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“I Know People Think I’m a Complete Pain in the Neck”: An Examination of the Introduction of Child Protection and “Safeguarding” in English Sport from the Perspective of National Governing Body Safeguarding Lead Officers

Mike Hartill ^{†,*} and Melanie Lang [†]

Department of Sport & Physical Activity, Edge Hill University, St Helens Road,
Ormskirk L39 4QP, UK; E-Mail: langm@edgehill.ac.uk

[†] These authors contributed equally to this work.

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: hartillm@edgehill.ac.uk;
Tel.: +44-(0)1695-584-763.

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Abstract: Child protection in sport emerged at the start of the 21st century amidst headlines about coaches raping, sexually assaulting and abusing children. Against this backdrop, in 2001 the UK government established an independent agency, the English Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), which introduced national child protection standards for sports organizations. This included the requirement to appoint national “safeguarding lead officers”. Utilizing the theoretical framework of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, this paper considers the impact of “safeguarding and child protection” (SCP) within the English sports community through the experiences of those who have been at the vanguard of its implementation in the early years of its establishment within sport. Utilizing data from qualitative interviews with nine national safeguarding lead officers (SLOs), the paper discusses the challenges experienced by SLOs and critically appraises the relation between them (their *habitus*) and the prevailing logic (*capital*) within their sporting *fields*. We discuss the extent to which SLOs have been supported by their organizations and conclude with a consideration of the degree to which national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) have been invested in SCP.

Keywords: child protection; safeguarding; sport; Bourdieu; habitus

1. Introduction

Of the 63.1 million inhabitants of the UK, around 14 million are under 18 years [1] and almost 82% of these are involved in some form of competitive sport [2]. Despite these numbers, the traditional autonomy of the sports sector has made the government reluctant to intervene in sport, resulting in “a legacy of traditionalism and resistance to change” ([3], p. 10), including making sport slower than other institutions to adopt social reforms for child welfare. Consequently, measures to safeguard children in sport remain relatively recent additions to the British and international sport policy agenda [4].

In insisting that safeguarding children is *everyone's* responsibility, Every Child Matters [5] and its related legislation, The Children Act 2004, marked the beginning of change for sport. The Children Act 2004 makes clear that all sectors of society, including sport, have a responsibility for safeguarding and protecting children, and voluntary- and private-sector organizations, including those in sport, are required to have safeguarding measures in place.

Within sport, recognition of the need for safeguarding and protecting children was brought into stark relief when, in 1995, Olympic swimming coach Paul Hickson was convicted of fifteen charges of rape and sexual assault on teenage swimmers under his care [3]. At the time, most national governing bodies of sport (NGBs)—the organizations responsible for managing sport—had no strategy in place to safeguard and protect their millions of members. One of the first initiatives within sport following the Hickson case was the creation in 2001 of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), the first government-backed agency with responsibility for safeguarding and child protection in sport [6].

In 2002, the CPSU introduced a set of standards for child protection for NGBs to work towards as a condition of receipt of government funding, the Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport [7,8]¹. The Standards are intended to:

...provide a framework for all those involved in sport to help them create a safe sporting environment for children and young people and protect them from harm ([8], p. 1).

The Standards focus on preventing and protecting children from abuse and managing suspected cases of abuse as well as broader safeguarding concerns, with NGBs required to audit their current position against one of three levels—Preliminary, Intermediary or Advanced [9]. According to the CPSU [9], 40 of 46 Sport England-funded NGBs have achieved the Advanced Level of the Standards. To help NGBs implement each of the 10 Standards, criteria is provided for each Standard. Standard 2: Procedures and Systems requires NGBs to have a “designated person/s”, a named person “of sufficient seniority and support to carry out the role ... who is/are responsible for the implementation of the child protection policy” ([8], p. 6) both at club/facility (local) level and at NGB (national) level. At club- and regional-levels, these individuals are often known as “welfare officers”, “child protection officers” or

¹ The complete list of 10 Standards is: (1) Policy; (2) Procedures and Systems; (3) Prevention; (4) Codes of Practice and Behaviour; (5) Equity; (6) Communication; (7) Education and Training; (8) Access to Advice and Support; (9) Implementation and Monitoring; (10) Influencing.

“children’s officers”, while at the NGB level they are referred to as national Safeguarding Lead Officers or SLOs [8].

SLOs have operational responsibility for managing, embedding and championing SCP within their NGB. Their role involves a range of duties including SCP policy development, monitoring and evaluation; managing recruitment and criminal history checks; developing and delivering SCP training and resources; providing SCP guidance to NGB members; and assessing and managing cases of abuse. More than a decade after the introduction of these roles, however, and despite the importance of those in these positions to ensuring children’s welfare in sport, little is known about the experiences of individuals occupying these designated roles. While limited research has explored the experiences of designated individuals at the club level [10,11], to the best of our knowledge no studies have investigated the experiences of national SLOs for sport. Given the centrality of the SLO to the process and politics of establishing child protection and (latterly) safeguarding within British sport, this paper explores the experiences and perspectives of some of these individuals.

2. Social Science and the Study of Child Protection in Sport

The relationship between social science and the recognition of child abuse in sport is significant. In the 1980s Celia Brackenridge, a feminist social scientist, publicly raised the issue of sexual harassment and abuse in sport [12]. Brackenridge [3,13,14] developed a critique of psychological theories of sexual violence. She offered a gendered account of male violence towards women and children within a sports system underpinned by hetero-patriarchal ideology that celebrated masculine privilege and sexualized the feminine. Brackenridge’s work built on and contributed to broader critiques of the social spaces provided for women and children within sport [15–19]. On the basis of the abuse she uncovered, she argued for the development and introduction of SCP policies within sport.

