

**AND VS OR: APPRENTICE FOOTBALLERS'
UNDERSTANDING OF IDENTITY AND PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with apprentice footballers' understanding of identity and Personal Development (PD). For those young footballers offered apprenticeships with professional football clubs aged 16, by the age of 21, five out of every six will be out of the game professionally (Professional Footballers Association, 2019). Rejection from such a career can lead to transition and adjustment issues due to the impact on identity (Lavalley, 2005, Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006, Roderick, 2006b, Brown and Potrac, 2009, Brownrigg et al., 2012).

Personal Development (PD), defined through an emphasis for the continued growth of the whole person (Danish et al., 1993), not just the athlete, is one concept through which athletes are encouraged to develop their understanding of identity, beyond their athlete status, by engaging within practical activities outside of sport, whilst concurrently employed within sport (Stambulova et al., 2014).

Study 1 of this thesis consisted of qualitative interviews with 12 apprentice footballers, to explore their understanding of identity and PD. Multiple players interpreted their club environments as encouraging them to view themselves as footballers, constantly, and become a 24hr (24/7) footballer.

Concurrent to Study 1, a relationship formed with League Football Education (LFE) which led to the thesis occupying a lead role in the planning and delivery (Study 2, Part A) and evaluation (Study 2, Part B) of an informative workshop delivered to apprentice footballers for the 2015/16 season entitled My Future Today (MFT). The workshop aimed to support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD. To achieve this, the MFT narrative was created to challenge the 24/7 narrative (Douglas and Carless, 2014).

Study 2, Part B, consisted of qualitative interviews with 12 apprentice players who had attended MFT, to explore their understanding of identity and PD. Through MFT, interviewees' understanding of identity and PD was supported and developed, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, during their career. Their understanding was underpinned in relation to their futures after football (i.e., appreciating the potential loss of identity that might accompany being released) and/or through a belief that this understanding would support them and their performances, as footballers, in the immediate sense. Indeed, empirical data suggested that the 24/7 approach was not seen as conducive to performance. The outcome of this understanding also resulted in numerous interviewees becoming more proactive in their post-apprenticeship transition planning.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning

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Abbreviation of Terms

FA – The Football Association

EPL – English Premier League

FL – Football League

PFA – Professional Footballers' Association

AI – Athletic Identity

AIMS – Athletic Identity Measurement Scale

LDI – Life Development Intervention

PD – Personal Development

MFT – My Future Today

EPPP – Elite Player Performance Plan

LFE – League Football Education

DKHT – Dame Kelly Holmes Trust

EPT – League Football Education Exit and Progression Team

RO's – League Football Education Regional Officers

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

The life of a professional footballer hinges around one key factor, selection or de-selection (Roderick and Schumacker, 2016). Yet, to reach this professional status and experience the weekly selection dilemmas, the elite youth footballer must be deemed worthy of progression to the professional ranks by his respective club. The journey can often involve considerable years of investment of time and energy in pursuit of this career.

Most often, young footballers identified as ‘talented’ will be affiliated to professional clubs throughout their formal education years. Then, as the young player leaves school aged 16, if their club wishes to continue to invest resources within their ongoing development, they are offered a Football Apprenticeship contract, also referred to as a Football Scholarship. For the remainder of this thesis, the terms ‘apprentice/apprenticeship’ and ‘scholar/scholarship’ will be used interchangeably to describe elite youth footballers who are offered contracts at professional clubs after they leave formal education. This contract will legally last for 2 years. In effect, players at this stage of development are full-time employees of their respective football clubs, but their contract is not a professional contract, nor can they be considered as professional players. It is with this cohort of apprentice players with which this thesis is concerned, those aiming to succeed in the game as a professional player, but those who are yet to overcome the final hurdle. If the young players are to complete their scholarship successfully (in relation to their football progression), key decision makers at their clubs must deem they have the necessary potential and talent to continue in the game and will make them a professional contract offer. Most usually, this professional offer comes at the end of the apprenticeship. However, if the player

is viewed unfavourably, either in the immediate sense or regarding his future potential, then he will not be offered a professional contract at the end of his scholarship and will be released from the club. The percentage of players released at this point is substantial (League Football Education, 2019). Effectively this group of young players will then need to find alternative employment, either within the game by signing for another club, or away from professional football altogether. Clearly, this career is precarious for the young people involved as they face daily challenges to prove themselves and their future worth to their clubs (Champ et al., 2018).

All professional clubs in England operate some form of academy system to develop the next capable footballer. Places at professional clubs' youth academies will be formally offered to children from 9 years of age (EPPP, 2011), however, most also offer pre-academy places from 6 years of age (EPPP, 2011). Therefore, for large numbers of players experiencing a contract decision at the end of their scholarship, this might represent the culmination of a journey that began somewhere in their childhood, and most often encompassed a full adolescence engagement within elite youth football (for example, if an individual begins pre-academy at 6 and completes his scholarship at 18) (Ford et al., 2012).

Statistically, during any one football season there are roughly 2,000 professional players, and 1,200 apprentices, employed to clubs within the English professional leagues (Professional Footballers Association, 2019, League Football Education, 2019). Further to these numbers there are approximately 12,000 young players signed to professional clubs' academies and centres of excellence throughout England, from the ages of 9-16 (EPPP, 2011). It is also important to recognise that release from academies can occur at any point for any of the 9-16 year old players throughout this experience if the club perceives the player is not progressing to the levels required to

achieve future success. Therefore, when those 12, 000 young people currently engaged are added to the potentially thousands more young footballers who have been released at various points, elite youth football is influencing the lives of many thousands of young people.

To simplify the process, the game operates in a linear fashion; the young players in the clubs' academies wish to become apprentices when they complete their formal education, and the apprentices wish to become professionals when they finish their apprenticeship. Of course, throughout this journey from academy to professional, there are players who decide to voluntarily disengage from the system and pursue different opportunities. However, for the clear majority of players, their clubs (or more specifically, staff members at their clubs) will ultimately decide how far they progress within the system. The attrition rate of 90%, in relation to players signed as apprentices, still being employed as professional footballers at 21 years of age (Brown and Potrac, 2009), alludes to the fact that for many apprentice players, even if they are offered professional terms, it is highly unlikely they will experience prolonged employment within the game. It is further estimated that the success rate for children signed at academies from aged 9, becoming professionals at aged 18, is somewhere between 1-10% across the academy system (Green, 2009). Such attrition rates are also a common factor of other elite sports, as governing bodies/clubs often invest in the over-production of young talent, resulting in a high turnover of young athletes, in the hope of unearthing a champion (Coakley, 2011). For Nesti and Sulley (2014), these individual failings are the unavoidable reality of sport, and indeed other performance realms (i.e., actors, musicians, artists etc.), yet it is how these environments are managed that is the crucial factor in the development of young and talented people. Yet, in football specifically, it seems despite an awareness as to the inherent challenges

associated with success, young footballers are embedded within a culture wherein their dreams are made to seem achievable, yet, for the majority, the rewards they seek are likely inaccessible, and failure largely inevitable according to Roderick (2014). Despite this heavy threat of failure and the inevitability that the vast majority of those engaged will not become professional players, the developmental experiences afforded to the young people in the academy system are constructed to maximise football 'time' and on-field performances (Champ et al., 2018), not to support their eventual transition from the game (Platts, 2012).

The developmental pathway for young players into professional football has recently captured the focus of the mainstream media following suggestions that those deemed unsuccessful experience psychological and emotional distress after their release (Ducker, 2015, Conn, 2017). A recent book by Calvin (2017) highlights the challenges facing children as they navigate the academy system, including numerous stories of severe problems through release and transition. From an academic perspective, the idea that rejection from such a career can lead to transition and adjustment issues, some of which could be classified as severely affecting players' mental health and well-being, has been widely acknowledged for a number of years (Lavallee, 2005, Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006, Roderick, 2006b, Brown and Potrac, 2009, Brownrigg et al., 2012). Of the major stakeholders within the professional game, including The Football Association (FA), English Premier League (EPL), Football League (FL) and the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), it is predominantly the PFA that exist to keep player welfare (i.e., mental health and well-being) concerns at the heart of their organisation (Professional Footballers Association, 2019). However, their focus of support is predominantly to those players who earn scholarships and professional contracts; they do not support the 12, 000 children

engaged within the academy system. The Duty of Care report from Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson (2017) suggests that athlete welfare, education and transition should be the cornerstones of elite sport development pathways, and that more consideration should be given to such areas from the governing bodies responsible for creating such pathways. The EPL will produce their revised guidelines surrounding the academy system and player development pathways in readiness for the 2019/20 season.

The academies of professional clubs employ full-time education and welfare staff at the youth/apprentice level, yet the underpinning motive for elite youth football is undeniably the production of professional players (Nesti and Sulley, 2014). This reality has led to the suggestion that on-the-ground welfare practices throughout professional clubs can become secondary and peripheral (Platts, 2012). It is less clear where and to what degree the welfare and wider developmental interests of young footballers 'sits' within the game as, at present, clubs justify their practices through the numbers of successful graduates they unearth (EPPP, 2011). Perhaps such an approach can be traced to the substantial sums of money now available to clubs in the higher reaches of English football. This encourages clubs to improve performance with the production of better players, which will therefore create better teams, which will make them more money according to Gilmore (2009).

Tighter regulation and general auditing of the professional football environment has been championed for several decades by many academics (Stewart and Sutherland, 1996, Roderick et al., 2000, Parker, 2001, Pitchford, 2007). From a research perspective, such aims occupy an ethical position owing to the fact that players who one day represent their clubs professionally, over a sustained period, are statistically in the vast minority of those engaged. However, the game's leading stakeholders would appear to be offering tighter auditing in efforts to increase the numbers, and

quality, of successful youth players transitioning into the professional ranks, as opposed to supporting any ethical concerns. To address this player production agenda, in 2011, the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) was introduced as a joint venture between the EPL and FA. The vision was to produce more and better home grown players, with success in this regard judged by ‘a points-based system which accurately measures the development journey of every professional player and makes it possible to measure the successful production of players at each Academy’ (p.23) (EPPP, 2011). Within this structure, whilst the headlines are for more and better players graduating from academies, attention was drawn to the welfare and developmental interests of young players. The welfare agenda was anchored to the potential performance gains to be accrued by creating ‘educationally rounded people through a holistic approach’ (p.12) (EPPP, 2011). The terms ‘rounded’ and ‘holistic’ are open to interpretation, especially with no common definition given, however, regardless of definition, there is a relationship between what such terms mean, or infer, and the concepts of identity and personal development (PD); how one sees oneself and how that person is developing. It is within these concepts, against the backdrop of elite youth football, where this thesis is positioned.

Identity has been defined as a ‘constantly evolving sense of who one is, both as an individual and member of society’ (Erikson, 1968) and is one of the ways researchers have attempted to further understand the experiences of elite athletes for several decades (Ronkainen et al., 2016). Historically, the focus of the academic work in this field has tended to highlight the potential for psychological distress upon career termination/retirement experienced by athletes who may have somewhat overly invested within a narrow and sport-related identity (Blakelock et al., 2016). In light of this, many authors including Champ et al. (2018), Roderick (2014) and Nesti et al.

(2012) have asked for relevant stakeholders and supporters of athletes to be mindful as to the types of identities athletes may develop as a result of their practices. Identity construction is an ongoing process, simultaneously related to both psychological and social factors, and how these factors are interpreted. For the elite young footballer particularly, social interactions and relationships, and environmental systems, at their respective clubs, can be viewed as fundamental in influencing the adolescent identity (Erikson, 1968). In returning to the EPPP's aim to develop 'rounded' young players, it is logical to suggest that a player's identity should contain variation, complexity and balance, rather than being constructed upon a somewhat one-dimensional view of the self as a footballer, and little else.

The mechanisms, or 'how to', for supporting the development of rounded young men with balanced and complex identities, can be termed personal development (PD); defined through an emphasis for the continued growth of the whole person (Danish et al., 1993). In effect, PD initiatives, in a sporting context, target the development of the entire person, not just the athlete. To promote such concepts, Strachan et al. (2011) advise all personnel involved within the development of talent to prioritise not just athletic performance, but the young person as a whole. In football, by developing an early emphasis upon the foundation of continued PD, clubs can enhance young people alongside equipping young footballers (Nesti and Sulley, 2014). At present, there exists a belief that sport participation alone is enough to facilitate the development of young people who exhibit broader concepts and ideas about their identities, according to Coakley (2011), however, such beliefs are perpetuated by anecdotes and unsystematic observations of practice. The continual interest and opinion associated with English professional football by fans and media-outlets perhaps subscribes to

similar views, suggesting that footballers appear to be engaging within a healthy, developmentally appropriate and fulfilling occupation (Conn, 2017).

To provide some further context, and critique the existing taken-for-granted assumptions as to the professional game offering players a developmentally-appropriate experience, Roderick and Schumacker (2016) and Champ et al. (2018) explained the inner-workings of football clubs whereby the manager controls the opportunities players have in terms of career longevity, financial reward and building reputations. Therefore, players are aware that to survive in this world, selection must be achieved, yet, selection itself is bound within the subjectivity of performances, and at the discretion of football management, creating a workplace context exhibiting a central and powerful influence upon employees (Richardson et al., 2013).

For the young players considered within this research, the workplaces awaiting them are described as particularly challenging and uncompromising environments within which they must survive, and flourish, to progress (Parker, 2000). For McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) there exists a necessity for all players to conform to the expected behaviours of the management to facilitate more selection opportunities and mitigate against contract and employment termination. In relation to identity, it has been suggested that young footballers may adopt the dominant identities they perceive are required to maintain continued selection by their clubs (Parker, 2006). To display such identities, they may adopt behaviours that are deemed culturally acceptable, most often entwined around performance, and through demonstrating their ability to reject all else to become professional players (Mitchell et al., 2014). In effect, they may actively present a narrowing of identity and neglect any form of PD they might view as detached from their on-pitch performances (Cushion and Jones, 2014).

Nesti and Sulley (2014) propose a different landscape within elite clubs throughout Europe as they attempt to support and encourage players to cultivate identities that include sport, whilst still maintaining a sense of balance and development as to their concurrent position as footballers and young people. A perspective further supported through research to propose the varied and complex identities of elite golfers (Douglas and Carless, 2006) and Olympians (Carless and Douglas, 2013a). The link between such identities and ongoing PD, transition, psychological well-being during and after career and performance is beginning to grow academically (Douglas and Carless, 2014). The identities of elite youth footballers, thus far, appear to be some way behind in their complexity and understanding which suggests this area should become a focus of developmental work (Blakelock et al., 2016).

In recognition of how, for the majority of young players, the end point of their football journey will be sporting failure, the current research seeks to explore the concepts of identity and PD within the context of elite youth football to ascertain the influence such a career aspiration has upon young players, as people. There remains the need for critical research in this area; particularly given the considerable time and emotional investment young players give to this dream (Roderick, 2006c). Further to this, the potential performance, well-being and transition benefits to be accrued through the adoption of more complex identities and ongoing PD have been discussed within other sports, such as Rugby Union (Pink et al., 2014), yet there is a lack of research to consider how such ideas relate to elite youth football.

Whilst research which elicits more contextual information and allows for greater understanding of important phenomenon will always be important, it has been argued that despite the best intentions of researchers, the general culture of professional football has remained resistant to adopting many of the recommendations put forward

through academic research (Richardson et al., 2013). Wider critique of sports science research, to-date, suggests the lack of translation and impact research is having within the applied practices of practitioners working with athletes, or indeed, within the lives of the athletes themselves (Bishop, 2008). In line with this, research to consider the general sociology of football (Roderick, 2006b), whilst increasing our understanding, has provided thought-provoking information, theories and ideas that have struggled to influence on-the-ground practice. For a myriad of reasons, there appears a failure to translate research into practice to enhance the life and experiences of young players (Pitchford, 2007, Nesti, 2010, Richardson et al., 2013). As a practical example, it has been shown that young footballers who overly-invest within an identity that is related to their position as a footballer can lead to (often severe) psychological distress if the player's career is terminated (Brown and Potrac, 2009). However, there is little evidence as to how this information is being used to educate, engage, and support the current players to consider such issues, or to increase their awareness and understanding.

This thesis proposes that now is the time for informed action, as opposed to more (potentially abstract) research, to bridge the research to practice gap. Therefore, this research seeks to consider how important and influential contextual findings might be translated and implemented to support and enhance apprentice footballers' understanding of identity and PD with the aim of offering them additional support and education alongside their football/on-field progression. This thesis will firstly explore how apprentice footballers understand their identities, an area which remains under-developed (Mitchell et al., 2014) and, their ongoing PD, an area wherein there exists limited published work related to football. Further, and crucially, this contextual information will then be utilised to support and develop players' understanding of

identity and PD through the planning, delivery and evaluation of an informative workshop.

1.1 Thesis Aims

To address such research questions, the thesis aims to:

1. Critically explore apprentices' understanding of identity and PD during the final phase of their apprenticeships (Study 1, Chapter 4).
2. Plan and deliver a research-informed workshop to support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD (Study 2, Part A, Chapter 5).
3. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop as an informative resource delivered within career to apprentice footballers (Study 2, Part B, Chapter 6).

Chapter 2

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The introduction outlined the key areas for consideration throughout this thesis. What follows in this chapter is a literature review of related academic research, split into various subsections, which will be explained and critiqued to help frame the current research. Specifically, it will be considered how the journey to become a professional footballer can influence the players in various ways related to the central themes of this thesis; identity and PD. Firstly, this chapter will outline the introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in 2011. Secondly, some of the most pertinent literature concerned with being employed, and attempting to become employed, as a professional footballer will be presented. This section is entitled; football as work. The next subsection will introduce the concept of identity, broadly, before critiquing the ways in which researchers have sought to understand the identities of elite footballers. The final subsection will present research relating to the concept of PD, and how this has been understood and applied within elite sport, and football, to-date. To conclude, gaps in the research-base will be highlighted and it will be presented how this thesis provides a novel and unique contribution to this research field. Specifically, it will be positioned how there is a fundamental lack of applied research that seeks to address the bank of prior knowledge, in regards to influencing players' understanding of their identities and PD in elite youth football, to engage with the very subjects of research in this field; the young players themselves.

2.1 Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP)

The flagship of the professional game in the UK is the EPL. The broadcasting rights for which are sold around the world, commanding fees which have grown from £49 million in 1996-1997, to £568 million in 2007-2008 (Relvas et al., 2010), to the current deal being worth £1 billion per year from 2016 (Harris, 2016). For the most successful clubs, these baseline revenues can be added to by other related media, sponsorship and marketing opportunities such an economically successful product can bring. Once the ceiling of player earning capacity was removed in the 1960's, this paved the way for the current pay structures in evidence throughout the modern game (Gilmore, 2009) and presents the professional players of today with an opportunity to earn life-changing salaries (Gammelsaeter and Solenes, 2013). According to Roderick (2006c), for a large number of boys born around the world, the dream of becoming a professional footballer is high on their list of wishes.

The dominant role of elite football academies in England has been to enhance the position of the investing club (Stratton et al., 2004). This is achieved by developing players with the aim of improving one's own 1st team (i.e., a club's academy aims to field academy graduates in their professional team to enhance the overall performance of the club) and/or generating finances for the club through selling their players to other teams (Stratton et al., 2004, Relvas et al., 2010).

In 1998, a wide-ranging report proposed a re-vamp of youth development practices in England was required. This was conducted by the then FA Technical Director, Howard Wilkinson, and his recommendations were called the Charter for Quality (Football Association, 1997). This consisted of a series of legislations that if clubs committed to, would result with increased funding from the FA in accordance with each club's

own investment within their youth development programmes. However, by 2007, Sir Trevor Brooking was proposing that youth development in England required yet another re-vamp to stop it from falling behind the rest of the world; central to his concerns were that the FA did not have sufficient control over clubs to influence, review and monitor their academy systems (Jackson, 2007).

A number of elements converged to influence the governing bodies to change the Charter for Quality, in 2011. The perceived lack of control the FA were able to influence over clubs (Jackson, 2007), when coupled with the commercial growth of the EPL (Relvas et al., 2010), and a swelling desire to produce more home-grown players, forced a review of current policy. Further, there was a realisation that players successfully graduating from academy to successful professional (i.e., a career that meets the 8 year average (Professional Footballers Association, 2019)) had not improved over the decades. These factors demanded transformation (EPPP, 2011). The desire to improve upon such issues led to the introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan in 2011 (EPPP). This was a joint enterprise between the EPL and the FA (EPPP, 2011). All professional clubs within the English professional game had to subscribe should they wish to receive funding and compete against other academies through organised fixtures. The vision was to ‘produce more and better home grown players’ (p.10), with success in this regard judged by ‘a points-based system which accurately measures the development journey of every professional player and makes it possible to measure the successful production of players at each Academy’ (p.9) (EPPP, 2011). At its core, the EPPP set the mantra of improving the standard, and quantity, of elite home-grown youth players in England (EPPP, 2011). To facilitate, clubs are categorised from 1-4 and audited in terms of how they nurture the technical, tactical, physical, psychological and sociological ability required to produce top-level

professional footballers. As an example, Category 1 academies are the highest calibre of classification, and must evidence a number of markers (e.g., sufficient facilities, numbers and expertise of staff members and overall investment within the development of young players) to achieve such distinction. Once audited upon their systems and categorised, the EPL and FA then match-fund the club's investment. One of the most pertinent aims of the EPPP programme was that more coaching time was established and formally timetabled with schoolboy players at professional and regulated clubs, from a young age, in the hope of an improvement to be seen in the professional ranks upon player maturation (EPPP, 2011).

Analysis of cross-European leagues suggested that the total training times afforded to British clubs through the Charter for Quality fell considerably below that of their European counterparts, according to the EPPP (2011). The introduction of the EPPP sought to increase the amount of training time for pre-apprenticeship/schoolboy players through the introduction of part-time, hybrid, and full-time training models. Whilst it is still the case that schoolboy players cannot become full-time employees until they leave school, the EPPP legislation provided clubs with the opportunity to expose young players to increased coaching time through the modification of existing formal education timetables. For those clubs operating Category 1 and 2 models, there exists the opportunity to devise programmes wherein players can be removed from school to increase training time providing that 'catch-up' education sessions are provided by the club to replace missed content (this is permitted within hybrid and full-time models) (EPPP, 2011). Some clubs operate full-time models whereby players, upwards of 11, will leave home to be housed and educated at a club-affiliated school. At present there is no academic literature to critique the full-time or hybrid models. However, what is known within both models is that it is commonplace for young

players to enter fewer GCSE examinations than they would if they attended mainstream education in line with the general population, to facilitate extra training. There now exists opportunities, of which a large number of clubs exercise, for players between 11-16 years of age to increase their training hours by foregoing some formal education to experience the life of a full-time employee/player. This could be termed as an early ‘professionalization’ experience. In this regard, whereas full-time (day-to-day) training was once the sole preserve of the players signed as employees (i.e., paid a wage and signed to employment contracts), now much younger (ages 11-16) players are experiencing training, living and ‘working’ (without being paid) as if full-time employees for some proportion of the working/schooling week.

The developmental contexts associated with supporting and developing elite footballers are well-referenced throughout EPPP documentation. The model is produced on ‘conclusion of the consultation process (across world-wide best practice models)’ (p.10) and sets out requirements to incorporate the holistic needs of the young players (EPPP, 2011). To achieve this, clubs are encouraged to ‘expose players to the experiences and activities that other young people are involved in outside of the Academy environment’ (p.72), produce players who ‘possess the life skills to be fully integrated and responsible members of society’ (p.72) and able to ‘deal with the challenges of working in a high-profile vocation’ (p.72) (EPPP, 2011). It is hoped this will support ‘the processes and criteria necessary to ensure that professional football in England is empowered to create a world leading Academy System that serves to provide more and better Home Grown Players and increase the efficiency of Youth Development investment’ (p.10) (EPPP, 2011). Such a programme for player development could be seen as fulfilling a ‘whole person’ approach, whereby the young footballer is not only encouraged to improve their on-pitch footballing performances

(e.g., focused training regimes to improve technique, stamina, speed etc.) but are concurrently supported to develop themselves off-pitch (e.g., improved life skills and sense of citizenship). Methods to develop the whole person could be seen as particularly important when considering the early professionalization of young players as, where once sport participation was developed in parallel to normal life, within elite sport it is more common for normal life to be adapted to fit sport according to Heinila (1984) and Coakley (2011). Whilst such references may appear dated, and their conclusions based upon elite sport in general, for Haugaasen and Jordet (2012), there is an early childhood engagement with academy football which accompanies the biographies of most of the professional players considered for their research. This approach, one of early engagement being necessary to achieve future success has become glamorised, leading football to become the dominant part of life for many young boys, and their families, within the academy systems (Calvin, 2017).

The concept of a 'normal life' or 'normal childhood' and what this constitutes is, of course, open to debate and interpretation within individuals and across societies. However, if a mainstream education, and all the life experiences this entails, is 'normal' within the UK, then clearly elite youth footballers are not afforded the same 'normal' experiences as their peers owing to their formal education often being reduced to accommodate increased training time at their respective clubs. It is therefore apparent how the EPPP's mantra of encouraging a whole person approach to youth development in football is a challenging position. How this is operationalised by individual clubs is perhaps unclear when compared with, for example, the coaching curriculum which contains numerous and detailed legislative guidelines (EPPP, 2011).

There are numerous missing pieces of information throughout the EPPP documentation, which are of interest to this thesis. Firstly, specifically how clubs should operationalise the holistic ideals of player/person development is limited throughout the general overview of the EPPP programme. Indeed, EPPP (2011) legislation provides no guidelines, instead offering a number of external providers who clubs can utilise to deliver life skills sessions across their academy. The markers and metrics through which each club will be judged, and the success of the EPPP as a system, are clear and firmly related to the numbers of players progressing through the system to represent the 1st team. Therefore, how the system will evidence and be accountable for the holistic development of all the young people engaged, is open to debate and given no reference (EPPP, 2011). A common pathway to becoming a professional footballer is one wherein young players will have reduced their formal education to increase their exposure to high-level youth football. However, at present, there exists limited sport-specific academic research work in consideration of this early professionalization experience and the potential impact and influence such an involvement can have upon young players as their lives progress.

2.2 Football As Work

Owing to the increased training time afforded to clubs throughout the EPPP, the social context associated with elite youth football becomes even more prevalent within the lives of young players. The world of elite football presents an interesting sub-culture of modern society, one within which thousands of young people are engaged. The term culture is used to ‘refer to the patterns of human activity and their symbolic meaning that can be seen to characterise a specific society’ (p. 11) (Craig, 2008). For Bryman

(2015), all human experience is socially influenced as one learns to behave appropriately within a variety of social contexts through experience, and how these experiences are interpreted. Therefore, any research into the lives of apprentice footballers must attempt to highlight and offer understanding as to the cultural settings they exist within. This understanding then forms the basis for trying to explain the potential ways in which they interpret their social experiences, how this influences them, and how they subsequently behave. Therefore, what follows is a critical discussion of research designed to offer further understanding as to the cultural world of elite youth and professional football, particularly in relation to how football-as-employment influences the lives of the players involved.

For Price (2007), young athletes exist within working environments unlike other forms of employment as they have the potential to become well-known for their work by those other than immediate family/associates. Cushion and Jones (2014) framed this by suggesting that, for the elite footballer, this form of work has the capacity for increasing one's social capital; a form of capital clearly valued within broader society. The perception exists that access to this social capital is within reach should the young player maintain their efforts and dedication to the cause (Jones, 2013). Roderick (2014) concurs, proposing young players maintain a belief that they could defy the odds and become the successful graduate into the professional game, yet in reality, this outcome is statistically, almost, impossible for the majority of candidates. In reality, it remains unlikely young players will be employed long enough for them to maximise the potential their training has afforded them (McGillivray et al., 2005). Certain researchers (Carless and Douglas, 2009, Coakley, 2011) have campaigned for those that govern elite sport to have a humanistic responsibility as to the developmental experiences of all the athletes engaged. This humanistic perspective has existed for

several decades, driven by the attrition rates inherent to the professional game, acting as the catalyst for several academics to examine the apprenticeship of elite youth footballers to better understand the social conditions, and resultant experiences, of their work.

The work of Parker was the first, academically, to consider the career of an apprentice footballer (Parker, 1995, Parker, 1996, Parker, 2000, Parker, 2001) through an ethnographic immersion within the daily working practices of an EPL club. The full season he spent with the players, engaging with them through their football experiences and concurrent education, allowed for an in-depth cultural analysis of the 'day-to-day' existence of the apprentices, their interactions with each other and respective managers/coaches. Firstly, he proposed that football apprenticeships were highly reminiscent of the male-orientated trades around which apprenticeships first evolved and promoted many of the masculinised rituals of traditional industrial workplace culture (Parker, 2000). As the football apprenticeship became part of the young players' learning environment, they acquired knowledge through participation (Parker, 2006). He concluded how this specific environment was devised to inculcate certain outcomes in attitudes and behaviours to work. The methods to achieve these outcomes consisted of exposing young players to a combination of personal and abusive language (saturated with symbols of domination), the explicit demand for an unquestioning reaction to official instruction, and the continual threat of physical exercise as punishment. Therefore, the apprentices were placed under great stress to conform to a series of official and unofficial workplace norms, values and behaviours, should they wish to progress their careers at the club. Parker (1996) proposed the concept of 'making it' in professional football was only achievable if the players could survive this particularly challenging and uncompromising workplace.

Methodologically, however, results from ethnographies of this nature should be treated with caution and carefully considered according to Van Maanen (2011), particularly in how they are written and received by an audience. The temptation for the reader of such texts is to consume all of the carefully, handpicked, testimonies from those being investigated and assume this account provides an appropriate representation of their experiences, and perhaps offers more generalizable findings. For Maanen (1995), historic ethnography was challenging, yet straightforward; after an immersion within a particular culture, a social report was written and disseminated. Yet, the recommendation is now for researchers and readers to refrain from such interpretive validity and realist epistemologies, and instead provide more tentative, open and partial interpretations of the phenomenon investigated (Maanen, 1995). In regards to the work of Parker, the results undoubtedly provide further cultural understanding as to the experiences of elite youth footballers, yet it should not be considered universal and representative of the whole profession. To provide more depth to the social landscape of high-level football, the work of Parker should be acknowledged as important, yet, as just one person's interpretations of the interpretations of others, it offers an understanding of a social world, not the only understanding. Therefore, further work is required that might address different levels of the game, or include players from different clubs, or further, and perhaps within a shift of research purpose, look to address some of the issues highlighted within such work.

The ethnographic work of Parker has since been expanded by several academics, perhaps most notably by Roderick (Roderick, 2006a, Roderick, 2006b, Roderick, 2006c, Roderick, 2014). Roderick's (2006b) research was the culmination of 47 in-depth interviews with current and ex-professional players, who were encouraged to

talk about the drama (key events) of their work, how these were interpreted, and the individual meanings players attached to them. Crucially, this work identified the central position of selection to the players' careers; employment would be fleeting and short-term without being selected to play. Yet, employment as a footballer was under threat from the moment a career began through an ever-present possibility of career failure and rejection. For any player, non-selection and a lack of subsequent progression, relegated them to a marginal position relative to their club's central activity (Roderick, 2014). The conclusion of Roderick's work coined the term 'a good attitude' in respect to how players perceived they should demonstrate their suitability to potential and current employers in order to achieve continued selection. For those players interviewed, it was deemed most practical to display this attitude through expressions of masculinity, aggression, sacrifice and subservience to the management, and greater (team) good (Roderick, 2006b). It was apparent how players perceived these as the types of behaviours coaches and managers were expecting to see. Roderick et al. (2000) earlier work into pain and injuries of professional players further supported this view. Here, it was imperative that players should display an appropriate attitude towards playing with pain, or risk the stigmatisation and ridicule associated with non-performance.

Whilst clearly extensive and influential work, tentative critique of the work of Roderick can unearth the methodological issues associated within the personal biographies of researchers. Roderick's career history as a hopeful apprentice footballer and successful semi-professional footballer, is seen as both helpful, in securing participants and alleviating access issues toward an otherwise closed and sceptical population, and challenging in regards to the constructionist and interpretive paradigms throughout social research (Roderick, 2013b). Roderick (2013b) discusses

his own challenging career (early rejection, deselection and the challenges faced through displaying his own good attitude) and suggests it is fundamental to outline one's biography at the forefront of research. In this way, the reader is aware of the researcher's assumptions concerning the profession and how, methodologically, it has been attempted to manage these (Bryman, 2015). He ascertains how his findings should be interpreted as co-constructed, with the interpretation and reporting of the narratives of the players/participants inherently linked to his own experiences, and interpretations of them. This admission is not deemed to detract from the validity or quality of the research; moreover, it is explicitly positioned for the reader's consideration to enhance the validity and credibility of what is read. This ontological and epistemological underpinning is considered in more detail throughout the methods section of the current thesis, and this researcher's own biography will be outlined, and the subsequent impact upon the research process debated.

The research of McGillivray et al. (2005) and McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) portrayed a social context within which footballers are employed, presenting this work in relation to 'capital'. Through the use of case studies conducted with players of two Scottish professional clubs, they suggested players are embedded within a social setting that puts physical capital at the pinnacle of their practicality to their employers. They liken this to athletes across various sports and draw upon the work of Wacquant (1995) who proposes a similar dynamic within neophyte professional boxers. McGillivray et al. (2005) suggest the development of cultural capital (e.g., education) should be at the forefront of players and employers developmental and performance needs. Yet, the professional world players exist within, one consumed with the promise of financial reward should they 'make it', further provides incentive for maximum dedication to the cause of developing their physical capabilities, often at

the expense of other forms of capital. This is an interesting view, yet their conclusions suggest that such ideas are not imposed upon helpless players, but rather that players become complicit in their own oppression and disempowerment through accepting their position as embodied and physical assets. In effect, this is translated to propose that players have a choice in how they navigate their career, regardless of the cultural constraints they exist within. The stark realities of getting older suggest that player's physical capabilities are forever depreciating, culminating with the working body being seen as unfit to fulfil performance duties and therefore being deemed surplus to requirements by an employing club. This assertion suggests the importance of education and personal responsibility within the cohort of employed players, especially as their depreciating physical capital is a fact players are intimately aware of, yet they often choose to do little to re-address this balance according to McGillivray et al. (2005).

Manley et al. (2012) have provided a more recent development to the research concerned with professional/academy football. This work outlined the new levels of surveillance that young players are exposed to throughout the academy/EPPP system at one Category 1 club, through the integration of sports science practices and monitoring. The vast amount of physical, technical, tactical and psychological data this club recorded from their players was firstly used as a performance-enhancement tool, and secondly, allowed staff to select, rate and promote/relegate young talent by more statistical and objective means. Through a series of interconnected interviews with players and staff, and field observations, over an 11-month period, this work suggests that such detailed and intrusive surveillance practices are designed to impact upon the behaviour of the players as they attempted to achieve workplace recognition. In effect, the data recorded and interpreted by this club served as a disciplinary tool to

further enforce the cultivation and adoption of certain cultural values and behaviours. Building upon the work of Roderick (2006b), the utilisation of sports science, in this case, has allowed staff more metrics by which to judge players in relation to the expectation of a good attitude. This work concluded with the suggestion that player behaviour mirrored staff expectations, most often fuelled through the fear of non-selection.

Academic work has also focused upon the suggested class system evident throughout football employment, and has attempted to explain why such practices are evident in the modern game. Bourke (2003) utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods and sought to understand the reasons behind the migration of Irish youth footballers leaving home and signing employment contracts with English clubs. Bourke (2003) suggests the social demographics from which young talent emanates is predominantly working class and provides explanations as to their acceptance of working-class employment constraints. Although this work can be considered somewhat dated, McGillivray et al. (2005) also support the suggestion of working-class demographics in Scottish football. Their research proposed this trend continued throughout British football in general, and their explanations suggest the usual work opportunities deemed accessible and achievable by young men from this social demographic are often limited, poorly paid and uninspiring. Therefore, becoming a professional footballer was seen to offer the greatest opportunity for a life the likes of which would otherwise be unobtainable. Due to this, Bourke (2003) suggested that young players were prepared to heavily invest their social and psychological aspirations within achieving the career goal of professional football. In effect, to overcome the well-publicised likelihood of their failure they were prepared to do whatever it took to

progress and actively conformed to the workplace expectations of the club and staff members responsible for their continued progression.

Further to the players themselves, it is proposed the working class sub-culture that surrounds the game can be evidenced through the various ways players are controlled by their managers. Kelly (2008) and Kelly (2006) considered the position of the football manager in the UK and highlighted the use of intimidation and abuse as forms of managerial control. This process was motivated to constrain their players to accept, without question, the rules they imposed and standards they set; managers' concluded how this level of control over their players was fundamental to their success in the job. For Willis (1977), managerial control and obedient employees was a central tenant of the managerial tactics aimed at controlling traditional industrialised workers. As Roderick and Schumacker (2016) suggest, football managers have the ability to deny players of their sporting aspirations, as such, their dreams and careers are literally within somebody else's hands. It seems the development of such authoritarian management styles were devised to maintain a clear organisational hierarchy and promote discipline, regulation and control within a group of professional players (Jones and Denison, 2017). Of further interest was the uncovering of the lack of formal management training existing within the game, supporting an assumption that, as the vast majority of managers were ex-players, playing experience was sufficient in regards to their perceived abilities to manage (Kelly, 2008). It is suggested that with little outside influence upon the development of football managers, they potentially revert to recreating the working environments and expectations they experienced as players. This research helps to highlight some of the sub-cultural expectations that players may be exposed to within the professional game.

