

**“Being a woman in the men’s game, it’s brutal”: a longitudinal photo-elicitation exploration of a woman football coach’s well-being.**

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## Abstract

Historically within UK professional football environments, women’s coaching representation has been low, irrespective of gender participation. The involvement of women coaches in the context of men’s football has been contested due to dominant hegemonic masculinity. For the limited number of women coaches in the men’s game, there is a need for deeper contextual understanding of how organizational dynamics and minority status intersect to shape well-being. Auto-driven photo-elicitation was employed to explore a woman coach’s well-being experiences longitudinally over a season whilst working in a men’s professional football club. Bioecological theory was utilized as a theoretical lens to enrich participant interpretations and sensemaking, and longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) was implemented to analyze interview data at four time points. Four experiential themes were created: “I can’t hide that I am a woman, so it is gonna be different for me”, “I don’t really know which direction to go in”, “I’m trying to get the balance between professional and personal life”, and “If I’m not coaching, what am I?”. Our findings illuminated that the woman coach excessively worked to progress their career in the men’s side of the game, which had deleterious consequences for well-being (e.g., neglecting wider aspects of life). Being an authentic self and seeking a third space away from work and home-life commitments were perceived as therapeutic for well-being. Well-being sensemaking was enriched by utilizing an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach. Our work acts as a springboard for future work to creatively explore well-being within varying sports coaching contexts.

Keywords: Bioecological theory, ill-being, interpretative phenomenological analysis, longitudinal, soccer.

43 **Lay Summary:**

44 Over four timepoints throughout a football season and using participant supplied images, we  
45 explored how a woman coaching in a men's professional football club experienced well-being. A  
46 variety of social and contextual factors (e.g., place of work, relationships with others and time of  
47 season) were identified to shape well-being experiences.

48 **Implications for Practice:**

- 49 • Identifying third spaces (e.g., a space away from work-life demands) that help to dissociate  
50 from the coaching role can be beneficial for well-being management (e.g., promote  
51 psychological rest and self-care).
- 52 • The woman coach perceived a requisite to work harder than male coaching counterparts  
53 which can lead to deleterious consequences for well-being (e.g., workaholism tendencies  
54 and lack of self-care).
- 55 • Organizations have a responsibility to support women coaches and should aim to mutually  
56 reflect with them on the socio-contextual systems (e.g., workplace demands and culture)  
57 that can shape their well-being whilst working in men's professional football club contexts.

58 **“Being a Woman in the Men’s Game, it’s Brutal”: A Longitudinal Photo-Elicitation**  
59 **Exploration of a Woman Football Coach’s Well-Being.**

60 Women’s representation in UK professional football coaching remains low (Clarkson et al., 2019;  
61 Knoppers et al., 2022; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). For example, the Football Association’s  
62 (FA) Women’s Super League (WSL) has seen the representation of women head coaches recently  
63 decline from 56% in 2021 to 33% in 2024 (Lee, 2024). Whereas, in professional men’s football  
64 contexts, women coaching representation has historically been limited, if not absent (Clarkson et  
65 al., 2019; Norman & Simpson, 2023). The appointment of Hannah Dingley as the first woman  
66 head coach in men’s football during the 2022-23 season marked a progressive step, though short-  
67 lived, as it was argued to be a publicity stunt (Edwards, 2023). This highlights how football  
68 organizational structures (e.g., hire and fire culture) can treat football personnel (e.g., coaches) as  
69 commodities (Newman & Rumbold, 2024), which subsequently can impede their well-being (e.g.,  
70 cause distress).

71 The scarcity of women in coaching roles, particularly in men’s football, has been attributed  
72 to the sport’s hegemonic masculine culture (e.g., dominant and entrenched patriarchy; see Levi et  
73 al., 2023), whereby leadership roles are predominantly held by men, and women’s entry is often  
74 scrutinized (Borrueco et al., 2023; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016). Women coaches frequently  
75 face gender-based challenges (Martin & Bowes, 2024; Norman & Simpson, 2023), including  
76 isolation and ridicule often disguised as banter (Levi et al., 2023) in professional environments  
77 (e.g., workplace and coach education), which can lead to dropout and impeded well-being  
78 (Didymus et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2018). To effectively navigate such environments replete with  
79 masculinity, women coaches often perceive the need to negotiate their gendered identities by  
80 assimilating to masculine cultural norms to feel accepted (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Thus,

81 for coaching in men's football to be a viable existence for women and for their well-being to be  
82 better supported, there needs to be greater interpersonal, organizational and socio-cultural changes  
83 (Martin & Bowes, 2024), which the present paper intends to illuminate and bring to the fore.

84 Traditionally, well-being has been viewed and explored from westernized perspectives that  
85 incorporate components like hedonia and eudaimonia, with hedonia focusing on affective states  
86 such as happiness, calmness, and tranquility, while eudaimonia places emphasis on a variety of  
87 aspects, but mainly purpose and meaning in life (Lomas et al., 2023). The amalgamation of these  
88 traditions usually leads to the adoption of 'psychological' well-being (Trainor & Bundon, 2023),  
89 capturing the relative attainment of one's personal subjective mental state (Lomas &  
90 VanderWeele, 2022). However, Lomas and VanderWeele (2022) asserts psychological well-being  
91 as a subset of the overall multidimensional well-being of a person, that can be defined as "the  
92 relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good" (p.2). Specifically,  
93 well-being as a construct permeates and traverses a multitude of other life domains and contexts  
94 (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024; Trainor & Bundon, 2023)<sup>1</sup>. For instance, Schinke et al.  
95 (2024) postulate that well-being is:

96 A dynamic state or experience of quality of life in one or more of life's many domains,  
97 such as physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, interpersonal, social, familial,  
98 cultural, financial, occupational/professional, recreational, intellectual, existential, and  
99 environmental (p. 3).

100 Consequently, there appears to be a drive towards multidimensional and ecological  
101 descriptions of well-being that account for various aspects of a person's life, which is adopted for  
102 the study and is often referred to as 'human well-being' (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2022;  
103 VanderWeele et al., 2021). It is also understood that well-being can be conceptualized differently

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Galvin (2018) for a comprehensive review of well-being domains and conceptualisations.

104 from one population and culture to another (Taris & Schaufeli, 2018). Thus, a focus on *being* in  
105 well-being is important because being human is to experience well-being in relation to spatial,  
106 temporal and interpersonal coordinates in one's life that have significance to that person (Holst,  
107 2022; Seamon, 2018). Consequently, well-being as an experience is multi-faceted, idiosyncratic  
108 and has a temporal flow (see Rush & Grouzet, 2012) which is influenced by reciprocal interactions  
109 within one's various life domains (Schinke et al., 2023). This is because human beings are  
110 inextricably linked and entwined within their environments and contexts (Sarvimäki, 2011;  
111 Seamon, 2018). Holst (2022) makes the argument that if we leave out a critical investigation of  
112 *well-being* (e.g., in relation to being-in-the-world), then we are simply discussing wellness as it  
113 has no foundations or structure to sustain it. Capturing lived experiences of 'being-in-the-world'  
114 is paramount to how we experience and make sense of well-being (Holst, 2022; Sarvimäki, 2011;  
115 Seamon, 2018). Therefore, it is pertinent that well-being is contextually explored over time, and  
116 personal meaning is ascribed to it (Trainor & Bundon, 2023).

