ‘overseer’ of such matters, highlighting the importance of completing allocated ‘jobs’ and the need to adhere to expectations around dress code:

I don’t wanna be seen as big brother but I will be if I have to be. They do jobs, our players do jobs. They look after their changing room, they look after their boot room, they sort their kit out, all these aspects they do. They do pro’s [professional players] boots. I think its spot on for ‘em, and if I seem ‘em coming in ‘ere looking like a bag of hammers [looking

unkempt], and they're not dressed accordingly how I expect 'em to be dressed, they get told.

### **Autonomy and accountability**

As we have seen, institutional procedures of initiation and admission at both Colby Town and Valley FC forced an overall reduction in the self-determination of trainees. Recruits had little autonomy over the way in which many aspects of their daily lives were conducted simply because they were denied almost all decision making responsibility in relation to social, occupational and professional experience. Organizational traits of this nature, Goffman (1961: 23) argues, are common to a range of total institutions and facilitate intentional processes of 'disculturation' or social 'untraining' amongst inmates which consequently render them relatively helpless in terms of wider social autonomy, expectation and action. More specifically, such characteristics appear to generate what Hollingshead (1946) identified as a feeling of 'institutional dependence', whereby individuals often become psychologically reliant on the services of the organization itself. In the case of military socialization, Hollingshead (1946: 442) argues that:

The ... institution becomes a substitute parent for an adult who has been reduced to infancy by the training it has given him. Moreover, the aim of the institution is to keep him in this infantile state by the use of psychological and institutional devices. Thus, every effort is made by the institution to organize the soldier's life both overtly and covertly.

Youth team life at Colby Town followed a similar format. Trainees went to bed and woke up when stipulated, dressed according to Club rules, ate in line with formal catering schedules and dietary stipulations, and modified their physical appearance to suit organisational standards. The

fact that individuals were compelled to leave their hostel residence by a specific time each morning, report to the Club, and thereafter follow a stringent programme of daily workplace practices and duties served to emphasize a heavily routinized pattern of existence which strongly contradicted the varied activities which home/school-life had previously presented. To this end, rules, regulations, instruction and subordination dominated individual experience. Each day represented an endless cycle of awaiting instruction, carrying out set tasks, and seeking the permission of Coach Terry Jackson to fulfil the next phase of daily routine. Walks to and from the Colby training ground, like the majority of activities, were supervised and paced in accordance with overall fitness objectives. Likewise, no trainee was allowed to enter any part of the Club complex until Jackson's verbal approval had been granted.

Each lunchtime in the Club restaurant trainees were subjected to the close scrutiny of Jackson in relation to their eating habits and general conduct. Afternoon activities in and around the Club itself followed a similar format. Lunch over, trainees were compelled to wait for Jackson's permission to take baths and showers or to use the Club's fitness gymnasium or sauna. In the case of first years, sanitation duties (i.e., the cleaning of changing rooms, baths and showers) had to be fulfilled (and carefully inspected by Jackson) before showers or baths could be taken. Those individuals who completed their 'jobs' in good-time inevitably had to wait for peers to fulfil their own designated tasks before further instruction could be given.

Institutional life at Valley FC was not dissimilar. Clear guidelines, rules and parameters concerning decisions around performance and lifestyle habits were established for trainees. Whilst these formed the benchmark against which all trainee behaviours were judged (be that whilst interacting with peers and superiors around the Club or whilst training and playing), it was highlighted that responsibility for upholding a particular moral character resided solely

with trainees themselves. Academy coach, Graham Kidd, stressed the importance of personal responsibility and the level of autonomy afforded to his young charges:

I think the players should know the rules, regulations, parameters and then it's up to them. 'Cos if I'm forever 'aving to do it for 'em monitor 'em, do this, do that, do the other: "Why 'aven't you done that? Why 'aren't you doin' this?". Fucking hell, hold up. When are they gonna start making the decisions? ... I encourage 'em to make their own decisions. I'll say to 'em "What do you think?". But I've got in my head what they *should* be thinking.