The social experiences, historically, awaiting the apprentice players as they embark upon their fledgling careers are suggested to be somewhat similar to that of the professional game within some academy systems (Richardson et al., 2013). Parker's (1996) ethnographic study was the first to highlight an authoritarian management style within elite youth coaching and this view is supported through case studies concerning coaching practices at a single club (Cushion and Jones, 2006) a single coach (Potrac et al., 2002) and more general coaching behaviour research (Cushion et al., 2012). For Potrac et al. (2002), the youth team coaches they researched sought to enforce and enhance the initial power and respect their role affords them through a transference of self-proclaimed knowledge and expertise to the young players under their stewardship. Their coaching became authoritarian in style and they demanded their players follow their instructions and behavioural expectations. Cushion and Jones (2006) exposed the common practice of players being continually berated for their performances and attitude, and offered no right to answer, with further conversations between the coach and player underpinned by authoritarian principles. This collective work presents many similarities to that of the professional-level research of Kelly (2006) and tentative assumptions can be made as to the underpinning employment expectations within elite youth football prior to the introduction of the EPPP.

To date, a small number of football-related research projects have attempted to explain the working conditions and expectations prevalent to clubs in the period since the introduction of the EPPP. Cushion and Jones (2014) investigated the responses of young footballers to their social world, using Bourdieu's work concerning habitus as a framework (Webb et al., 2002). Habitus, or socialised norms, act to guide the behaviour and thinking of individuals within collective groups. For Wacquant (2005), habitus is the way society deposits within people the unconscious dispositions for

certain culturally acceptable ways of doing. Cushion and Jones (2014) applied this theory as a lens through which to provide an ‘account of how socialization and the hidden curriculum within coaching practice contribute toward the formation of social identities’ (p 276). This work resulted firstly from a 10-month ethnography of observation at an EPL club post-EPPP introduction, concluding with player and staff interviews to triangulate the data (Patton, 2015). The result was an in-depth cultural understanding of the academy coaching process at one academy. Findings suggested that coaches were keen to develop ‘competent workers’ for the first team and sought to deliver this through constructing a particular habitus within which the players, and themselves, co-existed. Constant messages, from how ‘to dress, eat, train, play and behave’ (p.286), were given to the players with the aim of reinforcing conformity, ensuring the players followed instruction without question, whilst concurrently restricting notions and expressions of individuality (Cushion and Jones, 2014). In effect, the staff aimed to manufacture certain workplace behaviours and identities. Specifically, this process consisted of respecting authority (the coaches), showing obedience to instruction and displaying a narrowing focus to their work and view of self. The research further suggests all involved socialized the young players to accept the working environment as legitimate, to the extent that it became a common sense approach to development. Interestingly, they further propose that this habitus was often enforced through disciplinary practice, threats, and symbolic violence, which again appears to incorporate similar managerial practices to those shown by Kelly (2006) in the professional game and Parker (2006) and Cushion et al. (2012), regarding youth development systems, in the period prior to the introduction of the EPPP.

Work by Strachan et al. (2011), in considering the factors required for positive youth development through elite sport, suggest that supportive relationships and positive

social norms should be inherent to the club/team. Clearly, the above work of Cushion and Jones (2014), proposes that one specific club failed to provide players with the appropriate environment in this regard. In returning to earlier sections of this literature review, the EPPP's ethos was for clubs to incorporate the holistic needs of young players within their development pathways, expose players to wider life experiences outside of football and encourage general life skills (in short, an environment to support a whole person approach to development) (EPPP, 2011). When collated, the youth development research presented thus far suggests these guidelines are far from met. Of course, it is not prudent to imply that the majority of youth academies/coaches operate to construct such a social environment for their players to navigate. However, there exists roughly 20 years between the research of Parker (1995) and Cushion and Jones (2014) and the findings are strikingly similar in regards to the expectation for players to conform to the identities and behaviours set by those occupying the apex of the social hierarchy at the club. This process is commonplace within multiple industries as managers seek to develop their young workforce in ways they believe to be appropriate for individual and collective success. However, for Parnell et al. (2018) employment within professional football is characterised by limited tenure and a surplus of potential labour. Whilst this project does not wish to compare the life of an apprentice footballer to other apprenticeships, the working environment young footballers are exposed to is one of uncertainty, vulnerability and one wherein the power to award progression is firmly in the hands of club staff, not in the players themselves (Roderick, 2013b).

In further academic work conducted post-EPPP, Platts (2012) reported upon player perceptions of the club-based welfare provision available to them through their employers. This work suggested the welfare needs of the young players were

significantly compromised, firstly through players reluctance to engage (for fear any weakness would be reported to management staff) and secondly through the players perceiving their overall treatment equated to them being at the ‘bottom of the club’ (p. iii) and to a degree, unimportant (Platts, 2012).

There exists some evidence as to the practices of youth development policies and philosophies facilitating nurturing and empathetic environments; however, at present the majority of this work is from European clubs. Relvas et al. (2010) explored the organisational structure and working practices of clubs across 5 European countries. Through 26 interviews with heads of youth development, the research noted that practitioners’ predominant aims were to focus upon the player’s personal and holistic development (along with producing players for the first team and financial profit). However, this wide-ranging report fails to detail precisely how club philosophies were integrated into working practices, whilst there were no player testimonies to corroborate. A more recent chapter as to the current landscape of elite youth football by Richardson et al. (2013), outlines how players still considered in a developmental phase, constitute a great challenge to professional clubs who have invested considerable resources within them, and must now extract top-class professionals to justify such investment. It appears that in practice, clubs are still formulating the best conditions and structures for successful youth development and some clubs may have failed to align their youth development policies with their professional teams (Richardson et al., 2013). The proposition is that some academies have provided players with an environment that is ‘too’ supportive and empathic, and as a result players are ill-equipped to successfully progress into the more challenging, dynamic and often unsupportive professional realms as identified by (Roderick, 2006c). Academically, however, there appears to be limited evidence to support this

suggestion, particularly from within British football clubs, and/or through the testimonies of the actual players involved.

At present, there exists more research to suggest that clubs have adopted a somewhat 'survival of the fittest' ethos in regards to their youth development models, wherein, young players are subjected to similar expectations to that of senior professionals, and offered limited psycho-social support within challenging environments. For some clubs, those players that can survive this challenge are deemed worthy of further investment according to Morris et al. (2015). Perhaps those players not deemed to have successfully survived are given limited consideration as clubs turn their focus to the next batch of potential professionals. The EPPP (2011) perhaps tentatively acknowledges this position by aiming to bring reform and regulation to youth development strategies. This perhaps implies, or is an admission, that previous regimes have not supported and developed young people in the appropriate manner. As such, emphasis in the documentation is given to the quality of environment as created by individual clubs and practitioners as youth-developers (EPPP, 2011). Again, there exists limited academic research to critique the ways in which the players' involved within the EPPP system are being developed as young people in line with the directives of the policy.

In conclusion, there exist greater research findings that portray the culture of professional and elite youth football as being considerably challenging and domineering (Cushion and Jones, 2014), as opposed to supportive, nurturing and developmental (Richardson et al., 2013). There exists enough evidence to suggest that the world of work awaiting young footballers presents them with considerable challenges to navigate for the betterment/continuation of their careers. The depth of the work highlighted here permits tentative conclusions to be drawn in regards to the

social contexts that influence players. Whilst it is inappropriate to suggest that all clubs impose such strict behavioural demands upon their players, or that all players interpret their profession in such a way, there is enough evidence to support the notion that football clubs/managers/coaches expect and prioritise certain prescribed workplace behaviours. The collective proposition is that, to maintain status, players understand and actively target the display of such expectations, and the cultures created by club staff exist to foster conformity from their players. As such, limited autonomy is provided to players, in regards to how they behave, act and project themselves into their social environment. To navigate such a highly volatile and dynamic place of work, one wherein uncertainty, potential failure and the potential loss of identity is an ever-present (Roderick, 2006c), the likelihood is for players to conform and present idealised workplace behaviours when at work in order to be accepted, valued, respected and continually selected.

2.3 Identity

Academically, scholars have sought to understand and theorise identity from many different perspectives, the total of which are beyond the scope of this review. Instead, what follows are some of the key perspectives that might help to explain the identity construction and development of elite youth footballers. Firstly, the broad relationship between the social and psychological components of identity development are discussed, before perspectives including developmental, narrative and Athletic Identity are presented in relation to elite youth football. Importantly, the theories introduced here are included for their value in both understanding the identities of elite

youth footballers from a research perspective, yet also for how they have informed the practical and applied component of this research.

The study of the self and identity has interested academics at least since the work of Cooley (1902) and his proposal of the looking glass self as a means by which human beings make sense of the world, and themselves. However, in regards to sport-related research specifically, Ronkainen et al. (2016) suggest that owing to the inclusion of identity, and other notions of the self (esteem/confidence/knowledge), within everyday discourse, there is a lack of clarity in regards to the terminology and meanings associated with the term identity. Therefore, clarity and communication of research within this field will be improved through an outlined definition of terms. Throughout this research, the definition of identity is from the seminal work of Erikson (1968) where, in simplified form, identity is a continually evolving sense of who one is, both as an individual and member of society. This view encapsulates a deeply personal assessment of the self, which includes one's perceived values, potential and qualities as an individual. In turn, this forms the foundations onto which the beliefs, ideals and values that guide thoughts and behaviour are anchored. However, when discussing the research to consider identity, what begins with a simplified definition, becomes more complex to understand as a research field.

The complexity begins when consideration is given to the interaction between the wide-ranging psychological interpretations of social influences that can impact upon a definition of self. Erikson (1968), proposes through identity 'we deal with a process 'located' in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture' (p. 22). Further work shared this view and explained that identity should not be considered from two separate positions of individual and society; identities are not formed, supported and defined by individuals removed from cultural context

according to Shotten and Gergen (1989). The interaction between the person and their social context is widely discussed throughout identity literature and the various ways in which individual's perceive their social experiences becomes key to research projects designed to better understand identity. Therefore, the challenges for researchers in this field exist within trying to make sense of the subjective and interpretative nature of human experience, which are highly individualised, multiple and variable (Ronkainen et al., 2016). As an example, such complexity can be seen through the self-reflective writing of Somers (1994) who portrays how an individual will be influenced, but not exclusively, by gender, race, occupation, familial relationships, political orientation, nationality and more colloquial associations. All of these affect how one views oneself (psychologically) in relation to how they perceive they relate to, and are accepted by, the various environments they experience (socially). This portrays, firstly, a potentially diverse mix of ways that people can view themselves, secondly, the numerous sub-groups they can identify with, and thirdly, the suggestion of multiple identity constructs existing within the same person. However, it is impossible for this exact set of psychological and social factors to be replicated within another person. The collective conclusions surrounding identity-based research is that although an individual participant can be encouraged to explain how they define themselves, this process should never be considered as detached from the social settings within which they operate, nor as a process that is ever finished or resistant to change (Carless and Douglas, 2012). Ronkainen et al. (2016) support this, proposing the psychological study of identity has historically followed two traditions, one of identity formation through a developmental lens, and one wherein the self is studied through social psychology. However, both traditions recognise the role of the social, emphasising that identity cannot be isolated from culture.

Work by Erikson (1968) sought to research and increase understanding of identity through proposing a developmental perspective. He suggests humans most often define themselves with reference to society and through evaluations and comparisons with other people with whom they interact, a process beginning through childhood. This work concerned the stages of identity development experienced by human beings across their lifespan, with particular emphasis upon numerous psychosocial stages of identity development through childhood, the adolescent period, and into adulthood. Adolescence was identified as a crucial stage for developing a person's identity, a period that coincides with the elite youth footballer and is clearly pertinent for this research. According to Erikson (1995), an identity develops as one successfully resolves psychosocial crises that occur at each stage, however, crisis in identity terms no longer denotes an impending catastrophe. Instead, it is viewed as a crucial moment wherein opportunities to engage with varied and alternative identities present the chance for choice and decision. Once adolescents trial a number of different possible selves and explore the accompanying behaviour, then reflect upon themselves and their experiences, they are in a position to make some form of identity commitment. However, this is not a completely internalised experience or evaluation, as the adolescent youth is heavily influenced by social evaluation, often judging themselves in light of how they perceive others judge them. Importantly, as people, positions and roles within society change continually, within this developmental framework, so to do their interpretations of their experiences, meaning identity should be viewed as a constantly evolving process. This is a crucial factor and of relevance to the current thesis insomuch as identities are not fixed, instead they shift and evolve across the lifespan. Therefore, with the inclusion of a targeted and tailored informative resource

(or intervention), there is the potential to influence young players' understanding of identity.

In light of Erikson's (1968) findings, recommendations for working with young people suggest that during the period of adolescence they should be encouraged to trial a number of roles and possible future selves, before evaluating these experiences and adapting them to best fit an acceptable and meaningful view of self. Marcia (1976), continued the original work of Erikson and suggested further important categories that may be relevant to the identities of adolescents. Of significance is the concept of identity foreclosure, described wherein individuals are committed to an identity, without having experienced the aforementioned crisis. Critique of this theory has suggested a concept such as identity foreclosure may prove too static in conceptualising an identity, particularly in light of the aforementioned evolving process associated with identity (Hickey and Roderick, 2017). Whilst this may be the case, the theory proposes that adolescents (in particular) are at risk of committing to some view of self without having trialled any, or enough, meaningful alternatives. In aligning such research with elite sport, Coakley (1992) suggests the lack of varied developmental experiences and opportunities that young athletes typically experience as a result of their sport participation are perpetuating identity foreclosure. This is an interesting point for consideration in the context of elite youth football as perhaps similar experiences are evident for the young players engaged owing to the increased training time afforded to clubs through EPPP legislation. This could hinder the very opportunity (or support) to engage in wide and diverse life experiences, and varied social relationships away from their sport. Brettschneider (1999) proposed how developmental experiences should allow young people to build a varied self-concept and Coakley (2011) suggested such variations are crucial for the development of

balanced, complex and healthy identity concepts. Such terms are given further consideration as the thesis unfolds. However, it has been proposed that due to the exceptional demands, and promised rewards, associated with high level sport, adolescent athletes often bypass this recommendation (Brewer et al., 1993). Perhaps now, more so than ever before, the general premise of identity foreclosure could be particularly relevant for elite youth footballers engaged within the current system as they have limited exposure to identity crises (varied experiences and alternatives) due to an early professionalization experience (Brown and Potrac, 2009).

Critique of Erikson's work has centred upon the presentation of an utopian view of society. Slugoski and Ginsburg (1989) suggest that societies are seldom so benign as to provide a sizeable proportion of the adolescent population adequate time and resources with which to test and try new experiences. In effect, it is likely that it is not just elite youth athletes who have limited opportunities to engage with and test varied identities. Moreover, the majority of the general population of adolescent youths are presented with restrictive developmental experiences due to certain factors (e.g., a financial requirement to work and earn a living). Willis' (1977) classic sociological work outlined the material necessity of society, as such, the need to work, earn and provide are seen as necessities by the majority of young people of working age. However, within the context of this research, the general findings are still useful as the work of Marcia (1976) and Erikson (1968) helps to frame the definition of identity, positions the importance of society in this process, and proposes the importance of adolescence.

Previous research has presented evidence of a strong bond between footballers and their occupation, a position perhaps unsurprising owing to the amount of investment (physical, social and emotional) spent on honing their skills and employability within

this specialised field of work (Roderick and Schumacker, 2016). Academically, it is well-established, the relationship between work and self; employment provides an opportunity for new identities to be formed and existing identities to be strengthened and/or reduced in accordance with changing circumstances and interpretations (Bain, 2005). The young footballer is presented with an opportunity to establish a ‘self’ through work and this work-related identity has been the focus of several key pieces of research. Firstly, Roderick (2006b) explored the notion of developing an identity through employment as a footballer, against the backdrop of uncertainty inherent throughout the game. He suggested that due to the dedication required and challenge associated with being continually selected (in regards to competing with new players, gaining the respect and favour of managers and producing winning contributions to the team) it is quite natural that football players can entwine and attach their identity to their sporting successes. Further, being well-known for their work (in relative terms (Price, 2007)) means that for some the separation between self and work becomes blurred; no longer is football just something they do, it engulfs who they are and their identity can be inextricably linked to their perceived value as a footballer.

Footballers’ identities are reported to be defined within, rather than outside, the boundaries of the professional football field by McGillivray et al. (2005). This is corroborated further by Brown and Potrac (2009), who highlighted how elite youth players in football academies often displayed and invested within culturally acceptable identities which prioritised them as footballers above all else. Historically, the adage for young players to live, breathe, sleep and eat football, is one cultural expectation prevalent to youth development environments, which are interpreted by players to position football at the centre of their identity (Hickey, 2015).

Of the possible ways to research the identity constructs of elite athletes and the mechanisms by which they establish a self through work, by far the most common has been through the concept of an Athletic Identity (AI) (Ronkainen et al., 2016). Early researchers to discuss the identities of athletes were Brewer et al. (1993) and their work defined AI as the degree to which an athlete associates with their athlete role. This work developed a quantitative measure of identity through the introduction of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) questionnaire. This was designed to understand the strength of identification with the athlete role (social identity), emotional responses to failure in the athlete role (negative affectivity) and lack of other social roles (exclusivity). This methodology and specific AIMS questionnaire is still heavily utilised within sport psychology identity research (Mitchell et al., 2014) .

The concept of athletes investing within an AI has added to understanding in this area and what appears conclusive within this research field is that young footballers have the potential to over-invest within themselves, and their role, as an athlete. Suggestions continue as to how this identity construction, in turn, has led some players to experience psychological issues once football (professionally) was taken from them. Brown and Potrac (2009) reported the varying mental health concerns expressed by four participants in the aftermath of their failure to progress from an apprentice footballer, to the professional ranks. More recently, Blakelock et al. (2016) have made similar claims. They conclude how, although an identity may contain numerous dimensions, it is possible for one to become dominant as they suggested the players' AI had taken precedence over alternative identities and resulted in them experiencing transition difficulties.

The aforementioned failure rates associated within elite youth football provided the rationale for the work of Mitchell et al. (2014). Here, they administered the AIMS questionnaire to 168 elite youth footballers, before concluding how first year apprentices scored higher than second year apprentices in regard to their association with the athlete role (termed social identity). They suggest this might perhaps be in consideration of their most recent positive transition from school to employment (as a football apprentice). Further discussions suggested the second years might have dissociated from the athlete role as their contract decision loomed and they became unsure of their chances for positive progression, in footballing terms. The ambiguity with which these conclusions were made, however, alludes to a critique of such methodologies, a point that will be considered shortly.

Wider consideration of the research-base has suggested identification within the athlete role is a key characteristic for the majority of elite sportspeople (Adler and Adler, 1989) and increases motivation and allows for more positive athletic experiences (Horton and Mack, 2000). That being said, the research into AI has tended to suggest this is a fine balance and that athletes who place too strong an emphasis upon their AI can become somewhat one-dimensional, which can lead to many negative consequences (Douglas and Carless, 2006). The concept of AI has been a prevalent feature of sport-related identity research (Mitchell et al., 2014), and the suggestion that athletes can over-invest within such an identity and experience transition difficulties as a consequence, has led to academics recommending athletes should incorporate strategies to mitigate against this exclusivity. Such an understanding of identity can potentially support athletes as they transition away from their sport and lessen the potential for psychological distress and poor mental health according to Blakelock et al. (2016). In support, according to Brewer et al. (1993), the

psychological issues associated with retirement from sport exist because of the intensity of involvement and commitment of identity to the athlete role. In conclusion, it appears highly likely that athletes, and footballers, will associate with an AI, yet certain issues appear to surface if this identity becomes somewhat exclusive.

Fundamentally, the concept of AI has been investigated academically through quantitative research means for a number of decades (i.e., studies have predominantly sought to utilise some form of questionnaire and numerical data to quantify this concept within research designs) (Mitchell et al., 2014). Through their qualitative research methods book, Sparkes and Smith (2014) take considerable time to defend the contribution of quantitative research to the understanding of human behaviour and experience in sport. Further, supporters of quantitative methodologies in sport-related research suggest the introduction of questionnaires into social science research allows results to be grouped and classified, permits cause and effect relationships to be understood and allows findings to be generalised to wider samples (Gilbourne and Andersen, 2011). Perhaps most importantly, to affect organisational change, sporting bodies often demand hard statistics and seek definitive answers concerning how to support and develop elite performers so that they may understand where best to allocate funding (Gilbourne and Andersen, 2011). Therefore, quantitative research methodologies concerning the identities of elite athletes make an important contribution. However, critique of this work has grown, gathering pace in more recent years, most often due to its perceived inadequacies in explaining how and why individuals develop and invest within such identities (Hickey and Roderick, 2017).

Central to the critique of work aimed at the quantification of AI lies within its overly crude and simplistic approach in describing such a complicated and multifaceted concept as identity (Hickey, 2015). Quantitative methodologies such as the AIMS

questionnaire only permit the notion that an individual constructs an identity that is capable of being labelled within a certain category; this does not seem entirely plausible given the earlier discussions around the highly individualised, subjective and interpretative nature of human experience. This overly simplistic reading of identity can be seen when compared to the findings of qualitative research. Such approaches into the field of identity research have allowed for more complexity to emerge and, for Ronkainen et al. (2016), such qualitative work has ‘promoted an understanding of identities as multiple, dynamic, and fragmented, negotiated within cultural narratives or discourse within which the individual is embedded’ (p.10). Indeed, there is support from within football, as Nesti (2011b), through his work with elite and international footballers, exposed highly individualised identities formed from a range of experiences, beliefs and ideals. Further, Roderick and Schumacker (2016) on-the-frontline account of what it means to be employed as a professional footballer explains how an individual player’s identity was developed, supported and adjusted via an intricate web of individual factors, occupational demands and familial relationships. Therefore, it is positioned that attempts to quantify an identity will fall short in capturing the complexity of the experience, the context footballers exist within, and how they interpret this social reality to influence their identities (Hickey and Roderick, 2017). Therefore, Mitchell et al. (2014) have called for the continued growth of qualitative methodologies to increase understanding in this area of research.

Recent work by Hickey and Roderick (2017) and Hickey (2015) has challenged the AI theory prevalent to both qualitative and quantitative research concerned with the career transition of elite athletes (Park et al., 2013). This work considered how football players experienced their release from EPL clubs using creative vignettes. This research offers a consistent argument that athletes are not reducible to a solitary

identity as this does not permit the multiplicity of identity to be explored. Instead, they suggest researchers should acknowledge the fragmented and diverse nature of the self, and acknowledge that athletes' understand themselves through multiple and overlapping identities (Hickey and Roderick, 2017). For Hickey (2015), research should seek to understand the breadth and scope of individual player's identities 'that pertain to their lives both inside and away from football, and not as they fit the mechanics of quantitative instrumentation or the characteristics of the exclusive nature of athletic identity' (p.13). In a direct challenge, Hickey and Roderick (2017) propose footballers possessed multiple identities, both footballing and non-footballing, yet 'upon entering their respective clubs as places of employment, research participants discussed their identities as 'footballers', but they also spoke in interview of being a son, brother, friend, and student' (p. 12). They suggest these alternative sources and understanding of identity do not disappear when at work, moreover, they are not prioritised, nor play a crucial role, within the workplace and so are given limited attention. Accordingly, they present data to suggest that identities are not fixed, but are continuously being reworked in line with the desire of presenting a performance of the self (Goffman, 1959) and the motivation of a possible future self (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

Hickey and Roderick (2017) employed Goffman's (1959) famous use of dramaturgical metaphor which proposes individuals are social actors, and suggests that people seek to manipulate a particularly favourable presentation of themselves to an audience. There exists an inner 'I', which manages the social self, as the body becomes an overt mechanism for the presentation of identity. Evidently, such a theory could represent how footballers display their conformity, when at work, as they purposefully present an idealised self to those with the requisite power to facilitate their progression. For

maximum effect, this presentation is focused and put forward in the best way to show full compatibility to a culture's general norms and values (Hickey, 2015). Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed the concept of Possible Selves. Here, individuals understand where they want to go in the future and the person and/or role they wish to become; these possible selves are then constructed with reference to peers they wish to emulate. The possible future self provides players with a 'behavioural blueprint' (Robinson and Davis, 2001) for how best to achieve this outcome as they consume the actions of those within their immediate vicinity. For Hickey and Roderick (2017) the presentation of self is influenced and dictated by the motivational weight of the possible future self. Using football as a simple example, the position of becoming a professional footballer is inherently linked to certain behaviours. Whether these behaviours are perceived, real, or even necessary is insignificant, how successful footballers are portrayed to exist and behave consume powerful positions within the lives of neophyte players. If becoming a footballer is the future self they wish to obtain, then there exists a temptation for young players to consume expected behaviours and portray such through their social interactions. In summary, Hickey and Roderick (2017), suggest an AI presentation may occur when players are at work, and that AI may influence players in relation to their understanding of identity, however, underneath the workplace behaviours they suggest footballers exhibit more rounded and complex identities than the traditional AI understanding that dominates identity based research in sport. Indeed, all players enjoyed having a separation between life within and outside of football as they reported multiple identities alongside that of a footballer. The research coining the term: 'you leave football at football'.

For the players considered within Hickey and Roderick (2017), they reported to changing their performances depending upon the audience with whom they interacted

and the desired outcome to be achieved. Crucially, the research suggests when the audience legitimised the player's presentation and the future self being portrayed, from a transition perspective, the uncertain period that accompanies transition from sport proved to be smoother. As an example, one of the participants planned to transition from football and into higher education after his release. This transition was smoother because his performance and the future self (i.e., student) was legitimised by those he performed to (e.g., friends and family). Struggles arose when an athlete's presentation of who they may wish to be, post-football, contradicted what significant others (e.g., family members or coaching staff) thought they should be aiming to achieve. For Goffman (1959), the crucial concern is not what is presented, but whether it is credited or discredited by significant others. As such, suggestions for supporting players through transition are that football staff can help smooth this process by promoting the development and support for possible selves outside of the football environment, during interactions with young players. In effect, this work starts to create a new narrative for consideration within elite youth football, one wherein the identities displayed and presented by young footballers may appear to be somewhat narrow and one-dimensional, but this is only through the presentations they perform at work. In reality, young footballers may well recognise themselves as more than just footballers, yet this story is not always legitimised by those within the game (Cushion and Jones, 2014).

The work of Hickey and Roderick (2017) is a new and welcomed addition to the research base concerned with the identities of elite footballers. It proposes how the dominant understanding of athletes constructing a one-dimensional, sport-focused and exclusive AI potentially fails to acknowledge the reality; one of complexity and depth that might actually accompany the identity development and understanding within

elite youth footballers. At this stage, the relatively small sample as interviewed by Hickey and Roderick (2017), and the novelty of the findings, may be perceived to be lacking in depth and credibility to challenge the dominant research agenda surrounding AI and transition (Park et al., 2013). However, the suggestion that players may already understand themselves in broader terms and be active within the construction and negotiation of identities which transcend their footballing progression, is an important contribution to the field in light of the transition issues associated with deselection (Blakelock et al., 2016). Unfortunately, whilst contributing to understanding, critique exists within such a project's potential inability to influence the game and the players it concerns, as there is a distinct lack of practical initiatives to utilise identity-based research when working with young footballers. In returning to an earlier point, the bank of literature to-date has provided a running commentary as to the identities of elite youth footballers (Mitchell et al., 2014), without producing a practical initiative to address the multiple concerns.

Young athletes can often participate with excessive conformity to the norms and values of their sport, as many assume this will solidify their position as real and credible competitors (Coakley, 1992). For some young football players, perhaps the most viable opportunity to display their conformity to the workplace expectations is through narrowing their focus, energy, and investing within a view of self that is obsessed with performance-outcomes and predominantly values their progression as footballers, before all else (Mitchell et al., 2014). This becomes the dominant narrative, or story, available to those who wish to achieve within sport (Douglas and Carless, 2014).

The ways in which the identities of elite athletes are influenced by their social environments has been further considered by Smith and Sparkes (2009) and Douglas

and Carless (2014) through the concept of narrative identity. The central position here is that individual's form an identity by integrating their life experiences into a 'story of the self', with people making sense of who they are through the narratives they construct, understand, value, express to others and hear. Therefore, identity is understood as developed and sustained through storytelling and narratives (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). For McAdams (2003), people put their lives together through stories which are created from the 'raw' materials they have accrued over time (i.e., key previous experiences, important relationships, social norms etc.); in effect, just about anything and everything can go into the narrative of constructing who one is. As such, the critical position is that narratives are not constructed from within a cultural vacuum and devoid of context. Instead, an individual's narrative is informed and then attached to the dominant narratives that are available and acceptable within a particular society. Smith and Sparkes (2008) proposed that despite the abundance of nuanced theories surrounding narrative studies of identity, the scope of which are vast and highly complicated, the main consensus of agreement from a research perspective is that identities are shaped by the larger social world within which individuals exist. Indeed, the very essence of narrative theory implies a relational world. The relational world at play within elite sport has led Douglas and Carless (2014) to suggest that winning/sporting success occupies a central position within the lives of athletes, which can encourage them to subscribe to a narrative wherein all interactions, personal worth and definitions of self, revolve around performance outcomes. This has been termed the performance narrative (Douglas and Carless, 2006). Whilst this terminology and theory has not been specifically applied to football, Lavalley (2005) corroborated that for some footballers, sporting success becomes their life, and their life becomes their sporting success; it becomes difficult for the player to be anything else. This narrative

is actively championed by many of the controlling figures in elite sport as they perpetuate a narrative wherein sporting achievement is only possible through total dedication, becoming one's sport, and by neglecting all else (Aquilina, 2013).

Douglas and Carless (2014) and Carless and Douglas (2013b) propose that within the dominant elite sport culture, space must be created for more complex identity narratives to be understood and voiced. Earlier work of Douglas (2009) and Douglas and Carless (2006) reports how, in reality, athletes ascribe to many differing narratives which support their success and continuation in elite sport. Such a suggestion, whereby athletes make a choice about how they manage their careers and themselves, as opposed to following the dominant narratives available to them, proposes a degree of agency within the lives of elite athletes despite the need to be selected to progress (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Whilst social environments undoubtedly influence the identities of athletes, there still exists an inner world of each individual, one wherein there is choice. For McAdams (2003) identity is internalised, being made and re-made in the secrecy of one's own mind, and as such there exists unlimited opportunities for an individual to maintain a sense of control within the continual process of identity formation.

It is Carless and Douglas (2013a) suggestion that athletes can experience mental health difficulties should they construct an alternative narrative to the dominant performance narrative, if this alternative is not given legitimacy from within their sport. In effect, athletes will often hide their stories and identities if they do not fit those around them and it is this inauthenticity at the root of the associated issues. Therefore, in order for the welfare and mental health of athletes to be prioritised, alternative narratives should be promoted to them from within their cultural settings. In relation to young footballers, at present, research suggests that the dominant narrative for success available to them,

from their workplaces and the influential people they are surrounded by, would appear to be the adoption of the performance narrative which involves a narrow and performance-focused identity (Manley et al., 2016).

At present, there exists some suggestion that the dominant logic coursing throughout the cultural core of the game is that success on the field is only possible if players adopt an identity whereby football defines them, and, therefore, they should think of nothing else (McGillivray et al., 2005, Roderick, 2006c, Brown and Potrac, 2009). In summary, this landscape is completely contradictory to the espoused importance of creating players who are rounded and holistically developed young men as is the aim of the EPPP (EPPP, 2011). There exists a lack of critique and understanding as to the changes implemented since the introduction of the EPPP legislations. As discussed, the vast majority of players engaged within the elite youth football system will fail somewhere between childhood and adolescence, before their dreams are realised. For most, the footballer identity will be lost and a smoother transition will likely accompany those young players displaying more rounded identities.

Further to this, research in the area of identity has tended to be dominated through quantitative methodologies and/or anchored to the theory of AI, which has been considered against various variables (e.g., deselection (Brown and Potrac, 2009), or the differences in 1st to 2nd year apprentices' identities (Mitchell et al., 2014)). Qualitative methodologies are shown to add further context and understanding to this body of research (Hickey and Roderick, 2017). As such, this thesis will firstly seek to understand the identities of apprentice footballers engaged to clubs within the EPPP.

Secondly, whilst there are strong cultural influences at-play amongst apprentice footballers, there exists the opportunity for alternative narratives to be constructed

(Douglas and Carless, 2014). For the players already understanding broader concepts of identity (Hickey and Roderick, 2017), such ideas could be supported and developed further. In effect, the players themselves can make a choice once their understanding of the concept of identity is addressed. However, efforts to influence the identities of young players through providing alternative narratives of success and achievement, or by normalising an understanding whereby identities can be multiple, is yet to be considered academically. Therefore, there is a practical element to this thesis. There is already a bank of research and knowledge to provide information and theories concerned with the types of identities young players may develop. Where this thesis will add to the research-base is in consideration of the apparent dearth of work that aims to translate this research to influence how players understand such ideas about themselves. As such, instead of solely providing further academic comment surrounding the identities apprentice players exhibit and making suggestions for applied work in conclusion, this thesis will outline the development, delivery and evaluation of an informative workshop that targets developing and supporting apprentices' understanding of identity and PD.

2.4 Personal Development

The final section of this literature review will introduce the reader to the concept of personal development (PD). Previous sections have discussed the social contexts of elite football, specifically, what it means to consider football as work for young players, and have presented various theories to consider how such environments might influence the identities of those players. This thesis is concerned with providing an informative resource to support apprentice footballers as they navigate the multiple

challenges associated with their journey through elite youth football, as they experience football as work, and the identity influence this process exerts. To give this informative resource a foundation and focus, it is now presented that PD is one of the ways to support apprentice footballers in this regard.

The term PD is defined through an emphasis for the continued growth of the whole person (Danish et al., 1993). To support this continued growth, there are PD activities and practical initiatives that can be undertaken. For an athlete, PD initiatives are considered to support their continued growth as a person in the widest sense, not just as an athlete (i.e., developing is the whole person, not exclusively within one narrow domain). PD activities might support an individual athlete in becoming responsible, autonomous, rounded and balanced, and fully-functioning within modern society (during and after sport) (Danish et al., 1993). In developing the EPPP framework, the key stakeholders have supported this idea, and stress the need to develop the young player as a whole person (EPPP, 2011). This position is supported through the talent development models as formulated by Wylleman and Lavalley (2004). The term holistic development is utilised by Stambulova et al. (2014) in a similar fashion to PD. They explain this as a person who is doing sport, but this sport is incorporated into their wider life as they search for balance and seek to foster both athletic and non-athletic interests and identities.

Within research to consider the PD of elite athletes, the term balance is perhaps the most utilised. Therefore, for the remainder of this thesis, the term balance, will be informed by Stambulova et al. (2014), and evidenced by athletes searching for optimal balance between sport and other life spheres. Examples might be, athletes who are achieving in education, developing supportive social relationships, mindful of, and

proactive in, their mental health and well-being, transition planning, exploring wider life experiences, interests and opportunities alongside sport. In effect, an athlete searching for a sense of balance between their role and success as a performer, and someone who has similar motivations, and recognises a value, to achieve in other life domains. In the context of this thesis, a well-balanced young footballer, would be highly dedicated to their craft and value and continue to embrace and develop within other important life domains. In relation to the football as work and identity research considered thus far, an apprentice footballer embracing PD would be mitigating against some of the potential issues highlighted in previous sections through a broad understanding of their identity, beyond that of a footballer, and being active within the continued growth of themselves as a young person, alongside the footballer.

The following sections of this literature review will present key pieces of academic literature to study PD. Firstly, a specific focus on how the PD of elite athletes is addressed across a range of sports and cultures will be considered. Following this, the chapter will provide critique of the research to consider the PD methods evident throughout professional and elite youth football. In conclusion, the aims of the current research are positioned, highlighting how this thesis provides a novel and unique addition to the literature within this field.

2.4.1 Personal Development Of Elite Athletes

Coakley (2011) proposes that collective research has shown the relationship between sport participation and PD to be generally contingent and context specific. Therefore, a belief whereby sport participation alone has the transformative capacity to foster

positive development opportunities and outcomes for young people within elite populations is one that should be treated with caution (Coakley, 2011). The call for external scrutiny of elite sport has led to more recent publications posing the question: is high performance sport a healthy pursuit? (Baker et al., 2014). Here, the general debate centres on how the psychological and social development of athletes can be nurtured within environments where the primary outcome is evaluated by victory and performance. Whilst elite sport has numerous sub-plots that accompany the continual feed of news and media interest, ultimately, the industry is obsessed with winning (Carless and Douglas, 2012). Therefore, how to increase the likelihood of success has engaged academics and applied sports scientist for decades (Baker, 2012). However, a body of work exists to consider the experiences of the athletes within this culture, one obsessed with winning, fuelled by the realisation that from the population of hopeful athletes, very few actually become professionals, and from this bank of competitors, very few professional athletes actually consistently win (Carless and Douglas, 2013a, Roderick, 2014).