117 Ecological systems theory (see Bronfenbrenner, 2005) can be deemed a suitable theoretical  
118 framework to 'contextualize' well-being within specific domains (e.g., sports) and enrich personal  
119 meaning making (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024), which are both considered pertinent  
120 research gaps within sporting contexts (Trainor & Bundon, 2023). Ecological systems theory,  
121 unlike context-free theories, does not aim to claim answers but instead provides a framework for  
122 advancing the discovery of processes and conditions that delineate the scope and limits of human  
123 development and comprehension (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which in this instance is the  
124 development of well-being understanding. Bronfenbrenner (2005) developed ecological systems  
125 theory into bioecological theory, specifically the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model,  
126 which describes how personal characteristics (e.g., age and gender), proximal processes (i.e.,

127 temporal reciprocal interactions), and contexts (e.g., interrelating socio-contextual environments)  
128 contribute to well-being experiences and sensemaking (see Figure 1). The interrelating socio-  
129 contextual environments influencing well-being are the microsystem (e.g., workplace),  
130 mesosystem (e.g., player-colleague relations), exosystem (e.g., governing bodies), macrosystem  
131 (e.g., cultural norms), and chronosystem (e.g., life transitions). Consequently, a bioecological  
132 framework (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) complements and adds depth to other theoretical approaches  
133 that explore coaches' well-being (e.g., Simova et al., 2024) because this approach considers not  
134 only personal identities and organizational cultures (e.g., values and beliefs), but also broader  
135 reciprocal interactions within and between ecological systems over time. For example, historical  
136 context, key life events or transitions, various life domains, and individual biographies.

137 Literature examining well-being in sports coaching populations has highlighted the  
138 demanding nature of the profession whereby coaches are exposed to a variety of stressors that  
139 challenge well-being (see Kenttä et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2021). To situate our work within  
140 the context of men's football, coaches experience a range of personal (e.g., work-life balance),  
141 organizational (e.g., staff relationships) and performance (e.g., managing players) stressors  
142 (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022). For women coaches working in men's football, these stressors will  
143 be compounded by their minority status, intensifying feelings of isolation and marginalization  
144 (Knoppers et al., 2022; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Didymus et al. (2021) reported that  
145 opportunities for women coaches to build work relationships are limited, which combined with a  
146 perceived lack of support and intense workloads may result in burnout (e.g., ill-being)<sup>2</sup>. Norris et  
147 al. (2024) expanded on the issue of insufficient support for women football coaches by claiming

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<sup>2</sup> The authors acknowledge that ill-being is a related but distinct construct to well-being which focuses more so on negative factors such as stress and burnout (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2022). Factors that may impede well-being over sustained periods could subsequently lead to instances of ill-being.



148 that a large proportion rely on informal support networks (e.g., friends and family) to support their  
149 well-being, as opposed to formal systems, such as clubs or national governing bodies (NGBs).  
150 Given these contextual demands and how they influence a football coach's coping effectiveness  
151 and well-being, a season long analysis is warranted (Baldock et al., 2021; Didymus et al., 2021).

152 A seasonal (i.e., longitudinal) exploration of well-being would enable a temporal  
153 exploration of the construct. The temporality of well-being can be considered a combination of  
154 how well-being is perceived momentarily and periodically, while also considering the relationship  
155 and order between moments of well-being (Hersch, 2022). For instance, the life narrative of an  
156 individual can shape perceptions of well-being (Hersch, 2022), suggesting past experiences,  
157 present thinking and future anticipations are pivotal in well-being comprehension (Rush &  
158 Grouzet, 2012). Specifically, Rush & Grouzet (2012) state that the dynamic relationship between  
159 temporal *focus* (e.g., attention given to points in time), *attitude* (e.g., provoked affective  
160 components), and *distance* (e.g., how far an individual's thoughts can stretch away from the  
161 present moment) are pertinent when accounting for fluctuations in well-being.

162 One way to explore temporal well-being experiences in depth is through a longitudinal  
163 interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) of a single case (e.g., a woman coach), due to the  
164 idiographic focus of the approach (Farr & Nizza, 2019). An idiographic approach examines a  
165 phenomenon as it is experienced and understood by an individual within their lifeworld (Smith &  
166 Nizza, 2022). This can result in 'gems' (Smith, 2011, pp. 6-7), potent narratives and lived  
167 experiences which enhance understanding (Clouston, 2019) and aim to demonstrate existence  
168 rather than incidence (see Didymus et al., 2021; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022).  
169 Understanding the person-in-context and how the relatedness to said context shapes sensemaking  
170 is important (Larkin et al., 2006). Therefore, a single case LIPA approach can display how lived

171 experiences unfold in a meaningful manner and helps elucidate individual stories and personal  
172 meaning making (Smith, 2011; Smith & Nizza, 2022). It has been suggested that research should  
173 endeavor to illuminate coaches' well-being experiences and idiosyncrasies over time (Baldock et  
174 al., 2021, 2022; Higham et al., 2024), especially those of minority groups (e.g., women coaches in  
175 men's football) so that organizations can become better equipped to provide bespoke support  
176 (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018; Norris et al., 2024). Thus, a key research gap we aim to address  
177 is the exploration and sharing of a lone woman coach's well-being and related experiences while  
178 working within a men's professional football club over the course of a season.

179 In our study, a single case named Angie (pseudonym) was selected because her narratives  
180 were distinct from those of her male counterparts, likely due to her experience as a woman in a  
181 male-dominated environment (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016; Lewis et al., 2018). Angie's detailed  
182 narratives (e.g., 'gems') sparked interest and warranted further investigation as they highlighted  
183 aspects of well-being that might otherwise remain latent or tacit (Clouston, 2019; Smith, 2011).  
184 Given the scarcity of women coaches in men's professional football, it was important to foreground  
185 Angie's voice and experiences related to well-being (Larkin et al., 2006; Zehntner et al., 2024).  
186 Thus, her insights were emphasized to shed light on how well-being is experienced and understood  
187 within specific contexts and over time.

## 188 **Methods**

### 189 *Research Design and Philosophical Underpinning*

190 A single case LIPA design was used to demonstrate potent narratives and lived experiences (Smith  
191 & Nizza, 2022) of a woman coach's well-being within the context of men's football. Clarkson et  
192 al. (2019) suggest that the narratives of a solitary woman coach in men's football can effectively  
193 resonate with the wider population of women coaches aiming to enter this context. Specifically,

194 so few women coaches operate in men's football (Clarkson et al., 2019; Norman & Simpson,  
195 2023), meaning the opportunity to share one's voice throughout a season is pertinent for contextual  
196 insight into lived experiences of well-being. A single case design was employed to facilitate the  
197 exploration of phenomena, demonstrate existence rather than incidence, and capture how lived  
198 experiences unfold in a meaningful way (Smith & Nizza, 2022). For instance, case studies can  
199 elucidate individual stories and personal meaning-making within different contexts (Smith, 2011).  
200 Our design was informed by an interpretivist philosophical paradigm, a social constructionist  
201 epistemology, and a relativist ontology. Social constructionism informs our study as well-being  
202 knowledge and experiences are constructed by sociocultural and contextual interactions. Whereas  
203 relativism is adopted because well-being can be interpreted and perceived by coaches in varying  
204 ways such as, attributing personal meaning based on contextual factors like their upbringing,  
205 cultural backgrounds and overall biographies. A LIPA approach compliments such views as its  
206 foundations are phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic, which facilitate the  
207 exploration of lived experiences and phenomena in relation to a person's lifeworld over time  
208 (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Farr & Nizza, 2019). This enlightens the inextricably linked person-in-  
209 context nature of experiences because they are often shaped by the subjectivizing influences of  
210 language, culture, ideology, and assumptions (Larkin et al., 2006). The phenomenological  
211 component of LIPA is greatly influenced by Dasein, interpreted as there being or being there,  
212 which implies as humans our natural disposition is to always be somewhere, located, amidst and  
213 involved with some meaningful context (Larkin et al., 2006). Likewise, for human well-being there  
214 is no 'being' without 'place' because it serves as the condition of all existing things spatially,  
215 environmentally, and temporally (Seamon, 2018). Thus, interpretations of phenomena (e.g., well-  
216 being) will be influenced by socio-contextual interactions.