In one of the only studies of its kind, Brackenridge was commissioned by the Football Association (FA)—by far the wealthiest NGB in English sport—to evaluate the impact of their child protection strategy on various stakeholders within football [20]. The work was supportive of the FA’s efforts but questioned the extent to which SCP was accepted amongst all stakeholders. More recently, Piper and colleagues [21], based on the perspectives of sports coaches who have been subject to new policy developments, argue that the “intrusion” of SCP into sport (and of the CPSU) has caused adults to be fearful of working with (and especially touching) children and has, therefore, had a damaging impact on adult-child relations within sport. Others have drawn attention to the absence of independent research evaluation for the national programme of policy implementation led, since 2001, by the CPSU [22]. The English model has, however, received considerable support from other countries seeking to replicate this approach.

Nevertheless, research attention has tended to focus on sports cultures at the expense of investigating the SCP policy context and the impact of the rapid developments in this field. Indeed, the investigation of SCP in sport has largely been overlooked by social scientists within and beyond sport, and many researchers investigating abuse and exploitation in sport have ignored the conceptual tools and approaches available from within social theory. In addition, sport as a field of enquiry is often situated outside of mainstream social science. This paper attempts to contribute to a growing body of literature that has begun to address this (see [3,23–28]). In particular, through the perspectives of SLOs, we explore

the relationship between individual SLOs and their organization. In doing so, we align ourselves with a Bourdieusian epistemology, which we now briefly outline.

3. Methodology

Pierre Bourdieu's "philosophy is condensed in a small number of fundamental concepts—*habitus*, *field*, *capital*—and its cornerstone is the two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social *fields*) and incorporated structures (those of the *habitus*)" ([29], p. vii). Unlike other major social theorists (see [30,31]), Bourdieu wrote specifically on sport (see [32,33]) and explicitly designated it a "relatively autonomous" cultural field ([34], p. 118).

For Bourdieu ([33], p. 72), whilst "there are general laws of fields ... a field defines itself by defining specific stakes and interests ... irreducible to the stakes and interests specific to other fields". Bourdieu ([33], p. 72) notes that "for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes." Thus, *fields* are characterized by "struggles" over "the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field" ([33], p. 73). Therefore, adapting Grenfell and James ([35], p. 161), understanding sport as a field:

... is to see it as a structured space of forces and struggles into which individuals along with their *habitus*-specific dispositions enter ... the outcome of this encounter ... is the product of the interaction between them.

According to McNay ([36], p. 57), "[t]he idea of the field potentially yields a differentiated and dynamic model of power relations where each field has its own historicity and logic which may reinforce or conflict with those of other fields". Orthodoxy within any field is defended and conserved by those who monopolize the specific *capital* that characterizes a field. Hence, Brackenridge ([37], p. 265) observes that "most of the major sport organizations are run by self-selecting (male) oligarchies who are reluctant to give up their power".

Thus, Bourdieu theorizes social action from a position whereby historical social structures "inhabit" the individual, and it is on this basis that individual action is generated, but not determined. The *habitus*, then, is "the organizing principle of their action", the "*modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action)" ([38], p. 18), whilst the *habitus* is the concept Bourdieu uses to articulate the "generative principles or schemes which underlie practices":

... when individuals act, they always do so in specific social contexts or settings. Hence particular practices or perceptions should be seen, not as the product of the *habitus* as such, but as the product of the *relation between* the *habitus*, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or "fields" within which individuals act, on the other ([39], p. 14).

Thus, thinking in terms of *habitus* and field "is to *think relationally*" ([40], p. 96): "Involvement in a field shapes the *habitus* that, in turn, shapes the actions that reproduce the field" ([41], p. 87).

Bourdieu's notion of *capital* and its accumulation are key to understanding the operations of fields and the actions of individuals and groups within them. Bourdieu's *capital* principally refers to the logic of a field, that is, what is counted as legitimate and valuable, and what is not. Bourdieu argues that within each field:

Symbolic capital is any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and recognize it, to give it value ([29], p. 47).

Therefore, whilst Bourdieu [29] emphasizes that the social universe is such that all agents attribute, at least implicitly, a monetary value to their labour or time, *capital* can refer to any number of things (practices, traditions, locations) that are recognized and valued by social agents acting within the field. Bourdieu adopts a sporting analogy—“the feel for the game” (see [29])—to express the relation between *habitus* and *field*. Therefore, any consideration of social action must appreciate the normative logic or *capital*, specific to a *field*, as an appreciation for this field-specific capital is essential for “successful” action within any field.

The emergence of “child protection” within sport can clearly be construed as a meeting of *fields* with distinct, arguably very different logics of practice. This notion seems evident in the words of the first director of the CPSU, shortly after its establishment:

... those within and outside sport need to recognize that the significant changes in culture and practice that are required will take both time and resources. There are still some within sport who are resistant to change: those involved in promoting this work need to adopt an approach that will ensure change occurs at an appropriate pace ([6], p. 141).

It is with an interest in these “changes in culture and practice”, and how they are navigated and negotiated, that has guided this investigation. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework provides both the epistemological foundations for our methodological approach as well as the conceptual tools to “think through” our findings.