The general consensus is that PD is largely dependent upon the actions of significant others, the particular cultural norms, the social relationships formed and the manner in which sport is integrated into a person's life (Coakley, 2011). From an elite sport perspective, there exists the potential for positive developmental experiences through sport participation when sport is integrated into a balanced and healthy lifestyle according to Stambulova et al. (2009). However, for many athletes, where once sport participation was developed in parallel to normal life, for the modern-day elite youth athlete, it will be more common for normal life to be adapted to fit their sporting commitments (Heinila, 1984, EPPP, 2011, Ford et al., 2012). Perhaps this is especially so for the elite youth footballer. Coakley (2011) questions if young athletes are

actually trapped within a restrictive developmental tunnel as their focus upon professional performances overtake their PD requirements. To counteract these concerns, it is proposed that athletes should be supported to search for a balance between the demands inside and outside of sport, with development plans through which they are supported as more than a high performance-machine (Hoberman, 2001). As such, the PD of elite athletes within-career should be addressed and prioritised as soon as possible according to Danish et al. (1993) and Stambulova et al. (2014). According to Stambulova and Ryba (2013) the current landscape of elite sport across many parts of the world has begun to embrace the notion of PD with structured initiatives targeted at educating and guiding athletes to consider and value themselves as more than just athletes, during their careers.

Danish et al. (1993) were perhaps the first academics to apply novel ways to address the PD of athletes through a Life Development Intervention (LDI) aimed at teaching life skills through elite sport. They identified the central position of sport in society, and identified the impact of sport upon identity, before proposing that sport psychologists could adopt the LDI as a counselling-based philosophy of practice and become the teachers of life skills to athletes. The work of these researchers progressed to nurturing athletes to develop and invest within transferable life skills (Petitpas et al., 2005). It is their position that identifying and developing life skills within career will aide a smoother transition for athletes through retirement, whilst also supporting the athlete during his/her career. From a transferable skill perspective, developing skills to be utilised through a career transition would require an acceptance by the individual athlete that a transition was likely, and that planning for this would be sensible. According to McGillivray et al. (2005) and Brownrigg et al. (2012), such acceptance by individuals is not often a feature of football culture. Further, whilst the programmes

of Danish et al. (1993) and Petitpas et al. (2005) were widely heralded as successful, they predominantly focused upon American elite-student athlete populations, and their application and relevance to apprentice footballers employed within the English system, employed by full-time clubs and seeking professional contracts, could be less pertinent. Yet, the aforementioned success of such programmes in engaging with young people could be useful when developing similar frameworks within other sports. Perhaps tellingly, the careers of both researchers, Danish and Petitpas, have diverted away from elite sport in criticism of the sport industry's non-acceptance in supporting life skills programmes (Anderson, 2000). They suggest that sporting bodies are focused on the profile of the game, and coaches are concerned about personal survival; therefore, nobody really cares about the athlete (Anderson, 2000).

More recently, the work of Stambulova et al. (2014) has reported on the 'dual careers' of elite athletes. Here, professional athletes concurrently pursued both sporting accomplishment and higher education or vocational opportunities. This form of PD utilises the power of education, or employment, to support and develop broader identities amongst athletes. It also suggested there is a positive performance impact to be found through engaging with PD for athletes, and this is beginning to gain momentum within the research community, with support especially evident throughout the student athlete population. From the Olympic Games of Barcelona 1992, to London 2012, 61% of Team GB's Olympic athletes were either products of, or still engaged within, higher education according to Aquilina (2013). Such elite student athletes describe ways in which their dual careers were not just mutually compatible, but mutually complementary to high-performance, helping them maintain balance and perspective, stay motivated and improve performance (Aquilina, 2013). The work of McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) also reported a student-athlete

population of high-achievers in both elite sport and academia. Brettschneider (1999) examined 700 elite youth athletes and reported the importance of an increased academic self-concept in enabling young athletes to cope with the stress of competing. Methodologically, the quantitative nature of Brettschneider (1999) research can be critiqued as lacking context and providing limited understanding as to why athletes felt empowered, through education, to cope with sport. However, when the large numbers of participants are added to the qualitative work of Aquilina (2013), there exists growing evidence that developing a broader and more complex identity through off-field PD activities, can support the performances of elite athletes. This contradicts more culturally-dominant ideals encompassing the need for exclusive and total obsession with sport participation, at the expense of other interests and self-concepts, being the only viable route to sporting success (Carless and Douglas, 2012).

The implementation of PD philosophies into the working practices of an elite level team has been considered by Pink et al. (2014). Through a one-club case study, this research detailed the PD of employed players within a professional rugby club in Australia. They suggested that, although competing in sport is the athlete's primary concern, finding novel and personally meaningful ways to broaden the players' identities was an opportunity to support their current performances and help to alleviate some concerns regarding career termination. However, such work was only possible through the player welfare and development department being fully integrated into the operations and ethos of the club. Their work built upon the assertion by Price et al. (2010) that the majority of elite Australian athletes have other interests outside of their sport, and actively pursue balanced lifestyles. This assertion has more recently been supported within the work of Balk et al. (2018), who suggests that elite athletes actively pursue hobbies and interests outside of their sport to better prepare

them to perform. Within the case-study research of Pink et al. (2014), attention was also given to the work of Hickey and Kelly (2008) who outlined the challenges of integrating PD programmes to be accepted by young and aspiring rugby players. As a result, the club investigated by Pink et al. (2014) refrained from dictating any player's developmental journey, allowing them the autonomy to decide when to engage and what type of activities to engage with. However, they found the PD of players was so integrated and accepted within the culture of the club that all employed players participated to some degree.

In conclusion, although this growing body of research supports the performance and well-being related need for the PD of elite athletes, Petitpas et al. (2005) suggest sports bodies in general still see such areas as an adjunct to other services for athletes (e.g. sport science and medicine). In short, it is not viewed as essential to enhance both the current performance and the long-term psychological health and development of athletes. Whilst this body of research continues to grow in momentum and depth in regard to the PD of elite athletes across a range of sports and cultures (Stambulova and Ryba, 2013), to help frame the current thesis, it is important to consider how such initiatives are considered, embraced and delivered within elite youth and professional football.

2.4.2 Personal Development Within Professional Football

There exists well-established literature that considers, broadly speaking, how the PD of elite youth footballers has been integrated into the fabric of the game through educational provision. Research concerned with the education of apprentice footballers was often motivated to better understand the re-employability

opportunities in light of the attrition rates associated with youth players becoming professionals according to Parker (2000). In the PD initiatives available to young players, it is proposed that programmes should encapsulate educational growth (Platts, 2012), support players to build cultural capital (McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006) and develop identities beyond football (Champ et al., 2018). However, it is suggested the academic aspirations of footballers have remained low since the inception of the apprenticeship programme, to the modern day (Platts, 2012).

Monk and Russell (2000) reported the sense of anger and wasted opportunity felt by some players as they were released from the game owing to them feeling ill-equipped to re-employ due to their lack of educational achievement during their time in the game. They suggested the players' failed to engage with education during their apprenticeship due to the social context of football and the disdain of education prevalent throughout clubs. This is a view corroborated by Gearing (1999) and Parker (2000) who suggested that football clubs are sites of anti-intellectualism, reinforced in the everyday working practices of training, travelling and internal communication. This was evident throughout the work of Richardson et al. (2004), who outlined the challenges education and welfare staff perceived existed in preventing the synthesis of education and football for young players. It has been reported that for more academically-minded players, interest in further educational opportunities was considered to be a lack of commitment to their football career (Parker, 2001). The conclusion of Monk and Russell (2000) is that the lack of cultural emphasis on PD was reflective of the interests of the clubs. This aided in perpetuating the restricted view that most trainees adopted, to neglect aspects of their identity, such as education, to attain the status of professional footballer (Monk and Russell 2000).

Bourke (2003) and McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) suggested that involvement with a professional club places a significant restriction upon the levels of educational attainment for young players. No doubt, reasons for this are numerous, yet one possible explanation could be that 67% of footballers signed to Football League clubs are removed from some portion of formal education to increase their training time (League Football Education, 2019). One could suggest this figure could be higher within EPL clubs due to the expected increased financial investment and the adoption of full-time models of coaching/education provision, which means that formal education time could be missed by more players (EPPP, 2011).

Platts (2012) has specifically considered the education and welfare provision provided by English academies for their apprentices in the post-EPPP period. Through questionnaires and focus groups, players at 21 different English academies describe common educational practices such as: the tailoring of material so as to make failure almost impossible, and highly improbable; the lack of captivation within the content and delivery; and the consistent undermining of educational pursuits from within their clubs. Whilst this work considered players from 21 clubs, as opposed to the 92 in operation throughout the EPPP, the sample is comprehensive and perhaps allows tentative conclusions to be drawn. From here, questions remain as to how education and the subsequent PD benefits are championed if the philosophies are not valued through the structure of the game at the elite youth level.

The lack of value afforded to educational practices by young footballers in England appears to be a similar cultural norm existing within similar domains from further afield. Christensen and Sorensen (2009), using focus groups and individual interviews with Danish footballers at semi-professional clubs, and engaged with education of a similar age to those players considered by Platts (2012), proposed how the elite

football culture has an almost magnetic attraction for young players. This culture, they suggest, contains both implicit and explicit messages that to progress in the game, and to be accepted and respected by their coaches, young players should be only thinking about football. Gammelsaeter and Solenes (2013) compared Norwegian professional players to their semi-professional counterparts and provocatively entitled the research with a question: Money in- brains out? They report the dominance of a competitive logic (total immersion and obsession within training, restitution and competition) and/or the professionalism logic (players exchange their sporting abilities to become salaried employees at a club). For the clubs, as employers, there was no incentive to encourage the growth and development of their players as people, housed in the belief that this work cannot be readily transferable to on-pitch performances. Nor did the players see the value in developing themselves away from the pitch, as they exist to maximise short term, and performance-related earnings. They conclude that players are encouraged to put all of their effort into excelling on-the-field and, while the amount of time spent in actual training was similar for both groups, the semi-professional players' combine football and education/work, yet professional players fail to engage with other forms of developmental experiences. Therefore, despite the improbability of achieving long-term employment, players were encouraged to focus solely on the goal of gaining a professional contract (often at the expense of other possible areas of achievement and development i.e., academic, social, personal) by their interpretations of their interactions with coaches/club-staff.

As previously discussed, the advancement of athletes engaged within dual careers and higher education has grown across Europe in recent years, yet, whilst it could be suggested that the apprenticeship programme in England provides a similar structure, at present there is currently no academic evidence to suggest the integration of dual

careers. For many years the PFA have attempted to address this and prioritise the PD of their members in offering higher education and vocational training opportunities to their players (Professional Footballers Association, 2019). These initiatives are predominantly re-employability services through the provision of further education/training funding, advice and guidance and transitional workshops. However, for Brownrigg et al. (2012) professional players are still reluctant to engage within these initiatives predominantly due to a lack of acceptance as to the need to prepare for retirement. Both Christensen and Sorensen (2009) and Gammelsaeter and Solenes (2013) provide slightly different rationales for how these views are manifested through European football. They suggest the players acknowledge the associated threat of unemployment within a volatile profession, but rather than engage with activities to support their PD, they spend limited time and resources in developing themselves away from the pitch, focusing instead upon more widely accepted performance-enhancement techniques. In regards to education, the conclusions appear to propose the players adopt something of an either/or outlook; they should choose either football or education throughout both the elite youth and professional levels.

A European perspective to the PD of elite youth players was provided by Nesti and Sulley's (2014) review of the best-practice academies across Europe. This wide-ranging report into the practices of some of the most successful (in terms of player production) academies has suggested these clubs prioritise the development of young talent through embracing education and other novel activities for the PD of their players. Some practices include individual approaches to educational provision with clubs proclaiming the value, not just in the classroom, but also from a performance perspective. Such sentiments are in stark contrast to the education of young players in England as reported by Platts (2012). In reality, few, if any, young players favour

education above their football (Christensen and Sorensen, 2009), yet the successful clubs investigated by Nesti and Sulley (2014) promote education to their players through the on-field benefits inherent within the increased understanding of performance, preparation and responsibility that education can foster. They further support their players to embrace the continued growth and change inherent within the lives of players by encouraging a broader sense of identity (Nesti, 2010) and explain the optimal conditions for this are when structures encourage players to take responsibility for their own learning and progress, and continually develop themselves away from the pitch.

As suggested, structured PD work, other than education, with professional/elite youth footballers and/or clubs, has seldom been the focus of research projects. However, there is one piece of research that may be relevant. Lavalley (2005) specifically considered professional football, yet focused on retired professional players. He reported the success of a PD programme to assist footballers in their continued transition away from competitive action. This study utilised an intervention and control group, the intervention group participated in a life development intervention model as first outlined by Danish et al. (1993) within which supportive and counselling strategies were utilised when working with the ex-players. Specifically, this work included an initial assessment of life events, helping individuals to recognise the transferability of skills from their football career to other domains and the teaching of life skills to help individuals cope with future events. Lavalley (2005) deemed this intervention programme a statistical success, and provided quantifiable justification from a range of questionnaires. However, such methodologies may fail to capture the lived experience of the individual and neglect to evidence the contextual understanding required for the continuation of this work (Nesti, 2011a). The critique

of this approach within previous sections of the literature review, whereby a complex and highly individualised concept such as identity is attempted to be understood via some form of quantifiable metric, is again applicable within the context of PD. Put simply, it can be positioned that a categorisation or measure of how an individual is evidencing PD would be methodologically difficult to justify, and further to this, the personal understanding and the reasons underpinning the adoption of PD activities could be lost. Further, the approach outlined within Lavalley's (2005) work could be deemed reactive (dealing with the issues associated through career termination when they arise) as opposed to proactive (working with players throughout their careers to negate some of the issues associated with career termination). As such, whilst this study provides interesting conclusions, there exists the need for further research in this area that emanates from qualitative methodologies, to provide greater context, and addresses the PD of players whilst still employed.

Research by Gouttebauge and Aoki (2014) and Gouttebauge et al. (2015) has suggested that the mental health of professional footballers can be compromised through their retirement. Often, these mental health issues were related to the physical cost (e.g., osteoarthritis) of playing professional football and the lack of preparation, or support, for the players in dealing with such changes. Ex-professional players were described as having an increased risk of physical, mental and social health problems, compared to the general population, as they struggled to cope with their lives after football due to their lack of preparation (Gouttebauge and Aoki, 2014). This research recommends that mandatory attention is given to the career planning of all young footballers in order to lessen any potential problems in transition, whilst counselling should be offered to recently retired players, to promote healthier lifestyles away post-football (Gouttebauge et al., 2015).

The work of Larsen et al. (2014) addressed some of these concerns, specifically in regards to working with players during their career, with their structured intervention to allow football clubs to facilitate the psychosocial development of their players with the aim of equipping them with the skills necessary to succeed professionally. They provided detailed information regarding working with players through multiple sources: the players directly, the coaches, the culture of the club and on-pitch training interventions. Building upon Holt and Dunn's (2004) assertion that developing psychosocial competencies are associated with successful careers and career transitions in football, this approach to talent development focuses on working with the players by fully integrating into the working practices of the club. They conclude that clubs should support the development of their players as young people to increase the potential for successful sporting transitions (out of the game or into the professional squads), but also so that the individual might be better equipped for effectively managing their other life spheres.

Similarly, Morris et al. (2015) used two English professional clubs to compare best-practice, one deemed as having successful youth-to-senior transitional success for its players, and one deemed to be unsuccessful. They specifically considered the clubs' understanding and utilisation of a talent development model as outlined by Stambulova (2003) wherein the PD of the players is prioritised. This work provides interesting practical examples of the novel approaches the successful club adopted to develop their players (e.g., parental engagement). To date, the PD work outlined by Larsen et al. (2014) is yet to be transferred and adapted to infiltrate an English professional club and/or work with individual/collective groups of players across clubs. Harwood (2008) proposes such work would be vital whereby upon an early and

focused emphasis upon PD, clubs will be enhancing young people, alongside equipping young footballers with assets transferable to other life domains.

In conclusion, at present, the most commonly utilised resource for targeting the PD of young players within English professional clubs is through their continued education, whilst employed as apprentices. As discussed, on the ground, the players' actual engagement within this might be less than appropriate for their ongoing PD. The professional game has been shown to remain sceptical as to the benefits of players undertaking optional further education, or activities that might qualify as 'dual careers' during their careers. There exists the suggestion that approaches to education are viewed as pragmatic, actionable should a football career stall or fail, as opposed to developmental. Other than the educational opportunities afforded to players, there exists a dearth of academic research in regards to other methods employed through the EPPP, and delivered by individual clubs, to facilitate the PD of elite youth footballers. It is suggested that education, and participation within the system alone, may not be sufficient to support an understanding of identity and ongoing PD, beyond that of a footballer, for young players. Due to the insecurity of their career goals, and the potential opportunity for performance enhancement, one might assume that players would invest more efforts within broadening their identities and PD away from the football field. Identities understood in terms of balance, variation, complexity and a broad appreciation of a life outside of football, rather than being constructed upon a somewhat one-dimensional view of the self as a footballer (for example), and little else, would help to smooth transition from the game and potentially support current performance. However, it appears that the threat of unemployment causes a narrowing of focus, rather than a broadening.

Central to the critique of previous research, however, is the prevalence for research, collectively, to provide a running commentary of a social world, and whilst it has made suggestions to improve the current structure, what it has failed to offer is a practical initiative to address such identity and PD concerns. At present, there is no known research to consider how to work with the current cohort of apprentice players to support their understanding of identity and PD.

This research wishes to address several key areas, and in doing so, provide fresh additions to the research base concerned with the identity and PD of apprentice footballers.

To re-introduce the reader to the central aims, the thesis aims to:

1. Critically explore apprentices' understanding of identity and PD during the final phase of their apprenticeships (Study 1, Chapter 4).
2. Plan and deliver a research-informed workshop to support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD (Study 2 Part A, Chapter 5).
3. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop as an informative resource delivered within career to apprentice footballers (Study 2 Part B, Chapter 6).

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: Overview of Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter seeks to outline and justify, to the reader, the broad methodological and theoretical positioning that lays the foundation for the current thesis. What follows is a researcher biography presented via an auto ethnographic reflection, with specific attention as to how such a biography has influenced the current project. This section will further discuss the role of ‘insider’ in relation to the research process. Then, the reader is offered a broad outline of the theoretical position used to inform the research. Following this, the adoption of qualitative methods of enquiry as a justifiable method of data collection in relation to the aims of this thesis is addressed. Next, consideration is given to enhancing qualitative quality, through the terms credibility and resonance and the process of data analysis. The penultimate section provides an outline of the relationship with League Football Education (LFE) and how they came to be involved within this project. Finally, the relationship with LFE altered the course of this project as it became more practical in nature. As such, further methodological considerations are important for discussion regarding the role of the practitioner-researcher. The following points of discussion occupy a central position throughout the entire research process. As future chapters and studies are presented within the overall thesis, the overarching themes covered below will not be re-addressed each time, only the specific details and procedures relevant for each study will be outlined within each related chapter.

3.2 Researcher Biography

According to Bryman (2015), rarely does academic research just happen; it is most often underpinned by a researcher's attraction to research questions that resonate with them on a personal level. Similarly for Gill (2011), these research questions do not simply arise, they are influenced by a number of personal and first-hand experiences. In this regard, a recommendation is for the personal biography of the researcher to be outlined from the beginning of any academic project (Roderick, 2013b). In support, Sparkes and Smith (2014) propose that a biographical positioning is crucial to the overall credibility of any research. The inclusion of such information is advised, in part, to temper and manage, where possible, the subjective nature of social research. For Roderick (2013b), numerous 'methodological traps' are ever-present throughout the research he embarks upon, specifically in regards to how he contends with the interpretive clarity throughout the data collection and analysis procedures, as an ex-apprentice footballer, researching the lives of other footballers. For Denzin (1989), this is a standard methodological concern for all social scientists as one's subjective position must be considered through the process of empirical research.

According to Holt (2003), traditional practices for social research have come under considerable critique for assuming privilege in obtaining authoritative data. Generally, critique exists within the realist tendencies of researchers to portray a sense of 'author evacuation' when obtaining and translating information. Academics, such as Douglas and Carless (2014) and Sparkes and Smith (2014) advise neophyte researchers approach with caution any potential beliefs they may have in their abilities to remove themselves from their texts and research. In short, it is highly improbable that this can be achieved, regardless of researcher experience, and aiming to present this ability to

the reader could actually be detrimental to the credibility of the research (Bryman, 2015). As such, suggestion now extends for the inclusion of more varied styles of method and representation that allow for the position of the researcher to be considered alongside the central research questions, as opposed to claims they are absent from this process.

One particular way researchers can follow such recommendations is through auto ethnography, a form of qualitative research by which an author explores personally significant moments and makes sense of experiences, in relation to the central themes of their research (Sparkes, 2000). Accordingly, a highly personalised account, or story, is offered to the reader to help locate a researcher within their own projects (Starr, 2010). This can help extend the audiences' understanding of previous experiences, and in relation to the current project, how such experiences have influenced the author (Douglas and Carless, 2014). Such work is usually written in the first person, however, researchers should consider going beyond mere factual descriptions, and should capture the ways such events were interpreted, and subsequently how these have influenced the research undertaken (Holt, 2003).

The criteria through which auto-ethnographic reflections should be judged have been a focus of work by Sparkes (2000). Amongst a range of philosophical suggestions to create greater tolerance in allowing personal stories to appear differently in research outputs, Sparkes (2000) asks what must be added to such texts to move it from a good story, to become good scholarship? To answer, he proposes for the writing to be anchored to some form of theoretical abstraction, or for it to elaborate upon a concept that is important to the given domain under study. Further, Sparkes (2000) proposes authors should write authentic stories, cause reflection, present an evocative account of an experience, and find a connection with the reader. Clearly, the author can attend

to these suggestions, yet their acceptance is fundamentally at the discretion of the reader.

In this regard, what follows is the biography of the author, presented through a series of auto-ethnographic reflections surrounding becoming a professional footballer, maintaining a 15-year career, before retiring from the profession and the key experiences that relate to this research specifically. This is provided so that the reader can better understand ‘my’ journey, history, beliefs and attitudes; all crucial to my understanding of identity, PD and this thesis.

3.3 My Story

As Spencer (2012) notes, my ‘work’ has inherently shaped who I am today. On certain days, my mind almost forgets about the dedication of the past; the hours/days/weeks/years spent honing athletic skills and prowess all in the name of fulfilling the boyhood dream to become a professional footballer. At the time of writing this section of the thesis, I have been retired as a professional footballer for 3 years, having signed my first professional contract at 17, and retired at the grand old age of 32. However, there are other days when I struggle to think about anything else. On occasion, it still feels like I have taken an extended, and unauthorised, holiday, and I will need to report for training on Monday morning. Most lately, I have been moved to consider if it was actually ‘my’ dream, or if I got swept up with the realisation that I was rather good at running fast and kicking a football around a grass field, and the decision appeared so simple as I thought, ‘of course this is what I want to do’.

My career would have officially started in 1997 as I signed my apprenticeship with Crewe Alexandra FC upon leaving school. However, at this point, I would argue that

playing football was already, in effect, my profession owing to the fact that in 1995, aged 14, I had moved from home to attend the FA National School at Lilleshall. This was the original early professionalization model; we lived, trained and competed as full-time footballers for the final 2 years of formal education, before returning home and embarking upon football careers with our respective clubs. My initial success seemed to happen very quickly as I went from playing with friends locally, to signing for Crewe as a 12-year-old, to representing England Schoolboys at the Old Wembley vs Germany aged 16, in what seemed the blink of an eye. It felt as though I was on a rocket ship heading for the stars and, if truth be told, it all came rather easily for me. Reflecting back many years later, most of this time is a blur and only certain situations remain fresh in my memory. One of the overriding memories is, however, of feeling continually nervous, particularly as Lilleshall began, and having the awareness of being watched and judged by significant peers. There was no doubt that things had become serious.

As I left Lilleshall at 16, and returned home to sign for Crewe, I knew that my fate would be positive. It was strange, and to this day, I have no idea where my confidence came from. But, with football, I always knew I could do it. My apprenticeship went according to plan as I played, captained the youth team, and performed well most weekends. A professional contract decision, at the end of my apprenticeship, began to approach. Still, I maintained a sense of confidence that my decision would be positive. The day came, and all the players of my age sat in the lounge of the training ground and waited. I was called into the office and offered a 3-year professional contract. I was there, I had made it; at last I was a professional footballer. After the commotion, and sense of relief, it dawned on me that others had been less fortunate, particularly one of my best friends. The image of him running from the room in tears, jumping into

his car, and exiting the car park like a Hollywood stunt man, is etched in my mind forever. It was as if his world had collapsed. In truth, his situation had little impact upon my immediate behaviour, but a seed had been planted that day, one that has grown as the years have progressed. As I grew older I began to wonder: what does that sense of failure, rejection and release, at such a young age and after giving it so much effort, feel like? What would those players do now? How will they move on? Are we all destined for the same outcome somewhere down the line? This end of season release happens annually, I have heard it referred to as a cull of manpower, but before this moment, I was a little naïve and assumed all of us apprentices, having been teammates for a number of years, would be together forever. This experience brought the harsh reality into focus for the first time I can remember, this was going to be a tough career and I should expect no sentiment.

For the next few seasons, the major focus of my whole existence surrounded turning my undoubted potential into professional appearances. Indeed, for all of my career, ‘the whole week comes down to the team sheet’ (Roderick and Schumacker, 2016).

At the time of signing my first contract I was already a professional footballer, my employment contract was clear, but this fact alone was not enough to sustain a career. In short, players must play. They must play on a Saturday afternoon, in real games, with real points at stake, and they must play well. It sounds fairly simple, and a path I thought would be easy to navigate, to some degree. After all, everything before this phase of my career had been a resounding success and I was yet to take a backward step. However, my career trajectory did not maintain the same path. Between the ages of 18 to 22 my career was riddled with injury after injury. There were a couple of operations to contend with, but in the main the injuries were recurring and muscular. There was a period of time wherein I could not manage to stay fit for more than 5

consecutive games without suffering from a muscle injury. This type of injury is interesting, as, on the one hand, they are fairly short-term (lasting for a few weeks) in comparison to a more serious injury, however, they cannot be 'seen'. This means there is an uneasy truce between the staff (medical and coaching) and the player as they must 'trust' the severity of the injury as reported by the player. In the fast paced world of professional football, with competitive games happening every few days, a football manager demands his strongest team be available wherever possible; with a muscular injury that cannot be seen, perhaps quantified, the player often feels under great pressure to declare his fitness and not portray any 'weakness'. Indeed, a few years later when I was 25 and playing for Tranmere Rovers FC, I was struggling with another hamstring injury and the manager at the time asked me if I was a 'fanny' in front of the whole squad. So, the quest to 'conquer' my injury issues, and progress my career, led me to become even more professional and dedicated, bordering on the obsessive in the pursuit of staying fit and playing games. This meant I narrowed my focus, withdrew from anything in my life that, in my mind, was not directly linked to my on-pitch performances. I stopped seeing and socialising with my friends, I marginalised even my closest family members. I thought about my lack of appearances, contract situation and injuries constantly. I even turned to prayer in the hope a magical switch could be flicked and I would have the blueprint to staying fit. Yet, there was no magic switch, nor an escape from the mental turmoil I was putting myself through. However, and somewhat strangely, I almost didn't want an escape. I thought that would be cheating and, in reality, I thought beating myself up and thinking about my career (or lack of) constantly was the only chance I had to progress.

I have been asked about this period directly through my participation in other's academic research projects related to injury, mental health and the life of a

professional footballer. I describe it as a battle, and it seemed that the more I could give to it, sacrifice, dedicate, endure and ‘hang in there’, the more likely I felt I was to win the battle. I assumed more focus would lead to more rewards. On reflection, it is a time I found difficult to enjoy, and at times my mental health and general well-being were certainly compromised. My interpretation of the environment meant I must play forever and exclusively ‘the footballer role’, and in my own mind, it became all-consuming.

So, after a really challenging period of countless injuries throughout my early career, how did I manage to achieve another 11 years of employment as a professional, play in every league from the Championship to League 2, and amass almost 400 professional appearances? Well, without fully appreciating the mechanisms at the time, I began to progress as a footballer by developing myself as a person. For years I focused my attention upon my on-pitch performances and viewed myself through this lens. That was me, and football, it seemed, was the only way I could be happy and feel fulfilled.

As the story moves forward, I have changed from those earlier views. So, how did this happen? My own reflections lead me to 3 key moments. Firstly, the changes, albeit with baby steps initially, began when I agreed to an injury support and prevention consultation with a sports psychologist. Words will fail to do justice to the impact such work, and directly my relationship with the sports psychologist, has had upon me as a person. It is so important to me that I continued this work throughout the whole of my career, and beyond. We started with an admittedly narrow focus, at my request. On our first meeting I vividly remember saying, ‘I want to feel like a real footballer’. I was injured so much that actually playing regularly seemed so far away; it seemed beyond me. But, within a couple of sessions, I was beginning to change and I was

ready to work for more. It began to dawn on me how my football performances were related to how the person under the shirt, the real me, could develop himself within the constraints of professional football. The work was of an educational nature- attempting to do it justice would require a thesis in its own right- but was predominantly about me understanding myself, who I was, what I stood for, and how I could keep improving myself regardless of the environment I was in. The foundations were being laid for me to explore new things, think in different ways, seek new knowledge and develop myself. Sustained success on the football pitch came as a by-product of all of these things, whereas, initially I had prioritised my football and belittled, hidden, buried, any notion of what appeared unrelated to my career as a professional footballer.

The second and third moments are somewhat connected as they both began at the same time; I became a husband and new father, and enrolled at university as a part-time student whilst still playing professional football. If I consider getting married and parenting first, obviously, these are the roles I am proudest of most and come above all else in my life, but in the context of my football career, it was also incredibly helpful. I now had something else, something far bigger than kicking a football around, to prioritise. I had a family. I could allow myself to be something else instead of being a footballer all of the time, I could be a husband and a dad, and I could defend making this conscious decision to myself. In my view there were certain parallels found within the impact of becoming a student also.

The idea of higher education had interested me for a number of years before I finally took the steps to make it happen. A few factors influenced my thoughts. Firstly, my relationship with my sport psychologist had grown and grown and the seed for knowledge, development and new experiences had been planted. I could see that

having something else, something educational, in my life would benefit me in the short-term and long-term. Truth-be-told, initially, a major factor had been the insecurity of my football career, the constant confusion and anxiety caused by signing contracts that rarely extended beyond a year's employment left me feeling I had little control over my future. So, the decision to up-skill in another area was initially predominantly pragmatic, as I thought that I could help myself to find employment elsewhere with a degree. However, this viewpoint quickly diminished to the periphery as within weeks I was hooked. Not just on the content of the BSc Science and Football, but on the idea of learning, of developing my skills elsewhere and of having something different, yet complimentary, in my life as a footballer. The degree took me 6 years to complete due to my availability and 'day job', and within which time we had another child, but it rarely felt as though it was too much to handle. As I debated starting the degree over a couple of years, I was concerned that diverting my focus and attention elsewhere, away from the-pitch, would mean that my performances would drop and the very thing I had fought so hard to achieve after countless setbacks, would be taken away from me. But, I could not have been more wrong. It became the exact opposite, by having other things in my life I was able to find some separation from the often all-consuming environment of football. My life was no longer defined by the result of a football game, there was more to life, and more to me. Football was still very important and central to who I was and what I wanted to do with my life, but it wasn't everything any longer. I had found other things that interested me, that I could enjoy doing, that I could invest in, before coming back to football with greater perspective and zest to keep pushing myself. My life went from being very singular with a conscious narrow focus of being a footballer, to being complex, different and multi-dimensional. I dared to be more, and reaped the benefits both personally and professionally.

My graduation from university (with a 1st Class Honours) coincided with my release from Morecambe FC at the age of 32. I was at a definite crossroads in my life. The phone did not ring in regards to League clubs that wished to sign me, the offers I received were from non-league clubs (Conference level and below) and were part-time in nature (evening training and weekend games). It became ever-clearer as the summer progressed that I would not be able to maintain my status as a professional footballer, and so, after much soul searching, reflection and tears, it felt like the right time to move on with my life, to retire from professional football, and become something else; someone else. I decided to not be a footballer anymore.

So, now what? Being honest, this is a question I still struggle to answer as my story moves towards the current day. However, I went back to my own story through my 15 years of employment in the game, and that of my friend being released by Crewe many years ago, and knew that my next steps must be somehow related. I felt like I had a lot to offer, a lot to challenge and discuss, particularly in regards to young players trying to navigate the journey into professional football. Perhaps, I had found a calling for my next career and one through which I could find new meaning. Shortly after my decision to retire and step out into the unknown, funding became available for me at Liverpool John Moores University to progress into post-graduate research with an MPhil project. As time progressed, more funding became available and I have managed to create a novel opportunity to work with young players in a way that resonates with me in the form of this thesis.

In preparation for attempting to write such an honest biography as this, I have read and considered numerous completed theses. What researchers appear to struggle with is how best to portray their stories, and subsequent biases. They appear caught; acknowledging their beliefs that who they are is inescapably linked to what and how

they research the lives of others, but then attempting to somewhat belittle their biographies and instead justify how they effectively 'manage' themselves and their research through employing a number of methods. Without doubt, how to manage researcher bias is crucial to the credibility of the research, yet, ultimately it remains impossible to eradicate oneself from one's research completely. With this section, I wanted to attempt to address such issues and outline a real story, with real challenges and real emotions, and suggest how this story could in fact be seen as complimentary to the current study. My experiences have undoubtedly shaped me as a person and a researcher with an interest in the lives of young footballers, and so, of course, my research is fundamentally linked to who I am and how I see the world. I believe my story can also be acknowledged for how it demonstrates that I am well-placed to better understand how young players are aware of and understand their identities and PD and how I, as a researcher, can work with this information to influence the lives of young players. The research questions of the thesis are carefully constructed to not imply that young players should follow my path, should learn from my experiences, or should adopt the same strategies as I did. It is constructed in an attempt to support and develop their awareness and understanding of who they are (identity) and their ongoing PD. The issues and challenges associated with their understanding, and/or my experiences, may resonate with them, as current players. Academic discussions surrounding the potential problematic adoption of identities heavily invested within sport, and performance, have been the bedrock of research into the lives of athletes; it is my belief that my experiences enhance my ability to concurrently work with such information in relation to young footballers and capture this process academically.

As I retired, I asked myself how can I use my own experiences to work with young players in a developmental capacity. During many pre-research reflections, it became

evident that the population of apprentice footballers, those so close to achieving their goals, yet in reality highly unlikely to ‘make it’, would provide a personally meaningful, and academically interesting, demographic with which to work with. Through this project it is hoped they become better able to make informed decisions as to how they may best navigate their careers as young footballers in relation to their understanding of identity and PD.

3.4 The Insider

The biography outlined above presented the researcher with circumstance akin to that of an ‘insider’ as outlined by Douglas and Carless (2014). Sparkes and Smith (2014) note there are advantages to researchers already being a member of the group or sub-culture they wish to study due to an ease of access that might not be afforded to researchers with differing biographies. Roderick (2006c) has identified this point of insider as being particularly salient within professional football circles due to an apparent distrust of academic enquiry. Here, my position as an ‘insider’ helped in navigating some of these concerns as my playing history, and personal relationships/acquaintances within the professional game, were able to facilitate access to young players, initially, and later opportunities to discuss and create a workshop with a major stakeholder within the game in the LFE. The specifics of the relationship with the LFE in relation to this research are outlined later in this chapter.

Further to the topic of access, the role of insider is seen as important in attempting to build trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. As Roderick (2006c) suggested, the players in his research were more open when discussing their careers with a fellow footballer. In relation to the current study, the role of insider

could be seen by young players as a demonstration as to my membership and understanding of their specific culture, as, in effect, we had a shared experience and I could evidence an appreciation of the challenges they faced. The researcher assuming such a position leads to more authentic and unguarded accounts to be shared by participants according to Douglas and Carless (2006). In turn, these accounts provide deep and contextually relevant data with which the researcher can produce a thick description of such themes for the reader to consume. However, the position of insider, and this alone, does not guarantee sustained support. As such, I sought to empathise with the players throughout all contacts, whilst remaining professional. Empathy and understanding, as an approach to research, are key components upon which the quality of social research can be judged (Tracy, 2010).

Meaningful data is unlikely to be just 'given' to researchers, it requires the development, and often demonstration, of what Tracy (2010) calls tacit knowledge. In simple terms, this can be seen as a contextual understanding evidenced by the researcher, manifested within an understanding of the often hidden and unarticulated nuances of a specific culture. Within football this could be the mannerisms, jokes, slang, idioms, nods, glances and the notion of banter, as often used by players (Adams et al., 2010).

The recent thesis of Hickey (2015) challenges the majority of football-related research. He suggests that previous research has failed to scratch beneath the surface and adequately portray the lives of footballers because the researchers were unable to either demonstrate to their participants their tacit knowledge and therefore shared experience, or they were unable to identify they were being offered answers to questions that merely 'follow the book' by the players. Hickey (2015) proposes players are adept at giving somewhat sanitised answers to questions, especially when asked to

discuss themselves or their employers. He believes the failure of researchers to recognise these issues and encourage, perhaps challenge, the participants to address this equates to the conclusions of such studies doing little to capture the real experiences and sentiments of the players involved.

