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'I shouldn't have problems because I'm a footballer': exploring the lived experiences of career transition in UK male professional footballers.

ANDREW DAVID BROWNRIGG

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The current study focuses on understanding the lived experiences of male professional footballers during the process of career transition, specifically the transition out of professional football. The study was carried out over two stages. Within both stages of the research, the professional footballers found themselves within or, facing the possibility of career transition out of the game. Stage one used a focus group method with eight professional players facing the possibility of career transition. Stage two adopted face-to-face and online interviews with twelve players, being made up of professional players (some facing the possibility of career transition and some who at the time were in a rehabilitation centre for addiction and within career transition) as well as, a group of potential (Academy) professional players all facing the possibility of transition out of the game. The interviews allowed the players to express what it is like to anticipate or live through the experience of career transition out of football. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used for stage one and elements of van Manen's human science/hermeneutic approach during stage two. The analysis of the interviews produced a number of key themes, including experiencing 'self and identity', 'help and support', 'the gaze of others' and, 'uncertainty and disempowerment'. Importance for professional footballers was laid on meeting the requirements and expectations of others within the world of professional football. For some, this was experienced as a need to put on a pretence to live up to requirements, whilst for others it meant accepting abusive treatment as part of their development. What is more, the players often felt constantly judged and assessed and this was something they lived even in the absence of others. The players' experienced a need to portray the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, especially physical and mental strength at all times. In addition, the players felt like commodities, as if they were machines.. Therefore, some professional footballers' experienced conflict between their public and private self, especially during difficult times and thus, a need to outwardly show to others that they were coping with things, when actually in private they were not.

The research findings inform a number of recommendations to sporting organisations, professional football clubs and professional footballers to improve the current and future lived experiences of professional footballers. Principally, there is a

need to educate and develop those within professional football, in particular those in positions of responsibility, about the ways in which their relationships are influential in the lives of professional footballers in the immediate and long term. Encouraging professional footballers to adopt different ways of being men, could be seen as beneficial to professional footballers' lived experiences. Hegemonic masculinity ideals in the culture of professional football could be replaced by healthier scripts, such as pursuing holistic development and improving team spirit and cohesion.

Disseminated Findings

Papers

Brownrigg, A., V. Burr, A. Locke and A. J. Bridger (2012). "You don't know what's around the corner: A qualitative study of professional footballers in England facing career-transition." <u>Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin </u>(14).

Conference Presentations

Brownrigg, A. (2014) Exploring the lived experiences of career transition in UK professional footballers. Fifth International Conference of Sport and Society. Rio de Janeiro. Brazil.

Brownrigg, A. (2013) Exploring transition from Professional Football. Fourth International Conference of Sport and Society. Chicago. United States.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The following chapter will introduce the area of research including an understanding of the culture or lifeworld of professional football. What is more, an overview of how the research developed will also be provided.

1.1 Setting the scene:

This section will introduce the area of professional football for the reader and, in doing so; will highlight some of the main governing bodies and organisations within this industry. However, to begin with, it will discuss the area of career transition in terms of how male professional footballers progress into the sport and information about their progression out of the game.

In England, as part of the journey towards being a professional footballer, typically, players progress through what is termed the 'academy system'. According to Mills, Butt, Maynard and Harwood (2012), the academy system is recognised as the highest ranked development scheme in English elite youth football. Funded by each football club, professional academies provide specialised training schemes that predominantly focus on developing and preparing football players for the professional level. Across all ninety-two academies (20 academies in the Premier League and 72 Academies in the Football League) in England, there are approximately 9,000 boys aged 8-16 (Williams, 2009). Within this age group, young footballers sign up on 'schoolboy' forms and are trained and developed on a part-time basis. It is at the age of 16 that promising players are then offered a two year full-time 'academy scholarship' (Mills et al. 2012). In terms of the career pathway of an elite footballer, the academy scholarship is a crucial stage for development when training, competition and the pursuit of elite performance become the major foci in a footballer's life (Côté, 1999). However, elite youth football in England is a highly competitive environment where a vast number of full-time scholars (approximately 90%) fail to make it to elite level (Williams 2009).

Within the Football League, the governing body that oversees the welfare and educational development of academy players on full-time scholarships is called the League Football Education (LFE). In 2004, the Football League and the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) established the LFE, in order to oversee the delivery

of the 'Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence programme' (ASE) to the entire Football League clubs in England and Wales. The ASE integrates work based experience and learning with academic education, to ensure that scholars are schooled and educated during their footballing development. As part of this programme, and the requirements of the footballing scholarships, all players are required to attend college once a week to ensure they complete the ASE. In this regard, the academy players (or potential career professionals, as they will be called throughout this thesis) are integrating their sporting development with educational development. The LFE also run a number of annual lifestyle initiatives, or workshops, which look to provide the academy players with education and awareness around such things as addiction, suicide and preparation for a second career. From the findings of the research, it could be argued, that these issues could be significant in the lives of male professional footballers in their futures, something that will be discussed further below.

In conjunction, the Premier League oversees the welfare and overall development of those academy players on full-time scholarships within the Premier League. The Premier League is recognised as a separate organisation to the LFE. For both the Premier League and Football League Academy players, training to become a career professional starts when they leave school and lasts for two years. At the end of the two-year period, or during it, they may or may not be offered a professional contract. Prior to their Academy Scholarship, most players would have been part of a professional club's academy system for a number of their early developmental years with some professional clubs in England now recruiting players as young as 8.

A previous survey done by the Scottish Professional Footballers Association, (SPFA 2004), suggested that almost fifty per cent of existing players in Scotland had less than one year remaining on their contracts, whilst another four per cent had less than two years. These statistics highlight the uncertainty that professional footballers face in terms of employment security. According to de Rouiffignac Mallm, (2008) in the United Kingdom, approximately 600 players, or one fifth of the workforce, 'exit the game' each year and thus, face career transition. These figures highlight the sheer volume of professional footballers who are facing the possibility of career transition each year. What is more, previous figures have shown that only one player out of one hundred and sixty professional footballers in Scotland, never need to work again

once their football careers have ended (SPFA 2004). Therefore, it would seem that only a small proportion of former players leave the game financially secure and without the need to consider a post-sporting career. Interestingly, statistics that have just emerged from America, suggest 70% of former American footballers, and 60% of former American basketball players, are bankrupt or in financial difficulty within five years of retirement (Sports Illustration, 2013; X-Pro, 2014).Therefore, it is clear that financial insecurity, after an athlete's career could be a problem across a range of sporting cultures.

One of the supporting organisations that help the PFA, Premier League and LFE to assist players is Sporting Chance Clinic (SCC). SCC offers, amongst other things, a specialised addiction and recovery centre for current and former professional footballers as well as sportspeople. As part of their work SCC provide support, counselling, treatment and aftercare to professional footballers who are suffering with, amongst other things, alcoholism, drug abuse and compulsive gambling. Sporting Chance (2013) claim that of the footballers who attend rehabilitation at their clinic, 98% of them are former professional players who are no longer in the game, whilst the remainder are professional footballers who are still playing. These statistics would suggest that issues with addiction, or a shift in attitude towards help seeking, could become more prevalent once a professional footballer's playing days have ended.

Furthermore, a study carried out by Nottingham University for the charity organisation XPro (2012), an organisation that helps and supports former professional footballers in the United Kingdom with injuries; found that professional footballers are 1000 times more likely to suffer from osteoarthritis in their joints than people who have worked in other occupations. According to this survey, currently, four out of five former professional footballers suffer with osteoarthritis. When considering this and the statistics from SCC, we can see clearly the potential long-term effects that professional football can have on the mind and body of retired footballers within the United Kingdom.

In recognition of the need to support and help players to prepare for career transition, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) has over the last five years developed a Career Transition Programme (PFA, 2014). The 'Making the Transition'

programme, which takes place over a two-day period, has been designed to help players who are facing the possibility of career transition to consider a second career pathway. In addition, as part of this programme, counsellors and former professional footballers are available for the players to discuss any issues or problems, which they may have. What is more, the PFA allow professional footballers the opportunity to benefit from a benevolent fund that helps former and current players with financial assistance for such things as debt, medical and educational fees. Furthermore, the PFA support and fund any professional footballer who requires residential treatment at the Sporting Chance Clinic.

1.2 Development of the research

Throughout the development of the study, I was dependent upon the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), the players' Union for professional footballers in England, as a means of accessing a large portion of the career professional players for the study. Alongside this, The League Football Education (LFE) helped me with the recruitment of the potential career professionals. Furthermore, Sporting Chance Clinic helped with the recruitment of the career professionals who had been within transition for a period of time and who at the time were attending the Clinic.

In consideration of its aims and objectives, the study adopted a qualitative approach throughout and, in particular, the hermeneutic branch of phenomenology. In brief, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with understanding lived experience through an interpretation of textual data and is a methodology that allows the position and, thus, experiences of the analyst to be considered as an inevitable part of the interpretive process. The latter consideration was seen as something that was integral to the research process, especially when considering my own experiences as a professional footballer, which I describe later in this chapter.

The current study, initially, planned to use a longitudinal design, to capture the experiences of a group of professional footballers across three transitional stages.

1. Prior to career transition,

2. During the onset of career transition, and

3. After the onset of career transition.

To record the footballers' experiences, the study initially planned to utilise an approach with a range of qualitative methods. In the first stage of the study, I planned to use semi-structured interviews in order to grasp what it was like for professional footballers to experience the possibility of career transition. In stage two and during the players' career transitions, it was my intention to ask the players to record their experiences through personal diaries and photographs. In the final stage of the research, it was my plan to interview the players once again using semi-structured interviews devised from the analysis and findings from the study's previous stages. Therefore, the initial recruitment drive was established in order to recruit players who were facing the possibility of career transition with a view to them being part of the longitudinal process of the study. However, at this time and despite my position as a former player and my contacts within the game, I was finding it extremely difficult to get professional footballers to come forward and participate in the study. Fortunately, whilst I was experiencing these problems, I was also gaining opportunities through the PFA, LFE and SCC to gain access to professional footballers (both academy and career professionals) who were experiencing a diversity of circumstances.

For example, quite early on in the development of the research, I was granted an excellent opportunity by the PFA to gain access to and interview a group of professional footballers who were attending an annual 'transition programme' provided to them by their Union. In total, eight professional footballers facing the possibility of career transition were interviewed, in two separate focus groups, and whilst this opportunity was not seen to fall in line with the original design, it was still seen as an opportunity that was too good to pass by.

It was planned that the focus group opportunity would act as a first stage of the research and that this would serve to inform me, as a researcher, about some of the issues salient for players' facing career transition and thus the development of the research. Within this stage, the research used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith and Osborne, 2010) as a means of analysing the data. Indeed, the analysis of the focus group data threw up a number of issues which seemed worthy of further exploration including issues around self and identity and how the professional footballers perceived themselves and others in terms of help and support. Therefore, it was felt that to aid the on-going data collection process

adopting individual interviews in stage two of the analysis would allow for a more in depth understanding of these issues.

At this time, it was still my intention to continue with my original design. However, I continued to face severe recruitment difficulties (despite sending out reminders and information packs to more clubs) and because of this, it was deemed necessary to re-consider the design of the research. Therefore, I felt that the research would benefit by moving away from its original longitudinal design- with a sample of 'in transition' players- and instead adopt a cross-sectional study that considered the experiences of a more diverse range of professional players in differing circumstances. In the end, I was able to explore the experiences of professional footballers within different phases of their careers, different stages of career transition and circumstances.

It was at this time that another recruitment strategy was developed via the PFA. In collaboration with them, it was agreed that we would send out information packs to the Union's delegates, (current players who represent and work for the PFA at each professional football club in England), and ask them to distribute the packs to potential participants (i.e. those players who were facing the possibility of career transition). However, despite a prolonged and broad recruitment drive, with over 750 information packs and invitations to participate distributed, in total only one professional footballer came forward to participate. However, in the time that contact was established with the willing player he had already signed for another football club and, thus, no longer fitted the criteria of the study. Therefore, in the end, three professional footballers were identified by the PFA and accepted to take part in the study. Significantly, all of these players had successfully studied for a University degree within their football careers.

During this stage of the research, I also gained access to a group of former professional footballers who were at the time attending Sporting Chance Clinic. In this regard, these individuals were seen as a contrast group to both the career professionals and the potential career players because these individuals had experienced difficulties and thus, 'crashed and burned', since their sporting careers had ended. Specifically, these players were seeking professional treatment to address addiction related problems brought on by their experiences during their

careers and career transition. The problems that these players were experiencing ranged from alcoholism, gambling and drug-related issues. In total, four former professional footballers were interviewed as part of this phase of the study.

I was then given access to five Academy players, (or those training to become professionals) through the League Football Education, to ask them to take part in the research. These players were at that time facing the possibility of transition into the game as well as out of it. This was because these players were still waiting to hear whether their Football Club would offer them a professional contract.

Initially, it was my intention to continue with the use of IPA to analyse the individual interviews, as was used previously during the focus group interviews. However, the findings from the focus group interviews revealed, within the professional footballers' experiences, issues around relationships (with themselves and others), for example how they were treated and felt treated, as well as issues around their experiences of space and time, such as uncertainty around their current and future time. Because of this that it was felt necessary, to incorporate a methodology that moved beyond just a mere interpretation of the players' experiences during career transition, using IPA. With this in mind, I aimed to provide a more in-depth understanding of the players' lived-world. With this, it was necessary to move away from using IPA as the method of analysis and, instead, during stage two of the research the phenomenological approach of van Manen (1997) was utilised. Using van Manen's phenomenology as part of the on-going research allowed for a richer understanding of the experiences of professional footballers during career transition to be established, by considering their lived world existentials- i.e. lived body, lived time, lived space and lived relations.

1.3 Being an insider

In the following section, I offer a reflective account of my own experiences as a professional footballer including what it was like for me to become and be a professional footballer as well my experiences during career transition. For the record, I was a professional footballer (potential and career professional) for a total of eight years between 1993 and 2001.It felt important to provide this piece in order to locate myself as a former professional footballer within the research.

It should be noted that the following reflection was written after the analysis was completed and, therefore, through the lens of the findings. Initially, this piece was developed to allow me to record my story and inspect it from my vantage point at the time. However, over time it has progressed and been edited for the purpose of the thesis. I hope that this reflective writing will allow the reader to gain an understanding of my 'inside' position within the research whilst also explaining where the idea for the study came from.

From as long as I can remember football was something that I had loved doing and a footballer was what I dreamed of becoming. Throughout my development, from child to adult, this played a massive part in who I was- I was 'Andy the footballer'- and this had from a young age influenced the development of my identity and self not only in terms of how I viewed myself but also how I felt others viewed me. In reality, I spent a lot of time developing an identity that was heavily focused on and dedicated to sport. Therefore, I spent little time considering other aspects of who I was and whilst this was something that worked for me in the short term, this was something that in the long term served to be extremely problematic for me.

However, whilst looking back, retrospectively, I wonder whether the development of my sporting self could have been different especially when considering the requirements or characteristics that I deemed necessary to become a professional footballer- it would seem that this way was inevitable. The time and effort I spent practicing pursuing my dream was for me one of the major reasons why I eventually made it as a professional footballer. Dedication, commitment and what I see now as being obsessive to a particular cause is something that set me apart. A footballer was what I wanted to be and, over time, a footballer was what I moulded myself into- I took on the role, I played the part and I was heavily influenced by those in similar positions.

Though I often ponder, when I look back, why I sacrificed or curtailed my overall development due to this exclusive focus on sporting development. Why I did not see the woods for the trees. However, I guess you do not consider other realities when there are dreams to be made. I mean, the dreamer does not dream of being someone, or somewhere else, whilst in the intensity of a desired dream- on the contrary, they are instead totally immersed in the immediate experience. In essence,

I experienced professional football as a dream-my dream and in the context of it, and in reality, at the time no other dream or perspective would do.

My early experiences of professional football came when I was just seventeen, when I left home to pursue an opportunity I had been given at Hereford United Football Club. Optimism and excitement was coupled with anxiety that was brought on by uncertainty of leaving behind the place I had lived since birth. However, I followed my heart to pursue my dream- a portrayal of a cocky kid on the outside, yet on the inside a frightened and fearful young man. I was apprehensive of what I did not know and although I was finding it hard, I felt that this was something I had to overcome if I wanted to become a professional footballer.

The environment of professional football was a place for sporting development and an environment where a 'cocky' know-it-all would somewhat fit in. There was a lot of bravado and front and a place where people could have a laugh. It was a place where you could be put in your place. I remember vividly entering this environment as somebody who believed he had all the answers- I was someone who did not like to be told what to do. However, when looking back I can now see that there was a need for me to be like the rest- to conform to the authorities and listen, work hard, do my duties and not at any time show that I could not handle the pressure or the experiences that come my way. The latter was so, so important, to me at the time, that I did not show that I was struggling because I thought that this would be seen as a sign that I could not make the grade. This way of being, however, was not something that was new to me- the need to get on with things had been something I had learnt from a young age, as a lad growing up in a working class society.

When considering my early experiences of professional football what was interesting was that in my life prior to this I had rebelled against anybody telling me what to do. In my childhood and in particular during school I had not taken kindly to people directing me, the feeling of being controlled, I had always been a free spirit. However, despite the same kind of treatment in football, my response and or attitude towards it was entirely different. Notwithstanding some early resistance, I soon began to realise that if I wanted to get on in football I needed to conform to the rules, to the system, to the authorities. However, this was not without its problems. For, example I remember clearly my relationship with my first coach in professional

football being often problematic- he was the authority figure and I was the rebel. However, conformity was something that I needed to learn fast if I wanted to get on in this environment.

Then there was the experience of training, and pressures that came with this. This certainly influenced my self-perspective and, again, in turn impinged upon me and who I was, who I needed to be. Training, I realised early on, was important. My body was my vehicle for success and I remember the early experiences of training in terms of the need to impress- this was my stage and the coaches, managers and staff were the audience. Impression management was something that became important to me and this was necessary if I was to get on. This was something that had a profound effect on me because I was already quite self-conscious but these experiences served to amplify my self-focus even more.

Inevitably, when I was on the football field and when things were going well I was relatively okay in myself- I was in my comfort zone. However, when things were not going well on the field (and when I was not on it), I was not as confident and comfortable in my own skin. It was this feeling of awkwardness, inadequacy, and self-consciousness that, I believe now, led me to seek out ways in which to get away from myself. Seeking escapism through substances and other methods (it could be argued football) was a way of getting away from me. Away from the world of professional football, I began to look to escape from the pressures and feelings that came with my life and the use of substances allowed me to replicate the euphoria, highs, and lows that I experienced. The difficulties I had with myself and my self-conscious way of being was both paralysing and motivating in equal measures. All the time I would portray that I was someone who had it all, full of confidence, but on the inside I was crippled with low self-esteem, self-worth and was driven by a fear of being a failure.

Professional football was like a bittersweet experience for me. I loved it when things were going well, but inevitably, as it is in life things do not always run smooth. Therefore, when things were problematic, I struggled to be with my self; I had difficulties dealing with life. Looking back now I realise I began to repress my feelings and emotions; I did not talk to anyone about how I felt and began to feel isolated. I just got on with it, I did what I had always known- I sucked it up and carried on.

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At this point, I think it is important to reaffirm that the way I talk about my experiences are through a retrospective lens. Therefore, how my experiences are viewed now at this current time in my life is very different to how I viewed them as a sportsman. When I was a footballer, like the slaves in Plato's cave analogy, I experienced my reality in a very narrow sense and if anyone had told me that I needed to reconsider the way I viewed things, I would have been reluctant to do so. The main idea from Plato's analogy is that a group of slaves is chained to a rock face and, all they can see is shadows on the wall in front of them and these shadows make up their reality. However, one day a slave breaks free and discovers that the shadows are being created by a fire behind the group and despite attempts to tell the remaining slaves the truth, his new version of reality is refuted by them. In accordance, my own background, social environment, historicity and life experiences had shaped who I was and where I was in the world- and looking back, I realise that this was a very narrow perspective- this was my only viewpoint.

On the football field, things went okay, initially, but this was soon thwarted due to several bad injuries. However, off the field as usual things were not good. I found it hard to fit in within the dressing room at Norwich City- a Premier League club I had moved to at a young age. Conversely, I had just left a dressing room at Hereford United, which although competitive, was somewhat nurturing and something that I felt a part of in terms of my ability as a footballer. However, within the dressing room at Norwich the experience was much more like a 'cut throat' experience- the professional dressing room- and I was the new kid on the block, competition to some. From the offset I did not feel like I fitted in, or settled, and this was something that I found extremely difficult during my time there, I often questioned whether I deserved to be there and I felt like I was the only one who was going to get found out. This experience had a profound and lasting effect on me in terms of feeling part of something and I believe this has played a part in some of the social isolation that I have experienced since. However, as before, I never spoke about these experiences, never portrayed my discomfort and instead I ignored it and continued as if all was well. However, at this time, I began to isolate myself significantly and I withdrew. Through this period I lost who I was, I lost a healthy social connection and yet, I craved to be acknowledged as a footballer. However, retrospectively, my dream had been broken and I no longer wholeheartedly bought into this way of life.

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At this time, I began to see for the first time that the environment I was in, the one I had longed to be part of, had little substance. In essence, it was a 'dog-eat-dog' world that offered little nourishment. This was my dream, one that I had pursued for the majority of my life, but in reality, it was somewhat of a nightmare.

At this stage in my life I begin to reflect whether it was because things were not going well for me on the pitch that I felt the way I did. This was because I had been somewhat okay with myself when things were going well on the field. It was as if my well-being and happiness had become dependent upon my success as a professional footballer. Because I did not fulfil my potential as a player, I struggled with myself for the majority of the time in the professional game and I often felt out of place- an outsider on the inside. There were times I had been treated like a king, when things were going okay, but often when things were not going well no-one wanted to know. Ironically, as a professional footballer and at times when I was struggling with myself, this was the time when I felt like I was treated differently- as if I was not part of the team and subsequently felt alone, an outcast. However, at the same time, I was craving to feel good because this was how football made me feel when things went well- it became like a drug. However, this was not there when I was not producing the goods. I saw it all around me, preferential treatment, people doing anything for others because they were performing- the 'kiss ass' nature of success in football and indeed life. I thought this was shallow and felt like people were using each other to get on, something which did not interest me. However, there was still this part of me that craved success in football, it was seductive and I wanted to feel better, I wanted to be recognised and not be in the background. Nevertheless, in reality, I was clinging on. Yet, I realise now that there was a part of me that died through these experiences, my hopes, dreams and aspirations of what I thought it would be like to be a professional footballer had been shattered. In hindsight, I can see that this was a big part of my future and a slow move away from football, towards reconstructing my life, but I could not see this at the time. I was too far down the road to consider a different route, it felt like I had too much to lose (or so I thought) and so I continued to pursue my life as a professional footballer. I had dedicated a lot of my time towards this- from a young age- it was all I knew, but I now see that these experiences were slowly beginning to change my perspective on life.

I carried on working towards being a professional footballer. It was hard for me not to and I did not breathe a word to anyone about my difficulties and my reservations. I remember thinking that I was unique, that everyone else had his or her shit together and that nobody else was struggling. I remember thinking that I was the only one who felt like he should not have been there but also, the only one who was not coping. This experience impinged upon me and it made me feel less of a person- in terms of my being as a footballer as well as a man, as if I should not be experiencing what I was experiencing. My transition into the professional game and experiences within it was a bittersweet one for me- with many highs and many lows. At times, I was on a crest of a wave yet at other times, I was swimming against the tide. As I said before, paradoxically I felt I needed help and support but did not feel like it was there for me. Yet, I also have to ask myself was help there for me all along? On the other hand, did I just perceive that it was not available? In addition, what did I think would be the reaction if I did seek help? Furthermore, at the time did I perceive my problems as being that bad?

I never thought about seeking help and I continued to live up to my perceived expectations despite the fact that in truth I was struggling miserably.

Inevitably, my career nose-dived, and in my mid-twenties I had been released from professional football, and my dream (or so-called dream) was over. Over a period of decline my coping strategies and way of dealing with things, in the background, had progressed and become problematic. When I was released I was lost, I did not know whom I was, where I was and where I was going. My self-handicapping tendencies got worse and this in turn fuelled my sense of disappointment, bitterness, uncertainty, isolation and disorientation. As I always did I looked for a remedy through escapism and, in truth, I continued to run away from the reality of my situation,- I didn't want to face up to the fact that my dream was over and my potential had not been fulfilled and this I perceived was because I couldn't handle it, unlike the rest. Therefore, I ran and ran but continued to portray to the outside world that all was okay, yet at the same time on the inside I was dying.

This period of my life was the hardest I have ever experienced. I felt a failure, I felt scared and uncertain, I felt lost- I mean, who was I? I was no longer a footballer. The main part of who I was had gone and I felt naked and stripped of my very being.

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However, still I grappled, I held on to what I knew, what was comfortable, I held onto what I knew.

Foolish hopes and dreams remained, dreams that had in reality passed, yet I wanted the dream to continue. Therefore, I maintained the hope that I could still reach the heights I once had and fulfil the potential they proclaimed of me- in essence, it felt like I had unfinished business. It felt comfortable to keep hold of what was familiar. My experiences were not easy. I was grappling with my old self- that was full of bitterness- and a new self that was frightened, scared and in truth under-developed. A slow transition took me down some dark paths. During this period, my escapism progressed- where part of my old self did not want to face the reality of my life, whilst the new self was frightened by it.

People and in particular loved ones asked me to seek help- and sometimes I sought help- but, to be fair, this was always a token gesture, to save a relationship or to give those who loved me peace of mind. Throughout I had always thought I had it together and I had all the answers and that I could deal with it - I felt like I could do it on my own.

Even after I tried to take my own life, I still pretended I had it all together, I still maintained the bravado, the masculine charade, show and pretense to suggest I was bulletproof. However, at the time I wanted out, I was not coping and this was the reality of it, I saw no other way. Yet afterwards I continued for another two years holding on to my old identity, clinging on to what I knew despite being a wreck and a shadow of my former self.

After losing just about everything- at the time, I was clinging on to a relationship and a University course- I finally admitted defeat. For the first time in my life, I sincerely asked for help and from this, I slowly began to drop my front. Through the process, I began searching for me again- to get to know the young lad before football had become a dream and prior to the development of my masculine front. This was the first time in my life that I had been honest with others and myself about how things really were for me and had been. With this way-of being came new experiences. All of a sudden, I was no longer able to ignore my vulnerabilities, insecurities and difficulties. However, I began to remain with myself and within the world and with this, I began to grow and develop.

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At this time in my life, I began my research journey with an undergraduate dissertation that looked at the experiences of male professional footballers during career transition- ironically, the very experience and process that had been difficult for me. Researching this subject and being reflective about my experiences since professional football and the evolution of the study has changed the way in which I view the transition from professional football and indeed the lived world I have once was part of. The whole process has influenced my life and very being in a more positive sense.

The current research evolved through my own experiences as a professional footballer and, in particular, the difficulties I experienced as a sportsman during my career and after. As a researcher, my interests lie within the area of transition with a particular interest in understanding the lived experiences of professional footballers during career transition

1.4 Structure and content of thesis

In chapters 2 and 3, I locate the research within the existing literature on career transition from sport and sporting identities In so doing, it will clearly show that research on male professional footballers in the United Kingdom is needed and how such work will contribute to our current understanding in this area of psychology. In chapter 4, I introduce the chosen methodology of phenomenology and the two branches used within the analysis of study, namely interpretive phenomenology and van Manen's phenomenology. Chapter 5 presents stage one of the research (career professionals facing transition from football) and discusses the key findings from this stage of the study. Chapter 6 describes the methods adopted in stage two of the research, which looked at a group of footballers in two different career stages and different transitional circumstances (some facing transition from football and some within). Chapter 7 presents and discusses the findings of the analysis of the interviews with the career professionals. Chapter 8 presents and discusses the findings from the analysis of the interviews with the potential career professionals. Chapter 9 summarises the findings across both stages of the research and concludes with recommendations to those who have a responsibility towards professional footballers, including governing bodies, football clubs and indeed, the players themselves. Within this concluding chapter, I will also highlight the limitations

of the study and from this suggest future research for this area.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Career transition in Sport

In this section, in this chapter, I will initially cover the history and development of the area of career transition from sport, whilst drawing upon the main theories and models that have shaped this paradigm to date. Then following this, I will provide an overview of the important research carried out in terms of its connection to the current study. Finally, I will provide a clear rationale for the current research based on our existing understanding of career transition from sport.

2.1 History and development of the area

The concept of career transition has over recent decades become a topic which has received increased interest within the field of sport psychology (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee 2004; Stambulova, Stephan, & Japhag 2007; Lavallee, 2005; Warriner & Lavallee, 2008). The term Athletic Career (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007) is used to refer to an athlete's multiyear sport activity. Athletic Career termination is, according to Alfermann & Stambulova, (2007) the clearest example of a normative and even inevitable transition. Lavallee (2005) suggests that athletes consider themselves retired when they are no longer competing at the level they had once achieved. A non-normative transition is considered a transition that generally does not follow any type of plan or schedule but is the result of events that occur in an athlete's life to which she/he has to respond. These transitions can often be unpredicted and unanticipated. An example of a non-normative transition would be de-selection from a team or failing to qualify for a competition or having a change in coaches (Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavallee, 2004). One can see that irrespective of the type, a transition results from a change in circumstances that directly influences the individual's social, personal and sporting life (Wylleman et al., 2004).

However, when considering the retirement process of professional footballers in the United Kingdom, the transition from 'the game' is not always smooth or straight forward. The transition from professional football is an inevitable process (therefore seen as a normative transition) and it can sometimes happen at a time when the individual is not expecting it (therefore, also a non-normative transition), for example, when a player is released from professional football at his mid-career stage or even during the early stages of his career. Wylleman, et al., (2004) describe this process

as 'drop out', in which an athlete endures a premature or unplanned career termination at a developmentally atypical point in life and because of this, they fail to reach their potential as sportspeople.

Research within sport career transition has highlighted how, in some cases, the retiring athlete can suffer severe adjustment difficulties upon leaving elite-sport (e.g. Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; Baillie and Danish 1992; Crook and Robertson, 1991). These transitional difficulties are seen to be particularly problematic in athletes who have been forced to disengage due to non-normative factors such as injury or de-selection (Webb et al., 1998). The associated psychological difficulties reported by elite-athletes during involuntary retirement can include depression, eating disorders (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982), decreased self-confidence (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993), feelings of anger and/or anxiety (Alferman 2000) and substance abuse (Mihovilovic 1968; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982).

Some researchers have suggested that the onset of adjustment difficulties can be explained in terms of 'symbolic loss' (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Such loss can be experienced when the retiring athletes loses the sole focus of what has been their overall being for much of their lives including their physical proficiency (Lavallee & Robinson 2007), the adulation and worshiping from others (Adler & Adler 1989; Brown & Potrac, 2009), camaraderie with team-mates (Lally,2007), as well as the extreme 'highs' associated with elite-performance (Totterdell 1999).

Miller & Kerr (2002) identified that the process of transition out of elite sport in some cases can also lead to emotional and psychological difficulties upon career termination. Whilst this issue received little attention by the leading professional and governing bodies responsible for the well-being of elite athletes in the past (Gordon and Lavallee, 1995), interest in this area has increased in more recent years among sport psychology researchers (Lavallee, 2005). Murphy (1995) has highlighted how, initially, interest in this area was fueled by a notable increase in the number of elite athletes requiring the support of sport psychologists to assist them during their transition from sport. However, it is highlighted that for some athletes the transition out of sport is seen to be neither stressful nor a source of severe adjustment difficulties (Perna, Ahlgren and Zaichkowsky, 1999). In this regard, some critical summaries have seen retirement from sport not as a negative endpoint, but instead

as an opportunity for relief (Allison and Meyer 1988) and 'rebirth' for athletes (Coakley, 1983). Such ambiguity has led some authors to suggest that career transition from elite sport is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon (Lavallee, 2005). In this sense, a number of factors have been shown to influence the experiences of a wide range of athletes (e.g. collegiate, professional and elite athletes) during career transition in both negative and positive ways (Park, Lavallee and Todd, 2012). These include athletic identity (see chapter 3 for more information) (e.g. Warriner & Lavallee, 2008; Douglas and Carless, 2009), premature disengagement (e.g. Butt and Molnar 2009), sporting achievement (e.g. Albion, 2007), control of life (e.g. Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000) and relationship with coach (e.g. Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, Muscat 2010).

Whilst trying to address these complexities, several theoretical models have been employed within the area of retirement from sport over the years in an attempt to understand this phenomenon in more detail. Historically, comparisons have been made between the disengaged athlete and frameworks from within the areas of social gerontology (analysis of the aging process) and thanatology (analysis of the process of death and dying) (Lavallee 2000).

Social gerontology is concerned with the systematic analysis of the ageing process (Atchley, 1991). This theory consists of biological, social and psychological sub-divisions that look to explore the mutual interaction between society and ageing, in an attempt to explain the lives and activities of people who appear to grow older successfully. When considering the average age of the professional footballers in the current study being over 30 and the short life career of professional footballers per se, it is deemed important to highlight this field of research. In the past, several social gerontological models have been utilised to try to explain the process of sporting disengagement or career transition (e.g. Rosenberg 1981; Lerch, 1981; Ballie & Danish, 1992; Gordon, 1995). These models include activity theory, (Havighurst 1961); subculture theory, (Rose, 1965); continuity theory, (Atchley 1989, 1991); disengagement theory, (Cumming & Henry, 1962); social breakdown theory (Kuypers and Bengston 1973) and exchange theory, (Dowd, 1975).

According to Kuypers and Bergston (1973), social breakdown theory provides a detailed cycle associated with the process of social reorganisation after retirement.

This conceptualisation posits that an individual's sense of self, ability to mediate between self and society, and their orientation to personal mastery are functions of the kinds of social labelling we experience from our social world or culture. It proposes that elderly people are more susceptible to negative self-labelling (due to negative social labelling via the media), especially following the loss of their occupation and subsequent related roles. Such negative social evaluation can lead to isolation as one reduces involvement in activities due to feelings of uselessness and feelings of being obsolete. According to Rosenberg (1981), social breakdown theory is clearly applicable to the retirement process of elite athletes. She suggests that the disengaged athlete can be extremely vulnerable to social judgment when leaving their sport, which can lead to an adverse effect on how individuals redefine themselves thereafter. What is more, Edwards and Meier (1984) empirically correlated the theory of social breakdown with the retirement of professional hockey players in the United States. In addition, Lavallee and Wyelleman (2000) have suggested that athletes prior to retirement are able to move away from their sporting role, due to an awareness of skill deterioration and lack of congruence with their peers, and that this could lead some to experience negative self-evaluation. In relation to this, Ballie and Danish (1992) have recommended that athletes look to redefine themselves prior to the onset of sporting retirement. According to these authors, this can be achieved through a counselling process called 'social construction' where an athlete can be assisted in restoring and maintaining a positive self-image about themselves pre-retirement and, before the possibility of social breakdown occurring. However, it could be argued that for some professional athletes, (e.g. professional footballers), the need to redefine themselves prior to career transition comes at a significant time when a bigger commitment to their sporting role, or identity, is required in order for them to earn another contract. Therefore, it is proposed that some of the cultural requirements in most sports, which centre on the importance of productivity and sporting performance, may render it difficult for athletes to redefine themselves within their careers, despite a requirement to do so.

When considering the literature it is proposed research using social breakdown theory allows us to understand the ways in which athletes adjust to retirement and how the level of support and treatment that is provided prior to disengagement can

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influence this process. From this, it could be argued that we cannot ignore the role the sporting culture has on the experiences of athletes and how this in turn influences career transition. Indeed some authors have emphasised the importance of understanding the influence the sporting environment has on an athlete when trying to comprehend the sporting retirement process (e.g. Parker; 1996).

Like social gerontology (and its associated theories), the discipline of thanatology is interested in understanding what it is like for humans to experience a significant event or process in their lives. With a history in anthropology, psychology, sociology and theology, thanatology looks to understand the experience of going through the process of dying (Rosenberg, 1982). Drawing on this work, Lavallee (2000) has highlighted how parallels have been made between the process of retirement in sport and models of social death (Rosenberg, 1981; Lerch, 1981), social awareness (Gordon and Lavallee, 1995; Lerch, 1981) and stages of death (Baillie, 1993).

In her study with terminal hospital patients, Kubler-Ross (1969) suggested a series of stages that people go through when facing death. The stages of death proposed are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Whilst this original theory has faced criticism over the years, for example in terms of the prescription that people go through the stages chronologically (e.g. Kastenbaum, 2007), a number of theorists have utilised it as a means of understanding the process of retirement from elite sport (e.g. Lerch, 1981; Rosenberg, 1982; Baillie, 1993). For example, Blinde and Stratta's (1992) qualitative study demonstrated how the stages of death could document, in detail, the process of retirement for athletes who are experiencing involuntary (or non-normative) disengagement. The findings revealed that high school athletes in the United States who had been cut from the team, or whose sport programme had been suddenly eliminated, experienced trauma and disruption in their lives and, because of this, they frequently associated their feelings during career transition with the stages of death and dying, including trauma and disruption. Furthermore, when drawing upon Kerr's (1961) ideas on the stages of death and, in particular, the psychological adjustment that patients may have in terms of the perceived barriers of illness, loss or disability. Baillie, (1993) has suggested that this theory (and other thantological concepts) can be used 'flexibly' as a guide for understanding the different phases that retiring athletes go through. According to these authors, the barriers to athletic retirement can be seen as being

either 'complete', (where the athlete sees a return to sport as the only way of achieving normality), 'partial' (where new avenues to achieve previous goals need to be explored and developed) or 'non-existent' (which suggests a stage of denial or neurotic defence). However, criticism has been directed to the usefulness of this theory to athletic retirement because, according to Lavallee, & Wylleman (2000), it represents a normative view of the process of death or retirement from sport. Accordingly, a person does not necessarily go through the stages of death in the same manner because the process of dying, or sporting retirement, is regarded more as an 'individualistic' experience (Feigenberg, 1980). This has led some to argue models, like the stages of death, may not be generalisable to the experiences of the vast majority of retiring athletes (Gordon and Lavallee, 1995; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1998). Accordingly, some suggest that respective models in thanatology and social gerontology are unable to account for the complexities of career transition in sport and therefore other theoretical models should be considered in order to create a better 'empirical balance' (Crook & Robertson, 1991). However, Ballie (1993) posits that this theory offers only a 'useful window' into understanding the retirement of sports people, one which recognises individual differences in terms of the rate at which athletes adjust through the possible stages of retirement. Thus, it would seem that he was not trying to develop a 'generalisable' model but was merely offering an insight into how some athletes experience barriers to sporting retirement. In essence, it is felt that this theory should not be quickly disregarded as a method for understanding the experiences during post sporting life.

Over the years, other criticisms have been aimed at thantological and social gerontological theories and, with this, their applicability to understanding sporting disengagement. For example, some have questioned the ways in which this theory views retirement as a single event (Blinde and Greendorfer, 1985, Greendorfer and Blinde, 1995) and not a process. According to Lavallee & Wylleman (2000), whilst drawing upon the work of authors in other domains (e.g. economics, psychiatry and psychology) (e.g. Carp, 1972; Taylor 1972), over recent decades, retirement from sport has been regarded more of a transition than it is anything else. Because of this, a number of transitional frameworks have been utilised to try to explain the interaction between the retiring athlete and their disengagement from sport, for example, the human adaption to transition (e.g. Sussman, 1972) and the sociological

study of retirement (e.g. Schlossberg 1981).

Hill and Lowe (1974) were the first to propose that sporting retirement was a transition when they utilised the analytic model of the sociological study of retirement (Sussman, 1972) to this area. This theory puts forward that perceptions of retirement will be affected by several factors including: the individual's motives and goals; the situation surrounding a person's retirement (i.e. retirement planning, income, etc.); structural elements (i.e. social class and marital status); social factors (i.e. support of family and friends); and boundary constraints (i.e. economic cycles, employer attitudes, etc.) According to Hill and Lowe (1974), as in the work force environment, retirement from sport can have negative implications on athletes such as, lower income, the need to enter into a new environment (i.e. a working environment for most athletes) and the need to establish new skills and new roles. In essence, like the retired older individuals from non-sporting cultures, the retiring athlete can potentially face a crisis during disengagement due to not being prepared for a new career and or way of life. However, Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) and Sussman (1972) himself have criticised this model and its applicability to sport by suggesting that athletes have the ability to pre-plan for retirement due to an awareness that their sporting careers are short-lived. Nevertheless, it is argued that this could be seen as an idealistic argument, one that assumes that the majority of athletes pre-plan for retirement because of an ability to do so. What is more, research using this theory is very old and, since the study by Hill and Lowe (1974), the usefulness and application of this model to career transition has gone unquestioned over the proceeding decades.

One of the most frequently used transition theories in the sport retirement literature is the human adaption to transition (Charner and Schlossberg, 1986; Schlossberg, 1981). According to this model, three major factors interact during a transition, which take into account the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition, the perceptions of the particular transition and the characteristics of the pre-transition and post transition environments. From this theory, researchers have acknowledged that career transition in sport can be seen as diverse (Coakley, 1983); phenomenological in nature (Schlossberg, 1981); and of contextual importance (both in terms of the athletes pre and post transition environment). However, despite this some authors have argued that transition models like this one, because they lack

operational detail and the specific components of career transition from sport, have failed to provide a flexible and multi-dimensional approach needed to study the complexities of athletic retirement (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994). What is more, like the sociological model of retirement, research conducted using this theory is extremely old and, therefore, it is put forward that this model, and its application to career transition from sport, has gone relatively unquestioned over the last thirty years. However, researchers (Gordon and Lavallee 1995; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor, Ogilvie, 1994) have looked to develop what has been described as more 'comprehensive' models of adaptation to career transition from sport. In accordance, the Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Career Transition (CMACT, Taylor & Ogilvie 1994) is proposed to be a multidimensional, sport-specific model that highlights the individuality of the transition experience, including the potential for a number of influential mediating variables related to the sport-career transition of athletes. The model posits five developmental stages: 1) causes of career transition, 2) developmental experiences, 3) coping strategies, 4) quality of adaption to retirement and 5) interventions for retirement difficulties. The CMACT is considered by some as the first and only sport-specific model that considers the entire course of the career transition process of professional athletes, one that acknowledges both negative and positive factors (Alfermann & Stambulova 2007). The model suggests the quality of adaptation to career transition is influenced by the causes of retirement, the developmental factors associated with the process (e.g. social identity and athletic identity), the available resources available (such as coping procedures and social support) as well as providing suggestions of interventions aimed at helping athletes within career transition (e.g. cognitive, behavioural and psychosocial). However, I feel that in its development the CMACT has omitted (or not regarded) any influential factors that the athlete's pre-transition environment, or sporting lived-word, may have on their post-sporting experiences and subsequent adjustment. In essence, the model indicates that the 'process' of career transition begins once the athlete leaves their sporting-world and enters retirement with any important factors prior to this (e.g. influence of culture on the development of sporting identity) being somewhat disregarded or being attributed to the athlete (i.e. their attitudes towards coping and support). In terms of the latter point, it is proposed that attitudes towards coping and seeking support could be seen as being engrained within the identity of athletes via their experiences during their sporting careers and, in this sense, any potential

implications or factors associated with career transition can be seen to begin long before they enter the retirement process.

It is argued that the development of theoretical perspectives within this area of psychology has gone some way to improving our understanding of career transition in sport. For instance, through this extensive work, we are now able to identify some of the factors that are associated with the quality of career transition from sport and with this some of the available resources and interventions that can aid athletes during this process. However, despite these advantages, one may argue that through a quest to develop theoretical models which better explains the process of career transition, researchers may have somewhat neglected understanding the reasons why certain athletes experience this process in particular ways. Take for example, the conceptual model of adaption to career in sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), which identifies certain factors (i.e. identity issues, lack of control) which negatively and positively affect some athletes during career transition. However, whilst this can be seen as an informative tool, it is argued that as a framework it fails to highlight why such transitional problems manifest in the first place. In scientific terms, the current model and, to some extent, prior research, tells us a great deal about what the factors are associated with career transition but they do not tell us a great deal about why these factors are salient. Therefore, it is proposed that establishing future research that focuses on the latter point would allow us to develop a better insight into why some athletes suffer more problems during career transition than others.

A tendency to move away from a focus on understanding the factors influencing elite athletes experience of career transition and more towards understanding how athletes experience career transition is further evident when one considers the position of the 'intervention' section in Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model (currently, the main theoretical model in this area). Within this model, suggested interventions come after the factors that affect an athlete's quality of adjustment to career transition (i.e. factors associated with the adjustment process are highlighted prior to any suggestions of intervention). One could argue that this is a common theme within the literature on career transition in sport, where there seems to be a preoccupation with developing theoretical models which aim to identify the process and factors associated with career transition from sport, with little understanding of

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what lies behind the statistic.

2.2 Career transition in sport: an overview

In a systematic review of the literature on career transition in sport between 1968 and 2010, Park, Lavallee and Todd (2012) evaluated 126 studies that looked at the retirement process of athletes. This review covered a wide range of competitive levels of sport (e.g. club, non-professional, professional, elite, Olympic) with the majority being conducted on athletes in the United states (60 studies) and Europe (45 studies). The authors reported that 44% of the studies were concerned with exploring the psychosocial, emotional, social and physical consequences of retirement from sport, whilst the other studies investigated what variables influenced the quality of an athlete's career transition. Across all the studies, 84% of athletes experienced termination from their sport, whilst 16% of the total studies reported adjustment problems and difficulties for athletes during career transition. Furthermore, 68% of the studies reviewed reported that some, but not all, of their participants expressed career transition difficulties and negative emotions, including, feelings of loss, identity crisis and distress during their post-sport adjustment.

As part of this review, the authors identified 63 correlates from the studies that related to the quality of athlete's career transition. These variables were subsequently, reduced to 19 and, in turn categorised into two themes based on two existing models (Gordon and Lavallee, 1995; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994): (1) factors relating to the quality of career transition and (2) available resources during the career transition. The nineteen variables (and there correlation to career transition) were as followed. 1. Relating to the quality of transition: athletic identity, demographic issues, voluntariness of decision, injuries/health problems, career/personal development, sport career achievement, education status, financial status, self-perception, control of life, disengagement/drop out, time passed after retirement, relationship with coach, life changes and balance of life while competing. 2. Available resources during transition: coping strategies, pre-retirement planning, psychosocial support and support programme involvement. When considering the review, it is proposed that it provides an excellent resource and reference from which to explore the majority of the research that has been established in the area of career transition from sport over the years. However, one could argue that from this

it was clear that a focus on the factors associated within the transition process from sport was priority, with no real focus within the review and the literature on the pre-transition culture and experiences of athletes and the importance of such in terms of the process of sporting disengagement. In essence, the review and subsequent literature in the area of transition from sport can be seen as somewhat reactive (i.e. concerned with changing things in the immediacy of career transition), as opposed to being proactive (i.e. trying to positively influence the experiences of career transition by considering improving things prior to this process).