**217 The Case: Angie**

218 Institutional ethical approval was obtained, alongside adopting a trauma-informed approach  
219 (Zehntner et al., 2024) which considered psychological and physical risks, and the influence of  
220 history, gender and culture on implementation and interpretation of the work. For instance, it was  
221 acknowledged that although well-being is traditionally perceived as a positive state, personal  
222 interpretations may vary and lead to sensitive topics being discussed that impede well-being, such  
223 as gender-based violence and bullying (Zehntner et al., 2024). Thus, the lead author was sensitive  
224 to the context (Yardley, 2017) by being mindful of the sociocultural contextualisation and  
225 linguistical phrasing of Angie's narratives over time. Angie directed and led the interview by  
226 choosing images she felt comfortable discussing regarding her well-being, and she was offered the  
227 right to withdraw at any moment during the study. Angie was purposefully recruited as she  
228 identified as a cisgender hetero woman football coach operating in a men's professional football  
229 club<sup>3</sup>. The following participant details have been deliberately left vague for anonymity due to the  
230 unique nature of the case. For instance, women coaching representation in men's professional  
231 football is limited which could lead to identification if specific details are disclosed (Martin &  
232 Bowes, 2024). Thus, during the study Angie was aged between 25-35 years and worked two job  
233 roles. Our study focused on her academy coaching role at an English men's professional football  
234 club. Angie was also studying for a degree during this period, meaning she had to manage  
235 educational commitments alongside work. As the study progressed, Angie enrolled onto a Union

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<sup>3</sup> Recruitment was part of a wider LIPA study exploring UK football coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking over a season.

236 of European Football Associations (UEFA) coaching qualification, further adding to her  
237 workload<sup>4</sup>.

### 238 *Interviewer and Procedure*

239 Aligning with the idiographic nature of LIPA and to capture the richness of Angie's well-being  
240 experiences whilst coaching within men's football, a multi-modal LIPA approach was adopted  
241 (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This approach combined LIPA with auto-driven photo-elicitation (see  
242 Romera Iruela, 2023), which entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with visual stimuli  
243 supplied by the participant throughout the season (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Given well-being can  
244 often go unnoticed unless it shifts in some noticeable way (Seamon, 2018), an auto-driven photo-  
245 elicitation approach was implemented to prompt the participant to reflect on their well-being  
246 experiences which can illuminate tacit and latent meanings that may otherwise have gone  
247 unnoticed or been suppressed (Morrey et al., 2022). An auto-driven photo-elicitation approach was  
248 explicitly chosen as opposed to traditional photo-elicitation (e.g., researcher choosing images)  
249 because it was deemed pertinent to reduce power differentials between the lead author and the  
250 participant (Romera Iruela, 2023). Therefore, Angie led the interview by choosing her own images  
251 relating to her well-being and worked in collaboration with the lead author to enrich well-being  
252 sensemaking. Prior to participating in four separate interviews, Angie was asked to supply images  
253 which best captured her well-being experiences at four stages in the football season (see Figure 2  
254 for interview timelines and context). Angie had the freedom to take her own images or source  
255 copyright free images as it provided her with flexibility and the opportunity to creatively express

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<sup>4</sup> As an example of workload demands, UEFA coaching licences in the UK entail prolonged periods of study, ranging from 5-18 months. For instance, the UEFA A licence requires coaches over a 12-month period to engage in six residential modules held at the FA's national football centre, St. George's Park. The costs of such qualifications in the UK range from £650 for a C licence to £13,700 for a Pro licence, and enrolment on to such courses are highly competitive.

256 hard to convey and implicit notions (Morrey et al., 2022). Angie decided to use copyright free  
257 images throughout the study. All interviews were conducted online, and audio recorded via Zoom,  
258 resulting in a *Mean duration* of 94 minutes (Interview 1 = 86 minutes; Interview 2 = 88 minutes;  
259 Interview 3 = 104 minutes; Interview 4 = 99 minutes).

260 To provide transparency (Yardley, 2017), the interviewer (i.e., lead author) identifies as a  
261 cisgender hetero man who previously worked at a professional men's football club delivering  
262 psycho-educational workshops to academy players and is actively researching coaches' well-being  
263 within men's football contexts as part of a PhD. Additionally, the research team are football fans  
264 and are familiar with the socio-cultural norms attributed to men's football due to engaging in  
265 research within this context.

#### 266 ***Data Analysis***

267 Data analysis followed LIPA best practices (see Farr & Nizza, 2019; Smith & Nizza 2022) and  
268 was applied to a single case. The steps taken by the lead author were: (i) transcribing timepoint  
269 one's interview verbatim; (ii) rereading interview data to immerse oneself in Angie's lived  
270 experiences; (iii) line-by-line analysis of timepoint one's interview and taking exploratory notes.  
271 Exploratory notes contained either descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual comments in the righthand  
272 margin of text. For example, Angie's linguistic repetition of "career" to convey her relentless  
273 pursuit to progress in men's football; (iv) formulation of experiential statements informed by the  
274 exploratory notes were made in the lefthand margin which captured pertinent converging and  
275 diverging experiences; (v) the clustering of experiential statements into potential personal  
276 experiential themes (PETs) were established once the authors had come to agreement on the PETs'  
277 scope. Considering emergent themes in IPA are drawn directly from the voice of the participant,  
278 the double hermeneutic was used by the lead author as a tool to aid analysis by elucidating meaning

279 and acting as a reflexive lens to review interpretations (Clouston, 2019; Finlay, 2002). Finally, (vi)  
280 all analysis steps were then repeated for the remaining timepoints which facilitated the comparison  
281 of well-being experiences over time, to see if change had occurred or not. This resulted in the  
282 formulation of group experiential themes (GETs) which captured convergences and divergences  
283 in Angie's narratives across all timepoints.

#### 284 ***Research Quality and Rigor***

285 The present study was informed by quality indicators on how to achieve excellence in IPA (Nizza  
286 et al., 2021). For instance, constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative in the analysis is  
287 paramount. Therefore, data were carefully extracted from the transcripts to compose a seasonal  
288 story of Angie's experiences of working in men's football and how it shaped well-being.  
289 Throughout this process, the lead author used the participant's images along with experiential  
290 accounts to convey compelling insights and vigorous accounts that flowed through time (Nizza et  
291 al., 2021). Additionally, the lead author committed to close analytic reading of transcripts (e.g.,  
292 linguistics) and observation of images (e.g., abstract meanings) to enrich interpretations. This was  
293 evidenced in the theme "If I'm not coaching, what am I?", whereby Angie's meaning making was  
294 enhanced by both her and the lead author's interpretations of language and images. For example,  
295 Angie's chosen image 'sunny with cloudy intervals' pointed to how her well-being was 'clouded'  
296 (e.g., impeded) which after further discussions seemed to be due to her authenticity being 'clouded'  
297 by work. The lead author used the image and her choice of words as prompts to ask if the ray of  
298 sunshine captures how her authentic identity is trying to shine through the clouds (i.e., work-based  
299 challenges) so that she could better experience well-being.