My own perceptions of Hickey's (2015) conclusions are admittedly similar inasmuch as I have long felt that the academic work I have read does not adequately capture my experiences of employment within the professional game, or my transition into retirement. As a practical example, my retirement from the sport has been incredibly emotional, challenging and at times distressing, but at the same time quite liberating. This journey cannot be simplified, classified or quantified. The most likely conclusion I can garner from the majority of research is that I feel like this because my AI has been removed from me and I have perhaps over-invested within this view of self throughout my career. Undoubtedly, this is a crucial element of my transition, but it is not the only reason for my feelings, and suggesting so is overly simplistic and presents a somewhat 'safe' conclusion. In reality, how I feel is highly complex and related to, but not solely, superficial concerns as to how I can provide for my family. However, how I feel then goes much deeper as I think about finding new meaning in my life, and questioning if the meaning I associated to playing football was misplaced and incongruent to who I am, and yet I have dedicated the majority of my life (thus far) to that career. Clearly, these are highly individualised thoughts, but I am in agreement with Hickey's assertions in regards to current research and its failings to capture such emotion and perspective. It is my belief that I have the opportunity to address such concerns with this project as I feel my position will help to produce research that is credible, meaningful and relatable for a wide audience to digest through my experiences as an ex-player and neophyte academic.

As previously discussed, such a research population, and the researcher's biography, presented, on the one hand, a great advantage and platform from which to initiate a novel, informative and meaningful research programme. Yet, work with this population 'concurrently provided inexorable methodological traps' (p.88) (Roderick, 2006c). Specifically, this relates to the management of the researcher's own experiences and how such experiences would undoubtedly influence any attempts to further understand the lives of young footballers. For example, as Douglas and Carless (2014) discuss, amongst other issues, the insider may inappropriately impose their experience upon the participants through assuming their perspective to be universal and/or overemphasise their own experience when interpreting subjects' stories. Relatedly, Roderick (2013b) acknowledges the innumerable ways in which his position as insider affected his research, from influencing the formulation of interview questions, to the intricate ways in which such questions were asked, to the way he interprets the data collected and inadvertently relates his own story to those being studied.

Clearly the above sections have brought attention to a raft of methodological issues in relation to the researcher's biography that are important to consider for the trustworthiness and credibility of this research concerned with understanding the lives of young footballers. Therefore, the following section seeks to address such concerns. Firstly, as part of the process to enhance the authority of sport-related social research, authors should discuss the underpinning methodological assumptions and theoretical orientations that inform their projects (Jenner et al., 2004). Following this, the notion of researcher credibility within social research will be directly addressed and the practical steps followed to enhance such notions will be outlined (Tracy, 2010).

3.5 Theoretical Position

Bryman (2015) proposed that research is conducted through a particular paradigm that embodies what the researcher feels is important, legitimate and reasonable to study. This paradigm is essentially a worldview and provides the overarching beliefs, values and methods within which the subsequent research is conducted (Lincoln et al., 2011). In addition, Roderick (2013b) suggests the clear outlining of such beliefs should be a pre-requisite for all sport-related social science research. As such, it is important to locate the lead researcher's theoretical position in regards to ontology (what is the nature of reality) and epistemology (what is valid knowledge and how can we find it), and discuss how this has influenced the current project. Such discussions have interested academics for many centuries, and definitions and terminologies have extended to be highly complex and nuanced, both in theory and application (Charmaz, 2004). As such, an attempt will not be made to critique the merits of such wide-ranging methodological theory, however the concepts of ontology and epistemology will be addressed through the dominant traditions of positivism and interpretivism.

There exists a dominant agenda for performance enhancement throughout elite-level sport, which has manifested with the usual orientation for research projects concerned with elite athletes to be conducted with a direct aim to increase some form of on-pitch performance (Hoberman, 2001, Andersen, 2009, Douglas and Carless, 2014). To support this performance agenda, the general trend of sport science research has been to employ the tenants of natural science research, or positivist approaches, to the studies of human performance in efforts to show causal relationships as to certain variables and measurable performance outcomes. Simply, it is believed that it is possible for researchers to obtain objective knowledge in the form of facts, and it is

the researcher's role to capture such facts. Advocates of such positions suggest that athletes' performances are related to certain variables, data for which can be captured and manipulated in efforts to improve performance (Baker, 2012). This positivist position assumes an external and measurable reality, and suggests it is the role of academic enquiry to capture facts in order to prove and/or disprove hypotheses.

In its simplest form, the positivist approach dictates how the focus of study, or the things being studied are unaware of their existence, and that their actions are beyond their control (McNeill and Chapman, 2005). Further, it is suggested, research conducted through this positivistic paradigm will elicit data that is universal, with assured objectivity, without the influence of researcher biography and experiences, or by researchers' relationships and interactions with their subjects. This positivist approach to research has been replicated within the study of social science according to Bryman (2015) and, such influences are evident within the relatively new discipline of sport psychology (Andersen et al., 2007). Historically, early propositions suggested that, similarly to the natural scientist, the task of the social scientist was to uncover the body of knowledge and social influences that existed independently of whether people knew about them or not (Durkheim, 2014). Once these social influences and their impact were understood, societies could be bettered through the implementation of social policy. In effect, people were seen as relatively passive in their responses to social norms, expectations and pressures, and researchers could capture this reality objectively (McNeill and Chapman, 2005).

In critique, the positivist approach to the study of human experience has been challenged for applying the 'canons of the natural sciences to the study of social reality' (Bryman, 2015) (p. 13). In recent times, the suggestion is that more and more academics are moving from such paradigms to include more interpretivist

considerations of their social research. Bryman (2015) outlined how people and their lives, both of which are complex and individual, were the important difference between the subject matter of the natural sciences and the subject matter of the social sciences. In conclusion, the study of the social world requires a differing, and interpretive, logic. The important difference being that within the social sciences, humans are active and conscious within social situations and capable of choosing how to act in response of any stimulus as a result of how they interpret the experience (Patton, 2015). For Bryman (2015), the essence of the social sciences is in the understanding of human behaviour and how people actively construct meaning out of their experiences; as such, there is no one single and external reality. Therefore, in attempts to understand such phenomena, research in the social sciences can adopt interpretivist positions and be constructed to consider the intricacies and subjective interpretation of the human experience. In regards to the current study, the essence of the research questions are designed to explore how the elite youth football experience is interpreted by the player(s) in relation to their understanding of identity and PD. Within this research paradigm, there is no one objective truth, therefore, this research is conducted from within a broadly interpretivist position.

Further to the current study as broadly based within interpretivist ideals, of further importance to this specific research is the notion of constructionism. Here, the notion of constructionism suggests that human beings are active participants within constructing their social reality through social experiences (Patton, 2015). If viewed as a continuum, in opposition to constructionism, is the idea of objectivism. Bryman (2015) explains this position as the implication that social phenomena confront people as external facts that are beyond individual control; in effect, existing independently. In challenging this view, McNeill and Chapman (2005) propose that people create

culture continuously, and while acknowledging that culture persists and influences individual actors, this is not an objective reality. In support, whilst it is accepted that physical things exist independent to the body, the human mind shapes and constructs social reality, giving meaning to objects, people, experiences and interactions (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). As such, people actively construct their own realities through their interpretations of their experiences, causing a ‘continuous state of construction and reconstruction’ (p. 17) (Bryman, 2015). More simply, humans are not subject to external influences over which they have no control; rather, humans are actively partaking within the construction of shared meanings and interpretations of their social reality. Whilst recognising the influence of external factors, fundamental to the understanding of social experience is the active role of individuals in how they construct and interpret such involvements. The current research is positioned within a general belief that whilst certain cultural expectations can influence players, and often these expectations are strong and explicit, it is the footballers themselves that construct and interpret their social realities, and that these experiences are multiple and individual, as opposed to singular and universal.

3.6 Qualitative Research

An aim for the current research is to explore how young footballers understand identity and PD within the context of elite youth football. Therefore, to fulfil such an aim, the methods employed must capture the lived experiences, and their associated meanings, through the eyes of the players involved (Douglas and Carless, 2014). Sparkes and Smith (2014) propose that ‘multifaceted, constructed realities exist and the process of inquiry is a matter of interpreting the interpretations of others’ (p, 12). In effect,

research conducted through an interpretive and constructionist paradigm should attempt to ‘walk in the shoes’ of the players in efforts to understand their interpretation of their experiences and how they construct their lived reality (Charmaz, 2004). Therefore, the researcher must enter their world and attempt to unpick what is significant and meaningful to them (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). In seeking to understand such environments and issues from the players’ perspectives, Hammell (2007) recommends qualitative methodologies. For Morris (2013), the reasons for employing qualitative approaches to data collection are numerous, yet, importantly include how participants’ perspectives on the topic of research, captured in their own words, will enhance the breadth and depth of the data. This is as opposed to answers being somewhat constrained by employing more quantitative methodologies (e.g., surveys or questionnaires). Relatedly, a suggested positive of qualitative methods is the degree of flexibility it affords the researcher in presenting opportunity to prompt and explore answers with interviewees in efforts to clarify, extend or challenge their responses (Tracy, 2010). Further, such methods allow the researcher a freedom to gain information that was not anticipated prior to data collection. Indeed Mitchell et al. (2014) have recently called for research in the field of elite youth football to include qualitative approaches to further build upon the foundations of the quantitative work that has dominated the research base concerning identity in sport. Therefore, in efforts to increase appreciation of how elite youth players understand identity and PD, qualitative methods will be utilised throughout the following research studies.

The interview is the most widely employed method of data collection within qualitative research, allowing for understanding of how participants interpret their experiences and what sense they can make of them (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Further to this, semi-structured interviewing, wherein an interview schedule is developed, yet

the participant, and researcher, have opportunity to be flexible as to the direction of the interview within certain parameters, is seen as a further strength when qualitative research seeks rich and detailed data for the purposes of investigation (Tracy, 2010). In this regard, the current study utilises a qualitative semi-structured interview as the method for data collection in all studies. Within each of the studies to be presented in this thesis, by and large, all of the questions were asked and similar wording used within each interview, yet there was a freedom and encouragement for the interviewee to depart from the original question and offer insight into what they saw as relevant and important (Bryman, 2015). The specific details surrounding how each interview structure was developed is presented in the methods section for each individual study.

3.7 Enhancing Qualitative Quality

The literature is awash with ‘criteria for qualitative goodness’ (p.837), constituting advice, guidance and suggestions for neophyte researchers to consider according to Tracy (2010). However, this creates a confusing landscape to navigate, and in response, Tracy (2010) provides researchers with eight criteria to consider (and evidence to their audience) throughout qualitative research projects with the aim of enhancing quality and raising standards amongst the industry. In short, these criteria are designed to help researchers persuade their audience that what they have to say is worthy of attention, can be trusted, and is therefore helpful to policy makers. The previous sections of this chapter have identified the researcher’s biography, the role of insider, the theoretical underpinning of the overall project and the utilisation of qualitative methods in efforts to fulfil the aims of the thesis. These sections, when considered in unison with previous chapters, address many of the criteria identified by Tracy (2010). For example, the

introduction and literature review identified to the reader why the current project is a worthy topic (Tracy, 2010) to research owing to the volume of children engaged within elite youth football, the potential ways in which this experience influences identity and PD and the aforementioned failure rates associated. Similarly, Tracy (2010) highlights sincerity as an important criterion. Within this thesis, the reader is presented with the researcher biography, the upfront discussion surrounding my subjective values, biases and the ensuing methodological challenges (and benefits) this creates within the current study; all of which display a degree of honesty and transparency leading towards sincere research.

The following section will now discuss some of the further ways this thesis attempts to enhance the quality of the qualitative research on offer to the reader. Specifically, the broad criteria of credibility and resonance as identified by Tracy (2010), and also highlighted in Bryman (2015), are presented in efforts to address the raft of methodological issues that must be discussed and considered to appease the reader in this regard. In short, good quality qualitative research is dependable (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) and credibility and resonance are two further ways to evidence dependability. In support Lincoln et al. (2011) suggest if qualitative research can demonstrate such criteria it can adequately (if not absolutely) demonstrate quality qualitative research; that which can be trusted.

3.8 Considering Credibility And Resonance

Bryman (2015) stresses the significance of credibility for the social scientist's research as, due to the acknowledgement that there are likely several social realities prevalent within the experiences of others, it is the credibility of the account that a research

project offers that will determine its acceptability to others. For Tracy (2010), resonance can include terms such as generalisability and transferability and is related to how research can affect an audience through empathy and emotional connection. In short, how research can resonate with readers to have an impact upon them. Regarding credibility, ways to enhance this for the reader are in giving consideration to concepts such as thick description, crystallisation and triangulation, member reflections and validations. The sub-criteria/terms mentioned above provide a useful framework within the umbrella terms of credibility and resonance; however, they provide guidelines, rather than absolute measures. However, I am reluctant to engage within a checklist of terms and the countermeasures employed to ‘solve’ the various methodological challenges that exist within the current research. Such an approach is akin to the central tenants of quantitative research, with procedures and interventions introduced to address research complexities. Yet, in effect, this project *is* the research complexities it encounters, and attempts to manage those away would be aligned with alternative research paradigms. The issues presented when conducting research of this nature are never solved, only managed, and only where possible and appropriate. Therefore, what follows is a number of the ways in which I have considered the methodological challenges associated with research of this nature, and a discussion as to how they have influenced the process.

One of the suggested methods to enhance credibility is through an engagement with the participants of the research, after interview. Offering participants the opportunity to check their views are fairly captured, before being fairly represented, is the most common form of member engagement, often called member checking (Bryman, 2015). At a basic level, this is fulfilled by sending all participants their transcripts and seeking their feedback as to the accuracy of what has been captured. An attempt to satisfy this

recommendation was made by sending the interview participants from the current thesis their transcripts and asking for comment. The responses to this request were poor; however, those that did reply were unanimously content with their transcripts and requested no changes. However, after giving this process greater consideration, I am inclined to suggest that member checking within this context and within this cohort, may well be 'pointless'. Firstly, it was always unlikely for apprentice footballers to engage within this member checking process of their own volition. Apprentices would rarely receive e-mails and be asked to feedback upon their contents. An alternative approach would be to force participation, yet in such a task designed to enhance credibility, this would defeat the purpose. Secondly, this form of member engagement, wherein participants check the transcript for accuracy, is not a suitable means to assess credibility for this project. It does not adequately give them a voice after their interview. I made a mistake in thinking this was a worthwhile process.

An alternative method to enhance the credibility of the research is by engaging those people it concerns at regular junctions throughout the process. This can be achieved through member reflections and in multiple ways; within the data analysis process, the production of the results, the sharing of findings and/or offering opportunities for feedback, input and critique (Tracy, 2010). To explain, this research is broadly concerned with apprentices' understanding of identity and PD, therefore a means to enhance credibility, on reflection, would be to engage the players interviewed within Study 1 throughout the thesis as a whole. Asking for their reflections on the project from a broader perspective would have been valuable, as opposed to asking if their transcripts matched their recollection of their interviews. They could have formed something similar to a steering group, moving away from 'testing' that I got it right, and provided collaboration to help move the project forward (Tracy, 2010). This

would have provided an opportunity for critique of the project, from those who helped to shape it and who were the target audience. This was a missed opportunity. However, a form of member reflections was supported through engagement with the LFE and the sharing of preliminary results (Tracy, 2010). The following sections will shortly outline a relationship with the LFE, who became integral to this project as key stakeholders of an informative workshop delivered to apprentice footballers. At multiple points, emergent themes and ideas were shared with the LFE staff (without breaking the confidentiality of the participant players). The LFE staff have direct working relationships with all of the apprentice players within the football league and so it was prudent to present and discuss the developing ideas throughout various parts of the research with them, to ascertain their critique and potential validation to the findings.

Tracy (2010) proposes that in efforts for research to resonate with the reader, the answer may lie within the perceived transferability of its output. The transferability of qualitative research is related to the degree to which the findings of inquiry can be transferred to other areas which are similar in nature (Lincoln et al., 2011). As qualitative studies most typically are concerned with the in-depth study of small populations, their findings tend to be orientated to the specific context from which they emanate according to Bryman (2015). This has been a major criticism and explanation as to the lack of influence qualitative research exerts within governmental policy, however, knowledge generated through qualitative methods can still transfer and be useful in other settings (Tracy, 2010). Transferability can be addressed through the production of data deemed to offer thick description of the details of a culture or experience. In support of my role as insider and using the tacit knowledge developed as detailed within the researcher biography section of this chapter, helps to create a

research project which evidences thick description. This should allow the reader to empathise with the topic in question as an experience and make connections to their own circumstances (Morris, 2013). The volume of participants within the current thesis, coupled with the amount of data created, adds to the potential for thick description (as each study is presented within the thesis I will outline the specifics concerning participants' information, selection method and criteria, the data collection methods utilised, and the analysis procedures). It is hoped the findings presented here will carry some credibility and transferability for key stakeholders, researchers and practitioners interested in the identity and PD of elite youth footballers, however, the reader alone will be the judge in relation to the resonance of a project, not the researcher (Bryman, 2015).

Engaging within an auditing process throughout the course of the research has been useful to support the dependability of the project, and support my development as a neophyte researcher (Lincoln et al., 2011). To evidence the auditing process, open, transparent and clear research practices will be explained as each study unfolds (Bryman, 2015). Evidence of this approach is within the open description of the development of the relationship with the LFE, and the production of the informative workshop. A further example is how experienced researchers and practitioners were invited to attend the workshop and feedback their thoughts, and that raw data themes have been regularly discussed with the supervisory team. Shenton (2004) suggests these are debriefing sessions, used to acknowledge and manage the influences of the researcher within the research. In further efforts to consider the dependability of my research, I am more attuned to the concept of reflexivity as the research journey has progressed. Authors such as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) propose reflexivity, or critical self-reflection, helps to identify how the researcher influences the research

process and provides some degree of integrity. A reflexive research diary has helped this process, along with a number of mini-essays written in consideration of certain incidents throughout the course of the thesis, its relevance to the research and/or its impact upon me. For Douglas and Carless (2014) and Sparkes and Smith (2014) such admissions can then lead towards a self-reflective researcher, one who is authentic, and forever mindful as to their influence on the research process.

The above helps to explain some of the measures employed to enhance the quality of the research without, I hope, suggesting that the nuances of qualitative research can, or indeed should, be managed. In further efforts to enhance the quality of the research presented here, the following section details an open and transparent account of the data collection and analysis procedures employed throughout.

3.9 Data Analysis

The following provides explanations as to the overarching data analysis procedures employed throughout the entirety of the thesis. In future sections, as each study is presented, an outline of data representation only will be highlighted. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), researchers are culpable of using loose terminology (e.g., the theme ‘emerged’ from the data), with little information given as to the processes employed which underpin the reported results. This not only implies the researcher is passive within the process, the lack of clarity also causes scepticism and makes it difficult for readers to evaluate the research. It is Braun and Clarke’s (2006) position that this lack of clarity in procedures can influence the credibility of the research for the reader. To clarify, this thesis employs thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Braun et al. (2019), a method for identifying, analysing, and

reporting patterns (themes) within data. Qualitative data analysis approaches can be incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced, yet thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis, particularly for the neophyte researcher, as it offers a simple, useful and flexible method, which can provide a rich and detailed account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Biddle et al. (2001), thematic analysis helps to ‘distil information from large amounts of qualitative data’ and to ‘identify core or common themes within the data’ (p. 795). The following outlines the thorough analysis procedures employed throughout this thesis for the reader to consider.

Within qualitative research projects, the process of data analysis should not be considered as a distinct phase, instead, from the inception of the research, the processes of research design, data collection, analysis and representation should be approached as a simultaneous and continuous iterative cycle, wherein each element informs the other according to Huberman and Miles (2002). Further, a reflective and flexible approach is adopted to allow emergent themes, areas of interest and divergent views to be analysed during the data collection procedures, which allows new ideas to be explored with future participants (Silverman, 2016). This form of ongoing analysis and adaptation is embraced throughout the course of this research.

For Braun and Clarke (2006), the process of analysis begins from the very first interview, gathering pace as each of the interviews are transcribed. All of the collected data associated with this thesis was transcribed by hand, and where possible transcription was immediate and completed before the next interview. However, it must be noted that for some interviews this was simply not feasible as the agenda for my visits was set directly by the clubs. Where immediate transcription was not possible, I listened back to the audio recording of the interview before meeting the

following player(s) and noted anything of interest. My interest, in general terms, predominantly focused upon the overall research aims (e.g., what themes were emerging and should this be further explored in subsequent interviews?) and the specifics of that interview (e.g., how were my questions received and what could I have done better?). A specific example of the flexible approach adopted by this thesis was the emergence of the necessity to be a '24/7 footballer' as suggested through interview by a player early in the project (Study 1). This specific phrase and theme appeared interesting and related to the central research questions and, therefore, was incorporated into the following interviews of Study 1, helped to inform the informative workshop, and became a debate question/prompt within Study 2. The flexibility I was able to utilise as a researcher is seen as a fundamental pillar of qualitative research and a valuable tool for research trying to find understanding and make sense of subjects' experiences (Bryman, 2015).

The transcription of the data verbatim is the first step in becoming familiar with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Then, as data collection is a finite process, attention switches towards what meaning can be made from the data. Firstly, the inductive or deductive approach to analysis was considered. The recent work of Richards (2014) discusses the analysis procedures employed within qualitative research and proposes the most exciting and challenging findings require the exploration of ideas deriving from the data. In this way, qualitative research 'works up' from the data and it is the researcher's role to draw from the data new ideas, concepts and ways of relating them. This is an inductive approach to data analysis, one wherein the empirical data is approached with the aim of generating fresh understanding of a given phenomenon. Contrasting the inductive method is a more deductive approach, whereby data is analysed with pre-existing research aims and areas of interest at its centre. Examples

of this are particularly evident when external partners are involved within research projects and their aims are quite direct (Huberman and Miles, 2002). However, in reality, Bryman and Burgess (1994) suggest that qualitative data analysis most often incorporates elements of both inductive and deductive approaches, and it is helpful to position research along something of a moveable continuum. Therefore, in a practical sense, it appears that data analysis is often informed by certain a priori categories and areas of interest related to relevant literature and the overarching aims of the study, whilst allowing space and opportunity for concepts to emerge as the researcher works up from the data in an inductive manner (Richards, 2014). As a result, in line with Bryman and Burgess (1994) the current project can be positioned as something of a hybrid, incorporating inductive and deductive tactics through the data analysis procedures. In this regard, I fully acknowledge that the data was approached with the prior aim of answering the central research questions and draws upon the literature previously discussed when analysing the collected data. However, the process of making sense of the data did incorporate elements of an inductive approach. Thematic analysis, as almost exclusively a tool with which to analyse data, supports the hybrid nature of my analysis.

For clarity, in line with Braun and Clarke (2006), data corpus refers to all of the data collected (e.g., all of the interview transcripts), data set refers to all of the data collated for a specific part of the analysis (e.g., club environment), and data item refers to an individual piece of data (e.g., a specific quote). Both Braun and Clarke (2006) and Richards (2014) suggest that reading the transcripts is a crucial early stage in analysis; on the surface a simple task, but for the purposes of qualitative data, researchers should read their interview transcripts on several occasions with purpose and to begin the familiarisation process. In accordance, at the earliest possible opportunity, I immersed

myself in the data by reading each transcript several times, getting to know the data ‘intimately’ (Braun et al., 2019). For Richards (2014), a key component of this phase is to read with purpose as this begins the process of making sense of the data in relation to the central research themes. After the first round of familiarisation reading, I began to mark ideas within each transcript that I found of interest and would return to at later points. This is the first phase of coding; identifying a feature of the data that appears interesting (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This process is a messy rush of ideas (Braun and Clarke, 2006), with little conceptual thought, moreover, ideas, phrases, words are noted against pieces of text with brief explanations/further points. I found the use of highlighter pens especially useful here, which allowed me to identify similar ideas across the data corpus. Added to this, I wrote a brief description, most often just a few words or a sentence, for each highlighted passage to capture the essence of what I interpreted was being said. This was the first step in organising the data into meaningful groups, and following the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006), this task was approached with a degree of flexibility. If relevant, I coded the same part of text multiple times so that certain extracts were either not coded at all, coded once, or coded many times according to subject. I was also mindful to remain attentive to divergent statements and extracts which were contradictory and retained ‘accounts that depart from the dominant story in the analysis’ (p. 89) (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Further, codes were not identified in relation to the number of occurrences, instead, at this stage, each potential area of interest was considered on its merits and in the context of the overall research.

At the next stage of analysis, I moved from the descriptive coding of text, to the more analytical interpretation of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) refers to this stage as searching for themes, wherein a theme captures something important about the data in

relation to the research question, captures a patterned response and/or meaning within the codes. Richards (2014) describes this process as opening up the data to allow for the emergence of concepts and theory and is ‘coding that requires interpretation and meaning’ (p.102). Here, I interrogated the phrase or passage in context and moved to ask ‘why is this code interesting?’ and ‘why will this project benefit from that idea?’ To help facilitate the large task of theme development, I found the use of visual representations of the codes especially helpful. I sketched out several pen profiles to bring the codes to life (Mackintosh et al., 2011). These were simple diagrams to connect ideas and included profiles for an individual participant, for a specific idea related to a data set, for conflicting ideas and/or for a topic I found interesting. For example, one profile I broadly called identity, another club environment, another awareness. Essentially, I was working with the codes to try and better understand them and find the relationships between them. From here, I made decisions and collated codes that I felt were related in the form of overarching themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I found it helpful to collate related codes and start the process of creating themes in separate word documents. According to Richards (2014), this process further allows the analysis to move toward identifying latent themes within the data, wherein the underlying ideas, assumptions and ideologies that shape the transcripts are explored. At the end of this stage I had a collection of overarching candidate themes, and sub-themes, and all the raw extracts of data that had been coded in relation to them (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Next began the process of reviewing and refining the candidate themes. The suggestion of Patton (2015) was incorporated here, wherein, the data within each theme was reviewed to consider if it expressed a meaningful coherence, and whether there was clear distinction between candidate themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006)

suggest, this is to ensure ‘the candidate thematic map ‘accurately’ reflects the meanings in the data set’ (p. 91). A further review of the entire data corpus was also undertaken so that any omitted codes could be re-worked into the candidate themes. Again, I found the use of visually representing the candidate themes and the coded data to support them as pen profiles, especially helpful at this point. By the end of this phase, I was happy that I could clearly identify the different themes I interpreted from the data and had considered how they related to each other.

The final stage of the analysis process is the naming of themes. In following Braun and Clarke (2006), once I was comfortable in justifying the thematic map of the data, I wrote a basic and summarised analysis of what each particular theme discussed, why that was of interest to this specific research, and finally how it fitted into the overall context of the research. From here, concise names were given to each theme. Clearly, just as the processes of data collection and analysis should be considered as non-linear and recursive, so to should the relationship between data analysis and representation be considered in the same way. At this stage of analysis for each of the two studies in this thesis, the representation of each theme had already begun at the basic level. However, for each of the studies to follow in this thesis, the specific modes of data representation will be presented within each study chapter.

3.10 Involvement Of League Football Education (LFE) Within This Research

According to Tracy (2010), transparent research is marked by the disclosure of the challenges, and the twists and turns that transformed the course of the research. A

meeting with LFE presented one such example of an opportunity that transformed the course of this thesis. The role of LFE is to manage the formal education component of the apprenticeship for all Football League apprentices (League Football Education, 2019). LFE can be understood as an education provider, who are responsible for the apprentices' formal education and deliver this service by out-sourcing the educational delivery to third parties (e.g., apprentices from one club may attend a local college to complete their formal education or LFE may make arrangements for the course to be delivered on-site/at the club). The formal education component is a mandatory feature of the apprenticeship, as it is within all government-funded apprenticeships, and must be completed by all players. In short, LFE provide clubs with the services and support required for the successful completion of their players' qualifications. Therefore, LFE are the official education provider for apprentices and receive financial payment directly from the government per successful completion of the education framework. LFE then incentivize the clubs to support their players in this regard (e.g., prioritizing education days throughout the congested football season/fixtures) by offering financial payment per successful completion and other support services. LFE is part-funded by the Football League and the PFA.

It is important to note the LFE *only* provide this service to apprentices employed to Football League clubs (i.e., clubs competing within the Championship, League 1 and League 2). However, their services are received by apprentices at 72 professional clubs and they estimate circa 1, 200 apprentices per year are under their care (League Football Education, 2019). The Premier League clubs, and the education of their apprentices, operate within a separate but similar framework. Clubs and apprentices from within the Premier League were not participants within this research.

All of the LFE apprentices study the same academic course; a BTEC National Diploma in Sporting Excellence. Within this qualification, there are varying levels of achievement; however, it is fundamentally the same qualification. The players complete this course plus a football-specific National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) over the course of their 2-year football apprenticeship. To summarize, LFE's core business is the successful completion of apprentices' formal education, however, they have a further remit to support apprentices' general health and well-being, during and after their apprenticeship. Other support services see them offer a life skills programme and a 1-1 confidential support service to mentor players through their apprenticeship, and for them to report any concerns (e.g., safeguarding issues) (League Football Education, 2019).

Further to this, LFE concurrently support apprentices in a wider sense in offering exit and progression initiatives to help players as they leave the apprenticeship and change careers, or stay within the game as professional players. Their main role post-apprenticeship, is to help and support the player to find a positive destination (League Football Education, 2019). This work falls within the Exit and Progression Team (EPT) at LFE. It is with this department where a relationship and opportunity developed.

As my research was granted funding in September 2014, initially for a 1-year MPhil project, I began to utilise my connections within the game and make contact with many of the key stakeholders (e.g., The PFA, EPL, FA and LFE). During October 2014, meetings were arranged with each organisation, at which I asked for their support as I embarked upon my research project. These meetings served a dual purpose; firstly, I was able to request research support (specifically in securing their potential support to access players and clubs). Secondly, it also allowed me an opportunity to discuss the themes I wished to explore through my research (at this stage of the project, the aims

were broadly to investigate the identities of young players) and generally assess their level of interest within such a project. All of the stakeholders were vocally supportive at this stage and asked to be kept abreast of how the project proceeded, however, the meeting with the EPT at LFE went especially well as they appeared not just supportive, but keen to explore how we could collaborate. We discussed many ideas, from my interest in identity, how my MPhil (at that stage) was broadly considering exploring this further with current young players, how my football career and education had progressed concurrently and how they perceived their players to be reluctant to engage with anything they felt was not directly linked to their on-pitch performance. From the first meeting, something told me that this was an exciting opportunity to explore further.

They outlined their previous work in supporting the exit and progression of apprentices had been to provide a careers event. They described this as a traditional approach, and one they had been delivering for many years, at which apprentices could engage with potential employers, universities and other related work/volunteering opportunities. However, in short, they felt this was not working and had instead developed a one-day workshop for the players. They invited me to attend the pilot.

The pilot LFE workshop was held in November 2014 at a club that was geographically very close to me. This workshop solidified my belief that there was real synergy between both the EPT, and myself, as people, but also professionally in regards to working with young players. They asked for my critique of the workshop, which I duly obliged. I will outline this critique in a later chapter.

During the 2014-15 delivery of the workshop, my input was minimal as I attended 3 further, and local, workshops as a spectator at the request of the LFE. I was more than

happy to do this as it allowed me to keep in contact with the organisation and see how the workshop was progressing over time, plus, it was also a very enjoyable experience and I found it stimulating for my own research ideas and writing. We kept in regular contact throughout this period and I kept them informed as to my progress with Study 1 of this thesis (I had begun this study to explore identity and PD within apprentice footballers). In short, this regular contact and ideas sharing sparked further discussions around my involvement in the future workshops. During a meeting in July 2015, I presented my conclusions and ideas from Study 1, at which point they asked me to consider planning, delivering and evaluating the 2015-16 workshops; in effect, to incorporate my initial research and provide some academic rigour to the process. This was incredibly exciting as it presented me with the opportunity of turning my research into an applied project, something I was very keen to initiate as I felt it would provide a novel and much needed addition to the research base. Within one conversation, I took a lead role in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the My Future Today (MFT) workshop for 2015/16. Concurrently, I shared the LFE's proposal with the supervisory team at Liverpool John Moores University.

The university were equally as keen to incorporate this practical element into the thesis and so kindly agreed to extend my funding, allowing me to transfer from MPhil to PhD, and thus begin the formal process to incorporate the workshop into my research. The specifics of the workshop, in regards to the planning, delivery and evaluation are presented in detail as this thesis progresses, as will conclusions be drawn and future directions discussed. It is my assertion that the inclusion of the workshop within this thesis was an opportunity too good to turn down as it created a novel opportunity to work with young players through the practical application of the findings from the vast literature base concerned with identity and PD that is beyond the scope of most

academic research. However, agreeing to incorporate the workshop within the thesis meant that my role shifted dramatically as I became a neophyte practitioner-researcher and helped to co-create the revised 2015/16 delivery. The below outlines some of the methodological considerations regarding adopting practitioner-researcher roles.

3.11 Practitioner-Researcher

For Drake and Heath (2010), neophyte practitioner-researchers face a daunting task as they encounter numerous challenges owing to their inexperience in the role, added to the complications of them already negotiating a less traditional research setting. The offer from LFE to become integral to the 2015/16 workshop effectively meant the practitioner-researcher role was given to me; it was not planned, I was unprepared and it certainly felt daunting. In one conversation, I became integral to everything regarding MFT, from planning, to delivering and finally in evaluating.

Traditional models of research sought to create a clear division between the researcher and the research participants (Bryman, 2015). Further, the work of Bensimon et al. (2004) suggests a potential divide exists between researcher and practitioner. A simplified explanation is as such; traditionally, the researcher identified the problem, conducted the research, offered conclusions, all whilst concurrently positioning themselves as the expert (Bensimon et al., 2004). However, within this model, critique centers upon knowledge. In short, who knows more about the issue in question, those that practice, or those that research? To address such an important question and the subsequent disconnect between the researcher and practitioner, the role of the practitioner-researcher has grown over recent years (Champ et al., 2019). Numerous definitions exist, yet all highlight how traditionally

the role of the researcher was to collect and distribute information, and the role of the practitioner was to utilize information to affect change; put simply, the practitioner-researcher is a merging of the two roles (Conneeley, 2002). Here, research is conducted by the practitioner for the purposes of advancing their own practice and to advance understanding of the phenomenon in question (McLeod, 1999). Many professions are seeking evidence-based practice by encouraging researchers to become hybrids; both involved within high-level research and the utilization of this research within practical settings (Conneeley, 2002). From here, it is hoped research becomes more applicable and accessible to practitioners in the field. Over the course of the thesis, I occupied such a dual role.

In returning to football as an industry, Champ et al. (2019) suggest that coaches (i.e., practitioners) are reluctant to engage with academic research, perhaps having lost faith in research, which means they do not access academic work, or any research suggestions fail to have influence. An example of academic work offering limited practical impact could be Roderick's (2013a) research depicting the challenges experienced by professional footballers, and their families, as they (often) change clubs and therefore up-root their lives to different geographical locations, due to the short term nature of their employment. This caused a huge strain on familial relationships, and affected both players and their partners' general well-being. After reflecting upon such issues, one practical suggestion could be to offer additional support to players and partners from a centralized and independent body, such as the PFA, during periods of transition. However, the partners of professional players are not currently offered any formal support from within the professional game, despite the impact this may have upon contracted and transitioning players, and the family dynamics as a whole (Professional Footballers Association, 2019). At present, the

suggestions of Roderick (2013a) are not being heeded, and whilst reasons for this are myriad, they may exist within a lack of translation from academic research, to practical initiative. The practitioner-researcher role afforded to me through including MFT as part of this thesis, allowed me to at least try and address the lack of research-informed practice prevalent within the game. I attempted to use the information generated from Study 1, and other related research, to influence apprentices within project, as a practitioner.

The role was not progressed without an important acknowledgement that it became the foundation upon which the relationships between the players and myself was built, and through which an evaluation of this thesis, and MFT, should be understood. In outlining the preceding personal biography, and the role of insider, I have started the process of reflection and transparency necessary to acknowledge my influence throughout this thesis. The practitioner-researcher role also allows for a combination of multiple methodological practices, including empirical data, observations, and personal (researcher) reflections and perspectives, through which the reader can evaluate the researcher's influence within the context of the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Post-event interviews will explore the players' interpretations of the workshop in an evaluation chapter to follow. However, in addition, the reader will be offered wider sources of data through an exploration of certain moments within the research journey. These will be presented via auto-ethnographic reflections interspersed within the thesis and aim to acknowledge that I am in this research, fully, as a central character, yet outline to the reader my awareness of such a position and the challenges it presented.

As such, the auto-ethnographic accounts within this thesis are in relation to the central theme, identity. These are entitled: On Shaky Ground, Nobody Is Watching and Extracting Information.