Nearly half of the studies, were developed using a qualitative approach (e.g. 55 qualitative, 56 quantitative and 15 combined), with most of these utilising individual interviews for data collection and a thematic analysis. In consideration of the latter, the authors suggest that future studies exploring career transition from sport should look to employ other qualitative perspectives, such as narrative analysis (e.g., Gearing, 1999) and interpretative phenomenology (e.g., Warriner and Lavallee, 2008).

When reviewing the literature on career transition from sport, several studies have been developed over recent years using alternative qualitative perspectives (other than thematic analysis), such as phenomenology (e.g. Coakley 2006; Warriner and Lavallee 2008; Archer 2010). These studies have been established with a combination of athletes, with two of the studies being carried out with female collegiate (e.g. Archer 2010) and Olympian athletes (Warriner and Lavallee, 2008), whilst the other explored the experiences of male (American) footballers within the United States (Coakley, 2006).

The findings from the study by Archer (2010) using transcendental phenomenology revealed that relationships, adjusting to a new self and being unprepared, were important factors for female collegiate athletes who were experiencing career transition. Transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas 1994) is a descriptive brand of phenomenology that encourages researchers to bracket out their own experiences, to enable them to combine the experiences of others with the contextual situation others find themselves in to form an essence of the phenomena under study. In his study, Archer utilised a number of data collection methods, including bi-weekly journals, interviews and participant-produced drawings.

Significantly, the findings revealed the importance of relationships in terms of assisting athletes within career transition from sport and the influence of contextual factors during this process. Furthermore, in his interpretive phenomenological research, Coakley (2006) highlighted how, despite feeling prepared for career transition, male former national footballer players in the United States experienced feeling inadequate around their ability to deal with retirement, which manifested in negative feelings on subjective well-being. The interpretive branch of phenomenology, unlike the descriptive form, acknowledges the researchers own position within the search for meaning or interpretation. It is argued that such research builds upon our existing understanding by providing an insight into the experiences of athletes within the United States. However, to develop our understanding in this area and some of the key issues which has been established in previous research (for example, relationships and negative feelings), a study looking into the lived experiences with athletes within the United Kingdom would be beneficial to acknowledge contextual and demographic differences.

To date one study has been carried out in the United Kingdom on female athletes utilising a phenomenological approach (e.g. Warriner and Lavallee 2008). Using the interpretive branch of phenomenology, the study revealed that six out of seven female international gymnasts in the United Kingdom (e.g. Olympic and Commonwealth standard) experienced adjustment difficulties during career transition. Predominantly, identity loss was most salient in the athletes experiences, with physical changes associated with retirement also providing a source of distress. What is more, career transition was seen to be more challenging due to a heavy investment in sport during adolescence, when the pursuit of an identity becomes a key issue for a person. Again, whilst this study helps to build upon our understanding in this area, it is argued that a phenomenological study within the United Kingdom exploring the lived experiences of sportsmen would serve to bridge the gap in terms of any contextual and gender differences.

It is put forward that previous research using a phenomenological methodology has given us a richer insight into career transition from sport by providing us with an understanding of the lifeworld of athletes during this process. Significantly, within the existing research there were reports of adjustment difficulties across all the athletes' experiences. Two of the studies carried out utilising this methodology were

established within team sports in the United States (e.g. Collegiate and American Football). In consideration of this, it is argued that further phenomenological research is required in order to develop a richer understanding of the lived experiences of athletes within a wider range of team sports and demographic locations. Moreover, the only other research conducted using a phenomenological approach was carried out in the United Kingdom, exploring the experiences of female athletes (e.g. Olympic and Commonwealth). In this sense, it could be argued that although such research provides an insight into the lived experiences of retirement from sport, the findings cannot be simply transferred to professional football. Therefore, it is proposed that a study that looks at male professional footballers in the United Kingdom would allow us to understand the lived experiences of disengagement within this context, whilst also considering any gendered aspects that maybe specific to this process.

2.2.1 Transition from professional football

Surprisingly to date, specific career transition research on professional footballers is limited. Significantly, other than a recent intervention study by (Lavallee 2005), research on career transition for professional footballers in the United Kingdom is scarce. In an extensive review of previous research on career transition in sport between 1950 and 1998 (Lavallee & Wylleman 2000), there was just one specific reference to a 'football study' (i.e. Mihovilovic, 1968). Similarly, a recent systematic review of research on career transition from sport (between 1968 to 2010) by Park, Lavallee and Todd, (2012), revealed that there had been no other research carried out on professional footballers over this period. The three-part study by Mihovilovic, (1968), on 44 male Yugoslavian footballers, using a combination of qualitative interviews and questionnaires, looked to explore the reasons for career transition, the reactions of peers and ways in which the effects of retirement could be eased. The key findings revealed that 95% of the footballers retired involuntarily due to the factors of injury, age, club conditions or being replaced by younger players. For 52% of the players, retirement came suddenly and this was highly correlated with illness, family issues and age. However, for the rest of the footballers the process of retirement was gradual. In this regard, Mihovilovic suggested that the reasons for the gradual transition were due to players wanting to hold on as long as they could and that the decision to accept retirement immediately was difficult for them to accept.

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What is more, significantly the participants indicated the importance of maintaining contact with their ex-sporting environment (i.e. recognition, employment and playing in tournaments) as a means of improving their transitional experiences.

In Lavallee's recent intervention study (2005), he assessed the efficacy of life development intervention on career transition adjustment in retired footballers. Drawing on previous research, Lavallee (2005) argued that the implementation of life development intervention could be one way of assisting footballers in developing essential life skills that are deemed necessary for a successful post-career transition. Lavallee (2005) recruited two groups for his study both of which contained recently retired professional footballers that had played for premiership teams in England and Scotland. The intervention group consisted of individuals whose careers had terminated between 2000 and 2003, and who had been self referred to the author for psychological support, whilst the control group received no support over a 4-month period after retirement. The results indicated that the pursuit of football excellence, for some players, could be developed at the expense of essential life skills needed to overcome the challenges of career transition. Because of this, professional footballers were seen to have difficulties adjusting during career transition because essential skills, at that time, were not available to them. Yet through the implementation of life development, the footballers in this study were seen to develop sufficient skills to navigate through career transition. However, whilst this research tells us a lot about what could be done for professional footballers after their careers have ended, it does not tell us much about why and how professional footballers pursue a sporting identity at the expense of essential life skills. Furthermore, it does not tell us about how this sporting identity is developed and lived within the culture of professional football and how this, in turn, serves to influence professional footballers' experiences negatively during career transition.

When considering the research on career transition using a phenomenological methodology it is proposed that further research needs to be developed to build upon our existing understanding of the lifeworld of athletes during exit from sport. In particular, an exploration of the career transition experiences of sportsmen within the United Kingdom using a phenomenological approach would be a first study of its kind. What is more it is also apparent that more consideration should be given to the sporting cultural context and what this can tell us about athletes' experiences during

career transition.

Indeed, historically Ball (1976), Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) and Parker (1996) have all highlighted how the transitional experiences from sport should be seen as highly influenced by the specific sport culture and institutional context from which the retiring athlete is leaving. Despite this, over the years little attention has been given to understanding the influence that the pre-transition environment, or lifeworld of sport, may have on the transitional experiences of athletes during retirement. In addition, it is highlighted that only a limited amount of research has been carried out on the experiences of professional footballers during career transition.

In consideration, it is put forward that there is a requirement for researchers within this field to begin focusing more on the experiences of athletes during career transition from sport, whilst also acknowledging how the sporting culture could have shaped their retirement experiences. By focusing on these issues, it is felt that a more 'athlete-aware' understanding of career transition can be established, one which moves away from a focus on the factors associated with career transition from sport and, thus, shifts more towards understanding personal experiences of the athlete during disengagement. Through this process, it is believed that more focused sporting interventions can be established to help assist athletes during career transition, ones which consider any requirements that are specific to the sporting cultures that athletes are involved in and leaving.

With this in mind, it could be argued that at this time there is an over dominance of research on career transition which focuses on specific athletes exiting specific sporting cultures. This is quite clearly apparent in the large number of studies that have been carried out involving certain athletes, e.g. former collegiate student-athletes (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Adler & Adler, 1989, 1991; Carr & Bauman, 1996; Murphy, Petipas & Brewer, 1996; Lally, 2007), and former elite-gymnasts (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavallee & Robinson 2007, Warriner & Lavallee 2008). However, despite the advantages of such studies (e.g. understanding the influence of athletic identity on career transition from certain sports), it is argued that they fail to provide an understanding of the diversity of athletic experience outside the parameters of these specific sporting cultures. Whilst it is acknowledged that, the existing field of work has helped to provide a broad understanding of sport-career transition, as a

whole it could fail to focus on why athletes, in specific sports, experience career transition in the ways that they do. For example, the experienced world of an English professional footballer can be seen as being in some ways different to that of a collegiate athlete in the United States of America. Indeed, during the transition into professional sport, a collegiate athlete is fully integrated into a dual educational and sporting system (i.e. combination of full time education programme and full time sports development programme) compared to the English footballer who is exposed to a predominant sporting development programme (i.e. only one day a week for education). Further differences are proposed when comparing the career transitional experiences of Olympic athletes with professional footballers. For example, when an Olympian faces the transition from sport it is typical that they will not compete again at elite-level, however, this is not always the case for the English professional footballer. The majority of elite-footballers in England, when exiting the professional game, choose to take the transition into semi-professional football. When playing at non-league level, ex-professional players still have the opportunity of being 'talent spotted' by professional clubs and, in some cases, ex-players earn the opportunity to compete again at professional level. Therefore, the transition from the game for a professional footballer does not always spell the end and an immediate letting go of their sporting career (Mihovilovic, 1968). Unlike the typical retired Olympian athlete who can put closure on their sporting career upon career-transition, the professional footballer in some cases still maintains ' the dream' of playing again at elite-level long after the opportunity of such has diminished. Lerch (1981) somewhat alludes to the difficulty of 'letting go' when he proposes that, a number of athletes attempt to cling on to their athletic status, long after their sporting skills have deteriorated. Furthermore, Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) provides additional support to this view when he disputes the applicability of activity theory (which posits a total cessation of work upon retirement) to career transition because according to him not all athletes upon disengagement experience 'total retirement' from their sport. With this in mind, one has to consider how such 'clinging on' could affect the footballer in transition, especially if they continue to maintain their sporting identity long after their careers have ended.

However despite these differences, which could be deemed unique to each sport, there still seems to be an over preponderance of research within sport-transition

research which focuses on specific athletes (e.g. Olympic and Collegiate athletes) as well as within specific cultures (e.g. United States) (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). In this regard, Grove, Lavallee and Gordon (1997) have argued that career transition research has often made generalisations across a number of athletes and, thus, has not presented information about how to individualise approaches. With this in mind, it is felt that there is a necessity to begin to focus and develop our understanding of career transition within the relevant boundaries of each specific sport and, thus, culture. In doing so, it is hoped we can move away from trying to over prescribe this phenomenon and instead begin to focus more explicitly on the contextual influence of each sport and thus, what this can tell us about the experiences of athletes during career transition.

Chapter 3: Literature review: Sporting Identities

The following chapter will provide an overview into the existing literature on sporting identities whilst at the same time incorporating literature within the area of masculinities. In doing so, it will provide an overview of the important research that has been done in these two areas and with this highlight how they link in with the current research. Finally, I will provide a clear rationale for this study based on our existing understanding in these areas, including a reminding summary of the career transition from sport literature and the aims and objectives of the current research.

3.1 Sporting Identities

Due to the high-level demands placed on athletes, it has been recognised that the sporting elite are required to sacrifice a significant amount of time and resources in the pursuit of sporting success (Hughes & Coakley, 1991, Brown and Potrac, 2009). A study by Parker (2000) proposes how in the pursuit of their 'dreams', young professional footballers dedicate the majority of their time to sporting practice and are implicitly encouraged to do so regardless of the consequences. What is more, Miller and Kerr (2002) propose that a relentless pursuit of sporting elitism can serve to prevent or deny athletes the opportunity from which to engage in a wide range of developmental tasks across their lifespan, including those deemed necessary for developing a mature and well-rounded identity.

According to Lally (2007), identity is considered as a multidimensional view of oneself that is both enduring and dynamic. In accordance, athletic identity as proposed by Brewer, Van Ralte and Linder (1993) refers to the degree to which an individual identifies with their role as an athlete, that is how strongly an athlete associate themselves with their role as an athlete and how they want to be seen by others in terms of this. What is more, according to a quantitative study by Nasco and Webb (2006), athletic identity can be split into two dimensions, consisting of a private and public sphere. In their research on a 1000 non-athletes/recreational athletes, collegiate athletes and retired athletes in the US, the authors validated a short psychometric test that looked at the public and private aspects of the athletic role and their influence on behaviour. According to the authors, an athlete's private identity refers to the 'degree in which an athlete describes themselves as an athlete

owing to the internalisation of the athletic role', like for example how an individual thinks and feels as an athlete (p 438). Whereas in contrast, public athletic identity refers to 'the degree in which an athlete describes themselves as an athlete owing to the external rewards associated with being an athlete', like for example prescribing to the athletic role because of the attention being a sportsperson brings from others (p 438). Whilst considering current research, it could be argued that capturing a more deeper insight into how the public and private aspects of sporting identity is experienced by athletes would add to our understanding within this field.

Previously, Brewer et al (1993) has suggested that there are both positive and negative outcomes associated with forging a dominant athletic identity that can serve to act as either a 'Hercules muscle' or an 'Achilles heel'. From their qualitative research on high school athletes in the USA, the authors showed that student athletes (693 undergraduate students-athletes and 90 college American football players) who predominantly identified with their athletic role were more likely to attach significant value to their sporting successes, failures and feedback. As part of their research a measure of athletic identity was introduced (the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, or AIMS) which was seen to be a reliable and valid measure of athletic identity. From the research, the benefits of a positive athletic identity included the development of a salient self-identity or sense of self, positive effects on elite sporting performance and an increased likelihood of sport adherence, or commitment to the sporting role in the long-term. Conversely, athletes with a strong athletic identity are less likely to explore other developmental areas due to their sole commitment and involvement in sport and are, therefore, more prone to role-related difficulties during career transition (Adler & Adler, 1991; Good, Brewer, Petipas, Van Raalte & Mahar, 1993, Wiechman & Williams 1997, Douglas and Carless 2009, Muscat 2010). Thus, such a predominant affiliation to a dominant athletic identity can arguably lead to emotional disturbances for the athlete upon sporting disengagement.

Some have suggested that problems with identity during career transition can be associated to that of 'identity narrowing' (Lally, 2007), when an individual concentrates solely on one exclusive identity dimension at the cost of or exploration of other age appropriate roles. Drawing upon previous work by Wiechman and Williams (1997), Lally (2007) proposes that this type of extreme identity may result in

identity foreclosure when the athletic aspect of the self dominates all other aspects and, thereby, hinders the development of a multi-dimensional self-concept. The author also proposes that such athletic problems can also be linked to Goffman's (1961) concept of 'total institutions' and, in particular, his views on 'the mortification of self'. According to Goffman (1961), the concept of self has more room to define itself within the relatively stable social arrangements prior to entering a 'total institution' like professional sport. However, it is proposed that upon entry the self becomes 'mortified' as it is stripped of its connection to the outside world and is, thus, given up to be defined by the social arrangements of the institution which it resides in.

In addition, Adler & Adler's (1989) well recognised study revealed how college basketball players in the United States became engulfed in their athletic identity as they were seduced by the celebrity and fame that their athletic selves attracted as members of major college basketball teams. This 'glorified self' dominated the players' identities at the expense of investment in other identity dimensions including their academic and social selves. Subsequently, upon retirement the over dominance of their athletic role precluded the multidimensionality of the players' identities and with this their ability to successfully transition from the role of the athlete to other roles.

However, despite such claims, not all research supports the notion that athletic retirement evokes adjustment difficulties in the disengaged athlete terms of their identity. Indeed, some have argued that athletic retirement is one of many life transitions and, in essence, should be seen as no more detrimental to the self as other lifetime events (Alison & Meyer, 1988; Baillie & Danish, 1992, Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). In accordance, Perna, Ahlgren and Zaichzowsky (1999), in their study on collegiate athletes in the United States (i.e. 33 non-student athletes and 43 student athletes upon graduation from an American University), propose that athletes did not require any type of adjustment period following sporting disengagement. However, it could be argued that smooth transition in these athletes could have been due to the fact that these athletes were leaving an educational fraternity at a young age and could, therefore, have been better prepared for the transition out of sport than, for example, the professional sportsperson (whose life had been dedicated more to their sporting role). In addition Webb, Nasco, Riley and

Headrick (1998) found no correlation between retirement and overall life satisfaction in retired athletes (93 former student-athletes, 45 women and 48 men) which suggests that athletes in their study found ways of redefining themselves and their goals following retirement. Of these athletes 43% ended their careers during high school, 52.7% either during or just after college and 5.3% retired from professional sport. However, again, it could be argued that a high percentage of these athletes retired during or just after they were part of an educational institution and that this could go some way to helping them redefine themselves and their goals after retirement. What is more, just because career transition is considered to be one of many life-transitions, from this it is not fair to propose that this process will therefore be unproblematic for the retiring athlete. What is more, it could be argued that the research highlighted above is dated and therefore the findings of such may not represent the current state of affairs in terms of career transition and athletic identity, which is somewhat corroborated within recent research (see below).

In addition, Perna, Zaichkowsky, and Bocknek (1996) quantitative study found no differences when comparing athletes and non-athletes on measures of psychosocial development and career planning at the time of graduation when variables such as age, race, and socio economic status were controlled. This study of 33 non-athlete students and 43 athlete students at an American University highlighted that athletes were able to envisage their future selves as much as their non-athletic peers. However, it could be argued that the reason why there was no apparent difference may have been due to similarities of experiences because all the athletes were leaving an educational fraternity. In other words, unlike professional athletes, these athletes, like the non-athletes were leaving an educational culture that as part of its curriculum would have focused on the consideration of future plans and, thus, future selves. Such findings have led some to suggest that the concept of retirement as a traumatic event for athletes subscribing to a dominant athletic identity could be overly prescribed within the literature (Lally, 2007). However, in a recent systematic view of career transition literature between 1968 and 2010, over a quarter of the 126 studies reviewed were dedicated to the topic of athletic identity (Park, Lavallee and Todd 2010). This not only shows the importance of this topic in the field but the review also revealed that of the 35 studies that looked at athletic identity, 97% reported a negative correlation between a strong athletic identity and the adjustment

to life after sport.

Brown & Hartley (1998) have previously proposed that contradictions within the literature may be due in large part to the use of inappropriate methods, such as questionnaires, amongst researchers interested in the role of athletic identity during career transition. Subsequently, Brown, Glastetter-Fender and Shelton (2000) have criticised the inability of paper and pencil assessments to provide 'a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional and complex aspects of career and identity development processes' (p.60). Therefore, some scholars have recommended that complex entities, such as athletic identity should be explored in more depth using qualitative methodologies (Brown et al., 2000; Luzzo, 1995; Neyer, 1994). In relation to this, over the last forty years, there has been twice as many studies carried out on athletic identity and career transition using used qualitative methods (or 18 studies) in comparison to research utilising quantitative methods (9 studies). Therefore, we can see that there has been a growing recognition in the field of the usefulness of qualitative methods when studying this issue with half of the 18 studies over this period carried out within the last two decades.

It is highlighted (e.g. Park, Lavallee and Todd, 2012) that within the existing literature it has been common practice for researchers to explore athletic identity at a single-time event post-disengagement. However, Lally (2007) argues that despite popularity this type of process may fail to capture the 'dynamic character of identity or the transitional nature of retirement' (pg. 87). In an attempt to overcome such methodological problems, Lally (2007) incorporated a longitudinal design during her study on collegiate-athletes and this enabled her to explore athletic identity across three crucial transitional stages prior to disengagement, one month after the onset of 'retirement' and one year post 'retirement'. Through this process, Lally highlighted that collegiate-athletes committed themselves strongly to their athletic goals and anticipated interrupted identities upon 'retirement'. It was proposed that collegiate-athletes employed several coping strategies that included the proactive diminishment of their athletic role prior to retirement, where the athletes moved away from investing predominantly in their sporting identity. From this Lally proposed that by decreasing the prominence of their athletic identity prior to disengagement collegiate athletes preclude identity crisis or confusion upon and after athletic 'retirement'. However, the reason some student-athletes do not require any adjustment period

(Perna et al 1996; Webb et al 1998; Perna et al 1999), could be due to the fact that the educational circumstances they find themselves in render them the opportunity to plan ahead. In other words being immersed in an educational context, which considers the development of a broader range of skills away from sport, may give specific athletes the opportunity to consider alternative identity development prior to the onset of career transition. In this sense, it could be deemed inappropriate to generalise such views across all sporting contexts as not all athletes have the opportunity to decrease the prominence of their athletic identity and broaden their sense of self prior to sporting disengagement. For example, the majority of players within professional football in the United Kingdom prior to the onset of disengagement will find themselves in a position where their professional contract is at the point of cessation. Significantly, during this period professional footballers will be working extremely hard to maintain their employment status and earn a new professional contract. Therefore, it may not be appropriate for a professional footballer to begin actively diminishing their athletic identity at a time when it is critically required for them to make a good impression on potential employers.

When we consider the literature, it is clear that the sporting culture in which the athlete resides is recognised as playing an essential role in the development of athletic identity. Therefore, it is proposed that the influence of specific cultures should not be ignored when trying to understand how an athlete makes sense of themselves and their immediate experiences, whether this is within their sporting career or thereafter. The need to identify with the role of the athlete in elite-sport is recognised by both the athlete and sporting culture as a necessary determent for sporting success (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Indeed Parker (1996) has likened the culture of male professional football to that of a 'total institution' as proposed by Goffman (1961). Within the 'institution' of professional football (Parker, 1996), players are required to develop a cultural identity which displays high levels of sporting commitment (Brown & Potrac, 2009), a 'positive attitude' towards the game (Roderick 2006), hyper-masculine characteristics (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006) and 'impression management' (Goffman 1959).

When considering the culture of professional football, drawing upon his ethnographic study on 'Youth Footballers' in England, Parker (1996) suggests that 'impression management' is seen as a powerful form of social control within professional football

as it forces players to conform to the expectations of others (e.g. teammates, coaches and managers). What is more, according to Roderick's (2006) sociological study (using an interactionist approach), failure to comply with these cultural expectations is 'tantamount to admitting' that as a professional footballer you have a 'bad attitude' that can often lead to players being 'stigmatised' within their institution. However, it is argued that whilst these sociological studies offer an understanding of the cultural dynamics of professional football in terms of the expectations placed upon players, it doesn't give us insight into how these cultural aspects are lived and experienced by professional footballers.

In his study, on the identity of young English professional footballers (and its relevance to career transition), Roderick (2006) talks of a 'working class shop-floor culture' in which 'players begin to adopt, deliberately or unconsciously, the mannerisms, attitudes and behaviours that they perceive amongst the senior players at their clubs or which their managers and coaches reinforce' (p.43). From this, it is argued that the development of a footballer's sporting identity is crucially influenced by the sporting culture in which they find themselves (Roderick, 2006). In accordance, McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) in their qualitative study on Scottish footballers, used an epistemological position of Bordieu to study 26 players in three different career stages: young professional (16-18 years old), established professionals (19-25 old) and senior professionals (26+). The findings revealed how a footballer's identity, one which is wholly dependent upon the practical labour of professional football (for example, physical and practical sporting accomplishments); can become extremely fragile upon disengagement from sport. Therefore, it could be argued that such research highlights how the cultural identity that profession footballers are required to adhere to and pursue can come at a cost to them during retirement and this is something that warrants further exploration in the field. However, it could be argued that whilst this work has provided an insight into how identity is formulated in professional football in Scotland (through a sociological lens). A study that adopts a phenomenological approach and looks at the lived experiences of professional footballers in England around identity would shed further light on this. Therefore, it is proposed that further research in this area, in particular on professional footballers who are in a later stage of their careers (e.g. towards the end of their careers), could shed further light on this area of career transition within

professional football.

Surprisingly to date psychological research, specifically on athletic identity and career transition within the context of professional football in the United Kingdom, is minimal. Therefore, when attempting to comprehend athletic identity during disengagement from professional football, our understanding has to be based on theoretical perspectives that for the most part have been developed on individuals from outside this culture, like for example collegiate athletes from within the United States. However, Potrac and Brown (2009), in their qualitative study (using an interpretive biography approach) on four young male academy footballers in the United Kingdom whose careers had prematurely ended due to deselection, showed that the development of a strong athletic identity contributed to negative and emotional disturbances during disengagement from sport. The authors proposed that young athletes who take initial steps towards a professional career are more likely, than athletes outside of professional sport, to forge an exclusive athletic identity as sport becomes not only a central pre-occupation for a young athlete but also for the significant others in their life. The need for research on sporting identity, according to Brown & Potrac (2009), is particularly strong in the world of professional football in the United Kingdom, where, despite spending approximately half of their life developing in their sporting environment, the failure rate of elite youth players competing for professional contracts is over 85% (Professional Footballers Association). Therefore, it is proposed that the majority of players who work towards a professional career in football in the United Kingdom can do at a cost in terms of identity development. Therefore, for the main share of professional footballers they will not make it in the game and, thus, require the sporting identity for which they have relentlessly pursued.

The study's findings showed that all of the players developed a strong athletic identity during their development in the Academy and this led to them experiencing varying levels of adjustment difficulties during disengagement. These included feelings of loss, uncertainty, failure and disorientation. During career transition, the issue of loss of identity, or identity crisis, is something reportedly experienced by athletes in other sports aside from professional football (e.g. female gymnasts) Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; and professional rugby union, McKenna and Thomas (2007). However, for Brown & Potrac (2009) the emotional disturbances for the professional

footballers could be attributed to the fact that from such a young age the players had been encouraged and felt the need to develop a 'one-dimensional identity', one which was solely focused on sporting excellence. Furthermore, the footballers in their study also highlighted that since disengagement they had received little in the way of social support from the clubs to which they had dedicated a large part of their developing lives. Such significant levels of disregard produced feelings of anger and betrayal in the ex-players that, thus, served to heighten the psychological difficulties already associated with their experiences.

However, despite its findings it is argued that Brown & Potrac's (2009) study is limited in respect to its understanding of athletic identity outside the parameters of youth football. It was highlighted that during their years in the scholarship programme, English Academy footballers (Brown & Potrac 2009), like collegiate-athletes in the United States (Lally, 2007), are required to undertake an educational programme alongside their sporting programme. As such, professional football clubs work in conjunction with the Football League Education (LFE) organisation with a direct aim to promote and enhance educational and vocational training for apprentice footballers. Therefore, apprentice players are required to take adequate courses during their academy life to ensure that they are somewhat prepared for life after football. With this in mind, it is suggested that it could be more difficult for a senior player to establish a second career pathway, upon retirement, than it is for a young 17-year-old Academy player with recent educational and career training. A professional footballer's career offers many examples of what Spilerman (1977) refers to as 'career-line vulnerability to ageing' (p 559)' Indeed Roderick (2006), suggests that football is a type of employment that is highly contingent on sporting identity which can leave professional players with limited transferable skills, alternative occupational choices or methods of alternative income upon retirement. Therefore, it is argued that more research is needed on the role of athletic identity during disengagement from the senior ranks of professional football in an attempt to address any identity issues associated with such age related problems. What is more, research carried out on professional footballers who are at the end of their careers would also help us to address any identity issues associated with this age group of players during career transition.

Over the last few years, research has been carried out with professional footballers

that look at the influence of identity on career transition. For example, Roderick (2014) has researched the effects of 'job loss' on two career professional footballers using a biographical approach, (using two contrasting biographical case studies), and put forward the concept of dis-identification and the notion that some players are able to distance themselves from the dominant rhetoric and cultural prescriptions within the culture of professional football around athletic identity. In this sense, some professional footballers can become 'cynical athletes' who on the one hand can act as autonomous agents but at the same time perform managerial norms and rituals. What is more, a recent quantitative study explored identity formation in elite-level 'Academy' professional footballers in the United Kingdom (e.g. Mitchell, Nesti and Richardson, 2014). Again, give us a valuable insight into how the pre-transition environment can serve to shape professional footballers sporting identity. However, whilst this research gives us an indication of the prevalence of athletic identity in football, little is known, to date, about how the identity of professional footballers are lived and how this is experienced both during and after the career of a professional footballer.

3.2 Sport and Masculinity

The reason for including the area of masculinity within the literature review of the current study was because issues around this concept were apparent within the experiences of some of the professional footballers across the stages of the research.

According to Connell (1987), masculinity is defined as a social construction around what it means to be a man in a certain time and place. In accordance, hegemonic masculinity can be characterised by attributes such as striving for power and dominance, aggressiveness, courage, independency, efficiency, rationality competitiveness, success, activity, control and invulnerability, not perceiving or admitting anxiety, problems and burdens and withstanding danger, difficulties and threats (Moller-Leimkuhler, 2003). Connell (1987) developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a direct challenge to a traditional gender ideology that talked of a 'true masculinity'- a fixed and stable characteristic of the male body. From this perspective, hegemonic masculinity can be constructed in relation to and in opposition to femininity and subordinated males and is largely categorised by notions

of heterosexuality, power, authority and natural aggression. However, Connell (1993) posits that, in reality, only 10% of men are able to negotiate identity consistent with a hegemonic version of masculinity.

According to Wellard (2002) the world of sport is still seen as a 'natural arena' for boys and men to show off their manly capabilities through the process of athletic performance. When talking of an arena, one would naturally think of sport as a stage on which men show off their bodily prowess through such capabilities as strength, power, endurance and refined skill. However, the male body in sport is not solely used as a tool with which to perform sporting excellence, it is also used as a way to reaffirm masculine characteristics. Such characteristics are shown by the male-athlete on the 'field of play' through outward displays of aggression and power and are also performed 'off the field' through displays of sporting discourse, kudos, camaraderie, homophobia and sexism. The need to portray such performances is seen to be especially prevalent in the world of mainstream professional sport, like for example professional football, where it would seem that the pursuit of success is highly dependent upon players subscribing to an institution which is steeped in hyper-masculine expectations (Parker 2001, Roderick 2006). A discussion of this research and its findings in terms of athletic identity in professional football will be provided later in this section.

For Messner (1995) sport is regarded as a 'gendered institution', a male socially constructed institution, formed as a direct reaction to a 'crisis of gender relations' in the late nineteenth century (Pg.34). Within this context of 'crisis' and in response to a threatened masculinity, organised sport was seen to became an important strategy for gender politics and a referendum which aimed to establish male superiority or patriarchy where ..Messner (1989, 1997), suggests that this masculine response was brought on by the rise of feminism threatening gender politics and with this a widespread fear that boys and men were becoming 'feminised'. Thus, in an attempt to reaffirm patriarchy and the gender order, sport was a means of validating masculinity through the outward display of, amongst other things, physical strength and prowess.

Connell (1983) suggests that, in terms of developing male identity, men can learn their masculinity directly through the ways in which men project their bodies through

a physical presence and latent power. Previously, Featherstone and Turner (1995) have highlighted the importance of embodiment and the body as central issues in the humanities and the social sciences. What is more, embodiment has also been considered by researchers when attempting to understand the experiences of professional athletes during sporting disengagement.

What is more Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have identified sport as a process through which hegemonic masculinities are embodied via sporting practices, like showing strength, as well as relationships with other men. The focus on embodiment has been considered by researchers when attempting to understand the experiences of professional athletes during sporting disengagement. Indeed, Sparkes and Smith (2002) in their study on former professional rugby players provide vivid examples of how the body-self relationship impacts upon sportsmen once their professional playing days are over. The participants in the study were four former professional rugby players who had all experienced a spinal cord injury whilst playing and now defined themselves as disabled. The study illustrated how the body-self relationship went from 'an absent presence' in the lives of these men to something that was 'other, problematic or alien' (Sparkes and Smith, 2002). This transformation, according to the authors, 'instigated anxieties' associated with the 'combined loss of specific masculine and athletic identities' that was formerly 'at the apex' of the individuals 'identity hierarchy'. Therefore, from this perspective it would seem that some sportsmen are highly dependent on maintaining their sporting masculine role and, thus, sporting identity as a means of validating their overall sense of self.

However, it should be noted that there has been much criticism directed at Connells (1987) original theory, especially with the way that it conceptualises masculinity as hegemonic (Messner and Sabo, 1990; McKay, Messner and Sabo 2000; Mangan, 2000). However, despite criticism this concept is still used predominantly as a way of understanding masculinity across a number of disciplines (Connell, 2005). In recent work Connell (2005), identified the existence of multiple masculinities across a number of different social settings, cultures and social classes. Indeed, Messner (1992) proposes that within sport there can be multiplicity of masculinities that are significantly influenced by amongst other things social-class, race and sexual orientation. Furthermore, Messner (1995) also proposed how the choice for the individual to pursue an athletic career or not is very much 'determined by the

available means' from which 'to construct a respected masculine identity'. Messner's (1995) research in American sport with white middle class men, showed that athletes were more likely to reject athletic careers and shift their masculine efforts towards education or non-sport careers, than working class athletes. Conversely, men from 'poor and blue-collar', backgrounds (especially 'black' Americans) often perceived athletic careers as the best opportunity for occupational success. These subjective examples according to Messner (1995) suggest that: 'sport is not a smoothly functioning, seamless institution nor is masculinity a monolithic category' (Pg. 152).

In terms of research within professional football in the United Kingdom, Parker (1996) has suggested that sporting practice researchers need to acknowledge the construction of differing masculine identities in accordance with the diverse cultural values that are in place at any time in history. Regarding the cultural values of professional football, (Parker, 2001) believes that it would be both 'inappropriate' and 'inaccurate' to talk of a highly gendered institution that is represented by a singular monolithic form of masculinity. Instead, Parker (2001) states that:

> 'professional football clubs (like a host of other sub-cultural settings) should be viewed as institutions which exhibit a dominant or hegemonic masculine form beneath which a hierarchy of alternative subordinate masculinities continually challenge and contest this pre-eminent position' (pg. 60)

In an attempt to understand the construction of masculinity in trainee (now termed Academy) players within the context of professional football, Parker (2001) interviewed twenty male professional players between the ages of 16-19 using an ethnographic method. In his study, Parker (2001) found that hegemonic requirements at the football club were defined in terms of an 'explicit institutional logic' that incorporated 'notions of personal integrity, conscientiousness, discipline and the development of a healthy 'professional attitude'. Accordingly, as long as players progressed sufficiently in terms of sporting ability and as long as they adhered to the stipulated social norms and values of the club that were steeped in hegemonic masculine requirements, then trainees 'stood a reasonable chance' of gaining professional status (Parker 2001).

In support of Parkers work, Roderick (2006) suggests that professional players see masculine requirements in professional football, such as playing with pain and injury,

as 'routine work practice'. What is more, research on 'playing hurt' in sport suggests that male sport is an institution where masculine identities are constructed and reconstructed (Curry 1993; Messner 1995), where the need to be seen to carry on despite injuries is important. In the context of professional football, it is argued that playing on with injury and pain is an important aspect of professional footballers' masculine identities because it is considered by coaches and managers as a demonstration of a 'good professional attitude' (Roderick, 2006). Conversely, those who are not prepared to play on with injuries and pain are often stigmatised as not having the right attitude for the game (Messner 1995; Roderick 2006). What is more, a study by Murphy and Waddington (2007) looking at exploitation within the academy system of professional football in the United Kingdom, argues that young players are, at times, verbally abused and stigmatised by others to ensure masculine ideals are pursued. Furthermore, Bardsley (2006) argues that a professional footballers way of being within the context of professional football is 'invariably associated with physical performance and (hyper) masculinised masculinities rather than with academic achievement' (Pg. 374). McGillivary and McIntosh (2006) suggest that this is due in large to the professional football world placing higher value on embodied competence as opposed to the 'cultural capital' associated with formal education. What is more, in a recent phenomenological study Turner, Barlow and Heathcote-Elliot (2002) on ex-professional footballers in the UK living with osteoarthritis, revealed how players were socialised within the culture of football into accepting pain and injury as integral part of their world.

According to Galdas, Cheater and Marshall (2005) proposed traditional masculine behaviour could be attributed to delays in seeking help among men who experience illness, or injury. According to Addis and colleagues, the lack of help seeking amongst men is a direct product of masculine gender-role socialisation and social constructionism (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Bertakis, Azari, Helms, Callahan, & Robbins 2000). This is because some of the tasks associated with help seeking- like for example, relying on others, admitting a need for help, or recognising and labelling an emotional problem- is in sharp contrast to the messages men receive about the importance of self-reliance, physical toughness and emotional control (Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). What is more, O'Neil, Helms and Gabel (1996) put forward the theory of gender role conflict as a means of explaining how gender roles can have

negative consequences on people. In terms of masculine roles, O'Neil (2008) has argued that problems can ensue in men, due to restrictive emotionality, where the gender socialisation of some men does not allow them to develop emotional maturity and with this ability to process and express emotions healthily. The off shot of this, according to O'Neil (2008) is that men, like male professional footballers, often struggle to ask or seek professional help and talk about their emotions, where necessary.

When reviewing the existing literature, it would seem success in professional football is dependent on players' conforming to institutional social norms and values. What is more these require footballers to develop an identity that amongst other things, prescribes to a hegemonic masculinity script. When considering prior research, (i.e. Messner 1995, Connell 2005) contests that men generally have the opportunity to display a multitude of masculinities depending upon the features of their social location- e.g. class, ethnicity, sexuality. Therefore, not all men are subject to one 'hegemonic masculinity', for example, middle class men are expected to show decisiveness and strength of character compared to the working class man who is expected to show strength and aggressiveness. Therefore, it could be argued that professional footballers may be restricted when it comes to masculinity due to the constraints and requirements within their sporting culture. Indeed as Roderick (2006) points out, the attitudes and values of players' reflect the informal cultural norms of professional football which emphasise the values of 'masculinity, active participation and victory'. In essence, failure to conform to the institutional values of professional football can significantly threaten the career prospects of a professional footballer but would, at the same, time allow for the development of a different and broader identity.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the pursuit of football stardom could be established to the detriment of the long-term welfare of the individual. In accordance, Messner (1995) proposed that men's athletic careers are 'not entirely positive' experiences bringing attention to the 'the cost of masculinity' and how, as boys, the athletes in his study became attracted to sport, initially, as a means to connect with male significant others. However, significantly as these young males became committed to their athletic careers their identities became increasingly tied to the continuation of public success and a relationship with 'the crowd'. Significantly, at the

same time these young athletes' actual relationships with other people 'tended to become distorted' as others were increasingly seen as '(male) objects to be defeated or (female) objects to be manipulated and sexually conquered'. From this Messner (1995) argued that the 'socially learned means through which' the athletes 'constructed their identities (public achievement within competitive hierarchies) did not deliver what was most craved and needed: intimate connection and unity with other people' (Pg. 152).

Furthermore, Monk (2000) and Parker (2002) suggest that in relation to professional football, the pursuit of stardom can leave some players unprepared for career change and 'bereft' of transferable skills and qualifications necessary to secure employment in other labour markets. Failure to plan for a future outside 'the game' is quite surprising considering the current figures from the Scottish Professional Football Association which states that only one out of 160 professional players will never need to work again after their football careers have ended. However, despite such an apparent fragile 'labour market' it would seem that male professional footballers continue to make significant sacrifices to pursue their sporting identity and dreams of a career within the game (McGillivary & McIntosh, 2006).

However, despite the possibility of long-term issues surrounding the need to conform to masculine requirements within the context of male professional football, limited research has been carried out in the area of psychology. Currently a small amount of research (e.g. Parker, 1996; Monk, 2000; Burdsey, 2006; Roderick 2006; McGillivary & McIntosh, 2006) concentrates on the construction of masculinity within career of professional footballers (Parker, 1996; 2002; Monk, 2000; Roderick 2006; McGillivary & McIntosh, 2006) as well as, predominantly within the context of Youth Academy football (Parker, 1996, 2001; Monk, 2000; McGillivary & McIntosh, 2006, Mitchell et al. 2014). However, it should be noted that Roderick (2006) did interview 10 retired players during his study, although his focus was predominantly on the within-career experiences and did not touch upon the ex-players' experiences in relation to disengagement. It could be argued that despite the important implications of these findings it is felt that they do not give us insight into how professional footballers construct or reconstruct their masculine identities after their sporting careers have ended.

When summarising the literature on sporting identity and masculinities, it is put forward that existing knowledge has allowed us to build upon our understanding in this area. However, it is put forward that there is a need to improve our existing knowledge by looking to understand sporting identities during disengagement and how these are lived at the crucial time of career transition. What is more, as pointed out in the previous chapter on career transition, there is in particular a need to build upon our understanding in this area by considering a wider range of sporting contexts and methodologies. It is felt that a study that looks, specifically, into the lived-experiences of male professional footballers during career transition should be established. Therefore, in an attempt to address these gaps in the research in this area, the current study will look to explore the transitional experiences of professional footballers before and during the onset of sport-career transition, using a phenomenological methodology. Therefore, the aims of the research are:

- To establish an understanding of what it is like to be a male professional footballer during career transition.

- Based on the findings, to make recommendations to improve the transition experiences of male professional footballer.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The following chapter will provide an overview of the methodological and philosophical perspectives that underpin the research. In addition to this, it will briefly introduce the participants involved in both stages of the research, as well as cover the ethical considerations and data collection procedures across the study.

4.1. Epistemology

In order to explore the research question, I chose to utilise a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and the ways things appear to us through our experiences or consciousness. Within this field, there are two main branches of phenomenology, one concerned with description (Husserl, 1936) and the other with interpretation (Heidegger, 1927). *Intentionality* was for Husserl (1936, 1970) the key feature of human consciousness, where the mind is directed towards objects of study and where, in essence, knowledge of reality begins. It is through the process of phenomenological reduction where the description of particular realties can be established, where one comes face-to-face with the ultimate structures of consciousness or pure essence of human phenomena. According to Husserl, we are able to reach the 'essence' of experience by carrying out certain deliberations including the need to bracket out our outer world as well as our natural attitude. The *epoché* is a Greek word that was used by Husserl (1967) to describe bracketing, the process through which we look to identify our presuppositions and seek to eliminate any preconceived ideas about particular phenomena under investigation. It is because of *epoche* that, Husserl argues, we are able to see the pure character of consciousness through means of careful description.

Conversely, Heidegger argues that one's background, or situatedness in the world, produces a historicality of understanding. In this regard, our prior-history presents ways of understanding (Langdridge, 2007) and it is through this understanding that we determine what it is to know. Because of this, Heidegger argues that our background cannot be truly disregarded. Indeed, Munhall (1989) proposes that Heidegger's phenomenology views people and their world as indissolubly related in cultural, social and historical context.

Phenomenology is seen to take an existential turn via Heidegger. However, like

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology before it, Heidegger's focus remained with the human life world; but the way in which he views lived experience was different. Whereas Husserl's phenomenology focuses more on understanding being and phenomena, Heidegger's phenomenology is more concerned with *dasien* or 'the situated meaning of the human world' (Langdridge, 2007). Heidegger proposes that it is because of our situatedness in the world, why, that as human beings, we are unable to move beyond understanding because we are always in the process of such. Thus, we can never have something before us, in front of us in its pure essence, just as it is- which in part is what Husserl was advocating through his method of *epoche*. It is due in large to this impossibility- of seeing an object free of our prior understanding- which led Heidegger to claim that inevitably we are always working as interpreters alongside our preconceptions and fore-understandings.

According to Heidegger (1927, 1962) every human encounter involves an interpretation, an interpretation that in turn is influenced by our background or historicality. At this point phenomenology moved away from the epistemological basis of Husserl's earlier work- where intentional acts are seen to be individual- to a more ontological view of human consciousness. In doing so, Heidegger takes the original idea of intentionality-from a theory of knowing, where we are always conscious of something- to a theory of being- where consciousness is not something interior but instead a projection from oneself.

According to Heidegger, a *dasien* can only project from a limited horizon or from the perspective from which they are currently situated within the world. Thus, through interpretation, we do not acquire knowledge but instead we work out of the possibilities of knowledge, something that is projected and reflected upon and through which new understanding is developed (Heidegger, 1927/1985). It is via hermeneutics, according to Heidegger, where we find a horizon, or position to project from. It is from this horizon that we are able to develop a new understanding via our prior understanding and through a reflection on the acquirement of new knowledge or experience.

The word hermeneutics derives from the Greek language and refers to an explanation or translation (Crotty, Willis and Neville, 1996). The notion of hermeneutics first arose primarily within religion and predominantly within the

Christian tradition. This notion became well known in the Western world during the protestant reformation, when people began to question interpretation and their personal relationship with the Bible. As Protestantism took hold, hermeneutics grew rapidly and a need to interpret meaning was seen to expand into the area of law. It was towards the end of the Eighteenth Century and the emergence of Romanticism, that hermeneutics and an interest in interpretation began to come to the fore in the arts and sciences. Romanticism gave rise to a 'cult of genius' within literature, where art and literature was seen to arise from the extraordinary insight of the author. Due to this people were no longer preoccupied with evaluating literature and instead began to seek an understanding of it, interpretatively, via the genius (or author) of its production.

When used within the context of hermeneutic phenomenology, hermeneutics still remains true to its philosophical roots and refers to the interpretation of meaning through text (Kearney, 1996). It is via interpretation that new and plausible meaning is constructed, where one moves beyond just mere description of a phenomenon. The hermeneutic process, therefore, involves a movement between the parts and the detail or between the projection of meaning and anticipation of understanding. According to Gadamer (2004), we form new interpretation through what he terms the hermeneutic circle. The idea of the hermeneutic circle was carried through in the work of Heidegger and others before him (e.g. Schleiermacher, 1768-1834; Dilthey 1833-1911). However, the work of Gadamer brought the hermeneutic circle to the fore of philosophical hermeneutics.

