

**What is the lived experience of mental health professionals in
facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory
for young people?**

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Abstract

Objectives: This research explores into the Sport and Thought project, being a sport-based therapeutic intervention for adolescents. It is a small-scale study that aims to discern how facilitators within the project perceive its significance, as well as the challenges and dilemma they face in delivering it.

Methods: Using a qualitative approach, six participants were individually interviewed following a semi-structured format. These participants participated in Sport and Thought as facilitators. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and subsequently analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Results: The comprehensive analysis of the participants' experiences and reflections on the Sport and Thought initiative led to the identification of five major group experiential themes: "Bodily Echoes", "The Psychodynamic Dimensions of Sport and Thought", "Emotional Landscapes", "Understanding the Inner Workings", and "A Tapestry of Transformation".

Conclusion: The study highlights the impact on facilitators and users of a program call Sport and Thought, emphasising the therapeutic value of sport. While there's consensus on the program's theoretical framework, its practical execution varies due to facilitators' individual experiences and background. Internal and external factors, also influence its effectiveness. The study suggests an ongoing need for reflection, adaptation, and supervision to enhance this kind of project's impact. Future research is recommended to explore the intricate relationship between sports and therapeutic facilitation in more depth.

Keywords: *child and adolescent psychotherapy, psychodynamic approach, adolescent, young people, teenager, Sport and Thought, Youth engagement, facilitator*

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim and Objective

This study is based on an existing project call Sport and Thought¹ which is an innovative model of group psychodynamic psychotherapy that uses the language of football as a medium of therapy for adolescents who are struggling with their mental health and are not able to engage in traditional talking therapy.

The focus of this research is to delve into the experience of those delivering the project: the facilitators. This small-scale study aims to illuminate how the Sport and Thought facilitators conceptualise and conduct the project. Exploring their thoughts and feelings, the study unravels the meanings they attribute to their relationships with the project's users and among themselves, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their roles and connections within the framework of the project.

Sport and Thought (S&T) is a football project for adolescents experiencing behavioural and emotional difficulties. It has been developed by Brent Centre for Young People, a mental health institution operating within the voluntary sector in the London Borough of Brent. It has been running for over ten years in secondary schools and Youth Community organisations. It is delivered by experienced psychoanalytic psychotherapists, football coaches with an interest in mental health, school mentors and youth workers who are specifically selected, trained, and supervised. This phenomenological research will investigate the perceptions and experience of facilitators in relation to the young people taking part in Sport and Thought, as well as with other staff members.

¹ Throughout the research, I refer to Sport and Thought using several terms such as the project, the program or simply S&T interchangeably. When using any of these terms I am referring to the Sport and Thought project as coined by the Brent Centre for Young People.

Therefore, the central research question is:

What is the lived experience of mental health professionals in facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory for young people?

The objectives of this study are to:

- Gather a comprehensive picture of the clinical experiences that participants have had while involved in the Sport and Thought project as facilitators, using semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data and analyse the interviews through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).
- Report and discuss participants' experiences and use these as contributions to the future progress of the service and implications for further clinical work.

1.2. Origins of the project

Even though it was just a seed planted in my mind, my research questions began pre-clinically. I was always devoted to sport, which I practised throughout my life; however, approaching the psychoanalytic 'matter' offered me a different perspective to learn from. Specifically, I was inspired to explore team sport and group dynamics. It might not impress the reader that my encounter with Bion's work on groups radically changed the perspective (or the vertex) on how I saw team sport.

As a pre-clinical student, I used to have multiple jobs, including a matchday football steward for a premier league team. When I started the job, I was enthusiastic about football but didn't

realise the psychological implications of this work opportunity. I can clearly remember the first time the home team lost the game (4-1 for the away team): while escorting the crowd out of the stadium, a disappointed supporter verbally communicated his resentment to me in colourful language. I felt overwhelmed and confused because it was utterly unexpected, and I didn't know how to respond emotionally. I realised that football and, more in general, sports cannot be confined just as merely entertainment.

During that period, my primary job was in in school for children with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties as a therapeutic support worker. Part of my role was to engage with them during lesson breaks, and we used to play football together. However, these football sessions would frequently be marred by disproportionate reactions or aggressive behaviours, and it was clear that many struggled to function cohesively as a football team. Over time, football became the preferred sport during breaks, but it was hard to maintain the group functioning together. I was struck by how much insight I could glean from this activity, starting to wonder if football could be adapted to help young people develop the emotional and cognitive skills they need, in order to participate actively in their education and reach their potential.

On one side, we have the physical activity for amateur or professional purposes, in which athletes are trained and educated through the values and principles of the sport.

On the other side, sport catalyses passions and feelings, provides a sense of identity, and provides a source to escape from everyday problems, a common denominator at any latitude on the planet. The power of this emotional connection explains the success and dizzying growth of the sports business (Oakley, 2007).

With this psychosocial interest in sports, I came across a project in North London that blended the psychodynamic approach and football. I was lucky enough that one of my lecture teachers engaged in this project, and as he mentioned in one of the seminars, I didn't miss the opportunity to ask him some questions. A few months later, I was invited to observe a few sessions delivered in a secondary school, where S&T was well established. I was utterly impressed by the quality of the relationships and the level of discomfort the group could bear. In the conversation before the end, the child psychotherapist commented on the group tolerating anxiety and pain, which I could not bear before. This recalled an article I had just read. Here is an extract:

The working group is the kind of group *“where the group can tolerate, explore, and value difference, alternative viewpoints and the tensions and potential creativity these throw up. Individuals can acknowledge and own different aspects of their personality without splitting these off.”* Canham, H. in *Group and gang states of mind* (2010).

Fascinated by the psychoanalytic input and the level of engagement, I joined voluntarily the Sport and Thought project the following academic year. Looking back, my involvement in it appeared connected to the sense of fragmentation I experienced as a steward when a fan ranted at me and my experiences playing football in a therapeutic context. It seemed as if – without consciously thinking about it then – I had intuited the importance of a sport and, more in general, a project like S&T.

1.3. Sport and Thought: The Project

The Sport & Thought project aims to provide therapeutic intervention to young individuals presenting destructive behaviours, who have previously encountered difficulty engaging in

traditional therapeutic settings. This project predominantly works with a cohort of adolescents whose disruptive behaviour communicates unbearable states of mind, struggling to moderate their internal states through reflective thinking. Consequently, these young people often have low academic performance and a history of school exclusion or are at risk of exclusion as they act out and struggle to engage in classroom learning.

In 2019, the Mayor of London underscored a concerning trend: exclusions increased by 56 per cent across England between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017, with rises of 62 per cent in the West Midlands and 40 per cent in London (London's Poverty Profile, 2022). A notable correlation was revealed that nine out of ten children in custody had been excluded from school. This evidence indicates that children excluded from school are overrepresented in Young Offender Institutions and are more prone to be victims of serious violence. By employing the inclusive and engaging realm of group sports, Sport & Thought could offer to those young people a non-stigmatising milieu for exploring and reflecting on internal emotional states. Echoing Gilligan's (1999) assertion, the project capitalises on 'mainstream' activities within social networks or communities to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

Using football as its primary medium of exploration—though acknowledging that other sports can be equally engaging and transformative—Sport and Thought seeks to promote an integrated approach to the development of young people, helping them navigate the complex terrain of adolescence and transition successfully into adulthood. One of the aims of Sport and Thought is to highlight the potential benefits of therapeutic intervention for students. It aligns strategically with proposals for using sport to prevent or rehabilitate 'anti-social behaviour,' allowing participants to reframe life challenges and explore alternatives, more constructive

coping strategies while fostering academic engagement and reducing the risk of exclusion (Smyth, 2019).

1.3.1. How does the S&T project work?

The users are offered a weekly 75-minute session led by professionals, including at least a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist, a link worker, or a football coach. Each session consists of:

- 1) Arrival and introductory group chat with ‘check-ins,’ updates, and reflections on the previous session.
- 2) Three specially chosen drills (exercises) that emphasise teamwork, resilience, and control. The drills are simple and designed to enhance teamwork, not overly physically demanding but linked to the emotional demands of classroom learning.
- 3) A match to apply skills developed in the drills.
- 4) A final talk aimed at encouraging reflectiveness and connections between the sport and emotional challenges in life.

The physical setting of the sessions is consistent, emphasising the ‘analytic frame’ of psychoanalytic treatment. Facilitators ensure that the location and frequency are stable, contributing to consistency and emotional availability within the group. Smyth (2019) further described that the user’s reaction during a session reflects what they will tend to manifest outside this context, suggesting that the combination of sport and a therapeutic setting offers unique opportunities for reflection. This enables problem-solving, anger management, and a sense of responsibility for actions and behaviour. Integrating these elements, observations and discussions during the sessions helps facilitators and participants connect sports experiences

with external life situations. The understanding of the interplay between external and internal worlds is fostered, and reactions on the pitch are equated with reactions in other areas of life. The program also provides for weekly supervision, drawing attention to facilitators' reflectiveness and fostering the development of self-reflexivity in relation to one's membership in a group and the associated group processes. This engagement with the group, where members learn about each other's clinical work and the personal resonances they bring to their practice, is in line with Rustin's supervision, defined as '(the) ongoing regular series of meetings to which the supervisee brought detailed written accounts of their clinical work, and which implied some responsibility of the supervisor for the work of the supervisee.' (p.4, 2010).

1.3.2. Further reflection on the role of facilitators

Coaches, therapists, and front-line youth workers are crucial to the project's success. Facilitators are privileged to provide advocacy and consultation to young people and are responsible for regulating and encouraging players who express internal emotional states (Bergholz et al., 2016). From the facilitator's perspective, the literature about football training and psychodynamic psychotherapy needs to be more extensive and investigated. However, the present research reveals a positive impact of this similar kinds of programs with adolescents (Smyth, 2014; Bergholz et al., 2016; Wretman, 2017). It is, therefore, difficult to determine the effect of facilitators on the project.

Assigning at least two facilitators for each Sport & Thought group is valuable. Having two adults who can work and think together helps contain the group's anxieties. In psychoanalytic thinking, this models a thoughtful parental couple that can hold the child's needs in mind, contain their anxieties, set helpful boundaries, and show flexibility to enable the child to play

and discover the world. Moreover, the facilitator couple remains open and curious about the group, even in extreme cases, such as aggressive and challenging behaviour.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The literature review is to understand what has already been written on the topic of therapeutic intervention using sport² from a psychodynamic approach. To conduct this review, I began with a brief description of the method followed, conducting a literature search for empirical evidence using precise databases. Aveyard (2014) emphasises the importance of quality in a literature review, stating that “a good quality literature review is a bit of research in its own right” (p.3) and that reviewing the literature provides a more complete picture of the field.

This literature review is divided into two sections, which are key to comprehensively understanding the research question. The first section provides an overview of the context around the theoretical frame underpinning Sport and Thought as a project. The second section examines the actual project by describing the different parts. Additionally, comparisons will be made with similar projects in the field.

2.2. Methodology of Literature Review

The literature review of the Sport & Thought program is structured into two primary sections: the theoretical framework underpinning the study, and an examination of studies related to similar interventions that use sports to improve mental health in young people. This review aims to establish the foundational concepts and provide a comparative analysis of existing research to contextualize the efficacy of the Sport & Thought program.

² In this research, the term "sport" is at times used to refer specifically to football, as this was the sole sport activity utilised in the "Sport and Thought" project. Other references to sport in a broader sense are made according to context.

My initial research in 2019 focused on the Sport & Thought program as a therapeutic intervention. To conduct this review, I began by identifying four key concepts: adolescents, psychodynamic theory, football, and group therapy. All those concepts were important in understanding the distinctive integration of elements that constitute Sport & Thought program.

Attempting to include the word ‘facilitator’ complicated the research since it’s a characteristic role and jargon that doesn’t reflect in broader studies. Use of alternative terms such as *therapist* or *mentor*, failed to capture the uniqueness of Sport and Thought facilitator, which remains a small and inevitably distinct project. Notably, no studies were found that investigated the perception of individuals delivering specialised mental health program. Therefore, I focused my literature search on therapeutic interventions for adolescents using sport.

Using the respective variations for each keyword (*adolescents, psychodynamic theory, football, and group therapy*) the research was conducted on the EBSCOhost database. Employing the Boolean command "OR" yielded better results, allowing me to create 4 distinct concept searches (S1, S2, S3, and S4) as shown in Appendix H. Combining all four searches with the Boolean command "AND" across three different databases (PEP Archive, APA PsycInfo, and APA PsycArticles) further refined the search. This comprehensive approach was restricted to the PsycInfo database, which was selected for its extensive collection of full-text journals and eBooks related to psychology and the psychological aspects of related disciplines.

The initial search yielded 375 papers. To narrow this down, I added the subject "*Sport*," reducing the results to 78 papers. These were saved to a database folder, and I meticulously reviewed them to select the most relevant studies for this review. Papers focusing on the performance of athletes or medically-based interventions were excluded. Three studies were

critically analysed and are discussed in the following sections. Additionally, I utilized Google Scholar's "cited by" feature to forward-search for articles citing these studies and to retrieve further relevant material from my own resources. This extended research process produced more material, carefully selected for relevance with Sport & Thought project.

A total of 79 studies were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria of mental health interventions using sport. The majority of these excluded studies focused on enhancing the performance of athletes, reducing performance anxiety, or addressing obesity. These areas, while valuable, did not align with the core objectives of this study, which aims to address broader psychological and social challenges in adolescents and the benefits of sports-based interventions in improving mental health.

Eventually, 16 studies met the inclusion criteria for in-depth screening. These studies provided a comprehensive overview of how sport activities can serve as therapeutic interventions for young people.

The PRISMA diagram illustrating the selection process is included in Appendix H.

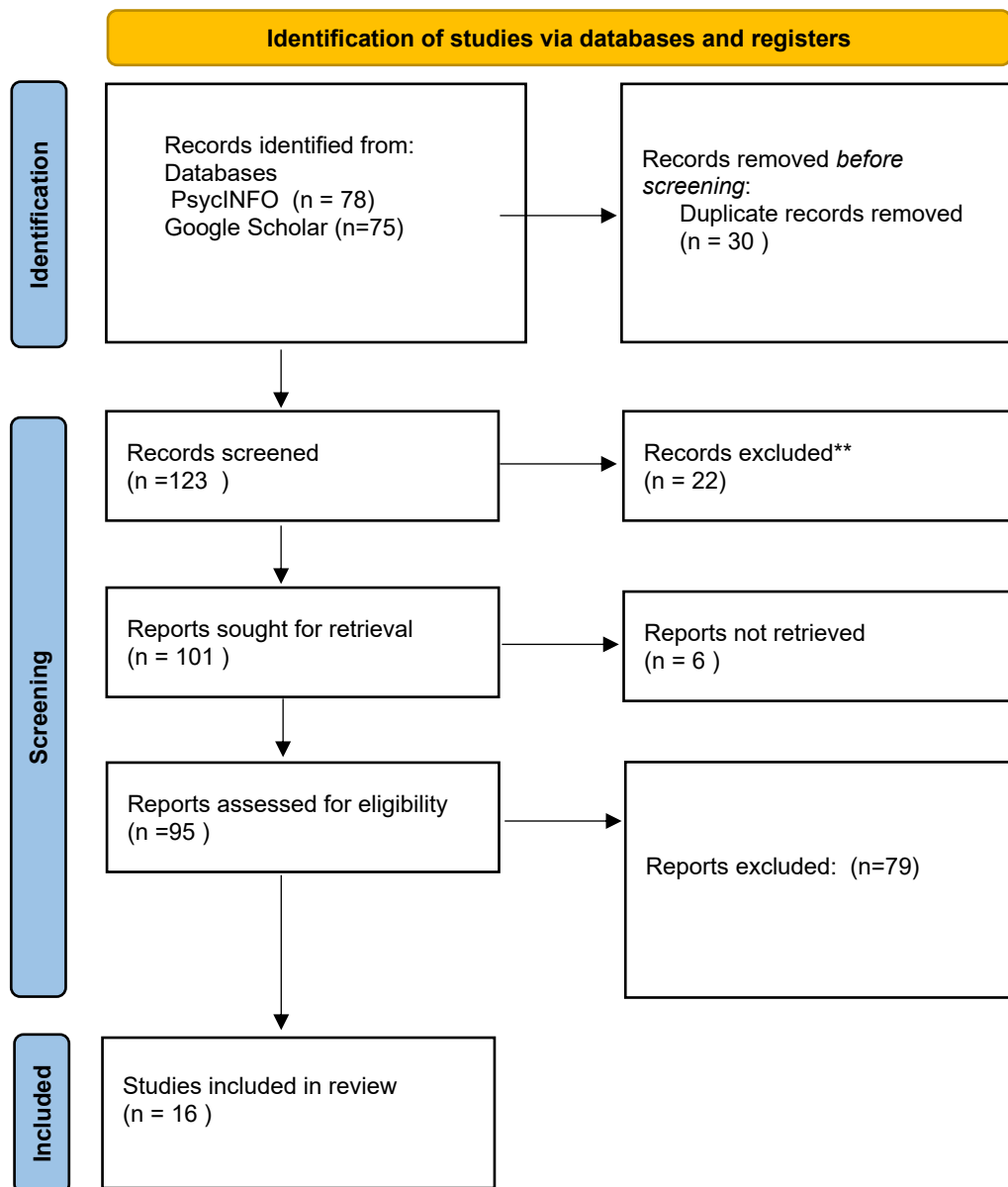


Diagram 1. PRISMA process for literature review

2.3. “The Whole and the Parts”: Complexity in Adolescent Development

Freud did not consider adolescence a distinct stage of development; he believed that personality structure develops during the first five years of life and that adolescence merely summarizes childhood experiences (Freud, 1905). However, our current understanding of adolescence is more complex than this. Aristotle, writing in 350 B.C.E., suggested that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (in Ross, 2001). This perspective can be applied to our understanding of adolescence: rather than viewing it merely as a summary of earlier experiences, we can see it as a distinct and transformative stage of development. In Freudian terms: adolescence is not solely a mere echo of early psychosexual stages but a stage that enriches and complicates the individual's psychic life, negotiating new terms of engagement between the ego, id, and superego.

Waddell (2002) argued that successful resolution of conflicts in adolescence depends on “the quality of the original containment of infantile impulses and feelings; on the degree of stability achieved during the latency years and on the internal and external pressures which the young person has to contend with” (p.142). Like a baby, an adolescent's emotional state must be contained and integrated, a prerequisite for later working through the depressive position. However, adolescence is also about experimentation, reorganisation, and integration of previous psychological development, now seen in a new context of physical and sexual maturity.

Meltzer (1973) identifies a key question for adolescents: “Whose body is it?” (p. 53). He highlights the dilemma that young people face in trying to distinguish their adolescent state from the infantile delusions of adulthood induced by masturbation and attendant projective identification into internal objects. Adolescents must navigate many challenges, including

balancing dependency on themselves and others. If they can tolerate dependency and separateness, they can develop a mature sexual position without being overwhelmed by persecutory or other negative feelings.

The Object Relations Theory emerged as a development of the Freudian tradition, shifting the focus from the internal psychic apparatus to external objects. Introduced by Klein in 1932 and further developed by Winnicott in 1971, this theory posits that environmental conditions and parental functions shape child development from an interpersonal perspective. The formation of the psychic structure occurs through holding, containment, mirroring, separateness, and idealisation between the child and the caregiver. When environmental conditions are adequate, children and adolescents can express their fantasies and master their anxiety. Initially, the infantile ego is utterly dependent on the caregiver. Still, with adequate support, the ego progresses from an unintegrated state to a structured integration, allowing the infant to experience anxiety associated with disintegration.

Winnicott interpreted the Freudian model from a Kleinian perspective and referred to adolescence as the ‘doldrums,’ a period characterised by isolation, uselessness, and a loss of reference points. He believed that it was crucial during adolescence to satisfy the development of the self and find adequate solutions to this process. Like Freud, Winnicott (1953) rooted his ideas in childhood relationship development and the potential interruption of the initial state of ‘going on being’ in the relationship with the “good enough mother”. When the mother or another primary caregiver can support the child’s omnipotence, understand their needs, and strengthen their ego, the child will develop their “true self” rather than a “false self” that is subordinate to environmental demands. Achieving a sense of self and individual independence from environmental demands is a fundamental task for adolescents. Failure in this process

could significantly impact adolescent difficulties, and maladaptive behaviours could emerge. Childhood relationships with parental figures or caregivers directly affect this process; if external objects are well-adapted, healthy development is possible, but if they are not, problematic outcomes may arise.

Freud's Oedipus complex, introduced in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), suggests that in normal psychosexual development, an individual progressively disinvests in parental figures and directs their drive towards a different loved object. Resolving the Oedipus complex enables adolescents to disinvest the parent of the opposite sex from libidinal desires and to reconcile with the parent of the same sex, freeing themselves from idealisation and domination.

As noted by Waddell (2018), the quality of the original mother-baby relationship and the introduction of a third "term" into that first dyad are two significant determinants of the nature of the inner world. The adolescent faces the task of relinquishing their parents as the original sexual objects and turning to others outside the family. However, the task becomes complicated when behaviours driven by infantile aspects of their sexuality continue to influence their interactions with both peers and adult. As Hoxter (1964) pointed out, "The adolescent has the physical capacity to put into action much which would appear mainly as phantasy in the young child" (p. 90). This leads to further difficulties as oedipal desires resurface, and adolescents struggle to reconcile their conscious and unconscious needs in a new context of having physically mature genitals. Testing containment and internalisation, the adolescent enacts their genital desires and negative feelings, which may exacerbate their difficulties in navigating the challenges of adolescence.

During adolescence, this negotiation between internal conflicts creates new opportunities and significant losses which can both have a greater impact on an adolescent's mental health. To cope with the subsequent mental pain, adolescents may engage in various forms of entertainment, such as sports, to help them navigate this challenging period of development. As they deal with the mental challenges and new feelings of growing up, adolescents may turn to activities like sports as a way to cope and express themselves.

While engaging in sports can help coping with the emotional difficulties of this life period, it is important to recognise that sports can also offer creative forms of expression that are often overlooked. Interestingly, two famous psychoanalysts working on group theory: Foulkes and Bion were not just theorists but also keenly interested in sport themselves. Foulkes, whose brother was a star footballer for the German national team, played for Karlsruhe himself (Spenceley, 2018). Although he never overtly referenced his athletic background in his academic work, it is conceivable that his personal experience on the field deeply informed his understanding of the complexities of group dynamics. Just as he would have understood that a successful football team is a synergistic blend of individual talents and efforts, so too did he emphasise the importance of considering the group "as a whole" in his analytical theories.