3.12 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to outline the delicate balance between the researcher's biography, and the position of insider, as being fundamental to the uniqueness of the project, the themes explored, and the access afforded to the current thesis, whilst also highlighting how such issues require acknowledgement and management in order to enhance the qualitative quality of the thesis. In support, the broad theoretical orientation and research methods employed throughout the remaining chapters of this project were then outlined. Attention then turned to some of the specific strategies employed to, where possible, consider the credibility and resonance of the research. In further efforts to produce good quality qualitative research, a transparent and detailed account of the processes of data analysis employed throughout this research was presented. The chapter then discussed how and why LFE, and the planning, delivery and evaluation of an informative workshop, came to be integral to this thesis. Finally, the role of the practitioner-researcher was presented. In providing all of this information, debate and transparency to the thesis, it is hoped the reader has greater clarity, in regards to the methodological rigour of the project, and can effectively critique how the data presented in the following chapters has supported the conclusions and points of discussion that will be presented through this body of work.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: Study 1

4.1 Introduction

As part of the introduction to this chapter, in efforts to enhance the credibility and transparency of the research (Tracy, 2010), it is important to provide a number of clarifications for the reader. Firstly, Study 1, as to be detailed below, was originally designed as a stand-alone MPhil study, not as an important part of a PhD thesis. Secondly, the Study was developed and the data collected before the opportunity to develop the LFE workshop was formalised. Thirdly, in this sense, Study 1 should not be considered as the typical ‘reconnaissance phase’ of a well-planned action research project (McNiff, 2013). As such, the thesis is not positioned to be judged upon the usual academic merits of action research. However, Study 1 does provide themes, ideas and context of data that helped to drive and inform the development and delivery of a workshop (a process outlined in later sections); yet, it was not originally designed to fulfil such an objective. As previously outlined, the journey of this project has taken a trajectory not envisaged at the beginning. However, the research interests have not changed from the very beginning to the very end of this thesis; the research topic has always been identity and PD in elite youth football. What changed throughout the course of the thesis was the opportunity.

The purpose of Study 1 was to provide information regarding how apprentice footballers understand identity and PD. This was investigated against the backdrop of an important contract decision at the culmination of their apprenticeship. The literature review presented the current landscape prevalent to elite youth football and outlined key pieces of academic research to consider the concept of ‘football as work’, identity and PD. To summarise, the collective research suggests that players can interpret their

working environments in such ways so as they prioritise their sporting self, to some degree, as they see success and progression on the field as more likely should they adopt identities whereby football defines them. Therefore, they construct an identity based upon their success in this area of their life, often at the neglect of other areas (McGillivray et al., 2005, Roderick, 2006c, Brown and Potrac, 2009). The literature review identified a number of research gaps, most notably the lack of practical initiatives that seek to utilise the body of research concerned with identity and PD and educate, broadly, the players themselves in regards to these concepts. Further critique identified the lack of research conducted since the introduction of the EPPP (i.e., the vast majority of studies were completed pre-EPPP introduction) and the call for more qualitative projects to be included within identity-related research (Mitchell et al., 2014). Hickey and Roderick (2017), suggested the dominance of research focusing upon the AI of athletes, ignores the multiplicity of identity, and there is an abundance of research which focuses upon identity in relation to career termination, as opposed to during career (Park et al., 2013). Further, there is a complete dearth of research to consider PD in football, beyond that of formal education. All of the research presented within the literature review was important, however, one fundamental issue pervades, there exists no published work aiming to apply the vast findings from the literature base to work with young football players in regards to their identities and PD.

This thesis is fundamentally concerned in working with young players to address research findings, as opposed to providing more theoretical positioning through which to understand the concepts of identity and PD. However, Study 1 allowed for greater context to be applied to the planning and delivery of this applied work as it sought to better understand the perceptions of elite youth footballers and their understanding of identity and PD. It remains unclear how apprentice players currently employed by

professional clubs, operating through the EPPP framework, understand the concepts of identity and PD. A further unique element to Study 1 is the timing of the data collection. It was engineered so that apprentice players were interviewed in the preceding weeks/days before an uncertain and momentous contract decision; selection or de-selection into professional football at the end of their scholarship. This created numerous ethical considerations, beyond the formal ethical approval as granted by the university, the likes of which will be considered within later chapters. However, this backdrop of uncertainty allowed for the final experiences of the journey into professional football to be captured and adds novel insight regarding how an understanding of identity and PD supports players during this period.

Study 1 aimed to:

- Critically explore apprentice players' understanding of identity and PD
- Critically explore how such understanding supports players as they approach an important contract decision

4.2 Methodology

The following methodological considerations are presented to supplement the overarching principles already discussed within the previous chapter. What follows here is the information not covered previously; namely, participants, sampling, procedural considerations, ethics, interview structure and data representation.

4.2.1 Participants

The participants (male, $n = 12$), were 2nd year apprentice footballers and aged between 17 and 18. All players were employed as apprentices to professional football clubs operating within the Premier League ($n = 2$), Championship ($n = 1$), League 1 ($n = 1$) and League 2 ($n = 2$). However, the league status of a club's professional team does not correlate with their youth department's EPPP categorisation (i.e., Premier League professional team does not guarantee a Category 1 EPPP categorisation for that team's academy). For greater clarity, it is helpful to view the professional team and youth department as separate entities existing within the same overall football club. As such, the participants were employed at Category 1 ($n = 2$), Category 2 ($n = 2$) and Category 3 ($n = 2$) academies as audited against the EPPP legislation. Clubs were recruited to provide a representative sample of EPPP categories; however, there exists only a handful of Category 4 youth academies in operation throughout the country, and so these clubs were excluded from this research.

4.2.2 Sampling

Sampling was initiated through strategic gatekeepers at each club (academy managers and/or youth team coaches), as opposed to individual players. This approach to recruitment is deemed ethical when interviewing young people (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Gatekeepers were identified as personnel with the authority to grant formal club entry and access to the employed apprentices at their respective clubs. Participant clubs were identified and approached via personal acquaintances and all were based within logistical convenience to the researcher. After initial contact, a research visit

was organised with the gatekeepers and, with their permission, a presentation in respect to the research aims, objectives and requirements was given to all suitable players at that particular club. These initial research visits took place some weeks before data collection and the players were asked to consider the research proposal, before informing their gatekeeper if they were willing to participate. This was then communicated back to the researcher and, through the gatekeeper, a convenient time and location to interview was identified. This approach allowed for voluntary participation, again identified as best practice due to the potentially sensitive nature of questions concerning their current contractual uncertainty (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). At clubs where more than 2 players had volunteered to participate, the gatekeepers were requested to select 2 players. At this point, there was no direct contact with individual players/participants. From the outset, it was envisaged to conduct interviews with circa 12 players, at 6 clubs representing the spectrum of EPPP categorisation. This sample of players was designed so that information could be gathered regarding how elite youth footballers understand their identities and PD, across a spectrum of clubs within the EPPP. Further, it is suggested qualitative researchers be mindful as to the volume of data they collect, as large data sets can be difficult, both to manage and to adequately represent the participants' views within academic writing (Bryman, 2015). This sample was not designed to suggest generalisations as to the state of elite youth football throughout all professional clubs, moreover, the sample provided a rich description of an experience for one group of young players, the data from which may then provide relevant findings for consideration within the wider fabric of the game (Williams, 2000).

The players were interviewed between April and May 2015. To be eligible for inclusion, players were 2nd year apprentices, and at the time of interview, unaware of

their employment/contract decision at the end of their apprenticeship. Players, either already aware of their decision, or 1st year apprentices, were not included in this study. This approach is purposive sampling, which is essentially strategic in nature and seeks to interview subjects who are relevant to the central research questions of the study and are undergoing similar experiences (Bryman, 2015).

4.2.3 Procedure

Following the recommendations of Sparkes and Smith (2014) and Bryman (2015), a participant information sheet was presented to each player. This included the aims of the research, the likely time constraints, how participation was voluntary and could be removed at any time without prior warning or reason, and the procedures to ensure confidentiality. Roderick et al. (2000) suggest that players' concerns surrounding confidentiality are part of the access problem facing academics in recruiting footballers to participate in research. Crucial to a player's successful progression as a professional footballer is the presentation of a 'good attitude' (Roderick, 2006c), therefore, there is a residual fear for players that they may be viewed as problematic and disruptive should they be seen to be offering criticism about the club, and/or staff, to outsiders. As the players were to be asked questions wherein they would offer opinion in regards to their environments, it was paramount to offer them assurances as to the dissemination of their comments and how these would be untraceable to them. It was outlined how their interviews would be anonymised, stored on encrypted university databases, destroyed after 2 years and how any direct quotes used would include the use of pseudonyms. After this information was presented and discussed,

participants were invited to ask any questions deemed necessary to clarify any further areas of concern.

All interviews were conducted on club premises, in private rooms, and lasted for between 60-75 minutes. This is in contrast to the data collection process of Roderick's (2006b) interviews wherein players were interviewed away from club premises. Off-site interviews might enable the researcher to capture the individual's full attention, without fear of being distracted by club colleagues and/or staff, and crucially may support more authentic testimony away from the gaze of employers. Ideally, a similar protocol would have been followed, yet, due to the players' ages (17-18), the sensitivity of an upcoming contract decision and the recruitment of players via club gatekeepers, private off-site meetings were decided against. Upon completion, interviews were transcribed verbatim generating 123 pages of data.

4.2.4 Ethics

The ethical concerns for this project were heightened due to the upcoming contract decisions all of the participants were to face within the coming weeks/months, and the uncertainty in regards to their career progression at time of interview. This uncertainty provided one of the focal points of the interview schedule and allowed for a novel element to the research. However, it became apparent how this set of circumstances could present certain ethical dilemmas. In line with the assertions of Hickey (2015) who conducted research with former EPL footballers after their release from the game, the current research sought to earn the trust of the participants through informed, considered and attentive questioning, yet, there was 'an unyielding responsibility to guide, protect and oversee the interests of the participants involved' (p. 130). Careful

consideration was given as to the possible responses players may provide to the various probing questions within the interview process, and the potential distress this may cause them. This was specifically in light of the momentous position such contract decisions can occupy in the lives of young players. In this regard, my role was clearly identified to the players at the outset of the interview process, inasmuch as I was not a trained counsellor or psychologist, our encounter was designed for me to capture their experiences, and as such, should not be considered as any form of therapy. Nor was I capable of offering them any advice. However, prior to, and upon completion of, the interview, the players were signposted to various mental health and well-being support services they could access if the topics of our interview had caused them undue distress and if they required further support to help them navigate their current situations. Within 48 hours of initial interview, all players were contacted via text to their mobile phone. This text thanked them for their participation and again highlighted the support systems available to them. This research was granted full ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores University.

4.2.5 Interview Structure

The specific research focus of this study surrounds the understanding young players have in regards to identity and PD, therefore, the interview schedule was constructed in a deductive sense with these central themes in mind (Biddle et al., 2001). The interview schedule for this study is available in Appendix A. The themes to discuss and explore and the specific questions were constructed from a range of sources. Firstly, specific questions were generated from the research base (Brown and Potrac, 2009, Platts, 2012, Roderick, 2014), the merits of which were discussed with

experienced supervisors (who were themselves asked to identify questions they felt had worked well for them within their own research and applied work). Secondly, my contextual understanding of once being, and interacting with, young players was crucial to forming appropriate research questions, worded in a relatable way. Further to this, experience from my undergraduate research dissertation wherein I interviewed ex-schoolboy international footballers about their career and how they constructed their identities throughout, proved helpful. Important consideration was given to the wording and delivery of questions in light of the participants' age and maturity. For example, the concept of identity is extremely personal, complex and challenging to comprehend for even experienced academics (Roderick, 2014). Further, much of the terminology surrounding the concept is in contrast to the players more usual methods of communication and vocabulary, and it was identified how young players were unlikely to have been asked such questions, about who they are and how they see themselves, before this encounter. Therefore, questions were constructed that linked to the players' usual language and communication, and practical (often visual) means for how I could further explain the questions were considered prior to interviews. This was particularly helpful in regards to questioning around the topic of identity as players were asked to imagine looking over the garden fence at themselves, before being asked to describe who they saw to me. Fundamentally, the questions were constructed to encourage the players to talk about themselves. From here, the questions moved to enquire as to how they viewed themselves, how and why they had constructed this view and how this view of self (identity) supported them as they navigated their careers.

Further to this, the notion of PD was explored with the players, specifically in regards to what they understood of this phrase and associated meaning, and how they were

experiencing and understanding their development as young people, alongside their football progression. Factors that might influence their PD were identified from the literature base, and questions were designed to explore such areas (e.g., education) (Danish et al., 1993, Lavalley, 2005, Price et al., 2010, Coakley, 2011, Platts, 2012)

Before a firm interview schedule was arrived upon, the first two interviews with players were treated as a form of pilot interview to trial certain questions. These two interviews are included within the data as limited changes were made to the schedule, but this process (i.e., treating the interviews as pilots and having the freedom to explore themes and make ‘mistakes’) proved invaluable to my development as a qualitative researcher. In much the same way as Warriner and Lavalley (2008) outline, I was alerted to all manner of data collection intricacies, from the challenges and delicacies of neutrally framing questions, the use of silence, the richness of data elicited by prompting for more information, and the requirement to be, at times, challenging when it appeared contradictions emerged. Following the recommendations of Kvale (2008), a balance was sought that included a clear, gentle and sensitive approach to asking questions, whilst a critical level of engagement was maintained in regards to any inconsistencies presented by the player’s responses. In much the same way as Roderick (2006b) suggests, the success of this data collection process relied upon my ability to make the participant feel at ease and secure through ‘trying to ask intelligent and apt questions and reacting with understanding to their responses’ (p. 92). In reality, this process constitutes my developing skills as a neophyte researcher and is ultimately never finished. As such, every interview conducted throughout this whole thesis has presented me with learning opportunities and the opportunity to engage within reflective practice (Knowles et al., 2012), chances to develop my skills that I have tried not to miss.

4.2.6 Data Representation

For Sparkes and Smith (2014), the dominant approach to representing qualitative data has been through the foregrounding of participants' voices and viewpoints, through written and direct quotations, within the results sections of research projects. With practice and through reflection, this approach can produce well-crafted work deemed compelling in capturing the experiences of individuals within various social contexts. This form of representation will remain the dominant method for the foreseeable future within qualitative sport-related research (Sparkes and Smith, 2009). However, to challenge the traditional, there is growing acceptance within qualitative research that such a means of representing the views of others is not the only form available to academics (Randall and Phoenix, 2009). Indeed, for certain projects, there might be more beneficial approaches.

Qualitative researchers are attempting to communicate complex ideas and express the multiple realities of their participants through their work. As such, it is suggested research in this field should not be constrained by standardised and formulaic methods of data representation, as is the case within quantitative methodologies (Clowes et al., 2015). Instead, academics are encouraged to embrace innovative and creative means through which to communicate their findings to their audiences, whether these audiences are academic, applied practitioners, or a combination of both (Douglas, 2014). The requisite to critically explore and analyse the participants' viewpoints is fundamental to the credibility of qualitative research findings; however, representing such views exclusively in the usual manner of in-text, direct quotations, might not be best served to engage with, for example, an external organisation such as LFE.

For Randall and Phoenix (2009), adopting visual methods of representation within qualitative research can enhance understanding of the social world and help to express the multiple meanings and complex relationships within and between data sets. Such an approach might be particularly helpful at translating complicated data findings into more user-friendly outputs and communicating with readers, and end-users, in an age saturated with countless visual resources, content and multimedia. Randall and Phoenix (2009) suggest a visual method might position research as more vivid and more lucid than other well-established forms. One such method of visual representation is through pen profiles. This is an emerging method of data representation, one not heavily utilised within mainstream sport psychology and sociology, to-date. Yet, this approach has been adopted within the context of physical activity research (Mackintosh et al., 2011) and the psychological profiling of elite gymnasts (Clowes et al., 2015). The approach utilises the transcripts of participants by representing their views via a diagram of 'composite key emergent themes' (Mackintosh et al., 2011). Then, as akin to more traditional data representation, verbatim quotations are then used directly from the transcripts in order to expand the pen profiles (Mackintosh et al., 2011).

The pen profiles presented here are constructed from the data generated through interviews with the players. To enhance the quality of qualitative research (Tracy, 2010), the pen profiles went through a triangulation process as they were presented to the wider research team. These meetings sought to critically analyse and discuss the themes presented and the direct quotes utilised to support, and how I had interpreted them from the raw data. This process was repeated at several intervals to challenge my thinking and interpretation of the data and ultimately helped in reaching a set of profiles that I felt comfortable justifying and presenting.

Of course, the adoption of visual methods needs careful consideration and it has been questioned if their inclusion here as an approach will contribute to the current study. It is concluded that the use of pen profiles to represent the themes and findings from the interviews has better equipped this research to engage with external partners, such as LFE, not in efforts to overly-simplify quite complex themes, but in efforts to present the data in an informative, thought-provoking, yet accessible form. In this regard the profiles allowed immediate discussions to begin, as opposed to an expectation whereby all LFE staff involved would read and digest a full, and academically tailored report. A traditional academic discussion does follow each pen profile, allowing for more complex ideas to be discussed and underpinned academically, however, for each theme, the data from Study 1 is presented initially via a pen profile. These were the profiles shared with the LFE in July 2015, a meeting at which we decided I would become fundamental to developing and delivering a workshop based, in-part, on this research.

4.3 Results And Discussion

The following sections introduce numerous themes that help in critically exploring apprentices' understanding of identity and PD, against the backdrop of an impending professional contract decision. Firstly, each theme is presented through a pen profile, before being supplemented with a critical discussion. The pen profiles were constructed using verbatim quotes from the interview data (figures 4.1 – 4.6). To begin, a theme entitled 'Understanding Me' helps to frame apprentices' understanding of identity. Following this, 'Switching Off' depicts their desire to find greater balance between life away from football, and life as a footballer. 'Club Environments'

provides information surrounding how the players' perceived their working environments. In addition, 'Approaching Education' outlines how apprentices' perceived they approached their formal education during their careers. 'Defining Personal Development' provides information in relation to the concept of PD. All of these themes are broadly exploring apprentices' understanding of identity and PD. Finally, the theme of 'Managing Now and Looking Ahead' explores how identity and PD understanding impacts upon apprentices' management of their current situations, and future plans.

4.3.1 Understanding Me

Understanding Me is a theme exploring how apprentices defined and understood themselves and their identities.

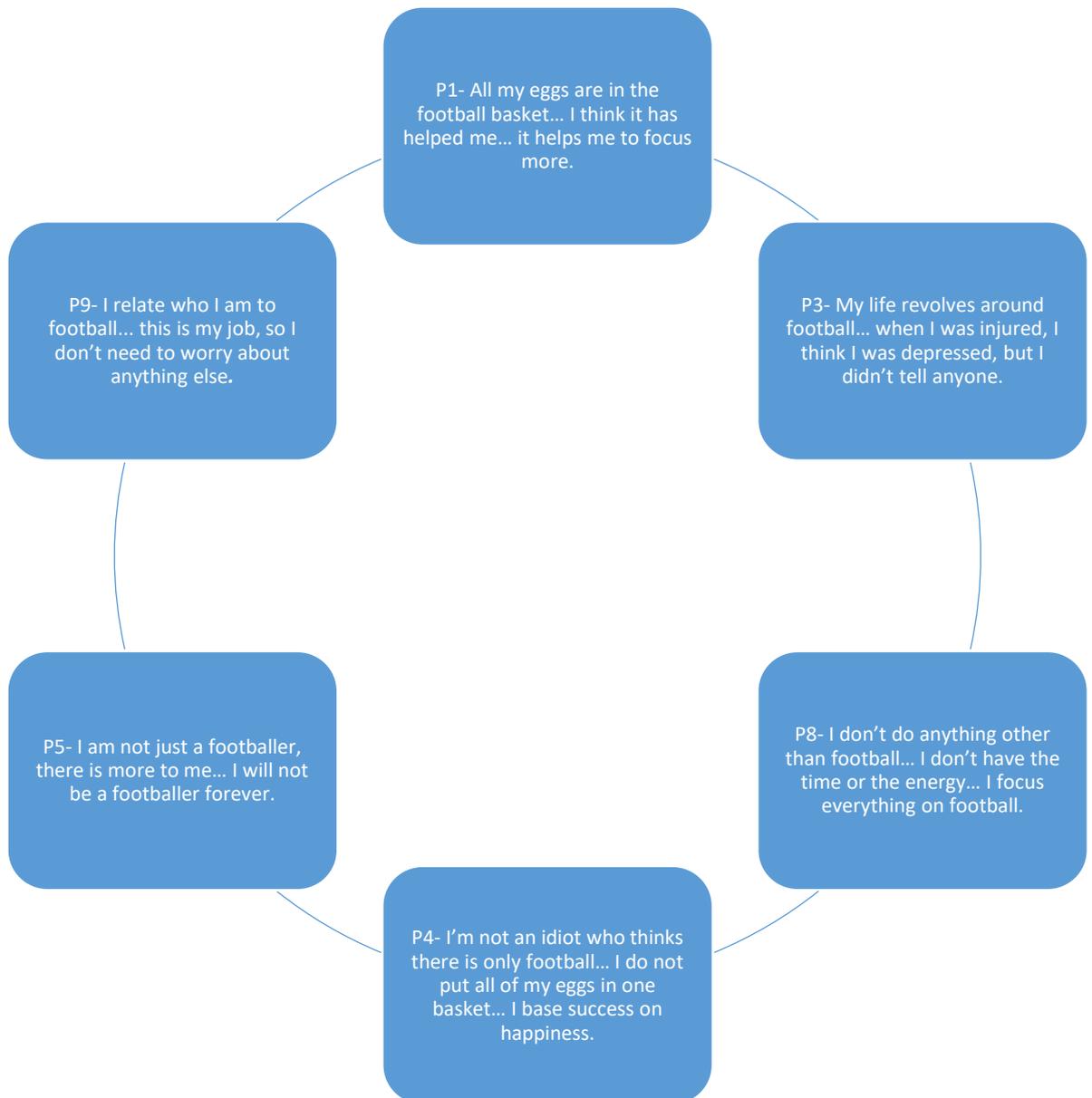


Figure 4.1. Pen profile showing verbatim quotes for the theme 'Understanding Me'.

For all of the players considered in Study 1, there was a clear suggestion that they aimed to progress within the game; to earn the position of being a professional footballer. Success (or failure) in this regard will likely influence the identity of each individual, and in turn how he views himself (Roderick, 2006b). For every player interviewed, their position as a young footballer was central and pivotal in supporting how they viewed themselves and an element of their life upon which they developed their identity. However, for a number of these players, their statements suggested the career aspiration of becoming a professional footballer, had encouraged them to adopt a position whereby they were choosing to elevate this element of their identity and potentially neglecting, or rejecting, other areas of their identity. Some statements would fulfil the exclusive AI position as suggested by classic identity-related research (Brewer et al., 1993). Stambulova et al. (2014) suggests the adoption of greater balance and breadth to athletes' identities, evidenced by searching for optimal balance between sport and other life spheres (e.g., achieving in education, developing supportive social relationships, maintaining health and well-being), is supportive to athletes within the domains of elite sport. It has been suggested how athletes adopting such identities are well-equipped in coping with transition (Lavalley, 2005, Douglas and Carless, 2009). However, certain findings here are similar to the work of Mitchell et al. (2014) and Brown and Potrac (2009), who suggest young players reject the suggestion of balance, in regards to their identity, and instead focus all of their time, energy and definition of self on the athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993).

For certain players, their identities appeared exclusively related to their sporting accomplishments. Player 9's statement in suggesting '*I relate who I am to football... this is my job, so I don't need to worry about anything else*', offers an indication of a possibly strong and exclusive AI. For Roderick (2014), the lines between work and

self can become blurred for footballers. Further, it could be suggested how such a quote is well justified to support the theory that young athletes, and footballers specifically can overly-invest within their AI (Brown and Potrac, 2009). For this particular player, as an example, in light of his upcoming contract decision (i.e., released or retained), and the raft of research to propose the transition/retirement issues associated with an exclusive AI, such views could be seen as potentially problematic for his post-apprenticeship (Park et al., 2013). Research to utilise this theory suggests the player's mental health and well-being may be compromised should he be released from his employment as a footballer, through experiencing some form of identity 'loss' (Lavallee et al., 1997, Sparkes, 1998, Tsang, 2000, Brown and Potrac, 2009, Carless and Douglas, 2013a). Owing to the attrition rates associated throughout elite youth football, it is clear that such a narrow understanding of identity may increase the likelihood of a player experiencing adjustment difficulties upon release. According to Lavallee (2005), for some players, such adjustment difficulties may prove to be severe.

The suggestion from Player 8 whereby, *'I don't do anything other than football... I don't have the time or the energy... I focus everything on football'* alludes to a potential transition risk, a somewhat narrow understanding of identity, and a complete disregard for any notion of concurrent PD alongside his football. However, in line with the critique of such research as offered by Hickey (2015), the somewhat superficial labelling of an identity as 'athletic' and/or 'exclusive', offers a gross oversimplification of a complex phenomenon. Labelling and discussing identity in this way, perhaps, does not permit players to understand themselves in multiple ways.

To develop an appreciation that identities are highly complex and individualised, and to allow for greater research understanding in this field to emerge, space must be made

within the academic literature to allow such identities a ‘voice’ (Douglas and Carless, 2014). Within the above pen profile, evidence of greater complexity is within Player 4’s suggestion that, *‘I’m not an idiot who thinks there is only football... I do not put all of my eggs in one basket... I base success on happiness’*. Douglas (2014) suggests the reporting of identities through over-simplified means (e.g., an exclusive AI), creates a false reading of a more multifaceted issue. For Hickey (2015), specifically within professional football, there was evidence to suggest players constructed alternative identities through narratives wherein they reported there was more to them than just performing at their sport. For Douglas and Carless (2014), such views are prevalent within wider elite sport populations as athletes discussed what their careers meant to them, and why they did it, which went against the more usual story depicting how life was sport. However, acceptance for these alternatives can prove problematic as there exists a reluctance within elite sport, firstly, by athletes to voice alternative views for fear of ridicule and/or the potential for deselection, and secondly, for organisations to support the development of athletes’ identities in this way (Carless and Douglas, 2012). In further football-specific research, complexity within the identities of footballers was presented through Roderick’s (2014) suggestion that some players maintained high levels of commitment to their performances, yet became disillusioned with their careers, cynical, and began to dis-identify with the dominant cultural expectations prevalent to their work. Support for footballers having more to their identities than just their football, can be seen through the statement of Player 5, who reports that, *‘I am not just a footballer, there is more to me... I will not be a footballer forever’*. The idea of a young footballer suggesting there was ‘more’ to him, however he may wish to personally define such a term, proposes alternative identities

might be developed and supported within such a highly volatile and all-consuming experience as elite youth football.

4.3.2 Switching Off

The theme presented here, 'Switching Off', is related to the concept of balance Stambulova et al. (2014),

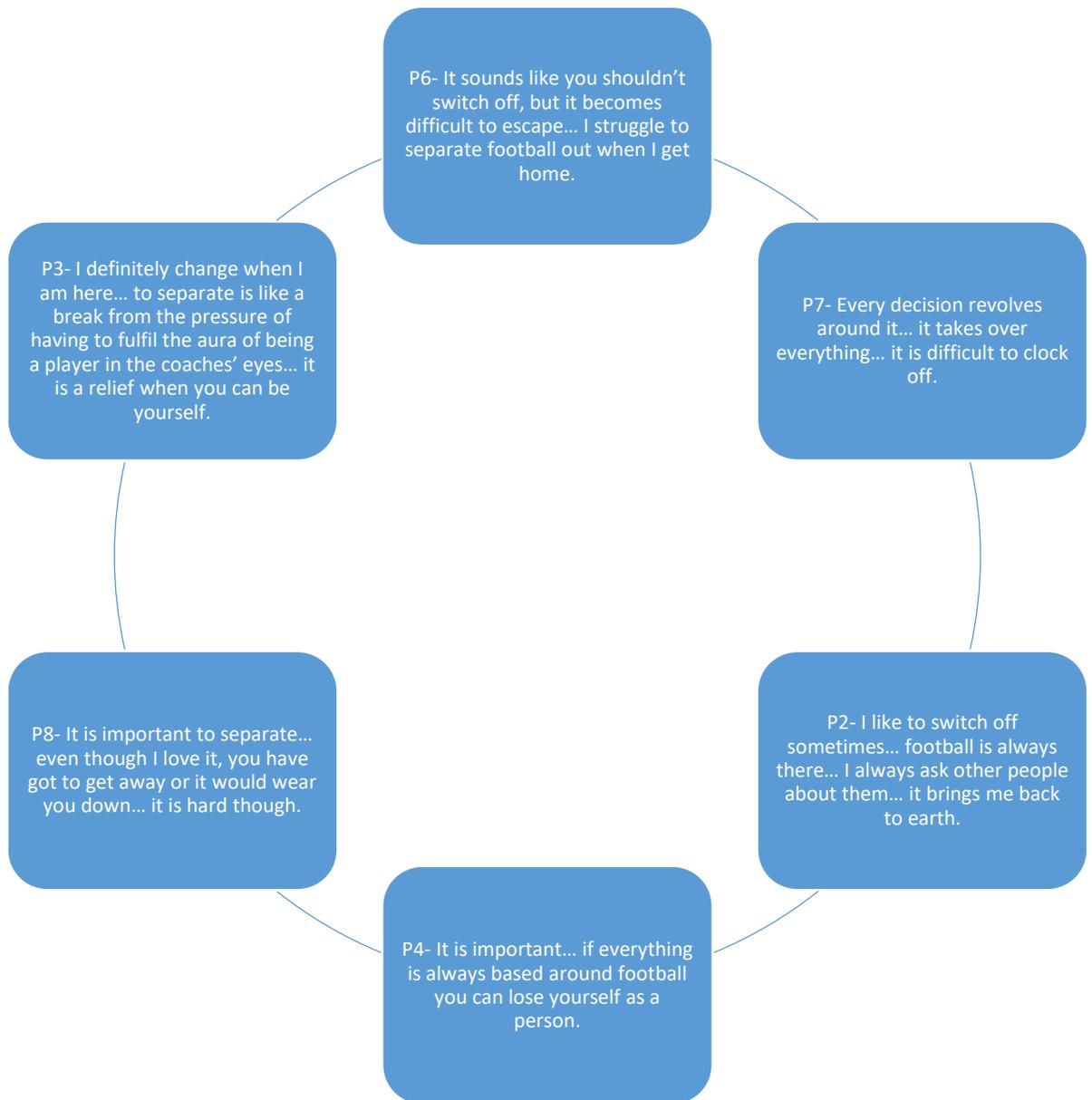


Figure 4.2. Pen profile showing verbatim quotes for the theme 'Switching Off'.

The requirement for multifaceted understandings of how apprentice footballers comprehend identity becomes further evident within the current data in relation to how interviewees discussed their life outside of football. They were asked to discuss if they sought to think about other things when at home (i.e., did they want some separation), or did they continually want to think about football. For some players, they discussed life away from football in relation to helping them find an escape from being a footballer, continually. As Player 8 reports, *'It is important to separate... even though I love it, you have got to get away or it would wear you down... it is hard though'*. For others, those who initially suggested they had nothing else in their life earlier in the interview apart from football, presented a more complex identity than they had initially suggested. All of the players reported the perceived need for them to find some separation (if only for a short while) from being a footballer. For Player 4, *'it is important (to get away)... if everything is always based around football you can lose yourself as a person'*. The idea that he could 'lose' himself as a person if he did not action some mechanism to switch off suggests an understanding as to the possible psychological benefits found in having an identity that is multiple; in this case, only partly, and not exclusively, related to football. This understanding as to the apparent requirement to 'get away' from one's sport is supported within the work of Price et al. (2010) and Aquilina (2013) who reported elite athletes found alternative activities (i.e., education, charity work, alternative vocational training etc.) helpful in managing the challenges associated with their pursuits of athletic success.

As the players discussed this concept and unanimously proposed they sought to find some degree of separation, some explained the difficulties in actualising this aim. For Player 7, *'Every decision revolves around it... it takes over everything... it is difficult to clock off'*. This was not an isolated view, the perceived difficulty in 'clocking off'

became apparent as several players discussed their struggles in justifying their need for separation, whilst maintaining an approach to their work that they felt satisfied with, and felt was conducive supporting their career progression. As Player 6 proposed, *'it sounds like you shouldn't switch off, but it becomes difficult to escape... I struggle to separate football out when I get home'*. This comment suggested certain expectations prevalent in how he felt a footballer 'should' behave, and perhaps a sense of guilt if he deviated from what he perceived others thought was appropriate behaviour. In short, he was looking for an escape (a balance between his sporting and non-sporting identities), but was wrestling with some cultural influences. This interpretation of expected behaviours begins to position the cultural influence young players may construe surrounding their careers, and how this impacts upon their understanding of self and identity (Roderick, 2006b).

The social process of identity development was particularly felt by one player who suggested his *relief* when leaving his club environment, due to how he perceived the challenges of presenting himself at work. As Player 3 suggested, *'I definitely change when I am here... to separate is like a break from the pressure of having to fulfil the aura of being a player in the coaches' eyes... it is a relief when you can be yourself'*. Such an approach by the player, one wherein he seeks favour through the presentation of an idealised self is positioned by Goffman (1959) as a cornerstone for all social interactions. Player 3's 'presentation of self' supports Hickey and Roderick (2017) who identified Goffman's work as relevant within research attempting to understand how players construct identities within the context of elite youth football. Player 3 interpreted what he believed his coaches were expecting of him, and the sense of relief (from a psychological perspective) associated with being able to depart from this presentation.

The data here suggests that all of the players were actively seeking a form of respite/escape/separation from continually fulfilling the identity, and subsequent expected behaviours, of an apprentice footballer. Yet, for some, they started to express a concern in regards to how such an idea might not align to the dominant cultural expectations of their employing club. The following section begins to depict these cultural expectations, as experienced by the players, and proposes how they can impact upon a player's understanding of identity.

4.3.3 Club Environments

How the players perceived their individual club environment, positioned the respective football club as a strong influence within their football careers, and their wider lives (Roderick, 2006c).

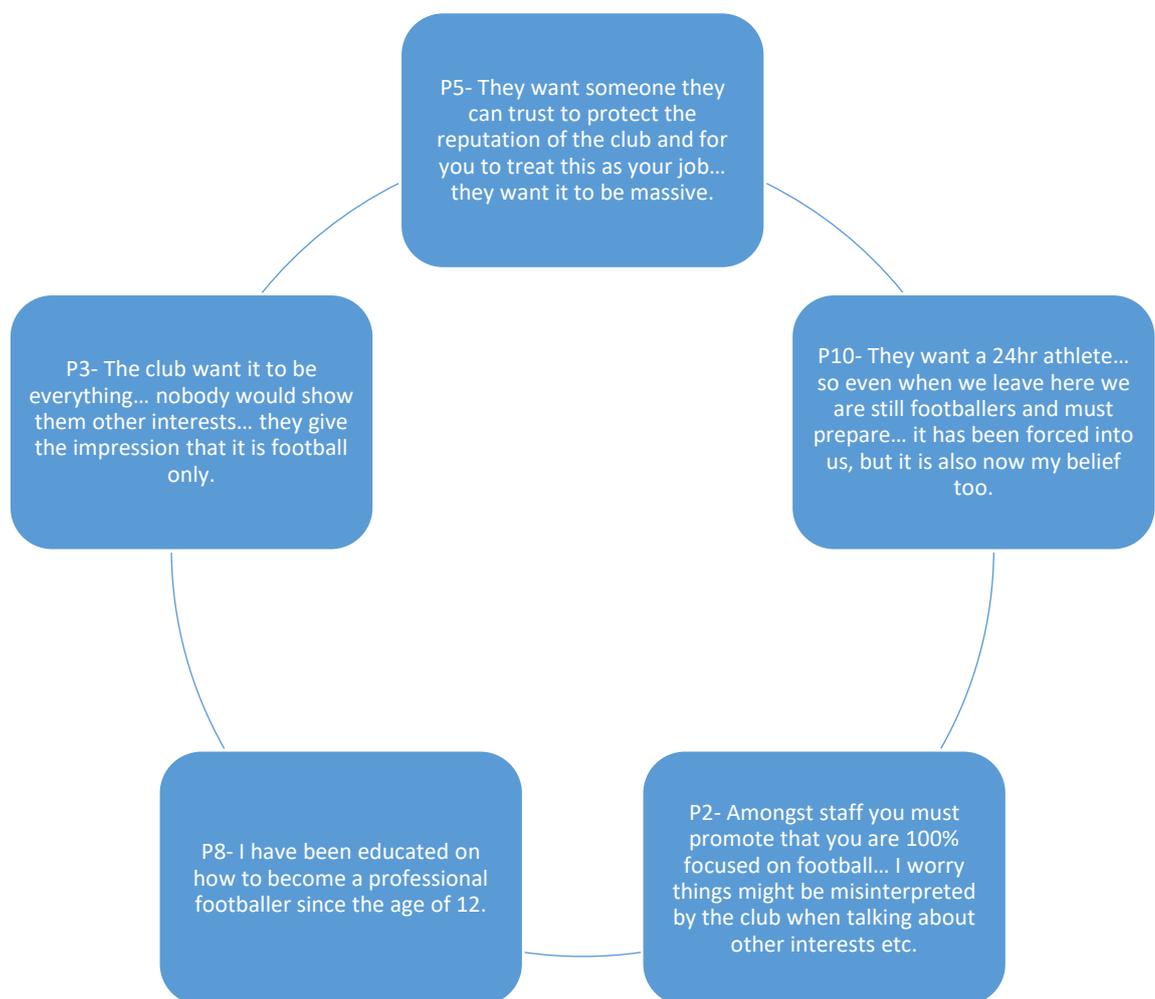


Figure 4.3. Pen profile showing verbatim quotes for the theme ‘Club Environment’

The influence of working environments upon how people interact, behave and define themselves is not an isolated occurrence within elite youth football, of course (Dutton et al., 2010). However, the data presented here evidences how the players perceive their club has a particularly powerful influence upon them. Consequently, this appeared to influence how they understood their identities (Mitchell et al., 2014)

The data presented suggests a potentially strong and complex relationship between how the players perceived their club environments and how this influenced their identities. To illustrate, the data presented thus far proposes players who, on the surface, appeared unable to understand their identities away from the football field. Yet, many of those same players were actively seeking some form of separation from maintaining such an identity. Potential cultural influences behind such views were exposed through the players reluctance to discuss their ideas surrounding separation at their club for fear of how this might be interpreted. In support, Player 2 proposed a view whereby, *'amongst staff you must promote that you are 100% focused on football... I worry things might be misinterpreted by the club when talking about other interests'*. Similarly, Player 3 proposed, *'the club want it to be everything... nobody would show them other interests... they give the impression that it is football only'*. For Cushion and Jones (2014), young players are socialised to understand how the club wishes them to behave, and such behaviours are positioned as imperative should they wish to gain favour and progress.