The Study

For Bourdieu, empirical research is essential for comprehending the relationship between *capital*, *field* and *habitus*. In selecting an appropriate method, Bourdieu advocated a pragmatic approach based on “the definition of the object and the practical conditions of data collection” ([40], p. 226). In particular, interviews offer:

... the respondent an absolutely exceptional situation for communication, freed from the usual constraints (particularly of time) that weigh on most everyday interchanges, and opening up alternatives which prompt or authorize the articulation of worries, needs or wishes discovered through this very articulation, the researcher helps create the conditions for an extra-ordinary discourse, which might never have been spoken, but which was already there, merely awaiting the conditions for its actualization ([42], p. 614).

Providing SLOs with an anonymous space within which they could articulate their views at length was deemed crucial if the research was to uncover something of the *relations* at play in the delivery of SCP in English sport. A conversational style was adopted whereby SLOs led the conversation and we prompted and encouraged them for further detail or asked questions to attempt to “see” the role of SLO through their eyes [43,44]. Interviews explored issues such as SLOs’ perceptions of their role, the culture and organization of SLOs’ NGB regards safeguarding, and safeguarding policy implementation in

SLOs' organization. In attempting to identify “what particular structure of the habitus is in play here” ([45], p. 61), our intention is to enable a voicing of the experiences of SLOs to identify issues they consider critical.

The research was approved by the authors' university ethics committee and participants were offered anonymity; pseudonyms are used for participants, NGBs and all other identifying features. Access to potential participants was facilitated by the CPSU. In total, 40 SLOs from across 24 NGBs were introduced to the project by the first author during an SLO Support Forum—regular meetings scheduled by the CPSU to support SLOs. The CPSU provided the contact details of SLOs willing to be approached for the study.

As the SLOs were located across the country, interviews were conducted by telephone and, with their consent, recorded using a digital telephone recording cable and Dictaphone. Telephone interviews allow the possibility of cheaply accessing participants who would otherwise be difficult to reach in person, and they can generate data comparable in quality to that attained by face-to-face methods and increase participants' perceptions of anonymity [44,46]. Nine SLOs from eight NGBs were interviewed, with interviews lasting between 30 minutes and three hours. Participants had been in the SLO post between two and more than 10 years. Only two of the eight participating NGBs had appointed a man to the role of SLO.

Interviews were transcribed and data subjected to inductive analysis [47]. This involved reading and re-reading the text to become immersed in “the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships” ([48], p. 362). Simultaneously, segments of text were coded into themes to facilitate analysis of text based on specific themes and to enable relationships between themes to be identified, including contradictory points and new categories. Through this process, themes became increasingly refined. Guided by our “relational” approach, we then focused on those areas which particularly identified the dynamic between *habitus* (of the SLOs) and *field*. As the position of SLO is occupied by a very small number of individuals, some contextual detail from the interview data has necessarily been excluded to protect their identities. We now present these themes, accompanied by initial commentary, before explicitly applying a Bourdieusian lens to further draw out our interpretation of these findings and the meanings within them.

4. Findings

4.1. Priorities, Resources and Responsibilities

SLOs raised a number of concerns around the manner in which SCP fitted into their organization's “core” business. The positioning of SCP within the organization's structure was a key concern, as was the resourcing of SCP and the priority it was given in terms of SLOs' workloads.

Responsibility for SCP may be situated within one of many different NGB departments, for example, within education, coach development, community sport development, legal and compliance, *etc.* The positioning of SCP within the organization's governance structure was identified by some as a crucial factor in effecting change as it impacted significantly on the extent to which an SLO's line manager could exert influence on senior executives and, thus, on the opportunities available to promote SCP at senior management level:

SLO5: ...the important thing to me really is where my line manager fits in terms of the whole organization, not necessarily where I fit. My line manager now is Head of [area] and is from the senior management team and that's the most important thing ... that means that I can influence at senior management level.

The SLOs were acutely aware of the need to achieve a high profile within their organization. The underlying concern was that senior executives do not sufficiently value SCP or that they view it as less important than other areas:

SLO2: The safeguarding team have recently been moved from [area] [to] Legal and Governance ... I think this is better for safeguarding ... I think we have definitely got a higher profile there, and I think that they are a bit more accepting of us, now we are in Legal and Governance.

The degree to which NGBs "accept" SCP, and the problems associated with whether or not SCP is considered a legitimate area within the development of sport, will be discussed further below.

While Sport England recently provided the CPSU with £1 million in funding over two years to develop and embed safeguarding and child protection in sport [49], NGBs are not required to set aside a minimum amount for this in the way they do for other operating costs, such as for sports coaching. Consequently, not only do resources for SCP vary according to the financial health of an NGB, they are also dependent upon the value that senior executives place on that area amidst other (funding-contingent) dimensions of their remit:

SLO4: The larger NGBs ... they've got money to throw at it. They normally have a permanent Lead Officer in place who has got maybe half a dozen staff around the regions, and they in turn have got one or two staff within the region. They've got a structure. Not everybody's as fortunate, unfortunately. ... the bigger NGBs, they've got money to throw at child protection and we don't. It's as simple as that. We can only do what we can do.

SLOs from larger NGBs were primarily concerned with the absence of dedicated funding from Sport England for SCP:

SLO3: There's no specific funding for safeguarding within the planning process. There will be a budget allocated to my area, I'm a budget holder, but there isn't ... it's not allocated from any of the funding bodies specifically for safeguarding. So I would put a plan together to say 'this is how much we would need to deliver the safeguarding functions' and I then would kind of fight it out with everybody else.

SLO7: ... it concerns me that there is no money ring-fenced with the funding from Sport England. You know we get this funding but none of it is ring-fenced in regards to safeguarding ... and I know there are other sports that have said this as well. If governing body's boards were advised that they have got to give X amount to safeguarding, they would probably take more notice of it.