More explicit behaviour regulation techniques manifested themselves in the form of monetary penalties. For example, trainees at Valley FC were fined a certain amount of money if they did not comply with rules around dress code, punctuality, absenteeism or behaviour. It was emphasised by Kidd that the 'fines system' should be policed by trainees themselves. Whilst this was designed to provide a sense of collective accountability and empowerment for trainees, the system simply acted as a disciplinary tool via which coaches and managers could reassert their authority and control where and when necessary, as indicated by Kidd:

I don't wanna fine 'em. I've told 'em: "I'm not interested in fining you, I will if I 'ave to but I don't wanna fine you. I want you to be on time. I want you not to be late for training". But kids need to know, if they're gonna be late there needs to be a repercussion (sic). So they set their own fines.

Notwithstanding the high level of monitoring around trainees at Valley FC, controlling and

regulating athlete behaviour outside the confines of the Club, specifically in relation to drinking or ‘going out’ after a game, was deemed high priority amongst members of the Club’s coaching and managerial staff. To ensure that trainees adhered to a disciplined lifestyle away from the institution itself, strict emphasis was placed on the ‘social role’ attached to the occupation of professional footballer, including limitations on where trainees could and could not go and what they could and could not do in their ‘free time’. Academy Manager Henry Webb described how compliance to such regulatory norms acted as a means by which staff could control trainee behaviour outside the confines of the Club. Likewise, a rejection of such norms was treated with a ‘zero tolerance’ approach with the ultimate sanction of dismissal:

They need to know that there’s a social aspect, you know, we talk to the boys about how footballers are in the limelight; any little thing where you step out of line you’ll end up in the [news]paper, ‘cos you’re a footballer. So, you know, we encourage them to live right, not to be silly...[to] understand that there’s certain places you can go on a night-time but equally there’s gonna be places that you can’t ... So it’s the whole educational package. At the end of the day if he [trainee] doesn’t wanna do that, it’s the exit door.

At Valley FC, Academy trainees were under an obligation to constantly demonstrate that they were willing and committed to conform to the prescribed norms in play. In this sense, autonomy was restricted through a framework of accountability related to a multitude of traits and behaviours, or what Goffman (1961: 45) terms ‘items of conduct’. Indeed, at both Colby Town and Valley FC, such restrictions and parameters were designed to shape, constrain and judge individual behaviours, thereby weakening the autonomy of trainees through the obligations attached to regulated activity and an idealised persona (Goffman, 1961).

## **Discipline and authority**

Although, in theory at least, trainees at both clubs worked on a collective and integrated basis in relation to the wider commitments of training and playing, in reality institutional indenture was organized around a two-tier system of responsibility whereby official demand and expectation varied according to year group status. As Colby youth team coach Terry Jackson proudly confessed, the Club liked to treat its “second year lads [trainees] a bit more like grown-ups”. The idea being that the less second year trainees were ‘distracted’ by the responsibilities of daily chores/duties, the more time they would have to “concentrate purely on their football”.

Nothing illustrated this differential approach to trainee life more clearly than the diverse basis upon which trainee activities were carried out within the routines of the typical working day at Colby. Not only were second year trainees required to fulfil a smaller number of basic daily chores but first years were often subjected to a wider range of occupational duties in comparison to their older counterparts. Younger trainees, for example, were required to undertake set tasks on official match days; acting as ‘ball-boys’ each time the Colby Reserve team played at home, and cleaning dressing room areas once these games had taken place. In the case of mid-week evening games, this sometimes meant that, aside from a short break for evening dinner, first years might not finish work until 10.30 pm. A duty rota was also in operation whereby younger trainees were expected to help out with the Club’s youth development programme on a fortnightly basis. Such responsibilities constituted attendance at Thursday night ‘School of Excellence’ training sessions where, apart from refereeing small-sided games of football involving local schoolboy players, trainee time was predominantly spent making cups of tea for on-looking parents, a subservient chore which no one relished.

Of course, there are connections here with anthropological writings around issues of social status, and in particular Turner's (1967; 1969) observations in relation to the concept of 'liminality'. Utilizing the work of Van Gennep (1960), what Turner (1967) puts forward is that the series of events which make up any rite of passage necessarily revolve around processes of social 'transition' and often condemn those involved to a liminal/marginal state of cultural identity. Ostracized from conventional work-place or lifestyle conditions, this heavily inferior and ambiguous role, Turner (1967) argues, represents a time of youthful 'growth' and 'transformation' within some cultures where those subject to its consequences are thus considered in a state 'betwixt and between' structural significance.