For some of the players included here, there appeared to be a tension between two positions; how they wished to behave and how they perceived they were expected to behave. In effect, the players collectively proposed they sought to separate themselves from being a footballer, yet they suggested their clubs, and respective staff members, were unsupportive regarding their separation. Throughout Study 1, there was evidence

to suggest that several players were aware of the multiplicity of their identities (i.e., they wished to separate from football and see themselves as something else for a portion of their day), yet, within the club environment, the players were concerned that admitting to such behaviour might be misinterpreted. This relationship can be considered within the context of narrative tension (Carless and Douglas, 2013b). Here, athletes are aware of the dominant identity narratives surrounding their profession (i.e., their success depends upon their total sacrifice and dedication to their sport) and find issue should their own identity narrative not fit within this view. For Carless and Douglas (2013b), narrative tension, or feeling like one's narrative does not 'fit' within the surrounding culture, can cause psychological issues both within career, and through retirement. The athlete feels a tension between the cultural expectations, the majority of which they wish to fulfil so that they are selected and progress, and how they really think and wish to behave. For the players here, this tension appeared difficult to comprehend as their primary focus was to succeed, be selected, and attain the position of being a professional footballer. Therefore, they felt displaying a 'good attitude' (Roderick, 2006c) to their work was their best opportunity.

For some of the players here, they appeared all too willing to do what they perceived was required, and saw part of this good attitude as concerned with hiding other areas of themselves and showing a total dedication and obsession to their football. It appeared they did not perceive they were permitted to have anything else in their lives, apart from their football, and therefore they hid other things that might have been important to them. Alternatively, for others, they may have withdrawn from allowing other interests, or the pursuit of other interests, to support them. The players here proposed the expectations were for them to prioritise success on the football pitch, and nothing else.

From this data, it is suggested that certain clubs wished to inculcate young players to adopt the view that multiple identities would not allow them to perform and progress. To varying degrees, the players interpreted the expectations placed upon them by their employers as requiring them to become the '24hr' athlete. The phrase was coined by Player 10, whereby *'they (the club) want a 24hr athlete... so even when we leave here we are still footballers and must prepare... it has been forced into us but it is also my belief too'*. The idea of such beliefs being 'forced into us', suggests the messages the players received were powerful and persuasive; so much so that players began to adopt these beliefs as their own. They perceived them to be logical and necessary to achieve success. The implication as to being a 24hr athlete clearly dictates there is no time, space and support for anything else to be included within a player's life. Subsequently these expectations can demand a very narrow and one-dimensional understanding of identity.

Of further interest to the perceived club expectations, was the idea of this process being an ongoing practice for a number of years. As Player 8 reports, *'I have been educated on how to become a professional footballer since the age of 12'*. The players recruited to this study all had varying pre-apprenticeship histories with professional clubs, however, the earlier age at which young footballers are recruited to professional football clubs, and these club's ability to reduce formal education capacities to increase training time (EPPP, 2011), becomes particularly important for consideration in light of these comments.

To concur with Hickey and Roderick (2017), the future self the players here wished to achieve (i.e., professional footballer) appeared to carry with it a set of beliefs and behaviours surrounding how to achieve this, or a blueprint for success, which is continually presented and reinforced to the players from within their clubs. The

majority of neophyte professional footballers were reluctant to occupy a marginal position within clubs; their central purpose was to be a valued footballer (Roderick, 2006b), one playing games and progressing. Through outlining one player's perceptions of the working conditions inherent to professional football, Roderick and Schumacker (2016) proposed the necessity to perform to a continual high level, to be selected above peers, to face public and private criticism, the potential threat to identity caused by de-selection, and to navigate a landscape of continued contractual insecurity. It would appear that to mitigate against these concerns, for a number of players interviewed here, they conformed to the strong cultural influences surrounding identity and behaviour when at work, and were left to wrestle with these implications when away from work. To simplify, the game appeared to demand a 24/7 footballer, yet the players themselves sought an ability, and perhaps some external support, to switch off from this incessant approach to success.

4.3.4 Approaching Education

Formalised education is the most structured PD initiative to influence the lives of apprentice footballers (Platts, 2012). The players within Study 1 offered numerous viewpoints in how they approached this element of their scholarships.

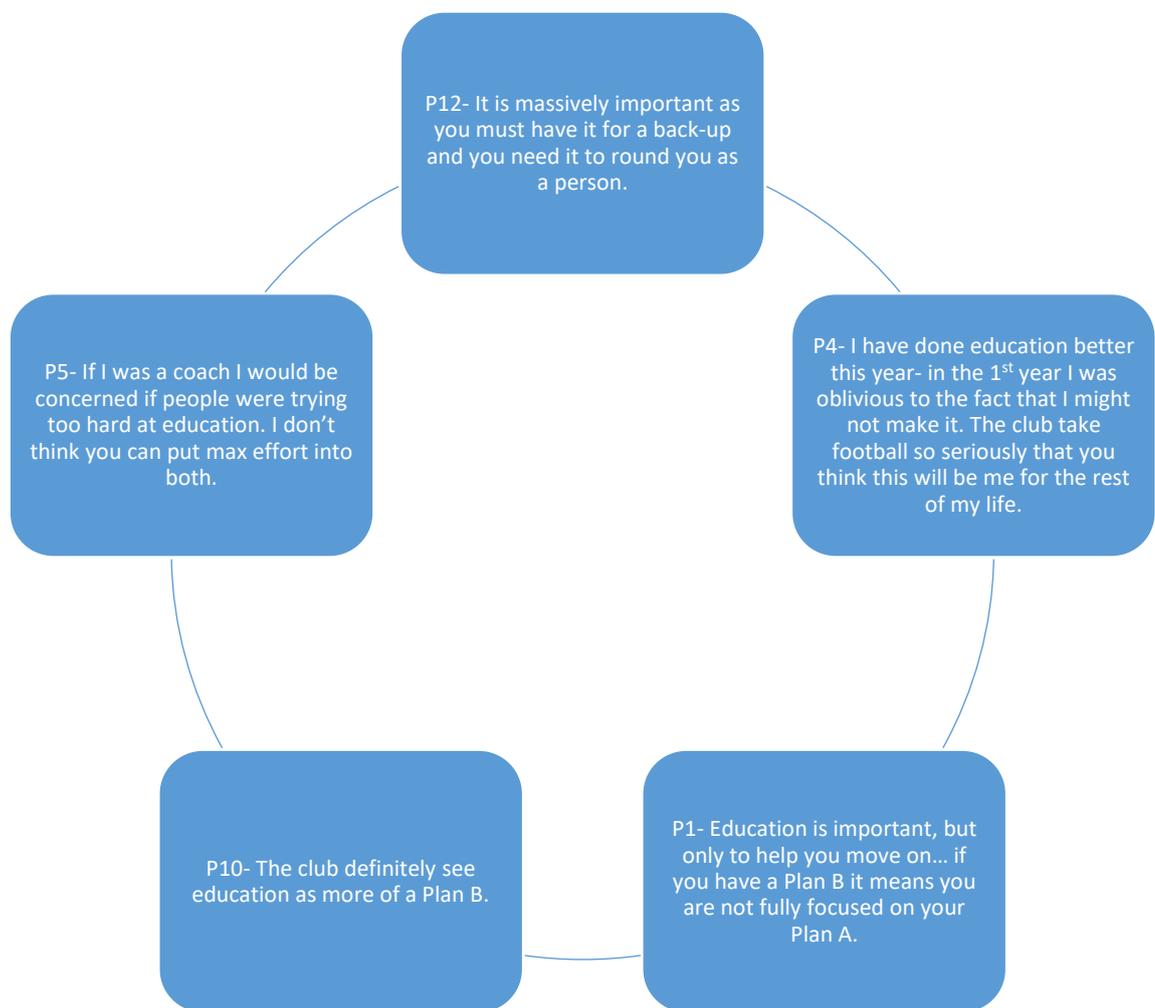


Figure 4.4. Pen profile showing verbatim quotes for the theme ‘Approaching Education’

Formal education is fundamental within the development processes for young footballers; indeed, their continued engagement within formal education throughout their apprenticeship is a cornerstone to EPPP legislation (EPPP, 2011). As previously presented, independent to the research concerned with the education of young footballers, there exists a growing body of literature to suggest that athletes embracing both education and sport, with the right support, can find great success in both (McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis, 2004). Aquilina (2013) further reported elite student athletes suggested their concurrent education was fundamental to their success as an athlete as it offered them opportunities to maintain a sense of balance within their lives and stay motivated to their training. For some of the players here, when offering their perceptions surrounding education, they explained contrasting viewpoints to the elite student-athletes considered by Aquilina (2013). Players suggested their sport and concurrent education were often in conflict, and/or they perceived education as a means ended pursuit, as opposed to developmental.

For certain players, their approach to education was evidently pragmatic, and only that. Dual career (i.e., combining sport and education, or sport and work) is positioned as a good solution for balancing sport and other spheres of an athlete's life, and preparing them for their life after sport according to Stambulova et al. (2014). However, for the players considered here, the logic they attached to their ongoing education was lacking in a developmental appreciation, with several feeling education was to be endured, as opposed to embraced. Reasons for this approach could be traced to the failure in content and/or delivery style to captivate an already sceptical group as to the positive developmental opportunities of education (Platts, 2012). Yet, crucial to their views appeared to be how they perceived their clubs positioned their education. This can be seen within Player 10's suggestion that, *'the club definitely see education as more of*

Plan B' (i.e., a Plan B is a career away from professional football). Collectively, there was no specific account whereby a player suggested his club had explicitly told him to neglect and/or disengage with education through his apprenticeship. Yet, it appeared club staff were inadvertently perpetuating the pragmatic necessity of education should players fail to succeed in football, as opposed to the potential developmental opportunities available to players through education (Nesti and Sulley, 2014).

Player 5's statement that, '*if I was a coach I would be concerned if people were trying too hard at education. I don't think you can put max effort into both*', suggests this player did not believe that improved education was linked to improved on-pitch performances. Further, he potentially sees academic effort as detrimental to his career aspirations. Perhaps, this has been implied from within the club environment and the result is a player that does not see the value education can offer him, as a neophyte professional footballer. Previous football-related work of Monk and Russell's (2000) suggested 'football's occupational culture militated against trainees with a more academic bent' (p. 65). For the more academically minded player, interest in further educational opportunities was considered to be a lack of commitment to their football career for Parker (2001). It would appear that many years later, there is still an undercurrent of this same view in not accepting education as part of ongoing PD for young footballers.

The position of Player 4, in that, '*I have done education better this year- in the 1st year I was oblivious to the fact that I might not make it. The club take football so seriously that you think this will be me for the rest of my life*', suggests that club staff are again crucial in how footballers approach education. In this instance, football staff were not positioning education as fundamental to development, in the widest sense, but instead

were perpetuating football-first sentiments within their players. This idea, and those presented earlier, supports early work considering the role of education and welfare officers within elite youth football clubs by Richardson et al. (2004), which suggested a lack of synthesis between education and football. As such, it appears that over a decade since the conclusion of this work, and the explicit requirements of EPPP documentation to move educational practice from the periphery and into the forefront of player development philosophies, similar themes are still emerging from within elite youth football.

The data here suggests that players within the EPPP system were approaching education as only a necessity should they fail to emerge successfully from their apprenticeships, as opposed to an activity to be embraced for ongoing PD. To elaborate such conclusions with more clarity would require information to be drawn from interviewing the coaches/club staff themselves, an area not included within this research. However, Potrac et al. (2012) suggested coaches employed within the elite youth system were under considerable pressure to produce players of sufficient quality to progress through the levels at their club. As such, coaches were judged solely in relation to the talented footballers they helped to produce. It is therefore logical that coaches might prioritise their attention, and their players' attention, away from other areas, such as education. Coaches within the research of Bourke (2003) outlined concern with the amount of time and energy their young players were devoting to their education, as they suggested this might be a distraction to their progression as footballers. Such research is somewhat dated, and does not reflect how players interpret their coaches' beliefs surrounding education as evidenced here; indeed, within this work, all the players reported their clubs were generally supportive of education. However, what appears to be missing in regards to how young players are

formally educated throughout their apprenticeship is an understanding as to the potential developmental benefits players can accrue through engaging with education, as opposed to the pragmatic approach as suggested within this data.

The means-ended approach to education as suggested here is in stark contrast to the conclusions of Nesti and Sulley (2014) who explored the player development philosophies and practices applied by the most successful European football academies. Within such club structures, there was a strong conviction as to the role of education in contributing significantly to player performance. Collectively, these clubs promoted education as being developmental and performance-related to their players. In turn, this approach supports the players' adoption of broader and more complex identities. For Nesti (2010), through working within the confines of the EPL, suggested the optimal conditions for supporting player performances and development were when players were continually encouraged to develop themselves away from the confines of the training pitch. The data presented here would suggest this type of experience is not afforded to current apprentices within the Football League. For McGillivray and McIntosh (2006), their summary was that young British players were recruited into a sport which exerted a strong social influence upon its employees, and promoted physical capital by devaluing educational/cultural capital from the outset. Their conclusions suggested the majority of players were more than ready to adopt the extreme attitude of abandoning education to pursue football (McGillivray et al., 2005). The results reported here suggest that the practices on offer to young players are failing to engage already sceptical young men as to the potential positive developmental outcomes to be achieved through meaningful education, as part of their ongoing PD as young footballers.

4.3.5 Defining Personal Development

This theme explores how the apprentices expressed and defined the specific concept of PD.

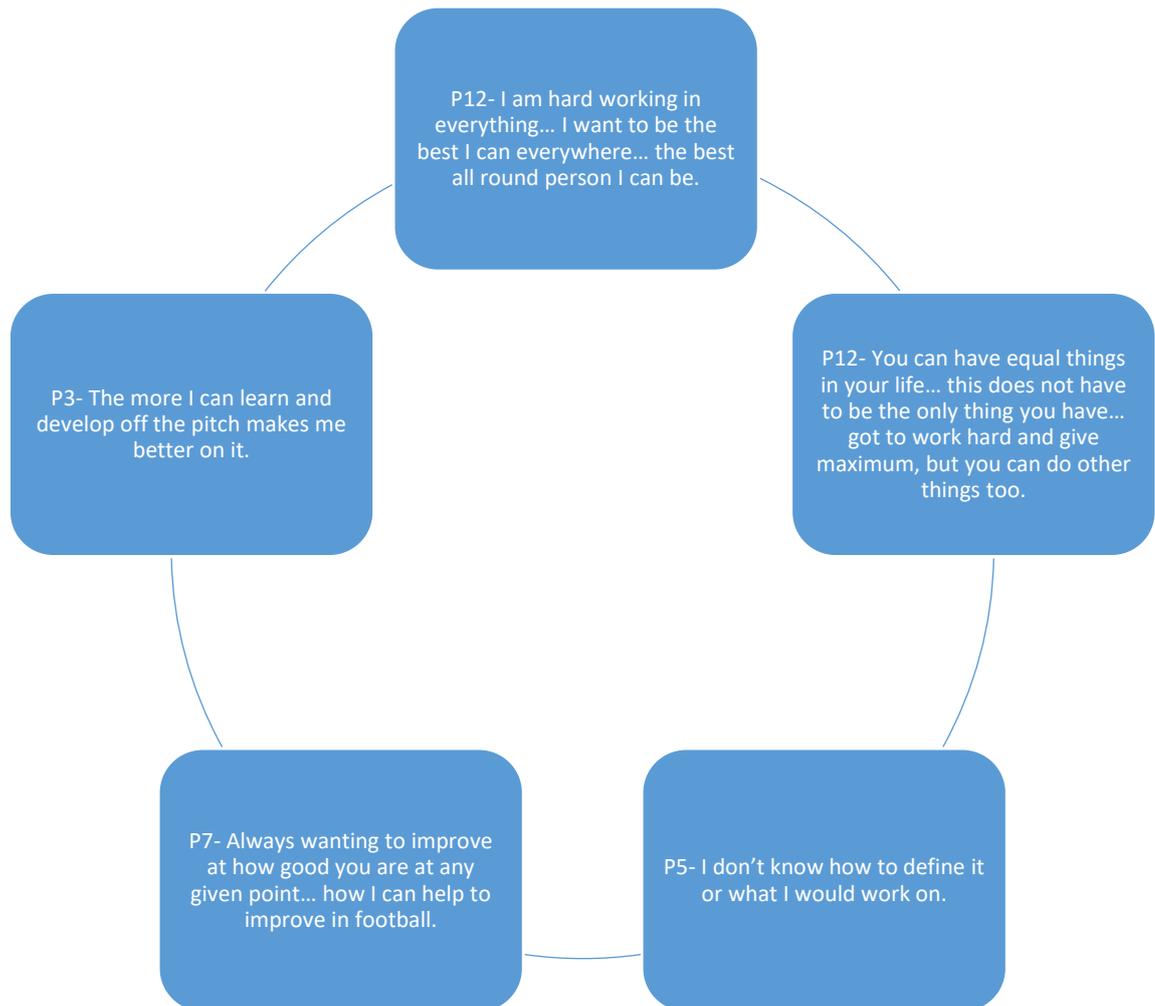


Figure 4.5. Pen profile showing verbatim quotes for the theme ‘Defining Personal Development’.

In returning to a definition of PD as being the continual growth and development of a person to achieve success across multiple areas of life (Danish et al., 1993), and to exhibit a broad, balanced and varied identity, certain players within Study 1 evidenced such ideals. As previously stated, all of the players expressed how much succeeding in their chosen career of football meant to them and how much effort, determination and sacrifice they were willing to exert in order to realise their dreams. However, some players were able to define, talk about, and understand themselves through a more complex appreciation of their multifaceted identities, and were able to identify themselves detached from their football performances and careers. An example of this is Player 12's suggestion that, *'you can have equal things in your life... this does not have to be the only thing you have...you've got to work hard and give your maximum, but you can do other things as well'*. This view outlined how performing in football was still very important within his life, yet he did not rely on this achievement as his only marker for justifying a successful life.

Some players reported a continuing investment within themselves academically (i.e., they valued the contribution of education to aide their development), socially (i.e., through maintaining/developing relationships away from their sport) and understood themselves to be more than the 'football is life' narrative. Through continued discussions with players, they had constructed these views despite the influence of their clubs, not because of their influence. Instead, players spoke of the influence of their parents in supporting and developing them to embrace alternative definitions of success and maintain a sense of balance to their neophyte careers and wider lives. The players then appeared to enter the world of professional football and push hard for success, but refuse to conform to the dominant messages of 'football is life' and how this should be prioritised before all else. As Player 12 suggests, *'I am hard working in*

everything... I want to be the best I can everywhere... the best all round person I can be'. It appeared that the players who could be considered as having an awareness of their on-going PD, were acting independently of any club-led initiatives.

In regards to the specific term of Personal Development, all players believed this was an important element in supporting successful careers and wider lives, however, when pressed to offer a definition, some found difficulty in articulating such a concept in relation to themselves. Of course, being unable to articulate a definition through an interview is not representative of a lack of understanding. Some of the players explained the concept and their understanding of PD through interview, without being able to offer a formal or coherent definition.

The players who expressed a broader awareness and understanding of their identity and PD, appeared to break from the dominant culture of their sport and maintained a sense of balance in how they adopted football into their lives, and found a sense of purpose and responsibility as to their on-going development as a young person, alongside a young footballer. These players exhibited a strong foundation of family, education and social development. This was evident in the ways they spoke about themselves and what was important to them; football was always a priority, but they defined themselves in other ways and had more in their lives.

Several player narratives supported the work of Douglas and Carless (2009) and Nesti (2011b) who reported the often multifaceted identities of high-performing athletes and their active pursuits to embrace continual growth and development within various life spheres. The work of Nesti (2010) is the only research to consider players specifically and exclusively from within the EPL. He proposed how this league was predominantly constructed of non-British footballers and was therefore a different context to the

studies of Parker (2001) and Roderick (2006b) who considered predominantly British working class demographics of players and staff. It is Nesti's (2010) suggestion that the majority of non-British players he worked with during his 10 years as a sport psychologist in the EPL understood themselves in complex ways, maintained a balanced perspective to their careers as footballers, whilst achieving high levels of performance. He suggested these players constructed many different narratives around their careers and wider lives, engaged within structured activities to maintain some separation from their work, and concluded how top-level performances were likely related to complex identities.

4.3.6 Managing Now And Looking Ahead

At points, all of the interviews invariably turned towards the present and the future. How the players discussed the uncertainty of their contract decision, and how they approached this upcoming transition, often appeared related to how they had understood their identity and PD.

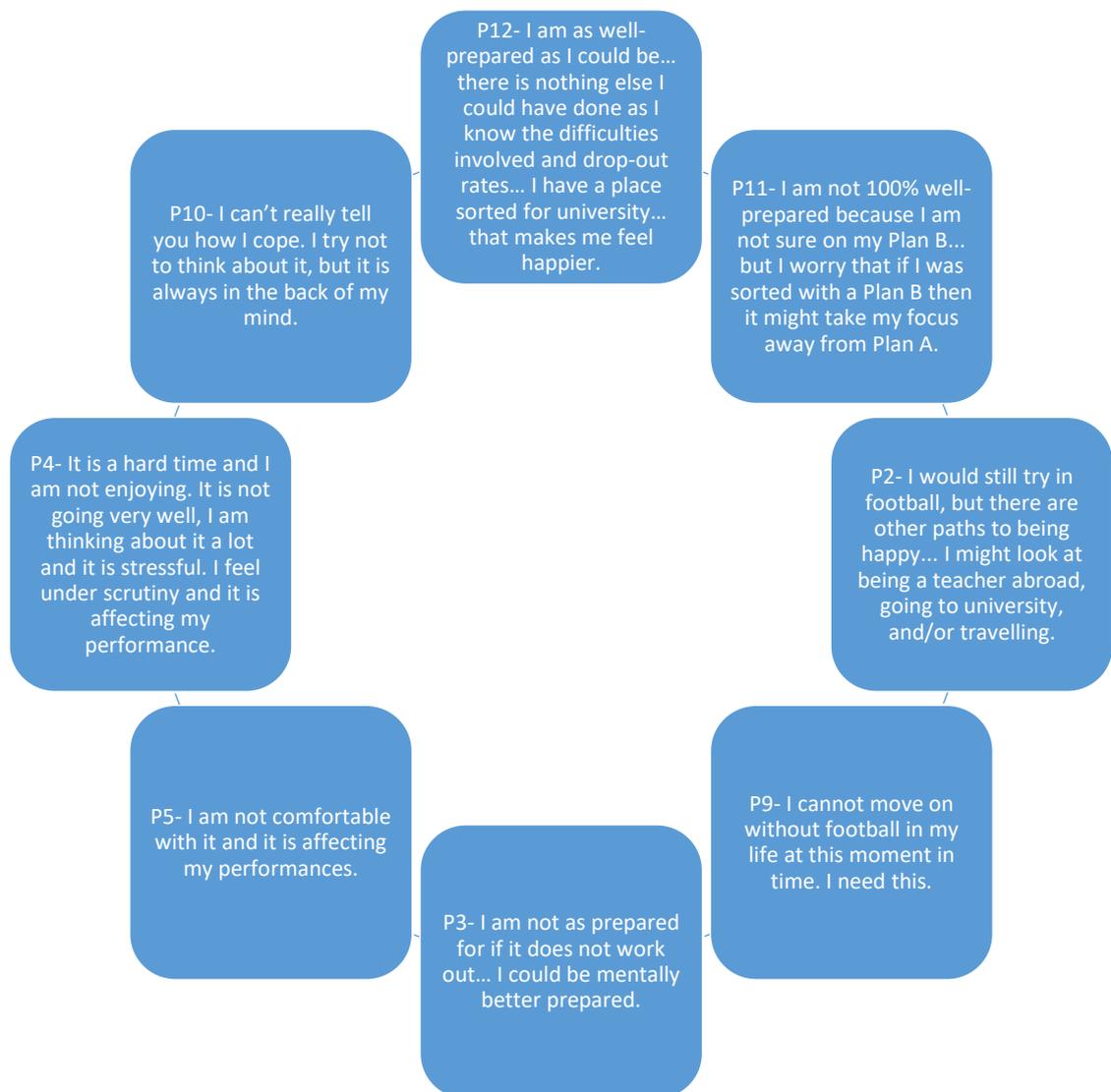


Figure 4.6. Pen profile showing verbatim quotes for the theme 'Managing Now and Looking Ahead'.

All of the players interviewed were experiencing difficulties in managing their current positions as the potential for success or failure hinged upon one pivotal decision. As Player 10 suggested, *'I can't really tell you how I cope. I try not to think about it, but it is always in the back of my mind'*. However, those players who had earlier expressed a position wherein they were reluctant to consider their on-going PD and, despite their desire to 'switch off', had instead constructed an identity heavily reliant upon their continued success, appeared particularly unprepared for their transition.

On a practical level, despite the upcoming decision, several players had no alternative plans; as Player 11 reports, *'I am not 100% well-prepared because I am not sure on my Plan B'*. Relatedly, as Player 3 disclosed, *'I am not as prepared for if it does not work out... I could be better mentally prepared'* suggested a concern as to how an unwanted contract decision might affect him psychologically. Yet, instead of realising their lack of alternative planning might cause them a more severe transition experience, some players still refused to consider themselves as anything but young footballers. As was the case with Player 9, who suggested *'I cannot move on without football in my life at this moment in time. I need this'*. Previous research (Gearing, 1999, Lavalley and Robinson, 2007, Brown and Potrac, 2009) has outlined the negative transition experiences of young players who, before their release, had subscribed to similar identity constructs as expressed by some players in Study 1. In light of the previous critique associated with over-simplifying and labelling identity constructs as healthy/unhealthy, the views of the players here should not be viewed as a pre-cursor for compromised mental health should they be released. However, such identity understandings can be considered against alternative viewpoints, and tentative conclusions suggested.

Player 2 offered an alternative approach to managing his transition by suggesting, *'I would still try in football, but there are other paths to being happy... I might look at being a teacher abroad, going to university, and/or travelling'*. Such a view supports an idea whereby he is able to appreciate success away from sport, should his initial efforts for a career in football be unfruitful. A further example of an alternative approach is Player 12's proposal that, *'I am as well-prepared as I could be... there is nothing else I could have done as I know the difficulties involved and drop-out rates... I have a place sorted for university... that makes me feel happier'*. This is an interesting idea, one wherein having an alternative career plan was perceived as supporting greater well-being throughout an otherwise challenging and stressful time. It is positioned that Player 12 is able to adopt this view in relation to his understanding and balanced view of identity and an adoption of on-going PD. In short, his understanding of both himself as a young footballer and young person. For Pink et al. (2014), developing alternative interests alongside sport can alleviate some of the concerns experienced during career transition. For Brettschneider (1999), the assertion was that a broad definition of self, allowed for a more positive response to future challenges. This was a view corroborated within the clinical psychology research of Thoits (1983) and Linville (1985) and their suggestion that a broad and complex identity can support individuals through stressful life events.

The work of McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) asserted how players could be considered complicit in their own oppression within the professional game as they were all too willing to conform to what was expected of them and adopt certain workplace identities and behaviours that neglected their on-going development. As Player 11 suggests, *'I worry that if I was sorted with a Plan B, then it might take my focus away from Plan A'*. Work by Christensen and Sorensen (2009) highlighted the

implicit and explicit messages existing within Danish elite youth football, namely, to progress in the game, and to be accepted and respected, young players should be only thinking about football. This is a view to suggest that in spite of the well-publicised insecurities of the profession, and especially a likely failure to progress from their apprenticeship for young players, even considering other options can be seen as detrimental to on-pitch performances (McGillivray et al., 2005, Roderick, 2006c, Brown and Potrac, 2009). However, certain players as reported here, suggested they were willing to break from this ‘oppression’ and suggested alternative ways to navigate the journey into professional football were possible. For these players, the logical approach to an impending contract decision was to have another plan in regards to their future should their news be unfavourable.

The previous research to consider the identities of footballers has suggested the transitions of some players who define themselves in ways related to their on-pitch success, can be problematic in regards to their mental health and well-being should they be deselected (Blakelock et al., 2016). Whilst this was not specifically considered within this research (i.e., the players were interviewed pre-contract decision) it could be proposed how certain players appeared to be exhibiting similar views, and, as such, perhaps had the potential to experience de-selection in a similar fashion to the players considered by Brown and Potrac (2009) and Blakelock et al. (2016). However, there is a lack of research to focus upon the potential impact of identity constructs upon the on-pitch performances of footballers *during* careers. The data presented here offers some tentative suggestions. As the players understandably discussed their current performances during interview, they expressed performance concerns owing to the uncertainty of their futures. As Player 5 suggests, *‘I am not comfortable with it (waiting for the decision) and it is affecting my performances’*. It appeared how the

uncertainty created by not having a transition plan was negatively influencing their current performances. Further, for other players who had been influenced by the all-or-nothing (24/7) approach to their career (and identity) as promoted by their club environments, this had also left them with performance concerns. For Player 4, *'It is a hard time and I am not enjoying. It is not going very well, I am thinking about it a lot and it is stressful. I feel under scrutiny and it is affecting my performance'*. A myriad of complex relationships underpin the performances of athletes, however, identity understanding could potentially occupy a central position (Nesti et al., 2012). For the players here, at this point in their careers, the potential for failure was high. This failure may have been perceived as a direct challenge to their identity, which may, in turn, have caused some players psychological distress. Perhaps, young players may find difficulty in containing this direct identity threat and still managing to perform. There is growing evidence to show athletes achieving success through the support of a broad and complex understanding of their identity, which is contradicting the suggestion that sporting accomplishments are only possible through a totalitarian and exclusive obsession with sport, at the neglect of other possible identities (Douglas and Carless, 2014).

The majority of sports science research includes a performance-enhancement rationale and justification (Reade et al., 2008), and so for the current research to be acceptable within the world of professional football, perhaps similar performance-enhancing work is required. The work here is clearly insufficient, nor is it designed to justify any performance enhancement claims, however, the reports from some players indicate there is a lack of understanding as to identity complexity, and/or a lack of support from those around them to support and legitimise their broader understanding. This may be causing them to struggle in maintaining performance through their current uncertainty.

There are many factors involved within producing performances within the sporting field, and for any one discipline to proclaim they have found the key to unlocking performance potential is ill advised (Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006). However, the work here does suggest a tentative link between the ways in which players constructed their identities and their self-referenced ability to perform on the pitch.

4.4 Conclusions

In general, the players considered within this research interpreted their club environments as encouraging them to view themselves as footballers, constantly, become a 24hr athlete and behave accordingly, and to prioritise their career progression above all else. Several elements of this conclusion are understandable given the context; the interviewees were young footballers attempting to become professionals, and those encouraging their progression (e.g., club staff) may be judged upon the number and quality of the players they help to produce (Potrac et al., 2012). However, collectively, it appeared the players considered here were not encouraged to value, or develop, themselves away from the training/match pitch. Further, they were not encouraged to explore an alternative understanding of identity, one of balance, complexity and breadth, and one whereby being a young footballer was central and important, but existed concurrently alongside an idea of continual development across a range of other life spheres. For some of the players here, they were willing to consume such messages and behave in line with how they perceived it was expected for them to think and act; it could be suggested their identity was derived from satisfying cultural expectations. There is limited evidence of the players interviewed here integrating football, and the pursuit of becoming a professional, into their identity,

whilst maintaining a sense of balance and variation as to how they see themselves and their futures. This is in stark contrast to the recommendations of the literature concerned with talent development (Stambulova et al., 2014) wherein it is suggested sport should be incorporated into an athlete's life, as opposed to being all consuming. However, it can be suggested that in reality, this philosophy appears more difficult to implement within the context of elite youth football as the strong cultural influences of football staff/clubs are persuasive, encouraging young players to neglect and marginalise other elements of their lives and identities.

The majority of players considered here, it would appear, are far from achieving a sense of balance as defined by Stambulova et al. (2014) and recommended by the models of Wylleman and Lavallee (2004). It could be suggested how the club environments detailed within these results, as interpreted by the players interviewed, were not specifically evidencing alignment to the EPPP (2011) stated aims to develop players with determination to succeed, but who have an awareness of outside interests and embrace wider developmental opportunities.

It can be further positioned how some of the players had constructed identities upon an idealised view of what they perceived it takes to become a footballer, without having been exposed to differing narratives (or identities) for success. Within the views of British football managers, those players that did not conform to the dominant narratives were treated with suspicion, ridiculed and often removed from the club according to Kelly (2008). This is similar to the proposal of Carless and Douglas (2013b) who suggested elite athletes across a range of sports had purposefully silenced any non-conformist stories surrounding how they viewed and achieved sporting success, for fear of how this might be misrepresented and reflect poorly upon them. The majority of players here failed to evidence an understanding of identity and PD

beyond football, embrace other elements of their lives, or develop as young people detached from the football field.

The notion of separation, or ‘switching off’, and all of the players’ agreement that finding separation will support them within their football careers, suggested a basic appreciation as to the possible benefits (e.g., performance, coping with transition) to be accrued by adopting greater balance within one’s identity. This is an important finding, in unison with Hickey and Roderick (2017), as it suggested that apprentice footballers were active in switching focus from their football and may be keen to develop outside interests to support this idea. However, some players were concerned as to how this might be translated by their clubs, or were still unsure if they should allow themselves to have time away from the game, rather than being the 24-hour athlete. It was clear the idea of separation was not part of the dominant narrative players were exposed to, and, as such, they still appeared confused, often choosing to hide their preferred efforts to action their separation.

When asked to discuss their futures, of course, all of the players were somewhat anxious about how their contract decision might play-out. However, those players who originally suggested their identities were predominantly football-focused, proposed how challenging they would find the process of being released and having to move forward with their lives after such a failure. As such, the players appeared to understand the possible transition difficulties associated within conceiving an identity predominantly supported by football success. Yet, throughout the interview they were reluctant to consider themselves in other ways and make alternative plans, or embrace a more developmental approach to their wider lives. For some players, there was a suggestion they had elevated sporting success to their only possible way of seeing themselves as successful in the future. That the majority of these players will fail is

not a new statistic, or indeed one clouded in secrecy, but some of the players were evidencing a similar finding to Roderick (2006c), inasmuch as they were reluctant to consider other alternatives, despite the well-known attrition rates. Perhaps they all believed they were the one to defeat the odds and enjoy a long and successful career, or if they did not believe this, they were reluctant to admit so. Due to the well-publicised insecurity of their career goals (Roderick, 2006b), and the potential opportunity for performance enhancement (EPPP, 2011), one might assume that players would invest more efforts within broadening their identities and PD away from the football field. However, these results suggested that for some players, this was not the case, and for those that did evidence an appreciation of a balanced identity and on-going PD, this was unrelated to the influence of their respective club.

As previously discussed, the tendency for research to consider the identities of footballers has been to make suggestions as to how the professional game might integrate findings to influence players. This often comes at the end of the study. However, owing to the relationship with the LFE, this project had the opportunity to integrate research findings *within* the project. The findings from Study 1, suggested that apprentice footballers, in the main, display a lack of understanding as to identity and PD. Further, it appeared that the football clubs considered, as perceived by the participants of this research, were collectively failing to support their players' understanding through a wider developmental experience. Of course, there were other factors to consider within this (e.g., the role and influence of parents), but to address these findings more broadly would require the inclusion of parents, club staff and governing bodies within the applied intervention. To affect maximum change requires organisational support; an opportunity not afforded to this thesis. However, the opportunity afforded here was to work directly with the apprentice players and,

ultimately, it is the individual players who are key; in their understanding of identity and PD, and in how they manage their careers (Nesti, 2010). As McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) suggested, the behavioural expectations of clubs and key staff members were not imposed upon helpless players, but rather that players had become complicit in their own oppression and disempowerment through accepting their position as embodied and physical assets.