The hermeneutic circle at the starting point consists of our being in the world, our background and fore-understandings. Gadamer (2004) refers to these fore-understandings as prejudices. However, in doing so, he attempts to distance the word from its vulgar roots from the time of the enlightenment period, where it was primarily considered as a negative concept and as something synonymous with false judgement. Instead, Gadamer reinterpreted the term prejudice to refer to our prior-judgement and, therefore, casting it in a more positive light and, as an inevitable aspect of human understanding. In this sense, Gadamer aligns himself with the philosophical perspective of Heidegger and in particular the rejection of the Husserlian technique of bracketing and with this phenomenological reduction. Indeed, Gadamer argues that to attempt to eliminate one's own conceptions from the

process of interpretation is not only impossible but also virtually impossible. Instead, Gadamer argues that our prejudices are seen to be an advantage in the hermeneutic process because it allows us to understand that which is different or new.

Gadamer (2004) proposes that interpretation is not something that happens independently but, instead, constitutes a coming to an understanding with others in what is termed a hermeneutic dialogue. This dialogue occurs via the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter. It is through this process that our own prejudices are brought into question and it is because of this that understanding occurs through the negotiation between one's own horizon and that of another's. Therefore, the hermeneutic dialogue aims to come to an agreement about the issue at hand and this coming together is coined as establishing a 'fusion of horizons'. Thus, whenever a hermeneutic dialogue is entered into there is always an opportunity to reflect on our pre-understanding, or prejudices, and this is where the possibility of new understanding occurs. It is this new understanding which represents the interpretative account within the hermeneutic circle (please see diagram 1.1 for an illustration of how the hermeneutic circle was used within the research).

The study utilised the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle as a fundamental part of its analytical process. The reason for choosing this interpretive strand of phenomenology ahead of the descriptive one was due mainly to my position within the research as a former professional footballer. In this sense, the research developed its analysis and interpretation through the process of projecting from my own horizon and understanding of the phenomena, via a fusion, and thus interpretation, of the players' horizon, as this enabled me to establish a new horizon or understanding of the lived experiences of professional footballers during career transition.

The projection: the
forwarding arc represents the
opening up of understanding
by exploring the lived

Fusion of horizons: the
returning arc allows
interpretation of my own
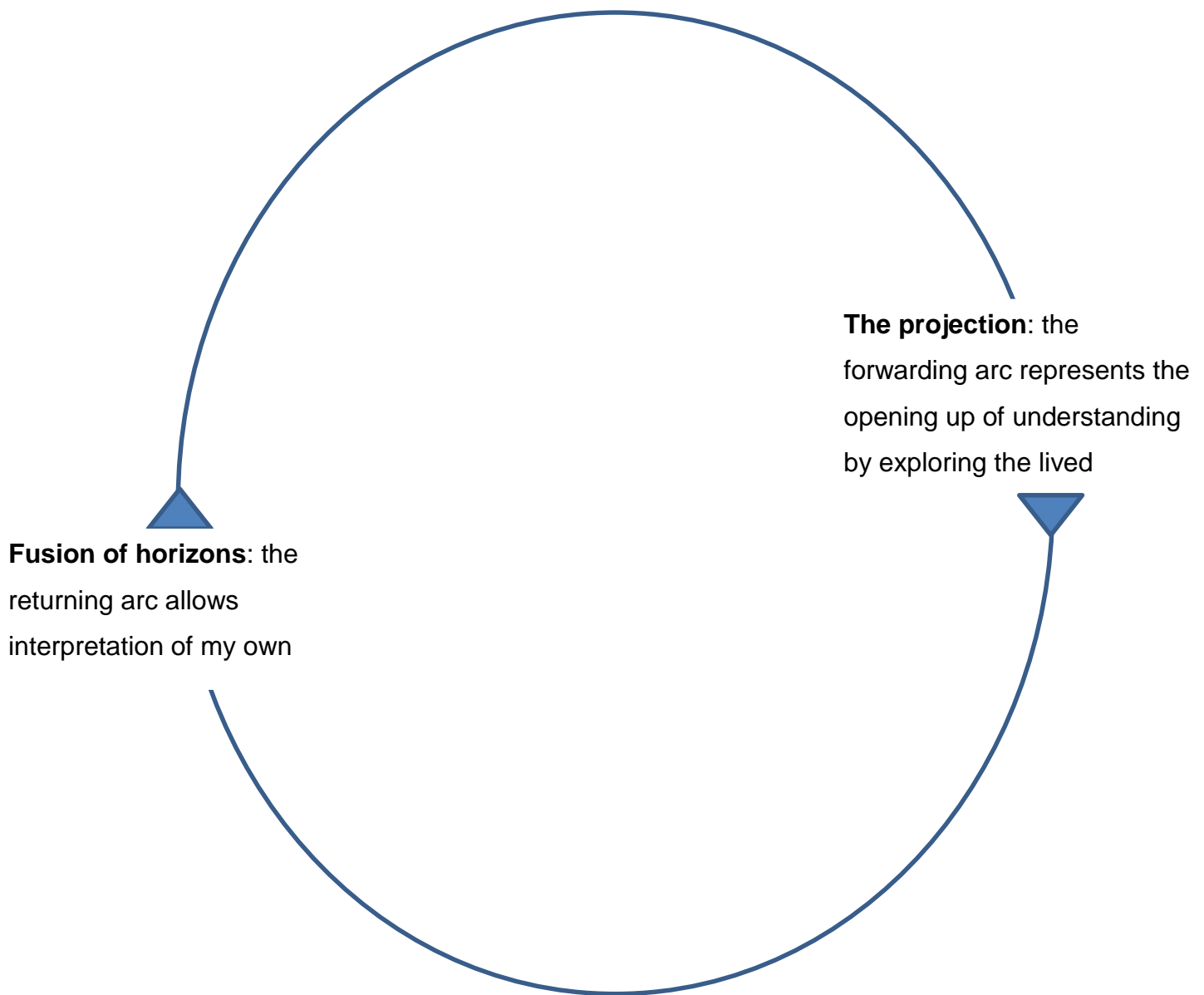
Diagram 1.1. The hermeneutic circle within the context of the study

4.2 Methodology

The current research adopted a qualitative approach, with a main focus on exploring
the lived world of professional footballers during the period of career transition. In the
following section, I will provide a rationale for the study's choice of methodologies
and subsequent research methods.

According to Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2007), those who choose to adopt a

qualitative approach within social research do so due to an interest in understanding meaning. In this sense, a piece of qualitative research looks to explore how people make sense of and experience the world that they live in. Through this understanding, there is a concern with quality and texture of human experience and the meanings that individuals themselves attribute to a given situation (Smith, 2007). As the primary researcher and as a former professional footballer, the use of a qualitative methodology is seen to fall in line with my own philosophical position and research aims, and in particular, a desire to understand the essence of what it means to experience career transition for professional footballers. In doing so, I rejected a positivistic approach to research and with this a concern with trying to establish 'universal' truths. Whilst the use of quantitative methodology would have allowed me to develop measurable and comparable data at the 'surface' level, this would not have enabled me to capture a more 'in-depth' understanding of the professional footballers' lived-experiences during transition.

4.2.1 Methods of Data Analysis

There are several methodological strategies within the phenomenological paradigm that can be utilised when adopting a hermeneutic approach. The most common approaches are Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborn 2011) and hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). In the first stage of the research, the study analysed the data using IPA. However, in stage two of the research, the study utilised the method of van Manen (1990). A rationale for the shift from IPA to van Manens phenomenology will be provided within the following section.

4.2.1.1 Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA)

According to Langdridge (2007), IPA is one of the leading approaches of phenomenology in the United Kingdom and is a widely adopted approach within qualitative research (e.g. Roncaglia, 2006; Lally, 2007; Warriner and Lavallee, 2008). IPA is a hermeneutic approach to phenomenology where there is less focus on description and where more attention is given to interpretation and engagement with cognitive and social psychological literature.

In stage one of the study, the research on career professionals facing the possibility

of career transition IPA was adopted. Focus groups are not commonly associated with IPA analysis as this method is sometimes seen as compromising the individualistic focus of phenomenology and the concern to understand personal experience. However, Smith (2004) has argued that collective discussions, such as focus groups, can be legitimately used as a means of generating data for IPA analysis. IPA allowed for a rich interpretation of the professional footballers experiences during career transition to be established (Brownrigg, Burr, Locke and Bridger, 2012).

However, during stage one analysis, it was apparent from the findings that the footballers lived world within transition revealed important issues around, amongst other things, their relationships with themselves and others as well as experiences within their present, current and future time. It was upon consideration of these findings, that it was deemed necessary to explore the lived-experiences of the players further, in order to bring to light the lived world of the professional footballers during career transition more. Because of this, I decided to revisit the method of data analysis in order to identify and utilise a methodology that would allow for a more in-depth interpretation to be established. Therefore, it was decided that during stage two of the research, Van Manen's branch of phenomenology was adopted and with this an emphasis on the lifeworld existentials. Over the process of the study and as I read more about phenomenology and methods of analysis, particular van Manen, I felt that this was more appropriate for the research (which I will explain below). What is more, because van Manen and IPA are based on the same broad principles, considering stage 1 and stage 2 findings as a coherent data set was not seen as a problem.

4.2.1.2 Van Manen's phenomenology and the life-world existentials

Van Manen's four lifeworld existentials of temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body) and sociality (lived relationship to others) are considered to be an integral part of the hermeneutic circle, (van Manen, 1990). According to van Manen (1990), these existentials are especially helpful as they allow us to gain a richer insight into the lifeworld of a particular population. These existentials illustrate a fusion of the objectivist hermeneutic circle (part-whole) and the alethic hermeneutic circle (pre-understanding) as well as acknowledging the

experience of a phenomenon in a whole experience and, also, the researcher's role within the research process (Dowling, 2007). The objectivist part of the hermeneutic circle emphasises that part of the text can only be understood, or considered, as part of the whole. The word 'objectivist' was devised, as it was understood that there was a certain objectivity or personal detachment to the hermeneutics process. However, whilst the natural sciences would argue that they could explain theories by facts and, thus, take a total objective stance, in contrast the social sciences and, indeed hermeneutics, are marked by a means of interpretation (which acknowledges the fusion of both the objective and subjective spheres of human understanding). Therefore, the alethic part of the hermeneutic circle represents our preunderstanding and understanding: it recognises our being in the world as meaning makers. In this sense, we can never be totally objective when developing new understanding because as human beings we always bring our historicity to the interpretive process. This approach therefore allowed me, as an insider, to both distance myself from as well as magnify the players' lived experiences, or the 'things themselves' (where intentionality was implicated and my being in the world recognised). Van Manen's approach enabled me to acknowledge my own relationship with the phenomena and this was seen as something of importance, not only during the evolution of the research, but also as part of its interpretive process.

Additionally, in comparison to other approaches, van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology is guided more by the relationship between the researcher and the text. Van Manen (1997) talks of phenomenology being 'discovery orientated', and 'pre-suppositionless', and, therefore, warns researchers against constructing a set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern a project (pg.29). In this sense, his approach moves away from a mechanical application of coding in an attempt to develop new understanding and instead recognises the important role the analyst plays in the co-construction of meaning. Therefore, the researcher is encouraged to form a strong relation with the phenomena of study and to, thus, enter into a personal dialogue with the text. It was felt that due to my position within the research as a former professional footballer, van Manen's ideas concerning the relationship between the researcher and the data was ideal. Because of my prior experiences in football, I already have a strong relationship with the phenomena under study and this was seen as something that also served to enhance the

research process. Therefore, my own experiences of difficulties as a professional footballer allowed the lived-experiences of the sporting chance players to emerge clearer, where my prior understanding helped to illuminate the interpretive process. What is more, my prior understanding of the culture of professional football served to help in the development of the interview schedule and during its process, where I was able to draw upon my own experiences and thus, allow these to fuse with the players' experiences of career transition. My prior understanding of the culture also allowed me to acknowledge the sensitivity of some of the issues discussed and this enabled me to phrase questions, and prompts, in a way that encouraged the players to elucidate their experiences further. During the interviews, I was able to draw upon my own experiences and thus, allow these to fuse with the players' experiences of career transition. In this sense, my prior understanding allowed me to reflect, privately, on my own experiences, whilst the players were discussing their experiences. This enabled me to note differences and resonances, and subsequent prompting and probing was informed via this reflection. During the analysis of the interviews (across all stages), my own experiences of difficulties as a professional footballer allowed the traumatic and problematic lived-experiences of the players to emerge more clearly, without being muddied by other issues.

Van Manen's (1990) approach to data analysis is less prescriptive and more heuristic; it is a guide to practice rather than a set of rules governing method. In sharing Gadamer's (2008) sceptism of methods, van Manen proposes that whilst we need to operationalise philosophy, we also need to avoid setting out rules for analysts. Instead, researchers are encouraged to adopt a creative engagement with method in order to prevent the possibility of foreclosure of understanding. The flexibility of van Manen's approach, compared with other interpretive phenomenological methodologies (like IPA), was particularly appealing in the light of the additional focus of the study in terms of wanting to explore the life-world of the players more deeply.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is, according to van Manen, a dynamic interplay between six research activities:

- Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world:

- Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it;

- Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;

- Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

- Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon; and

- Balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole.

These activities enable researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of meaning in human lived experience.

When approaching textual data, van Manen (1997) proposes three techniques that should be adopted when developing interpretive themes:

- In the holistic approach, we attend to the text as a whole and ask '*What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?'* We may then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.

- In the selective reading approach, we listen to or read the text several times and ask '*What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomena or experience being described?'* The statements we then circle, underline or highlight.

- In the detailed reading approach, we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask '*What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?'*

Accordingly, van Manen (1990) encourages researchers to apply the appropriate approaches that are deemed necessary for any given social scientific enquiry. Therefore, I utilised all the six research activities and techniques that are recommended by van Manen in his phenomenological approach. Fundamentally, I maintained an interpretive stance and drew upon the four lifeworld existentials to illuminate the meaning of the lived experiences. The existentials can be used as a guide for reflection (as part of the process of interpretation) and subsequently during phenomenological writing. Please note, a detailed summary of the analysis during

stage two of the research, including how the methodology was utilised, will be provided within chapter five.

I chose not to distil the collective experiences into an essential statement. There were commonalities across experiences however, I felt that I may have risked an over interpretation on my own part to provide this stage of analysis. My own experiences were very close to many of the interviewed participants. The distillation of themes to an essential statement moves the analysis into the descriptive paradigm and I found it difficult to engage in a moving away from what essentially would have been my own being to distil the experience. The players' each had rich stories to tell and this furthered my decision to try not to find in their talk and their shared themes, issues that I could say was essentially the story for all – all experiences are unique in the game and I felt to do justice to the voices of those included in this research, I needed to explore such and constantly acknowledge my own and each individual's Being in the study.

4.3 Ethics

The University of Huddersfield's Ethical Board approved all the stages of the study, prior to any communication with the supporting organisations and players. Consideration was given throughout the research design and process, to the ethical guidelines proposed by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) for research studies in the social sciences. The ethical considerations that are specific to each stage of the study will be provided within their relevant chapters, however when considering the collection and interpretation of the data, the following issues were considered to have ethical implications for the research.

In a small number of cases, the interviews with participants were short with some lasting 30-40 minutes. Short interviews can raise questions around the effectiveness of the interview process, the quality of the data and therefore the extent to which participants' experiences and views are properly represented. For instance, there has been criticism raised within qualitative research (Silverman, 2013) around how short interviews, may not facilitate important factors such as building relationships, trust and rapport. However, despite the shortness of some of the interviews within the present research, the data collected was deemed rich in meaning, including some players talking about very sensitive, personal issues within their lived

experiences. Therefore, this suggests that the interviews provided adequate opportunity for professional footballers to express their lived-experiences not only safely, but also in depth. Furthermore, it was apparent that my insider status facilitated good rapport with the professional footballers from the very start, which meant that little probing was required during the interview process, and the players felt able to open up freely about their experiences. In addition, some researchers (Silverman, 2013) have recommended follow-up interviews to ensure that rapport and trust are established. However, when considering the difficulties experienced, throughout the research, in terms of trying to access professional footballers and get them to come forward to talk (during the recruitment process), as well as the richness of the data that was gathered, follow up interviews were not considered.

Member checking was not adopted in the present research. Seeking feedback from participants or people from a similar population is often regarded as a useful method of ensuring credibility in the interpretation of data in qualitative research (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, whilst such feedback can serve to increase confidence in the interpretation of participants' experiences, member checking can also be problematic. Previous writers (e.g. Emmerson and Pollner, 1988; Bryman 2003; Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller and Neumann, 2011) have highlighted methodological and ethical difficulties with member checking. For example, participants' experiences since the interview may mean that it is difficult for them to connect with their previously reported experiences, or they may misunderstand the material, perhaps through its presentation in social-scientific language. Member checking may demand excessive commitment from participants, something I was concerned about in my research, and recruitment difficulties meant it was very unlikely I would be able to access further participants for this purpose.

Finally, a number of writers (e.g. Smith 2007, Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2007) have highlighted the importance of establishing a reflexive diary during qualitative research. In this regard, throughout the research process, I kept a reflexive diary that recorded my own developing experiences, interpretations and understanding over the life span of the study. This diary served to inform the evolution of my insider perspective (See Chapter 1) and the reflective nature of my lived experiences as a developing researcher and insider both during the analysis and thus, the co-construction of meaning (See Chapter 9).

4.4 Data collection

The following section will provide information of the data collection methods for both stages of the research.

4.4.1 Stage 1: Focus group interviews

The data collection method within stage one of the research was carried out by way of focus group interviews. This first stage of the research was necessarily exploratory in nature as the aim was to find out what kinds of issues were important in the experiences of professional footballers within career transition.

Therefore, the use of focus groups enabled the current study to facilitate a population connected in terms of their lived experiences and lived-world, in this case professional footballers during career transition, which allowed for data to be obtained which tapped into the players personal lived-experiences.. Focus groups are well suited to exploring sensitive topics, like for example, career transition from professional football because the group context can encourage personal disclosure (Frith, 2000). It was felt that this method helped generate rich data of the professional footballers' experiences during career transition by allowing the players to identify with one and other common experiences and, at the same time, prompting them to disclose their own experiences.

4.4.2 Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews

The majority of interviews in stage two of the research were conducted using face-to-face interviews. Semi-structured interviews have been utilised within social research and have been a common method for data collection when studying career transition within elite sport (e.g. Carless and Douglas 2009, Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000) and within professional football (e.g. Roderick, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were seen as an appropriate method of data collection, when exploring the lived experiences of professional footballers during career transition, as this process allowed rich data to be developed by allowing the players the freedom to express their own views.

Three interviews in stage two of the analysis were carried out on-line within a private chat room. The decision to conduct the interviews on-line was taken due to the

geographical location of some of the players making it difficult to access them to carry out face-to-face interviews.

4.5 Participants information/background and recruitment

When considering the scale of the recruitment drive as well as the range of circumstances that the participants in the study found themselves in, for clarity, a brief summary of these areas in relation to each stage of analysis will be provided below. Whereas, a more detailed overview of each recruitment process and participant group will be provided within the relevant chapters. Over the duration of the thesis, in terms of career stages, two sets of professional footballers were recruited, namely those within the academy process and those players who had been full-time professionals. For clarity, throughout the thesis I will refer to the academy players as 'potential career professionals' and the full-time professional as 'career professionals'.

4.5.1 Stage one

The recruitment drive for the focus group was established via the PFA and was undertaken during their annual transition programme that aims to support and advise professional footballers during career transition. The participants who took part in these interviews consisted of professional footballers in differing situations, some who were just out of contract and facing the possibility of career transition and some who had been in retirement for over 12 months.

4.5.2 Stage two

When building upon the procedure, design and findings of the study in stage one, it was decided that this stage of the research should focus on current players (both potential and career professionals) who were facing the possibility of career transition as well as former professionals (who had experienced difficulties during transition) who had been in transition for a while.

Access to the former professional players, who had experienced difficulties during career transition, was established via a personal friend at Sporting Chance Clinic. These players had been in the process of career transition for over two years and were attending the clinic to access support and help for addictive behaviours.

Whereas the career professional players, who had not attended Sporting Chance, were accessed via a personal friend at the PFA and were, at the time, still playing within the game. These specific players were facing the possibility of career transition at the end of the season, because their current contracts were ending. Again, for the purpose of clarity, I will refer to this sub-group of career professional players in the thesis as 'Sporting Chance players' and 'Within Career players'.

The potential career professionals were recruited via a personal friend at the LFE and were, at the time, facing the possibility of career transition. In this regard, like the career professionals, all the players' contracts were expiring at the end of that current season.

Chapter 5: Stage One: The Focus Group study

The following chapter will introduce stage one of the research and highlight how the study developed including the phenomenological analysis and interpretation. It will also highlight the key findings from the lived-experiences of two groups of professional footballers (career professionals), which consisted of players who were facing the possibility of career transition as well as two who had been in this process for a short time. In addition, whilst drawing upon existing literature it will demonstrate ways in which this research builds upon our understanding of this area of psychology and, in particular, the lived world of professional footballers during career transition. What is more, as a short exploratory study, this stage of the analysis served to inform the on-going development of the research.

5.1 Method

The following section will highlight the methods that were utilised in the development of stage one of the research.

5.1.1 Sampling and Recruitment

The study used a purposive sampling strategy which is often utilised in idiographic research when the study is seeking to recruit individuals who share the experience being investigated (Langdridge, 2007). To meet the main criteria of the study it was decided that would aim to recruit professional footballers who were, at the time of the interviews, experiencing either the possibility of career transition or within career transition. Therefore, if a professional footballer was out of contract and thus unattached from a football club, then they would be classed as being within the experience of career transition. What is more, if a player was still under contract but their current contracts were coming to an end (and not being renewed), yet they were still pursuing a career in the game, they were classed as facing the possibility of career transition. The majority of the players recruited for the focus group were, at the time, facing the possibility of career transition while the remainder of the players had been in this process for a short period. In this sense, I was able to capture the lifeworld of professional footballers within different situations and, in particular, what it was like to experience the immediacy (or possibility) and early stages of career transition.

The participants were accessed via the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), the players' union for professional football in the United Kingdom. Consent was obtained, via a personal contact at the PFA, to approach a group of professional footballers who were attending the organisation's annual 'Making the Transition' programme. This programme aims to help professional footballers during career transition by helping them to plan for and develop second career pathways. Annually, the PFA programme targets professional footballers whose contracts are ending and who are potentially leaving the game as well as players who are in career transition. As part of the PFA's recruitment plan, that year, over 150 emails were sent out to professional footballers inviting them to take part in the programme and from this, only a small fraction attended. In consideration, it is assumed that the population that took part in the programme and the study were of a minority of professional footballers who were willing to address and discuss their experiences around career transition. I will discuss the possible implications of this within the findings later on in the chapter.

All the players met the criteria of the study because they were currently 'unattached' to a professional football team at the time and, therefore, experiencing career transition. However, the majority of the players were at the time still hoping to get an offer of a contract from a professional club. In total, all nine players that attended the programme were approached via my contact at the PFA as these players met the criteria of the study. All the players were given information packs (see Appendix 1.1) that informed them of the nature of the study and their potential role within it. A consent form was included in the information pack and of the nine players that were invited eight agreed to participate.

5.1.2 Participants

The participants were all former professional footballers between the ages of 29-39, who had over a decade of experience and had played between 100 and 400+ games. What is more, Andrew and Tim had represented their country at international level on several occasions. At the time of the interviews, the majority of the participants (Tim, Chris, Noel, Rich, Liam and Alex) were in the early stages of career transition, having been unattached from their last club only a few months previously. The other two (John and Andrew) had been out of the professional game

for over a year and had, therefore, been experiencing career transition for some time.

In cooperation with and in line with the agenda of the PFA programme, each player was allocated a particular group depending upon their obligations on the day. Due to this, FG1 took place in the morning and was constituted of players who had commitments (one-to-one sessions to develop CV's and second career interests) in the afternoon. FG2 took place in the afternoon and constituted of those players who had programme commitments in the morning.

FG1 consisted of Chris (37), Andrew (37), John (37), Rich (29), Alex (35) and Ian (age). Ian was a current employee of the PFA, and he participated in both focus group discussions. It was agreed that Ian would be involved in both groups so that he could monitor the players' responses, something that would assist him in his role at the PFA, as well as contribute to the discussions as an ex-professional footballer. In terms of ethical consideration, the players agreed that Ian could sit in the interviews and, as a counsellor and former footballer it was felt that this would be beneficial in terms of his input and supporting skills. In addition, Andrew had been out of the professional game for one year and was thus, within career transition and considering a second career pathway.

Focus group two (FG2) consisted of Liam (36), Noel (34), Tim (39) and Ian. All participants were in the same situation as the majority of players in focus group one (i.e. facing the possibility of career transition), except for Tim who had been in career transition for one year.

5.1.3 Development of the topic guide

A topic guide for the interview was devised (see appendix 2.1.1), by considering prior research in the area of career transition, which focused on understanding issues such as sporting identity, support and pre-planning for retirement. In addition, the topic guide was influenced by my own experiences as a professional footballer whilst at the same time reflecting on my understanding of the current research on career transition. What is more, the structure of focus group interviews allows for the exploration of other issues that are important to the participant to be established. Therefore, whilst the above issues were anticipated to be important to professional

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footballers during career transition, I also gave space for further important issues to be discussed.

5.1.4 Procedure

The interviews took place on the final day of the PFA programme, with the first focus group (FG1) interview taking place in the morning and the second (FG2) in the afternoon. The players were approached by myself the night before the interviews and were offered an information pack. In total, eight players approached me the following morning with their signed consent forms and therefore agreed to partake in the research. Both interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and were between 40mins and 1 hour in duration. At the start of each interview the players were asked to introduce themselves, as it was felt that this would be a good way of getting the players to feel comfortable within the group. What is more, as the facilitator of both interviews I was mindful of players who were not participating as much as others and, therefore, I could draw them out with appropriate questions where necessary. What is more, at the beginning and the end of the interviews the player were briefed and debriefed.

5.1.5 Ethical Issues

During all the stages of the recruitment and data collection, the ethical guidelines of the BPS (2010) were followed. Thus, each player gave informed consent to participate in the research and all were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without reason. Because of the players' situation (i.e. facing career transition), a counsellor from the PFA (Ian) was present to assist and support any player who may have become distressed during the interviews. What is more, all the players were briefed prior to the interview regarding the nature of the study and their role within it. In addition, the players were informed that they could take a break from the interview at any time without reason. Once the interviews had taken place, the groups were debriefed and special consideration was given to the players' welfare and state of mind. In terms of the latter, a list of supporting organisations was distributed to ensure that the players were signposted to help and support where necessary.

5.1.6 Analysis

The transcripts from the focus group interviews were analysed using the standard principles of IPA (Smith, 2004). In particular, a two-stage analysis of the group discussions was utilised, where the researcher looked, initially, for group patterns within the data before returning to explore the individual experiences of the players. The first stage of the analysis looked to develop interpretive themes from within all the players' experiences. Once this had been established, I then clustered these themes into commonalties across both groups. Once these group patterns were established, I then looked to establish superordinate themes through a bottom down approach. A section of a coded transcript from the focus group interviews can be found in Appendix 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

5.2 Findings

The following section will provide an overview of analysis of the focus group interviews and in doing so will highlight how the key findings help to build upon existing research in this area.

Four interpretative themes were developed during the analysis of stage one of the research. These themes were:

1. A lack of control over their lives,

2. Handling pressures: the known versus the unknown;

3. Support and help-seeking; and

4. Unfulfilled expectations and anticipating the future.

In the following section, I will introduce the interpretive themes and illuminate the players' lived-experiences through quotes from the discussions.

5.2.1. A lack of control over their lives

The players often revealed a lack of control over their lived world during their experiences within their careers. In particular, the players attributed their successes and failures as being due to outside forces, such as being blessed, rather than their

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own efforts. More often than not, this lack of control was accepted as being a common part of the lived world of professional football, as Tim explains:

"…you know its swings and roundabouts, stuff you can't control. I think I learnt that quite early on stuff you can't control…" (Tim, FG2).

For Tim, specifically, the lived world of being a professional footballer was like 'swings and roundabouts' suggesting that he had to accept the ride that came with his career, one that had its ups and downs, as well as an experience which was recurring in nature.

Typically, the players attributed their successes and failures during their careers to luck rather than something they themselves had influenced. For example, Chris (FG1) says:

"...I was 19 working twelve-hour shifts then all of a sudden I get signed up by an English Premier League team. It was just beyond my wildest dreams, as well, so I think I feel very blessed for a start and I am not a religious person at all, but I think some of it is luck without a shadow of a doubt you are just lucky to be in a certain place at a certain time…"

Chris talks of the opportunity to enter professional football as something of great importance to him- it is beyond his 'wildest dreams'. However, when talking about his experiences of success he talks as though this is not something that he himself achieved. Instead, he refers to being 'blessed' and lucky, almost like chance, or some other force played a part in his achievements as a professional footballer. When talking about the difficulties he had during his career, Rich (FG1) relates how he has struggled in the absence of the good luck that he sees other players benefiting from:

"...I am tired of it. I have worked very hard when I've been injured and you know some players they get the luck, being in the right place at the right time. I am not that guy..."

The players' experiences revealed that the progress of their careers was dependent upon things which they felt they had little or no control over, such as being 'in the right place at the right time' or suffering with injury.

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5.2.2 Handling pressures: the known versus the unknown

Whilst the players' experiences involved a lack of control over their sporting careers in terms of success and progress, handling the pressure that came with their role as professional footballers was something that they felt they had some level of control over. However, the pressure that the players were experiencing in terms of career transition was something of an unknown territory and a new and threatening experience.

However, John highlights that he did not experience pressure when performing his role as a footballer:

> "...on the pitch training ground around the club throughout your career I have never really... pressure was never really a word, pressure was not something really that cropped up..." (John, FG1)

In addition, Chris (FG1) adds:

> "…as soon as you get on that pitch I don't feel any pressure at all, I go out and play with a smile on my face…"

Nevertheless, John suggests that what is key is that this control is something that is within his sporting role:

> "…I can handle 20 or 30 thousand fans roaring and shouting at you, I can handle one or two players team one or two managers expecting or demanding or what, because I place them demands on myself, I always found playing on a pitch was a comfort zone for me because I knew exactly...I was in control of what was going to happen or what could happen and I had some sort of hand in it…"

However, worry, pressure and uncertainty, in terms of career transition, arose in the players' stories on numerous occasions. Tim (FG2) says:

"…I don't know how it is for everyone else, but there is also a sense of fear because this is coming into the unknown…" and, John relates the pressure that comes with uncertainty about the future:

"…at the minute I am starting to realise what pressure is because as one or two of the lads, Alex as well, have spoken of the wife and kids you don't know what's around the corner, you don't know where the next wage is going to come from, you don't know what lies ahead…"

Like John, Noel (FG2) also talks about his fear about his family:

"…you are always in fear for your family, you know, I have obviously been the main breadwinner for however many years… you have got to try and keep that going and look after your kids and that, like…"

We can sense from the players' experiences the uncertainty that is coming with career transition because 'you don't know what's around the corner'. For John, this is a new experience that brings about 'fear' where he is moving into the 'unknown', almost like he is stepping out of a comfortable arena into a new one, into a place that seems uncertain and threatening. What is more, for both John and Noel the pressure (and uncertainty) that comes with this experience is something that reflects back on them as a husband, father and, thus, as men. Noel talks about his 'fear' in relation to his family and he does this from the position as 'the main breadwinner', suggesting that his role as a man is being threatened by his experience. Indeed, John also talks from a position of the provider and the uncertainty of not knowing 'where the next wage is going to come from' somewhat reflects back on him and his family in a pressurised manner. It is proposed that the experience of career transition serves to bring about uncertainty and newfound pressure for professional footballers and this is something that served to threaten them as men.

5.2.3 Support and help seeking:

Although some of the players clearly felt that there was a lack of support from within the clubs, there was also a strong suggestion that players themselves were reluctant to ask for help and that this may in part be due to the lived world or culture of professional football. The players felt that others within professional football had little concern for them, other than what they could give to them as professional footballers. In this regard, the players felt that they were treated as sporting goods or commodities. In addition, the players experienced the lived world of professional

football as a mistrusting place where it was difficult to develop meaningful and trusting relationships and this was seen to discourage the players from talking about things. What is more, within the lived world of professional football the players suggested that support and help could be on offer but that their culture played a part in influencing their attitude towards help seeking.

Initially, the reaction from FG1 to the issue of support and help was met with (ironic) laughter. Alex remarked "…I don't think the clubs are bothered about anything…" and John followed with the perception that professional footballers are: "…used and abused, I think that's what…."

Alex does go on to say whilst support was available to him, he felt that this was somewhat dependent upon his personal circumstances and that ultimately professional footballers are treat like commodities:

> "...I think the only time I have had support is only because...I was born in Kingsley, I have known one of the directors of Kingsley, that's it and through this he will support certain things and stuff...but that's only because I am from Kingsley, that's the only reason why there is support, otherwise we are just pieces of meat basically…"

We get a sense from the players' experiences how they felt that that they were treated by others within professional football as products, or sporting goods, with little regard for support and help. For Alex, he takes a general position (not just his own) by suggesting that 'we', as professional footballers, are 'just pieces of meat', suggesting that, commonly, professional footballers feel that they are only useful to others for what they can give to them. Whereas, for John in his experience, professional footballers are just 'used and abused', which posits that professional, football clubs are not interested in the players welfare, and instead are seen to mistreat them in the process.

However, some participants did suggest that the reasons players do not seek help is because they may be reluctant to access support when it is available:

> "…I would say there is plenty, loads of support out there, but, I don't know whether it is a footballer, or an instinct, or whether it is a pride thing but you tend to never go and ask for the support or for the help…" (John)

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Alex supports this sentiment:

> "…I tend to agree….you never have a situation where you would go to the chairman or something like that, it's just not what we do basically…I just don't think you are pushed into that way, whether or not they don't kind of make themselves available, and say come to me if you need anything or stuff like that…maybe it's there, but we have never been programmed...you have never been told to seek that kind of advice or guidance from them…"

Indeed, Tim (FG2) highlights that the culture of professional football may discourage players from opening up to others:

> "...it's almost how you have been brought up in football you don't really like to give away too much…there's a lot of politics in football...almost invisible politics if you like, because you're always up against the guy next to you…you have always got to weigh up how much I can give, how much I can tell the truth…"

Interestingly, for John and Tim the lived world of professional football was seen to influence how they experienced help seeking and support. Indeed, for Alex, asking for help or support is 'not what we do', which indicates that there is a certain way of being that professional footballers adopt, one that does not seek or ask for help. Significantly, the influence that the lived world of professional football has on the players can be seen in Alex's comment regarding him not being 'pushed into that way', suggesting that as a footballer he needs to be encouraged or 'programmed' by others to behave in a certain way (suggesting a lack of control of his way of being). Whereas for John, the culture of professional football is a 'political' place', one that has shaped him and his outlook towards opening up. In this sense, the lived world of pro-football 'has brought him up' and, thus, developed him to be cautious, to 'not give too much away', almost like professional footballers have got to keep things close to them because you are always 'up against the 'guy next to' him which adds a competitive and mistrusting aspect to Tim's experiences.

Likewise, Liam (FG2) talks about players not having many people in professional football that they can turn to:

> "...it's a trust thing even those who are your closest friends, footballers probably don't have a lot of close, close friends..."

Interestingly, Noel (FG2) talks about the experience of taking part in the interviews as an opportunity to discuss difficulties:

> "...I think even this here [the focus group interview], I have probably never talked like this to anyone, you know what I mean? I have never talked candidly about, you know, this is what I have found hard..."

The nature of Liam and Noel's experiences suggest that professional footballers find it difficult to develop trusting and supportive relationships within their culture. For Liam, the difficulties in connecting with people and forming close relationships is due to a 'trust thing' that suggests that professional footballers experience a mistrust of others within their lived world. What is more, Noel highlights not talking to others about his experiences he has 'found hard' which reveal that not talking about things has not been easy for him. From their experiences, it could be argued that professional footballers acknowledge the need for forming closer (and trusting) personal relationships in their lives and with this the opportunity to talk more about their experiences.

5.2.4 Unfulfilled expectations and anticipating the future

The players talked candidly and emotively about how they felt a sense of rejection during career transition, like they had been left behind or forgotten about. They spoke of experiencing unfulfilled expectations, not only in terms of support, but also in terms of their employability. For the players, it was clear that they had expected, or assumed, that their efforts (and successes) as professional footballers would have been recognised by others from within the game once they had finished playing. However, the reality of career transition was in stark contrast to what they thought they would experience as they now found themselves feeling as if their successes as professional footballers had now been dismissed and no longer mattered.

For example, John (FG1) talks about not being looked after or acknowledged within career transition:

> "...I don't see any of them now picking up the phone or patting me on the back and saying we owe you this we'll look after you because you looked after us…"

Whilst Chris and Alex (FG1) express a sense of rejection and abandonment in their experiences:

> "…I am just finding now how harsh it is really is I think during the week when you're playing and everything, your everyone's best mate and now when you're coming to the end of your career…they are all chucking you in the bin because of your age or injuries or whatever they're not really that interested…" (Chris)

> "...yeah and you are just waiting for your agent to ring they've still not rung so you give them a little text just to try and make sure he hasn't forgot about you…" (Alex)

In addition, Chris (FG1) feels that his prior career success would have counted for more during career transition:

> "...you are expecting to get emails like that, because you have played so many games and you have done reasonably well…I am hoping that a decent clubs around my local area comes in, so I don't have to move or anything and there's nothing coming in at all…"

The players show they are experiencing career transition from professional football, and possible exit from their sport, as a harsh reality. Their (often-unanticipated) experience left some of the players feeling rejected or abandoned where their achievements, as well as they themselves, were being dismissed. We get a sense from John, Chris and Alex's accounts how being unacknowledged or forgotten about as a professional footballer is not something that they are used to or expected. For John, he feels let down by people within professional football because there is no one 'patting him on the back', almost like he is not being rewarded for 'looking after' others in the game. Chris also talks about the treatment from others within the game by drawing upon his playing experiences when he suggests that, when you are

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playing (and given others what they want) 'everybody wants to be your best mate', which highlights how being successful as a professional footballer is a good experience, one which can leave you feeling wanted and popular. However, when talking about his experiences of career transition, Chris suggests that he no longer experiences being wanted and instead he feels like 'people are not interested' which for him is like being 'chucked in the bin', almost like he is now being discarded by others as rubbish and as someone, or something which is no longer required.

The players appeared unprepared for the nature of career transition, and this is borne out of their responses when asked about this. Tim (FG2) admits that he has put off planning for career transition:

> "…you kind of think, you know…I have got a another year, don't worry about it you know, I got another couple of years then before you know it has come on top of you, but to be fair with myself I have tried to look at it since I was 13 and stuff like that. I don't think people really realise what it is actually going to be like…"

Furthermore, Rich (FG1) suggests that, even when their contracts are almost finished, players feel a strong need to focus on their game rather than career transition:

> "…I think also when you're in the last year of your contract…you're still not thinking about it, you're still thinking I need to get my head down and concentrate even more doubly hard on the football…to get a new contract…"

Tim (FG2) also expresses how he has thought about the need to plan for career transition because of his age, yet still has not done anything about this:

> "…everyone would say to me 'you know it will never last forever' and you know you are getting old when you are picking up injuries, and you think you know in a couple of years I am not going to be here, I am not going to have this. I am still at this situation now where really I haven't done a great deal about it…"

From within the players' experiences we can see how they avoided making plans for retirement despite being conscious of the need to do so. For Tim, the security of having 'another year' as a footballer eases his worry of career transition and, thus, prevents him from looking forward which serves to plant him firmly in his present time. Accordingly, Richard talks about the need to keep his 'head down' when the threat of career transition is looming, almost like he is unable to look at alternative options as this could jeopardise his chances of remaining in the game. However, the speed in which retirement can creep up is evident in Tim's remark when he highlights that 'before you know it has come on top of you', which suggests that the experience of career transition without preparation is somewhat overpowering for professional footballers.

5.3 Summary of findings

The research highlighted a number of important issues surrounding what it is like for this population of professional footballers to experience career transition. The players indicated that they experienced a lack of control over their careers where the highs and lows of their professional lives were seen as being due to luck rather than their own efforts. Whilst the players felt able to cope with the pressures and demands of playing professional football, the uncertainty arising from a lack of control in relation to career transition produced fear and anxiety around their futures. What is more, they experienced the reality of career transition as a harsh one, a reality that they had not anticipated, one that left them feeling a sense of rejection and abandonment. What is more, the players felt that there was limited support available to them during their careers and that the lived world of professional football discouraged help seeking attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, although the players acknowledged the desirability of planning for their career after sport, they reported a tendency to avoid doing this and instead felt required to commit more to their sporting role at a time when the possibility of career transition was at its greatest.

Previous research has highlighted a number of adjustment difficulties experienced by elite-athletes during career transition, including identity loss, or crisis (e.g. Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; Baillie and Danish; Crook and Robertson, 1991), low self-control (Werthner and Orlick, 1986) and alcohol and drug abuse (Mihovilovic, 1968).

However, in the main, research within this area has been established using quantitative methods and different sports other than professional football. Therefore, it is argued that existing literature does not shed a significant light on the possible reasons for the adjustment difficulties that are somewhat specific to the experiences of professional footballers in the United Kingdom. Research done outside elite-sport has highlighted how the presence or absence of control can have a profound effect on the overall health and well-being of an individual (Averill, 1973; Miller,1979) and low levels of personal control in the workplace have been found to be psychologically harmful to individuals (e.g. Evans and Carrere, 1991; Ganster and Fusilier, 1989). Therefore, it is argued that a perceived lack of control, anxiety and fear for the future, feelings of rejection and difficulties with support and help seeking experienced by professional footballers are important factors when understanding the difficulties reported by previous research with elite-athletes.

The players' experiences revealed how pressure was a predominant aspect of their lived world both during and after their careers. However, whilst the pressure within their sporting role was something that they could handle, the pressure experienced within career transition was something that was new to them and something of an unknown quantity. It was clear that the professional footballers in this study were unprepared for the experiences and pressure that they encountered during career transition. What is more, the uncertainty and pressure that came with career transition reflected back on the players as men and, in particular, it threatened their masculinity in terms of their capabilities to provide for their families.

The players also reported being significantly unprepared for career transition and this was due, in part, to a lack of pre-planning despite the fact that players themselves acknowledged that they had thought about this during their careers. Previous research has shown that those who pre-plan for retirement (e.g. Reitzes and Mutran, 2004; Noone, Stephens and Alpass, 2009), or career transition in sport (e.g. Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte, 2006) are seen to navigate through the process of career transition more successfully. In addition, the players revealed that the lack of pre-planning was due in part to a need to commit to their sporting role even greater when their contracts were ending. However, whilst professional footballers may feel the need to show a focus on and commitment to their sporting development to remain in the game, greater attention to players' personal

development may help them better plan for retirement and also serve to enhance the development of their sporting excellence (Miller and Kerr, 2002).

The qualitative findings reported in this stage of the study provided an insight into the lived experiences of professional footballers both during and when facing the possibility of career transition. The above section provides a discussion of the issues that were specific to the players within the focus group interviews. However, for the purpose of clarity any issues that were common in the players' experiences across all the stages of the study (during stage 1 and stage 2), will be covered collectively in more detail within the discussion chapters of the thesis (i.e. within chapter 7 and 8).

The focus group interviews allowed the players to express their experiences of transition within a group context. However, whilst there were advantages to this method, such as understanding a wide range of issues across the players' experiences, it was felt that there was a need to drill down into these issues in more depth using individual interviews. With this in mind, the on-going research (during stage 2 analysis) adopted a more individual approach to its data collection and, with this, the use of one-to-one semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 6: Stage Two: Methods

The following Chapter will cover the methods adopted during stage two of the research, specifically the sampling and recruitment of participants, the development of the research, and the procedure.

6.1 Method

The following section will highlight the methods that were utilised in the development of stage two of the research.

6.1.1 Sampling and Recruitment

The proceeding section will discuss how the study developed its sample of players and how the recruitment process and research design evolved.

Part of the recruitment drive for this stage of the research (like in the previous stage) was established via the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), the players union for professional footballers in the United Kingdom. Because of the nature of the data collection in this stage and in particular a need to develop one-to-one interviews, it was deemed important to contact professional footballers on an individual basis. Therefore, initially, a strategy was devised where information packs (see appendix 1.2) would be sent out via the PFA 'delegates' at each of the seventy-two Football League club and several Premier League clubs, across England. The PFA delegates are professional footballers who represent and act on behalf of the PFA to assist and support professional footballers within their relevant club. It was agreed that a set of ten information packs (consisting of an information sheet, letter of invitation and a consent form) would be sent out to each PFA delegate to enable them to identify and distribute to professional footballers whose contracts were expiring and therefore, facing the possibility of career transition at the end of that current season. In total, over 750 information packs were distributed as part of an extensive recruitment drive. However, and significantly, despite a high number of packs being sent out and despite the number of professional footballers facing career transition each year, only one player came forward to take part in the study. However, in the end this player no longer met the criteria for the study because he was offered a contract at a new football club. Therefore, because no other

professional footballer had come forward to participate in the study, at this time, it was necessary to revisit and redevelop the study's recruitment plan. For the purpose of structure, I will discuss the significance of my recruitment difficulties later in the thesis.

After a long period trying to consider ways in which to recruit participants for the study, it was decided that I would utilise my personal contacts within the game, namely at the PFA, LFE and Sporting Chance, since this method of recruitment had worked for the focus group interviews. In the end, these contacts help me gain access to a diverse sample of professional footballers. These contacts were able to identify players in different circumstances and situations in terms of career transition. In contrast to the players in the focus group (who were facing the possibility of career transition towards the end of their careers), some of the players I was given access to were facing career transition as young footballers at the start of their careers. What is more, some of the career professionals (like the focus group players) were facing the possibility of career transition but had pre-planned for their retirement (i.e. they had studied for a degree during their careers). Finally, a group of career professionals (like the pre-planned and focus group players) who had been in transition for a while and had experienced difficulties during this process (i.e. were at the time of the interviews in treatment for addictive problems).