Clearly, the resources available to an NGB are a significant factor in determining the extent of the SCP structure that can be established within a sport and the degree of SCP support that can be provided

for that sports community. For some SLOs, the lack of specifically targeted funding raises the concern that essential resources are diverted to other areas considered higher priority.

The majority of SLOs in our sample expressed a clear commitment not just to the SLO responsibilities and the protection of children from abuse, but also to the broader principles of child welfare and children's rights. However, it is also evident that, as in our sample, many SLOs have responsibility for areas beyond SCP, for example, "doping" and "equity", and consequently SCP is only a subsidiary aspect of their role:

SLO4: The main part of my role is club development, which includes club accreditation, which obviously includes child protection ... child protection sits with those two areas. So, it might probably be around 20% of my role. ... Really it's a bolt-on part of my job rather than a fundamental part.

SLO6: If you asked me now [to take on the LO role] I would say no ... but that's not to say I don't want to do the role because of what it involves, it's because it doesn't really fit in with my [additional role] now. ... In an ideal world I would have moved that lead officer role onto someone else, but that hasn't been able to happen yet.

Clearly there is a concern here about the extent to which an official with designated responsibility for SCP is able to properly fulfill all aspects of the role amidst competing priorities. Where safeguarding is annexed to more "substantive" responsibilities, it seems important to question the extent to which a sport's external statements about how seriously it takes child welfare match the reality "on the ground". In the following section, we consider this in greater depth.

4.2. Organizational Resistance/Inertia

The initial refusal to accept that sportspeople (sexually) abuse children and the resistance to the introduction of SCP policy in sport is documented by Brackenridge [3]. All of the SLOs identified this resistance within their organizations:

SLO2: ... when I first joined there was a huge sort of push away from it ... "this is ridiculous! We have managed all our lives without this, we don't need this! ... this is all just political correctness gone mad!"

SLO3: I don't think they understood it. I don't think it was seen as being particularly important. The difficulty was, I think in early days there was this feeling of "this doesn't happen in our sport." I think there was definitely a feeling of "this doesn't happen enough [to justify changes]."

SLO7: I am advised that safeguarding is on the board meetings [but] I am yet to see it on any of the minutes. ... my head of department is representative of safeguarding on the board. Unfortunately, I have never had him approach me and ask me for any data or details or anything about cases to feed back into the board, never, so it is quite disappointing.

A result of this organizational resistance to SCP was that some SLOs found themselves in the position of not only promoting SCP within their community-level sports clubs, but having to persuade their NGBs' internal departments of the value and legitimacy of SCP, and, therefore, of the SLO position:

SLO3: I don't think they [senior management] really knew what to do with it. To me there wasn't really a willingness to ... I needed their weight to say to the organization "this is important, you need to do it". ... it was very isolating because anything that needed doing, I had to do and there was absolutely no team work involved ... I think you have to be extremely, extremely determined and thick-skinned to be able to do it, and driven to do the job. I don't think you can do this without the organization buying in, because it's not a one-person job. If it's genuinely going to work within the organization, it's got to be owned and driven by more than one person ... ultimately you need the executive team to do it because they are the decision makers—ultimately they drive the message. If they say it's important, then the organization sees it as important.

Senior managers have considerable influence on the culture of an organization [50] and their "buy-in" is clearly important if SCP is to be truly accepted, valued and adequately resourced. However, SLOs suggested gaining top-level support was a challenge and some felt their senior management had little genuine interest in SCP:

SLO7: ... sometimes you just feel "are you going to listen or what? Would you just like me to go away?" Cos that is the impression you get sometimes. [I] can never get in front of the CEO to put things forward, they just don't want to know—"I pay you to do the job, just do it".

SLO5: I think higher up the organization, they still kind of leave it up to the safeguarding department. There's still that whole, not understanding that everyone plays a part ... Like the [CPSU] safeguarding conference, I think there were very few CEOs there. I obviously started to go and they [NGB CEOs] said, "I think it's more for you." I said, "it is, but it'll be so good if you're there" but it was never going to happen.

The notion that child protection or safeguarding "is everyone's responsibility" has been a persistent message from child welfare advocates and organizations, such as the CPSU. Thus, the objective is to "embed" safeguarding principles and policies within sport, so that they play a meaningful rather than superficial role within an organization's culture. Indeed, the extent of support for SCP within an organization's leadership influences the culture [51]. However, these responses indicate that SCP in sport may be conceptualized as belonging solely to the safeguarding team (or more likely to the individual SLO). Where understanding of SCP amongst leadership is low, as it certainly has been within sport, the SLO role may, in fact, provide an opportunity for leaders to construct SCP as an area of expertise and the SLO as *the* "expert". We return to this issue below.

However, some SLOs discussed how initial resistance from within their organization had, over time, given way to greater, if somewhat begrudging, acceptance of the need for SCP:

SLO2: ... over the years I think people have recognized that we need to do something about it and they have become more accepting of it ... We still have to fight a little bit but nowhere near as bad as it used to be.

SLO6: ...whereas initially it was, "umm, why are we doing this? Why is this on the agenda?" to an understanding now of it—to them it presents a risk to the organization, you know, and umm, equally the importance of it. I think no one can ever deny the importance of child

protection, it's just how much—for them it might get in the way of doing other business ... because it's always “not in my back yard”. ... I think them understanding the number of cases we are dealing with, which I think has shocked them [management], that you know it is this sort like, “it doesn't happen, well, OK it does”, and you know, people didn't used to wear seatbelts but now they do and they just accept it, and it's just that change of attitude ... and eventually it's part of what we do. ... the board have now got an increased interest in it and we report to them every meeting on where we are with it.