The succinct conclusions presented within Study 1 highlight areas for consideration when developing a practical intervention to work with apprentice players. In the chapters to follow, this thesis outlines how such themes were addressed within the planning, delivery and evaluation of an informative workshop focussed on identity and PD understanding within elite youth football.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Study 2. Part A. Planning MFT 2015/16

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter is concerned with the planning and delivery of My Future Today (MFT) 2015/16, an informative workshop delivered to LFE apprentice footballers. The planning and delivery of MFT represents a clear shift in focus for this thesis, as attention turns to the practical application of research and ideas. The chapter will offer a transparent account for the reader to understand MFT, my role within its creation, delivery and evaluation, and its role within this research. Firstly, a timeline of events is presented to help orientate the reader as to the chronological order of key events throughout the research, and the remaining sections of the thesis. Then, the chapter will focus on the planning phase of MFT. Within this section, the background information regarding MFT and LFE will be presented, and I will provide personal critique as to the earlier version of MFT as delivered throughout the 2014/15 season. Following this, it will be outlined how the various conclusions from Study 1 (Chapter 4) and the wider literature base were considered and interpreted to support the development of the workshop. The planning section will conclude with the aims of the workshop and the creation of the MFT narrative.

The second section of this chapter will focus upon the delivery of MFT. Within this section, various points of the workshop will be explained in detail. Firstly, the inclusion of ethno-drama within the workshop is justified. Secondly, the logistical information surrounding the workshop is offered. Then, a number of scenes and activities from the workshop, and their explanations, are detailed. Finer detail of the workshop (e.g., scripts and other resources) are provided for the reader within

Appendix B and Appendix C. Finally, a number of auto-ethnographic reflections surrounding my perceptions of delivering MFT are presented.

Throughout the chapter, my role in the planning process and delivery of the workshop is continually outlined. To reiterate, the original contribution this thesis makes to the wider literature base is predominantly through the creation, delivery and evaluation of the MFT workshop; a creative and novel workshop that aimed to utilize research conclusions and wider ideas in a practical manner, within project, and within the career of apprentice footballers.

5.2 Timeline Of Events For MFT 2015/16

The below table offers a timeline of events for the thesis; from the initial LFE meeting in October 2014, to the planning and delivery of MFT 2015/16, to the collecting of data to evaluate MFT from April 2016.

Table 5.1. Timeline of events for thesis

Date	Action
Oct 2014	Initial meeting with Exit and Progression Team (EPT) at LFE
Oct 2014 – Mar 2015	MFT 2014/2015
Apr 2015 – May 2015	Study 1. Data collected
July 2015	Meeting with EPT to discuss Study 1 and related ideas. Invited to plan, deliver and evaluate MFT 2015/2016
Aug 2015 – Oct 2015	Study 2. Part A. Planning MFT 2015/2016
Nov 2015 – Mar 2016	Study 2. Part A. Delivering MFT 2015/2016
Apr 2015 – May 2016	Study 2. Part B. Data collected. Evaluating MFT 2015/2016

5.3 Planning MFT 2015/16

This thesis is concerned with the MFT workshop as planned, delivered and evaluated through the 2015/16 season. However, the workshop had been in existence since 2014/15, and it will be useful to start with a brief outline of this original. The LFE was introduced within the literature review and the burgeoning relationship between the organization and myself/this research was described within Chapter 3. To briefly

summarize, LFE are the education provider for all of the apprentice footballers employed at Football League clubs. The formal education component is a mandatory feature of the apprenticeship and must be completed by all players. In short, LFE provide clubs with the services and support required for the successful completion of their players' qualifications. However, they have a further remit to support apprentices' general health and well-being during their apprenticeship, and support their transition from apprenticeship into a 'positive destination' (either a new career outside of playing football, higher education or a professional football contract) (League Football Education, 2019).

For post-apprenticeship support, the LFE offers advice and guidance to apprentices, and monitors and tracks their post-apprenticeship destinations. Apprentices can access post-apprenticeship support from the LFE for 3 years after they leave the system. Usually this support will involve advice and guidance and in facilitating links for players with approved employment partners/opportunities. To facilitate this significant brief, the LFE have an Exit and Progression Team (EPT). For clarity, MFT was originally conceived in 2014 from within the EPT department, as they wanted to change their original careers event and had decided to develop a one-day workshop. The EPT suggested their original careers events were not working as, despite the sizeable budget, many of the players were failing to engage with prospective employers. Further, they suggested the majority of players were not willing to consider themselves to be anything but a professional footballer, and, as such, re-employment/education opportunities (however well positioned) were proving futile. To counteract these issues, they had devised a one-day workshop to address the lack of post-apprenticeship planning and awareness they felt was evident within apprentice players.

The workshop to replace the careers event launched shortly after our initial meeting in late 2014 and was (already) called My Future Today. I was invited to attend the pilot delivery. In my opinion, MFT was already highly innovative and appeared to be designed to get the apprentices thinking about who they were, what they might like to do in the future (away from football) and what transferable skills they could offer to alternative employers, post-football. The EPT, and all involved, clearly had a strong ethical intention to help support young footballers and I congratulated them on this.

5.4 Critique Of MFT 2014/15

After attending the original pilot MFT, I was asked by the EPT to provide some critique. As such, it is important to share this in a transparent manner, as it became my role to help evolve the workshop from its original format, and it is the critique of this original upon which some of the revisions were based. The basic framework of the workshop was to have actors portraying young footballers exploring some of the challenges they might face, and to have a series of activities around transferable life skills. The actors were provided by AftaThought (2019) and the activities were delivered by Dame Kelly Holmes Trust (2019). Both organisations will be explained in more detail as the chapter progresses. I was enthused by the creativity the LFE had shown, especially in trying to address some of the perceived issues in exit and progression support.

I thought carefully about how to congratulate the team, whilst also aiming to provide credible and thought-provoking critique. I firstly outlined how impressive the innovation of the whole day was, and how I considered it to be highly valuable within the careers of the attending players. During the 2014/15 season, I was a spectator at 3

separate deliveries of the same MFT workshop. At each workshop, I tried to place myself ‘in the shoes’ of the attendees, use my own experiences from my apprenticeship and professional career, and the countless other footballers I had come to know personally over this period, and unpick what they, as young and hopeful footballers, might be interpreting when attending MFT. Of course, my views on this are completely unsubstantiated academically, however, I felt the day was positioned within a ‘Plan B’ narrative and I wanted to raise this point. To explain, I interpreted the day as containing a dominant message akin to, *‘this workshop is for the players who will be released at the end of their apprenticeship as it will help them to find alternative opportunities’* and I felt the attendees had similar sentiments. My critique was that if a player perceived the original MFT as designed to support his transition away from the game, and this individual was not willing to think of a future self or career in this way, then he had the potential to become disengaged. If he disengaged, the workshop would likely be a wasted resource.

From our initial meeting in 2014 there was a clear interest from all involved within the areas of identity and PD. As we began to discuss these concepts within the original workshop, I proposed that if we wanted to influence how young players think (e.g., what did they think about having a post-scholarship transition plan), then their engagement would be crucial. In simple terms, I proposed that if a player was confident of progressing to become a professional, then he could be reluctant to engage within a ‘Plan B’ workshop. As Roderick (2014) suggests, players are influenced to consider their professional dreams are achievable, yet as is well established, for the majority, they are not. I used a thought-provoking question given to me by a friend throughout these discussions with the EPT, ‘who has a Plan B that is better than their Plan A, especially as a 17-18 year old?’ I suggested that if the day was perceived by

the attending players as predominantly to facilitate a Plan B, and they could see no other benefits to engaging, then realistically many might be unwilling to spend any time thinking. I further proposed that some players might view alternative career planning as an ‘admittance of defeat’ in their quest to become a professional footballer. There was a strapline from the event which proclaimed apprentices would be ‘ready, willing and able to progress within and outside football’ through attending MFT. However, there were no specific learning outcomes or objectives attached to the event beyond the EPT collating attendance data and requesting brief feedback through survey questions to participants. In truth, I felt ill equipped to anchor my critique to any perceived lack of aims or objectives surrounding the original workshop as my knowledge in this field was minimal. However, we did discuss the ways in which we could elicit the impact of the event from those attending through alternative methods.

Thankfully, the EPT staff responded thoughtfully to the critique and further, agreed with my perceptions having themselves noted a lack of engagement from some of the players. They were willing to consider fresh perspectives on their workshop, specifically in regards to identity and PD. In July 2015, I began to discuss the data and my conclusions from Study 1, which I proposed could add valuable context to the workshop moving forward and during the same meeting they asked me to ‘come on board’ and help shape the 2015/16 workshop. For clarity, I became part of the MFT team, including the EPT at LFE, the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust and AftaThought, to help revise the workshop for the 2015/16 season. It was therefore agreed that my role would be to utilize all of my playing experiences, the research findings from Study 1 and the wider research base to consider the identities and PD of young footballers and athletes, and lead on several fronts in the planning and delivery process. It is from this unique position, both theoretically informed through research *and* culturally aware

through an extensive playing career, that I was able to play a major role in shaping MFT into the 2015/16 season. The following sections will outline the planning process in more detail, especially highlighting how research informed the development of MFT.

5.5 Planning Meetings

The specifics of my role in the planning of the revised workshop began with presenting the succinct conclusions from Study 1 to the wider MFT team throughout several meetings from July 2015 onwards. At these meetings, I also led what could be described as ‘education and discussion sessions’ through which I sought to introduce the team to key academic research from the areas of identity and PD. A key member of the MFT team suggested here that my role was to educate the team so that they could all become ‘experts’ in identity and PD. Clearly, a big task, but in effect the requirement was to present this academic work in such a way that engaged a non-academic audience in efforts to facilitate their collective understanding of these important areas. It was crucial that I was able to outline how this research was relevant to MFT and how we could utilize it within a revised edition to engage, challenge and stimulate apprentice players.

To offer a practical example of this process, at one planning meeting I presented Douglas and Carless (2014), the idea of the performance narrative, and how this narrative, and other dominant cultural narratives, can influence identities. With me facilitating discussions, as a team we then debated how this could be relevant within the lives of apprentice footballers, how we could influence the dominant narratives young players were exposed to, and why we might want to present alternative

narratives to young players. From here, we looked creatively at how narratives could underpin the workshop and I challenged the MFT team to consider what would be the dominant narrative of our revised workshop if we were to move away from the 'Plan B' position of the previous season's MFT.

The following sections provide a summary of the research and ideas from Study 1, in conjunction with related research, which I felt were important for consideration and discussion with the MFT team for inclusion within the revised workshop.

5.6 Understanding Me And Club Environment

Pertinent findings from Study 1 suggested how, for the 12 players considered, their fundamental concern was their progression in the game to become a professional footballer at the end of their apprenticeship. To achieve this, they expressed a willingness to dedicate themselves to developing their skills and progressing their abilities, on the pitch. Of course, for them to realise this dream, the club environment, and specific club staff within this environment, were central; in effect, the player must be deemed as suitably talented by a number of staff to progress into the professional ranks. This relationship between player and environment/staff was complex; yet it appeared as powerful and manipulative in how it influenced some young players to construct an identity somewhat exclusively related to sporting success, and to consider little else. Part of the conclusions from Study 1 suggested how the players were forming an identity to satisfy their interpretation of certain cultural expectations. In support, collective conclusions from similar research has proposed how players' working environments, and important staff members, influence the identities of young footballers (Parker, 1996, Brown and Potrac, 2009, Cushion et al., 2012, Mitchell et

al., 2014, Morris et al., 2015, Manley et al., 2016, Hickey and Roderick, 2017). In respect to Study 1, although described in several ways, the underlying messages were similar inasmuch as all of the players reported their clubs demanded a '24hr' or '24/7' athlete/footballer, one who prioritised their football progression above all else. To support this, they were not encouraged to develop a wider understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of being a footballer. A dominant narrative prevalent within the perceptions of these players appeared to be the '24/7 footballer'.

It is logical to suggest that the 24/7 footballer has nothing else in his life and constructs a somewhat one-dimensional 24hr identity as a footballer. As such, there is no broader concept of, or balance to, identity. There are no outside interests, no separation from being a footballer; a 24/7 footballer identity is all-consuming. Such expectations in regards to how athletes should approach their careers and construct their identities are reported across a range of high-performance sports (Carless and Douglas, 2013b). However, Study 1 proposed that some players were willing to consume these cultural expectations, to neglect and marginalise other important aspects of their identity, and construct an identity wherein they were the 24hr footballer in efforts to progress in football.

5.7 Managing Now And Looking Ahead

For the players in Study 1 who appeared most willing to adopt the 24/7 view, and construct an identity to support it, they appeared reluctant to consider alternative career plans. This was an important point for discussion with the MFT team as it potentially helped to explain why many players were not active within their post-career planning. This lack of career planning was especially relevant given the highly volatile

profession apprentice players pursue. Although, in Study 1, the players contract decisions were weeks/days away, and they faced the very real prospect of unemployment and potential failure, most players had no alternative plan. Transitions from a sporting career to a second career can be extremely challenging for athletes from a range of sports due to the potential issues related to the strength of involvement and association with their sport-related identity (Lally, 2007, Park et al., 2013). However, for Brownrigg et al. (2012), professional players are still reluctant to engage within post-career initiatives predominantly due to a lack of acceptance as to the need to prepare for retirement. Christensen and Sorensen (2009) and Gammelsaeter and Solenes (2013) suggested players acknowledged the associated threat of unemployment within a volatile profession, but rather than engaging with activities to support their PD, they spent limited time and resources in developing themselves away from on-pitch, focusing instead upon more widely-accepted performance-enhancement techniques. However, within career initiatives are still encouraged by Lavallee (2005) to help players make effective contingency plans should their initial career aims fail to materialize, and to experience a smoother and less challenging transition from the game once they are released.

I felt that MFT could certainly look to support the post-career options of apprentices, but I suggested that a change in approach from the 2014/15 edition was required to incorporate identity as a key focus of the revised workshop. Potential reasons for the lack of post-apprenticeship planning, as suggested by the EPT, I positioned as identity-related, insomuch as an investment within the 24hr identity of being a footballer could be so strong for some that they refused to consider themselves as anything else, nor could they see a deviation from this path as being helpful. These players therefore rejected the opportunities to plan for alternatives. It was further presented how for

some of the players in Study 1, they perceived that having an alternative plan meant they were not fully focused on their primary career goal. For some, their understanding of identity and PD emanated from the 24/7 narrative and this appeared to be part of the issue, and certainly not helpful, in encouraging players to plan for the future. I proposed for a change in approach and that we could write a new narrative for the 2015/16 workshop, support for which could be found within the themes of ‘Switching Off’ and ‘Understanding Personal Development’, as explored throughout Study 1.

5.8 Switching Off And Understanding Personal Development

Within the data from Study 1 there was evidence to suggest more complex and multifaceted identities were prevalent, and that some players were active participants within their ongoing PD. Firstly, the concept of ‘Switching Off’ presented interesting themes for consideration within the revised MFT, as it began to suggest players were deviating (deliberately) from the aforementioned 24/7 footballer identity. In effect, switching off or finding separation, in this context, means the players were not considering themselves as footballers for *a* period of time and could be tentatively positioned as the first steps in PD (i.e., the practical initiatives to support the growth of the whole person and in searching for greater balance and breadth to identity). For the 12 players considered within Study 1, all were unanimous in reporting the need for separation, or ‘getting away’ from being at football, and being a footballer. This was despite the contradiction or confusion seen within the majority of players expressing their support for the 24/7 footballer identity. Here, a conflict was apparent, as fundamentally one cannot be a 24hr footballer and still find time to separate. Therefore, players in Study 1 already exhibited a basic understanding of, and were active

participants in, the potential benefits to be accrued in constructing multifaceted identities. This was supported by Hickey and Roderick (2017) who suggested that young footballers were already aware of their alternative and multifaceted identities, beyond football.

The players in Study 1 proposed that taking a break from the 24hr view and identity was a key feature of their time away from the club, however, as the players grappled with their understanding of separating themselves in this way, they expressed concern as to how their perceived need for separation might be interpreted by club officials. Returning to Hickey's (2015) assertions, their unease could be traced to the lack of acceptance for this approach from those with whom they interacted. Despite aiming to, the players in Study 1 also felt unease at switching off from football; it appeared as if they knew they wanted to, but were concerned if it was the right thing to do, or not, for their football careers. I proposed to the MFT team that apprentices may actually be keen to find ways to switch off when at home, to break from the 24/7 approach, and MFT could support them to explore this by normalising and supporting the idea of deviating from the 24/7 narrative.

I suggested that MFT should include an alternative narrative for apprentices to consider in navigating their football careers. Within Study 1, certain players discussed an understanding of identity and PD beyond football; they appeared to adopt a sense of balance and variation to their identities through PD activities (e.g., achieving in education, maintaining social relationships outside of work). During interview, these players from Study 1 were able to define and value themselves detached from their sporting accomplishments and, in regards to their futures, they saw future successes as possible from within a range of domains, and worthwhile of their efforts concurrent to their football. Further, they were active in developing alternative career plans.

However, and crucially, the players appeared to remain committed and determined to achieving their primary goal of becoming a professional player, despite their future planning. This planning was not an admittance of defeat, moreover their exit plan was a calculated, direct and proactive initiative and, of interest in the context of MFT, these players suggested having an alternative allowed them to maintain perspective in relation to their upcoming decision. Simply, these players proposed having the security of an alternative plan was supportive to them in the here-and-now. In light of this, I proposed that a broader understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, was a conduit to encourage apprentice footballers to be active in their post-career planning and could support them during their career.

5.9 Education Or Information?

For clarity, throughout the planning phase, MFT was not anchored to any form of educational framework from which to plan or deliver the workshop. In efforts to maintain transparency, it would be inauthentic to suggest that MFT was designed with any educational framework in mind. However, various members of the MFT team muted the discussion point, ‘is MFT an educational or informative workshop?’ during the planning phase. LFE, as an organization, are strong advocates of apprentices excelling in formal education and achieving tangible qualifications for their post-apprenticeship transition (League Football Education, 2019). However, MFT was always planned as a different style of intervention, or initiative, to the LFE’s usual (formal) offering to young players. As discussed, the original version of MFT for the 2014/15 season was delivered without any formal qualification attached, and was only loosely anchored to aims and objectives for apprentices to depart the session being

‘ready, willing and able to progress within and outside of football’. As such, the revised 2015/16 MFT followed a similar philosophy inasmuch as there was never an appetite from anyone at LFE for it to become formal, quantifiable (e.g., there was no desire for apprentices to be tested on the content of MFT or their understanding) or aligned to an educational framework. For these reasons, during the planning phase of the revised MFT, it was envisaged that the workshop would not be positioned as educational, in the formal sense, to any attendees. Moreover, the workshop would be less aligned to a formal education initiatives and more aligned with an informative workshop (i.e., providing relevant, useful and thought-provoking information for those in attendance).

There are numerous well established behaviour change models within academic literature (e.g., the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2014)), however, behaviour change is complex to both achieve and maintain according to Mackintosh et al. (2011). In general terms, the predominant aim of any intervention is to promote behaviour change (Mackintosh et al., 2011, Larsen et al., 2014). As such, a workshop such as MFT that could not affect or support change amongst attendees could be criticized as a wasted opportunity, and a waste of resource. However, behaviour change, specifically, was not a central component of the planning process for MFT. Instead, as a team, we decided to focus upon the philosophy, content and delivery of the workshop. We believed that getting these aspects right would support apprentices to consider changing their behaviours, in regards to identity and PD, however, this would be the by-product of attendance, as opposed to a direct aim. Perhaps, within a structured and pre-planned research project, for example, one conceived and delivered from an action research paradigm, an intervention such as MFT would be anchored to one of the common educational frameworks and/or behaviour change models. However, in truth,

such an intervention design was beyond any of the MFT team's skillset (my own included). Much like the decision to accept becoming integral to MFT 2015/16, the planning process moved quickly and the deadline for the revised workshop loomed. Therefore, the planning meetings I took control of focused upon areas I felt comfortable with, namely, engaging with the external MFT team as co-creators, educating them regarding identity and PD, presenting themes and ideas from the research base and editing workshop content in-line with the philosophies of the team. It was decided that creating something informative would be best for MFT, this would help to simplify the planning process as we could focus upon providing attendees with relevant and thought-provoking information regarding identity and PD, and apprenticeship football.

5.10 Aims Of My Future Today 2015/16

To summarise, Study 1 and related research proposed multiple ideas for consideration within the revision of MFT for the 2015/16 season, in order to offer apprentices additional support within their careers. Firstly, certain young players appeared to understand their identity in relation to their football status, but were not active in PD initiatives which supported the growth of the whole person, nor were they active in post-apprenticeship career planning. Reasons for this can be, in part, traced to the 24/7 footballer narrative which appeared prevalent and prioritized within the game. Certain players appeared to try to fulfil this role of the 24/7 footballer, however, all of the players considered within Study 1 discussed their desire to switch off and separate from being at work. This was positioned as a clear method to deviate from the 24/7 footballer, however, the idea left some players confused and/or feeling unsupported in

regards to this idea. In contradiction, a number of players appeared to understand identity and PD beyond that of the 24/7 footballer. These players were active within alternative career planning, or at least had alternative ideas about life without football, and appeared to be coping with their stressful contract decision with poise and perspective. Therefore, it was proposed to the MFT team that it was this type of player, one who understood himself in broader terms through different/alternative understandings of identity, and one who maintained an active approach to his ongoing PD, who appeared most likely to transition from his apprenticeship into a positive destination. Therefore, I proposed that supporting and developing apprentices understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of a footballer, should be a focus of the revised MFT.

From the planning and meetings, one central aim for the 2015/16 MFT was devised:

- Support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD

The phrase 'support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD' requires additional explanation to permit an academic evaluation to prevail later in the thesis. For apprentices, the dominant understanding of identity and PD appeared to be related to the 24/7 footballer concept. Therefore, within a developed understanding of identity and PD, apprentices would understand moving past this singular level of understanding to reach a more complex and broader level. From here, they would be able to explain an understanding wherein football was an important part of identity, however, it was only one element and they would be able to identify with other important elements. This may then encourage them to become active in developing the multiplicity of their identity through PD activities. For other players, they may

already possess this developed understanding pre-MFT, and so the workshop would support their pre-existing ideas.

To help the workshop achieve its aim it was proposed that MFT should:

1. Challenge the dominant 24/7 narrative by creating an MFT narrative
2. Encourage attendees to reflect upon their understanding of identity and PD

5.11 Creating The MFT Narrative

Identity, as a research topic, is filled with complex ideas (Ronkainen et al., 2016). As such, MFT sought to simplify this complexity in such a way that encouraged the players to understand the ideas, think about themselves and be aware of alternatives to support them moving forwards. To achieve this, the MFT narrative required careful planning and the skillful translation of complex ideas into simpler concepts for young footballers to consider. Once the aim of MFT was set and agreed upon, attention moved to consider how best to elicit this aim through engaging the players in attendance. Underpinning the planning and delivery components of the workshop was the work of Douglas and Carless (2014), who proposed the importance of narratives in influencing identities, particularly within sport and amongst high-level athletes. As previously discussed, this work proposed how the narratives within sport can exert strong influences upon athletes, perpetuating a view whereby success is dependent upon following the identity and behavioural expectations prevalent to that specific context. Douglas and Carless (2014) suggest the dominant narrative prevalent to elite sport is the ‘performance narrative’, wherein athletes are encouraged to value and

define themselves in relation to their performances. This theory holds many similarities to the '24hr' or '24/7' narrative as highlighted within Study 1; a narrative wherein football becomes all-consuming and encourages a one-dimensional understanding of identity as a footballer and a lack of ongoing PD. For Carless and Douglas (2013a), however, it is crucial that alternative narratives are permitted to support and protect athletes' mental health and well-being, transitions out of sport, and the sustained performance of elite athletes within career.

Study 1 proposed that alternative identities were possible within the confines of apprentice football, in much a similar fashion to within other elite sports (Carless and Douglas, 2013a) and in union with other cohorts of young footballers (Hickey and Roderick, 2017). In line with this, we concurred as a group that MFT should create its own narrative; one capable of challenging the dominant 24/7 narrative. From here, and if the narrative resonated with the players in attendance, it was hoped they would begin to reflect upon their understanding of identity and PD. However, creating this narrative was far from simple, instead requiring consideration of a number of potential options.

We discussed positioning to the players the potential benefits to be accrued through understanding identity and PD beyond football in relation to how this understanding can support a smoother transition from the game. Relatedly, we considered creating stories around the potential for distress as a consequence of experiencing some form of identity 'loss' in transition. In effect, using the concept of identity loss, as identified academically as an issue in athlete transition by Carless and Douglas (2013a) to educate the players regarding how transition may affect them should they be released from the game and not understand identity beyond that of being a footballer. We discussed how this idea of loss could be presented in comparison to a smoother and

less stressful transition for a player who did understand his identity beyond that of a footballer and could see success through multiple lenses. We concluded that both approaches were valid, and indeed they were incorporated into MFT 2015/16 in various guises (e.g., subtle suggestions of such stories within the ethno-dramas), however, it was the potential for performance enhancement/support to be accrued through understanding a balanced identity and engaging with ongoing PD which I positioned as fundamental to the success of MFT. In simple terms, I suggested this was essential to engaging apprentice footballers.

There was some suggestion as to the potential performance benefits within Study 1 wherein certain players exhibited poise and perspective about their progression and future when understanding identity and PD beyond football. All of the players interviewed reported the psychological challenges they were experiencing as they waited for their contract decision, however, the players who exhibited an understanding beyond football appeared to be coping well. This was in contrast to the players who exhibited an understanding that did not extend beyond football, who reported to be struggling from a performance and well-being perspective as the contract decision approached. However, for transparency, I felt this data was far from conclusive and indeed was not a key theme explored with the players in Study 1. There were performance-related suggestions, but not enough to be conclusive. However, a degree of academic credibility was presented to the workshop team as I introduced them to the work of Aquilina (2013), Price et al. (2010) and Pink et al. (2014). This research does explicitly discuss the potential performance benefits to be accrued through engaging with PD initiatives alongside one's sport. However, critique of this work is evident within the vastly different sports and cultures of the athletes considered by such researchers, compared to apprentice footballers in the UK. As such, it was at

this point in the process of developing MFT where I departed, somewhat, from purely academic research and referred to experience and craft knowledge.

I proposed creativity and cultural understanding were perhaps as fundamental to the planning and delivery of the workshop, as this allowed for the translation of research in a manner that would engage, educate and challenge attending players. Fundamentally, the workshop must be perceived as worthwhile and meaningful by the players themselves for them to gain value from attending. If the content and delivery of MFT failed in this regard, then no matter how well-informed the workshop was academically, it would have missed an important opportunity to influence and support young players, both in their immediate and longer term futures. Therefore, I effectively trusted my cultural understanding and drew upon my lived experiences to exert strong influence upon the workshop design. To reach more players, and support them through the challenges of their apprenticeships and beyond, I felt MFT needed a performance link.

The utilization of sports science practices employed throughout professional sport, whether that be through projects initiated by governing bodies, individual clubs/teams and/or individual athletes/players, are most often designed to enhance some element of performance (Baker, 2012). This is a similar situation within professional football clubs through talent maximization processes according to Gilmore (2009). In light of this, the vast majority of interventions apprentice footballers endure are likely to be positioned as performance enhancing. The performance-enhancement agenda is fundamental within elite sport environments according to Douglas and Carless (2014). For Nesti (2010), players require both support to help them as people, and support to help them as players; the two should not be separated. This, in relation to MFT, proposed that working with players without addressing their performance concerns

was unlikely to engage them. The applied reflections of practitioners, like Nesti (2010), further supports a performance link as being fundamental to the relative success of MFT as an engaging, thought-provoking and supportive workshop. One through which the attending players could recognise that understanding their identities and PD, and alternative approaches, could support them in the immediate sense by positively supporting their performance. Of course, this would then support them in continuing their central goal of becoming a successful footballer, however, they would be developing an understanding of identity and PD that would concurrently support them in transition, should they be released. Yet, this outcome of offering transition support should be the by-product of the workshop, instead of the direct focus.

To conclude, the MFT narrative attempted to encourage the players to develop an understanding of identity and PD, beyond the 24/7 footballer, by proposing that this type of understanding would support them to perform as footballers and would support them through their transition. There is considerable research to report *upon* the identities of footballers (Gearing, 1999, Brown and Potrac, 2009, Manley, 2012, Mitchell et al., 2014, Hickey and Roderick, 2017), with all of this work unanimous in suggesting the identities of footballers should become the focus of further research and applied interventions. Yet, there is no published research to evidence *how* to apply such suggestions. As such, my assertions as to including a performance link running throughout the MFT narrative were valid, and both research and culturally informed. This thesis and MFT is the first of its kind in producing a practical intervention that targets apprentice footballers' understanding of identity and PD. It was decided that to achieve maximum engagement and to stimulate reflection, the MFT narrative needed to be positioned with creativity and as being supportive to the players' central aim;

becoming a professional footballer and as being potentially beneficial to the players immediately, or ‘right here and right now’.

5.12 Delivering My Future Today 2015/16

For transparency, several points regarding the delivery of MFT are important to outline, specifically regarding engaging with external delivery partners. The MFT workshop was delivered on behalf of the LFE and in conjunction with two external partners, AftaThought (2019) and the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust (DKHT) (2019). As I attended the pilot session of the original MFT workshop in October 2014, the LFE had commissioned both AftaThought and DKHT to facilitate/deliver the day. The LFE later commissioned their involvement within the revised 2015/16 workshop, before my role was discussed. As such, engaging and working with both external providers was paramount to the success of MFT. For context, none of the LFE staff were actively involved within the delivery of MFT, although they did become involved within various activities, this was more in a support role. In the majority, MFT was delivered by myself, AftaThought and DKHT.

AftaThought offer innovative training to organizations through utilizing drama (live and recorded) to deliver staff training on behalf of employers. As an example of their work, they deliver safeguarding training to NHS staff through dramatic representation of key issues prevalent to that context (AftaThought, 2019). Within MFT, they provided three actors to portray young footballers and co-wrote all scenes with the wider MFT team.

The role of DKHT was to deliver the workshop through numerous practical activities and in simple terms, to be the ‘face’ of the day. DKHT is a charity set up by Dame Kelly Holmes, and seeks a dual purpose to (i) provide current and ex-elite athletes with transition support, vocational training and part-time employment and (ii) to utilize the skills and characteristics of said athletes to inspire behaviour change amongst underprivileged/disadvantaged social demographics. Their athletes are called ‘athlete-mentors’, and in this context, work with the young people to develop their employability and general life skills (Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, 2019). At the pilot MFT in 2014/15, I was introduced to the two DKHT athletes who would deliver the workshop to the attending apprentice players. One of the DKHT athletes at the pilot workshop was concurrently the head of athlete recruitment and programs at the Trust. Effectively, his role was to oversee new athletes joining the Trust and develop programmes for them to deliver in the field. Over the course of the workshop, we began to converse and he suggested I would be well suited to doing future work with the Trust, either around my research commitments, or post-research completion. The work suggested from DKHT was ad-hoc, flexible and part-time, and so it appeared a good fit for me to sign up. Added to this, their work in developing athletes to support young people, appealed to me from a personal and developmental perspective. Therefore, within a few weeks of this initial meeting I was signed up as one of their athletes (my professional football career being adequate to permit me ‘athlete mentor’ status within the context of DKHT). However, due to research commitments, I did not embark upon any actual project delivery for the charity, apart from MFT 2015/16, which I will now explain.

As the planning meetings for MFT progressed, the suggestion for me to deliver the 2015/16 workshops was made as part of my involvement. This proposal was more

plausible as I had already become a member of DKHT in the preceding months, and so I could deliver the workshop in conjunction with DKHT, within a project funded by the LFE. Becoming involved as planner and deliverer gave me the chance to try and support hundreds of apprentice footballers; this was exciting and an opportunity I grasped. I applied for ethical approval from the university to become a practitioner-researcher.

Ethical approval was granted from the university upon the provision that I identified myself to the attending players clearly and precisely. Therefore, within the first time I spoke to attendees, I introduced myself as a practitioner-researcher, explaining my role as having a dual focus for the day insomuch as I would be delivering the workshop and conducting an ongoing research project. I briefly stated how my earlier (Study 1) project had helped to inform and plan the workshop, and that the next stage of the research would be in evaluating MFT post-delivery. I informed the players that none of them would be mentioned by name in any report and that they may be approached in later weeks/months to take part in an interview regarding their perceptions of the day.

Upon reflection, the chain of events allowing me to deliver MFT happened quite naturally. The timing of the workshops in relation to my initial research ideas, my capacity to become involved formally through incorporating the workshop into my PhD, and our collective willingness to work together on such a project, all pieced together somewhat organically.

In acceptance of the offer to be fully involved, and especially to deliver MFT, the reality dawned insomuch as I was now heavily responsible for bringing the event to life; it was now for me to convert all of the ideas, the planning, and the underpinning

messages into an applied workshop that young footballers could view as relevant, engaging and thought-provoking. Within an instant of agreeing to such a change in role, I moved from detached researcher, to the face of the project. In truth, I had absolutely no training or experience in delivering workshops. Added to this, I specifically had no experience in how best to address the apprentice footballers' understanding of identity and PD. However, the collective MFT team were all valuable contributors to this process and offered personal encouragement for me to 'go for it'. Personally, I was armed with lots of ideas, some interesting themes through which to inform practice from Study 1, my experiences of living the apprenticeship and professional football world, and perhaps most importantly a real sense of purpose in working on MFT through a determination to support young players. For clarity, I was the lead deliverer, supported by another DKHT athlete, for every MFT throughout the 2015/16 season, bar one, as my wife gave birth to our son on the same day as a workshop on the 27th February 2016.

5.13 Ethno-Drama To Support The MFT Narrative

The inclusion of live drama was a key feature of MFT and was certainly a novel initiative when working with apprentice footballers. There are multiple forms of drama utilized in research settings and there appears to exist a complex set of emerging terminologies to accompany. However, for the purposes of MFT, the term ethno-drama is applied as this form of drama implies that numerous research-generated ideas are constructed into a script and there is a subsequent live performance (Morgan et al., 2013). The scripts and performances of ethno-drama are based on research participants' experiences and aim to get as close as possible to representing 'true life' according to

Saldaña (2003). Therefore, the reality of the scenarios is crucial for the success of the drama (Mienczakowski and Morgan, 2001). Further advice from Saldaña (2003), is for the dramatic performances to be perceived as aesthetically sound; in effect, the ‘feel’ of the drama needs to be real. To help achieve all of these recommendations, the MFT team constructed the dramas, in part, utilizing the data and conclusions from Study 1.

AftaThought recruited three actors (Bradley, JL and Jay (pseudonyms)) who all looked, aesthetically, as if they could be apprentice footballers. AftaThought and the actors also supported the co-creation of the scripts. In truth, their expertise in creating scripts, especially from a technical perspective, was far beyond any other member involved within MFT. As a team we aimed to take the attending players on a journey through the dramas they witnessed and the characters involved; a journey devised to support and develop their understanding of identity and PD. To achieve this, consideration was given as to the specifics of what would be said through each scene and character. The ethno-dramas allowed us to create the MFT narrative, and aimed to make the players think about themselves, and how they understood identity and PD by presenting stories that each individual player could attach himself to, and make sense of, in a supportive manner. As an example, within the data from Study 1, a strong theme emerged as to the ‘24hr’ identity, with numerous quotes to support. This broad theme was used to inform the character of Jay. The following is a gross oversimplification, and does not do justice to the intricacies of the scripting and performances, yet, Jay portrayed a young footballer with a limited understanding of alternative identities and PD, beyond football. Instead he constructed his approach to being an apprentice through statements similar to, ‘the only way to achieve success is by being a 24/7 footballer’. His approach to being a young footballer was built upon the ‘24hr’ identity and the behaviours

associated. He exuded an air of confidence in his ability to be successful and refused to consider himself to be anything but a footballer, or to understand himself detached from his performances. Such ideas, including the 24/7 footballer, of having a Plan B, of not doing anything outside of football, were all front and central within the scenes, from the opening performance of the workshop to the very end.

To be clear, none of the actors used large passages of data verbatim within their performances. Instead, the results from Study 1 were used to inform the authenticity of each character- the finished script can be seen as an amalgamation of research themes, anecdotes and creative ideas. Shorter quotes from the data were then used to add context to each character's position, where necessary. Throughout the workshop, each of the characters verbalize the various challenges they encounter as young footballers, what sense they make of them, and how they try to cope. As the day progresses, various ideas and issues associated with elite youth football are explored, and the concepts of identity and PD are introduced. The scenes are combined with the activities of the workshop and the actors have the flexibility to pick up on words, phrases and ideas discussed within preceding activities and weave them into their scenes adlib when/if applicable. The scenes build the three characters' understanding of identity and PD throughout the day, which it is hoped represents the apprentices' journey through the workshop.

5.14 Logistics Of MFT 2015/16

The workshop was delivered to circa 50% of the apprentice footballers employed by Football League clubs. This equated to circa 650 players, across circa 32 Football

League clubs, attending MFT during the 2015/16 football season. The clubs and players that did not attend during the 2015/16 season were then included through the 2016/17 delivery, however, this thesis is concerned with the 2015/16 season only. Clubs were clustered geographically and attended workshops in regional hubs, most often in groups of two or three (e.g., one workshop for two clubs in Humberside and similarly a workshop for three clubs who resided within South London). This approach was repeated nationwide. Most often the workshop replaced the apprentices' formal education day within a typical week, however, the venue, cluster of clubs, day and date delivered (i.e., early, mid, or late season) was controlled directly by LFE and beyond the scope of control for this research. All of the logistics for the day were at the sole discretion of the LFE including the club identified to host each MFT (delivery would usually be at the host club's stadium). Other clubs within the geographic cluster would then send their apprentices to the host venue. Further, as workshops were delivered to players through their clubs, both 1st and 2nd year apprentices were in attendance at the same event. The workshop was delivered to the same format on each occasion. The first delivery of the workshop was a pilot session in October 2015. At this event, the number of attendees was kept deliberately small with only apprentices from a single club attending. This enabled the MFT team to trial some ideas and reflect upon them, before evolving the workshop, where appropriate, as we moved forward. There were minor details addressed after the pilot workshop (e.g., minor scripting issues and delivery reflections), however, there were no structural changes made. The first workshop was then delivered on 28th November 2015.