300         Considering the unique nature of this study with a singular woman football coach, and  
301 given the authors identify as cisgender hetero men interpreting a woman coach's well-being

302 experiences within men's football, it was deemed important to maintain high levels of reflexivity  
303 (Finlay, 2002). Specifically, unconscious male biases could influence sensemaking (Levi et al.,  
304 2023), hence the lead author maintained a reflective diary taking note of any thoughts and  
305 assumptions that could shape interpretations (e.g., predicting the meaning of images before Angie  
306 revealed meaning). The research team also met after each interview to evaluate personal  
307 assumptions and interpretations. Additionally, the authors sought feedback on the interpretation of  
308 findings from a fellow colleague, who was a woman sport psychologist with experience of working  
309 in men's and women's professional football contexts. This facilitated a network of critical friends  
310 whereby the authors' presuppositions could be verbalized and writings critically analysed, which  
311 was not to reach consensus, but to constructively challenge and strengthen interpretations. Within  
312 IPA research the double hermeneutic (see Smith & Nizza, 2022) is employed. This entails the lead  
313 author endeavoring to make sense of how Angie made sense of their well-being. Thus, to mitigate  
314 the lead author's preconceptions of well-being, they afforded Angie lots of room to talk, as seen  
315 via the interview durations, and used a flexible questioning style to explore further Angie's images  
316 and sensemaking rather than trying to impose their own understandings.

### 317 **Findings and Discussion**

318 Four GETs were created during the analysis: "I can't hide that I am a woman, so it is gonna be  
319 different for me", "I don't really know which direction to go in", "I'm trying to get the balance  
320 between professional and personal life", and "If I'm not coaching, what am I?". The findings are  
321 described, interpreted, and discussed in relation to the supplied images, as well as appropriate  
322 literature, to facilitate sensemaking (Clouston, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological systems  
323 theory is employed as a framework to explore how well-being experiences are shaped via person-  
324 context interactions across systems (e.g., microsystem through to chronosystem). Angie's quotes



325 from different timepoints are presented to provide readers the opportunity to interpret for  
326 themselves some of the stable and fluctuating experiences of well-being.

327 *“I can’t hide that I am a woman, so it is gonna be different for me”*

328 This theme captures how Angie endured tough environments (see Figure 3) throughout the season,  
329 whereby difficulty exacerbated for her due to being a woman working within men’s football. This  
330 appeared in specific relation to the masculine culture (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005)  
331 which dominates men’s football and how it cultivates ideologies, stigmatization, or taboo subjects:

332 I guess it can be challenging at times... I don’t need to get offended if someone asked if I’m  
333 the physio when I’m at an away game like, I just get over it... If I got annoyed at that, my well-  
334 being would be plummeting all the time. So, I don’t need to... But again, because I’m so used  
335 to the environment, I think it’s sort of the norm for me. (Timepoint 1)

336 I think working in like male professional football... it’s a very, very brutal, tough environment,  
337 and I’m also a woman [chuckles]. So, there’s no-- I can’t hide that I am a woman, so it is gonna  
338 be different for me in terms of also when I have children or whatever it might be... I think it’s  
339 a very different sort of situation for me compared to men up there. Like it’s tough anyway, in  
340 terms of sustaining your job... the hours that you have to work... and then let’s not forget that  
341 I’m also a woman... I obviously want a family eventually... having children, like that’s another  
342 layer. But in terms of just being a woman, in the men’s game, it’s brutal... So, it is just another  
343 layer on top that’s just gonna add to those brutal conditions at the top of the mountain.  
344 (Timepoint 2)

345 Angie’s comment of “I can’t hide that I am a woman” is interesting as it connotes that other  
346 aspects of a person’s identity which could be targeted for abuse (e.g., sexuality and religion) can  
347 be hidden, but ultimately her ‘womanness’ cannot be suppressed and is constantly visible. This  
348 implies that the environment does not allow Angie to feel a sense of belonging while being her

349 authentic self. Thus, during timepoint 1 Angie appears to accept and normalize that she will be  
350 mistaken as a physiotherapist, stating “it’s sort of the norm for me” which implies such incidents  
351 occur regularly. Her account suggests she has been exposed to such sexist treatment for so long  
352 that she has had to demonstrate resilience to protect her well-being but has potentially gone about  
353 it in a maladaptive manner via emotional suppression. The suppression of emotions and dissenting  
354 voices systemically occurs for women coaches as they often reside under dominant masculine  
355 cultures, whereby they experience derogatory, misogynistic, and sexist remarks (Levi et al., 2023;  
356 Lewis et al., 2018). Angie reiterates during timepoint 2 the challenging and brutal context of  
357 working in men’s football, and that that being a woman adds additional layers. For instance, one  
358 challenging layer she mentions is having children and starting her own family (Martin & Bowes,  
359 2024), which she implies would impede her well-being experiences as a coach. Pregnancy and  
360 maternity within coaching can be seen as a taboo subject as women coaches feel their job may be  
361 at risk if they pursue motherhood (Borrueco et al., 2023). Thus, like how Angie cannot hide her  
362 ‘womanness’, she would not be able to hide pregnancy or children. Starting a family would  
363 ultimately make her feel more vulnerable than she already is within men’s football. The other  
364 “layer” she acknowledges is the “brutal” nature of being a woman who is trying to progress in  
365 men’s football. Angie’s use of the image was to capture her trajectory to the top of the mountain  
366 (i.e., becoming a men’s professional football coach) and the toll it takes on her well-being (e.g.,  
367 mental and physical fatigue) as she is relentlessly working with little self-care. During the  
368 interview she depicted the people in the fore and background of the image were all her,  
369 demonstrating how she is slowly progressing her way up the mountain (i.e., men’s football  
370 coaching) in isolation. Angie’s comment of “men up there” combined with this image symbolizes  
371 how she perceives that she must work even harder (e.g., scale a mountain) to be on the same level

372 (e.g., mountain summit) with male counterparts which can be physically and psychologically  
373 draining. This outlook has been shared by other women coaches operating within masculine  
374 dominated contexts (Clarkson et al., 2019) and women in wider societal workplaces (Gorman &  
375 Kmec, 2007), whereby the workplace environment is not conducive for well-being due to  
376 masculine cultural norms (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This in turn led Angie to  
377 adopt a lifestyle which she acknowledged is not sustainable but endures because she is young and  
378 wants to progress in her career while she can:

379 I think I'm sort of just aware that—it's not forever, but I sort of mean the lifestyle that I'm  
380 living isn't sustainable in terms of the hours that I'm working... like working weekends and  
381 those sort of things... So I think it [well-being] shouldn't [be sacrificed], but I'm sort of willing  
382 to take the hit because I know that it's gonna get me to sort of the next stage, but I wouldn't  
383 recommend it. (Timepoint 3)

384 The statement “it's not forever” captures in general how many football coaches give their  
385 all to football because coaching careers can be finite. For instance, coaches bend values and make  
386 sacrifices, all to stay alive within the game (Higham et al., 2021). This appears to be the case for  
387 Angie, who throughout the study not only acknowledged the challenges of any coach progressing  
388 in men's football, but the challenges of being a woman coach (e.g., starting a family and being in  
389 the minority) which can make her time in football more finite. Thus, Angie demonstrates that she  
390 is “willing to take the hit” on her well-being so that she can progress as quickly as possible within  
391 coaching. However, due to signing off the conversation with “I wouldn't recommend it”, there is  
392 a sense that she is not happy with the sacrifices she is making. For instance, Angie reiterates the  
393 lifestyle sacrifices she must make in timepoint 3 and then goes on to demonstrate in timepoint 4  
394 that sometimes she would like to set aside her career aspirations and simply live:

395 I think you sort of have to make a decision on what you want. Like you have to choose whether  
396 you're gonna have like loads of fun, excitement, whatever in your twenties and just sort of  
397 work nine to five... with coaching, you can't really do that. You're either in it or you're not...  
398 if you wanna get to places, you've gotta go all in... do all the hours... the horrible traveling...  
399 And that sounds really awful cause I love coaching, but I do think that is sort of what you have  
400 to do, especially if you wanna work in professional elite football, like you've gotta graft and  
401 even when you do all that, you still might not get to where you wanna get to, it's brutal.