Given these observations, and given also the extent to which inferiority and meniality have been historically prevalent amidst the institutional routines of footballing apprenticeship (see Author, 1996a), the domestic expectations placed upon first and second year trainees at Colby Town would appear far from atypical. Nevertheless, Colby trainees remained highly critical of their youth training experiences at the Club. **Within the privacy of interview sessions first years in particular repeatedly expressed anguish over their fulfilment of laborious and degrading chores and the psychological drawbacks of hierarchical insignificance. These criticisms often related to the processes of verbal humiliation which they regularly endured not just from their coach but also from a small group of unsympathetic professional players eager to capitalize on the minute details of 'boot-boy' inadequacy. All of which meant that first years eagerly awaited the end of their time as 'slaves' and 'skivvy's', when subservience would end, and when the importance of footballing performance and career progression would outweigh that of domestic efficiency. Colby Town first year goalkeeper Charlie Spencer summed up the feelings of the majority in this respect:**



Charlie: ... its hard 'cos you're always on your feet all the time. You finish one job and you've got to start another one, or something else crops up that you've got to do. An' a lot of the time ... whereas football should be the main thing, the [domestic] 'jobs' [around the club] seem to be the main thing, and the football seems to fit around the jobs you do. I know we've got a lot of jobs to do but we're primarily here to play football, not to clean peoples' boots or to clean the toilets or whatever.

But officials at Colby took a different view. For coach Terry Jackson, discipline and subordination comprised the heart of trainee upbringing, representing a crucial instrument of institutional regimen, organization and control. At the same time, the acceptance of and adherence to disciplinary practices were part of a wider (if predominantly implicit), 'test' of trainee character - a way in which Jackson could assess levels of 'professional attitude' loyalty, commitment and dedication amongst his young players.<sup>9</sup> It was, after all, in Jackson's interests to make sure that trainees obeyed his instructions as the extent to which they were prepared to suffer the indignation of subordination was a measure of both his success and theirs. Without establishing a sense of perseverance and resilience around such matters, how else would trainees contend with the physical and psychological set-backs of professional footballing life?

Likewise, at Valley FC, such examples of bureaucratic order were clearly evident in terms of hierarchical control. Authoritarianism and discipline were prominent and pervasive features of

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<sup>9</sup> Several writers have tried to define what the term 'professional attitude' actually means within the context of English professional football. For a more in-depth discussion see Roderick (2006a, 2006b) and Author et al. (2016).

everyday existence, holding various implications for trainees. Whilst describing the change in coaching style which they had witnessed since attending Valley FC as schoolboy players, both Charles and Julian outlined how the approach toward discipline had altered and how a harsh, authoritarian management style was now routine:

Charles: Once you come in from like [the] Under 15s, if you're doin' well there you've still gotta put effort in and [in the] Under 18s ... if you don't put the effort in you get a good bollocking ... [laughter]. So, you know you've gotta put the effort in like *every day*.

Julian: As a kid you can just get the ball and do what you want and you won't get shouted at for it. At this level you'd get bollocked for doin that ... but as a kid you can just run about with the ball and enjoy yourself, and there's no pressure on you ...

As a facet of institutional regimen, discipline within Valley FC's Academy was seen to establish a series of parameters around acceptable standards within training. Members of the Club's coaching staff believed that without such parameters, everyday activities lacked structure. Therefore, an authoritarian management style was seen as necessary to contribute to the disciplinary development of trainees. It is here that Max Weber's examination of 'domination by authority' provides an understanding of the functioning of authoritative discipline that can be witnessed within youth trainee environments in English professional football. The creation of an obedient subject is cultivated through commands that are dispensed by those in positions of authority, which are, in turn, interpreted as the 'norm' by those who receive them. Thus, Weber (1978: 947) states that, "in some limited respect the will of the one has influenced that of the other even against the other's reluctance and that, consequently, to

the extent one has dominated over the other". The link between domination and the authoritarian power of command can be further demonstrated by the lack of autonomy afforded trainees during training sessions. In this sense, domination by authority prevailed throughout the culture of the Academy; the 'ruled' performed certain commands based on a sense of duty, fear, or by 'dull' custom (Weber, 1978). Coaches at Valley FC readily endorsed the mode of discipline that was commonly used within trainee settings. Here Graham Kidd highlights the restricted nature of player autonomy and the authoritative behaviour traditionally associated with professional footballing environments. Emphasis is placed upon a strong adherence to reinforcing the work ethic required to succeed in the professional game, and a realisation that trainees were embarking upon a specific kind of occupation:

Graham: If it's like, what I class as one of them [those] days where it's just not happening for 'em, but if it's a petulant one where they can't be arsed and they're moaning with their teammates, and havin' a go at their teammates, I'll just say to 'em: "Stop. Do you wanna train? Yes or no? OK 'ave a go, if it carries on again I'll stop it a second time, that's your last warning, do you wanna carry on or get off and go in?". Players need to know where they stand. Other players need to know that the coach is prepared to step in and say, "You're not doin' it right, not a problem come out of my session". 'Cos otherwise the [training] session ends up dying on its backside because ... one particular player isn't in the mood - and it kills it for everybody. And they need to know that and they need to know that when they go out we're working.

Weber's (1978) notion of domination by authority was further demonstrated by a lack of trainee choice or autonomy around the assignment of 'jobs'. The dictates and routines of daily life allowed for the careful manipulation and regulation of trainee behaviour, leading to the acceptance of such values as constituting a normative part of the 'everyday'. Weber (1978: 964) notes that, "we cannot overlook the meaning of the fact that the command is accepted as a 'valid' norm". Indeed, the interest of trainees in conforming to commands—and to display a lack of resistance towards managerial authority—was, in part, based upon their desire to succeed as a professional athlete and/or to secure or renew their scholarship contracts. Lucas, a second year trainee, described in more detail the system in place for the sharing of weekly 'jobs' as administered by the coaching staff. In comparison to home life, trainees had little agency to refuse the duties that were imposed upon them, despite their feelings of reluctance towards such tasks:

The team would split into, like, the first years and second years and then someone would clean the changing room, someone would clean the boot room, and someone would clean the sink and stuff like that really. And obviously when your Mum says, "Put your clothes in the washing basket", you're like, "Ahhh whatever". But you've *gotta* do it here ... I don't hate it ... but you obviously don't enjoy things like that - but you've *gotta* do them.

Although on arrival at both Colby Town and Valley FC, trainees were familiar with the routines of training and playing, their previous experiences of amateur football fell far short of the often tense, ruthless and pressurised atmosphere surrounding their new-found occupational roles. The overall aim of youth training at both clubs was to help individuals adjust to the physical and psychological rigours of professional footballing life. Adhering to the assumption that even

if trainees failed to ‘make the professional grade’ at their respective club they would make it elsewhere, the immediate objective of coaches and managers was to prepare the minds and bodies of recruits for the harsh realities of the professional game, and to promote attitudes of acceptance, obedience and collective loyalty. These objectives were facilitated by way of a verbal and physical code of conduct and a set of institutional standards and expectations designed to ensure the efficient and consistent functioning of trainees at all times. Staff opinion was premised on the view that a lack of individual conformity ‘off the pitch’ would automatically translate itself into collective team failure on it. With respect to everyday workplace behaviours, conformity equated to an immediate and unquestioning response to official instruction. To this end, issues of club discipline and authority were seen as safeguards against trainee complacency and deviance, both at a social and at an occupational level. The often brash, unruly media image of English professional football was presented as an unacceptable threat to the reputation of player and club alike, and as a direct route to personal decline and disgrace. In its place the stringent standards of trainee policy were upheld. Proffering notions of conformity, sobriety and ‘a good professional attitude’ such standards were seen as the hallmark of institutional loyalty and a pre-cursor to occupational success.