Bion, instead, was also a talented sportsman in his youth, excelling in rugby, water polo, and swimming. Tim Smith's (2021) article in the *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* delves into Bion's athletic pursuits, suggesting that for Bion, sports served as a defence against emotional challenges. Bion himself acknowledged this, noting that games helped to divert his "ghastly sexual impulses" (1982a, p.108). This underlines the potential for sports to be a means of channelling difficult emotions during tumultuous developmental periods. Bion also noted the general practice at the time of "preserving a fit body for the habitation of a supposedly healthy

mind” but also wrote about how moral attitudes of the day “buried the growth of the personality till it turned cancerous” (ibid, p.110). Sports may have historically been viewed to maintain physical health and suppress emotional difficulties, however Bion’s writing suggests that sports can also be used as a tool for creative expression and personal growth.

Bion’s personal experience with sports suggests an exploration of its broader application in psychotherapy, especially for adolescents. Given the natural affinity many young people have towards sports, it can function as an accessible and non-threatening intermediary to engage them in therapeutic processes. Psychoanalytic theory, in fact, posits that psychotherapy has a unique ability to interpret subjectivity and can bridge social and cultural changes. In this regard, psychotherapeutic intervention should not be limited to the consulting room but rather should respond to the needs of adolescents by providing alternative ways of engaging in therapy. By moving beyond traditional therapeutic settings, psychoanalytic interventions can be more effectively integrated into everyday life and potentially have a greater impact on the well-being of adolescents. Such an approach acknowledges the complex interplay between individuals and their environment and highlights the importance of considering the broader social and cultural factors that shape an individual’s development, including sport.

2.4. Adolescents, Peer Groups, and Group Psychotherapy

Wilfred Bion and Patrick de Mare Foulkes were notable psychoanalysts who emphasised the importance of play and group dynamics in their work. Bion's theories centred around the idea that groups have unconscious processes that shape their behaviour and decision-making and that these processes can be explored and understood through group therapy. Foulkes, on the other hand, focused on the role of play in child development and the use of play therapy to access unconscious thoughts and emotions. Together, Bion (1982) and Foulkes (1990)

recognised the potential for sports and other forms of play to offer a tangible and engaging way to explore the complex dynamics of groups and individuals, making their work relevant not only in the field of psychoanalysis but also in the realm of sports psychology and group theory more broadly.

Psychoanalytic Group Therapy has become an established part of clinical practice since the introduction of therapeutic communities in the 1940s (Meltzer, 1976; Foulkes, 1964; 1975; Bion, 1961). It is now considered an alternative way of working, on par with individual intervention (Burlingame et al., 2004). By working in groups, patients are exposed to interpersonal relationships in ways that differ from one-to-one interventions. However, the work focuses on the patient's intrapsychic world. Group therapy aims to transform the patient's inner world, and while there are some differences, it is equally effective as individual therapy (Burlingame et al., 2004; Wood, 1999).

Recent studies have investigated the clinical application of psychoanalytic group psychotherapy, particularly with adults, but literature on psychotherapeutic group intervention for adolescents remains limited (Wood, 1999). This contrasts with the growing interest from professionals in adolescence, which involves transitioning from being a child in the family to being a person in society (Waddell, 2012). The peer group is an important aspect of this transition, often experienced under the same hormonal storm. According to Waddell (2018), this "safety-in-numbers" is an important adolescent milestone after a more ordinary separation from the immediate family group.

Working therapeutically in a group with adolescents serves two purposes: providing a space for experimentation and consolidation of changes triggered at the family level and enhancing

individual's social, emotional, and conscious and unconscious communication. Meltzer (1973) describes how adolescents often use other group members to project various parts of the self. If the group allows these projections (often psychotic parts of the personality) and survives, each member can experience regression without feeling overwhelmed, making the group more integrated. Meltzer and Harris (2018) suggest that young people who reach adolescence having experienced a good internal maternal object and stable sense of self, are better equipped to exploit new opportunities in the social context for their growth process. Thus, the peer group offers a protective place to compare oneself outside the family circle, the positive "exo-skeletal" in Bion's terms (1970), where integration can occur. Group psychotherapy for young people can be envisioned as an experiential laboratory where they have the opportunity to explore various aspects of their psyche within a supportive peer environment, enabling them to assign meaning to their perceptions of reality.

This exploration aligns with the emotional dynamics discussed in a chapter by Waddell (in Anderson & Dartington, 1998) in which the author highlights the intricate balance between individual expression and the desire for full engagement within the group's activities. In the context of group psychotherapy, young individuals face the complex challenge of establishing their own voice while simultaneously seeking a sense of belonging and connection within the therapeutic group. This mirrors the emotional complexities often found within family dynamics, which on some degree can also be observed in projects like Sport and Thought.

Bion identifies the specific dimensions of the group and considers it as the object of analysis. The therapist's attitude remains psychoanalytic, and the group is treated as an individual (Bion, 1961). Bion expanded Freud's notion that "Individual psychology is at the same time social psychology as well" (Freud, 1955, p. 12), suggesting that individual characteristics can be observed within groups.

According to Bion (1961), groups can be distinguished into two main categories: a group with a tendency towards work on the primary task or “work-group mentality”, and a second group with an unconscious tendency to avoid work on the primary task, which he called “basic assumption mentality”.

In his view, a single group member regresses to a very primitive level of mental functioning, which involves the partial loss of individuality in favour of a more spontaneous, unconscious tendency to combine with other participants by sharing basic assumptions (Bion, 1961). These basic assumptions operate unconsciously and can obstruct group activity through strong emotional tendencies.

The basic group assumptions identified by Wilfred Bion, a psychoanalyst who made significant contributions to group dynamics, are Dependency, Fight/Flight, and Pairing. These assumptions describe unconscious, shared beliefs that can influence the behaviour of groups.

- **Dependency:** In this assumption, the group members are emotionally oriented towards finding an idealised leader on whom they can fully depend for all decisions. This satisfies the group's emotional needs and allows members to abdicate responsibility for their own thoughts and actions.
- **Fight/Flight:** Here, the group is oriented to identify an external enemy and seeks a leader capable of organising them to either attack or avoid this enemy. Thinking is seen as a threat to the maintenance of the group's status quo. As a result, members are encouraged either to escape the situation or to confront and attack the perceived enemy.
- **Pairing:** In the pairing assumption, group members unconsciously focus on the hope that a pair within the group will produce a messiah or a solution to the group's problems.

This magical thinking diverts attention from the work the group needs to do, creating the illusion that someone else will solve their problems for them.

Bion's work suggests that groups may shift between these assumptions and that the ability to recognise and manage these underlying dynamics is crucial for effective group work.

Another significant contributor to psychoanalytic work with therapeutic groups was Foulkes, an English psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who conceptualised individuals as part of a series of social networks that influence development, communicative processes, and experiences and behaviours. Foulkes (1975) saw group analysis, or group analytic psychotherapy, as a form of "psychotherapy by the group, including its conductor" (p. 3). He introduced the concept of a *communication matrix* in which individuals are related to each other in a group, and the therapeutic work should focus on the individual connecting with the matrix.

For Foulkes, the primary objective of a group is to increase mutual awareness and communication among members, promoting discussion and an exchange of points of view supported by free discussions in smaller groups. Foulkes conceives of a group according to a network model in which each person is connected through a link to other people, forming a matrix. The matrix is not a simple sum of two parts, but it is endowed with overall characteristics, including unconscious communications, individuals, and the conductor. Special attention is given to the conductor as the "instrument" of the group, who should wean the group from being led, abstain from predetermined roles such as a godlike position, and remain detached from the material at hand.

2.5. "A Space to Explore and Develop": The Positive Impact of Sports

A growing body of research has highlighted the positive impact of physical activity and team sports on improving youth's peer relationships, physical health, self-efficacy, and social-emotional benefits (D'Andrea et al., 2013). Engaging in individual or group sports provides opportunities for adolescents to interact with others, including teammates and opponents. However, adolescents may need help to engage with institutions, which may prevent them from benefitting from the programs offered. For instance, young people may feel safer accessing mental health interventions in familiar settings, such as schools, where a culture of learning and thinking is already established, binding them together. In contrast, engaging with groups where the young people's relationship with the institution is weaker or more complicated can be challenging.

The S&T project aims to offer participants a space to explore and develop their identity, reducing the externalisation of unprocessed experiences, promoting emotional maturation, and translating it into the real world (Smyth, 2014). The facilitator of the group comments on a specific response, offering the young person an alternative to be mirrored in the classroom and life. Moreover, sports access, and its popularity can mitigate the stigma of participating in therapeutic interventions.

Those projects primary benefit is enhancing cognitive abilities directly related to core academics. A meta-analysis study conducted by Sibley and Etnier (2003) highlighted the positive impact of sports on children's cognition. Most of the reviewed studies found at least one statistically significant academic performance improvement for children who participated in either additional or enhanced physical activity (e.g., extra sport sessions) compared to students who participated in no physical activity or regular physical activity (Rasberry et al., 2011).

Wretman (2017) stated that sports produce positive physiological links between activity, cognition, and psychosocial skills. Supported by other researchers, the study promoted a model in which children's psychosocial and health factors predict academic performance. Two indices, global self-esteem, and positive body image were posited as favourable perceptions of the self that were intrinsically valuable and useful for their promotive effects on additional outcomes of interest. In the first case, regular activity could promote positive perceptions of the self. In the second case, positive body image is increasingly examined as a key predictor of self-esteem, and the authors concluded that participation in sports was linked with more positive thoughts about their physical bodies.

Another program in South Africa called Fight with Insight (FYI) offers young offenders non-judgmental boxing training, which has helped them deal with their anger and offending behaviour and has been a positive influence (Draper, 2013). S&T and FYI share many areas of overlap, highlighting the necessity of new ways of intervention to engage young people. Like the FYI study, S&T uses sport as a medium to channel aggressive impulses and constructively, encouraging participants to express their feelings and offering a space for them to do so.

Box'Tag is an Australian program for youth at risk of social disengagement or crime. It offers eight-weeks programs with low-risk boxing (to reduce potential injuries), promotes physical fitness, and enhances self-image and psychological well-being (Terry et al., 2014).

According to a study by Terry et al. in 2014, the program has been particularly effective in achieving its goals. Depending on the specific outcomes measured in the study, the Box'Tag program might have shown a significant reduction in youth crime rates, social disengagement, risk behaviours associated with crime or disengagement, mental health issues, or school

dropout rates among its participants. Therefore, it is an intervention worth noting for its positive impacts on at-risk youth.

Sports-based interventions have been designed to promote life skills development among at-risk adolescents, with positive outcomes reported in several studies. One such program is the Do the Good (DTG) intervention, which uses team sports to foster cooperation, build competence, and enhance self-esteem in adolescents in residential treatment settings. The DTG intervention has been found to reduce physical restraints among participants compared to non-participants and may be particularly beneficial for children experiencing hyperarousal symptoms consistent with PTSD (D'Andrea et al., 2013).

Similarly, a recent study by Nascimento Junior and colleagues (2021) found that life skills development in sport is promoted by coaching that allows participant autonomy during practice sessions, parenting that promotes a child's competence, and event organisation with relatedness satisfaction in mind. Such findings underscore the importance of developing flexible, sport-based therapeutic interventions to reach young people with disruptive behaviour resulting from low confidence and self-esteem, difficulties at home, or trauma-related issues. Several programmes promote life skills development through sports for at-risk adolescents, and each has shown a positive outcome. Converged, these findings suggest how important it is for professionals to continue to develop sport-based therapeutic interventions, which can reach young people with disruptive behaviour resulting from a lack of confidence and low self-esteem – perhaps due to having difficulties at home or trauma-related.

2.6. Football as Playful Game

Before encountering the complex interplay between team sports, social dynamics, and young people's emotional and cognitive well-being, sport is a form of play. Huizinga (1938) argued that play is foundational to culture and social organisation.

His thesis posits that the human ability to root culture stems from the act of play, placing it in close relationship with significant cultural expressions. This resonates deeply in a world where football is not merely a game but a cultural phenomenon that profoundly influences daily life—shaping schedules, language, and even relationships between individuals.

The Football Association (FA) report, "The Social and Economic Value of Grassroots Football in England" (2021), reveals that football is the most popular game in England, with 14.1 million people participating in football. This report also shows that over a third of children aged 5-18 in England play football weekly, making it the most popular team sport among children. It's important to clarify that the FA Participation Tracker survey captures data only for children aged 14-18. For younger children, the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey is used to determine football participation rates. In these studies, 'regular footballers' are defined as children who have played at least once in the past week, and this includes those who play informal football as well. These sports activities, including football, contribute positively to overall well-being and the development of social skills. The FA report states that each child spent an average of 83 minutes per week playing football. These findings are significant, as this time could be dedicated not only to physical development but also to emotional growth.

Over recent years, there has been a notable increase in interest in using football as a platform for mental health interventions. Pringle (2009) emphasises the need to shift the attitude towards football and mental health, urging the development of deep and sustained partnerships between the football world and mental health care to fully use the game's potential for good. Mental

health service providers have already started to develop strategies with football clubs, the Football Association, and government departments, incorporating playing or watching football and placing mental health services in football clubs.

The successful integration of football-related interventions into mainstream mental health care necessitates a shift in attitudes and the creation of compelling evidence to highlight the positive impacts of such interventions. In a recent study titled "The Role of a Trauma-Sensitive Football Group in the Recovery of Survivors of Torture" (Horn et al., 2019), the authors investigated how a football program tailored for torture survivors could help them build relationships, manage emotions, and reconnect with their physical bodies.

Another interesting adult-based program akin to Sport and Thought is the "It is a Goal! Project". In this initiative, the authors explored the use and value of football metaphors as tools for facilitating therapeutic work with adult men (Spandler et al., 2013). Like S&T, the project employed various ways in which football-related metaphors could enhance therapeutic outcomes, transforming them into rich and flexible therapeutic resources. For example, the term 'coach' was used metaphorically to characterise the role of a therapist. By framing the therapeutic process around football terminology, the project aimed to reduce perceptions of stigma, foster engagement, and promote therapeutic benefits. Such creative use of metaphors, grounded in a sport that resonates deeply with the participants, demonstrates how a familiar context can be leveraged to encourage openness and connection within a therapeutic setting (Spandler et al., 2013).

2.7. Rationale & limitation

Research indicates that sports can increase self-esteem and self-worth in youth who have experienced various types of traumas, perhaps perceiving the external world as threatening (Brown et al., 2009; Amir et al., 2009). It might be difficult to engage them in recreational activities such as sport (Bergholz et al., 2016), especially if they come from a deprived community with concentrated poverty (Lawson, 2005). For this reason, there is a crucial demand to adapt sports programs to engage young people as a preventative measure (Brown et al., 2009), and in this context, it is possible to include projects like Sport and Thought. Facilitators are privileged to provide advocacy and consultation to young people and have the responsibility to regulate and encourage players who express internal emotional states (Bergholz et al., 2016).

Despite growing interest in this area (Spandler et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2019; Pringle, 2009; Nascimento Junior et al., 2021; Wretman, 2017) and an increasing number of projects exploring the use of football to help young people, a significant gap remains in the literature. Very little or nothing is known about the firsthand experiences of the people delivering these projects. This perspective could provide valuable insights into such interventions' practical challenges and benefits. This highlights the need for further exploration and research to fully understand the complexities of using sport as a therapeutic medium for mental health support among young people.

It is worth noting, however, that there are limitations to this study:

1. The limited scope of existing literature on the intersection of football and psychodynamic theory for young people calls for further research on this specific topic.

2. While previous studies have explored the effects of sport on mental health in general, little research specifically focused on the facilitators involved in such projects.
3. This is a relatively new project, and therefore, more information about its effectiveness must be available.
4. There is also a gender discrepancy in the literature, with studies on sport and mental health largely focused on male participants.
5. While efforts have been made to include both male and female participants in this study, it is important to acknowledge that the impact of greater numbers of women attending football matches should also be the focus of future studies.

Despite these limitations, this study represents an important step towards understanding the effectiveness of sport-based initiatives for engaging and supporting young people from deprived communities. By exploring the lived experience of mental health professionals involved in the Sport and Thought project, this research will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of facilitating such projects and contribute to a broader understanding of the role of sport in promoting mental health and well-being. Ultimately, this study aims to inform the development of effective interventions for supporting young people from deprived communities, with the potential to positively impact their mental health outcomes and overall quality of life.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim and purpose of the research.

This chapter describes the methodology employed to ‘explore the experiences of mental health professionals in facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory for young people with emotional or behavioural problems. Given the relatively new nature of the project, the research was designed as an exploratory piece of work that sought to investigate how the role has been interpreted and experienced. The study was aimed at informing the work in the clinic and other colleagues who may consider embarking on a similar project. The research process involved keeping detailed notes during meetings with colleagues and supervisors and throughout the research process. It is worth noting that the researcher was part of the Sport and Thought team before conducting this research, which created some complications. To mitigate these issues, regular research supervision and group supervision was attended to ensure that the interests for the participants remained central throughout the study, and the researcher’s role as a facilitator was disjoined from the role of the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with familiar and unfamiliar colleagues to capture different aspects of the project’s complexity and the main themes that emerged while working in the service. It is also important to mention that this study started over four years ago. Since then, the researcher has taken over the role of the project manager of Sport and Thought, demonstrating the development of the service and the researcher’s passion for the project.

3.2 Epistemological frame

The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in this project, with its emphasis on language and the interpretive nature of human experiences, aligns with both an ontological

and an epistemological perspective that values subjective experiences and meanings as the basis for knowledge creation (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). The phenomenological approach further deepens this understanding by thoroughly exploring the participants' experiences and interpretations (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This approach is particularly relevant to examining the facilitators' experiences delivering the Sport and Thought project. It contributes to a broader understanding of the use of sport and psychodynamic theory in promoting emotional and relational well-being among young people.

Several methodologies, including Thematic Analysis, Grounded Theory, and Narrative Analysis, were considered within the context of this research. Of note was Reflexive Thematic Analysis, a methodology that is prevalently used in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy research. These methodologies commonly seek to discern “patterns” (themes, categories) across diverse cases (Braun & Clarke, 2020). In the context of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the researcher’s subjectivity is perceived as a fundamental resource, similar to IPA.

Nevertheless, IPA was deemed the most suitable methodology for this investigation after close consideration. IPA is specifically tailored to capture and interpret how individuals experience and construct the world, focusing on each case’s particular and unique details. The research question was concentrated on the exploration of personal experience and the construction of meaning within a specific context. Using a small sample and interviews to procure first-person accounts of personal experience rendered IPA distinctly divergent from Thematic Analysis, thereby making it more fitting for this study (Smith et al., 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Using IPA as the data analysis method for this project is consistent with an ontological view that recognises the importance of language and the interpretive nature of human experiences.

This approach also aligns with an epistemology prioritising subjective experiences and meanings as the basis for knowledge creation. As such, the data collected through the six in-depth interviews with the facilitators provide a rich source of information about the lived experiences of the facilitators in working with young people through the Sport and Thought project.

The use of the "double hermeneutic" in IPA acknowledges the impact of both the facilitators' and the researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Six in-depth interviews with facilitators were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for exploring their experiences and perspectives while maintaining consistency across interviews. The personal diary served as a means of reflecting on the researcher's experiences and biases while documenting the research process and contextual factors that may have influenced data collection and analysis. IPA also adheres to an ideographic method. This notion emphasises understanding the unique experiences of individuals in their particular circumstances. As Smith and Nizza (2022) outlined, IPA's focus on single cases facilitates a deep analysis of individual experiences within the context of their narrative before making comparisons between cases. This process enables the exploration and comparison of individual experiences within the context of other participants in the study, enriching our understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

3.3 Research Design

Qualitative research was chosen as the most appropriate approach to explore the lived experiences of facilitators. In this chapter, the research design is outlined in two sections:

1) data collection

2) data analysis

This chapter includes an account of the method employed and an understanding of the setting, how participants were identified and recruited, the interview questions, how data was collected, and ethical considerations.

The data analysis process is explained in the second part of this chapter. The rationale for choosing IPA is explained, along with a detailed description of the stages of its application. The chapter concludes by outlining the expected outcomes and contributions of the study, as well as the potential limitations and future research directions.

Before proceeding, it is worth addressing a primary challenge encountered during this research, which aims to shed light on the tension between the ideal research design and the realities of implementing this project, particularly amidst the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has presented unique challenges for researchers, particularly in researching vulnerable populations such as adolescents. Moreover, the ongoing pandemic has created uncertainty, which can impact the participants' capacity to engage fully in the research project.

Despite these challenges, the researcher has taken several steps to ensure the project's feasibility and ethical integrity. This includes developing a comprehensive recruitment and informed consent process, adhering to the guidelines set by the research ethics committee, and ensuring that all participants' identities are protected. The researcher is also committed to

ensuring that the project is conducted sensitive to the participants' needs, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

3.4 Sample and recruitment

This study's sample comprised six professionals, which aligns with the recommended size of a participant group in qualitative doctoral-level research (Smith et al., 2009). A small sample size allows for a more in-depth analysis of individual experiences, which is the focus of the IPA methodology utilised in this study. Further details on the methodology will be discussed in the following sections.

In addition to the small sample size, the ideal sample would include an equal number of participants from each profession involved in the Sport and Thought project. This would enable comparisons between the different mental health professionals and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the project's impact. However, due to exclusion criteria, such as professionals who remained in the project for less than an academic year or participants who did not give their permission to be interviewed, achieving this range of respondents might not be possible. With support from the project coordinator, the researcher has stipulated a list of potential participants who fit the criteria above. The study will focus on S&T facilitators who contributed to projects contracted by Brent Centre for Young People.

Recruitment of participants involved initial contact via email (see Appendix A) that contained key information, including the invitation to participate in the study. Participants were allowed to discuss the research and received a confirmation email with the *Participant Information* document (see Appendix B). This document provided more detailed information on the background and rationale of the study, interview duration, data protection, and ethical

approval. Before the interview, participants were given a chance to ask further questions. If they agreed to participate, they were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) digitally or in person, with a copy given to them.

Participants were invited to participate in an individual semi-structured interview aimed at reflecting on their experiences. The interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio recorded. Ideally, the interviews were conducted face to face; however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, they took place via telephone or video link. Two days before the interview, a screening contact was scheduled to check whether a participant was showing COVID-19 symptoms, had tested positive for COVID-19, or had been in contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19. If any of these conditions were met, the interview would be cancelled and, if possible, rescheduled.

3.5 Participants

This study's recruitment process involved contacting 12 potential interviewees, of whom four promptly agreed to participate. One interviewee was initially hesitant but ultimately agreed after a phone consultation and further explaining the project. The final interviewee had relocated to a different country, making scheduling difficult. The resulting sample of 6 participants is consistent with the recommended sample size for IPA research (Smith et al., 2009).