The nature of the recruitment drive gave me a chance to interview professional footballers located in different career stages and transition circumstances. Therefore, the design and direction of the research was reformulated and from this it was established that, a focus on understanding the lived-experiences of professional footballers in different career stages (e.g. Academy and Professionals footballers) and within different types of transition (e.g. potential career transition and career transition) would be carried out.

Through the contact at the PFA, I was able to access three career professional footballers to take part in the research. These footballers were still playing in the game but were facing carer transition and had been identified and contacted by the friend at the PFA about their willingness to partake in the study. It was felt that the willingness of these players to come forward and talk about their experiences due in large to the fact that these footballers were identified and approached directly by the

PFA. Significantly, these players were somewhat different to the majority of professional footballers, as they had all obtained a University Degree whilst they were still playing and thus, had already considered a second career pathway. Therefore, it could be that this group of footballers may have found it easier to talk about their experiences of career transition than those players, who hadn't considered, or developed a plan for, life after football (like for example, those players who were contacted via the PFA delegates).

Through the personal contact at Sporting Chance, I was able to access a number of former professional footballers who were within career transition and had experiences of difficulties during this process. These players, at the time, were attending a specialised treatment centre (the Sporting Chance Clinic), which treats professional and amateur sports people for addictive behaviours in the United Kingdom. Through this contact, four former professional players agreed to be interviewed as part of this stage of the study. In this regard, the contact at Sporting Chance approached four players, during a 26-day residential treatment that they were attending at the clinic. These players were targeted as they met the criteria of the study- they had been out of the professional game and thus, within career transition for a period of time. Via my contact, information packs about the study were distributed to the players and they then made a decision to take part.

In addition, via the personal contact at the LFE I was able to access a number of Academy footballers (or, potential career professionals). At the time, six players were approached by the contact (employed at the LFE) and were asked to take part and upon agreement. These sets of players were targeted by the employee at the LFE, as professional footballers who he felt would be willing to take part in the study. In total, five Academy players agreed to take part in the research. In terms of contact, the employee was emailed the study information and he then forwarded this on to the players electronically. The LFE oversees the education and personal development of Academy players during the course of their two-year training to become full-time professionals. In total, five Academy players were interviewed for this stage of the study. All of the players interviewed were still in the game yet at the same time, were facing the possibility of career transition at the end of the season (see participant information below for further details).

6.1.2 Participants

For the purpose of the analysis, the participants were grouped according to their professional status and experience. The first group consisted of full time professionals who, for clarity were termed the 'career professionals'. Three of these players found themselves facing the possibility of career transition (and had studied for a degree), whilst four had been in transition for a while and had experienced difficulties during career transition. The second group of players were in training to become full-time professionals, within the Academy structure of professional football clubs in England, and for clarity of the research were termed the 'potential career professionals'. The reason for grouping the players in this way was that it enabled me to look at the experiences of the potential professional footballers (i.e. young players facing possible transition), in the light of the experiences of the career professionals (i.e. more experienced players facing possible or actual transition) out of the game. For reference, a participant matrix can be located in appendix 1.6.

The following section will give a summary of the different groups of professional footballers and within this a brief biography of the individual players involved.

6.1.2.1 Career Professionals

The group of 'career professionals' consisted of seven players experiencing two contrasting positions, or circumstances. Three players were still playing within the game but were approaching the end of their current contract and therefore, facing the possibility of career transition. The age of those players ranged from 30 to 32. The other four career professionals were players who had all experienced career transition for well over two years and had since then, experienced difficulties in their post sporting lives including addictive behaviours. The age of those players ranged from 24 to 43.

I provide a brief biography of each of the career professionals below and to maintain confidentiality all names have been given pseudonyms:

Tony (43) was a former professional footballer who had played well over 300 games during a successful career. He had been out of the professional game for approximately 3 years, at the time of the interview. Since his football career had

finished he had experienced problems in his life around addictive behaviour for which he was seeking professional help for his difficulties.

Keith (33) was a former professional footballer who had played just under 100 games, across a career that spanned nearly half a decade. At the time of the interview, Keith had been out of the professional game for approximately 10 years and had experienced difficulties with addictive behaviour that he was seeking professional help to address.

Frank (27) was a former professional footballer who had played over 50 games during his career. When the interview took place, Frank had been out of the professional game for 7 years and had fallen on difficult times due to addictive behaviours, for which he too was seeking professional help.

James (24) was a former professional footballer who had played just under 50 games during his career. At the time of the interview, James had been in career transition for 5 years and had experienced difficulties around addictive behaviours, for which he was seeking professional help.

Darren (30) is a current professional footballer who at the time of the interview had played over 200 games during his career. When Darren was interviewed, he was facing the possibility of career transition, with only four months remaining on his contract.

Julian (32) is a former professional footballer who at the time interview was still playing and had made nearly 500 appearances during his career. At that time, he was facing the possibility of career transition with only five months remaining on his contract.

Gareth (31) is a former professional footballer who at the time of the interview had played almost 300 games during his career. At the time of the interview, Gareth was facing the possibility of career transition and had six months left on his contract.

When considering the different circumstances that the sample of professional footballers found themselves in (i.e. some within career and facing career transition and some within sporting chance and experiencing career transition), it was felt that it would be more interesting to analyse these players' experiences collectively as

opposed to seeing them as separate entities. What is more, through researching professional footballers in different circumstances, and within different stages of career transition, the research was able to highlight some significant commonalities and differences across all of the players' lived-experiences.

6.1.2.2 Potential Career Professionals

The group of potential career professionals consisted of five players (Harry, Richard, David, Steve and Lee) who at the time of the interview were approaching the end of their contacts as Academy footballers at the same football club and were therefore, experiencing the possibility of career transition into, or out of the game. The players were all 18 years of age and had been training to become career professionals for over two years. Subsequently, since the interviews all of the players have been released from the club and therefore are currently, within the process of career transition.

6.1.3 Development of the topic guide

The semi-structured interview topic guides for this stage of the analysis developed and evolved out of the procedure and findings from stage one of the study. In particular, the interview guide focused on understanding important aspects of the players' lived experiences, including identity, pressure, support and planning for life after sport. These topics were seen as significant because they were issues that had been revealed as important during the focus group interviews. In total, three separate topic guides were developed, as it was felt necessary to tailor the study guide slightly for each group. The additional questions were added to aid the exploration as a means of capturing the experiences within the range of situations and circumstances the players found themselves in. For example, it was considered beneficial to ask the career professionals, who had experienced career transition for some time, whether they could offer any advice to younger professional footballers based on their understanding of this process. A copy of the interview guide for each group of players can be found in Appendix 2.2.1, Appendix 2.2.2 & Appendix 2.2.3.

6.1.4 Procedure

The majority of the interviews took place face-to-face. For the four career professionals attending Sporting Chance, the interviews took place in a private

counselling room within the Clinic. The interviews with the eight potential career professionals took place within the privacy of their own homes. All face-to-face interviews were established using an electronic recording device and lasted between 40mins to 1hour in duration. For this group of players information packs (see appendix 1.4) were sent out via email, through the contacts at the LFE and Sporting Chance.

For the other three career professionals the interviews were developed on-line, in a private chat room. In terms of recruitment, information packs (see appendix 1.5) were sent out to the players through my contact at the PFA via email, inviting them to take part in the research and provided them with information about their potential role within it. In total three professional footballers agreed to take part in the study. These players were then provided with instructions (see appendix 1.4.1) which provided them with a systematic guide showing them how to access the private chat room. The chat room was set up via a social networking account on the internet, as this allowed the interview to take place in a secure space, and one that offered complete confidentiality. Therefore, the transcripts for the on-line interviews were developed within this private space and the names of the respondents were subsequently anonymised.

6.1.5 Ethics

During all the stages of the recruitment and data collection, the ethical guidelines of the BPS (2014) were followed. Therefore, each player filled out a consent form (as part of their information packs) which gave their consent to partake in the research. What is more they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. What is more, all players were briefed prior to the interview regarding the nature of the study and their role within it. At the end of each interview, the players were debriefed and consideration was given to their welfare and state of mind. In terms of the latter, a list of supporting organisations were provided to all players, other than those attending Sporting Chance, to ensure that they were signposted to help and support, if necessary. The decision not to distribute this support list to the players in Sporting Chance was taken after deliberation with the head counsellor at the clinic. Therefore, it was agreed that these players would be offered the chance to discuss their experiences of the interviews and any feelings

that may have arisen, during their next one-to-one counselling which was part of their residential programme at the clinic.

6.1.6 Analysis

For the purposes of analysis, the potential career professional and career professional interviews were treated as two separate data sets, as outlined above.

When considering my position within the research as a former professional footballer it was acknowledged that whilst this could serve to aid the interpretative process (i.e. as part of the hermeneutic circle and during the development of the fusion of horizons), at the same time it was important that my prior understanding did not over-saturate the analysis. Therefore, in order to be as inclusive as possible in terms of what features of the data were important; summaries of the player's experiences were established prior to any themes (or structures of experience) being developed. In essence, through a bottom-up approach I was able to let the data 'speak for itself' and therefore, avoided the analysis from becoming a self-interpretation.

Initially, I looked to form a strong relationship with the data through the process of reading and rereading. When considering the wholistic approach as proposed by van Manen (2003). Therefore, I first sought to develop an overarching summary of the players' experiences. This was established by considering the texts as a whole and thus the players' experiences, in order to capture the overall meaning of their lived world during career transition. I asked 'what does the whole text tell us about the fundamental meaning or main significance of the experiences of the players as a whole?' In doing so, I read through all the transcripts and formed an overarching summary, or meaning of the lived world of professional footballers during career transition, based on an initial understanding of each player's experiences.

Once the overarching narratives had been established, I then looked to develop an understanding of the finer details of the player's accounts. Therefore, during the next phase, I established individual narratives for each one of the players, using the same method. The development of these narratives (overarching and individual) allowed the players' lived-experiences to drive the analysis and therefore, prevented me as a researcher and former professional footballer from interpreting the players experience in a phenomenological sense, too prematurely. In addition, it was felt that

this process fell in line with van Manen approach and in particular describing the phenomenon of study, through the art of writing and rewriting. What is more, this process was seen purely as an aid to the analytic process and my own thinking and thus, not as an outcome of it. Therefore, it was not seen as appropriate to present these summaries within the thesis.

The next stage of the analysis was carried out in order to look for commonalities in the data and this was established in two ways. Firstly, I looked to analyse the players' experiences through a standard thematic analysis and secondly to revisit the data through the lenses of the four life-world existentials (spatiality, embodiment, relationality and temporality).

Initially, it was my intention to interpret the data thematically in a similar vein to IPA (as in the stage one analysis), but, with the additional flexibility and enhanced possibility for the 'fusion of horizon' that van Manen's approach offered. However, after embarking on the thematic analysis, I felt it necessary to adopt an additional layer to the analysis through incorporating an additional phenomenological lens that incorporated the four lifeworld existentials proposed by van Manen. This decision was made because it was felt that important aspects of the players' lived world were not being adequately captured through a standard thematic analysis.

The themes were developed through a careful reading of all the summaries (i.e. overarching and individual players). In addition, as part of this process, a mind map was established of the issues and their interrelationships and this was something that helped me to develop a schematic diagram of the themes and sub-themes.

As part of the initial stage of the thematic analysis, I looked to develop first level codes- or interpretations- of the player's experiences from within each narrative. Therefore, I read the overarching and individual narrative and began to identify themes from within the player's accounts that represented their lived experiences. Upon completion of this initial phase of coding, I then moved towards merging these codes together into themes and sub-themes. The first level codes were therefore brought together by way of association and from these several master themes and subordinate codes were established. As part of this process, as outlined above a schematic representation was developed that illustrated how the codes were related to the themes.

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In the next stage I followed van Manen's highlighting (or selective) approach, which posits a need to select some sentences or part-sentences that seem to be thematic of the experiences under study. Therefore, I read the texts several times and ask, 'what statements(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?' To do this, I utilised the developed themes and sub-themes as a guide to identify the reflective statements, or 'nuggets' of quotes from within the transcripts, notably those that seemed to be essential to the players' lived-experiences, whilst also considering the four lifeworld existentials. In other words, the merged codes (from the thematic analysis) were utilised as a guide to help locate quotes within the player's accounts that seemed to relate to the four lifeworld existentials to therefore, find the experiences that best reflected their lived world during career transition.

In this final stage of the analysis, I returned to the interview transcripts and drew upon the detailed or line-by-line approach of van Manen, which posits a need to look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, 'what does this sentence tell us about the phenomenon or experience being described?' By utilising this approach, I was able to reflect on the themes developed from the previous stages. This process allowed the 'nuggets' of experience to become objects of reflection, where I considered the lifeworld existentials of- lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived human relations within the professional footballers' lived-world. This process enabled me to develop the themes further, so that my analysis of the players' lived world of career transition was more phenomenological by nature (i.e. less driven by academic discourse or theory) and therefore, more 'alive' to the reader. A section of a coded transcript from the stage two interviews can be found in Appendix 2.2.4.

Finally, it was decided that I wouldn't move away from the interpretive position of the research to develop a collective or essential statement of the players' experiences, as this would have meant shifting into a more descriptive paradigm and thus, a risk of moving away from my own being (as interpreter) and the players' experiences.

For the purpose of the presentation of the findings, it was deemed necessary to structure this in such a way that would allow the reader to both engage with the

identified themes as well as to appreciate how the existential analysis extended this. Therefore, in chapters 6 and 7, the findings are presented as follows:

1. a schematic diagram of the themes and sub-themes
2. a summary of the content of the themes
3. an in-depth analysis of each of the four life world existentials, supported by quotes from the transcripts, and discussed in relation to the previously identified them.

Chapter 7: Findings of the Career Professionals

The following chapter will introduce the findings from the analysis of the career professional experiences during career transition. Firstly, it will provide a summary of the two main themes of experiencing self and identity and help and support by showing the major issues that arose for the professional footballers. This will be followed by the existential analysis that will be highlighted by quotes that illustrate the players' issues.

7.1 Main themes

The main themes established as part of the career professional analysis were experiencing self and identity in professional football as well as, experiencing help and support. A hierarchy, or schematic diagram, of the main-themes and sub-themes can be found below (Diagram 1.1)
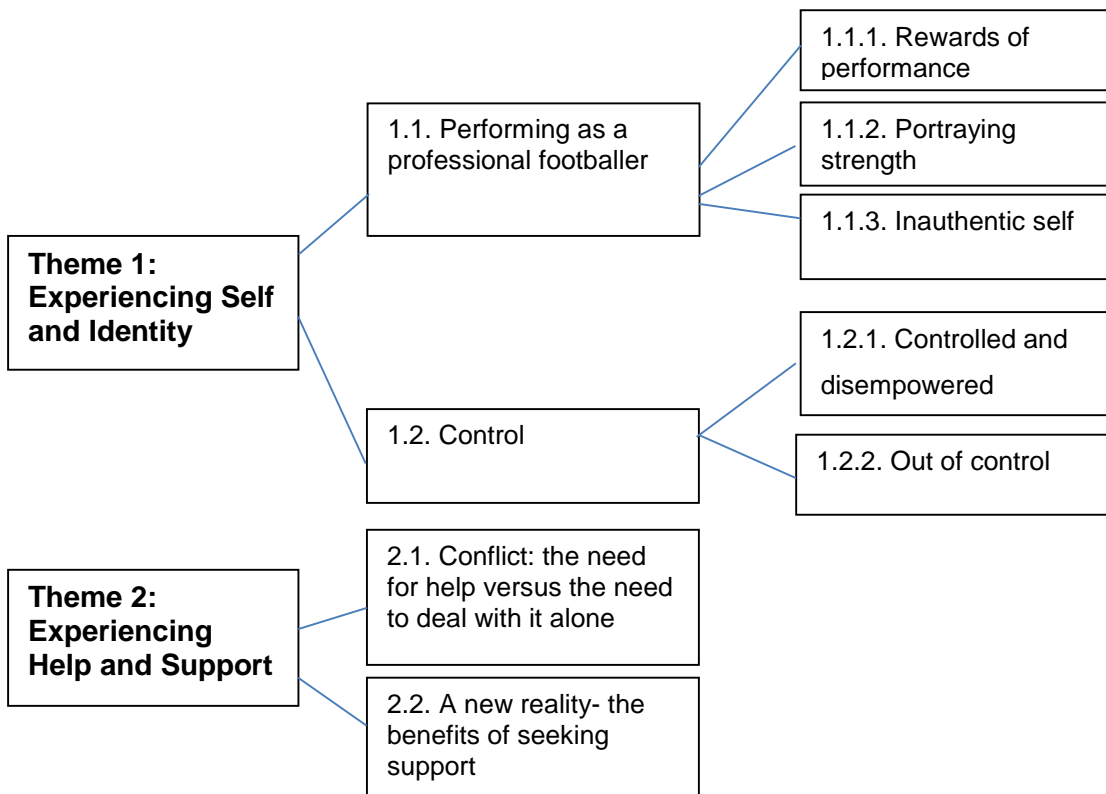
Diagram 1.1: Schematic diagram of potential career professionals

7.1.1 Experiencing self and Identity in professional football

One of the main themes, revealed during the analysis of the career professional interviews, was the issue of experiencing self and identity as sportsmen. The players' identity and self predominantly focused on their sporting identity, one that was built upon the requirements expected of them as professional footballers, by themselves and others.

What was common across the players' experiences was the importance of professional footballers' relationships with themselves and others. In particular, to be a professional footballer is to feel as if you are being constantly watched and judged by others. Thus, it was important to professional footballers how others view them, especially in terms of their sporting identity and ability. To be a professional footballer was to be held in a higher status and this gave the players a sense of privilege and, a job that most people would like to do. What is more, the field of play represented a place where they were comfortable, a place where they could escape and avoid the pressures of life, a place where they could express themselves and perform their sporting skills.

The need for performance was something that was also common for professional footballers off the field. In their experiences, it was important that they were seen to mirror the same characteristics off the field, as they did on it. Therefore, to be a successful footballer it was imperative that players showed masculine characteristics such as 'strength' and 'leadership' and avoid perceived feminine characteristics such as 'weakness' and 'shying away'. These experiences of performativity were very rigid for the players, as they did not allow professional footballers the freedom to show any other characteristics that were not in line with masculinity- i.e. showing emotions and feelings. Because of this, during difficulties the players experienced conflict between a private self - one that was struggling to cope; and a public self - which needed, at all costs, to show to others that they were coping. These experiences of performance led the players to feel as if they were being inauthentic, where there was a need to put on an act, in order to keep things in- and contained- and thus, to avoid showing to others how things really were.

Because of the requirements/expectations for professional footballers to show masculine characteristics (including coping and dealing with things), there was worry

(or fear) about how they would be perceived by others and how this in turn would affect how they would be viewed as professional footballers. In particular, there was a fear that seeking help would jeopardise their opportunities as a professional footballer in the future, as not being able to deal with things was something that was viewed as 'weakness'. Unfortunately, the sporting chance players had to continue to suffer with problems to the point where they had no other choice than to seek help. The experiences indicated that players would much rather continue performing that everything was okay and continue with their problems, than they would to seek help for their issues. This led the sporting chance players to experience isolation and loneliness both during and after their careers.

What was also common across the players' accounts was the experience of feeling controlled by others within the culture of professional football. This led the players to experience a sense of disempowerment, and lack of certainty in their sporting and non-sporting lives. It was apparent that the players' lack of empowerment reflected in their struggle to do what was best for them during their difficulties- i.e. seek help- despite knowing that they needed support and help for their problems. The need to be seen as a coping man- to conform to the expectations of others- was far more important than doing what was right for them. What is more, during their careers and subsequent transition out of the game, the players found it difficult to be assertive, make decisions and move things forward in a positive sense for themselves. The culture of professional football not only expected the players to be a certain way but it was also a culture where everything was done for the players. Therefore, the interviews suggest that the culture of professional football not only serves to control footballers in how they should be, but also disempowers them by encouraging co-dependent relationships within it.

7.1.2 Experiencing a need for help and support

Another theme that was common across the Sporting Chance players' experiences was the need to seek help and gain support for their problems. However, unfortunately, it was common for players to wait until things got bad for them before they sought help, and for one player this led to an attempted suicide. Furthermore, it was common for the players to experience worry around how they would be viewed if they sought help and, in particular, there was a fear of being seen as weak by

others. However, interestingly once the sporting chance players had sought help for their problems they had a different outlook on the world and their place within it. Instead of being concerned with how others viewed them, they instead became more concerned with how they viewed themselves. This shift was borne out of the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts in a non-threatening and judgemental environment (i.e. The Sporting Chance Clinic). Indeed, what was common across the sporting chance players was the feeling of strength and a sense of finding themselves after speaking out about their problems. Paradoxically, these players were more self-aware, authentic and felt 'stronger' after reaching out for help, which is the polar opposite to how they felt they would feel (or be perceived). What is more, these experiences were only apparent within the sporting chance players, when they looked back at their experiences retrospectively. This could suggest that the within career professionals may not consider the need to talk about their issues, whether that be because it wasn't relevant to their experiences per se or, their current situation (the requirement to fully subscribe to their sporting identity) did not allow them to consciously regard their problems as being directly attached to their sporting role. In other words, the within career players may not have any problems, or they may have problems but want to sweep then aside in order to continue focussing on their sporting role.

7.2 Existential Analysis

7.2.1 Lived Body

The players' experiences of lived body centred on dealing with difficulties in their lives and how this manifested in terms of their physical selves. This aspect of the analysis was achieved by reading the players accounts through a 'physicality' lens. Playing football at the top was like a drug to the players, something they wanted more of and maintaining their position as successful footballers became obsessive both on a physical and psychological level. What is more the sporting chance players' experiences indicated a need for pretence and in this sense, build an outer protective shell, or false self, for their real self to hide behind. However, in doing so, they felt that they neglected their real self with this; they deluded themselves that everything was going okay, when it was not. The requirement for professional footballers to conceal their difficulties, and camouflage the knocks was born out of a

fear of being seen as weak. Sadly, despite this way of being creating experiences of conflict and difficulty, the players found it difficult to resolve this, which in turn led to feelings of lack of control, or being out of control and disempowerment, which served to prolong their difficulties. However, upon getting help for their problems the sporting chance players experienced a sense of release as if they had dropped the false outer shell, the false self that was holding them back, and moved into a new self, and a way of being which was free to grow into the world.

7.2.1.1 Maintaining the buzz

For some of the players being a professional footballer gave them experiences that they enjoyed, such as the 'highs' from performance and this was something that they wanted to maintain.

In Tony and Gareth accounts, we get an understanding of the embodied experience of what it means to perform within the top level of professional football:

> "arr…I was well focused yeah, arr…I lived and breathed it, I even ate it, thinking arr…I couldn't switch off. I went home and even obviously starting from sort of, you know, Thursday obviously Wednesday day off I used to go running, I used to do an hour on the treadmill, obviously not fast, I couldn't switch off I couldn't rest…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

> "I want to play at the highest level and win and doing that is a great achievement playing at lower levels doesn't give me the same satisfaction after a game now, winning is like my drug and its stronger the higher the level I play at […] I enjoy the pressure and then the release afterwards/being able to relax knowing I've been challenged if it isn't challenging/hard the sense of achievement feels less, so I'd say the winning feeling goes quicker /wears off quicker depending on the level […] winning is like a drug, but you don't get the same buzz when you are not playing at the highest level…" (Gareth- Within Career)

The need to remain constantly focused was important for Tony, because being a professional footballer was his life, it was something that he 'lived and breathed' and 'ate', and suggesting that he almost saw football as a mechanism

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of survival. This coupled with the frequent use of the term 'I couldn't switch off' suggests that being a professional footballer consumed him physically and mentally, to the point where it was a predominant aspect of his life. This way of being in the end prevented him from being able to unwind and thus, able to get away from being a footballer. In a sense, we can see how being a professional footballer can manifest itself in a mental (not being able to switch off) and physical (live, breath and eat) obsession. Almost like a drug addict would become physically and mentally obsessed with the drug of their choice, as a means of survival, the professional footballer needs to have a similar embodied experience. Indeed, for Gareth, playing at the top as well as winning gave him a euphoric experience like a 'drug' would, and a high that is stronger the greater the achievement. It is somewhat addictive to him, the feelings and experiences associated with performance and winning are 'moreish', and he seeks out more of the feeling. Like a habitual drug taken in small doses, winning at the lower level feels, less satisfying and 'wears off quicker' suggesting that maintaining performance at the top level produces a drug-like chemical in the body. In essence, playing at a higher-level can somewhat prolong this sense of euphoria, the buzz, and thus the 'high' from performance.

7.2.1.2 Putting on a front

Putting on a front was an issue that was only common within the sporting chance players' experiences and this was not something which was a current issue within the experiences of the within career professionals. Again, one could argue that retrospectively the sporting chance players regard their sporting identity and role in this light. Thus, this may not be something which current players are conscious about.

The need to put on a performance was something that both Frank and James talk about in their experiences:

> "…yeah, yeah you have got to have it, you know, you wouldn't end up coming to somewhere like this, or, or, basically be at the bottom if you didn't have the front, because if you didn't have the front, you'd go and gamble and you'd go and drink and then you'd be like, ohhhhh, I can't cope and people would go no that's not an addiction if you do that, it's just

you are moaning over a hangover or losing a bit of money, you put on front because you don't want people to know, because you are embarrassed about what you are doing, but, you can't help what you are doing, err…and even when you say you are not going to do it again, you always end up doing it again, you say you are going to stop, you get through a couple of days through will power and after that you talk yourself into it being okay…" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

"I think it is wrong really, I mean, again it is putting on a, a certain persona, a mask, acting like you are, you know, this macho, sort of, way of acting rather than you are, if you are bang in trouble tell people you are in trouble…" (James- Sporting Chance)

We can get a sense from Frank's experiences of the importance of professional footballers owning or embodying inauthenticity, putting on a performance or a 'front' is seen as something essential to them 'you have got to have it'. We can see how Frank imagines himself not having the front 'if you didn't have it', and how this would manifest itself in people being able to see that he is unable to deal with things or that he 'can't cope', which in turn would lead to humiliation for him or being 'embarrassed' about what he is doing. It is important for Frank to put on the performance, to hide his problems, or avert others from seeing how things really are for him, because 'you don't want people to know'. What is more, there is a sense that Frank is unable to control his situation-which adds to the embodied experience of not being in control within his lived world-suggesting that 'you can't help what you are doing' despite saying to yourself that 'you are not going to do it again'. For Frank, we can see how strongly he feels about having to put on a performance with the language he uses 'I think it is wrong really'. There is a need for him to hide his real self from others, or to be avoided being seen, where he can put a 'mask' on his face, like a child would do to pretend to be somebody else. In a sense, Frank is there but at the same time he is hiding or not being authentic, he is there but he needs to keep part of his real self to himself, he wants to act from behind a facade. What is more, this performance is not something which he sees as natural to his being, or part of him- like for example breathing would be- but, instead it is an 'act', one which needs to be done in a 'certain way'- and, in particularly a 'macho' or

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masculine manner. In essence, the importance of how professional footballers live in their bodies is highlighted where there is necessity for professional footballers to embody masculinity at all times, to act and be like a man.

The need to contain difficulties within him and to keep things in his body was something that Tony also talked about:

> "You don't want to feel weak, you don't want to feel weak, you don't want to be, you don't, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm, even before here, here now, I wasn't shy about crying in front of my wife, I wasn't shy about crying in front of my kids, I never have been I have always been that emotional person, you know...but I couldn't do it in front of twenty two fucking lads in a changing room…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

Tony talks about not wanting to embody the emotion of 'weakness', and in doing so he is trying to position himself in opposition to it, in a position of embodied strength. When someone is weak in their body they are unable to do what they normally can, they lack energy and are vulnerable to attack from others, the polar opposite to what it means to be a fit and active, successful sportsman. Therefore, when we consider the players fearful experiences of being perceived as mentally weak, we could assume that they must feel like their thoughts and psychological state is not normal, it is not something that is associated with a strong and fighting fit footballer, it is not something that they want to acknowledge. However, the feeling of being perceived as weak was not something Tony experienced in all situations, suggesting that was able to show his feelings at certain times. For example, the emotions that were rooted in his body, he was able to show while he was in front, of his wife and kids. However, showing emotions and feelings in front of other footballers, or 'in front of twenty two fucking lads in a changing room', is not something that Tony would be comfortable doing. We can see how the need to contain things inside, is something which is necessary for professional footballers especially in front of their peers, or within the culture of professional football. Thus, there is a perceived requirement for professional footballers to contain their feelings and emotions inside, in order to conceal them from others. Again, there is a need for performance in the players' experiences and a need to hold things back, to

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ignore the body and thus, neglect his gut feelings for the purpose of those within the football club, including his peers.

James and Tony also talk about their embodied experience of concealment and keeping things from others:

> "because if you don't (seek help) then you are just going to bottle it up and the problem is just going to get worse it's never going to get any better by not saying anything, but you have got to want to do it, you have got to want to sort your problems out…"   (James- Sporting Chance)

> "I would just say, I would say, say for example if it was you, I would say, you know, you know everybody has problems in certain different aspects of life, erm and I would say from my experience that you know I was you, I was like yeah I'm alright, when I wasn't alright and it don't, it don't, it festers and festers, and festers…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

For James not seeking help as a professional footballers is embodied by also holding things in, to just 'bottle it up' evokes the experience that professional footballers are trying to keep things contained within them. However, this requirement can lead to things getting progressively worse for James. The importance of empowering oneself to want to sort out your problems is essential to improving things for professional footballers in James's experiences, 'you have got to want to do it'. Whereas, Tony imagines himself giving advice to others and highlights how he continued to deny, or delude himself of the reality of his situation, saying that he was 'alright' when he clearly 'wasn't'. In the end this experience, left him in a position where things got worse, where everything 'festers and festers and festers', like an infected wound to the body that doesn't get treated properly, eventually there is a need to amputate the limb.

7.2.2 Lived Relations

The experience of lived relations manifested in a number of ways in the players' interviews. This encompassed their relations with their families, with their club and team, with their fans, and with other people generally.

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The players lived relations played out in comparison to others and in particular, how they thought others saw them and how they desired to be seen. The gaze of others was an important aspect in the players sporting identities, which led to them feeling that others regarded them positively and this in turn made them feel good about themselves. They also experienced a sense of responsibility and obligation to others, centred on the pursuit of sporting success and possessing the right attitude, which in the end led them to become slaves to their pursuit. In addition, the players experienced a significant lack of control over their careers and other people played a part in this by controlling and treating them negatively, especially when things were not going well. What is more, expectations and pressure to perform in a certain way was a big part of the player's relationship with themselves and others. The need to demonstrate strong, in contrast to weak, characteristics, was perceived as essential for professional footballers both on and off the field. When performing off the field the players struggled with themselves and this manifested itself in feelings of inauthenticity, feeling trapped and in fear that their reputations and self-image would be ruined if they were to drop 'the act'. However, the players found it hard to maintain their performance during difficulties times, when they experienced a conflict between a struggling private self and a coping public self. The players prolonged their difficulties because they felt like they had to keep up the act to others, and thus were unwilling to seek help for their problems. However, upon seeking help, the players' experiences with themselves and others shifted; instead of worrying what others thought of them, they instead began to think about what was best for them.

7.2.2.1 Comparison with others

Frank, Keith and James express a sense of superiority and privilege, a feeling that they were looked up to, admired, set apart from others and somewhat special and of a higher status.

> "…for me now it's no big deal, I don't see it as a…erm…a job that, that makes you better than anyone else, when I was younger when I was a footballer it was, it was great…erm…you know, you felt special, you know, you felt more superior to everyone else who had normal jobs…erm…not in a bad way, but it was just the way it made you feel, it made you feel…erm…believe in yourself more…" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

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> "…erm…the majority of the time, you know, there is also a good financial incentive as well…erm…yeah I mean it's just nice to, to be a footballer…and I suppose it's, it's something which everybody wants to be so the fact that you can do it, you know, makes it that much nicer because every wants it, you know, and because you are able to get it…" (James- Sporting Chance)

> "I sort of love that where I have said it in here in one-to-ones that I'm an attention seeking bastard and I always want everybody to look at me, you know but through my career that's, because that's what I became, you know…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

For Frank, he preferred not to be seen as being better than others, or above them, however, the reality is that his experiences as a footballer made him feel "special" and "superior" in comparison. We get a sense that he is trying as a professional footballer to strike a balance between maintaining a positive relationship with himself and with others. In essence, being a professional footballer was seen to influence him in a positive way "it made you believe in yourself more"; however, at the same time he is sensitive to how others view him because he would not want this to reflect on him "in a bad way."

In James's experiences, he looks at himself as a professional footballer through the eyes of others'- he puts himself in their position. He imagines a general desire from others to become a professional footballer "it's something which everybody wants to be". Because of this, his experiences as a professional footballer are somewhat enhanced. He is able to do something that is so coveted by everybody else- "every wants it, you know, and because you are able to get it" like a scarce resource which you are lucky enough to have access to which others do not.

For Tony, being a footballer in the eyes of others is more about being acknowledged for what he has to offer. He loves the fact that people watch him, he wants to feel the eyes of "everybody" on him and to be the centre of attention, and he enjoys being admired. He is "an attention seeking bastard", yet the use of the word "bastard" would suggest that this is not seen positively by everyone. It would seem that the attention that he enjoys- "always want

everybody to look at me" is a longstanding part of who Tony is, especially in relation to others. James's account allow us to see him through the (imagined) eyes of others, whereas Tony places himself at the centre of his account- where others are there as his audience, not necessarily his admirer. For James, we are one of the onlookers, invited to envy him and the position he is in. Whereas with Tony we are there to watch him, to acknowledge him and thus what he has to offer.

The 'gaze' of others and their perceptions of the player are important in all three quotes, but in rather different ways. All of the players in some respects found that how they thought others viewed them influenced them in a positive manner. For James it allowed him to feel superior to others and thus made him believe in himself, for Frank he valued himself more because he had something that others wanted, whereas for Tony it gave him a sense of recognition. However, where the players differed was in how they wanted to be seen, or compared by others. In Frank's experiences, it was important not to be seen different to others, for James he wanted to be envied and to value his position, whereas for Tony he wanted to be admired and regarded for what he had, and what he could offer.

However, for Darren his emphasis on comparison was taken from both his own perspective and from the imagined position of others, in particular he highlights the importance of how he measures up against other footballers:

> **"**I love it, get paid to do what I enjoy, don't want to really do anything else […] you get to compete with the best in the world and being able to judge your performances… I want to be the best keeper I can be…and with the coverage we get you can compare yourself to the best and see where you stand, that and performing under pressure in front of a crowd is something I enjoy the most…" (Darren- Within Career)

We can get a sense from Darren's account how he experiences professional football in relation to himself and others. To him professional football is something that he 'enjoys' and 'loves' and he couldn't imagine what it would be like not to be a footballer and thus, do 'anything else'. His enthusiasm for his role centres on the financial benefits that come with the occupation, as well as

the comparison and competition that he is able to experience in relation to other footballers. Predominantly, the focus on comparison allows him to position and measure himself against others, and the benchmark is for him to be the 'best keeper' he 'can be'. There is very much a competitive edge to his relational experiences and in some way there is a sense of him finding his place as a footballer; he doesn't seem settled, secure or satisfied, but instead is constantly assessing himself in terms of his position, or 'where he stands' in relation to other footballers. Where he does feel satisfaction though is on the pitch, a place where he is performing under pressure and this is something that he enjoys, especially doing so in the view of others 'in front of the crowd'. The gaze of others at this point is a significant one, for Darren wants to be seen that he can perform under pressure, he wants people to acknowledge him as the 'best'. In essence, the football pitch offers Darren the best place to show where he is positioned in relation to other professional footballers and, in this sense, the perspective of others can be seen as being just as important as his perspective of himself.

What is more, Gareth talks candidly about the attention that he received when he was moving up in the game:

> "I was at Bentley Rovers from 8 to 14 and then I left for Greenwood Town. It was when I signed for Greenwood Town that it became a reality as everyone was fussing over me and a lot of other clubs were eager for me to join them […] It's a really good feeling to know people want you and especially if they are a big club. I couldn't really believe that all these clubs wanted to sign me..." (Gareth- Within Career)

We can see how Gareth wanted to be footballer from a young age, how he set out on a journey to fulfil his dreams but he never envisaged this becoming a reality. To become a footballer was to fulfil a lifelong ambition, it is a 'dream come true' and his sense of fortune is heightened by the fact that being a professional footballer is something that he loves. In doing so, he imagines how others would see him in terms of the position he is in. For him to be a professional footballer is something that others desire, it is a job that 'other people would love to do'. What is more, this sense of privilege and fortune is heightened by the attention that others bestowed

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upon him as a professional footballer especially when things are going well for him, or when things are on the up. For, Gareth the 'reality' of becoming and feeling wanted as a professional footballer was played out in his early experiences by the attention that he received from others, he felt in demand, he felt highly regarded by others. We get an understanding of how becoming a professional footballer served as a positive experience for Gareth where he is not only gaining something that he has always wanted, but he also felt like he had something which others want from him and the latter was something which he found difficult to accept, or to 'believe', it was somewhat unreal.

7.2.2.2 Responsibility and obligation: possessing the right attitude

The players' lived relations with their families and their club was infused with a strong sense of responsibility and obligation. In particular, the players were expected to display the right attitude and thus, place their football careers and the football club first:

> "…you start getting responsibilities and it's not just me, me, me, you got a family to look after you got a mortgage to pay you got cars to pay...erm…so I went down that road really, I never ever, ever said to myself right I'm on thousand pound a week or twenty thousand pound a week, or I'm on ten thousand pound a week- I never said that that's enough- I wanted more and that was my goal to get more and more and more, so my next contract would be a better contract, then the next contract would be better than that and I didn't say okay I've made it now, I've got fucking, I'm on five grand a week, you know, erm, but obviously I was quite fortunate towards the later, later on in my career that the money started to change in the game and I started to reap the benefits from it…I didn't earn the biggest money in the world but I had a good living you know…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

> "I didn't really, I tried to shut them out [the demands placed on him], because whenever, what the club asked me to do I was contracted to do, so if I had to go and present some trophies to kids, so be it, or coaching that was fine…" (Keith- Sporting Chance)

Tony gives a sense of embarking on a journey, a road, (giving an additional temporal element to this experience) in order to fulfil his family responsibilities, in which he feels compelled to seek out more and more rewards until this becomes an end in itself "I never said that that was enough". A sense of obligation and duty towards his club is clear in Keith's words, as he describes his attempts to ignore, to "shut out" the pressures and do and be whatever the club needed him to do and be, one might even say to become a slave to the cause. In the case of Tony, we can see how he became motivated by the financial rewards that came his way, which it would seem in the end stopped serving a purpose. Whereas Keith fell subservient to his sporting obligations, to the football club, and in the end these responsibilities he placed ahead of his own needs.

For Julian there was an obligation for him as a professional footballer to display the right attitude around the club:

> "I learned to deal with it better [disappointment for not being selected for the team] but, not once did I let it show at training and my attitude was spot on, maybe even better just to prove a point […] Attitude is the most important thing in football, we all know players with more ability than us but their attitudes are rubbish and they end up going out the game - for me that's the one thing you can control…but you need a bit of luck as well. Saying that football's a small world and if people start to question your attitude then it won't be long until more people do the same…" (Julian- Within Career)

The importance of having for oneself and showing to others a good 'attitude' is revealed in Julian's experiences. There is a need for him to not show what he is experiencing the disappointment of not being in the team to others, to 'not let it show' is something which he sees as being essential if you want to be a successful professional footballer. In essence, this characteristic of showing a good attitude is for him far more important than footballing ability alone. What is more, showing a good attitude towards work is 'the one thing' that professional footballers 'can control', which highlights the general lack of control that professional footballers experience in their sporting-lives. Furthermore, the need to display a good attitude is influential on how others see you from within the game; reputation is key within the

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'small world' of professional football and thus, possessing a bad attitude will essentially get people questioning your capabilities.

For Darren and Gareth there is a responsibility on them not to show to others their disappointment, especially when they are not in the team. In the case of Darren, this relates to how he acts or behaves at home:

> "It [when not in the team] makes me angrier than I am when I'm playing and I try to use the anger in a positive way rather than taking it out on the Mrs and kids […] when it is going well you are happy and everything is easier than when you are bombed out. I've got 2 kids now so don't sulk but that's mainly cos I've changed a lot since meeting my Mrs she doesn't let me sulk so I just get on with it now…" (Darren- within career)

We can see how performing on the pitch is something that has an impact on professional footballers' experiences of life off the field of play. When Darren is not playing in the team, and subsequently things are not going well for him in terms of performance, he experiences a greater sense of 'anger'. The experience of being left out of the side, is like being 'bombed out', suggesting that Darren feels like he is dropped like a bomb would be dropped from a plane, left to hit the ground where he is inevitably destroyed and shattered. What is more, the responsibility in terms of carrying the right attitude is important to Darren away from work where the need to deal with negative emotions is for him done in 'a positive way', in order to protect his family.

Whereas for Gareth a responsibility and loyalty to show that all is well, resides within the football club:

> "I would have sulked when I was younger [when not in the team] but I have realised the importance of going in on a Monday morning with a smile on my face as it has a positive effect not just on me but my team mates […] you have disagreements and bust ups as you are all competitive players all wanting to win, but it's important to shake hands and move on as quickly as possible for the sake of the team. You do not have to like everyone but no one should know this on the pitch […] when you cross the white line at the start of a game, you have a common goal to win the game. It is us against them and

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you get these instincts from the playground at school. Off the pitch you do not have to socialise with each other and can avoid speaking to each other…" (Gareth- Within Career)

We get a sense of the responsibilities that professional footballers have towards the team in Gareth's experiences here. Over time, he has gone from a younger player who 'sulks' when he is disappointed, to someone who now walks around with a 'smile on his face'. Again, we get a sense of the need for professional footballers to disguise their true feelings and thoughts within the club, as this was seen to serve the function of team and their role within it. Naturally there are fallouts, 'disagreements and 'bust ups', like in any other occupation. Nevertheless, it is important for professional footballers to sort their differences out as 'quickly as possible' for the sake of the team, to 'shake hands' and thus maintain cohesion, for a collective purpose. Again, we can see how professional footballers feel responsible to maintain the expectations of the football club, expectations which predominantly centre on productivity and thus, improving the opportunity for success on the field of play. The emphasis on 'crossing the white line' is almost like there is code of conduct that is expected of professional footballers once they step onto the pitch, and this is underpinned by a winning mentality. This also suggests that there is a strong boundary between work and private life for professional footballers. When on the field of play personal relationships are considered somewhat irrelevant. It is on the football pitch where the desire to win becomes instinctual and above everything else, there is an 'us against them' attitude, and this is something that is developed from a young age, in particular within the schoolyard, which suggests an almost childlike attitude at play.

7.2.2.3 Lack of control

The experience of lack of control was only apparent within the interviews of the within career professionals. It could be argued that because these players were still within the game the experience of lack of control was more confounded within their lived world. On the other hand, the sporting chance players at the time of the interviews were experiencing gaining some level of control back in their lives within a residential rehabilitation centre. What is more, it could be proposed that the latter

had also been out of the professional game for some time and thus, the experiences of life without sport was more familiar to them.

Darren, Julian and Gareth all talk about having limited control as professional footballers:

> "Not much (control) once you sign your contract; say you are a small step higher than a slave would be […] they love you then (when you are in the team), but, I'm the forgotten man at the moment (when out the team)…"
> (Darren- Within Career)

> "The most difficult thing is that you're not entirely in control of your own career […] regardless of how hard you work or how well you might be playing at any one time, if the manager isn't interested in playing you there's nothing you can do […] it makes me feel more determined to prove him wrong but sometimes that doesn't make a difference […] you can get very disillusioned by this…"
> (Julian- Within Career)

> "…the club can make a career by looking after you and playing you regularly or they can let you rot in the reserves. The clubs have most of the power and players are used by clubs, there is always another player ready to take your place […] it's hurtful, you give your all and put your body on the line and no one cares if you are ok…" (Gareth- Within Career)

We get a sense in Julian's experiences here of how he is treated as a professional footballer by others in the game (within the club). Once a player has signed a contract it's as if the club has got the players under control, being only slightly 'higher than a slave would be' suggests that professional footballers are somewhat disempowered in their circumstances, almost deprived of their will, where they feel they are forced to follow orders from those above them, like they are owned. What is more, good treatment of the players by others is conditional upon performance. When professional footballers are in the team people 'love you', but when you are not selected, you are the dismissed, cut out from others attention. The 'forgotten man' comment suggests a sense of rejection and being left behind, where Gareth feels abandoned as a professional footballer, where there is no longer the attention that was once bestowed upon him. For Julian it would seem that when the manager

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is not 'interested in you' then as a professional footballer there is nothing you can do about this situation, even if you were to prove him wrong- almost as if it is a personal stand off or position that the manager is taking up to prevent the player from progressing. In the end, Julian is left disillusioned by his lack of empowerment over his life, suggesting that lack of control was not something that he expected he would experience as a professional footballer. For Gareth there is a sense of being used and abused. Significantly, the clubs are able to leave players to 'rot' if they so wish, suggesting that the experience of being left out of the team is like being physically neglected, almost dying and wasting away, if you will. What is more, as a professional footballer there is always someone else to 'take your place', leaving players also with a sense of uncertainty, where their livelihood and position could be taken away from them or stolen at any time. There is lack of care for Gareth from others and this is painful, it 'hurts' and when considering he has put his 'body on the line' for others during his career he questions why this sacrifice is not being reciprocated by others, by way of care. Across their experiences, the players show how their lack of control over their careers and the attention, and treatment that they receive is determined by success and thus, the opinion of others. When things are going well for professional footballers it would seem that they have more control over their careers and in turn receive more positive attention and treatment from others. However, on the other hand, when things are not going well then they are seen to lose what limited control they have over their careers, but what is more the positive attention and treatment from others diminishes. Thus, it would seem that personal control and positive treatment from others is conditional, it is significantly dependent on successful performance, i.e. being able to deliver the goods on the field of play.

7.2.2.4 The pressure and expectations to perform:

The experience of pressure, expectations and the need to perform was lived by the sporting chance players through a need to demonstrate that they could measure up, show strength, act like men and pretend that everything was going okay. What is more, the players often experienced being treated like machines, where there was a requirement for them to produce the goods as footballers no matter what. This experience was only apparent within the sporting chance players' interviews and it could be argued that this reflects their ability to reflect back on their experiences as professional footballers. For example, it is

suggested that the within career professionals might not be overly conscious about their current experiences around identity, because they are totally immersed in their present sporting role, one which is still required and to some extent working.