The indication here is that an NGBs' “understanding” refers not to a recognition of children's rights or the broader safeguarding agenda, but to a realization of the risk posed to the “business” and its reputation by the number of cases being reported. In some instances, SLOs felt compelled to emphasize the financial advantages of implementing safeguarding policy in order to “encourage” greater engagement by senior management:

SLO5: We have to be able to drive it and challenge a lot. And also stand by your guns. And also do it for the right reasons. Sometimes I had to resort to the whole, “you know what, if we don't do this, as a governing body, we won't get more take-off funding.” It annoys me that you have to do it that way because my first selling message would always be you do it for the right reasons, because 28% of our memberships are juniors so we need to treat them in a responsible and appropriate manner ... it frustrates me.

Whilst there is some sense of gradual change, SLOs seemed to have been positioned as “outsiders” within their own organization, the bearers of “bad news” and faced with ambivalence, reluctance, inertia and opposition.

4.3. A Complex and Specialist Role

The SLO role is both wide ranging in its remit and specialist in nature, yet there are no formal qualifications for or prior training to become a designated officer within sport, so SLOs enter their role from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of different experiences and understandings of child welfare—in some cases the SLOs in this study had come from professional lives where they had gained experience of the statutory sector, such as the police, the legal profession, education, while others had not. As a result, the level of understanding of the SLOs' responsibilities varied at the point of entry into the role, leading them to note the challenges associated with the specialist nature of their role, particularly the required knowledge of statutory-sector legislation:

SLO3: ... as a lead officer with a non-statutory background, I found that extremely challenging. ... I still think dealing with cases within governing bodies ... is quite difficult because they're all different and they'll all bring up different things ... it's a very specialist area because it's verging on statutory and you have to kind of work out how you fit with statutory, how your organization deals with that. ... the complexity of dealing with the statutory sector and dealing with individuals and their families and everything else ... that was a massive, massive learning curve.

SLO9: I feel that, you know after four years I am pretty much to grips with the whole thing except when, when suddenly I get the legislation in front of me and I'm like "ooh, actually no that doesn't say what we have always thought it was saying for the last four years".

Some SLOs clearly lacked confidence in carrying out their duties, particularly when it meant dealing with external partners who they constructed as "experts" in child welfare compared to themselves:

SLO5: I have ... contact with a child protection consultant who we pay ... and originally when I first started, if we had a case I would say, "can you ring the local authority and get the information?" or "can you ring the police?", and he would say, "no actually, *you* can—these are the pertinent questions", and I'd only been to actually one, as we call it, inter-agency meeting and I admit I was terrified, because I was thinking I hope they don't think that I'm a massive expert. [emphasis added].

A core part of the SLO's duties involves managing cases of child abuse, dealing with abusers and working with internal and external partners. In this sense, SLOs occupy positions of considerable responsibility, and the stress and emotional impact of the role is not to be underestimated. Child protection social workers suffer from higher levels of work-related stress than the national average, which has been linked to increased levels of staff turnover [52]. While the SLO's role is markedly different from social workers', the impact of managing allegations of abuse, especially in an environment where SLOs feel they are unsupported, must be acknowledged. Some SLO's reported a lack of emotional support, even isolation:

SLO3: ... For me [I've learned the job] through fairly awful experience I have to say. I hope the sector has learnt to support people better, but I'm not sure that is the case. ... it's that we learn from the experience that some lead officers have had, in terms of the isolation of the role, because I think that role can be very isolating ... we need to make sure that it is more than just one person's responsibility ... it needs specialist support, not everybody can deal with that stuff. And actually I think people shouldn't be asked to deal with that stuff without having those support functions in place. It's a huge responsibility dealing with cases. I think a lot of early lead officers went through that and a lot of them fell by the way side as a result ... It's too much without the right support.

SLO2: ... I will admit to you that 3, 4, or 5 years ago I would say that no, I didn't have the personal support that I needed, and that was when we did have cases that weren't very nice, and I did struggle with that, you know, going home and thinking about what had actually taken place. And also I didn't have anybody to bounce ideas off or even say "look this is really upsetting, read this". I had to keep it all within myself.

These participants begin to reveal the emotional impact that this role may take on an individual in terms of the strain of dealing with cases of child abuse, but which is then exacerbated by the specialist nature of the role and the lack of understanding and support available, leading to anxiety and feelings of isolation. With limited other people within their NGB who understand their role and the emotional impact of it, SLOs highlighted the importance of connecting with other SLOs for support:

SLO3: I think that's the opportunity to meet with other people doing the same roles and I think lead officers need to meet with other lead officers because it's a kind of quite unique position and I think talking to other people who are having the same experiences is really important because I think that helps the isolation. And I think just people knowing that people understand what you're doing and your challenges is quite reassuring sometimes.

Given the specialist nature of the SLO role, training is essential. However, while the responsibilities of SLOs are, in the words of one participant, "verging on statutory", SLOs receive significantly less training than their statutory counterparts to prepare them for the rigours of their role; SLO's receive two-day "specialist safeguarding training" known as *Time to Listen*, which is specifically designed for people with lead responsibility for safeguarding or safe recruitment [53]. SLO's commented on the extent to which this was able to prepare them for the complexity of managing cases of abuse:

SLO3: I did [attend CPSU training for SLOs] but that in no way prepares you for the ins and outs of case management. ... *Time to Listen* is good training but it's not until you get into cases and how your organization deals with it that you kind of really get into the nitty-gritty of what dealing with cases is all about.