All participants were male and currently employed in education or clinical settings. Of the 6 participants, 3 were child psychotherapists, 1 was a mentor, and 2 were psychodynamic counsellors. One of the therapists had relocated to South America, but all other participants

were based in the UK. To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used to report findings, given the small sample size.

3.6 Interview Schedule

The present study employed online semi-structured interviews to collect data due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Specifically, the interviews were conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing platform. The participants were encouraged to openly discuss their experiences while the interviewer referred to the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D). The objective was to establish a dialogue enabling the participants to articulate their experiences, using questions developed from the literature on IPA (Smith et al., 2009) and further reviewed in research supervision.

Before each interview, it was made clear to participants that, should their participation in the study evoke unforeseen anxieties, they could choose to end the interview or terminate the recording at any time. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study up to two weeks after the interview date.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim on a password-protected laptop computer. These transcripts constituted the data set, which will be retained for three years, in accordance with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998). Once transcribed, all personal identifying information was removed from the data before the IPA analysis.

After the interview, all participants receive an email (see Appendix E) containing signposted information, including help or support they can access for any professional or personal issues arising during their study participation. Direct contact with the supervisor and/or head of

academic quality was also provided for any concerns or further questions. In case of emotional distress, participants will be encouraged to seek support from their GP, the Trust Quality Assurance Officer, or therapy through a signposted external agency, MIND. Please refer to the ethics section for further details about the ethical considerations.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the guidelines of IPA as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Given that the method prioritises an analytic focus on participants' experiences, attention was dedicated to the transcriptions of the six interviews. The five stages of analysis required by the IPA method were applied. These stages include becoming immersed in the data, identifying significant statements, organising these statements into themes, creating a comprehensive narrative, and maintaining a reflexive stance throughout the process. The data analysis was conducted rigorously and transparently, with input from research supervision to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. For the data analysis, the terminology adopted in this research is not based on Smith, Flowers & Larkin's book on IPA (2009) but on *Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* by Smith and Nizza (2022). This latest version is complementary, as described by the authors. However, in the data analysis chapter, they decided "to modify a small number of the terms used in describing the analytic process to make them clearer" (p.5, 2022). The main change is that the use of experiential statements instead of emerging themes and a collection of its personal statements is clustered to a custom personal experiential theme or PET. The cross-case analysis amongst participants of the study, and a possible connection between personal experiential themes, would form a group experiential theme or GET: a cluster of "common patterns and idiosyncratic differences within those similarities and how one case may shed light on another" (p.51, 2022).

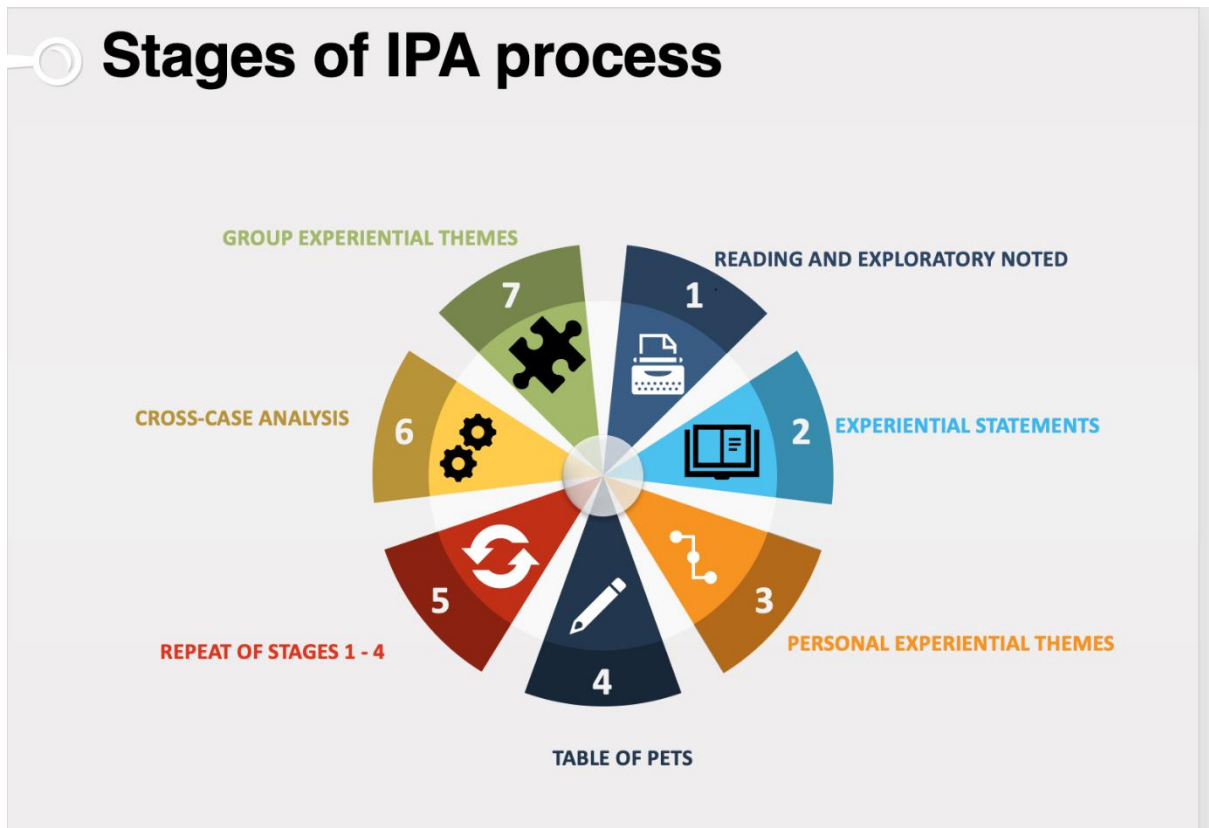


Figure 1 Stages of IPA process (based on Smith & Nizza, 2022)

IPA consists of a set of procedures that aim to systematically analyse data while being open to new insights and themes. The IPA data analysis is a rigorous and iterative process that involves seven main stages (Fig.1).

Stage 1: reading and exploratory notes

Once each interview was transcribed, any initial thoughts or reflections were noted and set aside. This process necessitated an exploratory level of analysis, which included setting up a column system to record exploratory comments and color-coding them based on three areas: **descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual**. Descriptive comments focus on the content of what the participant said, linguistic comments explore specific language used by the participant, and conceptual comments seek to interpret and interrogate the underlying meaning behind what has

been said. The notes are aimed at identifying patterns and themes that emerge from the data (Appendix G).

In Stage 2- developing experiential statements

This stage involves going through the exploratory comments and looking for patterns and connections across the data to identify Experiential statements (previously called emergent themes) that capture the essence of the participants' experiences. Themes can be conceptual or experiential, and they should reflect the meaning that the participants have given to their experiences. The researcher should remain open to new insights and perspectives that may arise during this process and allow the data to guide the analysis. This stage is crucial for developing a deep understanding of the data and generating meaningful insights.

Stage 3 – Searching for connections across Experiential statements and clustering.

In this stage, the researcher focuses on searching for connections across Experiential statements to facilitate the emerge of personal experiential themes or PET. The aim is to create a structure that brings together the Experiential statements in a meaningful way, allowing for a more focused analysis. This process involves charting or mapping the Experiential statements and considering how they relate to each other. The researcher may use different techniques, for instance I have grouped them together based on similar concepts. The goal is to identify the interesting and important aspects of the data and create a coherent and meaningful narrative that represents the participants' experiences.

Stage 4- put into a table of PETs.

Once Experiential statements clustering is completed, the next step is to identify determined PETs, compiling in a table including identifying information for experiential statements contained within each theme (Appendix H). Each PET is ‘An expression of the convergence as the experiential statement brought together’ (p46, 2022).

In Stage 5 - Moving to the next case

Stage 5 of the IPA data analysis process involves repeating stages 1-4 for the remaining participant interviews. This is done to identify any patterns or themes that may have been missed in the previous stages. However, it is important to approach each interview with fresh eyes and not let the analysis of previous participants influence the interpretation of the current participant's experiences. By bracketing off the previous analysis, the researcher can stay true to the ideographic nature of IPA and ensure that each participant's unique experiences are fully understood and represented in the analysis.

Stage 6: Cross-case analysis

In Stage 6 of IPA data analysis involves synthesising the findings from individual cases and identifying overarching patterns and themes across all participants or Group experiential themes (GETs). In this stage, the researcher compares the emergent themes and subordinate themes from each individual case and examines how they relate to each other. The aim is to identify commonalities and differences among the participants and draw conclusions about the broader phenomenon under investigation. During this stage, some sub-themes may acquire PETs, due to a series of related themes. The final product of this stage is a comprehensive and

nuanced understanding of the research question, which can be used to inform future research or practical applications.

Stage 7: Group experiential themes (GETs)

In Stage 7 of IPA data analysis, the Group experiential themes (previously called overarching themes) are developed by combining the PETs from each interview throughout the analysis process, initial familiarisation notes are recorded in the body of the interview transcripts. The aim is to capture the researcher's immediate reactions to the data and to facilitate the analysis process. The analysis process is iterative, and themes may be refined or revised based on ongoing analysis. This is the final stage of the analysis process, where the researcher brings together all of the findings from each participant to identify patterns and create a comprehensive interpretation of the participants' experiences (Appendix J). The aim is to develop a rich and nuanced interpretation that captures the complexity of the participants' lived experiences.

3.8 Reliability and validity

As previously stated, the principle of double hermeneutics in IPA allows participants and the researcher to convey and interpret the specific experiences tied to delivering a therapeutic group project, such as Sport and Thought. This process facilitates the "giving of voice" and ascribing "meaning" to these unique experiences.

In this IPA research, ensuring reliability and validity is paramount. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) posited that such research involves a "double hermeneutic" approach where participants and researchers interpret each other's experiences. Given that the meaning of experiences is

subjective and context-dependent, it was crucial to develop a consistent data analysis approach that could stand up to scrutiny.

To this end, the study prioritised sensitivity to context, commitment, rigorous participant selection, coherence, and transparency. Participants were invited to engage in individual, semi-structured interviews, exploring their perspectives and experiences related to the Sport and Thought project, including their clinical experiences, perceived benefits and limits of the project, and experiences of group dynamics.

Reliability and validity in the data analysis process were addressed by implementing a systematic approach that was both examinable and testable. This was achieved in part through regular supervision and consultation with a qualified researcher, who provided feedback on the analysis to assess its reliability and validity. This process also included reviewing transcripts and coding schemes to ensure accurate reflection of the data, as well as examining the interpretations and conclusions drawn to confirm their consistency with the findings.

3.9 Limitations of IPA for this research

While IPA is a valuable qualitative research method for comprehending individuals' experiences and meanings, it is not free from limitations. Tuffour (2017) has identified four significant criticisms that can be applied to this project or, more generally, to Sport and Thought:

1. **Lack of recognition of language:** One potential limitation of IPA in the context of Sport and Thought could be the lack of recognition of the role of language in shaping facilitators' experiences and thoughts. Although IPA acknowledges that meaning making occurs in the context of narratives, discourse, and metaphors, the unique language and terminology used in the sports/psychodynamic psychotherapy world may be disregarded or understated in an IPA study. To overcome this limitation, researchers should pay close attention to the language and discourse used by facilitators in their interviews and analysis.

2. **Difficulty capturing experiences:** Another possible limitation of IPA in the context of sport and thought is the difficulty of precisely capturing facilitators' experiences and meanings of those experiences. This is particularly crucial when dealing with potentially sensitive issues related to mental health in sports. Researchers should take extra care to establish a comfortable and supportive environment for facilitators to share their experiences.

3. **Focus on perceptions:** A third limitation of IPA in the context of sport and thought is the emphasis on perceptions rather than the conditions that triggered those perceptions. Although IPA aims to comprehend the lived experiences of facilitators delivering S&T, it may only partially capture the social, cultural, and historical factors contributing to those experiences. For example, it does not consider the socio-economic background of each group where the project was implemented.

Even though IPA has several limitations, it remains a useful methodology for exploring experiences and meanings. Further limitations will be discussed later in the paper.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This research study underwent a thorough ethical review process to ensure compliance with established ethical guidelines. The Health Research Authority (HRA) checklist tool determined that the study did not require review by an NHS REC. However, ethics approval was sought and granted by the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) for this study, which was sponsored by the Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Appendix F). Ethics approval was also obtained from the Brent Centre for Young People, and a risk assessment was conducted if interviews were not conducted on the Tavistock premises. The research plan and supporting evidence were carefully considered to ensure that the study was safe and appropriate according to ethical guidelines.

This study prioritised obtaining informed consent and upholding the right to withdraw. All participants were comprehensively briefed about the study's nature, purpose, and potential outcomes, including the interview process, through an information sheet. It was explicitly mentioned that interview excerpts might be used in the study findings. Participants were encouraged to ask questions at any stage and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study up to two weeks post-interview, after which data anonymisation would occur and withdrawal wouldn't be feasible due to ongoing analysis.

Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity was a paramount concern throughout the study. Participants were reassured their data would remain anonymous and pseudonyms would be used. However, given the study's small scale and the use of quotes, it was acknowledged that participants might recognise interview excerpts. Despite this, their identities were kept anonymous, and they were given opportunities to address any concerns before consenting to participate.

In terms of data storage, all interviews were conducted via Zoom on a password-protected laptop provided by the Local Authority, with transcriptions and recordings stored securely on its hard drive. Consistent with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR), all data from the study will be securely stored for five years. The study ensured adherence to ethical standards throughout the research process.

3.11 Reflexivity

"After many years in which the world has afforded me many experiences," Camus famously declared in 1957, *"what I know most surely in the long run about morality and obligations, I owe to football."* When he mused on the profound lessons football imparted to him, he inadvertently highlighted the depth and breadth of the game's influence beyond the boundaries of a playing field. This observation is at the heart of this research, which focused on S&T— an innovative intervention that skilfully blends football with psychodynamic therapeutic principles.

As I reflect on the broader implications of the project, I am reminded of Albert Camus's insights on football. To him, the game was not merely a sport but a lens through which he interpreted life, morality, and obligations. Similarly, Sport and Thought is more than its overt objective. It is not just about playing a sport or undergoing therapy; it encompasses life, self-understanding, connection with others, and navigating the myriad challenges that come our way.

The combination of sports and therapy might initially seem an unlikely pairing. However, the Sport and Thought project has reaffirmed my belief that the most transformative partnerships often arise from juxtaposing seemingly disparate domains. From my very first

"psychoanalytic" job in a therapeutic school, I was fascinated by the role of the body in working with children and adolescents. Initially, for me, emotional experience was primarily communicated through words. However, this perspective shifted as I found myself constantly under physical and psychological threat working with that cohort. Recognising that unconscious communication often manifests through the body, the idea of sport as a medium to connect with these children seemed evident. Instead of viewing sports as a mere arena for physical application, competition, and camaraderie, it was about blending it with therapy's introspective and understanding nuances.

Not long after I found myself captivated by Sport and Thought and its use of football as a means to 'reach out' for expression, growth, and understanding amongst young people. As I explored further, I came to realise the profound parallels between the worlds of sports and therapy.

Sport, in its essence, encapsulates a range of emotions. Taking a football match as an example, it mirrors the unpredictability of life, filled with unforeseen turns, exhilaration, heartbreak, teamwork, and moments of individual prowess. These games challenge individuals to adapt, think swiftly, and persevere through adversity. Just as Huizinga posited in his book "Homo Ludens" (1938), sports like football serve as physical exercises and microcosms of society. It shapes cultural narratives, forges social bonds, and moulds individuals. Isn't this reminiscent of a consulting room? At its core, therapy offers tools to navigate life's twists and turns, encouraging reflection and growth and by integrating these two aspects Sport and Thought can potentially improve mental health outcomes in young people.

My close connection with Sport & Thought, both before and after the data collection, necessitates a careful reflection on my role as an insider researcher. This dual role as a facilitator and later as the project coordinator has had a significant impact on my research

approach and interpretation of data. Initially, when I decided to undertake this research, I was actively involved as a facilitator. However, I stepped back from this role during the data analysis phase to minimize potential bias. I returned to work in the project almost 2 years later, after I completed the data analysis and the findings.

The dynamics of being both an insider and a researcher bring unique challenges and advantages. On one hand, my deep familiarity with the project provided valuable insights and a nuanced understanding of the context. On the other hand, it posed the risk of bias, potentially colouring my interpretations and findings in a positive light due to my passion for the project. To mitigate this, I engaged in fortnightly group supervision during my doctoral training and monthly individual research supervision. During those sessions, I was able to discuss the propriety of boundaries within the project and addressing potential biases. While collecting data, I refrained from any facilitating roles, ensuring a neutral stance during interviews and data analysis. However, the possibility remains that my subsequent role as a facilitator may have influenced the interpretation of findings in the discussion chapter onwards, particularly as I was actively delivering some of the projects myself. During these research supervision sessions, I was invited to discuss extensively about potential biases. For example, biases could have emerged during interviews between myself and the facilitators, where my past and present roles might have impacted the dynamics and responses. This will be addressed more in details in the limitations Chapter 5.6.

In conclusion it is important to say that the impact of the researcher on the study is an inevitable aspect of insider research. My personal investment in the Sport & Thought project has undoubtedly shaped my perspective and interpretations. This research journey, from my voluntary work during the pre-clinical course “Working with Children, Young People &

Families: A Psychoanalytic Observational Approach” to my current role as project coordinator, has been transformative. I have transitioned from a spectator to an active participant, witnessing first-hand the program's profound impact on young people.

4 Results

4.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the study in relation to Research Question: What is the lived experience of mental health professionals in facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory for young people?

I will refer to the participants as:

- Participant 1 –a male facilitator working as school mentor but who was also involved in the first stages of the project.
- Participant 2 –a male facilitator working as psychodynamic psychotherapist and coordinating the project.
- Participant 3- a male facilitator working as a child psychotherapist and coordinating the project.
- Participant 4- a male facilitator working as school mentor and coordinating the project. He was also involved in the first stages of the project.
- Participant 5- a male facilitator working as a psychodynamic therapist.
- Participant 6 - a male facilitator working as a child psychotherapist, coordinating the project, and supervising the facilitators' group.

It will be described a comprehensive overview of the findings from each participant with special reference to the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) and Group Experiential Themes (GETs). The in-depth analysis uncovered 5 distinct GETs. Key extracts from the interviews were used to lend voice to diverse meanings and concepts, drawing upon the participants' authentic expressions and vernacular. Detailed findings pertaining to each participant are

delineated in this chapter, achieved through the process of interpretation of individual perspectives and experiences within the framework of the double hermeneutic. The participants' experiences were viewed through an "intersubjective process of meaning-making" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, pp. 99), wherein their personal interpretations were further discerned by the researcher.

The research findings are organised under GETs and related subthemes, derived from shared PETs. It is crucial to note that these themes may occasionally intersect, as depicted in Table 2. During the process of data analysis of participants' perspectives, it became apparent that a substantial portion of the interviews were dedicated to describing the Sport and Thought project. This involved outlining its structural framework, illustrating the project from a user's viewpoint, and probing into its effectiveness and associated challenges. This led to the preliminary labelling of two GETs as " **Bodily Echoes: Expression of Trauma and Aggression through Sport** " and " **The Psychodynamic Dimensions of Sport and Thought** ", accentuating their direct relevance to the project's title and participants' conceptual experiences. Each of these GETs has three subthemes associated.

However, another significant section of the interviews was dedicated to the participants' personal experiences within the project. This highlighted their personal involvement and the subsequent impact it had on them as facilitators. Recognising and distinguishing these different elements proved crucial in thoroughly analysing and understanding the array of themes that emerged during the course of the study.

This insight inspired the creation of three additional GETs:

- **GET 3 Emotional Landscapes in Facilitating Sport and Thought**
- **GET 4 Understanding the Inner Workings: The Role of Supervision**

- **Get 5 A Tapestry of Transformation: Personal Development**

See below for a diagram (fig.2) that presents an organised overview of the themes that emerged throughout the study, including both Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and Personal Experiential Themes (PETs).

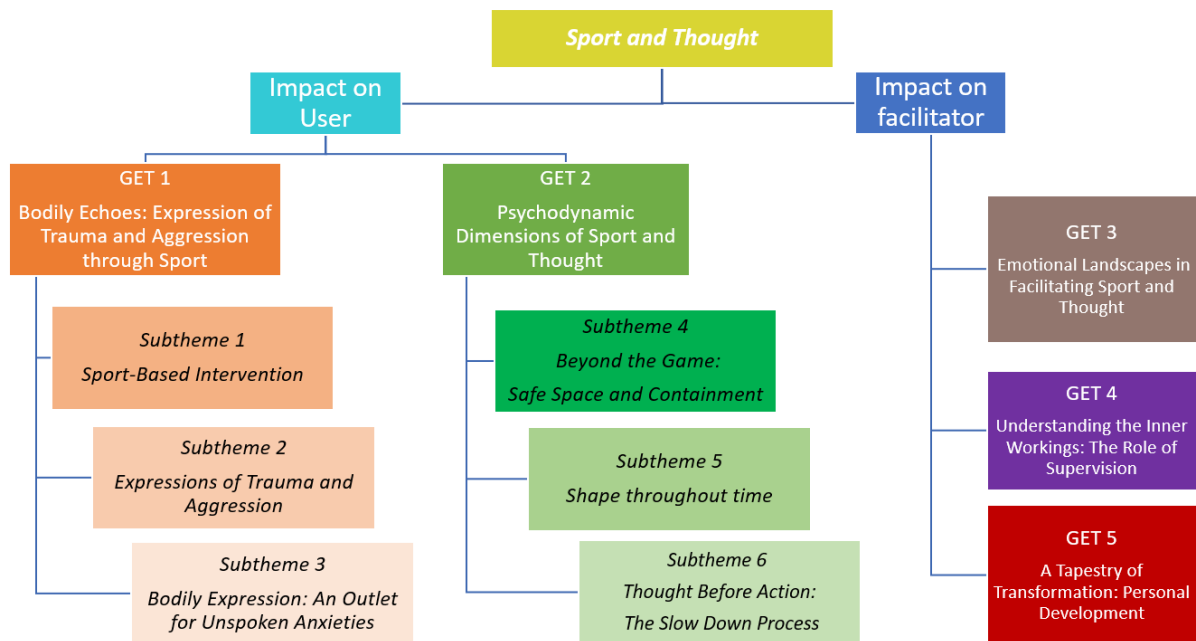


Figure 2 – Diagram of themes emerged in the study.