James talks about the pressure and expectations placed upon him and in particular, how he was required to perform in a certain way as a professional footballer:

> "erm…there's a lot of pressure in football, erm, you know, you're expected to act a certain way and…erm…you know, be a certain, sort of, type of person…erm…you know, you are always expected to play well…erm…which is not always easy you can't do that every week…erm…the pressure side of it is the most difficult part I suppose, because you have got a lot of expectations on your shoulders from everyone…" (James- Sporting Chance)

The use of the word "expectations" repeatedly in James language suggest that his lived-relations seem strongly about what he feels others expect from him. We get a sense that the expectation to perform as a professional footballer is something that weighs heavy on him and "his shoulders." There is a requirement from others to "act in a certain way", suggesting that the need to perform in a specific manner is something which is essential to being a professional footballer. What is more, professional footballers are "expected to be a certain, sort of, type of person", suggesting that the necessity to perform in a "certain" way is something that has to become part of the identity of a professional footballer, to become part of who they are.

For Frank and Keith there is a focus on professional footballers displaying strong characteristics when performing as professional footballers:

> "they are looking for somebody who's…erm…who's going to be a winner, mentally strong and a leader as well, just because you have a captain on the pitch you don't just want ten other blokes just following one man, you know you want, you want eleven leaders on the pitch and you want six leaders as a sub, so when they go on and whatever else, you know they

don't want they don't want people who are going to be weak…" (Frank-Sporting Chance)

"Oh! mental strength is massive, massive, I think there is an awful lot of people, definitely from my experience anyway, that err…there is an awful lot of people who have the ability but don't have it mentally, you know and Peter Brown (pseudonym), who we mentioned in there a while ago, who played with me and you, had all the ability in the world, best player I've probably played with ability wise, but I don't think he had the mental sharpness upstairs to get through…" (Keith-Sporting Chance)

We can get a sense from Frank's experiences of what type of performance is required of professional footballers. There is a need for them to portray strength to "be a winner, to be 'a leader" is expected in contrast to "weak" characteristics, because this is what "they're looking for". The use of the word "they" features regularly in the players lived relations, highlighting how it would seem that professional footballer are at the mercy of others' expectations and demands. The importance of displaying leadership qualities as opposed to weakness is clear in Frank's language especially in the frequency that he uses the term "leader" to describe his experiences. What is more, for Frank the importance of showing mental strength is also reflected in the language he uses, portraying strength for him, as a professional footballer, "is massive, massive", a big part of the identity of a footballer, and something that is just as important as having the 'ability' to play.

For James the need to perform is something that is required of professional footballers both on and off the field:

"…I suppose it is a team game and they need to be able to rely upon you on the pitch and if they see that you are like that outside of work, then they will expect you to be like that on the pitch for them, you know during games I think that is what they are looking for, I can't imagine they'll be looking for people that, sort of, when it comes to the crunch people who shy away from the challenge, I think they are looking for people who rise to the challenge…" (James- Sporting Chance)

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Reference to the "team game" and "they need to rely upon you" represents James's felt responsibilities to others. He talks from a position of how he thinks he is viewed, represented in being compared to an ideal type "what they are looking for", almost like he is being constantly assessed for a job. In doing so, he is measuring himself up to the imagined requirements of others, because he does not think, "they'll be looking for people that, sort of…" In terms of what is required from others, "they" are not looking for footballers who "shy away from the challenge", but instead are looking for those people "who rise to the challenge." Therefore, professional footballers are expected to go out and meet that which is uncertain or threatening head on, and not be protective of self, or be seen to recoil from a threatening situation. These types of requirements are something that are expected of professional footballers both off and on the field, because "if they"- i.e. others- "see that you are like that outside of work, then they will expect you to be like that on the pitch for them." It would seem that rising to the sporting challenge on the football field is something that is anticipated by the players, and something they are prepared for. However, they may be less prepared for the myriad of social and personal challenges that come with their job and therefore, the expectations that all professional footballers can rise to every situation, is proposed as being unrealistic. These idealistic expectations could lead to problems, if players feel forced into performing that they are "rising to the challenge" outwardly for others, when in fact they are struggling to deal with those very challenges inwardly within themselves.

Indeed, for James the need to perform as a professional footballer away from the football field was not something that he found easy:

> 'I don't think it's right that you have to act a certain way or be a certain way…because everyone's different, erm…I find it false, you know, that, you know, you have to act in a certain or be a certain way as footballer, I don't think, I don't that it's healthy because, you know, it's, it's hard work putting a front on all day every, every day that you are in, you know, and as a footballer there's no escaping it because you are always, I suppose you are always working whether you are on the pitch or training, or, you know if you are at a big club- out in the public, people know you so you

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have to, sort of put on this persona to these people whoever they may be and if you have got to do that all the time it is draining, if you can't be yourself then it's, you know it's not a healthy thing I don't think…' (James- Sporting Chance)

Again, we get a sense from James's experiences of how professional footballers are expected to be. James highlights the need to be inauthentic frequently. In this regard, footballers have to "act in a certain way" and are required to "put on a front" or "a persona", suggesting that this is an important aspect of professional footballers relational experiences. This is a way-of being where it is difficult to "be yourself" as a professional footballer and thus, there is need to be somewhat inauthentic and for James this is something which he disagrees with. Indeed, we can sense that there is a feeling of moral injustice in his experiences, "I don't think it's right" suggests that this is also a way of being which is not accepted wholeheartedly. Asking everybody to perform in such a way, when "everyone is different", suggests that all professional footballers have to adopt a similar persona- a kind of uniform character imposed on individuality where "you can't be yourself." Within this uniform, there is a sense of feeling trapped, where there is "no escaping" the scrutiny of others and need to perform. However, this way of being seems unnatural and "false", something that takes a lot of effort and is "hard work." Inevitably, to keep this act up for James is 'draining' and this eventually serves to sap away his energy, and therefore take everything out of him. In essence, when considering inauthenticity we can see how professional footballers live in a false relationship not only with others but also, more importantly with themselves.

For Frank the importance of performing both on and off the field was essential in order to maintain his reputation as a successful professional footballer:

"…people in football they talk and clubs are linked with other clubs and if you want to get a move, you know you are not going to get a move if one manager is saying, 'yeah well you know', or 'we've heard that he didn't want to play last week because he is suffering with depression' or whatever, and people would laugh at that, it's not, and no one know what it is…err…so… you leave yourself vulnerable in, is anyone going to take

me on, am I going to get the same money am on, and all them questions are going around in your head, you don't want people to think you are like that […] you end up putting on a front to make them believe you are in the right frame of mind because at the end of the day if you get on the pitch you are getting extra money on top of your wages with appearances, and bonuses and stuff…" (Frank-Sporting Chance)

The importance of reputation in Frank's experiences is paramount because "people in football they talk" and "clubs are linked with other clubs." We get the impression that Frank is vividly imagining how others could talk about him- and, how potential news of him not living up to the expectations of others in football would spread like wild fire. It could be argued that the constant scrutiny and need to perform a certain way has left Frank in a state of paranoia. Despite this position, being ready and available to perform on the field is essential, because if people in football hear that a player "didn't want to play" as he was "suffering from depression", then this could potentially affect a player's reputation, and thus opportunity to "move" forward. The option of owning up to his problems and thus not playing, would leave Frank open to feeling "vulnerable", exposed to an uncertain world where people would 'laugh at' his situation, therefore adding humiliation and shame to his experience. Because of this Frank, would much rather "put on a front" and therefore pretend that everything is okay; to do what is expected, as opposed to what is necessary for him personally.

For James and Keith, the need to maintain a performance off the field was also necessary to protect how they imagine others perceive them:

'…because I wouldn't want them to think that I was mentally weak, I just kept on going over the same thing papering over it, didn't want to train, couldn't be bothered playing, erm…but was just turning up anyway because it's not like you can turn around and say I don't want to play today because then you'll get sacked, you're just going through the motions kind of thing, it's like you are in auto-pilot you doing it until something happens and you can't go on anymore, you just…something happens where you hit rock bottom and you know that you…you've got to tell them then, there's no other way…' (Frank- Sporting Chance)

'I just think it's that, it's that sort of, erm…that feeling that…that…everyone will look you as being a bit of a… you know, a weak link I suppose, err, if you show your true feeling, you know, when you have got a problem I think, you know it's easier to bottle it up and not tell anyone and not actually say I've got a problem here…erm…so…' (James- Sporting Chance)

Frank's lived experiences indicate a need to show to others that he was mentally strong and a coping man. We get a sense that behind an outwardly coping public self, Frank is dealing with a broken private self, a portion of his identity, which in the background he was trying desperately to hold together. In doing so, he was attempting to disguise this shattered private self by using a temporary solution- i.e. "papering over it"- through an outward performance of coping, that everything was okay. Avoidance of revealing his "struggling" private self is born out of a fear of being seen as weak by others. Sadly, the walls all come crashing down on Frank and he "hit's rock bottom" It is only at this point that he feels forced to reveal to others the nature of his difficulties and thus, the struggling private self that he has been disguising.

Again, we can sense the importance of the relationship between how professional footballers are viewed by themselves and others in James's experiences. The importance of being seen as strong is paramount; anyone who fails to do so is seen as a "weak link", which again connects with a sense of responsibility to the collective that professional footballer experience. In essence, showing perceived weakness in professional football would be seen as somewhat problematic to the workings and production within a successful system, or team. Because of this, James is encouraged to be inauthentic and thus, keep his "true feelings" to himself. In doing so, he looks "to bottle it up", to keep his problems in to put a lid on them. The emphasis in bottling up problems, gives a sense that footballers feel the need to repress their problems, to keep their feelings and emotions inside like the fizz in a champagne bottle. However, as would be the case with champagne, when the bottle is shaken up and the fizz gets too much, the cork can no longer take the pressure and it will eventually spill out. Across experiences, one gets a sense of the conflict between a private and public self, between an inward struggle

and an outward show of coping, between the need for help versus the need to deal with things alone, which I will now explore.

7.2.2.5 The need for help and support versus the need to get on with things

The players often talked about how they at times experienced a need to seek help for the problems, yet at the same time were required by others to get on with things. This lived-experience was more common within the sporting chance players' accounts.

Frank and James go on to discuss the need for support and help in their experiences as professional footballers:

> "…I mean it is hard, but from what I can, all I can remember is wanting someone that…that would say 'look it's going to be all right' kind of thing, you know, don't, don't worry about it, but then it never happened and then you carry a doubt as to whether people are really bothered about you as a person as a footballer, yeah […] and the only time you feel like, you know you are kind of safe is when you are on your own, but that's the loneliest time because you don't want to be around people in case you offend them and tell them to fuck off…" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

> "…because I am a man to have to go and ask someone, you know, in desperation to help you out is a, is a tough thing to do, so it does knock you a bit to ask for help…" (James-Sporting Chance).

We can get a sense from Frank's experiences of the difficulties of being a professional footballer when you are struggling with problems. The need for a reassuring other was apparent; all Frank wanted was for someone to tell him "it's going to be all right." However, this was not forthcoming and because of this, the experience left him feeling uncertain about others intentions, 'you carry a doubt as to whether people are really bothered." There is also a sense of loneliness in Frank's experiences, and it could be argued that this is borne out of a mistrust of others, because for him being a footballer and alone with oneself is "the only time you feel […] kind of safe." Comparatively for James, difficulties in asking for help as "a man" are evident; this is something that does not come easy to him: "it is a tough thing to do", suggesting it has been done as

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a last resort. It would seem the experience of seeking help is something that serves to dent Frank's sense of masculinity "it does knock you a bit", because for him help seeking and thus, perceived weakness is not consistent with his own and others ideals of what it means to be a man, he continues:

> "because like I said if you bottle it up it is only going to get worse, erm…and it's, it's difficult to sort of to say to them go and speak to someone at the club, or whatever, because of that, sort of, feeling of weakness and, you know the expectations, you know, I shouldn't have problems because I'm a footballer…" (James- Sporting Chance)

> ''because what it is, what it is, is everyone will go "arr you soft cunt!", "what's up with you, you fucking puff", it's a man thing, do you know what I mean, then all of a sudden there might be fucking out of twenty players, seventeen will have a fucking problem and the other three might have a good day…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

In James's experiences, the need to avoid showing his difficulties to others causes him to push down powerful emotions by "bottling things up." The need to hide his problems is born out of fear of how revealing these to others, would be perceived because "you know the expectations." In essence, there is a continued requirement for him to contain his problems and avoid seeking help and support, because for him not coping would be perceived by himself and others as showing "weakness." Worryingly, the experiences of difficulties seem to be perceived as indefensible to Frank and to a certain extent somewhat discounted, because for him "he shouldn't have problems, because he's a footballer". Frank imagined that being a footballer would mean that he would be immune from problems and that this perceived ideal is something that he forged before he made it as of a footballer, from the outside looking in. It is almost like Frank is saying that as a footballer 'I've got it all' (through the eyes of another), so therefore, he should not be experiencing problems. However, in essence his perceptions of what it would be like to be a professional footballer and how he thought he would experience this in the future, is a lot different in the reality of his present time.

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Tony talks about how he imagines others will treat him if he was to seek help and support for his problems. To own up to not dealing with difficulties is not what men do- "it's a man thing", and showing this could potentially bring about references from others that would serve to threaten Tony's position as a man. The terms "you soft cunt" and "you fucking puff", would go some way to reinforcing the need for him, as a professional footballer, to maintain his position of coping, through the use of gender based and homosexual slurs by others.

Keith goes on to talk about how, in his experience, professional clubs treat players in terms of health and well-being:

> '…if you pull your hamstring we can treat that, if you've torn a calf muscle we can treat that, if you break your leg we can treat that, but we can't treat you mentally, we can't, we can't tell you, oh my god, we think you should go and have a chat to this guy, maybe once a week, just for now and vent your frustrations or get things out of your body, or your mind sorry, that needs to be out, you know, that never happened and what happened was, 'shut up! Keep quiet and get on with your job and you'll get ahead…"
> (Keith- Sporting Chance)

Keith is putting himself in the shoes of others to give himself a voice, to be empowered over his situation. He is saying how he experienced professional football in terms of support, "if you break a leg […] we can treat that", suggesting help is available for players to treat physical injuries, but also how he thinks things should be "we think you should […] have a chat to this guy" for emotional "frustrations" and mental "mind" problems . However, the reality for him is that he did not have a voice or an option to seek help "that never happened" and actually not saying anything, was what others expected from him. Keith's experiences show how professional footballers are encouraged by others to remain silent about mental or emotional difficulties without voice, disempowered if you will to- 'shut up!' and 'keep quiet', that is, if they want to 'get on' and be successful.

For James and Keith their experiences suggest that they feel as footballers, like they are commodities:

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'…you know at the end of the day you are treated like a…a machine, and if you are not working properly then, you know, they are not really interested…' (James- Sporting Chance)

'first and foremost, compared to the modern game now to when I was making my way in the game, err…there's not infrastructure for people to be letting go of emotions anyway, you just come in and you are robotic, a machine to them, who's like on a production line…' (Keith- Sporting Chance)

We get a sense from James's lived experiences that people within professional football, expect footballers to perform as 'machines' with a predominant focus on performance. Sadly, if a player is broken and 'not working properly' then there is little interest in him as a commodity. For Keith there is a need to hold things back and not 'let go of emotions'- for the sake of others. The expectations that are placed on him by others are in a sense non-human like- footballers need to perform as manufactured 'machines' void of emotions and feelings 'robotic' in their performance, where it seems performance is placed above understanding and support on a human level. Like James, Keith also feels like he is on a 'production line', he feels like one of many footballers that those in the world of football can just pick off the convey belt and discard at will.

However, for Frank and Keith, retrospectively, they now see the importance of seeking help for their problems:

'…it's not, it's not about them, it's not about what they think about you, it's not about that, it's about what you think and erm…and that is what it is always going to come down to…erm…if you think you are weak at that point, which you do you are mentally down, you are weak, what difference does it make anyway, it's not about what other people think about you, it's about getting help and once you speak to them they understand and people do understand and they will be there for them but they've got to, they've got to tell those who they need to tell to go down the right path, because if you keep it bottled up then you aren't, you haven't got a chance…' (Frank- Sporting Chance).

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'speak about it, 100%, get it off your chest, go and seek help, do not let it fester because if you do it becomes an angry animal and that animal want's to eat and feed on whatever…err…weaknesses you have it will exploit to the maximum…' (Keith- Sporting Chance)

We get a sense from Frank's lived experiences how professional footballers' relations with themselves and others, changes once they decide to open up about their problems. After seeking help there is no longer a worry about how others view them it no longer 'about what they think about you', but instead there is focus on how footballers view themselves, 'it's about what you think'. There is still a concern within Frank's experiences about how he is viewed as a man after seeking help, but again, this becomes more about his own perspective- 'if you are weak, you are weak so what difference does it make?', than it is about the judgement of others. We can see that seeking help is better ground for Frank- he is heading down 'the right path', a positive journey reached through sharing problems with others and a realisation that 'people do understand'. This experience gives Frank an opportunity to see beyond the need to repress his emotions and feelings by 'bottling things up'.

For Keith the importance for professional footballers to get help for their problems is reflected in his assertive language- 'speak about it, 100%'. We get a sense that ignoring and neglecting problems, can manifest itself in an unhealthy way of being, both physically and mentally. For Keith, if you 'let it fester' without seeking helps, problems have the potential to take on a life of their own, represented as an aggressor 'an angry animal', a type of parasite which can strip away your strengths and thus reveal your 'weaknesses'.

However, for Gareth there is also limited specific support available to him as a professional footballer within his career:

"Not much support at all. PFA are really good though […] but clubs do not really care. It is a bit in the past (football). So many things have moved on such as sports science (e.g. fitness, biomechanics, etc.) etc. So why not this area? (support and welfare), but, clubs will probably see it as an unnecessary expense…" (Gareth- within career)

The lack of support from others, in particular from people within the club is essential to Gareth's experiences here. In his experience football clubs offer little in the way of help to professional footballers, and alarmingly there seems to be an almost dismissive attitude, as if the clubs 'don't really care' about the players psychological well-being. For Gareth, the attitude of professional clubs is out dated, a 'bit in the past', suggesting that people in the game are not moving forward with the other areas in the game, like for example 'sports science'. It would seem that the area of psychological well-being of professional players is not regarded as being as important in the result run business that is professional football, unlike sports science, which is tangible – it can be seen to improve performance and fitness- and it, would seem is considered, because it is a necessary expense.

7.2.3 Lived Space

Within the interviews, lived space was something that was only apparent within the sporting chance players' retrospective experiences, which could suggest that the immediate space that the current professional footballers found themselves in was not something that was deemed problematic. The lived space of the sporting chance players manifested itself in several ways within the players' experiences, including their physical spaces (such as the football pitch) and their own psychological space. Commonly, the players talked about the space that they occupied when things were going well in contrast to when things were not going well. Predominantly, the players talked of their experiences in reference to their space on and off the football field. What is more, lived-space was only prevalent within the experiences of the sporting chance players, which suggests that the ability to look back on their careers retrospectively allows professional footballers to consider their lived space more than during their careers.

The sporting chance players talked about their space when things were going well as a place where things flowed easily around them, it was a good space, a place where they were able to have some control over and felt supported. What is more, both their space on and off the field, was seen to influence each other- thus, if things were going well on the pitch it would follow that things would run well off it. However, the space the players experienced away from the field was not always easy; and in

particular, it represented at times a lonely space, which led to the players experiencing isolation. Similarly, the space that the players occupied within professional football, in particular within the club, it was a space that felt unsteady and restrictive, where the players felt, at times, they needed to escape from (especially, with their problems). However, the space away from football, and in particular the treatment centre they were in, served as being a new space to the players, one that gave them the freedom of space to grow into their world, without restriction.

7.2.3.1 A comfortable and easy space: when things are going well

Frank and James, talk about their experiences of professional football when things are going well for them:

> "When things are going well (performing well on the field), money falls at your lap, you know the car never breaks down, you know, you don't have to worry, you know your agent is sorting everything out for you err…and life is easy…" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

> "err…I mean I suppose I never really, it didn't really faze me (the pressure of football) too much, err…you know a big, I suppose playing in front of a big crowd I quite enjoyed, err…you know…I didn't really let it get to me too much, err…but I can see how it does affect people quite a bit if you sort of over think it and, but erm…I mean, you know, now I sort of don't let it faze me really at all, it's, it's not something I think is worth getting down or upset, or, you know frustrated over just, I just play because I enjoy playing…" (James- Sporting Chance)

The players' experiences give us a sense of the space that professional footballers occupy when things are going well for them. Frank talks about the experience of lived space when professional footballers are off the field and when things are going well for them on the field. There is a sense that things when things are running smoothly "you don't have to worry", it is if he is at the centre of a wheel, a turning wheel where everything is synchronised perfectly around him, where "money falls at your lap […] the car never breaks down […] your agent is sorting everything out." For James, his experiences centre around

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his position on the football field, where he reminisces about playing within a big stadium in front of a "big crowd". It is a place where performance brings him certainty, and it is a position that does not "faze him", despite inevitable pressures, where everything seems so straightforward, so simple where he "just plays" because he "enjoys playing." What is more, James places himself in the position of others to imagine what it would be like to occupy a difficult space as a footballer "I can see how it does affect other people", suggesting that being too conscious on the field and when you "over think", can be problematic. From this we can see how the space of performance on the field for James, is a place a place of autonomy one which he is comfortable and happy in (which is used in the frequency of "enjoy" in his language), where he finds freedom from the stress of his life, because "you don't have to worry."

7.2.3.2 Lonely space:

However, Frank and Keith express how being a professional footballer is not always an easy space to occupy:

> "..it's kind of lonely place really, once you leave football you don't really hang around with all the football lads constantly, when you're there you work with them, but when you leave there and go home at 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock, or whenever, everyone else is at work, so you are on your own, it's a, it's a quite a lonely time […] so it's kind of a, err…that's what's been the problem for me, err…yeah and just, just the depression side of it once you get into that time on your hands, once you feel yourself going there's no one really at, at the club that can pick you back up again, they don't have people like psychologists, the big clubs probably do, I don't know…"" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

> "yes, a very lonely sport, […] I, I, I think it is a lonely game, if somebody tells me different I'd like them to show me […] I wanted to go home all the time, no one wanted to do that for me [people within the club]…no it was just, he'd be there at half eight every morning, turns up for training does the boots, gets on the minibus goes up to the training ground, trains, cleans the training ground , back to the ground and you become this manufactured person, from 9 until half past five every day and then you

go home and sit in the digs on your own and you think…this is not what football is all about, so it leans you towards mental strength but also to mental despair and torture really…" (Keith- Sporting Chance).

Both Frank and Keith talk of football being an empty space for them, a place which is empty of other people. For Frank, we get a sense of his space away from the club is "a lonely place" (adding a temporal experience to his lived world), void of others who do not play football "everyone is at work, so you are on your own." Inevitably, it is a space that serves to push Frank towards "depression", something that he can feel himself consciously moving towards "you feel yourself going". However, despite this he is within a space that he doesn't feel he can get himself out of- thus, adding a sense of disempowerment to his experiences- and suggesting that he is reliant on others to help him "get back up", in particular the club "there's no one really […] at the club that can pick you up." For, Keith he feels isolated within his space away from football, where "you go home and sit in the digs on your own." However, there is a contrast in his experience between being in a place of comfort at his family "home" (non-football home) versus being "in the digs" (footballing home). We get a sense that Keith is looking to escape his lonely space and thus, his footballing home, so he can go back to his non-football home as space where he feels supported. There is also a sense of disempowerment in his experiences, where the need get out of his lonely space is not something which Frank could do himself and instead he needed other people, but "no one wanted to do that" for him. There is also a sense of disillusionment in Frank's experiences, were he questions his position as a professional footballer: "this is not what football is all about", suggesting that the reality of being a footballer is different from what he thought it would, or should be. In particular, he draws on the position that footballers occupy in terms of their obligations, where you "become a manufactured person", where there is a sense of feeling the space he occupies is a place of automation, as well as a false position. What is more, the space of professional football "leans" Frank towards "mental strength", a position that he feels almost pushed or forced into- again adding a sense of disempowerment to his spatial experiences- which in the end leads him to

experienced mental difficulties "mental despair", which are somewhat prolonged and painful, or "torture."

7.2.3.3 Unsteady, precarious and restrictive space: within the club

The players also talked about the space within the football club as a difficult place to experience:

> "dressing rooms are very precarious places because dressing rooms are place where friendships are won and lost…errr...ideas about peoples personalities are formed and I sort of rebelled against that stereotypical get on with the rest of the lads type, because I didn't think it was the right thing for me to do…" (Keith- Sporting Chance)

> "I always used to say well, what do they say a problem shared is a problem halved or something like that, I haven't got a problem with that, but I think he don't want to know my problems, so you clam up on it, but then you can hide away from the fact, that you can go out there and you can go out on the training ground and switch off for two hours […] you don't think, all you think about is training all you think about is me- fucking how many goals can I get in training, fucking how many, do I get a sweat on, or do I feel good about myself…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

For Keith, the experiences of lived space within the dressing room represented a "precarious place" for him, a kind of unsteady and unstable place, a place that lacked security (which has similarities to lived experiences with "the digs" and opposite to his lived experiences of "home", or where he was brought up). What is more, we also get a sense of the competitive and judgemental nature of the dressing room in professional football, a space where "friendships are won and lost", and where "ideas about […] personalities are formed." For Tony, the space within professional football seems somewhat restrictive, especially in terms of discussing problems. This experience of space manifests itself in Tony "clamming up", with him wanting to become enclosed or closing up as if a shellfish would to avert danger, to go inside his shell so to speak. However, the football field "or on the training ground" gives Tony the space, or freedom to escape "you can hide away", without being detected and therefore, forget about

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your problems" or switch off." It's almost like the players' experiences of space within professional football is not adequate to meet the supportive needs of professional footballers, an unsteady and restrictive space which doesn't allow the players the freedom to open up and just be.

Indeed, Tony goes on to talk about the space of professional football being somewhat controlling:

> "I was embarrassed about coming out and asking for help because that was the problem I didn't have to ask for help, because everything was given to me, you know everything was on a plate for me, erm and then when, when you as we all say, when you come into the real world, you know for twenty years you've had everything given to you…" (Tony-Sporting Chance)

We get a sense from Tony's experiences that asking for help would be almost like "coming out", an act of moving out of himself to allow others to see what he has been holding back. Again, there is a restrictive nature to his experiences here, where he has worries of showing himself, or being himself out of fear of what others within his space might think. Furthermore, Tony highlights how the space that he occupies as a footballer is a space where things are provided for, where everything "was on a plate" or "given to you". Because of this he goes on to suggest that asking for help was not something that he was used to as a footballer until he "come into the real world", which would suggest that the space that profession footballers occupy prior to career transition is an is unrealistic one in contrast.

Thus, when discussing his experiences since leaving the game and seeking help for his problems, Tony's experiences of space are different:

> "You know, now, now that I have come into an environment like this (treatment centre), I'll speak to anybody […] and I think like fucking five months ago I'd be in bastard tears but because of the two weeks I've been in here now all them, all them, all them feelings out I don't feel emotional about it anymore, I can talk about it now, I'm not embarrassed to talk about it, do you know what I mean? So it's made me a better

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person being in here because it's made me been, like you say getting it off your chest, getting things out in the open, being honest with yourself more than anything else…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

We get the sense from Tony's experiences that the treatment centre offers a new space for him as a footballer "now that I have come into an environment like this", one which allows him let go, a space which gives him the opportunity to be free of constraints where he can get "it off his chest." What is more, we can feel the sense of growth in Tony's experiences where he does not "feel emotional anymore" and this experience made him a "better person." We get a sense of a contrast in Tony's experience between his "inside space" where he feels trapped with his feelings and the "outside space" which he is looking for the opportunity to escape too, so he can let his "feelings out."

7.2.4 Lived Time

It was clear that issues around lived time were only prominent in the experiences of the sporting chance players. It is could be argued that that this was because these players had been within career transition for a period of time and thus, found themselves reflecting more on their past, present and future time. What is more, these players had experienced difficulties in their post-sporting lives, which they were addressing within the clinic, so it is not surprising that their immediate experiences were predominant on the players' accounts. The sporting chance players' lived experiences of time included a strong sense of their past anticipation of hopes for the future, embarking on a journey of achieving their goal, their life-long dream of becoming a professional footballer. They sometimes looked back in time to their childhood, reflecting on and making sense of lived time as positive, goal-orientated and of pursuing a childhood dream contrasting with the more negative experiences of their present time. The players' future-orientation was infused with a sense of the unknown and unpredictability, and their present time filled with responsibilities and pressures, which was in contrast to the early days of their career. Thus, the sporting chance players' experiences progressed from an early narrative that was filled with hope and aspirations for their future, to their present experiences, represented with a sense of lost hope, pressure and for some, near tragedy

7.2.4.1 Future anticipation and achievements:

Both Frank and Tony expressed their sense of hopeful anticipation for a bright future:

> "…the good aspects are…erm…obviously you realise you have got a talent, you've followed that talent and set out a goal and obviously reached that goal of becoming a footballer and that is really great…" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

> "you know what I mean, playing in front of the lights where Dad took when I was younger that's all I wanted to do was score goals at (Peterstown's ground) and I got the opportunity and it was like a dream come true for me as a little kid really.[…] you know walking out at Wembley and looking to the left and there's 30,000 fucking Peterstown fans and 30,000 Trenchwood fans and you know you think 'fuck me!', I've always dreamed of playing at Wembley, you know what I mean, but this, for 90 minutes this is a defining moment in our life's…" (Tony- Sporting Chance)

Frank talks about his experiences of time in terms of recognising his ability to play as a footballer in the early days, something that he moved towards developing over his life. From the beginning, he 'set out' to achieve a future-orientated goal, a sense of hope that he would one day become a professional footballer. As time progresses, we can see how moves towards achieving this and we can sense the importance of what it means to him to achieve this, suggesting that reaching his life time goal was 'really great'. Likewise, for Tony he also set out to achieve a goal, a dream of becoming a footballer from being a 'little kid'. For him the experience of becoming a professional footballer was like a 'dream come true', suggesting that being a professional footballer was like capturing something which, in reality, was mostly only ever experienced within the imagination, or as a fantasy.

7.2.4.2 The reality of the dream: uncertainty, lack of control and dealing with pressure

However, the sense of contrast between their past hopes and dreams and present lived time is stark. As Keith relates, the future is now uncertain and unpredictable:

> "…it makes you question a whole lot of things, whereas before I'd done a lot off the cuff and it probably was better for me and I didn't worry as much and it makes you feel like sour towards getting up out of bed in the morning sometimes, you know, because you don't believe that everything is going to go as you planned it, every day, and like yourself again, you know, nobody, nobody can predict what's going to be round the corner for you both, in the same thing it would be nice to have a little bit of control where you can say, this is going to happen and this isn't going to happen…" (Keith- Sporting Chance).

For Keith, his lived experience of time as a footballer has left him searching for certainty, where he is now left 'questioning a whole lot of things', in contrast to before when he would be more care free and would do things 'off the cuff', and thus, without thought and preparation. Keith's experiences are emphatic- for him as a footballer 'nobody can predict what's going to be around the corner', lived time is uncertain and his future unfathomable. He desires some sort of grip over his experiences, his world, where it would be good to have just a 'little bit of control' over his life, his future direction. From this, we can sense disempowerment in Frank's experiences, as a footballer he does not have control over what might be, or what could be.

The rhythm of Keith's daily life is further disrupted by the uncertainties of his employment:

> "You know being in and out of the team affects the everyday running of your life, basically, everything you do has a knock on affect with your football, you know, so I'd say it was more down than I enjoyed it…" (Keith- Sporting Chance)

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For Keith the lack of consistency he experiences 'affects the everyday running of your life", suggesting that being a professional footballer means that sometimes things don't work properly, things feel broken or not in order. When things are not going well in football, there is a sense that this has a chain reaction, or a 'knock on affect' in all other areas of Keith's life, his lived time is affected in all aspects of his life.

Reflecting on the passage of time, Keith also contrasts the 'fantastic past' with the present that is full of pressures:

> "At the start it was great, fantastic, great novelty value, but I suppose as time goes on you get a bit older it becomes more of a job and a lot more pressure on your, of course, you need to pay mortgages…but, I think really if you're not, if you're not tuned in enough, err…and prepared for the bad and the worse days, don't worry about the good days because they look after themselves, it's those days in training when you fucking you are getting the yellow jersey or you're, you know, you're not, you're not keeping up with the pace of things it's a big, it's a big, big ask of you to try and keep at it all the time" (Keith- Sporting Chance)

The experience of professional football for Keith progresses from the hopes and dreams of his early years, to responsibilities and pressures in his present reality. Lived time during the good days is somewhat easy for Keith, it is something that will 'look after' itself; it is something that is lived out automatically whilst the harder days as a professional footballer are different. In contrast, the difficult days are experienced as a sense of lagging behind those in front, where you are trying to keep up with everyone else, or 'up with the pace of things'.

The language that the players adopt also highlighted the strength of their feelings. Tony highlights ' you know walking out at Wembley and looking to the left, and there's 30,000 fucking Peterstown fans and 30,000 Trenchwood fans and you know you think 'fuck me!', I've always dreamed of playing at Wembley' and Keith highlights 'it's those days in training when you fucking you are getting the yellow jersey'. Within their language there was a strong emphasis on the highs and lows that professional footballer's experience. For example, the

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difference between the 'dream' of being a professional footballer where it is 'fantastic' indicates an almost unreal nature that is seen to reinforce their early anticipations and experiences. However, this contrasts significantly with terms such as 'sour' and 'getting the yellow jersey' (referring to a common practice for footballers to vote after each training session for who the worse player was. The chosen player then has to wear a 'yellow jersey' or bib, at the next training session) represented in their current experiences.

7.2.4.3 Progression of problems: from loneliness to tragedy

Within their experiences, specifically, the sporting chance players talked about how things deteriorated over time, something that was illustrated in moments of epiphany within their accounts. For example, these players' experiences progressed from a period of loneliness to one of tragedy.

Over time, the players talked about their lived experiences of temporality in terms of struggling with their present lives, in particular with themselves and others:

> "…when I look back, the bad, my bad days came when I was lonely, I was alone and was very vulnerable and the older I got, my bad days were harvested more by, I'd have a drink, or I might have a bet, betting wasn't as much now as drinking, or I might do something stupid or I might buy something cause I could, as such, you know, but everything was on my own, even though I might have been in a relationship and a strong relationship at the time, I was still on my own…" (Keith- Sporting Chance)

For Keith as time progressed as a footballer and 'the older he got' the more he experienced his life in a problematic manner, for him his 'bad days' were played out alone, with himself, lonely and 'on his own'. We can get a sense of how Keith began to experience his present time in a negative manner, where his days became 'harvested' or nurtured by a need to self-medicate where he would have 'a drink' or 'a bet' to deal with things. This led him to prolong his problems as well as isolate from others. For Frank and Tony, the progressive nature of their perceived difficulties, and thus the nature of their current understanding as professional footballer led them even further down the destructive path:

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"…I spoke to somebody a couple of years ago and I had a few meetings? with them and I tried to stop for four months…err…and I knew then that I needed help, then I stopped for four months (gambling) and I thought well it's not that, because I still feel angry, still feel down, so I carried on gambling again and it got worse and worse; and then…erm…I just hit rock bottom when I just couldn't have money on me because I was constantly thinking about gambling, constantly depressed, everyday…erm…and it just got worse and worse…" (Frank- Sporting Chance)

"…oh god, I was embarrassed, I was embarrassed, I, I, I didn't, I think that when you get to rock bottom, when you get to rock bottom, I tried, obviously I tried to kill myself a few times and I got to the stage where I didn't want to wake up in the morning, because there was nothing for me, there was nothing for me, my kids, my kids didn't look at me as? the same- person […] I said to my brother once before my problems, I woke up one morning and I was down as fuck, down, my missus had gone to work, erm and I, I, I, I was like you know what mate, I don't want to be here no more and he looked at me as if to say my brother can't be saying that, you're Tony Johnstone, you can't be saying that, because he thought everything was alright, you know he thought everything was alright because I was in love with a girl at the time, which I was, I'd rented a house for seven months so everything was fine, I'd got everything, you know…" (Tony-Sporting Chance)

We can get a sense from Frank's experiences of how his problems progressed as a professional footballer. Despite knowing that something was wrong that he 'needed help', he still struggled to stop doing what he was doing, his lived time was played out questioning and searching for what his problem was- because, without answer he couldn't help himself (adding a sense of disempowerment to his experiences). The temporal and progressive nature of his experiences are represented in his accounts, for example 'to get to a stage' would suggest that the position he has got to had developed over time, and is thus not something that was sudden. In the end, Frank was seen to 'hit rock bottom', suggesting that he experienced himself falling from a great height, a painful fall and descent, which hurt when he hit the bottom. Tony also talks about hitting 'rock

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bottom'. However, his lowest ebb was experienced in a tragic way, where he saw no other option but to attempt to end his life, to stop time and to kill himself. The strength of Tony's feelings towards ending his temporality or life, is highlighted in the number of times he relates to this difficult experience- he didn't 'want to be here no more' he didn't want to 'wake up'. His experiences would suggest that Tony could not see his lived time both presently and moving forward in an optimistic manner, in essence, he envisaged no future for himself.

7.3 Discussion

The following section will discuss the key findings from this stage of the research and in doing so will link in relevant literature to show how the study has built upon previous work. In terms of structure, the substantive issues identified in the thematic analysis will be used as sub-headings.

7.3.1 Summary of findings

A major aspect of the lived world of the career professionals both during and after their careers surrounded their sporting identities and their overall sense of self. Significantly, the players' way of being was influenced by relationality and, predominantly, how others within the game viewed and related to them as footballers. The current study revealed how the early experiences of professional footballers played a major part in the development of their sporting identities. In doing so, it provides a specific understanding of how the development of athletic identity is 'lived' via the experiences of professional footballers in the United Kingdom. Indeed, by using a phenomenological approach, I was able to highlight how career professionals professional footballers identities are shaped and moulded over time, from the strong 'hopes' of their childhood experiences, to the reality of capturing their boyhood dreams. It is put forward, that the weight of the players' aspirations of becoming pro-footballers coupled with time spent towards accomplishing this, strongly reinforced the continued development of their sporting-self and thus, a pursuit of sporting success. However, sometimes, this way of being comes at a cost to the players, as they felt required to adopt their sporting identity (and role) all the time; and this did not always serve them well. For some a prolonged reliance on their sporting identity led to difficult experiences and this was to become more problematic, after their careers had ended. Therefore, the

experiences of becoming a professional footballer and being recognised as this, can become increasingly important to who professional footballers are in their past, present and future lived world. Previous work by Carless and Douglas (2013) has highlighted how athletic identity is often culturally informed, as well as being rooted in early sporting experiences. In this research, the authors highlight how athletic identity can be shaped through early experiences in sport and around a narrative that is 'wholly and exclusively' focused on performance outcomes, in terms of winning and beating others (pg. 31).

7.3.2.1 Self and identity

Past research (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007) has highlighted the importance of developing and identifying with the sporting role as an essential part of gaining and, maintaining success in elite-sport. This was certainly true for the players in this study, for whom being a pro-footballer seemed to infiltrate every aspect of their lives. In this respect, it could be argued that professional football can still be considered a 'total institution' (e.g. Parker 1988). Within a total institution, the 'self' can become mortified where a barrier is placed between the individual and the outside world, and thus, the self becomes 'totally' defined by the social arrangements of the institution within which it is placed. In this sense, the self has no freedom to define and broaden itself outside the culture it resides in. The phenomenological approach adopted in this research has brought to light how a total institution is still 'lived' in the experiences of professional footballers. Whilst prior studies in this area, have been developed using quantitative methods and tools such as, the Athletic Identity Measurement (e.g. Brewer et al 1993; Grove, Lavallee & Gordon, 1997), it is argued that the findings of the current research provide a richer understanding of how athletic-identity shapes the experiences of professional footballers. Accordingly, at times, professional footballers lacked room in their identities, and therefore their lived-space, and this was seen to play out in the players experiencing a sense of being 'trapped' within their sporting-self, with little or no room to manoeuvre, or 'escape'.

Previous work has also highlighted how- in the pursuit of sporting success, elite athletes can develop a form of 'identity narrowing' (Lally, 2007) where the pursuit of an 'exclusive' sporting self is undertaken at the expense of other appropriate identity

roles. Indeed, the professional footballers in this study at times found it difficult to draw upon an alternative gender identity, like for example, one that seeks help and expresses emotions, to help with difficulties. Alternatively, it was clear the players were heavily reliant upon their sporting identities that were steeped in masculine characteristics. Whilst previous quantitative work (e.g. Grove, Lavallee and Gordon 1997; Lally 2007) has been effective in assessing the role of athletic identity on the adjustment to career transition, it is proposed that the current findings add a more enriched understanding to the area. The study reveals how a masculine identity developed within professional football can serve to dominate the lived world of professional footballers, both prior to and during the onset of career transition. What is more, it would seem that for professional footballers the development of a masculine sporting identity was as much to do with what others expected from them, as it was about their own expectations. Therefore, when considering adjustment to career transition for professional footballers, the role that others play within the lived world of professional footballers in terms of influencing this process is seen as significant.

The career professionals experienced professional football as a place of scrutiny, where they, at times, found it difficult to escape the gaze and judgement of others. Whilst drawing upon the work of Foucault (1975) and his theoretical concept of 'disciplinary power', it is argued that the players experienced this type of scrutiny as a need to continually monitor and control their behaviour. People in powerful or influential positions use disciplinary power, as a means of ensuring their subordinates behave in the required manner. In this regard, the gaze of the controlling other is turned inwards, so there is no longer any need for them to be restrained or directed by others. It is put forward, that this type of monitoring was evident in the professional footballers' accounts and this experience left the players feeling trapped and controlled under the judgemental and watchful eye of others, something that was true for them even in the absence of others' gaze (and long after their careers had ended). What is more, it was deemed necessary for the professional footballers to demonstrate a good attitude, towards their work and sporting role. However, this way of being arguably entailed pressures to present themselves accordingly off the field and to perform in ways that were damaging to them and, ultimately, unsustainable.

According to Carless and Douglas (2006, 2008), sporting identity is not only 'seeded' in early experiences but, is also informed by the cultural context, in which athletes find themselves. In this regard, the influence of the sporting environment for athletes can centre on participation and performance outcomes and significantly a need to prescribe to a dominant narrative that emphasises the need to win and be successful, at all costs. The findings of this current study showed that the cultural, or 'performance' outcomes of professional footballers not only centred on the need to win on the pitch, but also around prescribing to 'hegemonic' ideals, or outcomes off it. In particular, the need to display masculine characteristics, such as coping and 'getting on with things', was seen to be a dominant aspect of the players lived experiences and world.

The sporting-role of an elite-athlete has previously been identified as being strongly founded on hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Messner, 1995, Messner & Sabo 1994). Indeed, McGillivray & McIntosh (2006), Roderick (2006) and Sparkes & Smith (2002) have all highlighted how idealistic versions of masculinity are a key feature of male sporting identity. Furthermore, Wellard (2002) has highlighted how the culture or 'lived world' of elite-sport can serve as a major influence in the construction and portrayal of masculinity. Indeed, some sociologists have highlighted how elite-sport can act as an agent for masculinity socialisation (e.g. Foley, 2001; Messner, 1995; Channel, 2007), where a win-at-all-costs mentality can serve to negate, amongst other things, the personal needs of the male-athlete (Watson, 2006). The present research provided an insight into how the need to display masculinity was 'lived' within the experiences of professional footballers in the United Kingdom. The players' experiences revealed the importance of developing a dominant 'sporting' identity and one steeped in masculine characteristics. Importantly, the players deemed it necessary to display an idealistic version of masculinity, at all times. This included demonstrating both physical and 'mental strength', not 'showing weakness' and because of this a need to demonstrate that they could withstand difficulties and threats. In essence, as professional footballers, outwardly showing to others that they were coping and dealing with things was essential to their lived experiences, both on and off the field of play.

The need to display masculine characteristic, was at times, adopted by the players in order to keep others from seeing that they were struggling to cope with their role and

thus, the inevitable pressures that came with their sporting-life. One could argue that this reveals the ways in which professional footballers experience the need to act as men, in order to comply with the social expectations of their lived world.

Previous work has identified how sport is a place where hegemonic masculinities are embodied, and lived, through sporting practices and relationships (e.g. Sparkes and Smith, 2002 Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The current study builds upon previous research by highlighting how professional footballers experienced a need to live up to, and demonstrate the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity off the field, as well as on it. In particular, through a phenomenological lens, I was able to capture the lived experiences of professional footballers whilst they struggled to conceal their difficulties as men. However, for the players their sporting masculine role/identity was, at times, hard to live up to and because of this, it did not feel 'natural' to them. Indeed, Connell (1993) has highlighted how only a small fraction of men (10%) are able to negotiate an identity that is consistent with the hegemonic version of masculine identity. Significantly, negotiating this way of being for professional footballers was very different from the experiences that the players encountered when displaying their sporting version of masculinity on the pitch (represented as an easy space that was free flowing, natural and felt automatic). For instance, off the field, the players experienced their sporting masculine self as if they were acting, or putting on a 'front', which left them sometimes feeling a sense of falseness. In this regard, the players talked about hiding behind a 'mask', a façade in order to disguise, that they were struggling to live up to their sporting masculinity and the pressures that came with trying to maintain this. It is proposed, that that the need for professional footballers to disguise their difficulties was brought through their socialisation, and thus, a requirement within the lived world of professional football to live up to a hegemonic version of masculinity. Unrealistically, these were unobtainable expectations where the players felt required to show that they could cope and deal with all the myriad of sporting and social stresses/pressure that they experienced within their lives.