402 (Timepoint 3)

403 I think about it [goals and aspirations] every day... I think cuz all I do is coaching, it's always  
404 to do with that football bubble, coaching bubble, it's sort of never ending... it's sort of always  
405 ongoing in terms of what the next thing is, where I'm going. So yeah, [goals and aspirations]  
406 do play a massive part in my well-being, one hundred percent. Whether that's good or bad in  
407 terms of some days it might be good and other days I'm like, I need to just forget that, and just  
408 live, and not always focus on that end goal. Just sort of live in the moment if that makes sense.

409 (Timepoint 4)

410 Angie comparing a carefree twenties' fun lifestyle to pursuing a coaching career in men's  
411 professional football captures how she has sacrificed a lot of her life for her career. This is  
412 compounded when she states, "You're either in it or you're not", an almost all or nothing attitude  
413 which mirrors her coaching lifestyle and mindset, as well as the professional football cultural  
414 norms (e.g., macrosystem) she interacts with (Higham et al., 2024). Here, Angie demonstrates  
415 workaholism like tendencies (see Lundkvist et al., 2016), as she has sacrificed physical,  
416 psychological, and social aspects of well-being (e.g., rest and socialization) throughout the season,  
417 which is often expected within professional football contexts (Higham et al., 2021). However, her  
418 wanting to "just live and not always focus on that end goal" during the conclusion of the study

419 suggests that dissociation and time away from coaching, possibly to rest, could benefit her well-  
420 being (Eccles et al., 2023). For example, the phrase “Just sort of live in the moment” illuminates a  
421 potential desire to cease intense workloads and ruminations, and to escape the “football bubble”  
422 to be more present.

423 ***“I don’t really know which direction to go in”***

424 This theme captures how ruminations and anticipations over future events and life transitions (e.g.,  
425 chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) outside of one’s immediate control can shape present well-  
426 being experiences. Throughout all Angie’s timepoints, she placed emphasis on uncertainty over  
427 her career. For instance, timepoint 2 and 4’s images (see Figure 4) capture her uncertainty in an  
428 abstract way, whereby there are a multitude of doors (i.e., opportunities) and roads (i.e., pathways)  
429 she may or may not be able to take in relation to her career:

430       So I’ve obviously spoken about how much I’ve got on next year and I think there’s so many  
431       different like doors. This is how I’m imagining it... more to the end of next year, so many doors  
432       I’ll be able to go through and opportunities, but I dunno which one I’m gonna go through [or]  
433       pick, which I wouldn’t say I’ve got anxiety about it, but I’m like, ‘oh God.’ Yeah, I’m in a  
434       really, really, really, good, privileged position, but I’m also like, ‘oh shit, where am I gonna  
435       go? Where’s it gonna take me?’ (Timepoint 2)

436       Angie’s reference to having a lot on next year was because she had recently enrolled onto  
437       a UEFA qualification which would increase her already hectic workload due to balancing two jobs  
438       alongside an educational degree. Angie denies feeling anxious regarding her future, though appears  
439       to show apprehension, ruminating over her future, indicating emotional suppression (Norman &  
440       Rankin-Wright, 2018). Therefore, like Rush and Grouzet’s (2012) work, Angie’s prolonged  
441       engagement in uncontrollable and unpleasant ruminations over distant events, evidenced by her  
442       uncertain future life transitions (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) being mentioned

443 during each interview, demonstrates how it can shape present well-being sensemaking. For  
444 instance, she stated that some doors may not even open, which further fueled her apprehension  
445 about what her future holds:

446 I just think because I don't know and it's not confirmed, that's what's probably like, oh I'm not  
447 sure then... And I think in terms of my well-being... Next year will probably be one of the  
448 most challenging things because, it's outta my control... I'm like, some of these doors might  
449 not even be open... So that's also like, but then what do I do?... So I think like in terms of my  
450 well-being, it's sort of the unknown, and I like to plan... I think not knowing is probably the  
451 thing that's gonna affect like my well-being. (Timepoint 2)

452 Interestingly within timepoint 2, Angie had a greater amount of control in the present  
453 because of job role stability, as well as coaching and educational demands easing for the December  
454 festive period. However, due to a lack of controllability and uncertainty over her perceived future,  
455 Angie continued to ruminate and dismiss the present, illuminating the importance of exploring the  
456 temporal nature of well-being. For instance, Angie's forethought to next year being challenging  
457 and doors not opening captures how distant future anticipations may prevent well-being  
458 experiences in the present (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Her statements of "I like to plan" and the future  
459 is "sort of the unknown", reiterates that ruminations over events which have not yet occurred, or  
460 may not even happen can hinder present well-being management (Higham et al., 2024). Although  
461 Angie spoke positively regarding her career and opportunities, the number of potential  
462 opportunities and associated uncertainty leads to perceptions of life feeling "manic", suggesting  
463 negative connotations. This is enriched by timepoint 4's image of a stack interchange which  
464 conveys a complex network of roads (e.g., routes):

465 I wanted a picture that sort of represented like a road and loads of different directions because  
466 I feel like, although like I've said, everything's positive, I feel like this is sort of my mind at

467 the moment because it's coming to the end of the season... I know where I'm going in terms  
468 of the end goal, but I don't really know which direction to go in. So that's what this sort of  
469 replicated here in terms of loads of different routes. It's a bit manic. (Timepoint 4)

470 The image captured how during timepoint 4, Angie's emotions were fueled due to her  
471 current context, whereby her education and other part-time work began to conclude, and her  
472 present coaching role within a men's club did not align with her ambitions (e.g., coaching men's  
473 first team). Angie's narratives illuminate how uncertainty over life events and transitions, and  
474 temporal focuses on the uncontrollable (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) can adversely  
475 influence present well-being experiences and sensemaking (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). This suggests  
476 focusing on what is within one's control would lead to better well-being management.