In the sections that follow, each of these themes and their corresponding subthemes will be elucidated in detail, drawing from exact extracts of the interviews. These extracts not only lend an authentic voice to the varied interpretations and ideas, but also bring to light the richness and depth of the participant experiences in their own unique words and expressions. However, some of the findings reported in this study focus on group experiences rather than individual narratives, in an attempt to emphasise the collective themes and insights that emerged across all participants, rather than a single perspective. As we delve into these themes, the intricate tapestry of individual and collective experiences, thoughts and emotions within the Sport and

Thought project will be unravelled, offering a comprehensive and insightful understanding of its impact.

4.2 GET 1: Bodily Echoes: Expression of Trauma and Aggression through Sport

The following section offers an in-depth exploration of the themes regarding the impact on users which is fundamentally divided into three subthemes: 'Sport-based intervention,' 'Expressions of Trauma and Aggression', and 'Bodily Expression: An Outlet for Unspoken Anxieties'. This discussion specifically revolves around the implementation and effects of the sport-based intervention for young people who use their bodies to express trauma and aggression.

4.2.1 GET 1.1- Sport-Based Intervention

The first subtheme under GET 1 is 'Sport-based intervention'. Intrinsicly embedded in the project's name, it was apparent that all participants were eager to discuss how sport can be adapted for therapeutic purposes. Even in the absence of direct questions about sport, participants spoke of their deep interest in it when asked about their motivation to engage in the project.

The participants unanimously expressed a deep-rooted love for sports. Participant 1 reported that *'In the summer, I played cricket, And, in the winter, I played football. And I've always enjoyed the atmosphere that you have in a team, when a team is functioning really well, and you play well, I find that you become part of a machine.'* an enjoyment mirrored by Participant 2's appreciation of the power of being in a team saying *'I'm also a big football fan and I have always felt that huge amount of opportunity to do. there's a huge amount of power in the idea of a team and what we draw on really that that aspect of team sport basically.'* “

Participant 3 highlighted the intricate social dynamics and wide range of emotions fostered by football whilst Participant 4, emphasising the centrality of sports in their professional life, simply stated, "*Sport is my thing*".

Participant 5 discussed sport's therapeutic role '*I found it for myself really enjoyable. To work differently with children, young people in a way that felt that something hadn't been for a long time is using play and games to communicate [...] So first and foremost, I've really enjoyed it myself.*' whereas

Participant 6 combined their enthusiasm for football with practical considerations '*I think it (S&T) was quite inspiring and interesting. Also, I needed a job as well, because I was finishing my training and starting work at the Brent Centre and I love football!*'

The participants varied in their theoretical understandings of sport as an intervention, but they all recognised its potential in engaging young people and providing a platform for expressing complex feelings and self-aspects. Participant 1, for instance, underscored the necessity of a safe and accepting environment for young people who might feel rejected elsewhere, stating that sport is a space that allows the release of aggression, competitiveness, and other emotions. Interestingly, the phrase '*let out*' used by participants indicated an emotional release during Sport and Thought activities.

The participants unanimously recognised the power of sport in promoting mental health by enabling individuals to explore their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. Participant 2 and Participant 5 noted the familiarity and allure of sport, which can help people comprehend emotional challenges within the context of a game, not the person.

Participant 3 highlighted the role of sport in facilitating young people's understanding of their experiences, a perspective reinforced by Participant 4's words '*let's try to figure out what's*

happening. I'm trying to interpret what's happening rather than say 'you don't do this' [...]but I think more helpful is that they have a place where that can be thought about and reflected on, rather than telling them that's not allowed to do because otherwise they feel they can't really bring in their difficulties.' It became apparent from the very start of S&T's design that football was going to be the primary sport involved in the project. Also, that the use of football was functional to guiding young people through their emotional and psychological journeys.

4.2.2 GET 1.2- Sport as a Medium: Expressions of Trauma and Aggression

This theme encapsulates the reflections, connections, and experiences shared by the participants regarding the occurrences of violence and trauma during the Sport & Thought sessions. Certain participants relayed their firsthand encounters with violent expressions during a session, while others analysed the way trauma moulds individuals and becomes evident within the project's framework.

Interestingly, some participants were more inclined to refer to disruptive behaviour as cause from 'trauma', whereas participants 1 and 4 favoured using the term '*violence*' as a substitute for aggression.

Initially, Participant 1's encounters with the boys proved challenging, invoking feelings of anxiety and fear in relation to trauma. They had to separate themselves from the happenings to grasp the core of the project - enabling the boys to vent their emotions. Participant 1 reported '*So, we had the practice match at the end and these boys got into a fight, because one boy thought that the other boy wasn't passing the ball to him enough. then that boy said, 'you're just shit it football.'* So, they both got into a fight. And I found myself breaking up a fight on the first day that I'd gone to this project between people on the same team. 'This experience of conflict between two boys on same team resulted in a sense of internal tension and offered

insight into the boys' volatile demeanour. The participant found the incident shocking due to the exhibited level of aggression.

Participant 4 reflected on aggressive behaviour, reporting a specific situation *'what would be running a very, very normal football session, what could that symbolise to us from us psychotherapeutic perspective. is that containment? Is that not containment? is an externalisation? You know, and because what we were seeing was the boys just wanted to smash the living daylights out of the ball and these were angry boys.'* That he subsequently linked with an external factor that intensified aggression in the boys during a session, *'And it turns out that the previous evening of being parents evening, none of their parents had gone. That was the reason for that situation.'* in his view, this disappointment prompted the boys to forcefully express their frustration, symbolised as 'smashing the living daylights out of the ball'. They examined how the boys projected their emotions onto the football and how the session helped them regulate these feelings. Emphasising their act of "*smashing the ball*" or referring to "*violent situations*", Participant 4 painted vivid pictures of sessions characterised by high levels of aggression and fighting.

Participant 2 and Participant 5 suggested that trauma could play a significant role in the behaviour of some group members. They both emphasised how the community could contribute to these behaviours.

Participant 2: *"I think maybe not all of the group have experienced some sort of abuse or like trauma, but I think a number of the group have either been sort of witnessed domestic violence or sometimes community violence as well"*. Participant 2 also described an incident where one group member criticised another's football skills *"then things just escalated from there, they brought in their family comments about their moms, and then quickly, they were physically fighting each other. That felt like quite a typical incident..."* Dealing with such incidents and deciding how much discussion time to devote to them was a challenge for the participant.

While Participant 5 spoke about the *valuable experience* gained from working with children who have experienced early traumas and the importance of addressing body communication and speaking to young people in an appropriate way: *“it's easy for me to think about this most recent project, this is sort of sport and thought, and probably the impact of trauma, and trust. So, all these kids were at risk of exclusion.... And working with like violence, working with trauma. I think there's also the importance of not just understanding how people communicate with their bodies, putting their bodies at risk, or threatening with their bodies through intentionally, or not intentionally, but unconsciously, perhaps, but then there's something about being more aware of their bodies.”*

Participant 3 emphasises the project's role in helping children/adolescents to manage and *think about their anxieties instead of turning them into enactments*. For instance, the participant raises the concept of anxiety and its influence on the behaviour of latecomers in the group: *“But I think that what happened was that they were extremely anxious of coming into the group perhaps to be targeted and attacked or mocked and stuff like that. So, they tried to get rid of it and put it on someone else...When the team started addressing these anxieties, it had an impact on the group dynamics.”*

Participant 6 suggested that the project helps detoxify *harsh interactions* between young people *“They (boys) seem angry, they seem frustrated, it's in cross with each other... You want to kind of try and hold the group. You don't allow them to be so destructive that they can't come back the next session”*. Interestingly, they also gave an account on the concept of managing destructive impulses and anger in a way that is productive and beneficial for both the facilitator and the young people. *“...But be able to allow that sort of anger, to bubble around inside you, and allow it to lend you some potency, as you lead a group of young people. I think that's a challenge And I think when you get that right, and they know your kind of angry or whatever,*

that you've got the force without acting out, without repressing it, they can feel, and I think they really listen to that. because that's what they want to know their aggression really, without it being disruptive”.

4.2.3 GET 1.3- Bodily Expression: An Outlet for Unspoken Anxieties

The expression of anxiety within Sport and Thought seems to significantly influence how the body is used and how the project is consequently developed. This relationship was illuminated through interviews with three participants who relayed notable difficulties that arose from such circumstances. These participants reflected on the use of their bodies during sessions, employing what might be termed a '*somatic*' approach - planning to navigate the landscape of their anxieties.

Participant 1 and Participant 2 acknowledged the *physically and emotionally taxing nature* of managing the group's dynamics yet found the challenge worthwhile. In particular participant 2 emphasised the project's role in facilitating the expression of anxiety and considered football as a potent medium, allowing the venting of emotions otherwise difficult to articulate.

“But actually, knowing how much anxiety the group can hold is quite difficult. I think it's quite precariously perched, sometimes I find.” They acknowledged the struggle of balancing the roles of facilitator and group member, grappling with the anxieties around maintaining group control and ensuring everyone's engagement and safety. *“Our goal is to help them navigate their anxieties. It's not just about their bodies or their physical movements, but about assisting them to express these anxieties. Football is an expressive game.”* Highlighting the role of physical presence, the participant added, *“Absolutely. It's crucial to demonstrate that it's okay*

to be present in your body, to acknowledge your feelings and discover healthy ways of dealing with them.”

Participant 3 portrayed the project as an effective psychosocial intervention, leveraging applied psychoanalysis to stimulate reflection and address anxieties. According to Participant 3, the project encourages young people to engage in more thoughtful processes, provides a safe space to explore: *“These anxieties, instead of frequently being acted out, can be brought to consciousness, thought about, and even discussed.”* The participant offered a positive outlook on the project, portraying it as an effective psychosocial intervention that employs applied psychoanalysis to stimulate reflection and address anxieties.

They continued, *“The project has the potential to aid young people in recognising that certain issues can be discussed, and anxieties can be thought. It encourages them to engage in more thoughtful processes, processes they might not pursue outside this setting. I view it as an excellent vehicle for delivering mental health assistance that is not only engaging but also facilitates processing anxieties that often get manifested through acting out. Otherwise, there might not be space to consider these issues.”*

Finally, the participant reflected on the project's physical aspect, *“It also aids in handling the physicality of situations. For instance, there may be adolescents who resort to physical fights. The project provides a platform for children, or adolescents, who use their bodies as a coping mechanism, to manage their issues in a healthier manner.”*

Participant 4, Participant 5 and Participant 6 shared experiences of working with young people who primarily communicate through their bodies, risking exclusion due to a lack of verbal communication. Participant 4 said *‘Working with boys who seem unable to contain anything, projecting everything out constantly. So, what we would say is okay, no one can take a shot*

until it's been 10 consecutive passes. So, if you can imagine you're passing the ball, technically what you're doing is holding something symbolically. So, if you learn that you can suddenly hold the ball, hypothetically, you can take that elsewhere, because what you learn to do is actually control your anxiety, and actually learn to work with your anxiety.

“A number of these young people are at risk of exclusion because they communicate primarily through their bodies, not verbally” the Participant 5 revealed. *“The context of a sporting group, like football, provides a better understanding of this form of communication, giving us the opportunity to translate these body messages into words.”* Also, participant 5 noted the beneficial role of sport in understanding this form of communication, enabling a translation of bodily expressions into words. They stressed the importance of body awareness, particularly in children experiencing early trauma or displaying symptoms of *dissociation or hypervigilance*. The ultimate goal is to improve body communication, considering the children's diverse backgrounds and potential trauma histories.

4.3 GET 2 - Psychodynamic Dimensions of Sport and Thought

The following section provides a comprehensive insight into group experiential theme, focusing on how the participants described the S&T's nature and significant psychodynamic aspects of the S&T. The GET 2 called ‘Psychodynamic Dimensions of Sport and Thought’, is split into three subthemes: ‘Beyond the Game: Safe Spaces and Containment’, ‘Shape throughout Time’ and ‘Thought Before Action: The Slow Down Process’.

4.3.1 GET 2.1 -Beyond the Game: Safe Spaces and Containment

The theme of containment, especially in the context of working with adolescents and young people, dominates all participants' perspectives. They acknowledge their role in providing a

safe space that contains the expression of intense, primitive anxieties during sessions. This experience has fostered resilience in their practice and promoted flexibility, allowing them to better understand and navigate the systems around these young individuals.

For instance, Participant 2 spoke about the *challenges and growth experienced* in their role as a facilitator. They described feeling isolated but noted that this experience ultimately led to developing crucial skills: *“Ensuring all our needs are met while maintaining the group's cohesion can be incredibly challenging...[but] my ability to distil and present ideas in an easily digestible form has improved with time and experience.”*

Concurrently, Participant 3 expressed the transformative aspect of their involvement in the project, specifically the ability to manage chaos and complexity: *“Engaging with this project has enhanced my capacity to endure chaos and trust in the process...it has strengthened my ability to handle increasing degrees of complexity.”* They also found their understanding of group dynamics to evolve, fuelling an active interest in effective interaction methods.

Both participants emphasised the need for a safe and respectful environment, where fears and insecurities can be openly discussed. This sentiment was encapsulated in one participant's reflection: *“A thoughtful group, where discussions about fear and vulnerability are encouraged, assists individuals in managing their insecurities more effectively.”* They highlighted the role of the Sport and Thought project in challenging traditional stereotypes around vulnerability and masculinity, ultimately promoting flexible think.

The notion of creating a 'safe space' was also central to Participant 1's perspective. He explains *‘But my view is that you're taking a group of young people who don't feel like they fit into the school, the community, the society, the country, sometimes even they don't feel like they fit into their own family and you're providing them with an environment and a nurturing space where you saved them.’* he later added *‘it was a real test, turning up was the test. They might think*

'he probably won't turn up this week' and that brings me on to something that is so unbelievably important about it, is that the consistency of it. To have a space consistently every week, where they feel cared by thoughtful human being, adult that turns up and speaks to you and is interested in you.'

In their view, this consistency and the ensuing trust that form the relationship's foundation between the facilitators and the participants is the ground to establishment of such an environment, where participants can freely express themselves. Interestingly, Participant 1's adjectival choices, including 'amazing,' 'caring,' and 'nurturing,' reflect their positive sentiment towards the project and underscore its crucial role in adolescent development. He said "I think Sport and Thought provides that space where it's competitive enough that you can let out a bit of aggression and competitiveness and anger, and so on and so forth. But it's also caring and nurturing enough, where you can talk about the fact that it hurt that you didn't get a good science result."

Participant 4 delves into a more abstract exploration of containment. *"We create drills to foster proximity and containment, encouraging them to retain the football and engage with it."* The repetition of the exercise over time, they explain, teaches users to manage their anxieties and emotions. *"Once you learn to 'hold' the ball, you gain control over your anxiety, a skill that can be transferred to other areas of life."* They utilise metaphors and powerful adjectives to describe the multi-faceted, symbolic, and therapeutic approach to the program, emphasising its profound psychological implications.

This was also better explained by Participant 5, who noted *"Over time, repetitive drills provide substantial psychological benefits for the children, particularly in fostering attachments and positive role models. These imprints, hopefully, take root in their minds for the future."*

Participant 5 also noted the benefits of positive transference, the building of trust, and the *creation of positive models* for the children. They underline the necessity of *time for trust* and attachment development, suggesting that these outcomes may be more effective in a longer-term setting than a short-term intervention. The participant speaks of group discussions around sensitive topics, “*When you address instances of shame, like someone being pushed over or tripping, you can broach these subjects in a group setting. While sitting in a circle may work for some, for others, it might feel overwhelming.*”

In contrast with the conventional approach in sports of singling out individuals for errors, Sport & Thought embraces a collective approach, Participant 6 said ‘*The group either succeeds or fails as a whole*’ he then continued. “*The idea being part of a group, reflecting on yourself and reflecting on what surrounds you and where you are in relation to other people. Then, you'd move towards sort of exercises, maybe where you would have the ball before to play a match at the end [...], It's all about trying work together as a group to look after the ball. We used to make comparisons of how to pass to each has it been, counting it. if you send a pass to someone else too harsh, or whatever, then you might get a pass back the same way or the ball will get out of control. [...]*”. The participants use these group exercises to draw parallels between the physical act of passing a ball and the emotional exchanges within the group. In doing so, they encourage users to think about how their actions affect others, encouraging a deeper understanding of mutual respect and collaboration among members. This seems also highlight the facilitators' belief in the therapeutic value of group dynamics in contrast with individual work and the importance of creating a supportive environment for discussing and managing emotions.

On the same line, Participants 2 and 4 highlight the importance of a cohesive group dynamic, using a metaphor of keeping the group dynamic circular. This roundness implies an

understanding of the contextual environment and emotions at play within the group, crucial for effective facilitation. Participant 2 observed a recurring group dynamic, wherein *blame and criticism* tend to concentrate on an individual, often absent, to preserve the creative, productive elements of the group.

He said ‘*I think that the group dynamic that we come across most, I think, is a sort of scapegoating and blaming and wanting to locate problems all in one person or in absent individuals. as a way of preserving, splitting off the bad and keeping the good creative and productive parts of the group safe. I think that's something we see over and over again, like scapegoating as a phenomenon.*’ They interpret this as a mechanism to separate negative aspects and secure the positive, productive elements, a phenomenon they referred to as ‘*scapegoating.*’ Also note by Participant ‘*There were so many dynamics...I mean scapegoating was quite a bit going on. And also, like, choosing someone that's the one that is making everything bad... splitting, lots of splitting.*’

Lastly, Participant 6 focused on promoting a safe and supportive environment for the participants through consistency and tolerance. He said ‘*You know, and there's something about just bringing young people together, and giving them a sort of a space that is kind of benign, you know, whether sort of, they can express themselves, but it's also kind of, spaces facilitated, that helps the group to...I feel like there's something about what we do that's like detoxifies the more harsh interactions between young people.*’ The Participant 6 explores concepts such as the need for consistency and tolerance in the facilitator, the importance of group dynamics and inclusion, suggesting that this type of facilitated space plays a crucial role in detoxifying harsh interactions among young people.

4.3.2 GET 2.2- 'Shape throughout time'

Across all six interviews, each focus group mentioned how *time* plays an important role in the project, with particular emphasis on the role of consistency. The process of facilitators turning up to a session week by week is a critical element underpinning the project's success, enhancing the single users to feel part of something and creating a *sense of belonging*. Participant 1 considered that this might not be unique to their project, with football coaches likely adopting similar practices, they believe the context of their project introduces a unique aspect. This distinctive element lies in the discussions held at the beginning and end of each session consistently. Participant 1 reported an episode when a latecomer young user saw the facilitators, who had been waiting despite no attendees.

“And there was one Friday when it was snowing, and we went there but there was nobody there. We waited for half an hour or 40 minutes. And one of the kids had been put on detention, as he was leaving, he saw us. And he was quite confused like ‘why are you here?’ We said we’d be here every week, so the next week after that, when we turned up, the boys’ kind of turned up and they were apologising to us ‘sorry, I didn’t realise.”

Moreover, Participant 1 also investigates the sense of belonging for users in the group in talking about the impact of the project: *“I think the impact is their feeling of belonging to something, and I don’t think you can see that by the way that they treat the project or people who are involved in the project”*.

Participant 2 built on the concept of consistency, considering its broader implications. For them, consistency encompassed not just the analytic framework but also the setting, timing, and location of interactions *“I think having the like consistency of the, of the analytic frame and consistency of the pitch and the time and the place, that is really important, the consistency and so when that is interrupted on occasions, for things that are out of your control, I think*

that the boys really struggle and that can be quite disheartening. Quite often they'll act out a lot around those times". Yet, Participant 2 also recognised the football pitch's less stigmatising and shame-associated environment as a critical factor in maintaining good attendance and fostering a safe space.

Despite observing both successful and less successful groups, Participant 6 was introspective about the reasons for continued attendance, suggesting factors beyond football that contribute to a successful group experience. Participant 6 spoke about *"doing something together as a group [....] about them feeling that they have a place, like I was saying before there's a sort of relationship with the facilitators, and that kind of consistency, and experience have been tolerated and not reacted to."*

On the other hand, Participant 4 used the metaphor 'I wonder if' to explore the parallels between game situations and life situations. The repetition of this phrase provided a gentle, non-assumptive way of building links and understanding.

Participants 5 and 6, emphasise the importance of consistency, time, and group activities in the process of facilitating sport-based interventions. Participant 5 noted *'I think time is most important thing in that the time that it takes the consistency that you need, and taking your time with how you work therapeutically with them in what you give them, and how they can make use of it'* suggesting he also added later in the interview *'he later added 'But there is in terms of the consistency, and you're doing the same thing And they're turning up to a lot to do with time.'* The participant reflects on the dual role of time in terms of consistency in weekly engagement, as well as the therapeutic impact of time and the potential changes that can happen over time. Whereas Participant 6 recognises the value of group activities, *'...there's a sort of relationship with the facilitators, and that kind of consistency, and experience have been*

tolerated and not reacted to. There's a kind of narrative that you kind of touched on, which is that things go wrong, but people don't get excluded' suggesting they resonate with the children and foster a sense of belonging, thereby highlighting the crucial role of facilitators in maintaining this group cohesion without feeling rejected or excluded.

4.3.3 GET 2.3- Thought Before Action: The Slow Down Process

Inextricably linked to the overarching theme of anxiety and bodily expression is the subordinate theme of a transferrable *'slow down'* attitude. All participants emphasised the significance of slowing down the process, which emerged as a surprising yet pivotal concept in the research. The focus here is on promoting thoughtful decision-making by encouraging individuals to pause, breathe, and reflect before acting - particularly crucial for those prone to impulsivity. Stressing such a reflective practice is seen as instrumental in helping individuals navigate away from problematic situations.

Participant 1 and 2 provided insights into the transformational potential of the sport and the challenges faced by the participants in accepting success. Participant 1 emphasised the significance of changing reactive tendencies both within the sport and in daily life, suggesting that controlling physical and violent reactions could be transferred to real-life scenarios *"So, if we can change the reaction on the football field, maybe they can see that that can also transpire into their you know, 'real life' And they cannot react in a violent or physical manner, on the street or in the classroom or at home"*. Participant 1 noted that by encouraging participants to slow down their thought processes and consider their actions, they could avert impulsive decisions with potentially adverse consequences.

On the other hand, Participant 2 highlighted the struggles these individuals encounter in sustaining progress, with a particular emphasis on their difficulty in accepting positive feedback. Their comments ‘Sometimes *almost like they don't know how to be. They always find it More difficult to do well, like when they get to a target, they will then spoil the progress with something really hard, some really bad behaviour and it's like, you can sort of feel the group lack of self-esteem and self-worth sometimes. It takes a lot of encouragement and pointing out about slowing down the process to see the small achievements they can see and transfer it elsewhere*” emphasising the need for therapeutic interventions aimed at understanding the pitch situation, learning from it, and encouraging its application to broader life skills.