As designated people responsible for managing NGBs' child welfare responsibilities, SLOs are central to safeguarding and protecting children and young people in sport, yet, they require no formal child welfare qualifications and receive minimal training (and limited emotional support). This raises questions about the value attributed to SCP in sport and the support offered to those with operational responsibility for this area.

4.4. Constructions of Safeguarding and Child Protection in Sport

The way in which SCP is interpreted or constructed within the governing structures of sport has implications for how it is understood and managed and, concomitantly, the extent to which the SLO role is valued, prioritized and supported. It is evident that the SLOs in this study all had to battle against a narrow, risk-based, legalistic construction of their role:

SLO8: Everything has to do with risk. Safeguarding is risk. When you write the child protection policies and guidelines, it's about cutting down the risk. ... you always get a lot ... "they're going to sue us." If you've not got your guidelines down, you're wide open.

SLO9: ...the sort of relationship with our legal team hasn't always been perhaps the easiest. It's, you know, they are very aware that it is a big, high-risk area.

In the new age of insecurity characterized by risk consciousness [54], SCP is understood in terms of the risk it represents to an NGB. It is well over a decade since Brackenridge ([3], p. 182) noted that "even where policy development is now underway, it is all too often based upon fear rather than any genuine commitment to social justice, equity or human rights". All of the participants indicated, explicitly or implicitly, that SCP is of interest to NGBs principally, or only, to the extent that it may pose a threat to the organization's "core" business and, therefore, must be dealt with. Consequently, SCP was identified as a "dangerous" area. SLOs suggested some NGB members were daunted by SCP and, consequently, preferred to avoid dealing with it:

SLO5: I think people are fearful of child protection, so yeah there were reluctant people leading on the Standards Framework [new national initiative] ... I remember, it must have taken virtually a day to do a press release about, I think it was CRB checks ... there was some news story and I remember it took them all day to get the wording [of the press release] right, and I was thinking this is just because this person—no disrespect because they knew it—they were so worried about getting the wording right ... it could have been done in minutes.

Following high-profile media coverage of the apparent mishandling of child abuse cases by social work and medical professionals over the past three decades, sport NGB personnel cannot fail to have been aware of the consequences of “getting it wrong” where child protection is concerned. Thus, in a sector where very little experience or knowledge exists [3], unsurprisingly NGBs constructed SCP through negative and reactive frames. In most cases, this clashed with SLOs’ broader agenda for child welfare in their sport:

SLO3: I think there’s still a little bit of “you deal with the scary stuff and the horrible side of things” rather than being seen as a positive enhancement. I’d like to get to that stage where it’s seen as a positive rather than just a person that sorts out the horrible stuff. I think the difficulty in safeguarding is quite often what you’re trying to do is presented as being an issue. So it’s kind of not seen as being important because it’s preventative. You’re doing things so that things don’t go wrong—you know you’re getting consent forms in place and making sure that people have been CRB checked—and they’re kind of not seen as being ... it’s quite difficult to explain that. People don’t understand the value in planning and preparation that a lot of safeguarding is.

SLO5: ... I’ve always said to people, you know, “safeguarding, child protection, it’s not just about a child that may be in distress, it’s a much broader thing”. I’ve done a lot with the organization as a whole in terms of, you know, the wider perspective, like how long the children are playing in tournaments and at what age should children be playing with adults.

The CPSU itself was established at a time when sexual abuse cases in sport had begun to emerge in significant numbers, accompanied by foreboding headlines in the national media. For example, according to Steven Downes in *The Observer*:

Youngsters in Britain face a growing danger of being sexually abused by their sports coaches ... this special report ... asks how we can best protect children from *the menace that may lurk at the poolside and in the changing rooms* ([55], emphasis added).

The introduction of a specialist unit focused on “child protection in sport” at a time when media narratives about predatory sex abusers in sport had recently emerged no doubt contributed to the dominance of a protection-focused discourse within NGBs, where compliance with national legislation on matters such as criminal history checks was equated with “the best interests of the child”. It was into this climate that the first mandatory lead officers for *safeguarding* were established in 2003:

SLO1: I would say... [sigh] more compliance at the top level, that’s how they see it. “Right, well, safeguarding, it’s probably a lot of money. Have we got to do it?” “Yes, we have to do it, this is why we have to do it.” “Right, well, we want to do it well and it fits in with our

image, yeah, so that's fine, we can deal with that because it fits in." So the motives from the top are more compliance rather than belief, I would say.

Thus, the difficulty of establishing a broader safeguarding agenda, underpinned by a children's rights agenda, which goes beyond attempts to protect children from "the menace that may lurk at the poolside and in the changing rooms" [55], has, then, been a key feature of the experiences of the first SLOs within English sport.

5. Discussion

Our investigation has been guided by Bourdieu's epistemology which seeks "connections between individual subjectivities and the generating principles acting on them in the fields through which they pass in their life trajectories" ([35], p. 180). Through an investigation of the experiences and perspectives of those designated with "lead responsibility" for implementing "safeguarding", we have attempted to excavate the logic that has underpinned the early construction of "child protection" within English sport. In this final section we consider our findings through Bourdieu's conceptual framework.

Whilst none of the SLOs would describe themselves as child protection "experts", their role is explicitly defined as having responsibility for this area. In a field where there was a considerable knowledge vacuum around "child protection/safeguarding", in introducing a "designated person ... who is responsible for the implementation of the child protection policy" ([8], p. 6) at the NGB level, it is perhaps unsurprising that SLOs were depicted as experts in this by their organizations. At one level this may be construed simply as a convenient means of senior management dealing with (whilst distancing themselves from) the "problem" of SCP. However, such a conclusion appears partial and superficial.