477 ***"I'm trying to get the balance between professional and personal life"***

478 This theme illuminates Angie's pursuit of work-life balance and her endeavor to improve self-care  
479 for enhanced well-being by working in to her busy schedule personal time and space. To represent  
480 her balancing multiple aspects of her life and how her well-being felt on the precipice, Angie  
481 sourced an image (see Figure 5) of someone balancing on a fence:

482 I chose this picture, because in my head, and in general terms of my well-being, I'm balancing  
483 a lot. So, I'm trying to get the balance between professional and personal life. I'm trying to get  
484 a balance between downtime and when I'm one hundred miles an hour. (Timepoint 1)

485 Angie's "one hundred miles an hour" comment appears in reference to how fast paced her  
486 life felt at timepoint 1, which followed a break period within the football season. Angie's fast paced  
487 comment could also be in reference to her unrelenting passion to progress within men's football,  
488 whilst juggling two jobs, a degree, coaching qualifications, and her personal life. Obsessive  
489 passion can cause instability and a perceived loss of control (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma,  
490 2022), potentially resulting in conflicts within and between microsystems, such as work-life

491 balances (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Later within the interview, Angie acknowledged that her work-  
492 life routines were not sustainable:

493 I know that it's [lifestyle] not sustainable. So, I can do it for this year, maybe two years, and it  
494 will pay off in the future. I think with coaching as well, I think everyone knows it isn't healthy,  
495 but you have to really graft, you have to put in the hours. So, I've always been aware of that,  
496 especially being a woman wanting to work in the men's game, I know I've got to do that  
497 [chuckles] a little bit more, or a lot more. (Timepoint 1)

498 From discussing her well-being throughout the interview, Angie begun to acknowledge  
499 that her pursuit to succeed as a woman coach in men's football was fueling her "one hundred miles  
500 an hour" work ethic and subsequent unsustainable lifestyle. This demonstrates Angie's willingness  
501 to sacrifice her short-term well-being for longer-term goals. Angie's overt immersion in work  
502 could be explained by insights from workplace literature, which suggests that women are often  
503 subjected to higher performance standards by employers compared to men in the same job role  
504 (Gorman & Kmec, 2007). Thus, the influence of her intense workload on well-being was apparent  
505 when Angie communicated her "energy" fluctuated on a regular basis, with many days leaving her  
506 "drained", questioning what percentage of her energy is left for herself:

507 I feel I've got energy today, but then there's some days where I just won't because I'm just  
508 drained. So, when I'm coaching, obviously I always try and give 100%. But after I might not  
509 feel like that, because I'm just drained... that's the one thing I'm aware of is because I'm doing  
510 so much. I'm quite stretched. So again, that's why I'm aware it's not sustainable because I  
511 want to be able to give 100% to all these places. But I can't do that because all I've got is  
512 100%... I want to be able to give my all, but if I do that, what's left for me? (Timepoint 1)

513 The persistent reference to 100% could be interpreted as Angie viewing well-being like a  
514 battery (Higham et al., 2024) which depletes in line with her demands. Due to Angie being



515 “stretched” by her multiple job roles and demands she is unable to give 100% to everything, which  
516 in turn leaves little energy for her to recharge (e.g., focus on herself). Rest is critical for well-being  
517 in coaching populations (Eccles et al., 2023), which became apparent to Angie the more she  
518 discussed her well-being throughout the interview, as she identified the need to take control over  
519 lifestyle routines:

520       How do I experience well-being? Um, I think, I’m trying to get better at like controlling the  
521       controllables. So like well-being is me like, I’m in control of it, like how much sleep I get...  
522       training myself and getting into a better routine... So I think when I’m in a good routine, my  
523       well-being is better because I have structure. (Timepoint 1)

524       Taking control may be in reference to her chosen image, as she wants and needs *more*  
525       control and stability to cope with the multitude of work-life demands and lifestyle routines, so that  
526       she does not *fall off the edge*, which she later clarified as “when I say falling off, I mean burning  
527       out”. Here, Angie is trying to get better at coping (e.g., controlling life routines) in the absence of  
528       having any perceived control at work. Ultimately, Angie is trying to compensate for coping at  
529       home to try and find a better balance. The contextual nature of timepoint 1 may be fueling such  
530       feelings as workloads had just increased due to the start of the new season (Baldock et al., 2022),  
531       which appeared to make Angie more aware of the need to better manage routines. Angie’s narrative  
532       and image captures the fragility of her current context as she balances on the edge of a cliff,  
533       signifying how prolonged engagement in this state (e.g., challenged well-being) could be  
534       detrimental (e.g., cause burnout; Kenttä et al., 2023). This could be explained in relation to  
535       proximal processes, which are most influential when there is sustained engagement  
536       (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), meaning for Angie, prolonged exposure to demanding contexts led to ill-  
537       being symptoms (i.e., burnout). The wider life context of a coach can induce symptoms of burnout,  
538       which seems to be the case for Angie, as during this timepoint she had started working two

539 coaching roles whilst studying for a degree. Later in the study, these sustained work-life  
540 interferences led Angie to critically reflect on time utilization:

541 I stopped going to the gym because I felt like I didn't have time... but, I loved that over the  
542 summer I was going to the gym loads because I wasn't coaching as much. I was going literally  
543 every day and then as soon as coaching starts, 'I can't do it now'... I think I convinced myself  
544 I haven't got time because I do so much, when better habits would obviously help my well-  
545 being anyway if I was going to the gym, because it would be like me time. (Timepoint 2)

546 Here, Angie was able to identify that she stopped going to the gym because she perceived  
547 to not have enough time, but that better habits and routines could facilitate time for self-care. This  
548 thought may have arisen due to timepoint 2's stage of the season affording her more time to reflect  
549 as it was the festive period where academy football and educational demands eased. Angie's  
550 reference to "me time" can be interpreted as wanting time and space for herself away from work  
551 and general life demands. For instance, within timepoint 1 Angie stated, "football is all I do" and  
552 that when she does have "me time" it usually entails doing tasks like "shopping, washing, and  
553 cleaning" which she identified as "not me time really". Oldenburg's (1999) work on 'third places'  
554 may help illuminate what Angie means by "me time" in relation to benefitting her well-being. A  
555 third place is somewhere other than work and home where people often go for self-care, relaxation,  
556 and to escape the pressures of life (Oldenburg, 1999). Thoughts over curating a third place  
557 continued into timepoint 3, possibly because of becoming more aware of her own well-being via  
558 periodically reflecting on it via the study and the timepoint of the season which perhaps makes  
559 engagement in alternative activities more achievable:

560 I think it [gym/exercise] gives me a different focus. So, I'm focusing on myself and getting  
561 fitter, getting healthier, but like mentally I think it'll help me massively... I don't wanna say  
562 an escape because it sounds like I'm in a hell hole, like I'm fine [laughs], I'm doing all right.

563 But it just gives me, I think it's just a different environment and focus... a focus that's not like  
564 my career, my career, my career. (Timepoint 3)

565 Angie's use of language is interesting, stating she is "fine" but then communicates how  
566 going to the gym and exercising would afford her an opportunity to "escape" and gain a "different  
567 environment and focus" possibly because it is a slower pace and somewhere she has control over.  
568 The repetition of "career" also captures her relentless career driven focus that she wants to switch  
569 off from, with the gym as a possible solution. Yet switching off is at odds with Angie's mindset of  
570 giving 100%. Angie's narrative appears to be oxymoronic, as she acknowledges that football  
571 coaching is demanding and there are benefits of spending time away from the role but is reluctant  
572 to do so because football expects coaches to "really graft". Thus, such cultural working norms  
573 could explain why Angie is resistive to self-care and prioritizes work. Interestingly, third places  
574 like gyms are stereotypically associated with physical well-being gains, but for Angie it seems a  
575 place for psychological relief, which may be due to the gym being somewhere she can be herself  
576 (i.e., display authenticity). Consequently, due to discussing and processing her well-being  
577 throughout the season, Angie joined the gym in timepoint 4 to manage her well-being:

578 I think actually when we last spoke, I think I said I was gonna join the gym... So I joined...  
579 Routine is definitely good for me... I think because I've sort of been looking after myself more  
580 in terms of going to the gym... although I'm on my own a lot anyway, I think it's nice just to  
581 be in a different space. So, it's definitely helped me have that sort of me time. (Timepoint 4)

582 As seen over the course of the entire season, Angie began to understand the importance of  
583 self-care and making space and time for herself. Angie found solace in the form of the gym because  
584 it was somewhere she could have control (e.g., a routine) and alternatively focus on herself rather  
585 than her career. Although this only came to fruition in the final timepoints of the study possibly  
586 because the latter stages of football season afforded more opportunities to dissociate, and taking