## **Conclusions**

Our aim within this paper has been to establish a theoretical and conceptual framework in accordance with which it is possible to interpret the nuances of elite sporting life. In so doing, we have proposed a series of links between sociological interpretations of ‘total institutions’ and the everyday practices of English professional football club culture. Utilizing notions of ‘totality’ in conjunction with theoretical concepts concerning issues of rationalization, bureaucratic control and occupational socialization, we have sought to map out a relationship between the disciplinary routines of military recruitment and those methods of institutional

admission evident at Colby Town and Valley FC. In turn, we have demonstrated, by way of qualitative empirical findings that youth traineeship within professional football appears to have changed little over the last two decades in terms of the way in which managerial authority and organisational control are used to shape the contours of trainee existence. Notwithstanding the fact that there are alternatives in terms of the kind of theoretical analysis which might be used to conceptualise and explain issues of authority and control within the context of elite sporting institutions (see for example, Cushion and Jones, 2006; Author et al., 2012; Author et al., 2016), the work of Goffman (1961) provides a means by which to expose the processes and patterns of interaction and constraint which define occupational identities and conceptions of ‘self’ in such settings.

Both Colby Town and Valley FC perpetuated strong cultural values around ‘professionalism’, in line with the (re)production of clearly defined identities. In turn, and in conjunction with an exposition of the cultural rules and socially constituted norms in play, both engendered institutional conformity via a cultural climate that advocated a legitimate and authoritative use of power heavily imbued by structures of dominance (Weber, 1978). **Though relatively uncommon, the joint deployment of the work of Goffman (1961) and Weber (1947, 1978) to the analysis of such milieux provides a means by which to expose the patterns of interaction and structural constraint that shaped occupational identities and conceptions of ‘self’ within both organisations, portraying an environment that emphasised the ‘social role’ of trainees and the level of behavioural scrutiny that they were under.**

With all of this in mind, perhaps the greatest concern regarding our exploration of these two institutional contexts is the lack of change evident in the construction of cultural values in these environments in the years between the completion of the two studies under consideration.

Whilst the structure of traineeship within English professional football has undergone significant change over the last two decades, most notably through the initiation of the English Premier League's Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP),<sup>10</sup> little appears to have altered with respect to processes of institutional admission during that time. In short, authoritarian management styles, a culture of subservience, and a conformity to strict behavioural norms remain central features of trainee life. Indeed, wider research reveals that such institutional practices appear to have become a dominant part of the cultural landscape to which youth trainees within professional football are subject (see Brackenridge et al., 2004; Cushion and Jones, 2006, 2014; Platts and Smith, 2009). Whilst large scale quantitative studies have been carried out to assess the impact of such environments upon youth trainees (Mills et al., 2014), further qualitative work is required that places emphasis upon the cultural constraints and institutional relations that seek to produce, structure and (re)make the social realities of young players. By eliciting further insight into the occupational conditions of traineeship, questions surrounding the physical health and well-being of those subject to such regimes may be addressed. Such insight might also uncover further instances of institutional resistance that may assist our understandings of occupational practice, both within and outside of these contexts (see Hodgson, 2005; Roderick, 2006, 2014).

The social landscape of professional (youth) football is shifting in response to the increased implementation of technocratic systems of measurement and control, evidenced by a drive to quantify performance in accordance with the 'big data' movement witnessed across a vast array of sporting locales (Mackenzie and Cushion, 2014; Author et al., 2012, 2016; Millington and

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<sup>10</sup> The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) is a long-term strategy initiated by the English Premier League in 2012 which aims to improve the processes of youth development in the game and increase the number and quality of home-grown players who come through the club 'Academy' structures (see Premier League, 2011).

Millington, 2016; Author, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). To this end, future research must be attuned to investigating these new forms of control, exposing such techniques and processes to critical inquiry with particular emphasis upon their perceived efficiencies, pedagogical merits, and abilities to reinforce dominant power relations. Through such avenues of enquiry scholars within this field may speak to a wider audience, demonstrating how workplace cultures implementing similar (or adapted) disciplinary technologies and modes of regulation may shape aspects of human agency, and expose the complex interplay between emerging socio-technological relations across an array of differing occupational domains (Bergström, Hasselbladh and Kärreman, 2009). **Finally, we emphasise the importance of approaching the study of organizational control from multiple theoretical perspectives. Such an approach, we would argue, provides a vantage point from which to better view the inter-connections between institutional structures and the nuances of social interaction both within and outside of sporting contexts.**

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