On the same line, Participant 3, and Participant 4, draw parallels between the football field and life situations. Participant 3 shared strong advocacy for applying psychoanalytic principles to group activities. They highlighted the benefits of *enforced reflective thought*, especially for children who rarely have the opportunity to pause and reflect. “*If you learn that you can suddenly hold the ball, hypothetically, you can take that elsewhere, because what you learn to do is actually control your anxiety, and actually learn to work with your anxiety*”. If participants can learn to ‘*hold the ball*,’ it implies they have learnt to control and work with their anxiety. This skill, Participant 3 suggested, is not confined to the field; it can be transferred to other aspects of their lives, thus emphasising the holistic benefits of the ‘slow down’ attitude.

Participant 4 emphasised a viewing of the football field as a metaphorical life stage where significant life skills can be practiced and learned. They described making explicit connections between game situations and real-life situations, intending to enhance the *transfer of skills and attitudes between these contexts*. Participant 4 said ‘*we were working with boys that couldn't even see the boundary of a football pitch, they couldn't see the lines of a football pitch. You*

know, the game would continue off the pitch. [...] But then if you can't see the line here, how are you going to see the rule in the class? how you're going to see the rule on the street? you're not. there's a really simple line, you can lift that so easily' This insight into how the boys struggled to see the boundary of the football pitch is a powerful metaphor for their lack of understanding of limits and rules. By teaching them to see the pitch's boundary, Participant 4 was effectively teaching them to recognise and respect boundaries in general - a generalisable skill in all aspects of life.

Participant 5's comments *"real lack of trust, they were quite disorganised, they would struggle to run slowly together, for example, that's quite important. Like, being able to go at a slower pace, and to be able to regulate yourself."* This insight is particularly crucial to the 'slow down' theme, as it clearly demonstrates the group's initial propensity towards impulsivity and lack of regulation. The struggle to maintain a slower pace signifies not just a physical challenge, but a psychological one as well. It highlights the group's general difficulty in slowing down, taking time to reflect, and making conscious, deliberate decisions - the core principles of the slow down attitude.

Participant 6 shared their experiences working with young people exhibiting disruptive behaviours. They noted how these individuals initially acted impulsively, often leading to accidents. The participant also discussed the use of 'freeze' strategy during games, involving frequent pauses and playing in constrained spaces, aimed at mitigating the participants' impulsive behaviours. He shared *'and then you'd say freeze, you'd notice how they're all bunched up and we'd be trying to get them to sort of have a bit of space between them sort of be keeping aware of what's around them. [...] And then we used to do in the match, we used to freeze it quite a lot, we were given quite, not very much space to play to be playing quite tight space [...] and tried to sort of get this idea that we want them to play in a thoughtful way.*

But I felt like over the years, the games have changed, and we've given them a bit more freedom. I notice more about how they work as a team, without that sort of sense of trying to manage that kind of drives, to whack the ball and try to mediate those drives.' in the participant view, the 'freeze' strategy encouraged participants to become more aware of their surroundings and their positioning relative to others. By frequently pausing the game and playing in a tight space, the players were compelled to think more deliberately about their actions and decisions on the field. This approach aimed to instil a habit of self-regulation, contrasting with their natural inclination towards impulsive and reckless behaviours.

4.4 GET 3 - Emotional Landscapes in Facilitating Sport and Thought

The overarching theme delves into the emotional aspects inherent in a S&T facilitation role. Facilitators unanimously express the substantial emotional impact and demands that accompany the S&T sessions, painting a rich tapestry of emotions that includes moments of exhilaration, helplessness, exhaustion, and professional growth. Notably, this theme also underscores the significance of their relationships with co-facilitators. The mutual exchange of thoughts and the process of debriefing post-sessions have been identified as critical components in successfully implementing the project.

Participant 1 begins by describing their post-session experience, recalling how, after sessions, there was typically silence and tension in the car during the ride back home another facilitator. They mention, *"I found (smile) that after the session, *** and I would drive back to where we lived and, in the car, there was no conversation, it was very quiet and quite tense, because I think you absorb a lot of the feelings of these boys."* This indicates the emotional toll of the

sessions and how the facilitators were absorbing the boys' emotions, which may have led to the tense silence.

The participant also highlights the advantage of having a co-facilitator to share and discuss thoughts and reflections about the sessions, emphasising the importance of this shared understanding and support in processing the events. *"You're not sitting alone with your thoughts. You know, you can share your thoughts with a couple of other people."*

However, there were also clear differences in their experiences and perceptions. Participant 3 emphasised the importance of psychoanalytic training to cope with challenging emotional situations, suggesting a potential skill gap among facilitators. They highlight the need for patience and resilience: *"Well, in terms of colleagues, I do think it was a particular project because you're also with someone that is not necessarily psychoanalytically trained, a TA or a mentor...."*

Participant 5 focused on the balance of roles within the team and the necessity for guidance and supervision. They emphasise the need for balance in team roles, highlighting the importance of having a coach to handle the practical aspects of the sessions, while therapists focus on the therapeutic aspects: *"it's important, I think, to have somebody apart from the therapist that can do hold the practical things and keep things going."*

Personal emotional experiences varied widely among participants. Participant 1 talked about absorbing the boys' feelings and tension after sessions 'because *I think you absorb a lot of the feelings of these boys. So, I'd say in the beginning, the first four or five sessions were not very enjoyable for me because I was constantly on edge in thinking there's going to be a fight.'*

Participant 2 expressed feelings of helplessness and inadequacy, while Participant 3 shared experiences of humiliation and bullying. In response to the question, "And how has it left you

feeling?" Participant 3 replied, "*Ehm, some sessions were difficult. Sometimes I would feel bullied. I remember one dynamic where, for example, when [name of another facilitator] and I talked, we would feel that we were put in a position to be bullied. Like the one that doesn't play well that day, the one that the kids hate that day. This created a split between the people facilitating it, which could leave us feeling bullied. It reminded me of school times when you didn't have a good time, feeling very much not liked, left out, and sort of being the rubbish.*"

Whilst Participant 2 also recount feelings of helplessness and inadequacy, saying, "*those feelings of like helplessness, and thing deskilled and a bit rubbish at your job, and trying to think about how that might be something that young people are trying to understand themselves or get rid of his feelings.*" Furthermore, the participant explores the challenge of managing intense moments during the sessions, explaining that these moments can disrupt their capacity to think, resulting in a chaotic environment: "*I feel like in some more intense moments, your capacity to think is really attacked, and it can be quite chaotic.*" They further note the difficulty of communicating complex ideas in a concise manner and see improvement in this area as an indicator of their professional growth as a clinician.

The experiences shared by Participants 2 and 3 highlight the emotional challenges faced by facilitators and the feelings of being bullied and inadequate not only impacted their professional roles but also triggered past traumas from their own school experiences.

In contrast, Participant 4 discussed the importance of leadership and adaptability in handling difficult situations. Participant 6's narratives mentions the need to be observant and attentive to the group's dynamics and emotional atmosphere they share personal experiences of self-doubt and self-criticism that often occur after sessions: "*like driving home after a session, like so often, punishing kind of thoughts in my head, like, 'you are an idiot, why did you say that?'*".

This statement reflects the emotional toll of managing a group and the self-pressure to perform

effectively. Participant 1 also recalled an incident of conflict between facilitators. Despite the co-facilitator undermining the participant in front of the boys, the participant chose not to react to this provocation. The participant interprets this incident as a beneficial situation for the boys, demonstrating a non-reactive response to a perceived provocation: *“And I’ve been in the situation before where *** has undermined me in front of the boys. And I haven’t reacted.”*

4.5 GET 4 Understanding the Inner Workings: The Role of Supervision

Homogeneously all participants emphasise the value of group supervision³ in providing a supportive, flexible, and comprehensive space for facilitators to share, learn, and gain new insights into their work. It was described as an integrative process that supports practitioners, fosters understanding, and permeates both formal and informal interactions within their working environment.

Despite initial hesitations, Participant 1 acknowledges the profound impact it has on the ability to comprehend the psychological underpinnings of behaviour, manage reactions, and promote effective therapeutic interventions. They noted *“But once I started to see what was being talked about and supervision on the field, playing out in a way that I could understand it, I have to say supervision was immensely beneficial.”* His statements elucidate the role of supervision in providing him a wider perspective, enabling him to understand the boys' actions better, and significantly, not to take their actions personally. They elaborate on how supervision significantly helped in gaining a better understanding of the inner processing of the boys he

³ The term "supervision" in this context refers to psychoanalytic psychotherapy supervision, which is a weekly meeting led by a senior professional, such as a senior child psychotherapist or psychoanalyst. Facilitators involved in running a project are required to participate in these meetings. The structure of supervision can be either individual or group-based, depending on the specific demands of the project.

was working with. He states, *“it really helped to get a clearer vision of what's going on inside these boys.”*

He further emphasises the role of supervision in fostering personal understanding and fostering calmness during his sessions: *“I started to go to the supervision and talk to the therapists about what was going on, maybe what was going on in these kids' minds. I started to understand a lot more about how it made me feel, and maybe why it made me feel like that. And then I could, I found myself being a lot calmer in the sessions.”*

The Participant 2, offers an in-depth account of how supervision plays a critical role in helping them contextualise their sessions, interpret group dynamics, and differentiate their own feelings from those of the group they work with. Participant 2 highlights the significance of post-session supervision, particularly in complex situations involving factors such as a student's return after a significant absence and the termination of the group: *“Then obviously, like bringing something like that to supervision afterwards... it'd be really important to think about what this boy's experience about coming back to the group was like...”* This underscored how supervision offered them a space for deeper reflection on group dynamics and individual experiences, insights that were not readily apparent amidst the session's immediacy.

Interestingly Participant 2 delve into the personal impact of the group's projections and their feelings of helplessness and inadequacy during challenging sessions. They comment, *“I think that a lot of that is about sort of thinking about the projections as well, that put your way during the session, that feelings of like helplessness, and deskilled and a bit rubbish at your job...”*

This self-reflection suggests that supervision offers a safe space for facilitators to explore and understand their own emotional reactions to their work.

Participant 3 appreciated the concept of supervision, emphasising its beneficial role not only for facilitators but also as a supportive measure provided by the institution running the Sport

and Thought project. He then continues exploring their post-session process, the participant highlights the inherent challenges and confusion that may arise, saying, *“I guess I always had in mind after the sessions ‘what the hell has happened?’ and tried to think and we tried to implement this type of supervision.”* This highlights the need for post-session reflection and supervision to make sense of the complex dynamics and occurrences within sessions, but it also suggests that supervision, in their experience, extends beyond formal sessions and permeates the overall work environment, fostering a sense of shared understanding among practitioners.

Participants 4 and 5 highlighted the profound benefits of group supervision, emphasising the importance of peer interactions and reflective processing. Participant 4 appreciated the flexibility of supervision, which allowed discussions on a broad spectrum of topics, including specific sessions, emergent issues, or matters related to other topics. They stated, *“I might speak about the session, I might speak about something that's come up, might speak about a coach.”*

Meanwhile, Participant 5 underscored the importance of reflection and slowing down in the supervision process, stating, *“I think it's really important to have the space afterwards to reflect because... if you're not able to slow down, reflect on that with the facilitators... I think you miss a lot of information.”* They detailed the procedural elements of supervision, including post-session debriefs and ongoing discussions, particularly after challenging sessions, underlining the potential to miss crucial information without adequate reflection.

Participant 6, who served in both supervisor and facilitator roles, emphasised the importance of adaptability and evolution in supervision to deepen understanding of group dynamics. Their unique dual role gave them a comprehensive view of the facilitation and supervision processes.

They acknowledged the significance of supervision as a reflective discipline, with the act of writing up and processing a session offering a chance to rethink it collectively. They noted, *“It's quite good, to have the discipline of writing up a session and try having another opportunity to sort of process it and then think together about it.”* The participant underscored the distinct nature of group work as opposed to individual work, hinting that supervision is instrumental in refining the collective understanding and approach to group work, thus enhancing their thought processes.

4.6 GET 5 - A Tapestry of Transformation: Personal Development

An overarching theme of personal development permeates all their narratives, underlining the transformative nature of their roles in the project. Participant 1 reflects on how personal growth emerges in parallel to the boys' development, as facilitators learn to manage their emotional responses and develop a deeper understanding of adolescent behaviour. By learning to separate their own identity from the boys' actions, facilitators can approach their role with greater empathy and understanding, a necessary factor within the facilitating role. He stated *‘I think what it does is it not only gives you a perspective as to, maybe why the boys do some of the things that they do. But I think it allows you not to take their actions really personally. That's actually, I would say, one of the biggest things about sport and thought from a facilitator's point of view. When you learn to separate out the action, as opposed to anything you've done, sport and thought becomes a lot more enjoyable to facilitate.’*

In contrast, Participant 2 's narrative is coloured by a strong focus on pioneering innovative methods to foster openness and vulnerability, particularly for supporting young men's mental

health. *“The project has helped me to think with the other people working with them about how they're doing, how they're progressing, what they're struggling with... I just wonder whether there's more room for the project to have contact with families of some of the young people, for instance, or other staff working with them.”*

For Participant 3, the project helped them a lot to continue developing their way of working, even individually. *“I do think that group work also helps you to think things a bit more. Also individually, and also maybe the different objects.”* Participant 3 acknowledges that personal development involves a continuous process of learning and refinement, suggesting that the benefits of group work extend beyond its immediate context. As they state, *“For me? Yeah, I think that it helped me a lot to continue developing my way of working even individually... group work also helps you to think things a bit more.”* This perspective implies a broadening of their analytical lens, applying an understanding of group dynamics to individual interactions, thereby enhancing their professional competencies. They also noted *“to bear chaos and trust, maybe what one could say and what one could point out, I guess it helped me to bear it more and more.”*

Whereas for Participant 4, the concept of personal development is deeply intertwined with the fulfilment and enjoyment derived from the role of a facilitator in sports. The participant attests, *“I mean, it's enjoyable, at the end of the day, it's enjoyable. I mean, you wouldn't do it if you didn't enjoy it.”* This sentiment highlights that personal development is not just about acquiring new skills or expanding knowledge; it is also about finding joy and satisfaction in what we do. The metaphorical language employed by Participant 4 - using phrases such as *“implant a seed”* and *“ticking away”*- underscores the long-term impact of the program, which aligns well with the broader theme of personal development.

Participant 5 highlighted the intricacies of achieving equilibrium in group facilitation and the crucial role of self-awareness. They recognised their growth through working in a group setting, stating, *“I think I learned so much about that, in working with a group.”* Their involvement in the Sport and Thought project expanded their understanding of group dynamics and how to manoeuvre challenging situations. Significantly, Participant 5 also gained a heightened understanding of how individuals, especially those subjected to early traumas, communicate via their bodies. They said, *“children who had early traumas probably use their bodies a lot and communicate through their bodies, and how important it is to speak to that...”* This insight reflects the facilitator's growing ability to interpret non-verbal signals, essential for their role. Their learning was amplified through being part of a group process, observing, and actively participating, reinforcing the need for both detached observation and immersive participation.

Participant 6, instead, spoke about a parental role evoked in working with young people, *‘It's funny, you get to feel a bit more like a parent to them, doing being a facilitator. You know, playing football in the park with these kids and sometimes you're joining with the games. I think about one enduring memory like this really strong, sporty, year 10, shoulder barging me when we're going for the fall... feeling like they want to flex their muscles with a father figure, and it is feeling safe for them to do that and no one gets terribly hurt. And there's something about that which I think you can end up having really sort of quite warm and loving feelings towards, these groups of boys, because there's something sort of less formal about it. you're sort of going through an experience with them, which is definitely the same as in intensive work, But maybe it's a bit different from individual work.’* Participant 6 likens their role to that of a parent, feeling warm and protective towards the young people they facilitate, also

reflecting on the emotional connection that can be formed within a group, particularly through shared experiences like playing football together.

4 Discussion

Chapter 5 delves into the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the participants delivering a project called Sport and Thought. Using the IPA research method, the focus of this research primarily concerns facilitators' narratives, and through referencing specific studies in the literature review, this chapter offers a comprehensive examination of the findings in the context of the research questions and existing literature.

A significant part of this chapter is devoted to a detailed exploration of each Group Experiential Theme that emerged during the analysis.

In addition to a detailed exploration of the project's methodology and findings, this chapter will outline the strengths and limitations of the research. The researcher will also provide personal reflections on this journey as a clinician, a facilitator, and a researcher in this project, contributing to a multifaceted understanding of the subject. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of future research and the dissemination of this research's findings, thereby positioning the study within the broader discourse on sport, therapy, and mental health.

4.1 GET 1- Bodily Echoes: Expression of Trauma and Aggression through Sport

Sport and thought utilises football and its group nature as a medium to convey its aims because of its popularity and ability to engage many young people in England. Similar projects use other sports, which can also be engaging and transformative, such as those described in D'Andrea et al. (2013), Sibley and Etnier (2003), Wretman (2017), Goren (2020), Terry et al. (2014), and Nascimento Junior et al. (2021).

Despite varying individual experiences, a sense of unity emerged among the participants, rooted in their common interest in football, widely regarded as the most popular sport in Western society. As the literature illustrates, there is growing recognition of football's potential as an influential instrument in mental health interventions. Various initiatives have highlighted the social and therapeutic benefits of engaging with the sport (Pringle, 2009; Smyth, 2004; Nascimento J., 2021; Horn et al., 2019; Spandler et al., 2013).

These findings suggest a positive impact and advocate for increased collaboration between the domains of football and mental health care, thereby leveraging football's potential in addressing mental health challenges.

In this study, a shared enthusiasm for football was found to influence the motivation of facilitators to participate in the project. However, it is not clear whether their motivation stems primarily from personal interest rather than structured training and support. If facilitators are mainly driven by personal enthusiasm, there is a risk that the quality of the intervention could vary significantly. Participants emphasised the importance of a sports-based intervention for young individuals who struggle with emotions, particularly those manifesting physically through acting-out behaviours. Even though the findings suggest the therapeutic potential of sports, particularly football, as a mental health intervention, it is important to critically examine these findings, as the study lacks quantitative metrics to robustly measure the impact of football on these psychological outcomes. According to participants football's ability to translate emotions and anxieties into physical expression promotes open communication, empathy, personal growth, and resilience within group dynamics, rendering it an invaluable tool for mental health professionals (Oakley, 2007; Pringle, 2009; Spandler et al., 2014).

The participants narrative also shed light on the profound impact of trauma and aggressive behaviour on the project in relation to others. These insights yield a complicated understanding

of aggression, interpreting it as a manifestation of trauma and a reflection of underlying violence. The challenges and complexities encountered in the S&T sessions spanned from overt verbal aggression and physical altercations to subtler expressions of trauma. However, how emotions are directed and managed in sports reflects principles in classical psychological theories. This resonates with the work of Bion (1982), who suggests that sports can serve as a channel for difficult emotions (of a sexual nature). As he implied that sports could function as a form of sublimation for more problematic tendencies, this study explored the participant narratives on understanding aggression within the context of sports, allowing one to interpret it as both a manifestation of trauma and a reflection of underlying violence. In this light, aggression in sports is not only merely a byproduct of competition but also an expression of an internal state shaped by complex emotional and psychological factors. Drawing from these insights, the therapeutic interventions within the S&T sessions were tailored to navigate this complex emotional landscape. As stated by Participant 6, this therapeutic intervention serves to ‘avoid harsh interaction’, exploring the anger at the root of it without acting it out. The participants further deliberated on the instances of heightened tension and anxiety within the group, revealing how concerted efforts were made to reconnect the group and render these high-stress moments ‘*thinkable*’ and ‘*remembered.*’ By addressing these demanding episodes and collectively working through them, the facilitators helped foster a sense of unity and resilience within the participants. This approach sought to acknowledge, confront, and process the anxiety entrenched in the group dynamics, thereby facilitating individual and collective growth and strength.

Another important aspect touched upon in the finding is that Sports & Thought aims to address not only the individual emotional landscapes but also the inevitable characteristics of the individual that can be observed within groups. Paraphrasing the words of the famous

philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, “*In football, everything is complicated by the presence of the opposite team*” (1976), highlighting the intricate dynamics in playing with the other(s). This confrontation with the ‘*other*’ compels individuals to engage with their own internal limitations, fears, and aspirations, all while operating within a group setting. The presence of an opposing force adds a layer of complexity to the group dynamics, intensifying the emotions and behaviours under examination in the therapeutic space.

The data in this study, therefore, correlate with the work of Bion (1961) on groups and the notion of the ‘basic assumptions’ that emerge within the group setting. These assumptions can either fuel or frustrate the group’s collective objectives, avoiding a work-group mentality (Bion, 1967). Within the S&T sessions, these basic assumptions were evident when facilitators spoke of feeling overwhelmed by anxiety in the group. By recognising and addressing these basic assumptions, they used sports to not only ‘increase a pleasurable feeling of vitality’ (Bion, 1961, p. 159) but also to confront these obstructive emotional tendencies. Participants were encouraged to move beyond simplistic dependency on leaders, to think constructively rather than reactively in fight/flight scenarios, and to find resilience without the need for an external singular guide, enriching their individual and collective experiences. In this context, sport served as more than a physical exercise; it was a canvas upon which these deep-seated emotional and psychological tendencies could be painted, examined, and perhaps redrawn.

Another interesting finding from this research was the convergence towards a ‘somatic’ approach in the Sport and Thought sessions. Participants shared a recognition of the role of bodily expression in reflecting anxiety points. This finding resonates with Meltzer’s key question for adolescents: “*Whose body, is it?*” (1973, p. 53), emphasising the complex challenge that young people face as they navigate adolescence, attempting to separate their developing selves from childish misconceptions and projections related to adulthood. The body

is a source of sensations and a way of accessing and expressing emotions, affecting how the body is experienced and represented. This aligns with Robertson's suggestion that people may not verbally 'do emotion' but often express emotion through action (2007 Spandler et al., 2014). It can be that, as mentioned by Participant 6 in the study, an explanation roots in Glasser's concept of 'The core complex' (1979). Glasser postulated that attempts to connect and feel mentally and physically close to another might be perceived as too intrusive, triggering a fear of engulfment, and activating a fight-or-flight response. While initially framed in relation to individuals with perverse sexualised tendencies, this concept may apply to some S&T participants who experience aggression towards the facilitator (the object) or other members (siblings). In this context, the urge to destroy could transform into a sadomasochistic desire to inflict pain and make the other suffer. Incorporating these insights underscores a somatic approach's complexity and potential therapeutic value in S&T sessions.