CEOs and executive committee members undoubtedly represent powerful expressions of what is most valued within the sporting field. Indeed, the greater the investment within a field, the greater the complicity between field and habitus: "The habitus is what enables the institution to attain full realization" ([56], p. 57). Although it is beyond the parameters of this study to properly investigate, the habitus of CEOs, presidents, board members, senior management and other officials within specific sporting fields are, arguably, the most developed representations of the field "made flesh" ([56], p. 57).

Conversely, SLOs are required to be simultaneously invested in both the field of "child protection/safeguarding" *and* the field of "sport". The individual habitus of each SLO, which led them to apply for, accept and maintain the role of designated "safeguarding lead", appeared to place them, to varying degrees, in conflict with the dominant logic of the field. Arguably, this misalignment leads to the frustration, anxiety and isolation our participants report. Thus, SLOs indicate a "belief" in safeguarding, but a simultaneous lack of investment—and lack of belief—from the field, in them. Thus, SLOs' lack of (material and personal) organizational support can be seen as the product of their relation (or their role's relation) to the symbolic capital dominant within the sporting field.

Developing this further, it may be argued that the generative logic or principle of the sporting field is "performance"—that is, the successful domination of others (and others' bodies) through one's own corporeal/athletic endeavor. This is not the same as saying individual CEOs are purely focused on medals, *etc.*, nevertheless, material and symbolic resources (*capital*) within the field are organized according to this principle and distributed to those who are closest to this objective of corporeal domination. Therefore, it is possible to observe across sporting fields a complex infrastructure of

supporting mechanisms, communities and agencies (including NGBs) wholly geared towards this principle, neatly captured by the Olympic slogan “*citius, altius, fortius*” (faster, higher, stronger).

If the child protection field can be momentarily encapsulated through the slogan “the welfare of the child is paramount” [57], the experiences of the SLOs in this study suggest that what is valued most by dominant agents within the administration of sport is (at least potentially) substantively different from that which is most valued within the field of child protection—for example, as one SLO noted, SCP was perceived as getting “in the way of doing other business”. Indeed, beyond the “performance principle” even other areas that may be construed as part of sports’ “social agenda” appear to be viewed with greater enthusiasm than the troublesome area of “safeguarding”:

SLO: “That’s all happy-clappy stuff that we can publicize everywhere—look how good and wonderful we are”. Well, I never get to see my CEO or Chair because they’re not interested. If I did it wrong, or there was a big case, that’d be different. They’d want to see me then. But for [equal opportunities] it’s like ... “we’ve got another photo opportunity here.”

Therefore, as an agent of the sporting field an SLO is required to promote (even enforce) practice that is accorded little value within that field. In such circumstances, a personal investment in SCP is crucial to SLOs remaining motivated to do the role and, hence, to SLO retention:

SLO5: I really wanted to do this ... I believe in it so much and I think it’s absolutely the right thing to do.

SLO3: I know people think I’m a complete pain in the neck. I’m the one who’s, “hang on a minute, have we thought about the whatever” and that’s the—you know, I would love to get to a stage where I’m not seen as the one that’s the pain in the neck. ... I really think the work’s important. I really genuinely believe. I don’t think I’d still be here if I didn’t genuinely believe.

According to McNay ([36], p. 72) “a complex dynamic [exists] between the symbolic and the material, where the logic of the field may reinforce or displace the tendencies of the habitus. It is this tension that is generative of agency”. “Displacement” is perhaps an apt expression for the experiences reported by some of our SLOs, who found themselves isolated and at odds with their senior management despite being heavily invested in their role. Nevertheless, through this tension it is also possible to observe the ways in which SLOs struggled against the pervading construction of their role (that is, in SLO3’s words, “being about the scary, horrible side of things”). For example, SLOs reported (reluctantly) adopting “scare” tactics (principally around loss of resources and reputation) to convince senior management to engage with and commit support to SCP beyond the absolute minimum. In other words, and perhaps according to the degree to which they were personally invested in the child protection/safeguarding field, SLOs found creative ways in which to navigate and negotiate their role within their sporting field. Given the emotional pressures and anxieties that go with the role, it is hardly surprising that they report the need to be “thick-skinned”.

It is clear, therefore, that the task of the SLO is considerable—indeed no less, perhaps, than to alter the underlying structure of the collective habitus that dominates within their particular sporting field. This was intuitively appreciated by our participants:

SLO5: We have to be able to drive it, and challenge a lot. And also stand by your guns ... I just wanted to be able to sort of change hearts and minds ... it's cultural stuff, it's a slow burner ... sowing the seeds and then coming back and trying to change people along a bit more.

The commitment to their role provides an important message for agencies recruiting individuals to such positions. Given the anxiety and tension that seems inherent in the SLO role, coupled with the organizational indifference and/or resistance that appears to accompany it (especially in the early years of introducing SCP in sport), the personal disposition and emotional resources—the *habitus*—that an individual must bring to the role should not be underestimated. This was illustrated succinctly by one of our participants who clearly provided a vital counter-balance to the discourse of compliance to minimum standards:

SLO3: [Senior management said] “we’re seen as being a good governing body and you’re now suggesting we’re not!” And I was sort of like, “I’m just saying that there’s more to it than having a policy.”