587 part in the study increased her awareness and helped forge intentions through reflecting. Thus,  
588 given Angie's desire for a space that enables "me time" and one where she can focus on herself,  
589 Oldenburg's (1999) conceptualization of third places can be built upon, as traditionally they are  
590 considered communal and conversational in nature, prioritizing socialization. Whereas for Angie,  
591 a third 'space' does not have to be anchored in or prioritize social interaction away from home and  
592 work contexts but must purely orientate around and prioritize time for herself. Hence, with the  
593 coaching profession revolving around social interaction, which can be beneficial for well-being,  
594 this could also be mentally fatiguing and in turn give rise to loneliness (e.g., desire to seek out  
595 solitude; Coplan, 2019). A core component to acknowledge in Angie's accounts throughout the  
596 season was "time", as without crafting time for herself it would not be possible for her to access  
597 the gym (i.e., third space). This implies a form of lifestyle or job crafting (Rumbold et al., 2023),  
598 enabling more free time and the opportunity to rest which can be beneficial for well-being. What  
599 was evident from Angie's seasonal insights were third 'spaces' that have low cognitive demands,  
600 place focus on the individual, allow for "me (i.e., personal) time", and provide controllability can  
601 yield greater gains for well-being. However, as Angie demonstrates with the final image she  
602 supplied during the study (see Figure 6), football coaching can be unrelenting:

603 I wanted something to represent, the end, but also the start because it's sort of like, it doesn't  
604 really end when it ends, something else starts. That was sort of what I was going for because  
605 of how football works... I know we'll finish for June and then all of a sudden it will be July  
606 and I'll be like 'oh it's preseason'. (Timepoint 4)

607 Angie's narrative here (e.g., end of the season) exemplifies how time for oneself in football  
608 coaching can be sparse due to the cyclical nature of the seasons. Angie goes on to state "I love the  
609 role and the profession... but you just have to be careful with giving yourself time in the break to  
610 actually... breathe", which she follows up with "I sort of need the break cause I'm coming to the

611 end. Um, in terms of like mentally, physically, and just needing something different for a bit before  
 612 we go again.” Her references to “something different for a bit” and needing to “breathe” can be  
 613 interpreted as wanting to dissociate from the role to rest and recover (Eccles, et al., 2023; Higham  
 614 et al., 2024). Thus, Angie’s concluding remarks during this period are not only indicative of a  
 615 cyclical nature to football seasons, but also the well-being experiences of football coaches’.

616 ***“If I’m not coaching, what am I?”***

617 This theme conveys how Angie endeavors to *shine through* her coaching personality, as others and  
 618 sometimes herself, find it hard to see past the coaching tracksuit. For instance, Angie supplied an  
 619 image (see Figure 7) during timepoint 1 to originally express how her well-being is positive (e.g.,  
 620 light shining) but there are factors (e.g., cloudy intervals) challenging it:

621         In my head I was thinking things are clear to some extent, but then also it can be quite cloudy,  
 622         because it’s so busy at the moment. In terms of this picture... the sun is still coming through,  
 623         but it’s just a bit cloudy... I think that’s currently where I’m at. It’s not like blue sky, sun,  
 624         because it’s the start of the season again, seven days a week. It’s a lot, so I think this sort of  
 625         represents it quite well in terms of my mental state. (Timepoint 1)

626         Here, Angie acknowledges that her well-being is challenged, or possibly *clouded*, due to  
 627         the start of the season increasing workload and time commitments. This is expressed by her saying  
 628         “it’s the start of the season again, seven days a week”, implying she perceives her coaching  
 629         commitments as unrelenting. Angie’s narrative demonstrates how seasonal transitions (e.g.,  
 630         chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) play a role in shaping well-being experiences. However, as  
 631         Angie discussed her coaching role it was apparent that it formed a large part of her identity:

632         I’m always coaching, I’m always in that role, I’m always in my [club] kit, so I never wear  
 633         normal clothes... Yes, I’m myself, and I’m not like, I’ve not changed who I am, I’m still myself  
 634         because I love the environments I work in, but I’m always a coach, I’m not seen as like Angie...

635 that can be draining sometimes... I'm like I just need time off from being that person because  
636 I'm also a person outside of just being a coach. (Timepoint 1)

637 Angie appears conflicted by how she is viewed as a coach before being seen as her true  
638 self, the "person outside" of coaching. Her stating "that can be draining" and "I just need time off  
639 from being that person" suggest that she needs to dissociate from the role to aid her well-being,  
640 possibly by resting and being authentic. Angie distinguishing two different people not only  
641 portrays how she is balancing two identities, but that she may feel unauthentic because of  
642 continuously coaching and neglecting life outside of work (Higham et al., 2023). By saying "I'm  
643 always in my [club] kit... so I never wear normal clothes" could be interpreted as she does not  
644 step out of the coaching role, even when away from the workplace. From Angie's account she  
645 appears to demonstrate strong immersion-in-place (Seamon, 2018) and struggles with displaying  
646 her authentic self (Sarvimäki, 2006), with both placing strain on well-being. Angie reflects on this  
647 further within timepoint 2, and acknowledges how there appears to be a connection between her  
648 coaching workload and well-being (see Figure 8):

649 I always go into coaching mode. People will be like 'How're you doing?' I'm like, 'yeah,  
650 coaching's fine.' I feel like I always do that because that is all I do, because it like consumes  
651 me in a good way... I never actually say, 'Oh yeah, I'm actually alright'... If you flip it on the  
652 other side, I'm alright, because everything around me seems a bit calmer in like my life separate  
653 from coaching because the coaching's calm... I think this time of year is fine, but I think after  
654 Christmas it'll probably pick up again. (Timepoint 2)

655 Angie's default response of "coaching's fine" when being asked how she is, signifies how  
656 her coaching career is prioritized over her personal life and interests, something she acknowledges  
657 by saying it "consumes me." The consumption of her role is clear as she believes her personal life  
658 thrives when her coaching is calmer, demonstrating the interactional nature of her role demands

659 on wider well-being experiences (Higham et al., 2024, 2023). Moreover, Angie identifies during  
660 timepoint 2 (e.g., festive period) there was a lull in workload, enabling her personal life to be  
661 “fine”, but foresees the period after Christmas to challenge her well-being due to increased  
662 workload. Thus, the image provided by Angie (see Figure 8) could be interpreted as conveying a  
663 sense of serenity and a soothing nature given the calm waters and clear sky, possibly representing  
664 how she is not as *clouded* compared to timepoint 1. However, the mountain in the background  
665 captures what she perceives is a tough and challenging time ahead (e.g., start of new year and  
666 second half of the season). The post-Christmas demands were captured during timepoint 3 (see  
667 Figure 9) as Angie felt a lack of control:

668         So for me, this is I’m on the road and I’m missing a lot of the stuff going by because I’m going  
669         one hundred miles an hour... looking at the image, that’s what I’m seeing, like it actually makes  
670         me go a bit dizzy... but it’s just like a blur because I feel like I’m going so fast and am never  
671         given the chance to just settle and like be still. So, this picture captures I’m on the road, which  
672         is great, but everything that’s going by me, I’m gonna obviously miss stuff. (Timepoint 3)

673         Angie feeling “dizzy” looking at the image and things currently are a “blur” can be  
674         interpreted as losing control and stability in her life due to propelling herself into work. This can  
675         be supported by her stating that she is “on the road” (e.g., pathway to coaching men’s football),  
676         but due to thrusting herself into multiple work-related commitments to excel her career, she’s  
677         passing by and “missing” things (e.g., socializing with friends and family). Angie’s obsessive  
678         passion to excel as a woman coach in men’s football appears to be destabilizing wider aspects of  
679         her life (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). This is not uncommon amongst other women  
680         coaches who highlight the need to work twice as hard as men which subsequently leads to  
681         increased pressure and workloads (Clarkson et al., 2019). Later within the interview, Angie also  
682         states “I don’t wanna be like, who am I? Cause that’s so dramatic but if I’m not coaching, what am

683 I?”. This excerpt can be enlightened by her chosen image during timepoint 1 (see Figure 7) as the  
684 image portrays clouds and a ray of sunshine, whereby her coaching identity and commitments (i.e.,  
685 clouds) are clouding her true self (i.e., ray of light). Angie wants her authentic identity and  
686 ‘womanness’ to radiate through, hence it could be assumed that well-being can be impeded when  
687 one’s authentic self is inhibited (Sarvimäki, 2006).