Roderick (2006) has proposed how displaying a 'bad attitude' towards cultural expectations (or roles) within professional football in the United Kingdom, can lead to players being, amongst other things, stigmatised. Despite nearly a decade since Roderick's research, the current study revealed that professional footballers are still

worried about how others view them, if they went against cultural expectations, like for example, revealing their difficulties. For the players to open up and show that they were struggling was not seen as fitting the masculine requirements of their culture and this was a way of being that felt unsafe and 'was not what [male] professional footballers do'. Some of the professional footballers were worried about being stigmatised, like for instance being labelled a 'fucking puff', or a 'soft cunt' if they were to open up about their difficulties. It is put forward that the lived world of professional football uses homosexual and gender-specific slurs around a specific way of being a man, in order to maintain a hegemonic order, where a dominant form of masculinity is maintained by ostracising and stigmatising characteristics, like talking about emotions, are deemed inappropriate to the idealistic version of masculinity. According to Roderick (2006), professional football in the United Kingdom has working class concerns around masculinity and thus, a fear of femininity. Indeed, Roderick has previously highlighted how professional football is represented as a 'shop floor culture' where players adopt the working class attitudes of being a man, such as showing strength and emotional control, through their perceptions of the behaviour of others. The current research revealed how the culture of professional football is still represented as a 'lived world' that discourages players from adopting alternative forms of masculinity. What is more, it would seem that the role of masculinity within the culture of professional football influences individuals in a negative manner. Prior research has identified how sport is crucial site for the reproduction of a patriarchal structure or system (e.g. Pringle, 2005), where, amongst other things, productivity is seen as the most important determinant for those in power, something that is established through exploitation and control. It could be argued that the current findings show that masculine attitude and ideals around being a male professional footballer is something that is produced to serve and influences those in power (i.e. producing success in football), but at the same time, it would seem that this is something which is negatively affecting things at the individual or, personal level.

Interestingly, understanding masculinity in the experiences of elite-sportsmen during career transition has had limited consideration in the existing literature (for example, back this up). However, Sparkes (1998), has highlighted ways in which a 'strong' or dominant athletic identity can serve as an 'Achilles heel' for sportsmen, especially

when the self is required to redefine itself' for example, during times of change and difficulty. In accordance, some writers, have highlighted how adhering to a hegemonic sporting role can serve to socialise men to reject that which is perceived as weak and feminine (Theberge, 2001). According to this notion some men can experience gender role conflict (GRC) (O'Neil, Helms and Gabel 1986)) when their potential as human beings is hindered or restricted. It would seem that the current findings support the notion of GRC, by indicating that professional footballer's masculine sporting identities served to discourage them from seeking help and find a potential solution to the problems in their lives. Indeed, the players talked about experiencing a 'conflict' between their private-self, one which was struggling to cope and a public-self that was expected to display coping. The 'lived' experience of this tension for the players manifested itself in them feeling like their self was 'broken in two', where the shattered part of their sporting identity was not working efficiently. Because of this, the players felt the need to 'paper over the cracks' of their broken self in order to disguise their difficulties, from the full view of others. Significantly, when discussing their experiences the focus group players also talked about seeking help as not being something which professional footballers are programmed, or brought up to do. It would seem across both stages of analysis, the career professional footballers revealed that there was need for them to possess and display a way of being which was restrictive for them.

The theory of GRC posits that living up to an idealistic masculine role can serve to restrict men in terms of how they process and express their emotions, a way of being that has been termed restrictive emotionality (O'Neil 2008). Previous research, combining a qualitative and quantitative approach, has shown how college-athletes in the United States (Steinfeldt et al. 2009) who are strongly associated with GRC, demonstrated higher levels of athletic identity and stigma towards help seeking than their teammates. Building on this through the life world of male athletes, the current research highlights how professional footballers in the United Kingdom lived through conflict and a need to conceal and keep their problems (and emotions) inside, and out of sight of others. The players experienced what could be regarded as a restriction of their emotions (O'Neil 2008) and thus themselves, through a constant need to 'bottle things up' and be seen to get on with things. This way of being was characterised by a worry of being seen by others as 'weak', because of the

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expectations placed on professional footballers within their life-world. In the end, it was believed more efficient to just 'keep quiet and get on with your job', in order to get by and be successful as elite sportsmen. However, the constant pressure to portray masculine characteristics and thus, fulfil their sporting role created unmanageable stress for the pro-players, in particular off the field. At times, this stress became unbearable, especially, when things were not going well for them on the field and when, inevitably, their futures looked uncertain (e.g. experiencing career transition).

A historic study with footballers in Yugoslavia (Mihovilivic, 1968) revealed how difficult experiences for professional footballers associated with career transition, led players to use alcohol as a means of coping. Interestingly, there seems to have been limited research on the experience of coping for professional footballers during career transition since this study. In light of this, the lived experiences of professional footballers, over half a century later, highlighted how using substances as a means of coping during career transition was still prevalent within the experiences of some professional footballers. Indeed, the sporting chance players were seen to cope with their difficulties in unhealthy ways, through self-medication and escapism. In particular, these players used alcohol and gambling as a means of dealing with difficulties, both during and after their careers had ended. When considering the number of professional footballers (former and current) in the United Kingdom that the Sporting Chance Clinic helps with addiction issues annually, approximately 40, one could argue that this further supports such claims.

Adler and Adler's (1989) concept of the 'glorified self', posits that professional sportspeople are often seduced by the attention and spotlight that is bestowed upon them by others as elite athletes. However, this 'glorified' way of being can come at a cost to elite athletes as they can soon become alienated, or detached from their other selves, due to the over objectification of their selves by others. What is more, within this glorified identity sportspeople can become so locked in their current glory, or situation that they would not look beyond it at their future selves or before it, at their former self. Whilst building upon the theory of the glorified self, the current study revealed how the sporting chance players found it difficult to establish any future orientation due to their futures becoming totally defined within their sporting identity and thus, present time. In essence, the players' lived experiences showed that

before and after their careers, professional footballers can became stuck in a 'discontinued' sporting identity and with this, a reliance on sporting self that no longer served them, or others. Whilst these players' experiences might not be defined as glorified, the need to hang onto their old sporting selves certainly fell in line with maintaining the characteristics that were attributed to their former glories and successes as professional footballer. For example, the players continued to hold on to the expectations of what it meant to be a footballer for them and others- for example, the need to get on with things, despite an obvious need to adopt (or establish) a healthier and alternative identity. In the long-term, continuing to adopt this way of being forced the players to keep silent about their difficulties. Therefore, it would seem that the sporting role, or sporting identity of a professional footballer, is not only something which players utilise as a means of being recognised as 'successful' sportsmen whilst playing, but for some, they continued this way of being after their careers were over, and at the expense of their own well-being. However, the lived experiences of maintaining this identity and thus, prolonging their difficulties played out in professional footballers feeling like they were caught in a downward spiral, without the capabilities, or knowledge, of establishing a jump off point. Worryingly, in the end, some players plummeted all the way to their 'rock bottom' because they could not find an alternative route. For one player, this tragically played out in an attempted suicide, before he deemed it appropriate and necessary to seek professional help.

7.3.2.2 Support and help seeking

The current study allows us to understand professional footballers' lived experiences as sporting beings, in terms of their relationships with others from within their immediate sporting world. In this regard, the players talked about being treated as if they were manufactured machines that were only valued on their ability to produce the goods as sportsmen. Because of this, the players were expected to be almost non-humanlike and thus, void of feelings, opinions, and a voice. What is more, the professional footballers in the focus group interviews also experienced being treated as commodities, where they talked about only being useful, or considered by others, in terms of what they could produce as sportsmen. McGillivray, Fearn & McIntosh (2005), in their quantitative study, revealed how professional footballers sporting identities and skills were seen as a commodity to those within the game and over

time, they became surplus to requirements due to their working bodies and assets being exhausted. Whilst, the above research gives us an understanding of how professional footballers in Scotland are viewed as commodities, the current study with its use of phenomenology gives us a richer understanding of what it is like for professional footballers in England, to live through this experience. . In this regard, the players talked about how they at times felt like they were seen as 'machines' by others, as if they were on a production line in a factory-a desired commodity which could be trashed at will. Significantly, the players at times experienced being a professional footballer as being non-human, where they were expected to live like performing 'robots' almost void of any emotions and feelings. In accordance with the findings of the current study, Waquant (2001) in his ethnographic research in an American boxing gym, revealed how boxers were conscious of their 'corporeal exploitation' as sportsmen, likening it to prostitution, slavery and animal husbandry. Therefore, the current findings reveal that experiencing 'exploitation' is not something that is solely confined to the sport of boxing, but is also evident within the lived world of professional football. With this in mind, it could be argued that the experience of exploitation may not be something that is confided solely to the culture of professional football (and boxing) and therefore, future research to investigate this could be considered within other sporting contexts.

When considering the professional footballers' experiences of exploitation and the fact that they felt that any positive regard from others, was conditional on giving others what they wanted (i.e. performance), it is felt that these experiences could lead to long term issues manifesting in the current and future lives of professional footballers. For example, when considering Rogers (1995) theory of 'self-actualisation' which posits that there should be unconditional and basic acceptance (and support) for a person from significant others, despite what they do, in order for the individual to develop a healthy self-worth and self-regard, the treatment of professional footballers in this manner could lead to future problems with their self. On the other hand, people who receive conditional positive regard from significant others and thus, only receive acceptance and support on the condition that they live up to others expectations can develop feelings of low self-worth, become guarded and have an inability to face new challenges. It could be argued that professional footballers in this study, struggled to face their future and present challenges and be

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open to others about their circumstances, due to a lack of self-worth brought about by experiencing conditional regard from others within their sporting lived world. In essence, the experiences of difficulties with seeking help and pre-planning for retirement may be borne out of a lack of self-worth and positive regard that professional footballers have towards themselves, due to the regard from others in their lived world being on condition that they produce the goods and give others what they want.

Existing research has highlighted how professional footballers can feel significantly unsupported at times of difficulty, especially at a time of change (for example during career transition), when there is a need to redefine themselves and develop alternative identities (Brown and Potrac, 2009). Indeed the current findings show that despite the need for professional footballers to draw upon alternative identity roles as a means of dealing with the uncertainty of career transition and their on-going difficulties, there was limited support available to them. In accordance, it was clear from the lived world of the players in the focus group interviews that they too experienced a perceived lack of support within their sporting and non-sporting lives. In particular, for the focus group players this was at an important time when they felt a significant lack of control in their lives, borne out of the uncertainty and pressure that came with career transition. For these players, significantly this way of being was in sharp contrast to the level of control (and ability to deal with pressure) that they experienced within their sporting roles, as professional footballers. Significantly, it would seem for the career professional footballers in this study, developing a broader identity could have assisted some players, before the onset of their difficulties and prior to their transition from the game. Indeed, Miller and Kerr (2010) call for more support to be given to elite-athletes, like professional footballers, in order to help them develop an all-inclusive identity, one that advocates the development of other identities and skills alongside sporting identity, for example one which is not adopting a dominant version of masculinity and therefore demonstrates emotional maturity. According to the authors, such a broadened way of being would serve to enhance the potential of elite-athletes not only in their sporting world, but also, across the wider aspects of their lives. Some studies (e.g. Brewer et al. 1998; Sparkes, 2000) have shown how a strong, yet narrow sporting identity can have a detrimental effect on elite-athletes experiences during career transition. It is argued,

that encouraging players to develop broader identities, one that encourages alternative roles could be seen as a 'win-win' strategy for professional football clubs and professional players. Developing a broader identity, could serve to maximise the likelihood of success for professional footballers, as this would allow a less restrictive way of being to be established. It is proposed that developing a broader way of being would decrease the likelihood of difficult experiences both during and after the careers of professional footballers, by allowing for a wider choice of roles and positions to be taken up, or drawn upon.

Moreover, for the players who entered the treatment centre for help with their behavioural problems, their experiences of this culture were more positive and nurturing. The space that they occupied was necessary and was experienced as a new and different space, one that allowed the players to show themselves safely, free from any fear of judgement and threat. Indeed, Carless and Douglas (2006), in their qualitative study with sportspeople suffering with mental illness, demonstrated how giving individuals the space to re story their lives in a more positive way allowed them to reconstruct their identities in a more meaningful manner. In accordance, the current study was able to show how the lived experiences of letting go and talking about their difficulties and tell their story allowed the professional football to find a new freedom away from their difficulties. The embodied experience of the players was as if they had been reborn or taking back to an early time when they were a lot younger and healthier. Paradoxically, the very thing that the players had perceived as being weak - i.e. admitting to not coping and showing their difficulties - served to be a source of strength and an opportunity for growth. In essence, they had found that surrendering sometimes leads to winning.

Chapter 8: Potential Career Footballers

The following chapter will present the findings from the analysis of the 'potential' career footballers. In doing so, it will look to thread the 'existential' interpretation around three main themes, experiencing the gaze of others, conforming and unfair treatment as well as uncertainty and (dis)empowerment. A hierarchy, or schematic diagram, of the main-themes and sub- themes is provided below (see diagram 1.2). An in-depth discussion of the findings specific to these younger players will be provided with any common experiences that have already been discussed in the analysis of the career professionals and FG participants, briefly identified. In addition, any implications from the findings of the 'potential' career professionals will be discussed in relation to the experiences of the career professionals that are further on in their sporting careers.
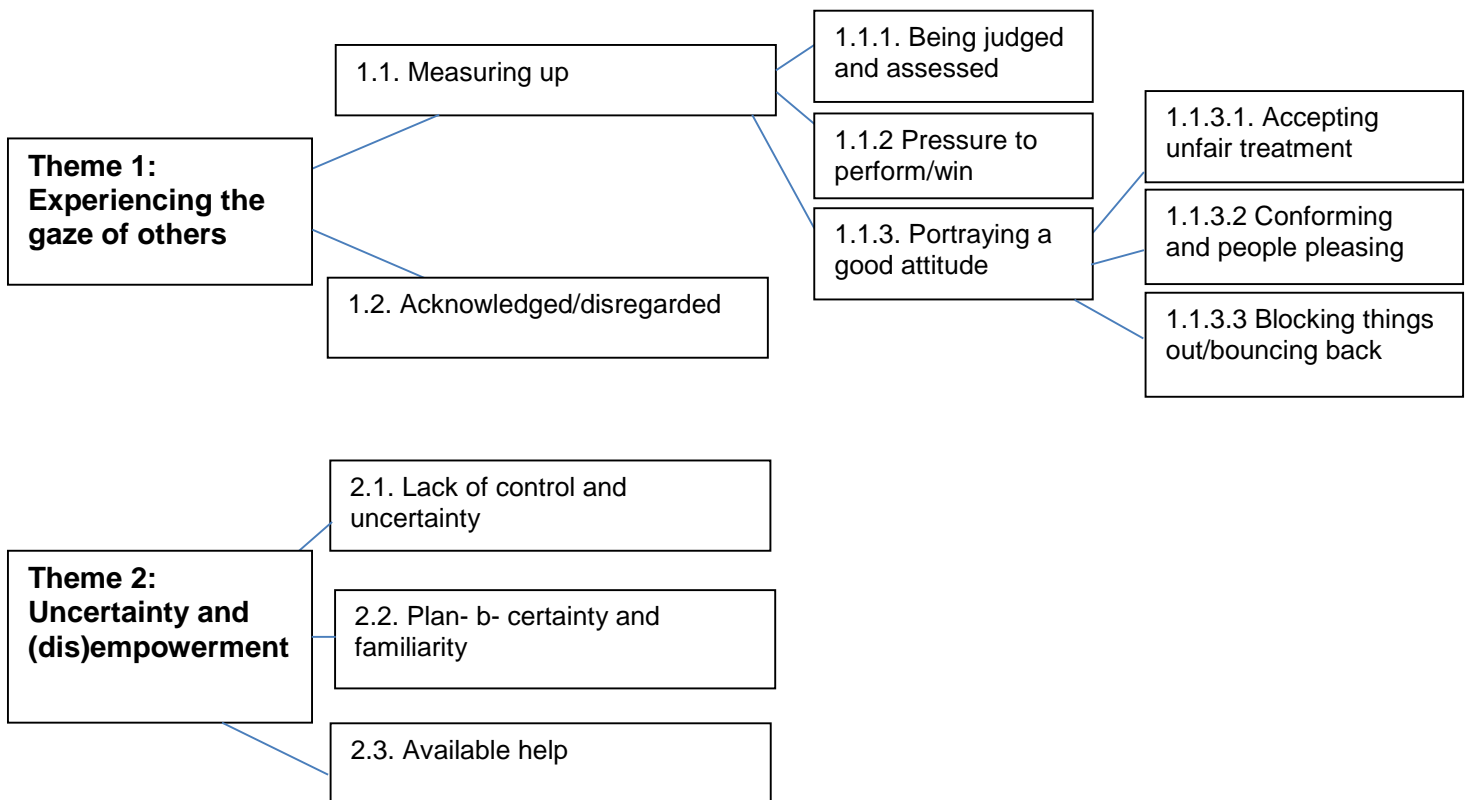

Diagram 1.2: Schematic diagram of potential career professionals

8.1 Thematic analysis

The players' lived experiences predominantly centred on how others wanted them to be as professional footballers. For the most part, the players felt as if they were constantly under the gaze and assessment of others and this played out significantly in terms of whether they felt like they were measuring up as professional footballers to the expectations and requirements of others from within the club.

The need and pressure to win was a crucial aspect of the players' experiences in terms of their relationships with others and this manifested itself in feeling like they were being constantly being assessed and judged on their actions. In particular, the players were required to show that they had a good attitude to their sporting role and at all times show professionalism in terms of their behaviour both on and off the field. In addition, the players' experiences showed how professional footballers are expected to cope with the harsh treatment and thus requirements that are bestowed upon them from others from within the game. For most, the players experienced the treatment of the management as being unfair and, on occasions, totally unacceptable and inappropriate. However, despite this the players rationalised the treatment and expectations of others as being in their best interests as this was seen as a method of assessment to indicate whether they measured up to the requirements associated with being a professional footballer. For example, the players were required to show that they could be mentally strong, cope with criticism and abuse, be resilient and be able to block out the pressure and stresses that came with their sporting role. In essence, the players were seen to dismiss the unfair treatment of others that eventually led them to conform to their culture and, thus, accept the expectations and requirements from within it.

Whilst the need to constantly impress and influence others, though football performance success was an essential aspect of the players lived world, this way of being was seen to create feelings of disappointment. In essence, the players' sporting identities were invalidated due to being constantly disregarded and unacknowledged by those they were trying to impress, in particular the management team. However, despite their experiences the players continued to pursue their football careers and, therefore, the more frequent acknowledgement by others in the hope that they could somehow change opinions.

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What is more, the players experienced professional football as an unstable environment that lacked certainty and left them feeling disempowered. The players felt as if their efforts and hard work to become professional footballers had been for nothing. This was because they felt as if they had done all the work that was necessary to become a professional footballer but they felt that they had not received their just rewards. In essence, the players felt that they had limited control over their situation. However, despite this, the players continued to see performing on the pitch as a way of gaining empowerment as it was here where they could at least give their best and, at the same time, potentially change others' opinions and thus bring about some certainty in their lives. What is more, some players developed a 'plan-b'- a scholarship opportunity in America after they finished playing (where they would continue to train full time as a footballer within a collegiate/educational setting). For these players this opportunity served as way of giving them some control back in an uncertain environment. Interestingly though these players highlighted how their chosen 'plan-b' served as a way for them to continue the pursuit of their footballing careers. In this sense, some of the players had been offered a 'scholarship' in America which gave them the opportunity to study for a degree whilst at the same time continue their daily training as a sportsman. Therefore, whilst this post-career opportunity was seen as a way of giving the players something to look forward to and some certainty in their uncertain environment, it was also seen as a way of maintaining an involvement in football and ,thus, a possibility of getting back into professional football sometime in the future.

The players also discussed how they were satisfied with the help that they had experienced during their careers. In particular, they highlighted the importance of the help that was made available from some from within their club, from family and friends as well as from supporting organisations (LFE and PFA) and associated staff. This had provided them with the help, for example through education support and guidance, which helped some players get through certain difficult times and allowed some to identify a second career pathway. However, whilst the players were satisfied with the help they had received, significantly their future orientation showed that they did not have as a much faith in the help that was, or would be, available to them if they were to make it to the professional ranks. In essence, for them the first team

culture was all about performance and winning and, thus, was a place where such a thing as help for personal problems was not high on the agenda.

8.2 Existentials

8.2.1 Lived Relations

Predominantly, the academy players' lived world as professional footballers was associated with the relational experiences with others and in particular those from within their football club. The players focused their relationships on a need to live up to the expectations of others. It should be noted that, like in the sporting chance analysis, the academy players' lived relations was a significant aspect of their lived world. In essence, it is proposed that relationality for professional footballers is far more important than any other existential. Performance on the pitch to a high standard and the need to be seen as possessing the right attitude and professionalism, both off the field and on it, was essential to professional footballers. The lived world of the players was characterised by the need to display certain characteristics, like for example, coping with criticism and unfair treatment as well as being able to handle pressure, expectations and difficulties. Sometimes the players were treated unfairly and inappropriately, however, this behaviour of others was accepted as appropriate, as it was seen as a method of measurement to see if they, the players, had what it takes to make it as 'professionals'.

7.2.1.1 Being judged and assessed: a need to measure up

David, Harry and Steve talk about the pressures and stress that comes with being constantly judged and assessed as a professional footballer by others.

> ""Well obviously being involved with a professional club you are expected to be able to perform to a certain standard consistently. When I was younger, I did use to put quite a lot of pressure on myself to play well because I thought I was getting assessed all the time, they're making judgements of me as a player so it can be quite hard to deal with especially if you're putting pressure on yourself. As I've got older I seem to be able to handle that better and try and focus on enjoying football but it can be hard the expectations particularly when you know you're being assessed and judged…" (David)

Within David's account, he explains clearly the pressure that is experienced from constantly being assessed, as a professional footballer.

For Harry and Steve the pressure placed on them to measure up is something that reflects back on them as sportsmen and in turn how others treat them:

> "Football wise they made me a better player technically but I think the player management was always on your case and not giving you any positive feedback – it was always negative. You do something right and they don't praise you but if you do something wrong you get it real hard […] I think they just judge you on how you play football and they don't really care about your life outside football. They're only interested in how you're performing on the pitch…"" (Harry)

> "…this year you are the, kind of, senior member of the side, you know there's people underneath you, they the coach and the manager expect you to pull through, so then you like, you know you got that bit of weight on your shoulders and it feels as though, I have to win, we have got to win this game, otherwise it's going to reflect on me because I'm the first port of call and err…you know, those places where you've actually got nowhere to hide…" (Steve)

Harry's lived world also centres on the importance of successful performance on the pitch and his treatment by others in terms of their assessment of this. For him no matter what he does on the football field he receives punishing feedback as if he is helpless and can no longer win. It would seem others are always critically evaluating him, where they are always on his 'case'; he is under scrutiny without 'positive feedback'. We can see how the need to perform well is reinforced by a fear that ,if he does something wrong, he will get it 'real hard'. Whilst Harry does not disclose what 'get it real hard' entails we can sense that this is not something that he likes and he experiences this as extreme. Being 'hit hard' suggests a blow to his self where the judgement and treatment from others, in terms of not performing satisfactorily, can at times hurt or damage his overall way of being.

Again, Steve talks about his lived world in terms of his relationship with others around being assessed on his performance. Specifically, he highlights the importance of winning as a means of validating certain characteristics deemed

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necessary to be a professional footballer. He is expected by others to 'pull through', suggesting that as a professional footballer he has to show that he is able to carry on through difficulties, to be able to cope on the football field during adversity, or when the going gets tough. What is more, the experience of responsibility is a big load to carry for him and this rests heavy upon his shoulders. The assessment and judgement of others, whilst performing, feels as though he has 'nowhere to hide' (adding another spatial aspect to his experiences); as if he cannot escape the experience he is in, like an animal that is caught in the headlights. In essence, he is exposed at a time when he wants to get away from others.

7.2.1.2 The need to be acknowledged: giving others what they want

The need to be seen as possessing a good attitude was another aspect of the lived experiences of the players:

> "At first, I think it would be quite hard to adjust (becoming a professional) and I think it would take some time to adjust to it but expectations are that you can't sort of do things wrong outside football. You've always got to have a very good professionalism, perform well in training and, obviously, if you're just joining, you want to make a good impression on the pros that are already there…" (Harry)

> "…they're looking for people who are mentally strong because in football not everything runs smoothly, there are ups and downs, so I think they're looking for people who can deal with the success and failure. I think they're, also, looking for people who are dedicated to the game who lead a professional life and have a good attitude to the game and how they treat their own bodies and who have good levels of professionalism…" (David)

We get a sense from both Harrys and David's accounts of how there is a need to show to others, in the lived world of professional football, that they possess a good attitude. For Harry, he talks on several occasions about the need to 'adjust', in particular when he looks towards his future in terms of how he needs to be as a professional footballer, suggesting that it would take time to adapt and not something that would develop overnight. Within his experiences, there

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is a constant need for him to show to others that he possesses 'very good professionalism'; he is someone of high standards and someone who does things right both on the pitch and off it. Making a 'good impression' on others is an essential aspect of his experiences, where he is looking to fit in with others standards, to qualify as a professional footballer. For David the emphasis of his lived experience around professionalism, also, revolves around the need to show a 'good attitude' to others within the game.

However, some of the players talked about the difficulties they experienced when they were not being noticed, or acknowledged by others:

> "when you do get overlooked it's, it's gutting, but for, for me it, it drives me on to go and show them […] so I say right this is my chance I'm not going to give them an excuse to overlook me, they still will, but then I can say like, you know they can't turn round and say, you know, you fobbed it off in that game and that is why I'm playing, you know and all they can say is, err…he's bigger than you and if they say that then fair enough because I can't do anything about that right now, or just yet […] it's, it's gutting and it certainly like smashes you back down to earth " (Steve)

For Steve, not being seen as a professional footballer is something that is 'gutting' for him, a feeling of disappointment as if someone has cut him open and ripped his stomach out. What is more, the lived experience of being unacknowledged for professional footballers is like falling from a great height, where it 'smashes you back down to earth', as if he has crashed down from the exiting and dizzy heights of being a professional football to the reality of being passed over. However, instead of serving to discourage him this experience was seen to 'drive' him 'on, and it, thus, fuelled something within to push him onwards and forwards, to pursue his identity as a professional footballer even more. The vehicle through which he used to push on was performance on the football field and in particular the need to show others that he is not 'fobbing it off', that it is necessary to come back and give his best shot, almost as though he would be perceived by others as a fraud or a deceiver if he didn't. Although despite his efforts to avoid being "overlooked", Steve is resigned to the fact that

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"they still will", which puts him in a no- win situation, but one which interestingly, he is still willing to pursue.

The players also talked about needing to appease others:

> "Well apart from it being a privilege, football is a horrible sport in terms of keeping your job and trying to please the right person at the right time. Pleasing people is one of the main things…" (Harry)

For Harry, the culture of professional football, despite him being in a 'privileged' position - which implies that he thinks others would like to be where he is, he experiences it as a 'horrible sport'. We can see from his experiences that it is almost as if he is implying that how professional football is perceived from the outside is not how it actually is on the inside. In particular, the need to 'please' people is a major aspect of his discontent. We get a sense of how it is important for professional footballers to show that that they can give others what they want and this is seen as essential if they are to maintain their opportunity. Harry goes on to highlight his point further by drawing on an early experience he had with his coach:

> "He basically tried to pin everything on me saying it was my fault we were losing. I was not having the best of games but I do not think it is down to one person how you lose a game. Therefore, I answered him back and it escalated from there and he fell out with me. I was at school at the time and he rang my Mum to tell me I'd been released from my contract […] they just think "who does he think he is trying to answer a coach back – he thinks he knows more than me", so, you can't say what you want to say you've just got to take it on board whatever they throw at you, you've just got to dust yourself down and keep going…" (Harry)

From Harry's account we can see how there was a need for him as a professional footballer to be agreeable to others and accept the blame regardless of his opinion on it. The coach was seen to 'pin everything' on him, like somebody would do to frame or blame someone for a crime. But, it would seem that, this was not a crime or a situation that Harry was solely responsible for and he felt that he was being wrongly singled out because he didn't think that losing the game was 'down to one person'. However, through his

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experience, the consequences of speaking up or 'answering him' back led to the coach falling out with him, and, therefore, he eventually lost his contract, and potentially his dream to be a footballer. We can understand from his lived experience how there, is a perceived need for professional footballers to remain silenced when they feel wronged or blamed because, if they do not, then they can be threatened with losing their opportunity. In essence, like the innocent sentenced to a crime they did not commit, it would seem that professional footballers are damned if they do, damned if they do not. For example, if they speak up, they are potentially ostracised, yet if they keep quiet and 'not say what you want to say' then the players potentially lose themselves and their voice to conform to the viewpoint and opinions of others. In the end, there is a need for Harry to accept whatever is 'thrown at him', like a boxer would do in a one sided bout, and just pick himself up, 'dust' himself down and ,thus, continue to accept and reinforce the behaviour of others. For David, the need to be seen as agreeing with others as a professional footballer was also an important part of his experiences:

> "…something that I didn't agree with what the coach did at a certain time or if he went to discuss that it could have a negative effect on my relationship with him. It can vary – it's hard to give a specific example, but, at the end of the day, you have to be agreeable you have to just get on with it and make sure you are giving them what they want all the time…" (David)

Lee also talks about the need to give others what they want:

> "I used to get frustrated when he used to bring me off and things like that but I have by sticking at it and just trying to please him as much as I can, I think I have won him over now…"

We can see from David's experiences how he feels that disagreeing with others from within the club could potentially have a negative effect on his ongoing relationships with influential figures from within the club. It would seem that it is important for professional footballers to be 'agreeable' and this is something you have to just 'get on with', suggesting that there isn't an option for the players, a controlling position that can leave them somewhat defenceless. It is

important that the players give others 'what they want all the time', and, it would seem, this requirement to please is placed ahead of their own wants and needs. In essence, the desire to make it as a professional footballer can at times come at the expense of the players own self, where they are faced to place the perspective, wants and needs of others before their very own. For Lee, we can see the importance of persevering with trying to change the opinions of others, he kept 'sticking at it' as he would out on the training field as if he were trying to eradicate a mistake through practice and repetition. In the end, he felt that he could 'win' the coach 'over' by 'pleasing him as much' as he could, as if there is a need for professional footballers to constantly give others what they want, where it could be argued professional footballers become slaves to the wants of others in order to gain attention, and thus success in football.

For Richard and Steve not being seen or recognised for their performance had left them in a place of obscurity and disappointment:

> "Yes, we don't really know. The gaffer does not really take great notice in us lot, he is not really bothered about youth but it depends really. Playing a lot of reserve games now it's time to impress but we don't know where we stand really…" (Richard)

> "It's an unfair game, you've got to be in the right place at the right time and liked by the person that matters. That sort of sums it up, like; you just need to get noticed…" (Lee)

For Richard, we can see how the lived world of professional footballers is a place where you need to be noticed especially by those from within the club. Like Shakespeare's famous quote 'All the world's a stage', the space that professional footballers occupy, it would seem, was like a platform to perform, where players are trying to 'impress' the watching eyes, the audience (or coaches and management) as it were. However, the feeling of not being noticed, or being overlooked leaves Richard feeling unsure and uncertain about things, he talks collectively when he highlights 'we don't know where we stand', suggesting that there is a shared sense of being lost and unsure. Lee also highlights the need for professional footballers to be seen. However, for him

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this space is more of an unreliable one that doesn't offer him much reward for his efforts, in essence it's an 'unfair game', which doesn't offer him any level of consistency.

7.2.1.3 Lack of control and uncertainty

The players also talked about a lack of control over their careers brought on by the opinions and subsequent treatment of others:

> "He's so opinionated (the manager) you can have a very good player that someone doesn't like you and that's it you've done you're not playing. I don't know it is off putting because it's not a nice environment all the time […] So when I see stuff like that like peak players getting treated like that it just shows you that you're never in control of your career and you can do the best you can to put your foot in the door but, at the end of the day, if they don't want you, they don't want you…" (Lee)

> "It's interesting because I think it comes down to, obviously, when you get away from the game sometimes you feel a little bit used as such because you think I've got more to offer but they're just channelling me down some sort of robotic kind of routine […] when you are in that regimented like way of things, sometimes you start to say "right I've just got to put a shift in" and then, even that saying summarises it all. You're putting a shift in, you're not playing, you're just doing a job, you're in a team and you're the cog in that whole machine of things…" (Steve).

We can see from Lee's experiences from within the club how professional footballers feel they lack a certain amount of control over themselves and their careers. There is a big emphasis on the opinion of others and, at times, it does not matter how good you are as a player, if someone 'doesn't like you' then your opportunities of success diminish. It would seem that the control, or destiny, of a professional footballer never rests in their hands 'if they don't want you, they don't want you', but instead rests in the hands of others. This, it could be argued, leaves professional footballers with a recurring struggle for certainty, where 'you are never in control', a powerless position that offers no genuine reward for effort. For Lee, this situation manifests itself in experiencing

professional football as not a 'nice environment', and, whilst he highlights that this is not the case 'all the time', we can understand that it is not easy for professional footballers to deal with the uncertainty and lack of control that comes with their culture and, thus, their identity within it. In essence, it would seem that professional footballers feel they are at the mercy of the judgement and perspective of others, constantly, in terms of their performance and future success.

We can see within Steve's experiences, how the controlling nature of professional football is evident in his lived-world. We can sense the frustration he feels in terms of not getting rewarded for his efforts, where he's 'got more to offer' and where he is 'putting a shift in', without getting game time. , Steve's choice of words suggest that at this point he is no longer 'playing' as a professional footballer, but instead he is 'just doing a job', indicating a shift towards football being more of an occupation than enjoyment for him. Whilst, there are similarities across his and Lee's experiences, in terms of destiny and opportunities being in the hands of others, at the same time Steve, specifically, highlights how others control him as a professional footballer. What is more, for Steve he feels as though he is treated like a 'machine', where he is only regarded as a 'cog in the whole machine of things', where there is a necessity for him to be working properly and efficiently as a professional footballer within a system with a main focus on productivity.

7.2.1.4 Accepting unfair treatment

The players' experiences also indicated a need for them to accept unfair treatment of others as part of their job:

> "I suppose, for me, it's the first time they tried putting pressure on me because I'd never experienced anything like that before. I thought they were digging me out and trying to shame me in front of my team mates but as I've gone on I feel they're trying to put more pressure on me because they want to see me progress as a player and build you into how the professional managers behave. They want you to have more expectations of yourself and want you to perform better as a player so they try and pin more things on you for your individual mean […]I thought

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that was very unprofessional of him but at the same time I was the same because, obviously, you shouldn't answer a coach back. You should listen to what he's got to say and then take it on the chin […] I'd say to see what kind of person you are really and how you'd react to it so that when they're digging you out will you go into your shell or will you roll your sleeves up and say have you got any more criticism of me because I can take it and I'll show you what I've got next time…" (Harry)

We get a sense from Harry's lived world how he perceived the treatment of others as 'pressure' and that this was not anything which he had endured before, suggesting that this was a new experience for him. The experience felt like people were 'digging him out', as if he was being exposed in front of his team mates, where others were attempting to bring him out from under surface, to make an example of him. However, strikingly over time (another temporal experience) he experiences this treatment as being in his best interests for his development as a professional footballer because this way of being is how he is expected to 'progress' and 'build' as a player. From this, we can see how as a professional footballer Harry accepts the unfair treatment as an essential part of his training and development. What is more, as part of this, the expectations placed on him are based on others being able to 'pin' more and more on him, where he is required to accept almost being labelled/blamed by others. What is more, this type of treatment is seen by him as an assessment of character, where others within the club are assessing him to see whether 'he can take it on the chin', to see if he can receive a blow/knock to his self and this not let it knock him down. It would seem he is expected to stay on his feet, in essence, to show he is able to take the punishment and behaviour of others and thus keep coming back for more. One may argue that this sort of relationship, in another context, could be seen as somewhat controlling and abusive/bullying, as it would seem that professional footballers are expected to take whatever others say to them and at the same time not complain about this treatment, even if the behaviour of others is deemed unfair. Lee also talks about experiencing inappropriate behaviour from others:

"Yes it does make you feel worthless, you're wasting your time being there like when he (Youth team manager) says you're never going to play

for him again you think right I'll pack my bags and go now but if you really thought about you knew that he didn't mean it – he just lost his head a bit putting his point across […]That made me feel shit being brought off and not even spoken to than if the old manager had battered me because I felt more shit when he hadn't said anything to me […] I mean, my First Team coach if he bollocked you he went at you, I can deal with that quite well, even in your face calling you (he got my face once – literally that close) saying "shit you'll never play for me again". That's at 17 but it was all mental assessment, like, he'd be testing you" (Lee)

For Lee, there is an element of experiencing the harsh treatment of others- some would argue bullying treatment- that he receives as being acceptable because, for him, the coach does not really 'mean it' and, thus, cannot be held responsible for his actions. However, despite this treatment it would seem that Lee struggles with the feelings that come from his experience, where he is left feeling 'shit' from being 'battered' by the manager, as though he feels like someone who has been abused. He also recalls experiencing when a coach 'went at' him, like a dog would go for someone in anger, where he was physically held by his face and told that he 'would never play' again. It could be argued that in any other environment this experience and treatment from others would be seen as workplace bullying. However, for Lee it is again seen as acceptable- as a 'mental assessment' where the coach is 'testing you', almost like a military drill sergeant would do to his soldiers to see if he could break them. Yet despite this, this treatment is seen as in the best interests of him and for his on-going development as a professional footballer.

Steve goes on to talk about his experiences of being a professional footballer in a de-humanising sense:

"Well, I think, like I said, the way he's looking at the team and the way he's looking at the club at the minute it's like a business and so his players are assets not human beings. Obviously, he is a father and all the rest of it but he comes into work and he wants this, this, this, and you have to give it to him if he rather expects it. So when it comes about some personal kind of problem or perhaps just like human nature kind of thing it's almost like,

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well, ok if you're suffering we'll get someone else in who's going to do the same job as you […] I just think that the way he gets his head round things is, well it just baffles me sometimes because it's like very dictated and , I think you'd say it's old school but there's older coaches that had a better understanding of things and how to treat an individual because it is an individual's perspective […] but when it's that dictatorship,[…] it's embarrassing but even then you're individuals, you're human beings that you're dealing not just machines and that's what it comes down to I think…" (Steve)

For Steve, his experiences as a professional footballer are as if he is owned in a business sense and, in this regard, he is not seen like a 'human being' but instead is treated conditionally like a commodity, like something that is either valuable to others, or not. He puts himself in the position of the other as a father figure (in this case the manager) and questions this persons actions, in particular his disregard for the players' personal problems, and not treating them at the level of 'human nature'- as if professional footballers are expected to be non-human like, almost void of feelings and a voice. For him, the expectations of those around the football club are based on a 'dictatorship' where professional footballers are expected to give others what they want, without question. Furthermore, Steve's experiences suggest that the professional football club is represented as a patriarchal system where, it could be argued, older men are controlling younger men without consideration of the affect this may have on them. The expectations and behaviour of others is not only experienced as being unfair but, also, we can see how if he shows that it bothers him and that he is 'suffering' then there is a threat that he can be replaced by another who can and would 'do the same job. It is almost as if the treatment of others is diluted as it is seen as though, as a professional footballer, he is fortunate to be where he is and, thus, if you do not accept unfair treatment then you can be replaced with somebody else. What is more, the experience makes Steve feel as though he is treated like a non-human, and instead like a 'machine' where he is expected to carry on as if he is almost devoid of a voice and feelings. This type of treatment from others is further highlighted in Steve's experiences here:

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"I think, I've seen it, kind of…couple of different, different ways because like I say the old manager he had his boys and when things weren't happening and this was the youth team manager, when things weren't happening you know, you'd pay the price for it and with it being physical it'd be extra running, or you'd be in early. You'd just make sure that you never wanted to do it again […] you know the little jobs like in the Youth Team you have jobs like cleaning the changing rooms afterwards, cleaning the boots, sweep the paths etc. and if they weren't up to standard then it would be, right, this is reflecting on the side. He would beat a real stick with you and would really hit you…." (Steve)

Again, we can see how the treatment of others plays out in his lived experiences, in terms of how professional footballers are schooled and therefore need to develop in a certain way. It is important that professional footballers ensure that things are running smoothly (on the field and off it) because if things were not going well- and others were not getting what they wanted - then the players would 'pay the price' by way of punishment (physical training). In a sense, we can liken the experience and training of professional footballers to those of soldiers, where there is an almost military mentality about their work and performance, where mistakes and errors, or falling out of line is punished both physically and mentally. It could be argued that this experience can potentially leave professional footballers in fear of repeating past behaviour, where 'you never wanted to do it again' out of fear of recrimination. There is a significant fear of others and the treatment that they would dish out if players continued with this behaviour, where the coach 'would beat a real stick with you', almost like an old headmaster would hit you with the cane for misbehaving. From his experience this 'would really hit you' suggesting that this would have been a significant blow on his self and one which would leave some damage to him and his way of being.

7.2.1.5 A need to block things: get on with things

For Richard and David there was also need to block out things and to be able to bounce back from difficulties:

"but a lot of people have gone through it (difficulties) and they haven't bounced back and it's got to them a bit and then a couple of weeks after they expect you to forget about it and to have a go at it again […] Some people if they lose can take it too hard but they expect you to take it and then bounce strong the next coming Monday and get ready for training again if you've lost. Not just let it sink in all the time and put you down…" (Richard)

"It was quite difficult really because it was quite contrasting how the Youth Team coach was treating me and how the coach above the Youth team coach was treating me in terms of not picking me. The Youth Team coach was always picking me, he made me captain but anything above there, I was getting blocked for one thing or another and they expect you to get on with it, to carry on like everything is okay. In the end, I had to take the positives from the Youth Team coach and use them to knock out the negative treatment I was getting from the Assistant Manager who was choosing who went with the reserves…" (David)

We get a sense from Richard's lived experience how there is an expectation on professional footballers to get over difficult experiences as soon as possible and to have the capacity to move on. In doing so, he talks about experiencing seeing others who have gone through difficulties where they haven't 'bounced back', almost like there is a need for professional footballers to recover from a blow quickly and return to how they were before, almost like a rubber ball. Within this process, professional footballers are expected to almost block out their experiences and 'forget about' what has happened to them, in order to 'bounce back strong', which would suggest that professional footballers by blocking out their experiences have to be seen to come back stronger from their difficulties and disappointments (on the field). In essence, professional footballers are required by others to be able to not let things 'sink in, to almost be oblivious and dismissive towards the feelings and thoughts that come with their experiences, in order to avoid it 'putting you' or keeping you down.

For David, we can see how he found the treatment from others as difficult, especially the lack of consistency between the different coaches at the club. Despite his

performances in the youth team, he was being overlooked and 'blocked' as if his opportunity and road to success was being cut off by others like a roadblock. As a professional footballer, he was expected to 'get on with it', to carry on regardless like 'everything is okay', to almost be in denial of the reality of his situation and to move on. In doing so, he looked to draw upon the positive treatment of others, and use them to 'knock out' the negative treatment of others, as a fighter would do to a threatening opponent. However, for Steve we can see how blocking things out manifests itself in his everyday life:

> "I think to the outside world like I say my brother's very good at this as well. He's very good at not putting a face on but just like hiding his emotions to the general public and even to your team mates at times you go in and you're the same person and they don't think much has changed but when you come home you know? My Mum and Dad will bring it up with me all the time like "you're so nice to everyone else and then you come home and you let it out". When you're in your home environment that's when I think you have to let it out and talk to someone and, personally, I'd rather be doing that with my parents or my brother and just keep it to those three people…" (Steve)

We can see from Steve's experiences how there is a need for him to hide things from those within the club and conform to be the same person he always is or what others want him to be. In doing so, he talks about the 'outside world' like this is a different world to professional football, like he is inside an institution, like a prison or military camp. He draws upon his brother to indicate what is required of professional footballers, in and around his culture, in particular the need for players to put 'a face on' and 'hide…emotions', like a performing clown would do to disguise his sadness, or backstage from his audience. A different and safer environment, like the family home, is for Steve a place where he feels secure enough around others to 'let it out', almost as if there is a constant conscious effort for him when he is in and around the football club to hold in his emotions, to not let them out.

8.2.2 Lived Space

The accounts that follow are about the players' psychological space, where the use of spatial metaphors is given to give a feel for their experience. However, this space

is seen to be different from their experience of the physical environment of the club-e.g. what it's like to play on the field, or to be in the changing rooms, or 'penned' in their room. The players' lived space was occupied with a sense of uncertainty and this was demonstrated by a distinct lack of control over their surroundings. It would seem that for young professional footballers the spatiality that they live in, in particular in and around the club, was one that felt limiting and directionless where players at times felt as if they were lost as well as transparent. However, despite this the players felt a certain source of comfort within their environment and the familiarity of their surroundings, in particular, the camaraderie and friendship was important to them as this served as a means of keeping them happy within what was, at times, a difficult space to occupy.

8.2.2.1 Standing on uncertain ground

For some of the players expecting the culture of professional football and indeed the possibility of career transition can leave them in doubt and with limitations:

> "It's hard, it's a difficult situation, really, and a lot of people might go through that. It's hard like. One day you think I might have a great chance here and then another day you might think not and you just do not know what you're doing really. You're just stuck in the middle between getting one or not [a contract]…" (Richard)

From Richard's lived experiences, we can see how difficult it can be at times to be a professional footballer due to the uncertainty that surround the environment they occupy. For him, his position as a footballer is confusing and is ever changeable, where he can one day feel that he has a 'great chance' of becoming a successful player, whereas the next he 'might think not'. There is a level of uncertainty and a lack of consistency in the space that he is in, almost like he is 'stuck in the middle' and not knowing which way to turn. This way of being and position, in the end, can be seen to leave professional footballers in a state of confusion, as Richard suggests 'you just don't know what you're doing', as if professional footballers are almost constantly in limbo and, therefore, uncertain without any immediate hope for a solution. For Lee, at times, professional football felt even more limiting than that:

"You just felt like you'd just sit in your room or something and it felt like a prison camp. You've got your room and then you just down a beer and you feel so shit about what you're doing and you're wasting your time…" (Lee)

We get a sense from Lee's lived world how, at times, professional footballers can feel like they are being penned in without hope. For him, his lived space as a professional footballer can sometimes feel like he is in a 'prison camp', as if he has been captured and confined in a space that he cannot break free from. Living in this space, in the end, leaves Lee feeling confused and bewildered, where he questions what he is doing there and whether he is just 'wasting his time'.