Clearly, for sport agencies who are serious about the introduction of SCP into their communities, it would be anticipated that considerably greater investment (of all forms of *capital*) is contributed to this endeavour than that reported by some of our participants. However, it must be recognized that NGBs—whilst constituted here as individual fields within which the politics of SCP in sport are played out—are also fields *within* fields. They are semi-autonomous fields, thus, whilst distinct, also subject to the influence of other fields. Therefore, they are also engaged in struggles over *capital* (e.g., funding, media coverage, public recognition) and these various struggles are clearly factors in the manner in which SCP is constructed within each sport. Thus, we observe that the discussion we present here is based on the views of just (a relatively small sample of) a single group within English governing bodies of sport. A fuller picture would incorporate the views of other key stakeholder groups, for example, department heads, senior management and CEOs, as well as other stakeholders within and without the NGB. Furthermore, this paper has mostly focused on the relation between the SLO and their management within the NGB. However, the interviews also revealed other relationships and these require separate analyses. Therefore, we frame this discussion merely as a contribution to the overall picture of the politics of child protection in English sport during the past decade, but not the totality of it. That said, we would reiterate that these individuals were particularly well placed to offer an important insight into this process and we would encourage other researchers to consider similar investigations.

If NGBs want to overcome (or avoid a return to) “inertial opposition” to SCP ([3], p. 185) organizational understanding and support for the SLO role is crucial. Our analysis suggests that SCP needs to be led, with vigour, from the top. Unless those agents with high volumes of cultural capital within each sporting field (not confined to the leadership of NGBs but certainly including them) respond positively and proactively to the children’s rights agenda that underpins “safeguarding”—a fundamental aspect of which is the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation—the implementation of SCP within sport will be piecemeal, stifled and inadequate.

The invisible nature of much safeguarding work and the challenges of evidencing the benefits of this work to the sports community are not easily resolved and depend in large part on leadership being convinced that there is a discernible benefit to the organization. Thus, the evolution in safeguarding policy is not always evident in safeguarding *practice* and child protection often remains the key focus of many practitioners.

Paradoxically, the SLO role itself may have encouraged NGBs to annexe SCP from its core business rather than integrating it. This may well be reinforced by the specialist (typically three-hour) “safeguarding and child protection” “training” programmes sports personnel are required to undertake, offered (or rather *sold*) by various agencies and often required as a condition of accreditation (e.g., *ClubMark*). Compliance with official “minimum operating standards” clearly says little, if anything, about the extent to which individual dispositions are transformed, yet the number of people trained in SCP are often prioritized by sports agencies as “hard” evidence of cultural change. If SCP is to be truly integrated into sporting cultural practices, coach education needs to be substantively reconfigured around the principles and tenets of children’s rights.

6. Conclusions

High-level efforts to address the abuse of children within sport contexts are evident and ongoing: for example, a recent Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) conference highlighted the issue of child abuse in sport at a pan-European level [58]; the German Sport Youth, ENGSO Youth, and the SPORTUNION Austria have recently implemented European collaborations aimed at tackling sexual violence in sport; the European Commission has emphasized “the fight against sexual violence and harassment in sport” within its funding priorities for 2014–2020 [59]; and the United Nations Office for Sport for Development and Peace has also designated “child protection” as a key theme within its programme, “encouraging” member states to “implement plans to prevent the exploitation and abuse of children and youth in sport contexts” [60]. Such high-level plans are important, however, based on the analysis presented here, we suggest that for the implementation of “child protection in sport” to be meaningful (rather than superficial), organizations must demonstrate much greater investment, belief, in the philosophy of children’s rights than was encountered by the SLOs interviewed here.

A broader safeguarding agenda clearly requires much greater organizational investment, illustrated by the substantial “Framework for Maintaining and Embedding Safeguarding for Children In and Through Sport” recently introduced by the CPSU [61]. Following full compliance with the national standards [7,8], this new *Framework* comprises 11 elements, the first of which is “organizational commitment to safeguarding” which requires that “leaders ensure that safeguarding principles underpin all areas of activity” and that they “monitor and evaluate the implementation” of the principles [61]. This is reinforced in a recent report: “Everyone from senior managers in national governing bodies, county sports partnerships and local authorities to clubs, coaches, parents and young people need to take ownership of this agenda” ([9], p. 4). We suggest that what the new “Sports Safeguarding Children Initiative” is in fact calling for, in Bourdieu’s terms, is a transformation of the *sporting habitus*, or rather a disruption of the synchronicity between *habitus* and *field* as it is currently configured within the field of sports. Arguably, this has been the mission of the CPSU since its inception over a decade ago.

Thus, it is through destabilizing the inertia or “hysteresis” of the *sporting habitus* that “increased possibilities may arise for critical reflection on previously habituated forms of action” ([62], p. 196). This has surely been the role of the SLO in English/British sport. However, as Bourdieu ([29], p. 122) argues, “rupture cannot result from a simple awakening of consciousness; the transformation of dispositions cannot occur without a prior or concomitant transformation of the objective structures of which they are the product”. This seems to provide some general support for the objective of Sport England and the NSPCC to transform (via the CPSU) the structures of the English (and British) sporting fields. However, according to our findings, within English sport, the destabilizing task required for social transformation—the transformation of dispositions—appears to have been highly dependent upon the fortitude of a small number of individuals and their willingness and capacity to challenge the inertia within the structures of their own organizations. In our opinion, whether there has in fact been a widespread transformation of dispositions is yet to be determined.

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Author Contributions

This research was conceived by the first author. Both authors contributed equally to the research design, data collection, analysis and writing up. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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