### 688 **Applied Implications**

689 Our findings demonstrate that Angie’s well-being was facilitated when she was able to make time  
690 for herself, usually in the form of seeking out third spaces away from work-life commitments. It  
691 is recommended that coaches, organizations and NGBs (e.g., the FA) are educated on the benefits  
692 associated with third spaces (e.g., facilitates rest and authenticity). Once educated, dialogue can  
693 then be initiated between the coach and organization as to what personalized time and space can  
694 be curated throughout a season via a form of mutual job crafting (Rumbold et al., 2023). A sport  
695 psychologist with support from the FA would be well placed to mediate such an approach.  
696 Additionally, support from organizations and NGBs would be greatly welcomed in the form of  
697 updated well-being policies and practices within football, as Angie’s narratives reiterated the need  
698 for professional football to reconsider its 24-hour, 7-days-a-week working culture, where false  
699 views around resilience ultimately end in potential maltreatment, to the detriment of well-being  
700 (Newman & Rumbold, 2024). Furthermore, Angie detailed how she felt the need to work  
701 excessively and unsustainably to progress in men’s football. Organizations (i.e., clubs) and NGBs  
702 (e.g., the FA) need to improve their awareness of the deleterious consequences of workaholic  
703 tendencies on well-being, such as causing wider life implications and identity conflicts. This is  
704 especially needed in women coaching populations who feel marginalized and not respected in the  
705 same regard as men coaches, because such experiences fuel intense working cultures (Gorman &



706 Kmec, 2007). This relates to broader equality and diversity issues in football whereby the sport  
707 actively promotes equality, yet the underlying culture remains resistive. Therefore, clubs have a  
708 duty of care to better safeguard the well-being of women coaches and reassess organizational  
709 structures and policies (i.e., ecological systems) to levy sustainable changes within men's football  
710 (e.g., greater women representation and support). We encourage clubs to consider the benefits of  
711 appointing a 'head of performance environment' (see Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2023) to aid with the  
712 development and implementation of more inclusive cultural strategies and club policies.

### 713 **Future Research Recommendations**

714 Throughout this study, Angie's narratives revealed that her well-being was closely linked to her  
715 authenticity both as a woman and as a person outside of football, highlighting how motherhood  
716 and misogyny could halt her beloved coaching career (Borrueco et al., 2023; Martin & Bowes,  
717 2024). Future work could explore such significant life events in women coaching populations  
718 using a combined LIPA and photo-elicitation approach to track and illuminate temporal lived  
719 experiences. More broadly, exploring how women coaches navigate their environments and  
720 manage well-being over time using such a combined approach could help illuminate the tacit and  
721 latent experiences associated with the profound difficulties women face compared to men in the  
722 coaching realm, especially within football. Angie's narratives highlight the temporality of well-  
723 being and how it can fluctuate over time due to temporal focus, attitude and distance (Rush &  
724 Grouzet, 2012). Therefore, future well-being work in sports coaching populations would benefit  
725 from exploring the temporality of well-being in more depth and via creative methods, such as  
726 employing visual and auditory approaches like photo-elicitation and digital story telling (Martin  
727 et al., 2019; Romera Iruela, 2023). Additionally, there is scope for this work to be extended by  
728 exploring organizational leadership's and NGB's attitudes to supporting the well-being of women

729 coaches within men's professional football contexts. This is important because organizations and  
730 NGBs have more power to instill changes at policy and club levels, meaning such insights would  
731 be invaluable.

## 732 **Conclusion**

733 In this study we have addressed prevalent research gaps by contextualizing well-being experiences,  
734 illuminating personal meaning making and providing necessary insights into a woman coach's  
735 lived well-being experiences whilst working in a men's professional football club. Not only have  
736 we captured and demonstrated the temporal nature of well-being throughout a season, but how it  
737 can be shaped by a wide array of socio-contextual systems outside of the coach's control. This  
738 indicates that while individual strategies for managing well-being are somewhat effective, broader  
739 systemic changes (e.g., updated organizational policies and socio-cultural practices) are necessary  
740 for the well-being of women coaches to be fully supported and thrive. Our work also advances  
741 current IPA research by placing a temporal focus on lived experiences, accounting for how  
742 retrospective and prospective insights shape present sensemaking. In addition, we are the first to  
743 employ a combined IPA and photo-elicitation approach to explore a coach's well-being and  
744 encourage others to use creative qualitative approaches to capture lived experiences of well-being.

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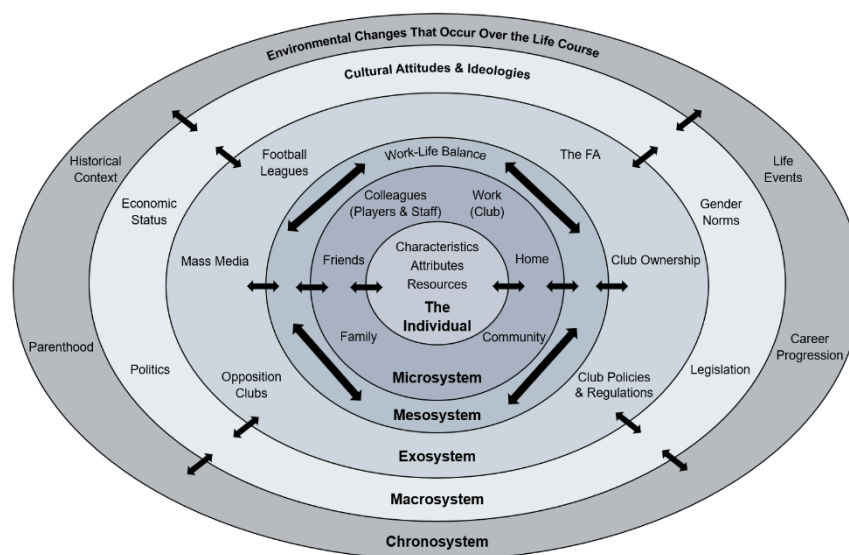
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**Figure 1. How a coach's well-being can be shaped using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model.**



**Figure 2. Four interview timepoints throughout the season.**

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Timepoint 3

**Figure 3. Navigating the brutal conditions of male football contexts.**



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 4

**Figure 4. Uncertainty over what the future holds and which direction to take.**



Timepoint 1

**Figure 5. Trying to maintain a balance between professional and personal life.**



Timepoint 4

**Figure 6. It does not really end when it ends.**



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Timepoint 1

**Figure 7. Sunny with cloudy intervals.**



Timepoint 2

**Figure 8. Everything's clearer but there's still a mountain to climb**



Timepoint 3

**Figure 9. Going 100mph.**