8.2.2.2 Looking ahead: holding on to the familiar

However, for some of the players the development and opportunity of a second career pathway offered them some security and hope in what was an uncertain and uncontrollable environment:

"Well the reason why I think a Plan B is more important is that, as we've already mentioned, you don't have full control of your own career because it can be influenced by one person's opinion so that's why I see it important to get a Plan B […] you've got to make something happen yourself because it's not going to fall on your knee…" (David)

"I'm playing my football and I've got a Plan B in place now. I've been offered two scholarships in America to go there to play so I just kind of relax and I'm quite happy being here…" (Lee)

For David, developing a Plan B and having something in place for career transition is significant for him, as it allows him to empower himself in an uncertain place, for him 'it is important' to plan because as a footballer you never 'have full control', almost like planning has allowed him to grasp back control of his life somewhat.

However, when discussing why others in professional football do not seek to plan-ahead, David talks about how in his experience professional footballers at times want to hold onto their familiar space:

> "It's coming out of their comfort zone because for 2 years they were in quite a positive environment, like the banter with the lads, a close support network so I think they're just scared to come out of that comfort zone…" (David)

When putting himself in the position of others from his experience, David highlights how professional footballers are in their 'comfort zone', where football has become a safe haven for some. In essence, it is a familiar space for professional footballers because it is what they know. However, this place would seem in sharp contrast to the difficult space that the players discuss across their accounts in previous extracts. In essence, it would seem that they would much rather hold onto that which is familiar, despite the difficulties that accompany this, than let go of the dream and the discomfort that is perceived would come with this.

8.3 Discussion of potential career professionals

The following section will highlight the key experiences of the potential career professional's life world during their careers and during a time when they were facing the possibility of career transition. In doing so, it will draw upon relevant literature in order to show how exploring the lived world of potential career professional footballers has helped to build upon our current understand in this area of psychology.

8.4 Summary of findings

A predominant feature of the lifeworld of the potential career professionals was the experience of needing to measure up to the requirements of professional footballers. This was something that was also common within the lived experiences of the career professional in the previous analysis stage. In this regard, relationality played a significant part in the existential experiences of the potential career professionals, far greater than lived-body, lived-space and lived-time. In this sense, the experiences

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that potential professional footballers have with others was seen not only to be fundamental to their sporting way of being but was also a significant means through which they gained and gauged success within their sport. Within their experiences, the players constantly felt under pressure to win and perform and, therefore, were required, at all times, to demonstrate a good professional attitude to their sporting role. Possessing a good attitude was, at times, reflected in the players' lived experiences through a need to accept unfair treatment, lose themselves (and their voice) through conforming, as well as a requirement to block out sporting disappointment and subsequent feelings. In addition, the players often felt uncertain about their careers and because their sporting-lives were, predominantly, within the hands of others, they at times felt disempowered in terms of their present and future time. However, the pitch, or field of play, was a place where the players experienced some sort of empowerment in their lives. In essence, performing on the field was represented as a place where they gained the opportunity to influence their present and future outcomes in a positive manner and this was experienced by impressing others through sporting performance as well as displaying the right attitude towards their sporting role.

8.4.1 The Gaze of Others

Prior research has highlighted how elite sportspeople can, at times, be subject to continuous observation and correction in terms of their sporting bodies and it has been suggested that this method is used as a means of increasing the productivity of sporting performance (McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005; Manley, 2012). However, whilst previous research has gone some way to understanding how and why professional footballers are assessed in terms of sporting performance, it is fair to say that it has not captured what it is like for professional footballers to experience this type of pressure. Using a phenomenological approach, the current study sheds further light on this phenomenon by providing a richer understanding of what it is like for potential career professionals in England to experience constant pressure to meet the requirements of their sport. Significantly, the current research revealed that the mental attitude that professional footballers display, as well as the persona that they present, are also things that are observed and regulated by those from within their sporting world. When building upon previous research it is proposed that this

way of being was experienced by the potential career professionals as a need to put on a pretence to display that they are presenting themselves in accordance to what others expected.

An insight into the lifeworld of the potential career professionals, like for the career professionals in the previous analysis, showed how the scrutiny and expectations of others in their sport plays a significant part within their lived world long before they earned a professional contract. Significantly, a need to meet or measure up to the expectations of others was seen by the young players as an essential part of their sporting development. These findings mirror the experiences of the career professionals in the previous analysis stage who revealed that the need to measure up was a major part of their sporting lives. What is more, the need to meet the demands and pressures placed on the career professionals was seen to affect them and their experiences negatively in their present as well as future time. For some of the senior players, the long-term consequences of adopting this way of being, one steeped in hegemonic masculine characteristics, served to impact upon them in problematic and almost tragic ways. Therefore, it could be argued that like the career professional, the potential career professionals are required to develop a hegemonic 'macho masculinity, one which is socialised through the continual assessment, expectations and pressure placed on them by those within the lived world of professional football. Moreover, it is proposed that the development of this way of being, one that is steeped in hegemonic masculine characteristics, is something that becomes embedded in the sporting identity of professional footballers from a young age. With this in mind, it is proposed that some of the long-term difficulties that professional footballers experience could be traced back to their early experiences in terms of the development of their sporting identity and, in this sense, via their relationships (and the expectations and requirements) with others in professional football.

8.4.2 Conforming and unfair treatment

As has been highlighted, essentially, it was imperative for 'potential' career players to demonstrate that they could meet the requirements, deemed necessary by themselves and others, for success in their sport. The required characteristics within the players' experiences centred around possessing a good attitude and with this an

ability to accept unfair treatment, conform to others, as well as block out disappointment and feelings. It is proposed that this way of being provided an indication of the players experiencing being trapped and to a certain extent powerless over their situation, where they had to be seen to accept the lived world of professional football for what it was.

Manley's work (2012 cited in Roderick & Gibbons 2014) on academy football and rugby players in the United Kingdom has shown that male-elite athletes need to adopt an identity that adheres to a working-class masculinity, in order to meet the social requirements (or norms) of their culture. Accordingly, Roderick and Gibbons (2014 pg. 153), suggest that sportspeople see their work and sporting identity as a 'privileged' one and, because of the importance of this, it should not be 'squandered' or risked. It could be argued, that the players experienced a need, at times, to conform to the requirements within their culture in order for them to maintain the opportunity of them becoming professional footballers and ,thus, not squander their chance. Indeed, possessing what it means to be a professional footballer and conforming to cultural requirements was at the forefront of the players' lived experiences and this was something that was placed above anything else including their very own perspective and viewpoint. In this sense, the players needed to be seen to be 'agreeable' at all times, in order to give others in professional football 'what they want'. Because of this the players felt silenced and without a voice and thus, they were denied an opportunity to 'say what they want to say'.

Prior research has indicated that the predominant types of coaching and management styles within professional football are inflexible and authoritarian (Kelly and Waddington 1996; Cushion and Jones 2006). Indeed, Roderick (2006: pg.115) suggests that within professional football 'authoritarian control' is used to keep players in line with the cultural requirements represented, by amongst other things, the rejection of the players effectiveness, like for example a lack of acknowledgement for performance on the field. Furthermore, Roderick (2006: pg. 115) has highlighted how 'normative control'- like for example possessing a 'good attitude', is seen as an attempt to 'shape work cultures and workers' in professional football in order to ensure 'compliance'. Moreover, Parker (1996, pg.48) has proposed how young footballers are required to develop a type of 'professionalism'

that is represented by 'acceptance, obedience and collective loyalty' centred around an 'explicit institutional logic' which incorporates, amongst other things 'discipline and the development of a "professional attitude". Accordingly, players such as potential career professionals are required to demonstrate these characteristics to display to others from within the football club that they are progressing and 'maturing' sufficiently (Parker, 1996). Significantly, when considering previous research (e.g. Kelly and Waddington 1996; Parker 1996) and ten years (e.g. Roderick 2006; Cushion and Jones, 2006), nearly a decade later, the current findings show, how authoritarian treatment and the need to meet the requirements of this is still prevalent within professional football today. Therefore, it would seem that little has changed within the culture of professional football, in terms of management styles and expectations placed on professional footballers, over this period. However, the phenomenological approach sheds further light on how the lived experiences of meeting the requirements within professional football manifested in the players feeling as if they were at the mercy of others and, because of this, they were willing to accept unfair treatment from others. With this, the findings build upon previous research (e.g. Parker 1996; Cushion and Jones 2006; Roderick 2006) by showing that the experience of showing a good attitude and professionalism to others in professional football goes beyond the need to demonstrate loyalty and discipline. Quite worryingly, the lifeworld of the players revealed that potential career professionals experienced oppression and abuse at the hands of others and that the players believed there was a need to accept this treatment as part of what it meant to mature and develop as a male-professional footballer.

Previous research has indicated that elite sports-people are not immune from experiences of physical, sexual and mental abuse (Kirby & Greaves, 1996; Stirling and Kerr, 2008, 2009). For example, Kirby and Greaves (2000) and Gervis and Dun (2004) have reported how a number of elite athletes have experienced high-levels of abuse during their careers. Qualitative studies have shown how experiencing abuse can serve to have negative psychological effects on child elite-athletes (e.g. Gervis and Dun 2004) and elite-athletes from sports other than football, like for instance gymnastics and swimming (e.g. Stirling and Kerr 2008, 2009). However, a specific understanding of abuse within the experiences of potential career professionals in football in the United Kingdom, to date, is limited. Although, research by Murphy and

Waddington (2007), looking at exploitation in terms of health risks in English academy footballers, has identified how players, not willing to play through pain and injury, can be often stigmatised for not having the right attitude or the required characteristics as sporting beings. In this regard, the above authors suggest that the coaches use verbal abuse as a way of ostracising players from the social milieu of the team to ensure that masculine ideals are pursued. However, worryingly nearly a decade on, the findings of the current study show how professional footballers can still experience abuse at the hands of others within the game. Instances within the players' experiences ranged from verbal and physical abuse including being grabbed by the face and told that 'they wouldn't play for the club again'. For some players, the lived experience of being publicly belittled and shamed within the club, felt like someone was 'digging' them out' like they were prodded or poked, and being 'battered' like they were repeatedly attacked. Again, we get a sense from the player's experiences of how the relational experiences with others (in terms of abuse) was lived and felt in an embodied sense by the professional players. What is more, the lived-experience of abuse was at first challenged as being unfair by the players but over time was rationalised as being an accepted aspect of their sporting development. In addition, whilst management and coaching styles were also experienced as being controlling and authoritarian by the 'career' professionals, experiences of abuse were not common within their accounts. However, the reported abuse experienced by the potential career professional could be in part due to the fact that they have no real career prospects to bargain with unlike the 'career' professionals. Therefore, it could be argued that those within the lived world of professional football feel that they are able to get away with more unreasonable behaviour with the younger players than they can with those who are more experienced.

Significantly, it would seem the potential career professional chose to accept their experiences of abuse because they saw this as being in their best interest as developing sporting beings. Accordingly, Sterling and Kerr (2009) in their qualitative study on Canadian elite-gymnasts and elite-swimmers found that female athletes 'normalised' abusive behaviour from their coaches because they were fearful of the powerful position that the coaches held and, subsequently, the influence that they had on their careers. Therefore, the current findings confirm that such 'normalising'

of abuse is not solely limited to other sports and is something that is also common within the current lived world of professional football in the United Kingdom. In essence, the experience of normalising abuse for the players was seen to come from a position of acceptance in terms of what it means to be and become a male professional footballer. Indeed, the lived experiences of the players' revealed that the abusive behaviour of the coach was perceived as being part of the their sporting development and, in essence, as a 'mental assessment' to see if they were meeting the requirements deemed necessary for success in their sport. It is argued, that the players chose not to speak out and challenge the coach regarding the abuse as they did not want to be seen to show signs of not measuring up to their sporting role. In this regard, it is proposed that the current study reveals an apparent gender difference in elite-sport in terms of how male and female athletes experience abuse from others. Whereas previous studies (e.g. Sterling and Kerr, 2009) have demonstrated how female athletes can normalise abuse due to fear of the coaches position and influence, the current study showed that potential career professionals footballers were seen to accept abuse as being part of what it means for them (and others) to become a successful male professional footballer. Therefore, it could be argued that the experiences of abuse for the male footballers was, over time, reflected back on who they were as sporting beings whereas for the female athletes abusive experiences were seen as a reflection on who the coach was and, thus, not at all a reflection of themselves.

It is proposed, that abusive treatment and the acceptance of such by professional footballers as part of their sporting way of being, is consistent with previous research in this area (e.g. Roderick 2000; Turner, Barlow and Ilbery 2002). The phenomenological research conducted by Turner et al. (2002) on ex-professional footballers in the UK living with osteoarthritis (OA) revealed how players; were socialised during their careers into accepting pain and injury as an integral part of their lived world. In accordance, Roderick et al. (2000) has highlighted how a need for pro-footballers to possess a good attitude (like for example, being able to tolerate playing with injury and pain) can be reinforced by punishing practices by significant others from within the football club. In this regard, the pro-footballers in the study by Turner et al (2002) were subjected, at times, to a regime that reinforced feelings of worthlessness by being ostracised and ignored (abused) during their injury

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experiences. The results from Roderick et al (2000) and Turner et al. (2002) reveal how an attitude of stoicism plays a major part in the injury experiences of professional footballers, both during and after their careers had ended. According to Jansz (2000, p.170), stoicism is defined as not showing vulnerability and restricting emotions and is one of the main attributes which characterise the dominant cultural model of masculinity- i.e. hegemonic masculinity. Significantly, in Turner et al's., (2002) study the former professional footballers minimised or denied their injury/abusive experiences as a response to the idea that by not getting on with things, as male athletes, would be regarded by themselves and others as weak. The current research builds upon previous work by showing that young professional footballers (or potential career professionals) lived experiences of abuse left them disempowered where they accepted this treatment as part of their development as sportsmen and as something which reflected upon them and not on others.

What is more, previous research (e.g. Douglas & Carless 2009; Carless & Douglas 2012; Carless & Douglas 2013) has highlighted how elite athletes can develop a 'performance' narrative predominantly scripted around winning and beating others. Such a dominant cultural narrative can serve to influence and shape an athlete's sense of who they are and who they want to become. Significantly, conforming to the performance narrative was seen as being extremely important in the athletes in the study, where cultural pressure is put on them to ensure that they look to pursue the dominant script. It has been highlighted (e.g. Lally and Kerr 2005) how the development of an 'exclusive' identity in sport and an overemphasis on a performance narrative can lead athletes to neglect alternative narratives that would serve to broaden their sense of self beyond their sporting culture. However, whilst the current study does not adopt a narrative approach, the experiences the players' relayed allowed me to understand, in more detail, the experiences associated with the development of their sporting identity. This sporting identity was heavily reliant on the validation of others in terms of their sporting performance and success. The experiences of the players showed that this acknowledgement also centred on being able to display that they could handle the pressure and expectations that were placed on them as footballers. In order to do so, there was a requirement for them to show that they could bounce back from disappointments and feelings of mistreatment quickly in order to focus on what mattered- i.e. sporting performance.

Within their experiences of bouncing back, the players were required to block out the reality of their lived world as this allowed them to 'get on' with their sporting career as if nothing had happened.

8.4.3 Uncertainty and (dis)empowerment

Previous research (e.g. Stephan, 2003; Stambulova, Stephan, Japhag 2007; Pummell, Harwood and Lavallee, 2008) has reported how elite sports-people can experience levels of uncertainty during periods of transition in elite sport. However, the current research adds to our understanding by specifically highlighting how uncertainty played a part in the experiences of professional footballers in the United Kingdom and this was reflected in their experiences within their careers and whilst facing the possibility of career transition. In this regard, the players' lived world was experienced as an uncertain and 'difficult' space where 'you don't know where you stand' and 'where you never know where your fate lies'. It could be said, that the players experienced somewhat disempowered in terms of their current and future lived time because their opportunity as professional footballers was heavily reliant upon the 'opinion' and perspective of others. Because of this, the players often found themselves searching for some sort of direction and certainty in their lives. In this regard, the players experienced some level of control over their sporting lives when performing out on the field of play. Spatially, the football pitch was represented as a place of hope, 'where things can change' for the players and where they gained an opportunity to 'impress' and shift the opinion of others which in turn could serve to improve their opportunities as professional footballers. Because of this, the players' lived space within football was experienced as an insecure and unstable place, where they were constantly searching for some sort of steady ground. The safest ground for the players was out on the football field and it was here where they felt like they had some control over their lives. Through performance on the field of play, the players were able to experience to gain back some level of control, and empowerment, within their precarious lifeworld. However, the nature of their world in terms of their futures being in the hands of others meant that this experience of control for the players was often temporarily and somewhat fleeting. Therefore, it could be argued that the players found themselves caught up in a loop of (dis)empowerment where a pursuit of success and, thus, empowerment in

professional football could be by its very nature be the root cause of players' experiences of disempowerment and uncertainty.

Another key aspect of the players' experiences around the uncertainty in their lived world was played out in their development of a future pathway out of professional football. In this sense, some of the players looked to develop a 'plan-b' and with this pursued a second career pathway as something to fall back on, just in case they did not make it as professionals. Developing post career opportunities gave the players some hope for the future and, therefore, allowed them to consider their future time and life after football. Previous work (McGillivray, Fearn & McIntosh 2005; McGillivray & McIntosh 2006) on professional footballers in Scotland highlighted how predominantly professional footballers' identities are formulated within rather than outside the boundaries of football and this can lead professional footballers to lack skills needed for future employment once their careers have ended. The current study revealed that the potential career professional in England who had developed an alternative plan for career transition experienced a desire to pursue a second career pathway that gave them the opportunity to maintain their footballing identity and career. In this regard, the players were planning to pursue a footballing scholarship in America that, over four years, would provide them with an environment that incorporated full-time football training (like they experienced at their football club) alongside a University degree. The prospect of this future event for the players was experienced as being 'similar' to the lived world of professional football, where they could continue to develop 'physically and technically' as sporting beings. It is proposed that the lived experiences of career transition reflected a need for professional footballer to maintain what was familiar to them because exiting the lived world of professional football was like coming out of a 'comfort zone', a fearful experience which can leave you feeling 'scared'. It is put forward that these experiences reflect a need for professional footballers to maintain their sporting identity out of fear of the unknown.

In summary, the lived world of the potential career professionals revealed that it was essential for the players to live up to the expectations of their culture and that this was monitored and controlled through the gaze and treatment of others. Significantly, the need to become a professional footballer was so important to the players that they at times accepted abuse, mistreatment and

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the uncertainty of their lived world and, in doing so, rationalised these lived experiences as being fundamental of what it means to develop and succeed in the professional game.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Recommendations

The following chapter will summarise and discuss the key issues in the players' experiences across the thesis. In doing so, it will highlight how the need to live up to an idealistic masculinity was socialised within some of the players' experiences within the lived world of professional footballers. Drawing upon the work on gender role conflict (Helms and Gabel 1986) and, in particular the concept of restrictive emotionality, I will identify how complying with a hegemonic version of masculinity as a male-footballer can serve to create negative outcomes, especially over the long term. What is more, in consideration of the findings and discussions, future recommendations will be put forward that look to inform organisations and governing bodies in professional football about future policy and practice. In doing so, it is hoped that the lived experiences and lived world of current, future and former professional footballers both before and during the onset of career transition can be improved.

9.1 Conclusion

The current research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a valuable insight into the lived experiences of male professional footballers during transition from professional football in the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, it was clear across the stages of the analysis and the lifeworld of the current male professional footballers, that relationality played a major part in their lived experiences. Within their accounts, how the players were viewed, as male footballers, observed and judged was seen to play an essential role in how they, in turn, related to themselves and their lifeworld both during and after their footballing careers.

The majority of players talked about being observed and treated, by others, as commodities and were therefore aware that they could be replaced at any time if they were not meeting the requirements or giving others in football what they wanted in terms of sporting performance. Indeed, those players who were facing the possibility of career transition (i.e. the focus group and within career professionals) talked about feeling like 'pieces of meat' who were just there to be 'used and abused' by others from within the game. What is more, the potential career professionals

experienced physical and psychological abuse from others from within the lived world of football; for many of the players their relationships with others from within the culture of professional football made them feel like they were 'machines' who were at times expected to be almost non-human and 'void of feelings'. Previous research (e.g. O'Neil, 2008) has highlighted the problems that can ensue through men not expressing or processing their emotions in a healthy manner, like for example, resulting in their seeking professional help for health and psychological issues. This way of being for professional footballers was heavily influenced by a need to meet the requirements placed on them from those within the game. Because of this, the players experienced a need to accept their 'sporting' lifeworld, without question and the reality of this as being an essential part of what it meant to be a male professional footballer.

The players' lived experiences around acceptance and conformity was born out of a need for professional footballers measuring up to what others expect. It is argued that these expectations/requirements centred on some players adhering to a hegemonic way of being and ideal masculinity both on and off the field. Prior research has shown how sport plays a big part in the construction and reconstruction of hegemonic masculinity (Messner, 1992; Wellard, 2002; Whannel 2007) and how male athletes can receive an increased sense of self-competence from evaluation of their accomplishments from themselves and others. Indeed, according to the integrative model of masculinity (Meek, 2011) an individual's style of masculinity can be maintained through the benefits of positive reinforcement/experience or positive evaluation from others. The current study builds upon previous work by revealing that, within the lived world of professional football, an extreme masculine ideology was reinforced through the relational experiences that the players had with others from within their football clubs. In particular, the players sporting masculinity was developed through the ways in which they were treated, judged and assessed in terms of their sporting success and capabilities.

Previous research (e.g. Helms and Gabel, 1986) has shown that those adhering to socialised masculine roles can at times experience what is termed gender role conflict (GRC), when gender roles can have negative consequences for people. This way of being can often lead to negative intrapersonal and intrapsychic consequences for men, for example, due to a conflict between what they require and

what is required of them. One of the main negative aspects that can arise from men adhering to such idealistic gender roles is restrictive emotionality where men find it difficult to process and express their emotions in healthy ways. Due to rigid roles, GRC can often lead men, like male professional footballers, to experience negative outcomes such as substance abuse (Monk and Riciardelli, 2003) and suicidal thoughts (Jacobson et al. 2011). Whilst drawing upon the theory of restrictive masculinity, it was clear that there was reluctance for most of the professional footballers to speak up about any worries as this would have be seen as going against what was expected of them within their sporting life-world. In essence, the players experienced a need to measure up to 'strong' characteristics of hegemonic masculinity if the levels of expectations of others and themselves, as sportsmen, were to be met. As part of this way of being, at times, the players felt required to 'shut' or 'block things out', especially anything that went against what was expected. However, this way of being manifested in some players experiencing negative outcomes, due in part, through a need to hide their difficulties (and their emotions), and to avoid showing that they was struggling. Indeed, within their lived-world, it was common for male professional footballers to experience putting on a 'mask' (career pro's), or a 'front' (career pro's and focus group), to ensure that they were outwardly showing to others that they were coping. However, for the sporting chance players this led to conflict within their experiences and, thus, their identity and sporting role. In particular, these players experienced a conflict between their struggling private-self that was not coping and their public-self that was required to be seen to measure up at all times. Unfortunately, this way of being led them to hit 'their rock bottom', leading them to experience severe difficulties in their life. Indeed, for some this led to substance abuse, self-handicapping experiences and attempted suicide. It was not until these players experienced severe difficulties that they deemed it necessary to drop what was an 'unobtainable' masculinity, to reveal their difficulties, and eventually reach out for help.

Prior research has shown how hegemony is negotiated by men in sport as a means of constructing and reconstructing masculinity (e.g. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 1992, 2002). However, significantly, this way of being, over time, served to affect the experiences of professional footballers in this study in problematic ways. For instance, some players felt required to take not speaking up to the extreme and,

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therefore, got on with difficulties to ensure they kept up with the characteristics associated with success for male professional footballers. Research has shown that men who adhere to an ideological version of masculinity (power, success, competition) and negative-restrictive components of GRC (e.g. restrictive emotionality) have more negative attitudes towards seeking professional help. Indeed, within the experiences the need to get on with things played a big part in why young players did not speak up about their experiences of physical and psychological abuse. Furthermore, not speaking up, it is argued, was influential in the reason why some of the career-pros did not seek-help for their difficulties earlier. It is argued, therefore, that encouraging the development of a hegemonic, masculine way of being, one which doesn't allow room for alternative ways to be men, like for example help-seeking, may play a part in why professional footballers prolong their difficulties once their careers are over and long after their sporting identity is needed. In essence, it would seem that professional footballers would much rather be seen to carry on with things than show or express that they are not coping and look for an alternative way of being. It strongly argues that this is a worrying way of being when we consider how restrictive emotionality (O'Neil 2008), can lead to negative experiences, such as suicidal thoughts and behaviours in men (Jacobson, Marrocco and Kleinman, 2011). In the light of this, it is put forward that, whilst the 'young' potential career-pro's had yet to experience problems within their life-world, when considering the accounts of the career-pros, continually adopting this way of being, one which adheres to a 'restrictive' masculinity (and emotionality), could serve to increase the likelihood of future negative experiences in the long term.

In consideration of this, the current study revealed how both the career professional footballers and potential career professional footballers were encouraged to carry on with difficulties and move on quickly in order to meet expectations within the lived world of professional football. In particular, both the career pros and potential career pros talked about being negatively treated by others within the game. For the career-pros, this mistreatment centred on not performing properly on the pitch, whereas for the potential career-pro's, the bad treatment was dished out for not dealing with things accordingly on and off the field. Significantly, for the potential career professionals they felt obliged to accept abusive treatment as part of their sporting development. It is proposed that these experiences were seen to reinforce the need

for professional footballers to keep quiet and get on with things, that is if they wanted to progress in the game.

When considering the research, it is proposed that there are a number of limitations that warrant discussion. In this regard, it is suggested that it is important that future work looks to develop upon the current research, that is, if we are to improve the experiences of professional footballers during transition from sport.

Firstly, it is felt that whilst the use of small number of on-line interviews in comparison to face-to-face interviews, was not initially deemed a problem, there were differences within the data between the face-to-face sporting chance players' experiences and the on-line within career players. It was felt that the on-line interviews did not work as well as the face-to-face interviews, due to a lack of interaction and therefore I wouldn't recommend this method of collection in future research with professional footballers.

However, the differences in their experiences it is argued, warrants and deserves further exploration. At times, the sporting chance players felt like they were putting on a pretence to meet the cultural requirements as male professional footballers which was not something that was apparent with the within career professional players. In this sense, it could be argued that these differences could be due to the within career professional still requiring their sporting identities and thus, not seeing immediately past their current sporting role and situation. What is more, when we think about the experiences of the potential career professionals and their acceptance of abuse as part of their development, it is argued that understanding how this affects these players in the long term could also be interesting. Therefore, it is felt that by developing longitudinal studies that look at exploring professional footballers across their career (including the transition out), or across critical life stages, could serve to better understand how the development of a professional footballers identity is developed and experienced over their lifetime.

What is more, when considering the recruitment issues that were a big part of the study, it is argued that getting male professional footballers to come forward to talk about their experiences for research purposes, or indeed for themselves, could be difficult and problematic. This supports the findings of the study in terms of players being reluctant to talk about their problems to maintain what was expected of them

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as male professional footballers. Therefore, it is hoped that sporting organisations and football clubs would look to support and encourage more professional footballers to engage in such work, as this may help improve our understanding further and their experiences.

Whilst the current findings give us an understanding of the lived experience of male professional footballers in the United Kingdom, this research and its findings should be understood within its situational and historical context. Therefore, future research should look to also study professional footballers in others countries to give us a better understanding of the lived-experiences of the transition from professional football within different cultures. In addition, gaining an understanding of the lived-experiences of female professional footballers in the United Kingdom would also shed further light on this population during transition from football.

9.2 Recommendations:

When considering the findings of the study, it is argued that a number of recommendations can be put forward which, it is felt, would serve to help future and current professional footballers both in the short and long-term. In terms of the structure of these recommendations it is felt necessary to address the important groups within the culture of professional football, for example professional football clubs, professional footballers and governing bodies.

When considering that professional footballers are seen to accept abusive treatment as part of their development, it is strongly suggested this is an area of extreme importance. Worryingly, underpinning the acceptance of mistreatment was a perceived requirement for professional footballers to measure up to what was expected those within the club in positions of responsibility, or positions of power.

9.2.1 Recommendations to governing bodies:

It is strongly suggested that consideration should be given to improving how professional footballers are schooled and developed, in particular, by those within the professional clubs. As has already been stressed, the importance of relationality in the players' experiences was paramount and this was predominant in terms of how they were treated, developed and regarded by others within the game. Therefore, governing bodies should make those responsible for the coaching and

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development of professional footballers accountable for anything that could be considered as being detrimental to the well-being of professional footballers, not only during their careers but also after their sporting careers have ended. It is proposed that those employed within the game and who are responsible for the development of professional footballers should be regularly monitored and assessed in terms of their professional conduct and behaviour. For instance, bullying and abusive treatment towards young players, or any player for that matter, is not something that should be within the modern game. Therefore, developing a training and assessment system, ensures that professional football clubs and, thus, employers are held responsible for the safeguarding and well-being of their players. It is felt, that such a system would help to prevent future problems around the issue of abuse by addressing current or future problems. What is more, it is felt that training programmes that look to educate staff in professional football clubs about the potential affects that abusive conduct and mistreatment can have on the experiences of professional footballer, should serve to improve professional practice for those in positions of responsibility.

9.2.2 Recommendations to professional football clubs:

It would seem, from the findings of the current research, that the masculine culture of professional football is heavily influenced by those from within the game and, in particular, those within professional football clubs. With this in mind, it is argued that focus should be given to ensuring that different ways of being men (or multiple masculinities) are recognised and encouraged by those from within the professional football clubs and, where any requirements to display or adhere to a masculine script are maintained, within the boundaries of the field. For example, adopting an ideal version of masculinity could serve professional footballers (and their clubs) during competition, or whilst performing on the field as a sportsman, however this way of being could serve to be restrictive (e.g. restrictive emotionality O'Neil 2008) for the players when they are no longer performing (whether within or out of their career). Therefore, encouraging players to maintain this idealistic way of being at all times could serve to increase the likelihood of immediate and long-term problems for male professional footballers. It could be suggested that encouraging a competitive spirit and hardworking ethos within the lived world of professional football, without the

need to invoke hegemonic masculinity, may serve to establish healthier sporting cultures.

When considering the players' experiences, it is felt that those who play a significant part in the development of professional footballers have a moral responsibility and obligation to create a difference in the game. Therefore, it is proposed that it is vitally important that professional football clubs look at ways in which to develop cultures which are healthier and, thus, not intrinsically built upon hegemonic ideals and structures. Therefore, it is put forward that professional football clubs have a duty of care to ensure that their cultures encourage players to seek help for any issues (either currently or in the future), and to ensure that stigmatisation, fear and threats around this issue are diminished.

For that reason it could be proposed that the likelihood of successful post- career transition adjustment can be significantly increased through the introduction of life developmental techniques during a footballer's career. Thus, it could be highly advised that the importance of personal excellence should not be neglected in the pursuit of performance excellence as it is seen as an essential proponent in the overall lifelong-development of a professional athlete.

9.2.3 Recommendations to professional footballers:

Upon consideration of the cultural expectations and requirements placed on professional footballers as sportsmen. It is argued that, without a change in the culture or lived world of professional football, it will be a challenge to get players to prescribe to an alternative and, potentially, healthier version of masculinity (or way of being, as sportsmen). However, this should not discourage players themselves from looking to adopt different methods through which to improve their way of being and adopt alternative ways of being men away from the football culture. For example, the research showed that those professional footballers who found a healthy and safe place to express and talk about their problems were able to experience their lives and world moving forward in a more positive sense. Therefore, professional footballers should be encouraged by this and should where possible look to seek help as this should serve to improve their productivity as sportsmen and give them the best opportunity to maximise their sporting potential.

Again, it is felt that this attitude would be much easier to adopt for professional footballers if those within the culture of professional football encouraged players to develop a good professional attitude around competitive spirit and hard work without the need for professional footballers to prescribe to a hyper-masculine role and unobtainable hegemonic script. Across the sporting chance players, the reality of their experiences revealed that this ideal version of masculinity for most of the time was not being met but instead was something that was being portrayed. It could be argued that the potential career professionals may have been too caught up in hegemonic masculinity (one which was required to accept abuse and get on with things) and thus their sporting role (and development) to consider whether they were portraying their identity as men. Therefore, it is proposed that developing programmes that educate professional footballers around the concepts of masculinity may serve to improve the ways in which professional footballers experience their lives as men. For instance, programmes that focus on highlighting how developing a broader identity as a man and sportsman, by changings attitudes towards such things as help seeking (and talking) and improve ways in which footballers process and express their emotions, should serve to improve players well-being and emotional maturity across their lifespan. Importantly, it would seem such programmes would not only serve to improve the opportunity for success for professional footballers (both on and off the field), but should also serve to increase productivity for the professional football clubs, through the evolution of healthier cultures and, thus, healthier athletes.

Therefore, as stated in the previous sections, such programmes or strategies should not just look at targeting professional footballers exclusively. Indeed, it is crucial that the coaches, managers and significant others who play an influential role in the overall development of professional footballers should be encouraged to improve their knowledge, understanding and practice.

9.3 Reflections from the inside

This final section will provide a short reflective piece to highlight my journey as a researcher and as a person throughout the process of the study.

My journey through the research has been somewhat challenging, yet fulfilling. Through interpreting the lived-experiences of professional footballers in different

career situations, I was able to arrive at a new understanding in my own experiences as a professional footballer, and to a certain extent this allowed me to find some peace with the past. Throughout my life, I had felt that my experiences, of difficulties and relationship, were somewhat unique to my lived-world and me. This often made me feel disconnected not only from the world but also from myself. Whilst it was difficult to acknowledge some of the experiences of the players', as a researcher it has fuelled a drive and passion in me to continue developing research in this area to help improve our understanding of career transition for professional footballers. By using the skills and knowledge that I have acquired, I feel strongly and confident about developing future studies to help build upon our existing knowledge. In essence, at this final point, this current research journey, albeit long, frustrating and times over-consuming, has made me as driven as I was when I first started out.

Personally, when considering my cathartic experience through a shared understanding/interpretation, it is somewhat ironic when I reflect on some of the tensions that I experienced, especially during the interviews. For example, it is argued, that the opportunity to put forward my own experiences as a professional footballer, could have given the players the same benefits of knowing that they were not alone with their experiences. However, during the interview process, I frequently felt I had to hold back my own trauma and difficulties, ethically and methodologically, to avoid flooding the interviews with my lived experiences, at the expense of those of the players.

Finally, in consideration of this and the revelations of experiences of abuse that some professional footballers shared, it is felt that it is ever more important to encourage professional footballers to share and talk about their lived-experiences. My own viewpoint is this, no professional footballer, or person for that matter, should have to experience abuse of any kind. The fact that some professional footballers accept this as normal and as a requirement is worrying, to say the least. It should be a moral obligation for all people in the professional football community to get rid of this sort of attitude/behaviour. At the individual level, it is important that people who have experienced abuse and mistreatment have a platform to voice and talk about their experiences, without judgement. In essence, my position within the research placed me in something of an interloper position, and therefore within a power relationship between professional footballers and professional football clubs. In other

words, as a researcher, I accessed and learnt things that other people wouldn't necessarily get to know about, such as bad practice by others. On reflection, it is felt I am left in a difficult position as to what I should, or shouldn't do with this information. For instance, it would have been difficult to have reported this information to the relevant organisations as this would have wavered the confidentiality of the players' and may have jeopardised their careers. In essence, it could have been that this may have been reported back to the people engaged in bad practice. In consideration, it is strongly felt that future presentations and workshops, should allow the findings of the current study to be made available to a wide range of audiences, so the lived experiences of the players in this study can be accessed and acknowledged accordingly. For example, my current and ongoing work with Sporting Chance Clinic (lifestyle consultant) and the PFA (involvement in annual career transition programme) allows me the opportunity to raise awareness, and give advice to professional footballers, around the key issues from the research. What is more, consideration should be given in this regard to other sports and sportspeople. Such opportunities and methods, it is argued, should serve to facilitate change by influencing how people live, think and practice not only on the macro, or cultural level of professional football (and sport), but also on the micro and individual level.

Apart from the issues described above, overall, the research journey was a positive and satisfying experience. The study has served to develop me not only as a person, but also as a researcher. I feel that I am now more skilled as an interviewer (in terms of both development and facilitation), more able to deal with recruitment difficulties and have learned how to navigate through a data collection in which I am more than just an interested observer. Significantly, identifying, understanding and interpreting the lived experience of career professional football has allowed me to find some peace with what has been and therefore, a much needed opportunity to move forward with my future. What is more, my development as a researcher has given me the skills and passion to want to continue developing understanding in this area, to help move things forward for professional footballers (and sportspeople) within the culture of professional football (and sport). My commitment to the players in this study and their lived experiences, will ensure that the findings are made widely accessible and that the research is seen, heard and acknowledged by those within

the field of professional football, sport and wider cultures. Finally, the players' bravery and motivation to step forward and discuss their experiences should serve as a platform for myself, and others, from which to build future research upon, so that improving understanding in the area of career transition within professional football can continue.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment

1.1 Focus Group Information Packs

Dear Players

With reference to the following project**:**

The experiences of professional footballers

I am writing to you today to ask if you could take part in an important research study. This study will look at professional footballer's experiences during their careers in particular key periods within their professional timeline.

I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield as well as an ex-professional footballer and this study will be undertaken as part of my PhD thesis.

The study involves exploring in detail the experiences of professional footballers during the transition from the game. As an ex-professional footballer I have experienced the uncertainty of being out of contract I with the possibility of exit from the game. However, despite the difficulties experienced by players there is little in the way of research to help inform strategies and interventions aimed at supporting them during this period. Although the PFA are already engaged in a number of positive initiatives in this area, this research will look to highlight the range of experiences associated with such uncertainty. Therefore, your participation is important as the findings could serve to help bodies such as the PFA and other institutions within the professional game, to more effectively improve the lifelong welfare of professional footballers. In essence, your participation in the study may go

a long way towards advocating new approaches to the way in which current and future professionals cope with and are supported through the process of transition.

Please find enclosed some information explaining the study in more detail. This information will help clarify the reasons for carrying out this research and your potential involvement. If you are willing to take part in the study please fill out the personal detail form that is attached and send this back to me in the provided pre-paid envelope.

With best wishes

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: U0664695@hud.ac.uk

Encs: Information Sheet / Consent Form

The experiences of professional footballers

The study will explore the career experiences of professional footballers. Specifically it will focus on those players who have recently experienced the transition out of the game. The research aims to understand what it was like for you to become and be a professional footballer and also how it has been for you during your recent exit from the game.

How will the research be conducted?

The research will be conducted by means of a group discussion/interview that will consist of approximately 5-6 professional footballers, who have recently exited the game.

Group Interview

The group interview will look to explore the experiences of professional footballers. The interview will ask a number of questions regarding the player's experiences as a professional footballer and will allow them to talk freely within a group of fellow players without any pressure or prejudice. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and the players will not be forced to join in the discussion if they choose not to. I am only interested in understanding what it has been for the players to experience becoming and being a professional footballer, including their recent experiences of leaving the game. The interview will last for about 1 hr and will be audio recorded so that I am able to study the content in more detail afterwards.

What will happen to the information gathered?

Each participant and any associated teams will be given a false name so that the team and any individual involved in the study will not be traced or recognised by anyone who reads the findings. The research information will be kept secure at all times in a locked filing cabinet and a password secured computer folder and will only

be accessible by me and my supervisors. Upon completion of the thesis all information will be destroyed to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and football clubs.

PFA requirements

I will be looking to collaborate with the PFA in relation to accessing the participants for the study. Therefore the researcher will be looking to distribute via the PFA all relevant correspondence (invites, info sheets and consent form) to those players who are considering attending the Transition Programme that the PFA are running sometime in July. I hope that the players' union can recognise the importance of the proposed study and thus help me with my request. If the PFA is in agreement to the proposed collaborative suggestions, I will be required to gain a signed consent form (see attached) for the purpose of ethical approval.

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student, School of Human and Health Sciences

The experiences of professional footballers

Name: ....

Contact details: Phone number..

Email address..

Thank you for considering taking part in my research. Please read the following statements and place an X next to each one, to make clear that you understand the purpose of the study and that you are willing to take part.

I understand that I am taking part of my own free will and I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any consequences for me.

I understand that I am free to choose not to answer a question without giving a reason.

I have been given full information regarding the aims of the research, and the opportunity to ask about it.

I agree to my interviews being recorded on-line via meebo and instant messenger

I understand that the information collected will be used in the thesis, future publications and public presentations

I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publically available

I agree to take part in the research.

Signature of participant

Signed: ....   Date: ....

1.2 Career professionals documents information packs (via delegates)

[Invites-via delegates]

Dear Delegate/Players

With reference to the following project**:**

The experiences of professional footballers

I am writing to you today to ask if you could take part in an important research study. This study will look at professional footballer's experiences during retirement.

I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield as well as an ex-professional footballer and this study will be undertaken as part of my PhD thesis.

The study involves exploring in detail the experiences of professional footballers during the transition from the game. As an ex-professional footballer I have experienced what it is like to exit the professional game and the uncertainty that can come with it. However, despite the difficulties experienced, there is still little in the way of research to inform strategies and interventions which are aimed at supporting professional players during retirement. Whilst the PFA are already engaged in a number of positive initiatives in this area, this research will look to improve our understanding in this area. Therefore, your participation is important as the findings will help bodies such as the PFA and other institutions within the professional game, to more effectively improve the lifelong welfare of professional footballers. In essence, your participation in the study will go a long way towards advocating new approaches to the way in which current and future professionals cope with and are supported through the process of retirement.

Please find enclosed some information explaining the study in more detail. This information will help you to clarify the reasons for carrying out this research and your

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potential involvement. If you are willing to take part in the study, please fill out the personal detail form that is attached and send it back to me in the provided pre-paid envelope.

With best wishes

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: U0664695@hud.ac.uk

Encs: Information Sheet / Consent Form

[Player Information Sheet-via delegates]

The experiences of professional footballers

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or you require more information.

Whether or not you decide to take part in this study is entirely voluntary. You can decide not to take part at any time without any reason and also to withdraw your data from the study at any time. Please be assured that your participation or possible withdrawal from the study will not affect your current or future team status in any way.

Who am I?

My name is Andrew Brownrigg and I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield. I have played professional football for over 8 years gaining valuable knowledge and experience of what it is like to be an elite sportsperson. Now I am in full time education, I have left professional status and I am now retired. Since retirement I have developed an interest in the psychology of professional football, and I am particularly interested in promoting the well-being and welfare of professional players both during and after their professional careers.

What is the research?

The study will explore the career experiences of professional footballers. Specifically it will focus on those players who find themselves up for contract renewal. The research aims to understand the experiences of professional footballers as they progress through various transitions in their careers.

How will the research be conducted?

The study will consist of three phases and will take place over a period of 4-6 months, between February and July 2011.

Phase One - during phase one, you will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will explore your experiences of professional football, and will allow you to talk freely without any pressure. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I am just interested in what it has been like for you to experience becoming and being a professional footballer as well as your future expectations. The interview will last for about 1 hr and, with your consent, will be audio recorded so that I am able to study the content in more detail afterwards.

Phase Two - over a period of about four months you will be asked to further document your experiences as a professional footballer. You will be provided with a disposable camera and a personal diary and you will be encouraged to take pictures and record personal accounts of any issues that seem important to you during this period. Again it is important to stress that there are no right or wrong ways in which to record your experiences, I am just interested in what it is like for you during this time.

Phase Three - you will be asked to take part in another interview. This interview will explore the issues that came out of the earlier stages. We will also talk about your expectations and hopes for the future and about any sources of support or advice that you think might be helpful for professional footballers.

What will happen to the information gathered?

The team and each participant will be given a false name so that the team and any individual involved in the study will not be traced or recognised by anyone who reads the findings. All photographs will be anonymised through digital pixilation to further ensure confidentiality. The research information will be kept secure at all times in a locked filing cabinet and a password secured computer folder and will only be accessible by me and my supervisors. Upon completion of the thesis all information will be destroyed to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and football clubs. A copy of the final report will be made available to each participant upon completion. Please note that any participant who wishes to obtain a

copy of the report should do so by contacting the researcher at the following address (please see below)

If you decide to take part in the study please fill in the enclosed consent form, and return it to me in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. I will then contact you to agree a time and place for the first interview.

If you want to know more, what should you do?

If you have any further questions or would like any more information, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: U0664695@hud.ac.uk

Alternatively, the main Supervisor of the research:

Dr Vivien Burr

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR1/01)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 01484 472454 (Ext-2454) Email: v.burr@hud.ac.uk

1.3 Sporting Chance Documents Information Packs

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

[Sporting Chance Invites]

Dear Players

With reference to the following project**:**

The experiences of professional footballers

I am writing to you today to ask if you could take part in an important research study. This study will focus on the experiences of professional footballer's during the period of career transition (the transition out of the professional game)

I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield as well as an ex-professional footballer and this study will be undertaken as part of my PhD thesis.

The study involves exploring in detail the experiences of professional footballers during their transition from the game. As an ex-professional footballer, myself, I know what it is like to experience the uncertainty of being out of contract and with this the possibility of exit from the game. However, despite reports of apparent difficulties experienced by players during career-transition, there is still little in the way of research to help inform interventions which are aimed at supporting them during this period. Although support groups like the PFA, LFE and Sporting Chance are already engaged in a number of positive initiatives in this area, this current research will seek to broaden our understanding in this particular area. Such research is deemed extremely important as the findings could serve to help inform those strategies which are designed to improve the 'lifelong' welfare of professional footballers. In essence, your participation in the study could go a long way towards advocating new approaches to the way in which current and future professionals cope with and are supported through the process of career-transition.

Please find attached some information explaining the study in more detail. This information will help you to further clarify the reasons for carrying out this research and your potential involvement. If you are willing to take part in the study please fill out the personal detail form that is attached (in the original email) and send this back to me via way of email.

With best wishes

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: U0664695@hud.ac.uk

Attached: Information Sheet / Consent Form

The experiences of professional footballers

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or you require more information.

Whether or not you decide to take part in this study is entirely voluntary. You can decide not to take part at any time without any reason and also to withdraw your data from the study at any time. Please be assured that your participation or possible withdrawal from the study will not affect your current or future team status in any way.

Who am I?

My name is Andrew Brownrigg and I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield. I have played professional football for over 8 years gaining valuable knowledge and experience of what it is like to be an elite sportsperson. Now I am in full time education, I have left professional status and I am now retired. Since retirement I have developed an interest in the psychology of professional football, and I am particularly interested in promoting the well-being and welfare of professional players both during and after their professional careers.