This interpretation is particularly significant, considering many S&T users frequently engaged in fights. Participants in the interviews used words like "difficulties" and "threatening" to articulate the challenges these students face, reflecting an understanding of the turbulent environments from which many of them come. By consistently addressing these intense moments with the users, the facilitators can help articulate the underlying feelings, aiding the individuals in recognising and managing their anxieties. This suggests that football, or sports in general, serve not just as a stage for physical competition but as a complex emotional and psychological space. According to Oakley (2007), football isn't just a game; it's a way for people to express hidden feelings like anxiety or desire. The author observed that it is not necessarily through analysing the game that therapeutic intent or change is achieved. Instead, it's about recognising that the way people act within the sport can reveal deeper

emotional truths. These behaviours in the game can serve as clues to understanding complex emotions, providing a unique opportunity for therapeutic intervention.

Winnicott (1964), when describing his work with juvenile delinquents, observed that when you encounter a disturbed young person, you are meeting a life that has gone wrong. Usually, very early on and during a S&T session, participants may express anxieties or communicate feelings that they might not otherwise be able to articulate. This approach is particularly vital when engaging young people at risk of exclusion from schools, often those for whom life has gone awry in the manner Winnicott described. A study of UK prisoners revealed that 63% of them had been temporarily excluded from school, and 42% had been permanently excluded (The Commission on Young Lives, 2022). Further, children who have been excluded are more likely to become involved in serious violence (ibid, 2022).

DfE data shows that London's secondary school exclusion rates have increased annually since 2013. The mention of Black and Asian children is particularly noteworthy, as these groups are consistently overrepresented among the participants of Sport and Thought. The potential role of unconscious bias in contributing to the overrepresentation of certain student groups in exclusion figures remains an area requiring further exploration. The empathetic insight provided by Winnicott's work provides a backdrop that underscores the importance of approaches like S&T in reaching these marginalised youths, leveraging a shared cultural connection to football as a pathway towards understanding, inclusion, and healing.

The S&T population is culturally and ethnically diverse; however, interestingly, the multicultural aspect of the project has yet to be fully explored by the participants in this study. The projects are delivered in areas of London where the poverty rate exceeds the city's average (London's Poverty Profile, 2022), adding another layer of complexity to the context. The

diversity of the project may warrant more scrutiny, as cultural biases exist among the study participants as well. For instance, only one participant is of mixed race, while the rest of the cohort consists of white males (mixed British or other).

Although the project has had facilitators from various backgrounds and minorities, they did not participate in this study. This demographic composition highlights the underrepresentation of individuals from diverse backgrounds. This observation aligns with broader national statistics in the UK, which show not only the limited number of Black managers in football but also the fact that in 2021 there were only five other Black managers in the top 92 clubs in England's professional leagues (ESPN, 2021).

Research by Grant (2022) and Bradbury and Conricode (2021) stress persistent challenges in achieving diversity and inclusion within leadership roles in sports. These findings suggest that there are ongoing challenges in the broader sporting world, which are mirrored in projects that utilise sports, such as the Sport and Thought initiative. Such patterns may indicate that football-related contexts often display a resistance to change, favouring dominant liberal ideologies that continue to exacerbate racial disparities.

The landscape in the psychotherapeutic field is similarly concerning. While there are no specific statistics regarding the representation of Black psychotherapists in the UK, data from the Health & Social Care Information Centre in 2013 indicated that Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals make up only 9.6% of qualified clinical psychologists in England and Wales (The British Psychological Society, 2019). This lack of diversity parallels the challenges observed in the Sport and Thought project and points to systemic issues that span multiple professional domains. Drawing on Fakhry Davids' exploration of "internal racism", it's worth considering how unconscious internalisations of racial stereotypes, prejudices, and ideologies may permeate these dynamics. Individuals of all racial backgrounds can

unconsciously absorb and perpetuate these internal biases, which can profoundly affect both self-perception and interaction with others (Davids,2011).

Shifting the lens from racial and ethnic diversity, another area that demands scrutiny is gender representation. This research, in fact, also highlights an inequity in gender diversity among the group facilitators, which may be ascribed to the reasons mentioned previously or could be due to underlying biases or institutional practices that favour male participation in sport-oriented interventions. The representation of gender within the project is notable, potentially shaped by societal perceptions that identify football as a predominantly male-dominated activity. This perspective could inadvertently function as an obstacle to active female participation. However, there is no inherent justification for excluding women participating in this S&T project. Especially given the growing efforts to provide women with equal access and opportunities, there has been a noticeable increase in their participation in the sport. It is suggested that boys may encounter more difficulties when accessing therapeutic support, a demographic that simultaneously maintains a deep-rooted emotional and cultural connection to football (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2013). This disparity is unfortunate, as emphasised by other studies (Deaner et al., 2016; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2013).

Susan Levy, who led a therapeutic football group in Freedom from Torture, did not explicitly mention her gender in her work. However, she reflected on her perceived role as a supportive figure, potentially embodying an idealised mother figure. Levy's role symbolised a boundary in an environment where boundaries had previously been disrupted for these players (Levy, 2021).

These observations stress the interplay between sports, cultural factors, and at-risk youth's emotional and psychological needs. The study's findings encourage further examination of unconscious biases, gender roles, and cultural influences within the context of sports-based

therapeutic interventions, emphasising the importance of a comprehensive understanding to enhance the efficacy and inclusivity of such programs.

4.2 GET 2- The Psychodynamic Dimensions of Sport and Thought

The experiential theme branches into three pivotal subthemes: ‘Beyond the Game: Safe Spaces, and Containment,’ ‘Shape throughout Time’ and ‘Thought before Action: The Slow Down Process.’ Within these thematic categories, participants emphasise the creation of ‘safe spaces,’ especially crucial for adolescents and young individuals. From the participants’ view in this study: the environments serve as platforms for emotional expression and psychological flexibility, equipping young minds to navigate complex emotional terrains. Notably, within these safe spaces, discussions are not confined to the realm of sports but extend to complex and often stigmatised topics like sexuality. Participants 1 and 3 highlighted this need for safe venues for such conversations, an observation that parallels findings in studies involving refugees (Horn et al., 2019; Spandler et al., 2013).

The notion of ‘*safe space*’ also aligns with literature stressing its importance for trauma-sensitive sports interventions (Horn et al., 2019; Levy, 2021). Here, the theories proposed by Meltzer in 1973a and revisited in 2018 become particularly relevant. Meltzer articulated that the types of groupings—such as sports teams or even informal groups—that adolescents are attracted to might sometimes mirror their internal clusters. These clusters contain what he defined as the ‘*destructive parts of the self*,’ or the internal ‘gang’ (Meltzer, 1973, p. 52). The group dynamics often externalise inner conflicts and emotions that these young individuals

might be grappling with, offering a way to confront and contain these feelings within a structured, supportive environment.

In this context, Sport and Thought contributes by fostering a peer environment that functions as an “exo-skeletal” (using Bion’s terminology, 1970) support system. This serves as an alternative to the family’s holding function until such time as the adolescent develops a more robust internal emotional and psychological backbone. This temporary “exo-skeletal” structure provides the emotional scaffolding, helping young individuals build the resilience and stability they need for emotional development. This aligns with Meltzer’s understanding that adolescents with stable self-concepts and reliable internal frameworks are better equipped to embrace novel social opportunities for personal growth (1973). Thus, in the participants' view, Sport and Thought does not just offer a physical playing field but opens up a complex emotional and psychological terrain where users can explore, understand, and challenge various aspects of their identities, emotional health, and social interactions.

Building on the concepts of safe space and the “ego-destructive superego” structure described by Bion (1973, 1962), the Sport and Thought project also reveals the complexity and depth of group, including group dynamics called “scapegoating” where an individual is associated with failure, reminding others of their shortcomings and collective guilt. According to Bion, early life anxieties rooted in infantile helplessness, hunger, or fear can manifest in a self-destructive relationship with one’s internal world, often carried into later life. Such destructive energies can resurface in group settings, manifesting in behaviours like “scapegoating,” where individuals project their anxieties and perceived shortcomings onto another member.

Waddell's definition of scapegoating is “an active process a disavowing or evacuating on the part of the group, or more accurately a gang [...] of and unacceptable aspects of themselves;

the locating of those aspect in another and the persecution of that other, who becomes the repository for feelings which cannot be acknowledged as part of the self.” (In Anderson & Dartington, 1998, p 127). This process can be driven by deep-seated anxieties about identity, reflecting an acute intolerance for differences either within the self or within others. One individual is thus made to carry these unwanted, guilt-inducing parts on behalf of the group. the author also offers a poignant example that resonates with this phenomenon. She tells the story of a patient who, as a child during wartime, felt that a foster mother's cat was receiving all the available rations, leading him and his friends to feel threatened. Drawing a parallel with this research, the results suggest that young people in the Sport and Thought project appear to experience similar feelings of deprivation that are not adequately addressed by the adults involved. Stemming from their own traumas, these young people transform their passive suffering into active cruelty in an attempt to manage their emotional pain (Waddell, 1998).

This observation aligns with Waddell’s insights into adolescent group modalities, specifically regarding unconscious defences against change, intimacy, pain, and the “basic assumption” tendency to retreat into thoughtlessness and destructive enactment (p. 81, 2018).

These insights raise questions about how group dynamics work, particularly when challenging emotions or traits are projected onto a single group member. It allows the group to distance themselves from them and observe these difficult aspects in other(s). However, this process can compromise individuality as people unconsciously align with shared assumptions to form a more cohesive group.

As Segal (1997, p. 132) elucidates, “We tend to project into the group parts of ourselves which we cannot deal with individually, and since it is the most disturbed, psychotic parts of ourselves which we find hardest to deal with, those tend to be projected primarily into groups” and this, emphasised the importance of an ongoing dialogue about the complexity and potential of

sports-based therapeutic interventions. More than one facilitator discussed the theme of users finding differences very threatening, often turning to these differences within the group, especially when feeling anxious and attacked. This suggests that the therapeutic environment might offer an opportunity to work through emotional conflicts within a structured and supportive setting, using symbolic expression and containment of anxiety.

Consistency within the group promotes a cohesive culture and a sense of safety (Horn et al., 2019). Facilitators involved in the current study emphasise the role of regular attendance in establishing trust, fostering a sense of belonging, and effectively engaging members. They highlight the critical nature of keeping a consistent settings, timing, and locations, understanding that disruptions might lead to struggles among participants. Moreover, participants draw parallels between game and life situations, exploring these connections through metaphorical language. They used the phrase '*I wonder if*' to explore the parallels between game situations and life situations, leading to thoughts about how the dynamics of a game can reflect broader life challenges. The metaphor opens avenues for introspection, allowing individuals to relate their experiences on the field to their own lives, and possibly encouraging deeper understanding and personal development.

All facilitators also concur on the value of *consistency* in promoting engagement and emotional processing but offer unique insights based on their personal observations and interactions. Collectively, these themes emphasise the psychological complexity of the project and the need to grasp group dynamics to facilitate effective sessions, ensure group harmony, and advance adolescent development. A compelling argument for therapeutic football is its familiarity and comfort for many participants. In the facilitators' view, traditional, in-person talking therapies may pose barriers to some young people, making this project a valuable complementary space for fostering alliances within the group and organisation, providing an accessible entry point

for those who might otherwise be reluctant to engage in more conventional therapeutic methods. Employing a familiar and enjoyable activity like football, therapeutic interventions can bridge the gap between traditional therapy and individuals in need, offering an alternative way to explore personal development, emotional processing, and interpersonal relationships in a less stigmatised and more engaging environment.

To enable that, Sport and Thought employs a long-standing, specific model developed by the Brent Centre, which has been applied in various schools and youth club settings over the years. Participants noted how S&T is not purely a traditional psychodynamic group; its methodology integrates outdoor activities on the sports field with specific football tasks or drills for the group to work on. Despite these distinctive features, the foundational principles of the therapeutic work remain consistent: creating a containing, reflective space for the participants to explore and to think collectively about their identities by reflecting on their behaviour within a group. Accordingly with these findings, through repetitive drills and group dynamics, it is possible that S&T fosters a sense of safety, respect, and trust and challenges conventional stereotypes. While the existing literature on this subject is thin and may not provide statistically significant evidence, preliminary observations suggest that the method of slowing down the thinking process and linking specific game situations with ordinary life experiences has a positive outcome. Research by Smyth (2019) suggests that therapeutic interventions within football programs are linked to a decrease in school exclusions among young participants, underscoring the effectiveness of such an approach. The strategic combination of a slowdown process with carefully designed drills and the provision of an open space for discussion promote a therapeutic environment within S&T. This approach encourages reflection about users' identities and struggles rather than resorting to exclusion or banning them from the group, as they may have historically experienced. Participant 4 in this study further draws a parallel between game

and life situations, explaining how the repetition of specific exercises or drills and their subsequent interpretations could offer a deeper understanding of behavioural patterns and responses in other areas of users' lives.

However, all participants emphasise the necessity to slow down the process, fostering thoughtful decision-making by encouraging pausing, breathing, and reflecting, which is crucial for those prone to impulsivity. Participant 1 illuminates the potential for transformation within the football field and beyond, advocating for a change from reactive tendencies to restraint in physical and violent reactions. They emphasise slowing down thoughts and considering actions to prevent negative consequences. Participant 2 highlights the tendency to self-sabotage and underscores the struggles in maintaining progress, reflecting on the need for therapeutic interventions. Participant 3 and Participant 4, drawing parallels between the football field and life situations, emphasise the benefits of enforced reflective thoughts to control anxiety, and to recognise and respect boundaries. Participant 4's comparison of the jog to prepare for an exam or being a professional athlete is metaphorically powerful. Participant 5 notes the struggle to maintain a slower pace, indicating a propensity toward impulsivity and lack of regulation, emphasising the need to understand physical communication, slow down and make conscious decisions. Participant 6 highlights the structure of sessions focusing on repetitive drills that instil patience and deliberation, contrasting their initial propensity for rushing and impulsiveness. The 'freeze' strategy, keeping the ball on the floor, emphasises the 'slow down' attitude, a strategy and deliberation transferable to everyday life. All participants agree on the key point that involvement in the Sport and Thought program seems to have a positive impact on young people, enhancing of self-reflection, promoting decision-making, and helping to avoid negative consequences (Norbert et al., 1966; Smyth, 2019).

By fostering self-regulation and decision-making abilities in other life aspects where individuals can thoughtfully engage with their experiences and emotions, the S&T methodology demonstrates a progressive intervention model that contrasts with traditional punitive measures. In the participants' view, this inclusive and reflective approach has the potential to enable participants with strategies to understand and manage their behaviour in a manner that promotes personal growth and positive development (Smyth, 2019). For instance, Smyth's study (2014) emphasised the link between an individual's mental state and educational performance. The study demonstrated that employing this methodology resulted not just in a reduction of behavioural issues, but also in enhanced academic performance, particularly in key subjects like Math and English.

This is also in line with other meta-analysis research (Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Rasberry et al., 2011) that underscored the positive effects of sports on children's cognition, revealing that the majority of analysed research suggested statistically significant improvements in academic performance for children engaged in extra or intensified physical activities compared to those with no or regular physical activity.

In summary, GET 2 emphasises the role of safe spaces, containment, and consistency in facilitating the expression of strong emotions and fostering self-understanding among young people. As Participant 6 from the Sport & Thought project stated, "*The group either succeeds or fails as a whole.*" This collective approach resonates with Foulkes' assertion that the aim of therapy is to engage with the "group as a whole" (1948, p. 140). When functioning optimally, the group itself becomes the therapist. In this context, the leader of the therapeutic process is often referred to as either the conductor or the facilitator, as per the project's terminology.

By delving into the complex dynamics of group interactions and drawing on game situations as metaphors, the study uncovers deeper connections between these group experiences and broader life challenges. These findings provide a thoughtful platform for introspection, personal growth, and improved decision-making skills. Importantly, there was a collective emphasis on the need to slow down the thinking process as a countermeasure to impulsivity.

4.3 GET 3- Emotional Landscapes in Facilitating Sport and Thought

Participants' narratives underline the emotional challenges associated with the S&T facilitator's role, the importance of peer support, relationships among facilitators, and the necessity for reflective practices. This points toward a broader understanding of group dynamics and the intricate relationships between facilitators. These accounts stress the difficulties in managing emotions during taxing sessions and the complexities of working with colleagues from differing training backgrounds, exposing a rich tapestry of human interaction and emotional resonance.

For instance, a prominent feature in this research is the absorption of the user's emotions by the facilitators, leading to experiences of tension and silence. Participant 1's description of the post-session car ride reveals more than just the emotional toll; in their view, it illustrates the raw reality of facilitating these sessions. The silence represents more than just a pause in conversation. According to the participant 1, it is a manifestation of the absorption of the emotional turbulence experienced by the boys during the sessions. In contrast to individual therapy, the interactive nature of group tasks, where transformation remains a dualistic job, is central to this process.

Yet, the dynamics of co-facilitation are complex and can introduce challenges. Discrepancies in facilitation styles and professional ideologies among co-facilitators can lead to inconsistencies in session delivery. The study does not sufficiently explore these potential conflicts or provide strategies for resolving them. For instance, a discrepancy emerges in how participants perceive the presence of another adult running the project. Reflections on the need for someone to exchange thoughts emphasise that this mutual support is vital for processing intense emotions during sessions. The presence of two facilitators, allowing the users to perceive them symbolically as a “parental couple,” can either contribute to or interfere with opportunities for containment of the group.

This concept aligns with the insights of Woods and Argent (2009), who recognise the advantage of having another mind within the therapy room, and Canham and Emmanuel’s (2000) observations on the early splitting of parental couples in transference. This seems to suggest that the parental couple in transference can bring forward integral elements of family life and school dynamics, sometimes creating perplexing experiences for the group.

Moreover, the competitive nature of team sports, such as football, introduces unique strains that shape the relationships between facilitators, unveiling tensions and unexplored dynamics. These challenges are further explored by Oakley (2007) in the football context. According to Oakley, the sport is a transitional space, often deeply rooted in adolescence, at the intersection of confusion and undigested emotion. This ‘*in-between*’ state nature of football appears to resonate in the roles of facilitators as they navigate the competitive tensions inherent in the sport and the emotional and developmental turmoil represented by adolescent dynamic re-emerging in the context of football, as indicated by participants. Consequently, frustrations and divergences in experiences and perceptions among facilitators play a pivotal role in the delivery of the program. The inconsistency in how participants spoke about struggles in co-facilitating

might stem from anxieties about revealing personal vulnerabilities, conflicting professional ideologies, or a lack of clear team guidelines. These underlying apprehensions could influence open communication, affecting the overall cohesion and efficacy of the therapeutic process. Personal emotional experiences openly shared, paint a picture of wide-ranging emotions felt by facilitators, ranging from self-doubt to feelings of humiliation and inadequacy. These insights humanise the professional role and clarify that the emotional landscape is not merely about managing the boys' feelings; it is also about managing one's emotions.

Meltzer and Harris's (1976) insightful theory that adolescents often utilise group members to project various parts of the self, requires a closer examination, as it sheds light on a fascinating aspect of group dynamics within sports intervention projects. These projections may encompass what Meltzer refers to as the more primitive or even psychotic parts of the personality, fragments that the individual finds challenging to integrate. Allowing these projections to be expressed within the group without becoming overwhelmed or disintegrating is a delicate and complex task for a facilitator. The facilitator's capacity to survive these projections without dismissing or negating them can lead to a profound experience of regression and growth. In other words, the members may temporarily return to an earlier stage of emotional development in a controlled and contained environment to rework unresolved conflicts and issues, as has happened to Participant 3 when feeling bullied and subjected to negative group dynamics.

The process of containment within the facilitators' group is central to this experience, acting as a receptacle for these projected parts (Waddell, 2002). The facilitator's ability to accept, understand, and integrate these projections can lead to a more cohesive and integrated group. D.W. Winnicott's concept of being "good enough" (1953) strongly resonates here as it proposes that the facilitator does not need to be perfect but must be responsive, adaptable, and

capable of maintaining a therapeutic stance. This “good enough” approach enables the facilitator to assist young people in developing a “true self,” a central concept in Winnicott’s theories that refers to the authentic and integrated sense of self.

However, the journey toward this “good enough” state may be fraught with tensions, misunderstandings, and conflicts. The dynamics of containing such intense and often conflicting projections can lead to significant imbalances within the facilitators’ group itself. The research indicates a perceived gap in what Participant 4 termed as ‘bearing the chaos.’ Furthermore, the challenges of working with someone who is not psychoanalytically trained and may struggle to bear the chaos and humiliation that can occur in the project. By this, the participant was referring to the capacity to tolerate the ‘not knowing’ outcome of an interaction within the group, which is, for Bion (1962), the essential process for achieving real knowledge.

In conclusion, this comprehensive examination of the multifaceted relationships, emotional burdens, and therapeutic dynamics within the S&T project offers a unique window into the human condition. Blending various theoretical frameworks and personal insights paves the way for a richer understanding of sports intervention projects. It serves as a timely reminder that behind the outcomes and results lie complex human interactions that deserve careful exploration, understanding, and support.

4.4 GET 4 - Understanding the Inner Workings: The Role of Supervision

Despite the debates over the necessity of psychoanalytic training for managing difficult situations and the varying emotional tolls experienced, all participants unanimously spoke about the intrinsic value and practical implications of supervision in the Sport & Thought project.

Each of the six participants included in this study provides rich insights into the multifaceted nature of supervision, detailing its emotional and cognitive impacts and its role as an integrative process. Supervision offers a space to process all those feelings, helping facilitators to ‘recover from and compare our experience of the session, review our thoughts, and support each other’ (Canham & Emanuel, 2000). For this reason, GET 4, “Understanding the Inner Workings: The Role of Supervision”, is closely linked with the previous section. In that prior section, participants often described feelings of being overwhelmed by the group’s projections, further underscoring the essential role of supervision in the overall therapeutic process.

Participants 1 and 2 emphasise the ‘post-session significance’ of supervision, particularly in navigating complex group dynamics and emotions tied to elements of change and transition. Their recounting provides a compelling portrait of supervision’s reflective space, where therapists can explore and understand their emotional reactions to their work. These participants’ reflections underline the crucial need for supervision to make sense of complex dynamics and occurrences within sessions, suggesting that it plays an integral part in fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared understanding among practitioners.

Likewise, Participant 4 shares the value found in the flexibility of group supervision, outlining its capacity to span various topics relevant to their work and stressing the informal yet productive nature of group discussions, which occur in settings such as pubs. As described by this participant, the diversity in contexts for supervision emphasises how this practice is not confined to formal, structured settings, allowing for a more relaxed exchange of thoughts and experiences.

Participant 6, uniquely positioned as a facilitator and supervisor, highlights supervision’s disciplinary function. They underline the contrast between individual and group work and point

out that the reflective process during supervision enhances their collective understanding of group work, suggesting that supervision helps evolve their thinking and deepens their understanding of group dynamics.