What is the research?

The study will explore the experiences of professional footballers during retirement. Specifically it will focus on those players who have been retired from the game for

longer than 2 years. The research aims to understand in more detail the experiences that professional footballers go through during the process out of their sport.

How will the research be conducted?

As part of the research you will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will explore your experiences of retirement from professional football and will allow you to talk freely without any pressure. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I am just interested in what is has been like for you during retirement. The interview will last for about 1 hr and, with your consent, will be recorded so that I am able to study the content in more detail afterwards. For your convenience the interviews can either be conducted in person by way of an audio recording, or on-line through a secure chat room.

What will happen to the information gathered?

Each participant and any associated football clubs will be given a false name so that the team and any individual involved in the study will not be traced or recognised by anyone who reads the findings. The research information will be kept secure at all times in a locked filing cabinet and a password secured computer folder and will only be accessible by me and my supervisors. Upon completion of the thesis all information will be destroyed to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and football clubs. A copy of the final report will be made available to each participant upon completion. Please note that any participant who wishes to obtain a copy of the report should do so by contacting the researcher at the following address (please see below).

If you decide to take part in the study please contact me at either by email or by phone (please see below for my details). I will then look to contact you to agree a time and place for the interview.

If you want to know more, what should you do?

If you have any further questions or would like any more information please do not hesitate to contact me:

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: u0664695@hud.ac.uk

Alternatively, the main Supervisor of the research:

Dr Vivien Burr

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR1/01)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 01484 472454 (Ext-2454) Email: viv.burr@hud.ac.uk

[Sporting Chance-Info Sheet]

The experiences of professional footballers

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or you require more information.

Whether or not you decide to take part in this study is entirely voluntary. You can decide not to take part at any time without any reason and also to withdraw your data from the study at any time. Please be assured that your participation or possible withdrawal from the study will not affect your current or future team status in any way.

Who am I?

My name is Andrew Brownrigg and I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield. I have played professional football for over 8 years gaining valuable knowledge and experience of what it is like to be an elite sportsperson. Now I am in full time education, I have left professional status and I am now retired. Since retirement I have developed an interest in the psychology of professional football, and I am particularly interested in promoting the well-being and welfare of professional players both during and after their professional careers.

What is the research?

The study will explore the career experiences of professional footballers. Specifically it will focus on those players who are no longer playing at professional level. In doing so, it will look to understand in more detail the experiences associated with such a transition.

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How will the research be conducted?

As part of the research you will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will explore your experiences of professional football, and will allow you to talk freely without any pressure. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I am just interested in what is going through your mind during the possibility of contract renewal. The interview will last for about 1 hr and, with your consent, will be recorded so that I am able to study the content in more detail afterwards. For your convenience the interviews can either be conducted in person- by way of an audio recording, or on-line- via a secure private chat room.

What will happen to the information gathered?

The team and each participant will be given a false name so that the team and any individual involved in the study will not be traced or recognised by anyone who reads the findings. The research information will be kept secure at all times in a locked filing cabinet and a password secured computer folder and will only be accessible by me and my supervisors. Upon completion of the thesis all information will be destroyed to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and football clubs. A copy of the final report will be made available to each participant upon completion. Please note that any participant who wishes to obtain a copy of the report should do so by contacting the researcher at the following address (please see below).

If you decide to take part in the study please fill in the personal details form, and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided. I will then contact you to agree a time and place for the interview.

If you want to know more, what should you do?

If you have any further questions or would like any more information please do not hesitate to contact me:

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: u0664695@hud.ac.uk

Alternatively, the main Supervisor of the research:

Dr Vivien Burr

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR1/01)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 01484 472454 (Ext-2454) Email: viv.burr@hud.ac.uk

The experiences of professional footballers

Thank you for considering taking part in my research. I would be grateful if you could provide your contact details and send them back to me via my email address: u0664695@hud.ac.uk

Contact details:

Name:

Phone number:

Email address:

Signature of participant

Signed: Date:

Print Name:

1.4 Career professionals documents (on-line)

1.4.1 On-line instructions

For your convenience, please follow the step-by-step guide that should help you access the on-line interview area:

1. Go to www.meebo.com and proceed to click on 'sign on to individual accounts' which is within the 'Sign on to Meebo' box.
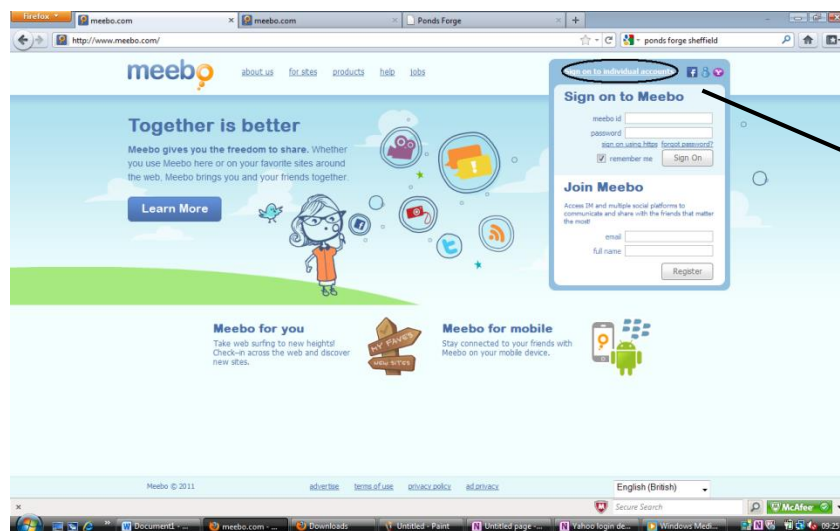
2. Then proceed to log on to the site via the yahoo section, using- username: pseudoynm47@yahoo.com, and password: *********
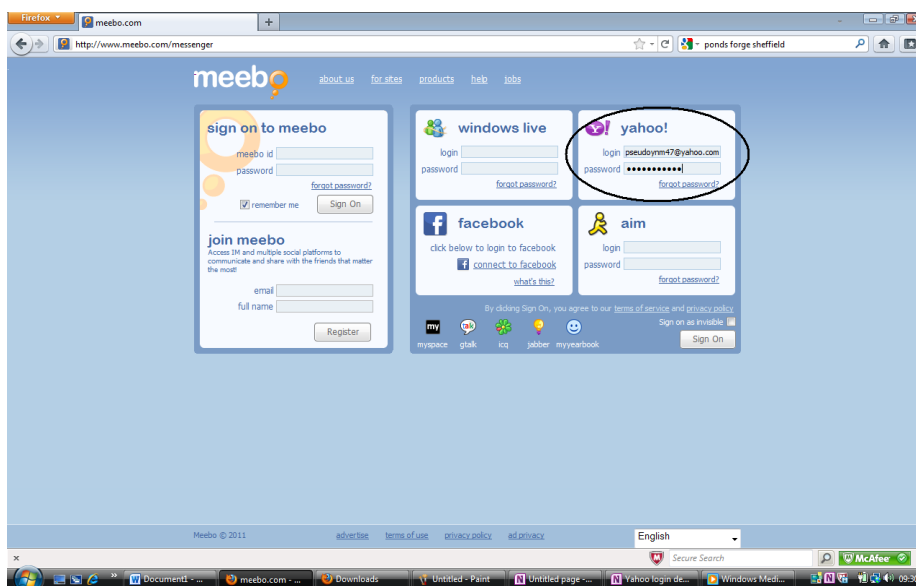
3. Once you have logged onto the Meebo site, then wait for Andy to message you. Once communication has been established a 'pop-up-box' should appear within the screen.

Pop-up
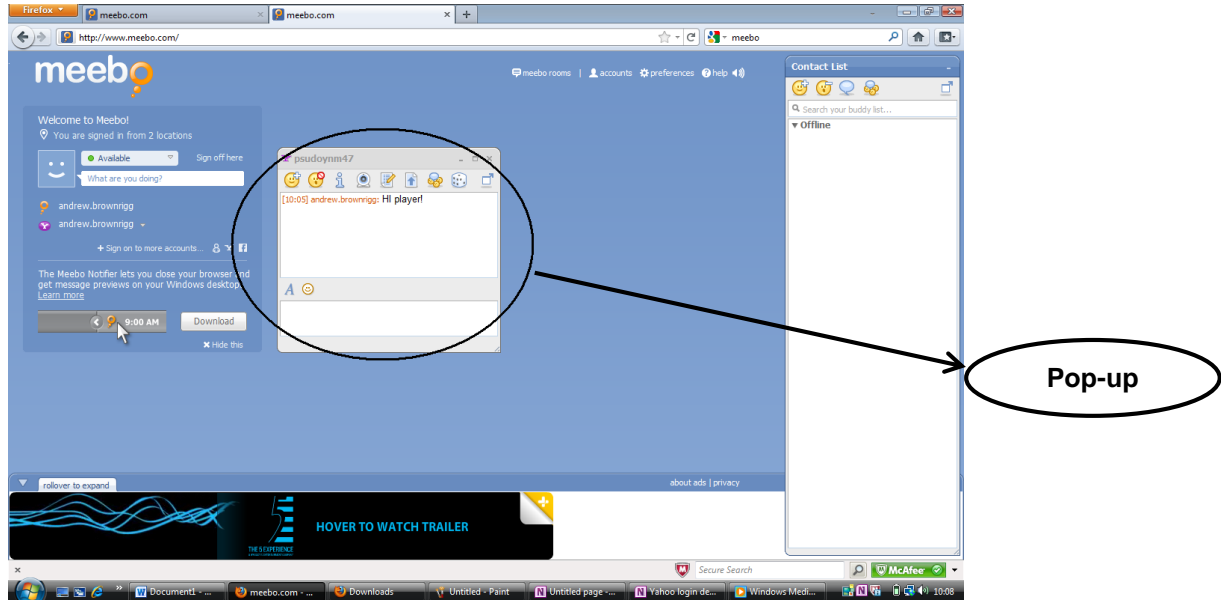
4. Once communication has been established the interview will then commence.

5. Upon completion of the interview, please ensure that you log out of the Meebo site for security purposes.

Log off
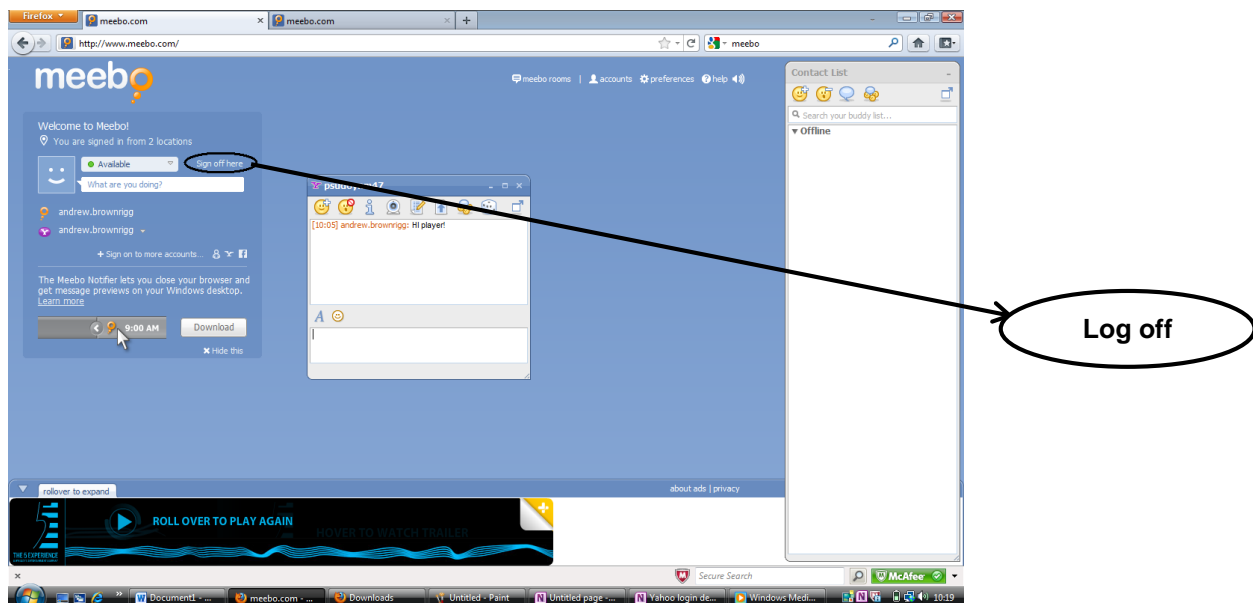
1.5 Potential Career Professionals Information Packs

[Invites]

Dear Players

With reference to the following project**:**

The experiences of professional footballers

I am writing to you today to ask if you could take part in an important research study. This study will look at professional footballer's experiences during retirement.

I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield as well as an ex-professional footballer and this study will be undertaken as part of my PhD thesis.

The study involves exploring in detail the experiences of professional footballers during the transition from the game. As an ex-professional footballer I have experienced what it is like to exit the professional game and the uncertainty that can come with it. However, despite the difficulties experienced, there is still little in the way of research to inform strategies and interventions which are aimed at supporting professional players during retirement. Whilst the PFA are already engaged in a number of positive initiatives in this area, this research will look to improve our understanding in this area. Therefore, your participation is important as the findings will help bodies such as the PFA and other institutions within the professional game, to more effectively improve the lifelong welfare of professional footballers. In essence, your participation in the study will go a long way towards advocating new approaches to the way in which current and future professionals cope with and are supported through the process of retirement.

Please find attached some information explaining the study in more detail. This information will help you to further clarify the reasons for carrying out this research and your potential involvement. If you are willing to take part in the study, please contact me via my email or phone, whatever suits you best.

With best wishes

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Brownrigg

Postgraduate Research Student

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR3/10)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: U0664695@hud.ac.uk

Attached: Information Sheet / Consent Form

The experiences of professional footballers

[Information sheets- potentials]

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or you require more information.

Whether or not you decide to take part in this study is entirely voluntary. You can decide not to take part at any time without any reason and also to withdraw your data from the study at any time. Please be assured that your participation or possible withdrawal from the study will not affect your current or future team status in any way.

Who am I?

My name is Andrew Brownrigg and I am a postgraduate psychology student at the University of Huddersfield. I have played professional football for over 8 years gaining valuable knowledge and experience of what it is like to be an elite sportsperson. Now I am in full time education, I have left professional status and I am now retired. Since retirement I have developed an interest in the psychology of professional football, and I am particularly interested in promoting the well-being and welfare of professional players both during and after their professional careers.

What is the research?

The study will explore the experiences of professional footballers during retirement. Specifically it will focus on those players who have been retired from the game for longer than 2 years. The research aims to understand in more detail the experiences that professional footballers go through during the process out of their sport.

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How will the research be conducted?

As part of the research you will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will explore your experiences of retirement from professional football and will allow you to talk freely without any pressure. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I am just interested in what is has been like for you during retirement. The interview will last for about 1 hr and, with your consent, will be recorded so that I am able to study the content in more detail afterwards. For your convenience the interviews can either be conducted in person by way of an audio recording, or on-line through a secure chat room.

What will happen to the information gathered?

Each participant and any associated football clubs will be given a false name so that the team and any individual involved in the study will not be traced or recognised by anyone who reads the findings. The research information will be kept secure at all times in a locked filing cabinet and a password secured computer folder and will only be accessible by me and my supervisors. Upon completion of the thesis all information will be destroyed to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and football clubs. A copy of the final report will be made available to each participant upon completion. Please note that any participant who wishes to obtain a copy of the report should do so by contacting the researcher at the following address (please see below).

If you decide to take part in the study please contact me at either by email or by phone (please see below for my details). I will then look to contact you to agree a time and place for the interview.

If you want to know more, what should you do?

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University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 07824 324655 / Email: U0664695@hud.ac.uk

Alternatively, the main Supervisor of the research:

Dr Vivien Burr

School of Human and Health Sciences (HHR1/01)

University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Tel: 01484 472454 (Ext-2454) Email: v.burr@hud.ac.uk

Consent Form

The experiences of professional footballers

Name:

Thank you for considering taking part in my research. Please read the following statements and place an X next to each one, to make clear that you understand the purpose of the study and that you are willing to take part.

I understand that I am taking part of my own free will and I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any consequences for me.

I understand that I am free to choose not to answer a question without giving a reason.

I have been given full information regarding the aims of the research, and the opportunity to ask about it.

I agree to my interviews being recorded on-line via meebo and instant messenger

I understand that the information collected will be used in the thesis, future publications and public presentations

I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publically available.

I agree to take part in the research.

<u>Signature of participant</u>

Signed: Date:

1.6 Participant Matrix

	Within career transition (crashed and burned)	Facing possibility of career transition (no crashed and burned)
Has Plan-b		Liam(36) John(37) Julian (32) Gareth (31) Darren(30) Steve (18) Lee (18) David (18)
No Plan-b	Tony (43) Keith (33) Frank (27) James (24)	Tim(39) Andrew (37) Chris(37) Alex (35) Rich (29) Noel(34) Harry (18) Richard(18)

Key:

Focus group (Stage one: Career professionals)
Sporting Chance (Stage two: Career Professionals)
Facing transition (Stage two: Career Professionals)
Academy (Stage two: Potential Career Professionals)

Appendix 1.4.1 Information Pack

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With best wishes

Yours Sincerely

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The experiences of professional footballers

[Invites- on-line interviews]

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[246]

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Consent Form

The experiences of professional footballers

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I understand that the information collected will be used in the thesis, future publications and public presentations

I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publically available

I agree to take part in the research.

Signature of participant

Signed: Date

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Appendix 2: Data Collection and Analysis

2.1 Stage one Documents

2.1.1 Topic Guide: Focus Group

Focus group schedule-Pilot Study

The transitional experiences of professional footballers

The following focus group will look to explore the transitional experiences of approximately 5 former professional footballers who have recently exited the game.

Topics to be addressed:

The following questions will be used by the researcher during the interview process:

1. **Identity as a pro footballer**

 What it's like being a professional footballer? How does it feel to be recognised and known as professional footballers?

2. **Achievements and failures/pressures**

Can you tell me what it feels like...

Did you ever feel pressured if things weren't going so well? How did this compare to when things were going well?

3. **Control over events**

How much control do you feel professional footballers have over their careers? How much control do you feel you have over your career?

4. **Career planning**

What are your views on professional footballers planning in advance for their exit from the game?

5. Culture of masculinity

How does it feel to be a part of the world of professional football, with all the 'camaraderie' and 'banter' that comes with it? What does it feel like now you are not directly involved in the football culture?

6. Support

What are your feelings on the levels of support that are available to professional footballers during their careers? What about for players during your predicament?

2.1.2 Focus group 1: Analysis Example

Rich- everyone said to me 'you're so mentally strong' but you have to be that's how you learn it through those experiences, so hopefully I can take that on and do slightly better in my next career.

I- going back to that my next question was did you ever feel pressured when things weren't going so well, did you ever feel pressure in yourself.

Rich- yeah, I thought my career was over and I wasn't going to come back from this but that's the kind of first month when you get the injury and then you get something to bite onto and you see it in the long-term and you just go for that

Alex- I think the pressure for myself is like I have got four kids and so the pressure is making sure you are going to provide for them basically when everything has finished that's what kind of drives me really my family nothing else really as long as my family and myself and my family are gonna be all right then that's the main thing for me you know just don't need to have pot loads of money just as long as we are secure that's all I wish for

I- so there's that kind of uncertainty when things aren't going well you're worrying about your future and your kids?

Alex- that's the uncertainty now when you are like I have come to the end of my contract at Coventry like I say and I am hoping for a deal somewhere else but you have got that uncertainty and I suppose everyone has it in everyday life just because were footballers doesn't make us different but you know people especially in their current climate at the moment there are lots of people out of work and they don't know what to do and certain things and that's a pressure which basically I will keep to myself because I don't want to put the pressure on my wife or the kids do you know what I mean so that's a pressure which you have in side which I deal with but you know it's just one of those things you have to deal with I suppose.

I- anybody else?

John - I have always, I have always throughout my career I have always pressure always just a word that was over used in football and at the minute I am starting to realise what pressure is because as one or two of the lads Alex as well have spoke of the wife and kids you don't know what's around the corner you don't know where the next wage is going to come from you don't know what lies

(5)

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I- so in a sense there's a little bit of not being in control you not being in control of your situation does anybody else?

Chris- well I am probably the same as Graham I think playing football is probably the easiest thing that I have done really I think as soon as you get on that pitch I don't feel any pressure at all I go out and play with a smile on my face this summer is probably the first summer in 16-17 years that I haven't had a nailed on job so I think er same as Alex I have got three kids as well you want to feed them and even all the good stuff you have done over your career there's not loads of people phoning you up and saying listen we will give you a job there and it does get a bit daunting and especially when there is families involved as well so I think erm that's why I have come to this if it means that I have got to take a change in direction I am willing to do it like I say I have got kids to feed is my main objective

I- it sounds very much like that when you are playing erm like I say from my own experience as well there's a lot of things there for you and then during this period you feel like there's not that kind of support you lose that kind of support or major support that you had during your career

Chris- well I think at the end of the season as well you get the PFA form with all the players that are getting released and everything you get the PFA form to fill in and everything and you are expecting to get emails like that because you have played so many games and you have done reasonably well and everything and your expecting to get loads of emails from clubs and everything and I think erm it's funny because the first week I done it I got an email from a club it was Poole Town [change] and I am thinking for fuck sake I am obviously like I am expecting these well I am not expecting I am hoping that decent clubs around my local area so I don't have to move or anything and there's nothing coming in at all so I think erm

I- how does that make you feel?

Chris- Pardon?

I- How does that make you feel, like?

Chris- scared for a start like I say it is the first year like since I was 19 that I haven't had a nailed on contract for the following season so I think err I just think it makes you take stock if anything and if it

(⑦)

2.1.3 Focus group 2: Analysis example

Tim- but I think if you still have that, are you still playing or are you retired?

Noel- still playing yeah

Tim- still playing so I mean for me I probably the last couple of years I started thinking about this transition about are you going to spend as much time with the kids but that's what everyone else does you know when you realise that everyone else you know in the outside world does that then you learn to find a way I think understanding and knowing it's going to be different it's going to be a change does for me help soften the blow I mean it doesn't make it any easier it just softens the blow I think

I- Do you think it has helped Tim that you have planned a little bit, mentally planned for..

Tim- yes because everyone would say to me 'you know it will never last forever' and you know you are getting old when you are picking up injuries and you think you know in a couple of years I am not going to be here I am not going to have this so I have to think about what I am going to do and as much as I thought about it I am still at this situation now where really I haven't done a great deal about it but I am on the right lines

I- so it would seem that you mentally prepared yourself, in a way, which doesn't always happen

Tim- well you don't always get the opportunity well I know that I have been quite blessed in some ways [financially] and it has allowed me to have a little bit of time to think about my next move and I am still not quite sure what that is.

Noel- as you were saying before I think we all put it to the back of our minds we'll think about that one later and I think we all have a moment where it sits up and we have to take notice I mean like me last season I was like I had Achilles tendinitis problems and I think at one point I thought I am never going to get rid of this and I think that's me done like I was half in my head I was half packing it in like and err obviously thoughts turn to what am I going to do?

Tim- mmm

Noel- I think we all have that pivotal moment

Tim- I think because the Achilles is such a massive area

Noel- exactly yeah

I- it takes something like that I think to make you think

Noel- to trigger it off yeah

I- for me there was always that mentality that it was always going to be there

Noel- before last season I was thinking my body feels fantastic and I can probably go for another eight or ten years and I am saying to the missus I could play until I am forty you know what I mean but your body does catch up with you and inevitably it will, sooner rather than later like

Liam- I err, I had a bad ankle injury in the season and I had to have a micro-fracture done on my ankle and it's the second time I have had it done on the same ankle and the same place err basically

(10)

Left margin handwritten notes: TOWARDS END OF CAREER BEGAN TO CONTEMPLATE LIFE AFTER; EFFECT ON FAMILY; OUTSIDE WORLD; ACCEPTING THING WILL BE DIFFERENT; SOFTENS THE BLOW; PRE WARNED AND ACCEPTANCE OF CAREER TRANSITION; PROCRASTINATIN; BEEN BLESSED FINANCIALLY; FINANCE GIVING HIM TIME TO THINK ABOUT NEXT; CAREER TRANSITION TO THE BACK OF YOUR MIND; PIVOTAL MOMENT WHEN YOU START TO THINK ABOUT NEXT MOVE; FEEL LIKE YOU CAN CARRY ON PLAYING; BODY CATCHES UP ON YOU

Right margin handwritten notes: REALISATION THAT THINGS WILL CHANGE WITH KIDS; INSTITUTIONALISED OUTSIDE WORLD; UNDERSTANDING THINGS WILL CHANGE - HELPS; REALISATION OF CAREER TRANSITION BUT STILL NOT DONE MUCH ABOUT IT; BLESSED: FINANCIALLY GIVEN HIM TIME TO CONSIDER BUT STILL NOT DECIDED; PUT THE THOUGHT OF RETIREMENT TO ONE SIDE; PIVOTAL MOMENT MAKES YOU ACKNOWLEDGE POSSIBLE RETIREMENT; WANTING TO PROLONG CAREER; BODY CATCHES UP

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they go in crack the bone make the bone bleed, so I was out for four and a half months with that and everyone told me that was it your career is finished you won't ever play again your age and all that so I had this mental thing in my head that I was retiring, I was finished, I was completely done erm but I managed to get back quicker than what I thought and I managed to get myself fit played seven games at the end of the season and done really well now I want to carry on as stupid as it may sound the specialist has given me the all clear so I can carry on and play so I am trying to get another year- two years out of my career. But I had the mindset I was finished I was completely done and this period here was me going to get a job or get into the stuff that I am doing but it has actually turned around but it's still messing with my head I am towards the end of my career, but I am not quite there yet but I was going to give up but now I'm not you know so my head is spinning all the time.

I- so there is kind of a polar opposite with the injury it's like I can't do it will I do it, whereas now it's like I can do it but will I do it?

Liam- exactly

I- Its like a, its difficult isn't it because it is like you have got the ability to still do it but you are in a position whether you dont know if it is going to happen

Liam- yeah definitely

Ian- I think for me it was I case like I said before that I got lucky in a sense that because I had so much crap in football at the age of 29 I was like you know what this professional game has beaten me so much

Group- [agreement]

Ian- and I couldn't take anymore of this beating you know what I mean you get to a club manager likes you he gets sacked or leaves that happened about seven times in my career do you know what I mean

Tim- yeah

Ian- and there's nothing you can do about a new manger coming in

Group-[agreement]

Ian- I haven't done anything wrong they just don't like you and then your forever trying to get him to like you and he don't fancy you as a player

Noel- yeah your fighting a losing battle aren't you

Ian- yeah

Tim- yeah

Ian- I got to twenty nine and I was at [previous club] and I thought you know what [ex-manager] signed me he's left and gone to [different club] new manager taken over don't like him I am calling a day and I signed for [non-league team] and did non-league for five years erm but the passion for football came back again the passion for football came back again because it wasn't

⑪

Noel- I have thought I can unload to you I can tell you obviously someone else in the game I can tell you how I am feeling but as you say you never do it in a group situation would you?

I- why do you think that is?

Liam- I think Tim has hit it on the head it's a trust thing even those who are your closest friends footballers probably don't have a lot of close close friends

Tim- and not only that as well there's a lot of politics in football that almost invisible politics if you like because you're always up against the guy next to you he's in your position or someone else is in your position which could affect the team you or them in what you say you know you have always got to weigh up how much I can give how much I can tell the truth in say like meetings you can't go out and say what you think about the manager if it is going to be in a bad way it's only going to reflect back on you, you know and you got to be sensible about that and I think in that way you are I think players are generally quite guarded.

Noel- I think because of the environment as well because of the banter and the bravado

Tim- mmm

Noel- you know

Tim- yes

Noel- you don't want to be going deep on people

I- you dont want to be having a group hug and talking about feelings do you?

Group – [laughter]

Noel- exactly yeah, it's not a done thing is it, I hope you are not suggesting one?

I- no

Noel- out in the corridor later

Tim- so you did counselling Ian and how does that differ?

Ian- well I was lucky because what I did was there are varying different counselling techniques you can use mine was person-centred which is it's all about the emotional person, some people work on the brain whereas I am always like tell me what it is like for you and how do you feel what's going on because particular in football is such a closed game you're a closed person you don't give much away you know you don't get asked those questions do you know what I mean and if you do get asked a question you usually say oh I am fine you know what I mean

Tim- well that's another thing as well you have to put all your personal issues to one side and once you step over the line you have to be in the right frame of mind so

I- I would say the difference between myself and Ian is probably Ian is working with theories so he is helping people with theories in psychology and counselling whereas my area is really looking at understanding what is going on and developing our understanding through research

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2.2 Stage Two Documents

2.2.1 Topic Guide- Sporting Chance Players

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The following interview schedule will look to explore the experiences of career professionals (within Sporting Chance) during career transition.

The following broad questions will be used as a guide by the researcher during the semi-structured process. Please note that the prompts and probes for each question are highlighted beneath.

1. **What is/was it like to be a professional footballer?**

   [prompts: depending on what is brought up I can ask further questions to elicit their experiences around the players identities as professional footballers, for example 'how they view themselves? and how they feel others may view them?']

   (probes: what is it that like? how do you see yourself? what does this feel like? How does that make you feel?)

2. **Apart from physical fitness and general technical skills what type of characteristics do you think professional clubs like to see in a player?**

   [prompts: depending on the responses I can look to explore the players' experiences further by looking at such things as 'why clubs, may or may not look for certain characteristics?' and 'how players are expected to show such characteristics?]

   (probes: why do you think that is? how do you feel about that?)

3. **Can you tell me about the good and the not so good aspects of being a footballer?**

   [depending on the responses I can ask further questions about their experiences during difficult/good times, like for example: how did you feel at this time? or, how does this compare to how you felt at this time?]

   (probes: what was this like for you? why did that make you feel that way?)

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4. **Can you tell me what it was like for you when things weren't going so well?**

[prompts: depending on their responses I can look to explore the players accounts further by asking about what it is like for them to experience such things as pressure? and stress?]

(probes: how was this for you? how did this make you feel? How does this compare to when things were going well?)

5. **How do/did you deal with the demands that are/were placed on you as a professional footballer?**

[prompts: depending on the players responses I can look to elicit their experiences further by asking about their 'coping strategies' and 'their feelings about the demands placed on them']

(probes: How did this make you feel? How was that for you? How did you deal with that?)

6. **What was it like for you to experience your personal difficulties as a professional footballer?**

[prompts: depending on the responses I can look to explore 'how they feel this may be differ to how people in other professions may experience personal difficulties?']

(probes: How did that make you feel? What did/do you think about that? Why did you feel that way?)

7. **Did you ever feel that your career may have been affected if you were to admit to your difficulties?**

[prompts: depending on the responses I could look to explore 'the ways in which players view there difficulties with regards to their career?, do they see it as something threatening? or as non-threatening?]

(probes: In what way? How did this make you feel? How did this influence you?)

8. **Prior to you contacting Sporting Chance, how did you feel about seeking help for your problems?**

[probes: depending on the responses I can explore the players perceptions with regards to seeking help as a professional footballer, for example: how did you feel you would be viewed by others if you were to sought help? or how did you view yourself as someone who seeks out help?]

(prompts: Why did you feel that way? Why made you think like in that way?)

9. **How does this compare to your feelings now that you have sought help?**

   [prompts: depending on the responses I can explore the players perceptions with regards to how they see themselves now they have sought help, for example: how do you feel others will view you now that you have gained help for your problems? or how do you see yourself now you have sought help?] (What makes you feel that way? why do you think that is? how does this compare)

10. **What are your views on the level of support that are available to professional footballers?**

   [prompts: depending on the responses I can look to explore in more detail the players views on support within the game for example from their clubs and their fellow players, from external organisations and from a personal perspective (i.e. family, friends, etc.)

   (Probes: What do you think about that? How do you feel about this? How does this compare to)

11. **Based on your own experiences, how would you advise those within professional football who are experiencing personal difficulties?**

   (probes: why would you say that to him? Why do you think that is important? How do you think that may help?)

2.2.2 Topic Guide- Career Professionals

The following interview schedule will look to explore the experiences of potential career professional footballers who are facing the possibility of career transition:

1. **What is it like to be a professional footballer?**

   [prompts: depending on what is brought up I can ask further questions to elicit their experiences around the players identities as professional footballers, for example 'how they view themselves? and how they feel others may view them?']

   (probes: what is it that like? how do you see yourself? what does this feel like? How does that make you feel?)

2. **Apart from physical fitness and general technical skills what type of characteristics do you feel professional clubs like to see in a player?**

   [prompts: depending on the responses I can look to explore the players' experiences further by looking at such things as 'why clubs, may or may not look for certain characteristics?' and 'how players are expected to show such characteristics?]

   (probes: why do you think that is? how do you feel about that?)

3. **Can you tell me about the good and the not so good aspects of being a footballer?**

   [depending on the responses I can ask further questions about their experiences during difficult/good times, like for example: how did you feel at this time? or, how does this compare to how you felt at this time?]

   (probes: what was this like for you? why did that make you feel that way?)

4. **Can you tell me what it was like for you when things aren't going so well?**

   [prompts: depending on their responses I can look to explore the players accounts further by asking about what it is like for them to experience such things as pressure? and stress?]

(probes: how was this for you? how did this make you feel? How does this compare to when things were going well?)

5. **How do you deal with the demands that are placed on you as a professional footballer?**

[prompts: depending on the players responses I can look to elicit their experiences further by asking about their 'coping strategies' and 'their feelings about the demands placed on them']

(probes: How did this make you feel? How was that for you? How did you deal with that? How does this compare to?)

6. **What are your views on the level of support that is available to professional footballers?**

[prompts: depending on the responses I can look to explore in more detail the players views on support within the game for example from their clubs and their fellow players, from external organisations like Sporting Chance Clinic and from a personal perspective (i.e. family, friends, etc.)

(Probes: What do you think about that? How do you feel about this? How does this compare to?)

7. **How do you think this compares to the level of support that is available to pro-players after their careers?**

8. **What are your views on professional footballers planning in advance for life after sport?**

9. **What are your expectations of life after professional football?**

2.2.3 Topic Guide- Potential Career Professionals

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

The following interview schedule will look to explore the experiences of potential career professional footballers who are facing the possibility of career transition:

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   (probes: what is it that like? how do you see yourself? what does this feel like? How does that make you feel?)

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(Probes: What do you think about that? How do you feel about this? How does this compare to?)

7. **How do you think this compares to the level of support that is available to pro-players after their careers?**

8. **What are your views on professional footballers planning in advance for life after sport?**

9. **What are your expectations of life, or a career, in the professional game?**

10. **What are your expectations of life after professional football**

2.2.4 Stage two: Analysis Example

Narrative of experiences

When talking about his early experiences as a footballer (when he was young) the player talks about football in a positive light and how he felt special and believed in himself. He also talks about feeling lucky to have been given, a gift and a talent to play football and, the opportunity to do this as a job. In terms of his status as a professional footballer, the player says that he did not feel like he was better than anyone else was. However, when talking about performing as a professional footballer the player talks about how easy it was for him and how he felt- in comparison to other footballers- better than everyone else. In addition, the player talks about feeling a sense of accomplishment and that this had made him feel like he had repaid the faith that others had in him.

[Margin notes: POSITIVE EARLY EXPERIENCES; THE NEED TO COMPARE WITH OTHER FOOTBALLERS; SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT - REPAID THE FAITH.]

When talking about the good aspects of being a footballer the player talks about the ability to reach goals and fulfil potential, short working hours as well as the physical benefits. Conversely, when discussing the difficult aspects of being a professional footballer the player talks about it being a lonely place- both during and after a player's career. In terms of the loneliness- during a footballer's career- the player attributes this to short working hours (because most other people are working all day) and the fact that in his experience professional football is not a place where you make friends. When discussing these experiences the players suggests that, the 'lonely' nature of professional football can lead to depression. Part of the problem according to the player is that there is no real support within the club and that players are reluctant to seek help for their problems as this would show mental weakness (which is not a characteristic that professional clubs are looking for- see below for an overview of this). Therefore, according to the player, professional footballers tend to keep going (despite problems) and thus, look to 'paper over the cracks'.

[Margin notes: FOOTBALL IDENTITY - PHYSICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND OCCUPATIONAL BENEFITS. LONELINESS- DEPRESSION. LACK OF SUPPORT AND A GAP- SEEKING HELP TO LONELINESS- PERCEIVED WEAKNESS.]

Accordingly, when talking about the characteristics that professional clubs are looking for in a player, the player talks about the need to be mentally strong, a winner and a leader. In addition, the player talks about the need as a professional footballer, to show that you are not weak. Therefore, there is a need for professional footballers to 'put on a front'- if they are struggling- because if they don't then this could affect them in terms of being selected for the team, which in turn can affect the player financially. In this sense, the player talks about how it is important to put on a front so that football clubs do not see you as a weak link- something that the football clubs are looking for. In essence, the player sees this process as 'papering over the cracks'- something which in the end doesn't work because eventually you hit rock bottom and it all blows up. When discussing these experiences the player talks about how it was difficult for him, in particular he talks about how he took things personally, felt less than and hated himself. During this period, the player talks about experiencing isolation and how he used methods such as gambling as a way of escaping the reality of his situation. Yet, despite his problems, the player talks about finding it difficult to talk to anyone- in particular at the football club- about his issues.

[Margin notes: PLAYERS GET ON WITH THINGS - DON'T DEAL WITH PROBLEMS. NEED FOR STRENGTH - NOT WEAKNESS. NEED TO PUT ON A FRONT - TO AVOID DESELECTION AND TO MAXIMISE SUCCESS. PAPERING OVER THE CRACKS- PUTTING ON A FRONT. CULTURE OF FOOTBALL - DIFFICULTIES TALKING ABOUT PROBLEMS. ISOLATION - NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES.]

The player talks about how he dreamed of being a professional footballer from a young age, but how his experiences changed once it became a job to him. In particular, the player talks about how he did not enjoy his time as a trainee footballer (i.e. during the Youth Training Scheme- now known as Academy Scholarship), mainly because of the work that he had to do during this period (jobs and responsibilities). However, once he became a full professional footballer (after his YTS had finished) the player talks about how he enjoyed his job more- especially, the more relaxed nature of being a full professional and the banter that came along with it.

DREAM JOB
DIDN'T ENJOY SCHOLARSHIP
ENJOYED PROFESSIONAL STATUS - RELAXED & BANTER

When talking about the good things about being a professional footballer the player talks about the financial and physical benefits, the attention you receive from the fans and the fact that it is a job that most people would love to do. When things are going well the player says that everyone wants to be your best mate- the manager wants to know you (i.e. acknowledges you and takes an interest in you) and people want to be around you. However, when things are not going well the player talks about experiencing football as a 'fickle' industry, in particular, he talks about how his the blanked him and how nobody is interested in you- i.e. 'not the flavour of the month- because you are not giving certain people what they want. When talking about how the clubs treats players', he highlights how professional footballers are treated like 'machines' and that, when the machine is not working properly no body is interested.

GOOD FINANCIAL, PHYSICAL ATTENTION
REGARD AND ATTENTION - THINGS GOING WELL
DISREGARDED - THINGS AREN'T GOING WELL
TREATED LIKE MACHINE- NOT WORKING NOBODY INTERESTED

When considering the characteristics that clubs are looking for in professional footballers the player talks about experiencing the need to show strength- for example, not giving in and rising to the challenge (as opposed to shying away from it). The player also expresses the need for players to show these 'strong' characteristics- and live up to them- not only on the pitch, but also off it. However, according to the player in his experience if you are not this type (someone with strong characteristics), then there is a need for professional footballers' to put on a front (and thus to, outwardly, show such characteristics). In terms of putting on a front, the player talks about how this is a cultural requirement- i.e. by the clubs and players (peer pressure)- something that is, further reinforced by the fans- i.e. being viewed as 'superhuman'. Furthermore, the player talks about how this need to be a certain way was hard, unhealthy and was at times difficult to escape. All in all, the player would have much preferred to have been himself as a professional footballer.

NEED TO SHOW STRENGTH
STRENGTH - ON AND OFF THE PITCH
IF NOT FEELING STRONG - NEED TO PUT ON FRONT
CULTURAL REQUIREMENT- PUT ON A FRONT- SHOW STRENGTH

When discussing the difficulties that professional footballers' experience the player talks about the need to act in a certain way- i.e. to show that one is dealing with pressure. In particular, the player talks about certain pressures that come with being a professional football, for example- the pressure of playing well and the need to fulfil your potential. The player talks about how dealing with pressure- something which he suggests did not faze him (note: which contradicts his previous comment about showing one is dealing with it)- by concentrating on enjoying playing football. In addition, the player talks about how the pressures and expectations were harder for

PUTTING ON FRONT - HARD
ACTING EVERYTHING IS OKAY
NEED TO DEAL WITH PRESSURE
DEAL WITH PRESSURE THROUGH SPORTING DEV.

<u>Frank</u>

"…they are looking for somebody who's…erm…who's going to be a winner, mentally strong and a leader as well, just because you have a captain on the pitch you don't just want ten other blokes just following one man, you know you want, you want eleven leaders on the pitch and you want six leaders as a sub, so when they go on and whatever else, you know they don't want' they don't want people who are going to be weak or if they think you're not at 100% for an issue that has gone on, you know you might have had a death in the family, or whatever it might be, you see footballers not playing that weekend even though they might want to play, the manager kind of pulls them out because they might not be in the right frame of mind and if you are not you end up putting on a front to make them believe you are in the right frame of mind because at the end of the day if you get on the pitch you are getting extra money on top of your wages with appearances, and bonuses and stuff…"

> **Comment [AB1]:** The player talks about his experiences of what football clubs are looking for in a professional football (lived relation) in this passage. According to his experience football clubs are looking for players to show strength (winner, mentally strong, be a leader) and not weakness (for example not dealing with difficulties in one's life). For him these characteristics are essential aspects of the performative (on the playing field and off it) nature of being a professional footballer and being part of the team. To succeed, he highlights how there is a need to 'put on a front' so as to remain in the side/team. Therefore, it is important that as a player he gave off the impression he was in the right frame of mind- despite potential difficulties.

"…because I wouldn't want then to think that I was mentally weak, I just kept on going over the same thing papering over it, didn't want to train, couldn't be bothered playing, erm…but was just turning up anyway because it's not like you can turn around and say I don't want to play today because then you'll get sacked, you're just going through the motions kind of thing, it's like you are in auto-pilot you doing it until something happens and you can't go on anymore, you just…something happens where you hit rock bottom and you know that you…you've got to tell them then, there's no other way…"

> **Comment [AB2]:** In this passage the player talks about how his experiences as a professional football was always in relation to others- impression management. Specifically the player talks about the need to not show weakness (perceived) to others and how there was a need to carry on with things- 'paper over the cracks'. The idea of seeking help or speaking out about problems is not an option as this would potentially jeopardise the players livelihood. But, thid experience shows that the player is struggling to deal with his issues and this is impacting on his ability to perform as a footballer. Sadly, it is not until the player hits 'rock bottom' and can't go on anymore, that he then decides to seek help and tell somebody.

"…yeah, yeah you have got to have it, you know, you wouldn't end up coming to somewhere like this, or, or, basically be at the bottom if you didn't have the front, because if you didn't have the front, you'd go and gamble and you'd go and drink and then you'd be like, ohhhhh, I can't cope and people would go no that's not an addiction if you do that, it's just you are moaning over a hangover or losing a bit of money, you put on front because you don't want people to know, because you are embarrassed about what you are doing, but, you can't help what you are doing, err…and even when you say you are not going to do it again, you always end up doing it again, you say you are going to stop, you get through a couple of days through will power and after that you talk yourself into it being okay…"

> **Comment [AB3]:** The player talks about the need to put on a front in this passage, specifically in relation to his addiction. In particular, it would seem that the player is talking about how people would not understand his issues (gambling and drinking) and instead would dismiss it as something trivial.

- A need to show strength. not weakness. (Performance related).
- Put on a front – to maintain in team.
- Impression management – not show weakness (Percieved)
- Seeking help – Jeapordising livelihood.
- Impact on performance – harbouring issues of need for help.
- Hitting rock bottom – realisation for help.
- Putting on a front – people wouldn't understand.

"...yeah, yeah...because people in football they talk and clubs are linked with other clubs and if you want to get a move, you know you are not going to get a move if one manager is saying , "yeah well you know", or "we've heard that it didn't want to play last week because he is suffering with depression" or whatever, and people would laugh at that, it's not, and no one know what it is...err...so...you leave yourself vulnerable in, is anyone going to take me on, am I going to get the same money am on, and all them questions are going around in your head, you don't want people to think you are like that..."

"...why would you if you was a manager, why would take me on if I'd told a club that's better than your club I don't want to play for them because I feel mentally not right, what, you wouldn't sign me knowing that I've fucked that up because I'm mentally not right and then you're going to take a chance on me..."

"...yeah, I can understand what you are saying, but at the same time, if, if you knew it weren't somebody who was associated to the club that you could speak to on a confidential level and it wasn't going to go back saying well he's light nosed and he's saying he's not right and he won't be able to play at the weekend, if they were just going to monitor, or something came out and said look this guy left it to the end and he's ended up killing himself, you do not want that, and opening stuff up where things have happened and whatever else has happened because there is a few players who have killed themselves now, they need, they need to get something that is right and something you can see, or a DVD or whatever goes round a clubs and says look it's a sad thing to do, to see or whatever else..."

"...I think if the PFA had representatives that went round to clubs or they could link up to somebody and they said look this is confidential between you and us we are going to monitor it, don't...we aren't going to go back to your club and monitor it, so we feel that you know it's going to be a point of you are going to have to..."

"...yeah, it kind of chews you up inside because, you know, you want someone to put their arm around you and say look, I can kind of sense that you have got a problem, just tell me a little bit and we are going to get, you know, we can sort it out we can get you help, don't worry about whatever that's all sorted you kind of, you're like crying out for it, but at the same time if it was to happen, you'd probably say it was alright, so it's a kind of you want it but you don't, kind of thing and it's a, that's

- masking difficulties - maintain reputation (performance).
- masking difficulties/putting on a front - confusion (internal reality and external performance).
- showing you are struggling - stigma..
- maintaining reputation - not disclosing problems.. (performing footballer)
- importance of confidentiality - seeking help. (jeopardise reputation- performance).
- importance of confidentiality - a safe environment.