As with other therapeutic work, supervision for projects like Sport & Thought is a space to talk through difficult experiences, such as receiving harsh projections. Staff may leave sessions feeling exhausted and de-skilled due to the intensity of the group's projections of unmanageable states of hopelessness and helplessness. This process of going away, thinking about the group, putting down thoughts into words, and sharing impressions with others offers a vital experience of containment for staff, leaving them better placed to return to the group feeling hopeful and capable.

In line with Bion's (1962) containing function, the therapist is a consistent and trusted presence, helping the child 'metabolise' raw, unprocessed emotions into more manageable states. This dynamic is part of Bion's 'container-contained' framework, where the therapist stabilises the individual's emotional turmoil.

In the specific context of Sport and Thought, the research highlights the central role of therapeutic supervision not only for the well-being of the participants but also as a support system for the facilitators themselves, enabling them to navigate complex emotional landscapes with resilience and empathy. Supervision becomes essential in ensuring the project's ongoing success and ethical integrity by creating a space for reflection and growth.

Drawing from Foulkes's idea of the communication matrix, the significance of supervision in the Sport and Thought project becomes clear. Foulkes (1975) depicted the matrix as an interconnected web where individual experiences and interactions fuse to create a general

framework. In the Sport and Thought project, this matrix is evident in the intricate weave of group dynamics and shared emotions. Each session and interaction contribute another thread, bracing the collective fabric and deepening group understanding. However, it's through supervision that the depth and complexity of this matrix are truly understood. The project's emphasis on supervision reiterates the importance of reflecting upon and understanding these intricate interactions, serving as a space where the matrix's threads can be unravelled, examined, and understood.

In her paper "Observation, Understanding and interpretation: The Story of a Supervision," Margaret Rustin responds to uncomfortable feelings evoked by patients, stating, "It is an important matter that, as a profession, we try to describe what kind of learning and living environment is required for clinical work of quality, rigour, and depth to be sustainable [...] in which there will always be a pull towards the evasion of the anxiety and pain inherent in the growth of the mind." (p445, 1998). By putting thinking to enactments that may have been unthinkable, supervision helps facilitators continue to think and work together, thus strengthening the bond and mutual understanding within the group and getting in touch with their capacity to help the group.

Supervision serves as an essential tool for therapists working within the context of the project, allowing them to differentiate their personal reactions from the intense feelings of self-disgust, self-loathing, and shame that users often bring to sessions. These powerful emotions can invade and shape the therapeutic interaction, impacting the therapist's countertransference. Through supervision, facilitators apply a "slow down" approach that they find valuable within the project. This mirrors the work done on the field during sessions, where facilitators emphasise a thoughtful approach to play designed to be transferable to everyday life. S&T's goal is to

encourage participants to think before they act, fostering greater self-reflection and mastering the control of the ball to control impulsiveness. To the same extent, supervision serves a parallel function, allowing for the deliberate slowing down of recounting session experiences. This careful processing enables thoughtful reflections and creates an opportunity to analyse the session's dynamics and the group's interactions. The influence of supervision extends beyond mere reflection; it actively promotes a space where the group can tolerate, explore, and value differences, alternative viewpoints, and the tensions these might create (Rustin, 1998).

The question raised by the participant, "*What the hell has happened?*" encapsulates the potential confusion a facilitator might face after a session, highlighting the necessity for a space to unravel this confusion. Metaphors such as "*offload*" further paint a vivid picture of what supervision can mean to facilitators, serving as a place to share personal anxieties and experiences that arise during a session. Supervision allows valuable time for reflection, both chronologically and mentally, away from the immediate session environment. This detachment from the session provides a crucial respite, allowing facilitators to decompress and thoughtfully process their experiences without the immediate urgency to respond. In this way, supervision acts as a supportive platform that enables '*more enrichment in thinking,*' deepening the understanding of the session's events and '*allowing our thinking to be a bit broader,*' as Participant 6 said.

An important aspect of the findings to address is what a few participants described as experiences of humiliation and bullying. This phenomenon within the S&T project has emerged as a significant issue for facilitators, potentially reflecting the intrinsic personal experiences of the users with this form of abuse. Nevertheless, it also encompasses broader aspects where group dynamics and social aggression manifest. Bullying, defined as deliberate,

repeated, and/or long-term exposure to negative acts performed by a single individual, a group of individuals, or a single individual authoritatively representing such a group (Cour et al., 2022), highlights the complex interplay of power and aggression in these settings.

Participants' narratives highlighted instances where facilitators had to manage bullying behaviours, often indicating deeper underlying emotional and psychological conflicts. From a psychoanalytic perspective, bullying can be viewed as a manifestation of unresolved internal conflicts and projections. Melanie Klein's (1932) theory of projection suggests that individuals project their unacceptable feelings and parts of themselves onto others. In the S&T project, the football field becomes a stage where these internal dynamics are played out, with bullying seen as an externalization of the bully's internal struggle with feelings of inadequacy, fear, and aggression. Margaret Rustin (2001) described a similar scenario where a patient protected himself from psychological pain by becoming the person who inflicted it, illustrating the complexities of such behaviours. As she notes, "therapy provides a second chance," bringing trauma into the therapeutic relationship to enable meaningful change (Rustin, 2001, p.10). She suggested that adequate time and organisational support should be ensured to conduct this necessary work safely. This is not dissimilar to what happens in Sport and Thought, where the use of concepts such as consistency and slowing down the process could offer important support to mitigate these challenges.

However, recognizing and addressing those issues during an S&T session is not straightforward, with supervision playing a crucial role. Supervision allows facilitators to reflect on specific incidents, discuss group observations and responses, and understand the unconscious processes at play. Canham's (2004) insights further emphasise the importance of supervision, noting that it triangulates the relationship between therapist and patient, offering an alternative to the prior failure of the parental couple in relation to the child. Effective supervision, providing a containing structure around the therapist, helps to manage the group's

projections, ensuring that the therapist does not end up enacting the role of the abused child or abuser. In the S&T context, where groups are invited to express themselves freely, it is not unusual to be exposed to these ‘awful dynamics,’ as one participant described. This does not mean that a facilitator should passively accept attacks by the young people but should actively transform them into a more digested, less threatening experience. Canham (2004) suggests that the struggle in the therapist may represent, at some level, the damage done to the patient’s relationship with both maternal and paternal objects when abuse has taken place, which is translated in S&T when facilitators feel overwhelmed or bullied. He also emphasises maintaining a balance that allows for being both firm and understanding. Even though facilitators know they can stop the session if they feel unsafe, only one participant reported prematurely ending a session due to feeling unsafe.

This highlights the complex interplay of projection and containment, where facilitators must navigate their own emotional responses while providing a stable environment for the group. It is possible to speculate that this study has also shed light on how important it is to provide facilitators with support, helping them develop the ability to withstand and process these dynamics. This mirrors the therapeutic process, where the therapist helps the patient integrate fragmented parts of the self into a cohesive whole, fostering growth and resilience within the therapeutic relationship (Rustin, 2001). Canham (2004) adds that understanding the distinction between violence driven by a desperate need to communicate past violent experiences and violence driven by the perverse parts of the patient is crucial for effective intervention. Addressing bullying through the lens of psychoanalytic theory and translating these insights into practice, with robust supervision and reflective techniques, seems to alleviate facilitators from the burden of feeling targeted and mitigate bullying behaviours more effectively.

In conclusion, the role of supervision in this context underscores the transformative potential of supervision for mental health professionals. Following Foulkes' idea of the conductor as the "instrument" of the group, supervision is an essential component of their practice that helps to remain detached from the material at hand, guiding them to respond effectively to the complexities of their roles, encouraging individuals to acknowledge and own different aspects of their personality without necessarily splitting these off (Rustin, 1998, 2010).

4.5 GET 5 - A Tapestry of Transformation: Personal Development

This overarching theme illustrates the intricate and rich texture of personal development among mental health professionals in their multifaceted roles as facilitators. It brings into sharp focus several key elements essential to understanding the broader implications of the project. The personal growth journey of the participants was layered and complex, involving an amalgamation of various emotional and cognitive aspects. Each participant brought a unique perspective to personal development, demonstrating that facilitating the Sport and Thought project was not a one-size-fits-all experience. These different emotional journeys reveal the intricate nature of personal transformation, emphasising the importance of individualised approaches in facilitator training and support.

Personal development also emerges as a central theme within the reflections of facilitators engaging in the Sport and Thought project. One participant highlights the tension between the burden of personal responsibility and the pleasure derived from facilitating sports. This juxtaposition illustrates a critical intersection in the facilitator's personal development journey. It was highlighted that Sports and Thought could be a powerful tool for building relationships with young boys. However, it also risks being misused to inflate the facilitator's ego or create power dynamics.

Despite the challenges that come with being a facilitator, there's a prevailing feeling of reward and satisfaction among them. The act of participating in a sport together breaks down barriers, fosters camaraderie, and creates a unique bond that often transcends the sport itself. For facilitators, observing the users' progression, their internal shifts, and growth through these shared experiences provides a profound sense of purpose and achievement. Yet, this journey is not without its complexities. Balancing these two facets – the ethical duty and the legitimate enjoyment – becomes essential to the facilitators' personal development. These individual complexities often mirror larger systemic challenges.

It also creates tension in the institutional dynamics and group unconscious processes (Bion, 1961). As adolescents may struggle to engage with institutions (Meltzer & Harris, 2018), the same seems to apply to facilitators grappling with their organisational roles and responsibilities. This challenge may lead to internal conflicts and a lack of alignment with institutional values, reflecting a broader struggle that permeates personal development and the overall cohesion and success of the institutional objective.

More than one participant reflected on the benefits of group work for their own development and the young people they were working with. Participant 2's focus on openness and vulnerability, along with Participant 3's application of group dynamics to the individual, highlights the significance of collaboration and community in fostering mental health. This echoes existing literature on the effectiveness of group therapy and psychodynamic approaches, adding new insights into their application within a sports context.

For instance, Participant 5 spoke about gaining observational skills that eventually led them to learn how individuals who have experienced early traumas might communicate through their bodies. This finding shares intriguing similarities with Ester Bick's development of the infant observation method, a technique known for its meticulous attention to the atmosphere of the

room and subtle non-verbal cues. Both approaches value the importance of observing not just the individual but also their environment and the interaction between the two (Bick, 1964). However, while Bick's methodology was designed to understand infants in a controlled setting, the observations in our study were made in the more dynamic, group-oriented realm of sports. This juxtaposition might suggest that Bick's theories have wider applications beyond their original focus. It hints at the possibility that her methods for observing and understanding individual's behaviour within a specific setting can be generalisable to understanding complex group dynamics in diverse environments (Foulkes, 1990).

For Participant 6, working in S&T was an opportunity to cover several roles and responsibilities throughout their involvement in the projects, becoming a project manager and later serving as a supervisor. Interestingly, they talk about the importance of harnessing emotions in a way that is not disruptive to themselves. They use metaphors of anger "*bubbling around inside you*" and "*force*" to describe how to manage destructive impulses, but also the use of the word "*potency*" suggests that there is power in allowing oneself to feel and express these emotions. This participant, who raised a parental aspect of working with young people, had the insight to note, "*I think you can end up having really sort of quite warm and loving feelings towards these groups of boys because there's something sort of less formal about it. You're sort of going through an experience with them.*" This reflects a nuanced understanding of emotional management, where the emphasis is not just on control, but on the richness that comes from vulnerability and self-awareness. It is about experiencing life's complexities together, navigating them, and, through the process, growing as individuals.

The "*parental*" dimension of engagement highlighted by Participant 6 offers critical insights into the re-emergence of Oedipal anxieties during adolescence. This engagement enables adolescents to disinvest emotional and libidinal energy from their parents healthily and redirect

it toward peer relationships and individual growth, as outlined by Hoxter (1964). In this context, the facilitators' emotional investment in the work with young people could function as a transitional emotional space, aiding them in navigating the intricate process of emotionally distancing themselves from their parents. This notion is corroborated by Waddell's theory (2018), which posits that an individual's inner world is profoundly shaped by early relationships and their subsequent evolution to include social connections beyond the immediate family unit.

To further elaborate on the emotional dynamics involved in group facilitation, an unpublished paper by psychotherapist Charlie Beaumont, presented at an ACP conference and titled "It's Only a Game? Why do Teams Succeed and Fail - a Psychoanalytic Perspective," provides supplementary insight. Beaumont notes: "Sometimes when facilitating an experiential group, I have come out of the session dazed and drained when the group have really grappled with the conflicts that exist between group members, but at the same time I have been very much aware that in the same group in the very same session there has been a real attempt to join up with each other in an emotional way." This observation highlights not only the emotional complexities and difficulties faced by the facilitator in handling conflicts but also emphasises the importance of understanding group dynamics. It shows how these dynamics impact emotional interactions among participants and allow the group to connect on an emotional level.

It is well known that peer dynamics often play a significant role in a group setting with adolescents. Peer validation or lack thereof can either bolster or hinder personal growth and self-awareness similar for Adolescents that may be more cautious about showing vulnerability in a group due to judgment or peer pressure concerns. On the other hand, the group setting can

also offer a more extensive support network and different perspectives, which can be beneficial for emotional growth and awareness (Waddell, 2018).

In conclusion, this GET offers a nuanced look into the multi-layered emotional and psychological journeys that facilitators undertake in their roles. Similar to the adolescents they work with, facilitators also experience complex group dynamics that shape their development. This "parallel process" between facilitators and adolescents draws attention to the interconnected experiences of facilitators and users. Just as adolescents navigate vulnerabilities, strengths, and peer pressures in a group setting, facilitators also grapple with their own challenges, including ethical dilemmas, enjoyment, and the responsibility of role modelling. Facilitators don't just guide the young people in their care; they too are influenced by the same group dynamics that affect their charges, presenting both challenges and opportunities for growth and understanding.

4.6 Strengths and Limitations

The study examined participants' experiences while they delivered a sport-based intervention under the Sport and Thought project, which operates within a psychodynamic framework. Despite the small sample size and the lack of diversity among facilitators raising concerns about the representativeness of the findings, the narratives provided offer a compelling insight into the versatile nature of sport as a therapeutic tool.

One of the key strengths of the Sport and Thought initiative is its unique blend of sports and therapy. Sports, being universally appealing, make therapy more accessible, especially for

those hesitant about traditional forms of therapy. The physical and emotional ups and downs experienced in sports are akin to those in therapy, where both involve challenges, teamwork, and a journey of personal growth and collaboration. However, one significant limitation of this study is the lack of quantitative metrics to support the qualitative findings. While the narratives offer valuable insights, the absence of standardized measures for assessing psychological outcomes, such as anxiety, aggression, and trauma, limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the project's effectiveness.

Also, the findings suggested that facilitators actively participate, emotionally and sometimes physically, in the journey. This active involvement led to a deeper, more intimate understanding of the challenges and triumphs experienced by the users. The sporting context offered a tangible backdrop against which emotional and psychological changes could be observed and understood. Much of the literature on those kinds of project are written from the client's perspective, ignoring, or avoiding the complex implications for people delivering the actual projects. This study also aims to shed light on the challenges and difficulties adults face and how this impact the program's execution. Ultimately, the findings emphasise the potential of such integrated approaches in reshaping the landscape of therapeutic interventions, making them more flexible, engaging, and effective.

In addition to the limitations described on different sections (page 25 and 40), important limitations should be discussed.

First of all, the broader institutional backdrop of this project can be considered. While the previous chapter briefly touched upon the institution responsible the project but didn't go into detail about how its culture and politics might affect people's experiences. Every institution,

with its ethos, politics, and interpersonal relationships, undeniably shapes the experiences of those within its fold. For instance, it is noteworthy that one participant initially exhibited hesitancy in being interviewed, stemming from a previously abrupt and perhaps strained relationship with the institution. Even though that's not the main focus of the study, it's important to consider because it affects how willing people are to participate and how they view the project.

Nevertheless, it was encouraging to observe that the participant mentioned just above was more amenable to participate in the study upon realising the study's independence – that it was not a promotional tool or an internal organisational survey. Perhaps the lack of certain reflections, particularly concerning the host institution, can be in part attributed to the nature of questions posed during the interview.

Upon subsequent review and reflection with my supervisor, we recognised that some important questions were inadvertently not included during the interviews, potentially limiting the scope of institutional perspectives explored. For example, questions that would have shed light on the organisational support for the Sport and Thought project were missing.

During the interviews, it was noticeable that there was a compounded need for caution by the participants. There were palpable moments when participants appeared reticent, possibly due to concerns about sharing critiques or reservations honestly. They might have been wary of revealing opinions that could be interpreted as negative judgments about the service's practice, fearing potential repercussions or exposure in this thesis. Such reservations were most palpably sensed when one participant felt compelled to seek reassurance after disclosing a fractious relationship with another facilitator, wondering aloud: “*This is all confidential, right?*”

This heightened sensitivity to confidentiality further influenced the writing process of this research. The researcher has been deeply aware of the need to maintain participant confidentiality throughout the writing process. This includes ensuring that participants are not misrepresented, either inadvertently or intentionally.

Another important limitation to consider is the lack of diversity in the sample. The cohort of facilitators interviewed in this study does not represent the diverse population attending the Sport and Thought program. This lack of diversity might link to the broader issue of few individuals from diverse backgrounds applying for therapeutic or mentoring roles in schools. Historically, Sport and Thought has hosted only a few Black facilitators, raising critical questions about the institution's efforts toward inclusivity and representation. It is possible to speculate that this lack of diversity among facilitators may impact the program's effectiveness and its ability to relate to and address the unique experiences of all users. This shortfall suggests a need for the institution to critically evaluate its hiring practices and support systems to foster a more inclusive environment that better reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

4.7 Future Research

This study highlights a gap in research: not enough focus on the individuals delivering sport-based therapeutic projects. The lack of examination into the experiences of these facilitators and the possible consequences thereof calls for further investigation.

It is a concern that extends beyond the scope of this study; when thinking about sports intervention projects more broadly, the focus often needs to be more on the outcomes achieved rather than the people executing these initiatives.

Future research could specifically target how the facilitators' personal experiences and understandings of their projects could influence their therapeutic interventions. Questions could include: How does a facilitator's state of mind impact the Sport and Thought session? Or how do their perceptions of the project's aims shape their interactions with users? Studies on this front could incorporate quantitative data for an evidence-based approach, exploring specific clinical dimensions. A useful model for such inquiries might be the "Therapists' Clinical Work between Sessions: A Preliminary Study of the Post Session Therapist Questionnaire" (by Rocco et al., 2021). Investigative forms like this could provide a panoramic view of the facilitators' cognitive landscape, illuminating their areas of focus, concern, and reflection.

While the current study has been exclusive in its focus on adult experiences within the Sport and Thought project, future research should consider broadening this scope. A more comprehensive analysis could involve gathering meta-data from various projects that employ sports in mental health settings. Future research should incorporate quantitative measures, such as standardized aggression and trauma scales, to validate this qualitative observation. Exploring multiple sport-based therapeutic initiatives could offer a more understanding of how different sports activities impact therapeutic outcomes. Additionally, this multi-project analysis could provide insights into different projects' varying organisational structures, training methodologies, and support systems. Understanding these variables could be critical in exploring what may make certain interventions more successful than others and in understanding the potential role of institutional support in these initiatives.

5 Conclusion

This research study was designed to explore the experiences of mental health professionals in facilitating a project that combines football and psychodynamic theory for young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties. Although S&T has been running for the past 12 years, it is still relatively new project. This study aims to serve as an initial exploration into how facilitators in the Sport and Thought perceive and navigate their roles as well as the impact on users of the service. The ultimate goal is to inform clinicians and colleagues who may consider implementing a similar project.

Another important contribution from this study seems to derive from the acceptance and popularity of football. differently from other group sports, football is exceptionally appealing and familiar, making it extremely useful for therapeutic intervention. One participant aptly pointed out that football provides a *sense of normality* for many young people and might be the only occasion in the week when they feel fully themselves. Overall, the participants spoke about the impact of the project on users, highlighting important factors such as ‘Expression of Trauma and Aggression through Sport and more practical support such as Safe Spaces and Containment and The Slow Down Process’ to rationale the engagement of individuals who might otherwise shy away from conventional therapeutic settings. This study also offers an opportunity for deeper introspection and self-exploration, which participants feel help participants make sense of their places within broader social and emotional contexts.

This research suggests the need for alternative therapeutic programs, especially ones that use creative methods to connect with children and adolescents from diverse backgrounds.

Integrating physical activity, such as football, within a therapeutic intervention like the S&T project seems to provide an opportunity to address complex internal emotional states. This aligns well with Levy's assertion that trauma victims often "express their internal states through physical action rather than with words" (1998, p.227). Within this context, football facilitates the externalisation and processing of internal emotional conflicts. Facilitators play a vital role in interpreting physical actions as manifestations of underlying emotional issues, thus offering valuable insights into users' emotional dysregulation. For example, during an S&T session, facilitators might interpret aggressive tackles or an over-eagerness to score as manifestations of underlying emotional challenges. Similarly, missing a goal or making a poor pass can evoke emotional responses, offering facilitators valuable insights into participants' affective dysregulation which also resonates with Levy's emphasis on the need for a strong therapeutic alliance to help individuals articulate their emotions (1998).

On the other hand, the research also revealed the complex nature of the project's impact on facilitators' emotional involvement, group dynamics, the role of supervision, and personal development. While a thread of convergence runs through their narratives, the richness of their experiences also surfaces through their divergent viewpoints, offering a comprehensive understanding of the personal and professional impacts of their involvement in the S&T project. Each participant expressed perceived positives gained through participating in S&T, noting changes in working with adolescents, a belief in learning from mistakes, advocacy for group work, and methods of addressing physical responses, especially in response to trauma. Furthermore, facilitators are not merely passive observers but active contributors to the therapeutic setting. They are emotionally and physically engaged, becoming integral parts of the project. This hands-on, caring approach makes the project work, and it seems that facilitators' emotional investment helps to guide the youth more effectively through their

challenges, making the program more successful. In addition to their therapeutic roles, facilitators grapple with the challenge of navigating complex organisational structures. Being part of a group entails managing team dynamics and organisational policies and fostering healthy relationships among team members.

However, while the study extends our understanding of sport-based interventions, it also emphasises the need for tailored therapeutic frameworks that can be adapted to other modes of therapeutic engagement. Further research would do well to explore these possibilities, especially to benefit those in society who are most disadvantaged and in urgent need of such services.

Moreover, this research demonstrates significant potential for more specialised support in creating viable and meaningful alternatives for engaging youth in therapeutic contexts. This is particularly relevant when professionals employ innovative methods to connect with children and adolescents from diverse backgrounds. As supported by the literature and extensively discussed in this study, group sports and therapy are highly effective in creating a safe space where anxieties can be heard, understood, and addressed. However, setting up such an initiative can take time and effort, especially when securing long-term funding and implementing the project in schools or community centres. Facilitators must be committed, reliable, and prepared to confront the various challenges in such settings. This research emphasises the importance of facilitators feeling like integral parts of a group rather than merely instructors focused on athletic improvement. They must be prepared to understand and manage complex unconscious processes that can be reintroduced into the group in a less threatening, more manageable way. Understanding the experiences, challenges, and needs of facilitators is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, the facilitators' well-being and professional development directly influence the services' quality. If facilitators are burned out, stressed, or unprepared to manage the

emotional and psychological complexities of their role, the therapeutic outcomes for the children are likely to suffer. While adolescents are not merely a continuation of previous developmental stages but represent a unique psychodynamic phase, facilitators too should be understood as more than just their professional roles. They embody a rich interplay of emotional, interpersonal, and organisational complexities.

Secondly, understanding the facilitators' perspective can yield insights into the systemic factors that either facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of such projects. This could include institutional support, access to resources, or even how the structure and expectations of the program affect the facilitators' ability to function effectively.

Lastly, focusing on facilitators can help scale and replicate the project. By understanding what makes a facilitator's role manageable and fulfilling, policymakers and organisational leaders can better design similar programs that are effective and sustainable in the long term. This can help broaden the impact of such programs, which, according to participants, can benefit many young people.

With the right support and promotion of a collaborative approach, therapeutic transformation in sports-based group settings becomes not just a possibility but a reality or, as Reid (1999, p. 257) properly stated, 'in group psychotherapy, becoming a group is a therapy'.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Recruitment email



Dear [name],

I am Riccardo Gentile a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist in Doctoral Training at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust with a particular interest in Sport and Thought. As part of my Doctoral Research Project, I am undertaking some research into the Sport and Thought project, in which you are or have been involved. I am interested in your experience of facilitators working directly with adolescents who have emotional or behavioural problems and who participated in Sport and Thought. For this, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview. This will mainly be for you to talk freely about the topic with some prompts from myself. During the discussion, I would be interested to hear about how you think about Sport and Thought programme and the impact of the group you have participated in.

I would like to invite anyone who has previous or current experience within S&T contracted by Brent Centre for Young People. At least one academic year of involvement in S&T is required. These interviews will be guided by me, will last between 60 and 90 minutes, and will be audio recorded. These interviews will be held at the Brent Centre for Young People or at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. However, if this is not possible due to COVID-19, they will take place via telephone or video link. These appointments are flexible and will be mutually agreed, and no extension to your usual working hours will be necessary.

If you would be interested and willing to take part, I have attached a participant information sheet for your information.

This project has been approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethic Committee (TREC).

Kind regards,

Riccardo Gentile - Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist in Doctoral Training

Email: RGentile@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Participant Information Sheet

What is the lived experience of mental health professionals in facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory for young adults?

You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of this study?

This study seeks to explore the experience of facilitators involved in the Sport and Thought project. This may serve to identify how professionals think about and experience their relationships with young people attending Sport and Thought.

Who is conducting the study?

I am Riccardo Gentile a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist in Doctoral Training at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust with a particular interest in Sport and Thought. I am the principal investigator of this study, and I have designed the research study and will conduct the interviews and data analysis.

What will participating in this project involve?

I am interested in your experience as facilitators working directly with adolescents who have emotional or behavioural problems and who participated in Sport and Thought. For this, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview. This will mainly be for you to talk freely about the topic with some prompts from myself. During the discussion, I would be interested to hear about how you think about Sport and Thought programme and the impact of the group you have participated in.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for professionals who have previous or current experience within S&T contracted by Brent Centre for Young People. At least one academic year of involvement in the project is required.

What can you expect?

An audio recorded interview guided by me and last between 60 and 90 minutes. These interviews will be aimed to be conducted face to face in a convenient place as possible for you: it can be either at the Brent Centre for Young People or at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. However, if this is not possible due to COVID-19, they will take place via telephone or video link. These appointments are flexible and will be mutually agreed, and no extension to your usual working hours will be necessary.

What will happen with the results of the study?

The documented results of the study will form my doctoral thesis and may also produce an academic paper and feature in relevant published academic articles, books and/or presentations.

Do I have to participate after I agree?

No: participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Although your contribution would be invaluable, if you agree to take part but then change your mind, you can decide to withdraw and withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied from the study up to three weeks after the initial interview has taken place without needing to give me a reason. You can change your mind at any time, and if you want to stop, you can leave at any time without explaining why. Any research data collected before your withdrawal may still be used unless you request that it is destroyed.

I believe that your participation in this study will provide a significant contribution to a better insight into the potential of Sport and Thought.

Your contribution has the potential to enhance insight about football training and psychodynamic psychotherapy from the facilitator's perspective. I am also confident that having a dedicated opportunity to reflect upon and share your views about your S&T experience can be beneficial to introduce a new perspective on whether the project requires any adjustment.

Are there any risks?

No, there are no direct risks. However, in this small-scale study on a specific project, there are limitations to the level of confidentiality I can guarantee. Although every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of your identity. Please, see below for details of how this will be achieved.

At the end of the interview, you will receive a Debrief Letter. Although in the case in which the interview might raise additional distress, I will endeavour to make myself available for follow-up conversations. For any concerns or further questions please contact my supervisor and/or head of academic quality.

Will your taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust is the sponsor for this study based in the United Kingdom. I will be using information from you in order to undertake this study and

will act as the data controller for this study. This means that I am responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

It is in your rights to access, change or move your information, in respect of reliability and accuracy. To safeguard your rights, I will anonymise and disguise any personal information, removing all identifying details. The anonymised information will become the study data and kept entirely separate from your personal information. Those data will be kept in encrypted files, which only I will have access to. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Any paper copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. All audio recordings will be destroyed after completion of the project. Other data from the study will be retained, in a secure location, for five years, according to the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR). You can find out more about the legal framework within which your information will be processed by contacting the sponsoring Trust's Clinical Governance and Quality Manager, Irene Henderson: IHenderson@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

If you would like more information on the Tavistock and Portman and BCYP privacy policies, please follow these links:

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/contact-us/about-this-website/your-privacy/>

<https://www.brentcentre.org.uk/privacy-policy/privacy-policy>

I will also provide you with a Debrief Letter, which will provide specific information and serve to secure your privacy.

Has this research granted ethical approval?

Yes. This research study has received formal approval from the sponsor of the research, the Tavistock and Portman Trust Ethics Committee (TREC). These processes ensure I conduct the study within legal and ethical standards. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my conduct, you may contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk).

Contact details

I am the primary contact for the study. If you have any questions about the project or would like to discuss this further please don't hesitate to contact me. My contact details are:

Gentile Riccardo - Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist in Doctoral Training
Autistic Spectrum Conditions & Learning Disabilities Team (formerly Lifespan)
The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

120 Belsize Lane. London. NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 7435 2240

Email: RGentile@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Alternatively, any concerns or further questions can be directed to my supervisor:

Danny Isaacs

Email: DIsaacs@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you have experienced emotional distress you speak to your GP or if you would like to speak to an external agency, you can contact the following:

Mind

15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London E15 4BQ

Reception: 020 8519 2122

Supporter relations: 020 8215 2243

Email: supporterrelations@mind.org.uk

Thank you for considering taking part in this study and taking the time to read this information. If you are willing to take part in the research, please complete the consent form provided

Appendix C: Consent Information

Consent Form

Project title: *Sport and Thought: making sense of a football project for Adolescents*

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research project.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my agreement to participate is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw it and to withdraw any unprocessed data and information without giving a reason up until to three weeks after my interview takes place.
- I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed as described in the participant information sheet.
- I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential, unless I or someone else is deemed to be at risk.
- I understand that all data which I contribute will be held securely by the researcher and destroyed no later than 3 years after the study has been written up.
- I understand that it is my responsibility to anonymise any examples referring to cases I chose to discuss during the interview.
- I understand that the results of this research will be published in the form of a Doctoral research thesis and that they may also be used in future academic presentations and publications.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Participant's Signature=

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Investigator's Signature

Date:

Contact details:

Researcher: Gentile Riccardo Email: RGentile@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Supervisor: Danny Isaacs Email: DIsaacs@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Participant's name (Printed): _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

Appendix D Interview questions

Indicative Interview Schedule

Welcome:

- This is semi-structured interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes.
- You are welcome to talk freely about the topic of how they think about and have experienced in Sport and Though.
-

Introduction:

- Identify whether it is current and previous role in S&T-
- Where?
- For how long?
- Who did you run the project with?
- What is your view of S&T?
- What was your motivation to get involved?

Reflections on experience and points of view- 'What was it like?' What was/is your opinion?

- Based on your experience, how do you think about S&P and the impact on young people?
- Have you experienced any benefit for you? Have you notice any improvement in the participants?
- What sense do you make of this?
- Were there cases of personal or colleagues' struggles, drop-outs/attrition, breakdowns during the project?

Session:

- How was your training session set up?
- How did you get prepared for it?
- How has it been for you during training sessions?
- What do you think had influenced the most YP's engagement or attendance level?
- How has it left you feeling following sessions?
- Have you felt the need to make alterations?
- Do you have in mind a drill that might be relevant to mention?
- Incidents or struggles involving with YP?
- Any extra support received (e.g., supervision)? How did it help you?

Group:

- Which aspects of group dynamic were involved?
- How do you think the group shape the individual? And vice versa?
- Was there ever a sense that thinking about the group was encouraged or discouraged?

Future:

- What might help or benefit you when working with adolescent cases in the future?
- Looking to the future, what suggestions would you make about the role of facilitator in the project? Does it feature too much, not enough; are some aspects missing or wrong to be included?

End:

- Are there any aspects of your experiences and views in relation to S&T that have not been covered in this interview?
- Thank them for taking part.
- Any questions or want any further information to contact me.

Appendix E - Debrief Letter



Post-Interview Information and Debrief Letter

What is the lived experience of mental health professionals in facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory for young adults?

Thank you very much for your contribution to my Doctoral Research Project. I believe that your participation in this study will provide a significant contribution to understanding the potential of Sport and Thought better. Additionally, I hope your insights may be of help to improve the project and offer an alternative way to engage adolescents with problematic life experiences, out of reach with traditional therapeutic interventions.

Unforeseen questions or concerns may arise for you now your part in the study has ended. If you would like to speak with someone, please do contact The Brent Centre for Young People:

By telephone: 0207 328 0918

By email: info@brentcentre.org.uk

By post: The Brent Centre for Young People, Laufer House, 51 Winchester Avenue, London- NW6 7TT

If you have experienced emotional distress you speak to your GP or if would like to speak to an external agency, you can contact the following:

Mind

By telephone: 020 8215 2243

By email: supporterrelations@mind.org.uk

By post: 15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London E15 4BQ

For any questions or would like further information about the project, you can directly contact me. If you have any concerns about how the study has been conducted please contact myself, my supervisor Danny Isaacs at DIsaacs@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk or Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

I sincerely appreciated your contribution.

Thank you,

Gentile Riccardo - Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist in Doctoral Training
The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.
120 Belsize Lane. London. NW3 5BA
Tel: 020 7435 2240
Email: RGentile@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Appendix F: Ethical approval from TREC

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Ricardo Gentile

By Email

19 January 2021

Dear Ricardo,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: What is the lived experience of mental health professionals in facilitating a project involving football and psychodynamic theory for young people?

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc. must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix G- IPA stage 1 - an example

<p>discussion highlights the concept of belonging and how it is linked to group membership.</p> <p>more tolerant and inclusive manner to promote greater belonging.</p> <p>be more thoughtful about their group memberships and to be more tolerant of the vulnerable aspects of themselves and others.</p> <p>Exclusion and loss: individuals may feel excluded on different levels and that creating a space in people's minds where they feel accepted and included is crucial for promoting greater belonging.</p>	<p>is that they know how to belong to that kind of group and what we're trying nudge them towards, help them to be a bit more thoughtful about them. Get in touch with the more fragile parts of them, and be more tolerant of it, sort of move it into a more like working group. In that sense, I feel like, perhaps, we are able to help them to be to have a greater sort of capacity to sort of belong, in the way that the school can manage. But they're often people on the outside in so many ways, because they're in the outside. I wonder what the stats are, but imagine a good percentage, which probably not having a father or have come to this country during their lifetime. Or come from parts of the world where their parents have been traumatised in some way. They've already kind of experienced great sort of loss, and experienced parents who are so preoccupied, that they've not felt being taken in by their parents and have a space in their parent's mind. it feels like on lots of different levels, they're excluded and not part of something.</p> <p>I: I think you notice, basically, that part of the sport and thought population are from immigrants or second or third generations of immigrants, right?</p> <p>A: Yeah. I reckon. I don't know what the stats are, we probably have the stats at BCYP.</p> <p>I: And you've touched base about the struggle of colleagues or facilitators? do you remember any dropouts or breakdowns? Or, you know, what</p>	<p>fragile parts of them</p> <p>The participant is discussing their thoughts on the concept of belonging and their understanding of gang mentality in groups. They suggest that members of a gang have a sense of belonging and that the aim is to encourage individuals to be more thoughtful about their group memberships. They also talk about the importance of working in a more tolerant and inclusive manner to promote greater belonging.</p> <p>The participant uses metaphors such as "fragile parts" to describe the vulnerable aspects of individuals that need to be nurtured to promote belonging. They also use phrases like "move it into a more like working group" to describe their approach to inclusion and belonging.</p> <p>great sort of loss.</p> <p>The participant suggests that there are different levels of exclusion that individuals may experience, such as not having a father or experiencing trauma in their home country. They also talk about the need to create a space in people's minds where they feel accepted and included.</p> <p>the speaker describes the immigrant population and the challenges faced by colleagues or facilitators in the program.</p>
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Appendix H - Analysis of PETs - a sample-interview

- Success stories of students who were on the verge of exclusion but benefited from the project

9. Providing a safe and non-judgmental space:

- Creating an environment where participants feel safe to express themselves
- Fostering a non-judgmental atmosphere to encourage open discussions
- The role of the mental health professional in maintaining a safe space for participants

10. Challenging negative expectations:

- Addressing preconceived notions and stereotypes about young people
- Overcoming negative expectations through the project's activities and outcomes
- Personal experiences of challenging and changing negative expectations

11. Promoting inclusivity and diversity:

- Ensuring the project is accessible and welcoming to individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Strategies for promoting inclusivity and diversity within the project
- Observations of the impact of inclusivity and diversity on the project's dynamics and outcomes

12. The power of sports in reaching and helping excluded young people:

- Recognizing the unique role of sports in engaging and supporting marginalized youth
- Examples of how sports activities facilitate connection and support for excluded young people

Appendix I - -Connections between PET- a sample

A	B	C	D	E	F
P1	p2	p3	p4	p5	p6
1. Collaboration and Partnership	1. Experiences and challenges as a co-facilitator for Sport and Thought	1. Progression through different roles	1. Externalisation: Using sports drills to externalize emotions and behaviors.	1. Creating a relaxed atmosphere and building positive relationships with young people through play.	1. Timeline/Chronology: The speaker discusses a series of events that occurred over time, including their involvement in various projects and the transition of project management from
2. Volunteering and Experience	2. Innovative approach	2. Challenges and successes	2. Containment: Teaching boys how to contain themselves and control their anxiety through drills.	2. Building trust and a positive transference with the group.	2. Role/Responsibility: The speaker describes their various roles and responsibilities throughout their involvement in the projects, becoming a project manager, and later serving as
3. Gender and Violence	3. Value of medium-to-long-term groups	3. Motivations and goals	3. Symbolism: Viewing drills in a psychological way to symbolize different therapeutic perspectives.	3. Benefits of working in a group setting with two adults.	3. Collaboration.
4. Structure and Leadership	4. Significance and impact of the program	4. Psychosocial intervention	4. Thoughtfulness: Teaching boys to play thoughtfully and find gratification in retaining a football.	4. Potential for longer-term interventions.	4. Effectiveness of group therapy.
5. Setting and Context	5. Importance of finding alternative ways to engage boys in therapy	5. Effect on individuals and the community	5. Use of sport as a therapeutic intervention for children with behavioral difficulties.	5. Communication through the body.	5. Detoxifying interactions.
6. Career Development	6. Power of team sport and the idea of a team in promoting mental health	6. Working through anxieties	6. Importance of adapting the intervention based on participants' needs and behaviors.	6. Creating a safe and contained space for young people to share their experiences and feelings.	6. Challenges in forming therapeutic groups.
7. Positive Impact	7. Encouraging vulnerability in boys as a means of addressing mental health issues	7. Applied psychoanalysis	7. Use of language and communication to address behaviors and emotions in the moment.	7. Different ways to engage with adolescents.	7. Importance of research: explore factors such as why some groups feel transformative while others do not.
8. Referral for students almost excluded	8. The impact of S&T	8. Reflection and discussion	8. Externalization of emotions and behaviors through sports and symbolic play.	8. Finding interventions for children at risk of exclusion.	8. Inspiration.

Appendix J -Map of key themes

P1

1. Collaboration and Partnership
 2. Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment
 3. Positive Impact
 4. Inclusion and Diversity
 5. Leadership and Structure
 6. Trauma and Mental Health sport as a therapeutic intervention
 7. Communication and Relationships
 8. Personal Development and Self-Reflection
 9. Measurement and Evaluation
 Supervision

P2

Group 1: Program Experiences and Impact
 Group 2: Innovative Approach and Engagement Strategies
 Group 3: Team Sport and Mental Health sport as a therapeutic intervention
 Group 4: Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment
 Group 5: Group Dynamics and Conflict Management sport as a therapeutic intervention
 Group 6: Understanding and Reflection
 Group 7: Support and Collaboration
 Group 8: Individual Challenges and Issues
 Supervision

P3

Group 1: Personal Experiences and Growth
 Group 2: Psychosocial Intervention and Community Impact sport as a therapeutic intervention
 Group 3: Creating a Safe and Open Environment
 Group 4: Group Dynamics and Social Interactions
 Group 5: Practical Aspects and Adaptation
 Group 6: Collaboration and Communication
 Group 7: Future Research and Football
 Group 8: Engaging Difficult Young People
 Group 9: Institutionalization and Personal Experiences
 Supervision

P4

Group 1: sport as a therapeutic intervention
 Therapeutic Approaches and Techniques
 Group 2: Communication and Engagement
 Group 3: Facilitator's Role and Reflection
 Group 4: Impact and Benefits
 Group 5: Collaboration and Context
 Supervision

















P5

Group 1: Establishing Positive Relationships and Creating a Safe Space
 Group 2: sport as a therapeutic intervention
 Understanding and Managing Emotional Dynamics
 Group 3: Facilitator's Role and Reflection
 Group 4: Positive Impact and Benefits
 Group 5: Communication and Learning
 Supervision

P5

: Group dynamics and Therapeutic Process
 Belonging and Inclusivity
 Emotional Impact and Support
 Group 5: Youth Engagement and Development
 Communication and Relationships:
 Supervision and Reflection:

Appendix K

Search ID# ▾	Search Terms	Search Options	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/>	S4  group therapy OR group counseling OR group intervention	Expanders - Also search within the full text of the articles; Apply equivalent subjects Search modes - Find all my search terms	 Rerun  View Details  Revise Search
<input type="checkbox"/>	S3  football OR soccer OR sports	Expanders - Also search within the full text of the articles; Apply equivalent subjects Search modes - Find all my search terms	 Rerun  View Details  Revise Search
<input type="checkbox"/>	S2  psychoanalysis OR psychology OR psychodynamic theory	Expanders - Also search within the full text of the articles; Apply equivalent subjects Search modes - Find all my search terms	 Rerun  View Details  Revise Search
<input type="checkbox"/>	S1  adolescents OR teenagers OR puberty OR youth OR young adults	Expanders - Also search within the full text of the articles; Apply equivalent subjects Search modes - Find all my search terms	 Rerun  View Details  Revise Search

Postscript

Impact on Current Practice

Subsequent the conclusion of this research project it was noticed the little amount of support the organisation owning the project was offering to facilitators. They knew very little or not considered the detrimental mental health of working in such stressful environments and in fact they promptly implemented a few considerations on Sport & Thought project's operation and outcomes. The following sections detail the specific impacts of these recommendations on current practice.

Improve Supervision and Support

One of the most impactful changes has been the introduction of a structured supervision schedule. This has provided facilitators with consistent and regular opportunities to discuss each group every week. Before this research, the supervision occurred weekly but focused on just one group, rotating each week for an hour. It is possible to think that some of the facilitate interviewed for this research, did not receive enough supervision especially the one that joined the project in a very early stages where everything was new, and it was difficult to address certain aspect in detail. Following this research, the supervision was extended to 75 minutes, with the first 30 minutes dedicated to urgent matters for each group and 45 minutes on one group, with clinical notes to be discussed in detail. Feedback from facilitators indicates that they feel more supported and better equipped to manage complex issues without having to carry the burden of specific matters for weeks until it is their turn to present a session.

Additionally, the project coordinator has allocated protected weekly time to discuss important matters that might arise during the week and require more consideration and discussion time. For instance, facilitators can now discuss their observations and concerns about a specific Sport & Thought group or a particular difficult session, allowing a more attention to each facilitators needs. This 'ad-hoc' space has proven to be a beneficial implementation to alleviate the burden of feeling under attack, containing facilitator anxiety by Sport & Thought's group participants.

Induction Training for new facilitator

Another important development subsequent to this research is the creation of an induction training designed to equip new facilitators with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage complex situations effectively. In the past, prospective facilitators were appointed following a brief interview and informal observation of a group. However, in more recent days, the organisation has implemented a more rigorous and comprehensive induction process.

The training program now includes several components designed to thoroughly prepare new facilitators for their roles. This begins with an orientation that covers both the theoretical underpinnings of the Sport & Thought project and practical strategies for dealing with the unpredictable nature of working with adolescents in a therapeutic setting. New facilitators are introduced to psychodynamic theory, which forms the core of the therapeutic approach used in the project. Understanding these concepts is crucial as they provide the framework for interpreting the behaviours and emotional expressions of the young people they will be working with. Facilitators learn how to use sports not just as a physical activity, but as a medium for therapeutic intervention, helping young people to navigate their emotions and develop resilience. Practical techniques for managing group dynamics are another critical

component of the training. Facilitators are taught strategies for managing conflicts and encouraging positive interactions among S&T participants.

Furthermore, the induction process now includes shadowing opportunities. New facilitators are paired with experienced therapist who provide ongoing guidance and support. This mentorship allows new facilitators to observe and learn as well as = understand the dynamics of the group sessions before they take on their own groups.