The players were requested to arrive at 9.30am so that MFT could begin at 10am. In regards to the players, of note within the context of this research, was our request that all players attended the workshop in their own clothes, or more specifically, not in

club-affiliated attire. On a superficial level, it appeared to help the attendees mix with players from other clubs and went some way to remove potential barriers or rivalries amongst certain teams and/or individuals. Secondly, I felt it helped to provide visual reinforcement of a key position for the workshop, namely, an encouragement for the players to understand themselves, their identity, detached from their status as a footballer, or at least try to for the duration of the workshop. Thirdly, it had the potential to help the players understand that although they had attended the workshop as a young footballer, the premise of the day was for the MFT team to support them as a young person; their success on the football field was not related to the support they would receive throughout the day.

Although the majority of the delivery material was the same for each event, how each event was presented by the deliverers, and perceived and interpreted by the attendees was obviously variable. By design, the delivery and facilitation of MFT sought to be both informative and interactive in nature, this allowed for various topics, questions and statements to be explored as presented. As such, each workshop had its own feel and took on its own form to varying degrees, yet we stuck to an agreed framework. Often club staff were in the room; at least as the day began, however, the range of engagement from club staff was completely different at each event. Some staff members were actively involved throughout the day, participating within the various activities. Others simply 'delivered' the players and departed. For others still, they would sit outside of the workshop room and/or sit in the room but on the periphery and spend the whole day on their laptops. Throughout the course of the whole season, at most, a handful of technical staff (e.g., academy managers, coaches) attended. Again, their level of engagement within the workshop was highly variable.

All of the logistical factors identified above help to describe the event to the reader. Each of the variables discussed undoubtedly influenced the delivery of the workshop and the perceptions of attendees, yet, many of the variables were uncontrollable within the context of this research (e.g., the role club staff played in supporting MFT). As such, the following sections will focus on providing an outline of the standardized running order and delivery sections of the event.

5.15 MFT Running Order

Table 5.2. Running order and timings for MFT

Time	Activity
5 mins (10- 10.05)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 1: Creating A Context ➤ Introductions to MFT team
10 (10.05-10.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 2: I'm 'OK' ➤ Workshop format explained. Aims outlined
20 (10.15-10.35)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 1: ➤ Personal Development
5 (10.35-10.40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 3: ➤ Intro to Exploring Personality
30 (10.40-11.10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 2: ➤ Exploring Personality. Team & Individual
5 (11.10-11.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 4: ➤ Outro from Exploring Personality
10 (11.15-11.25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Break
5 (11.25-11.30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 3: ➤ Identity Statements
10 (11.30-11.40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 5: ➤ Being Let Go
20 (11.40-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 4: ➤ Skills for success
45 (12-12.45)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lunch
10 (12.45-12.55)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 5: ➤ Energiser after lunch
10 (12.55-13.05)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 6: ➤ Outro- Skills for Success. Intro- Profiling & Goal Setting
30 (13.05-13.35)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 6: ➤ Profiling and goals
10 (13.35-13.45)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 7: ➤ Outro- Profiling & Goal Setting
30 (13.45-14.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Activity 7: ➤ 30-Seconds
15 (14.15-14.30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 8: ➤ 30- Seconds Pitch & Wrap-Up

5.16 Examples Of MFT Delivery

The following section will provide the reader with specific delivery details of MFT. This will include examples of scenes and activities. To help simplify this information, the details will be split into sections to include (i) Scene 1: Creating a Context (ii) Scene 2: I'm OK (iii) Activity 1: Personal Development (iv) Activity 3: Identity Statements and (v) Activity 7: 30-Seconds. Each section will be presented via the activity session plan used by the delivery team, screenshots of any accompanying booklet pages, and/or segments of the actors' scripts. Interspersed within this information will be a summary of the key aims and messages contained in relation to each section.

All of the content delivered within MFT should be considered as important and each element was included for a purpose. However, some of the practical activities, and parts of the scripting, were not specifically designed to address the central themes of the day, instead, they were designed to help 'manage' a group of young footballers. To explain, certain activities were included for very superficial means (e.g., to energize and have some fun with the attendees after they had been sat down for considerable time). Of course, the inclusion of such activities are vital to the overall success of the day and important to maintain the flow, engagement and attention of the apprentices. However, within the focus of this chapter, I will not discuss such elements of MFT in light of the volume of information already required to explain sections of a 4-5 hour workshop. Instead I will focus on the activities and the segments of scripts which were specifically designed to address the fundamental aims of the day as identified within the planning chapter; the apprentices' understanding of identity and PD.

5.16.1 Scene 1: Creating A Context

All of the players would be sat down in rows of chairs and facing the ‘stage’ (an area of open space identified by the actors as appropriate for their scene). Before MFT began, other than standard pleasantries and some housekeeping information, as a delivery team we purposely had limited contact with the players prior to the workshop beginning. Once we were happy that all of the players were present, I gave a sign to the actors, and MFT went live.

One of the actors (Bradley) would slowly walk to the stage area, as if he was not formally involved with the workshop. The other two characters (Jay and JL) would enter the room from behind the attendees, pretend to recognise Bradley as a friend and current apprentice, and enter the stage with a high-energy rendition of a famous football chant; ‘There’s only one Bradley Thompson’. This initial introduction would certainly capture the attention of the players sat down, and anybody else in the room who was unaware that MFT would begin in this way.

For context, all of the characters are apprentice footballers, with Jay and JL playing for one team, and Bradley another. They share some jokes about which team is performing better before they ask each other, ‘what are we doing here?’ The dialogue then raises some pertinent issues in relation to Plan B. Jay suggests that he is getting kept on (i.e., will be signed as a professional) and so does not need this ‘type’ of day, whereas the other characters’ futures are less certain/positive, and so they may need this type of event to help them move on.

JL: Oh. This is *that thing!* Yeh – this thing... this thing is a waste of bloomin time if you ask me (mimicking coach)

Jay: Well yeh. It is a waste of time for me but it's not for you is it?

JL: What do you mean?

Jay: What do you think I mean?

JL: I don't know what you mean.

Jay: You *do* know what I mean. I mean I don't need to know this stuff cos everyone knows that I'm getting kept on. But you?

JL: I might get kept on. (*indicating Bradley*) He might get kept on too...

The characters then discuss this issue in relation to the day, before JL then suggests he knows a little bit about the day and it is concerned with 'developing yourself as a person'. This is the first reference to any developmental aim. The scene ends as the actors introduce a support DKHT deliverer and myself, and invite us onto the stage.

I then provided the practitioner-researcher ethics 'speech' to detail my role in the workshop and the ongoing research of this thesis and a very brief overview of the day (i.e., the actors and workshop activities). I informed the apprentices that our aims for MFT were for them to have an understanding of identity and PD, an awareness of alternative approaches, and that they leave the event feeling empowered and supported to reflect upon themselves and the ideas presented.

5.16.2 Addressing Plan B

Including the reference to Plan B in the opening section of the workshop essentially hinged on two related ideas. Firstly, as a delivery team and drawing on our combined experiences of apprentice footballers, we concluded how a number of the attending players were likely to be approaching the day with a Plan B logic already. LFE's work with players is fundamentally in relation to their education and welfare, not their performance as a young footballer (League Football Education, 2019). As such, it was suggested an LFE workshop may already have certain connotations to the attending players and they might be expecting transition support. From here, we decided that if there was a chance the players were likely to be thinking in this way, then if we were overt and addressed the issue of Plan B straight from the first scene then we could work with the idea and attempt to use the day to change/alter/challenge those perceptions. Secondly, being overt with the inclusion of Plan B in the narrative allowed us to explore the idea throughout the day, specifically through one of the characters, and refer back to this within the subsequent workshops. Jay's position (i.e., his belief that MFT was to address Plan B and was therefore not relevant for his progression) presented an opportunity to increase his understanding of MFT so that by the end of the day he could exhibit a change in position. We suggested this journey of understanding could mirror that of the players through MFT and as such might be a powerful message to include from the very first scene.

5.16.3 Scene 2: I'm OK

The three actors enter to deliver a high-energy performance, yet the segment ends with a more sombre, reflective, personal narrative to convey Bradley's emotions as he navigates apprenticeship football. The characters' dialogue discusses many of the potential issues young footballers can experience, and then serves to highlight the difficulties, statistically, associated with achieving success as a professional footballer.

Bradley: The problem is that football is the only thing I want to do

JL: The problem is that I think football is the only thing I can do

Jay: The problem is if I don't get a contract – my dad's going to kill me

JL: The problem is that everyone's going to be disappointed in me if I don't make it

Jay: The problem is there are 1500 apprentices hoping to be professional footballers and by the time they're 21, 90% of them won't be playing pro anymore

The following is from the final segment of the same scene, as Bradley is on his own in the centre of the stage.

Bradley: But then again – if all I think about is my football, when do I get to think about me and who I am? I mean – if I make it – what kind of player am I going to be and can I even handle success? And if I only

get to play pro for a year – or even not that long – what kind of a person am I going to be at the end of it?

To be honest with you right now I'm not ok – I'm really not. But how can I get to where I am ok? My coach is focused 100% on getting me a contract and that's good but I'm nervous, I'm anxious and I'm thinking about it most days. I bottle it up but I'm not speaking to anyone about it. Some of the other lads have said that I need to learn to switch off but you know it's difficult to escape isn't it? I struggle to separate football out when I get home. Sometimes all I want to do is chill out with my dad and watch a film or something but I can't remember the last time we did that.

The scene finishes with a character in a more vulnerable and thoughtful state than the players have yet witnessed within MFT and this allowed me, as deliverer, to conclude the scene with an important question for the players to consider. I asked if Bradley's issues could be related to him only seeing himself as a footballer. Such a question is, in a research context, of course leading. However, the wording was chosen carefully in the hope it would encourage the players to reflect upon Bradley's position, his identity, and perhaps reflect upon themselves, immediately.

5.17 Activity 1: Personal Development

Table 5.3. Activity 1 Session Plan

Lead	Content in short	Outcomes
AT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene: Actors explore being ‘OK’ and not being ‘OK’ 	Intro- to identity & PD
CMc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set scene: Bradley does not feel ok. Is that because he only sees himself as a footballer? ➤ Do you feel similar going through the apprenticeship? ➤ Today- help you explore ways to be ok more of the time by being more than just a footballer. ➤ <u>Aims of workshop:</u> ➤ <u>1. Understanding of identity and PD</u> ➤ <u>2. Practical examples</u> ➤ <u>3. Potential benefits of within career PD</u> ➤ Pre-workshop. CMc. Explain examples on the wall. ➤ Joey Barton- Peter Clarke- Mark Noble. ➤ Workshop. 6 new examples. Build the jigsaw. Slow reveal. ➤ 1. Give pack of quotes. Players to read several and ask why this athlete has PD activities. ➤ 2. Activities ➤ 3. Then players ➤ Give out booklet. Answers contained. ➤ Wrap-up. Facilitated questions and small group discussion ➤ Potential questions depending on groups and answers ➤ 1. Who was aware of this? What do you think about footballers doing other things? ➤ 2. What did the examples have in common? How different? ➤ 3. Are the players unprofessional for doing other things? ➤ 4. Do you think this supports their performance? Does it support their general life? ➤ If appropriate- CMc/DKH athlete to share own PD story. 	<p>Players to reflect</p> <p>Introduce PD with examples</p> <p>Explore identity and PD</p> <p>Potential benefits of within career PD</p>

5.17.1 Activity 1: Resource

Personal Development


Leighton Baines
Premier League footballer and music enthusiast

"Music lets me relax and take my mind off football by focusing on learning a new skill. As much as I love football, I prefer to separate myself from it when I am at home and it helps me to give everything when I come back to it."


Juan Mata
Premier League footballer with a marketing degree, studying P.E.

"I am so focused on my career but I don't think football and studying are mutually exclusive. I can do both and they both help each other."


Jay Jay Okocha
Premier League footballer and charity worker

"I give everything to my football but this is only possible because I can give everything to my life outside of football too. It lets me come back to it with fresh perspective and allows me to dedicate myself to it over a long period of time."


Frank Lampard
Premier League footballer, book enthusiast and children's book author

"I love new books that excite me but also make me learn. I was surprised how much enjoyment I got out of writing. It is the perfect hobby for me."


David Pocock
Rugby Union international, campaigner for gay rights & climate change

"It is very easy to have this persona as a rugby player and essentially use that as your identity. I have always said I don't want rugby to define me. This gives me perspective especially when I was injured for so long. There was more to me than just my knee."


Linvoy Primus
Premier League footballer on faith and friendships

"I have now got friends both through church and outside of church but it's not because I'm a footballer, it's because I'm Linvoy. My friendships in Portsmouth will keep me here even when football finishes. If you make football your life then when you finish you'll be disappointed. I know that win, lose or draw, life will still carry on."

Figure 5.1. Activity 1 resource from MFT Booklet

5.17.2 Activity 1: Explanation

The players were asked to stand up and come over to me as I stood in front of some examples of professional footballers engaged within PD activities. The three examples were laminated and ran horizontally across the wall. The first laminate was a picture of the professional player/role model (e.g., Joey Barton), the second was his PD activity (e.g., studying philosophy) and the third was a quote which described why he was choosing to engage within this activity. All of the quotes used within this activity were sourced from direct quotes from the players as published by various mainstream sources (i.e., newspaper/online articles). During delivery, these three initial examples allowed me to refer back to the earlier issues identified within the narrative/performance of Bradley (Scene 2: I'm OK). I asked the players to think about why the players in front of them were doing other things alongside their usual football activities.

After seeing the examples on the wall, the players then split into smaller groups and formed circles with their chairs, maintaining a central space on the floor. The activity then began as six more examples, similar to the ones on the wall, were given to the players. However, as part of the aim for this activity was for the players to think about the reasons behind the professional players engaging within PD activities, we only provided the players with the quotes at this stage. They were all asked to take one quote, read it fully, and ask themselves why the role model player was active within PD activities away from football. After it appeared they had considered this, and swapped amongst themselves a number of examples, the activities each professional player was involved in were then given to each group. The task was then to try and match the quotes to the activities. Players were encouraged to debate and share ideas

amongst themselves. After a few minutes, the professional players' identities were revealed as the final set of laminates were given to each group, and the task was to correctly match the player, to the activity, to the quote in a sort of jigsaw game on the floor. Figure 5.1. provides the completed task from the MFT booklet.

Once the MFT booklets were handed out, which contained the answers to the activity, it was important to wrap-up the exercise with some pertinent questions in relation to the task and the overarching aims of the day. We opted for small group discussions facilitated by a member of the MFT team as this appeared to encourage individuals to express their thoughts amongst smaller numbers. From here, we would then ask for feedback from the wider group. The questions were carefully constructed to elicit the reasons behind the professionals' engagement with other activities, and to expose the differences between the activities (i.e., one professional was enrolled upon a degree whilst another wrote music reviews/blogs). Selection of the role model examples for this task was difficult, yet as the MFT team we tried to find a balance between high-level/famous players and strong messaging.

A creative approach to address identity and PD understanding amongst apprentice footballers was central to MFT and the workshop activity outlined appeared to meet this criteria and served to get the apprentices thinking and talking about such concepts.

5.17.3 Activity 3: Identity Statements



"I'm not an idiot who thinks there is only football. I do not put all of my eggs in one basket. I base success on happiness."

"My life revolves around football. When I was injured, I think I was depressed, but I didn't tell anyone."

"The more I can learn and develop off the pitch makes me better on it."

"I don't know how to define personal development or know what I would work on."

"I am hard working in everything. I want to be the best I can everywhere and the best all round person I can be."

Figure 5.2. Activity 3 resource from MFT Booklet.

As the players returned from a short break, on the floor between their chairs, there were five laminated statements. Each statement was taken verbatim from Study 1 participants and represented an understanding of identity and PD within the context of being an apprentice footballer. Figure 5.2. provides a selection of some of the statements used. In the activity, the players were asked to stand up, read each of the five statements on the floor, and stand next to the one that made most sense to them. Within such a task (i.e., voting with their feet as opposed to just reading the statements in a booklet), we were happy that the attendees were reading the statements and, hopefully, thinking about themselves, in relation to the views expressed. The statements were positioned in an order whereby Statement 1 was a quote wherein the player suggested there was nothing in his life other than football and Statement 5 suggested that, whilst maintaining a strong focus to become a footballer, he could give maximum effort to several areas of his life, concurrently. Again, questioning surrounding this activity asked the players to think about what statement they identified with, and why.

5.17.4 Activity 7: 30 Seconds

Table 5.4. Activity 7 Session Plan

Lead	Content in short	Outcome
AT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scene 7: Outro- Profiling & Goal Setting 	Wrap-up activity & intro 30 seconds
CMc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Today has been about you and your understanding of identity and PD. ➤ Now we would like to hear from you... ➤ <u><i>Aims of the workshop:</i></u> ➤ <u><i>Final challenge and out of comfort zone</i></u> ➤ <u><i>Practice a new skill</i></u> ➤ <u><i>Show understanding of identity and PD</i></u> ➤ Set-up. Jose Mourinho wants to sign you after scouting you. He now needs to know about you as a young person before he will sanction the transfer. ➤ Challenge- in 30 seconds, tell him who you are. He is especially looking for players who are more than footballers. ➤ Task- 30 seconds to talk about yourself without using football ➤ Who are you/what is important? ➤ What other interests do you have? Your future PD? ➤ Speed dating – players face each other in long line of chairs and deliver 30 second speeches. 	<p>Pulling MFT together</p> <p>This is a relevant task for them as apprentices</p> <p>Show understanding</p>

5.17.5 Activity 7: Explanation

Activity 7, the 30 second challenge, represented the final activity of MFT. Within the design and implementation of the final task, it was hoped for several outcomes. Firstly, a desire to offer the players a challenge to conclude MFT, something they would be

capable of achieving, yet an activity that would stretch them. Added to this, we aimed to finish the day in a positive and fun manner, so the players would leave the event with a sense of enjoyment. Further, the 30 seconds challenge allowed us to solidify several key messages of the workshop. To explain, the task asked the players to talk about, or ‘sell’, themselves for 30 seconds to a prospective football manager (e.g., Jose Mourinho), however, the apprentices could not use any reference to football or their perceived abilities as a footballer. Effectively, the activity was designed to encourage the players to talk about themselves as a person, instead of ‘just’ a footballer. In supporting the players to deliver this speech, and impress, we suggested they should outline who they were as a young person, or what was important to them, what interests they had outside of football, and how they were planning to continue their ongoing PD. It was reiterated to the players how this should all be done without any reference to them as a footballer (e.g., they should not reference their current club, position of play and/or strengths as a footballer). The hope was that this activity would then encourage them to reflect upon themselves and their understanding of identity and PD, beyond football.

After a few practice trials with their partners, who they most often knew already as friends or colleagues from their club, the apprentices moved seats to sit opposite a new person. We hoped this new person was not a friend or colleague and through this they were presented with a further challenge (i.e., talking about themselves to somebody they did not know). The session would finish with an invitation for any player who wished to stand up and perform their 30 seconds speech in front of the whole group. At every event, we had several players that would stand up and take on this challenge, which we always commended as an impressive feat.

The activity allowed us to encourage the players to talk about, and think about, themselves as young people, as opposed to just young footballers. We saw this as an important conclusion for the workshop whereby, at this point in the day, we hoped the impact of MFT had been such that the apprentices were able to talk about themselves, and think about themselves, without referencing their perceived ability and standing as a footballer. For clarity, we were not aiming to detract from the importance they attached to being a footballer, their identity as a footballer, or to belittle this as a career choice in anyway at all. Moreover, the crux of MFT had sought to support and develop their understanding of identity and PD, through an alternative (MFT) narrative and to encourage reflection. We hoped this would support them both in the immediate sense, and into their futures.

5.18 Auto-Ethnographic Reflections

The following auto-ethnographic reflections will provide the reader with further important information surrounding MFT, namely, how I felt and perceived the experience of planning and delivering the workshop. Such reflections, when added to the preceding sections of this chapter in detailing the planning and delivery of MFT, will add context to the event and help the reader in forming a critique of this research.

5.18.1 On Shaky Ground

Here we go. MFT 2015-16 is about to launch at a small college in the North East of England in front of roughly 50 apprentice footballers. In moments, I will become front and central in the workshop for the first time this season, attempting to put into action

all of the planning ideas as deliberated for many months. My opening speech is prepared to outline the day to the players. However, I have been pushed, by the MFT team, to consider what I tell them about me, about who I am. This topic (me) has never been my favorite topic of discussion, but we decided that the attendees should know some things about me. I am comfortable with this, as I feel it will start the process of developing a relationship, and it will give me, perhaps even the whole day, some added credibility in the eyes of young footballers. However, as I approach the center stage, I am confronted with a flashing light in my head which asks, ‘yeah, but, who are you?’ To explain, in a flash, I realize the ‘self’ I give to the players in front of me, the one that includes a career as a footballer and now a career as a researcher, might not actually be as stable as I would like it to be. Yet, I feel an urge to present myself in such a way so that they think I have it all figured out, that I have the answers for them. Yet, in reality, I feel on shaky ground. I know deep down that I do not really have my feet firmly planted, that I am wobbling, but I do not really want to talk about that, not now. I cannot, can I? I must keep that to myself. All of a sudden, I feel much less comfortable in presenting who I am to a group of strangers.

The first workshop seems to go well, and I am happy with my delivery, broadly speaking. The flashing light bulb is pushed to the back of my mind for the remainder of the day as I look to support, engage and challenge the players. However, as I travel home, I reflect again, and central to these reflections are whether I have been as honest with how I have presented myself to the players, as I could have been, or perhaps, should have been.

Central to this narrative, is the question of identity, but specifically the challenges faced when delivering an event to bring identity and PD into the focus of apprentice footballers, whilst still negotiating my own transition from professional football. I was

pleased to find some solace in the work of Baker (2012), as she offers a frank account of her own journey through her thesis. Interestingly, she discusses the process of being in one's research, in the ethnographic sense, inasmuch as she proposes the majority of ethnographies are presented with a degree of consistency, or stability, in regards to the researcher, how they work, collect and interpret data. For Baker (2012), there is purported consistency in other's work, in their methodological position, fieldworker role, even within the writer's voice and style of writing. It is as if the researcher does not move, is stable, and can be 'trusted' to do a good job- from a research perspective. However, she suggests this stability is far from an accurate depiction of her own journey through research as she reports on changes to how she sees herself, to who she is; effectively, her identity is continually shifting, evolving, and is anything but stable as she negotiates the process of completing doctorate level research. I find solace with her story, the changes, the instability of self, the insecurity and understanding of identity, as it makes me reflect on my own identity through this research. I am not stable by any means, I am figuring out a massive change in role and identity, whilst trying to present a united front to those I aim to support, the players.

I try to hide these struggles, but they emerge at every workshop. Practically, as I deliver MFT, I am struggling to pay the mortgage and to provide for my family in a way I feel my hard work should allow and permit. Nevertheless, it is much deeper, I have been rejected from football, to some degree, and I am no longer the very thing (the footballer) that I had tried to be for so long. There is confusion. I feel strange, uneasy, on shaky ground with negotiating firstly who I am, and then how much of this I give to others. I am presenting a 'together self', functioning in academia, a father, a husband, a workshop deliverer, an ex-footballer, when really this is anything but stable. Something has changed, it has been lost, and I am not sure how I feel about it. And

yet, here I am, here I stand, in front of a group of young footballers, and, to get them thinking about who they are, I perceive I need them to think I am something of an expert in the field. Well, I have never been an expert, in anything, and certainly not this.

A strength of this research, highlighted through this story, is that I am thoughtful and reflective, hardworking, and determined. That I am asking myself these questions, is a strength, but an uncomfortable one (Knowles et al., 2012). In truth, it gets no easier as the workshops pass, and I do not have a definitive answer for you, as reader, to outline how I managed myself within delivering this work to young footballers. You may see this as a limitation to the credibility and transparency of the research presented. However, I can assure you of this; that I tried my best to help them, and I thought about it a lot. An awful lot. Perhaps I am guilty of being too involved, but being reflective in my guilt is the best defense I can give.

5.18.2 Not Being Watched

When considered in general terms, my opinion was that the behaviour of the players at MFT was adequate and there were limited behavioural issues that needed to be addressed. I felt many of the players approached MFT with a degree of scepticism and I saw it as our job, as a delivery team, to address this in a non-confrontational manner and aim to reduce their scepticism by the end of the day. However, at one specific MFT towards the end of the season, there was a behavioural incident involving two attendees, which culminated in me removing one of the players from the workshop and reporting the incident to the respective club. As I made sense of this event in the immediate aftermath, and again over a longer timeframe, I felt their behaviour was

related to the concept of surveillance (Manley, 2012), and more generally in regards to the possible identities and behaviours of apprentice footballers.

The sequence of events which concluded with me asking a player to leave MFT, began from the first moment- as soon as the actors entered the scene. For some reason, my eyes were already fixed upon two players, sitting next to each other on the periphery of the seating plan. As the scene began, they turned to each other and one of them said, 'what the fuck is this?' They were not just skeptical; they were already rude and certainly not engaged. Then, as the scene progressed they appeared to survey the entire room to see who was there. The staff member from their club was their education manager, not their coach. At the time, I was aware I could be wrong about them, or jumping to conclusions, and that they could have been thoroughly engaged by the end of the workshop, but I sensed not. Over the course of the day, these two players emerged as the most disruptive and challenging to manage within the delivery of MFT for the entire season. Their behaviour got gradually worse, and by the time of the last activity, the 30 seconds speeches, I asked one of the players to leave the room. Of course, the experience provided me with an opportunity for reflection and growth as a practitioner-researcher, yet also, I feel, provides an interesting example of the potential identities of young footballers, and the potential influences involved.

The players in attendance at that MFT were effectively on their own. By this, I mean in a behavioural sense, they were on their own to behave in a manner they saw as fit and proper within the context of MFT. For context, nobody within the room that day had the power or authority to harm their football progression, or accelerate their careers. As such, I felt the players were aware their behaviours were likely to go unchecked throughout the day. According to Manley (2012) athletes are aware they are being watched, judged, and that to progress they should exhibit certain ways of

conforming to the dominant expectations of that environment. In returning to this story, I suggested the players approached the workshop fully aware that the environment was different, and did not contain the same behavioural expectations in their perceptions. I wondered if the two players felt they could regain control over certain elements of their behaviour.

My own sense of insecurity emerged throughout the day as I pondered when, and indeed how, to intervene. By any means, I am no expert in how to manage 'problematic young people' nor, for that matter, what actually constitutes a problematic young person. I do not have the experiences on which to reflect in this area, through which I could find a style and set of expectations to which I am comfortable. Yet, as I looked at the two players in question, I saw them as the dominated beings that McGillivray et al. (2005) had proposed, to some degree. The description and the connotations seemed so apt in this context. For me, their behaviours were formed by what they thought they should be and who they thought they should be, in the eyes of those in control of their futures. Once this power dynamic was removed through the logistics of MFT (i.e., no coaching staff from their club attended) they no longer carried the burden of expectation and acted as they saw fit for that context.

Upon reflection, I thought those two young people, and perhaps many more, were just a little lost in regards to who they are. They were yet to realize they have a choice in how to think and behave, in who to be as they move forward. Within the admittedly isolated incident in question, perhaps as a set of expectations were removed (as adults around them did not have the perceived authority to support their on-pitch progression) they felt the need to act disruptively, rudely and confrontationally. They were no longer under surveillance and they decided to act out. I actually felt a little sorry for

them, sorry that they had not been able to approach MFT in the manner in which it was intended, to make them think about who they are, how they might develop, and ultimately to support them.

5.19 Conclusions

This chapter has presented the reader with detailed information regarding MFT for the 2015/16 season. Firstly, a timeline of events for the thesis, and MFT, was outlined. Attention then moved to the planning of MFT. This included the background information regarding the developing relationship between the LFE and myself, the critique of an earlier edition of MFT, and the various themes that were considered in planning the workshop. The aims of the workshop were then outlined and it was positioned how an MFT narrative would be created to help the workshop achieve its aims.

The chapter then focused upon the delivery of MFT. This section included the background information, the inclusion of ethno-drama and the logistics of the event. Detailed information regarding the practical delivery of the workshop was then presented. This included multiple scenes, activity explanations and session plans. To finish, auto-ethnographic reflections were included to give my own perceptions of delivering MFT.

In all, it is hoped this chapter provides the reader with enough information to appreciate the volume of planning and delivery work that accompanied MFT. This thesis is fundamentally concerned in working with young players to address research findings, as opposed to providing more theoretical positioning through which to

understand the concepts of identity and PD. The complexity and depth involved within identity-related research is important to help move the ‘athlete support/development’ field forward. However, this body of work is potentially problematic when consideration is given to how best translate the collective findings to help support and develop the population it concerns, the players/athletes themselves. Therefore, MFT aims to produce something original and novel in turning the vast amount of complex ideas concerned with, broadly, the identities and PD of elite youth footballers, into an accessible, informative, engaging and impactful workshop for the players themselves. The focus of this thesis will now shift in the following chapter to provide an evaluation of the workshop through interviews with participant players.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Study 2. Part B

6.1 Introduction

To help orientate the reader, the introduction and literature review outlined some of the key features and challenges prevalent to the context of elite youth football, especially within the concepts of identity and PD. The method chapter outlined the overarching methodological positioning of the thesis. Study 1 then captured apprentices understanding of identity and PD, the results from which helped to inform the planning and delivery of MFT for the 2015/16 season. The processes of planning and delivery were presented as Study 2, Part A. The current chapter now seeks to offer the reader an evaluation of MFT 2015/16, to help inform critique of the workshop relative to its ability to support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD, and its inclusion as a workshop within the career of apprentice footballers.

The following sections of this chapter will re-present the aim of MFT and the related ways in which the workshop intended to achieve the aim. Then, the method section will outline the specific information related to Study 2, Part B, that has not already been included within the overarching methods chapter previously presented (Chapter 3). Following this, an evaluation of MFT is discussed through an integrated interview data and results section. A conclusion based upon the data and results will close the chapter.

For clarity, My Future Today 2015/16 aimed to:

- Support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD

The phrase 'support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD' was given further explanation in the preceding chapter to help when evaluating the

workshop. To briefly summarize, the dominant understanding of identity and PD for many apprentice footballers appeared to be related to the 24/7 footballer concept. Therefore, within a developed understanding of identity and PD, apprentices would explain moving past this singular level of understanding to reach a more complex and multiple level (i.e., an understanding that moves beyond the 24/7 footballer). From this position, they would exhibit an understanding wherein football was an important part of their identity, however, it was only one element and they would be able to identify with other important elements. This understanding may then encourage them to become active in developing the multiplicity of their identity through PD activities. For other players, they may already possess this developed understanding pre-MFT, and so the workshop may support their pre-existing views.

To achieve the aim it was proposed MFT should:

1. Challenge the dominant 24/7 narrative by creating an MFT narrative
2. Encourage attendees to reflect upon their understanding of identity and PD

6.2 Methodology

The following methodological considerations are presented to provide specific information regarding Study 2; namely, participants and sampling, procedural considerations, ethics, interview structure and data representation.

6.2.1 Participants And Sampling

The participants (male, $n = 12$), were all 1st or 2nd year apprentice footballers and aged between 16 and 18. 2 players each were interviewed from 6 different clubs (Championship ($n = 2$), League 1 ($n = 1$) and League 2 ($n = 3$)). At the time of interview, all players were employed as apprentices to professional football clubs operating within the Football League. However, the league status of a club's professional team does not necessarily correlate with their youth department's EPPP categorisation (i.e., Premier League professional team does not guarantee a Category 1 EPPP categorisation for that team's academy). For greater clarity, it is helpful to view the professional team and youth department as separate entities existing within the same overall football club. As such, the participants were employed at Category 1 ($n = 2$), Category 2 ($n = 1$) and Category 3 ($n = 4$) academies as audited against the EPPP legislation.

The sampling of players was initiated through strategic gatekeepers at LFE, as opposed to individual players. In line with multiple recommendations, for example Sparkes and Smith (2014), this was deemed the most ethical approach owing to the ages of the participants. Upon completion of MFT delivery, LFE Regional Officers (RO's) were approached for their assistance in granting access to interview 12 players from various

clubs. RO's support and manage the formal education provision for apprentices at a number of clubs as clustered geographically (e.g., one RO works with clubs in the South East). Beyond this, their role is to meet regularly with apprentices on a 1-1 basis to support their education, general mental health and well-being and offer post-apprenticeship support (where appropriate). They are the 'face' of the LFE in the clubs and know the players to a greater degree than any other staff members at the LFE. They often attended MFT when it involved their clubs and I came to know a number of them personally over the course of the 2015/16 season. Upon request, they provided interview access to 3 clubs from the Midlands, 1 from the South West and 2 from the South East of England. In short, I engaged with 3 different RO's to gain access to 6 different clubs and interview 12 different players. I conducted 6 research/interview visits and interviewed 2 players at each visit.

The RO's were tasked with recruiting all of the participants to be interviewed. The only legislation was that the individual player must have attended MFT within the 2015/16 season. Other variables, for example, 1st or 2nd year scholar, age, contract status, were not controlled. This wide brief made recruitment easier for the RO. I requested they asked players to attend the interview on a voluntary basis, however, the translation of this request cannot be confirmed. The first time I met the player formally (i.e., outside of him attending the workshop) was when the RO brought him to meet with me. Of the 6 separate research visits, 1 visit was to a local college which the specific club utilised for their education provision and 5 visits were to club training facilities. All of the interviews were conducted within small and private rooms. As within Study 1, this approach was purposive sampling, which is essentially strategic in nature and seeks to interview subjects who are relevant to the central research

questions of the study and who have undergone a similar experience (i.e., attending MFT) (Bryman, 2015).

From the outset, it was envisaged to conduct interviews with 12 players who had attended MFT within the 2015/16 season, from 6 different clubs. This was a similar format to Study 1, as I believed it provided a degree of uniformity to the thesis and would elicit a comparable amount of rich data through which to evaluate MFT. As within Study 1, it is suggested that qualitative researchers be mindful as to the volume of data they collect, however, this amount of data had worked well previously and I opted for a similar set-up within Study 2, Part B. The premise of this sample was not to suggest generalisations as to the state of elite youth football throughout all professional clubs, or their players' understanding of identity and PD; moreover, it provides a rich description of one group of players' perceptions of MFT and the related themes. The data may then produce relevant findings for consideration within the wider fabric of the game, yet it should not be positioned as absolute (Williams, 2000). Of note, the data generated within Study 2, Part B, was not intended to be offered in comparison to that of Study 1, however differences will be explored within parts of the conclusion of this evaluation.

The apprentices were interviewed between April and May 2016. As the player reported for his interview, I had no idea as to why it was him, specifically, and not somebody else. The RO's may well have chosen their 'favourite' players, or young men, or alternatively, those they felt would have been the most challenging to interview. My inclinations were that the apprentices reporting for interview were generally well-respected by their RO's, and generally respectful young men.

6.2.2 Procedure

Following the recommendations of Sparkes and Smith (2014) and Bryman (2015), a participant information sheet was presented to each player before the interview began. This included the aims of the research, the likely time constraints, how participation was voluntary and could be removed at any time without prior warning or reason, and the procedures to ensure confidentiality. The potential issues surrounding confidentiality were a consideration within Study 1 also, and so the interviewees within Study 2, Part B, were given the same assurances. Roderick et al. (2000) suggest that recruiting football players as research participants requires the researcher to address their concerns around confidentiality in an upfront manner. Part of the problem is that players are well-aware of the necessity to present a good attitude to their employers, as such, any information that could appear derogatory regarding individual staff members, or the club in general, is unlikely to be shared if they are concerned the statements could be traced to them in the future. The interview structure for Study 2, Part B, was more concerned with their perceptions of the MFT workshop, than seeking to explore their perceptions of club culture, however, assurances were given regarding the dissemination of their comments and how these would be untraceable to them within any written or oral presentation. It was outlined how their interviews would be anonymised, stored electronically on encrypted university databases, destroyed after 2 years and any direct quotes would include the use of pseudonyms. After this information was presented and discussed, participants were invited to ask any questions deemed necessary to clarify any further areas of concern and/or remove themselves from the interview before it began.

All interviews lasted between 60-80 minutes. Upon completion, interviews were transcribed verbatim generating 129 pages of data. It was considered if conducting off-site interviews would have been appropriate, ethically, and would have helped support the authenticity of the research process. However, much like in Study 1, the ages of the players was considered within safeguarding practices and it was decided to conduct interviews on club/college premises, in private rooms, yet within public places.

6.2.3 General Ethics And Practitioner-Researcher Ethics

The ethical concerns for this project were heightened due to the ages of the participants and the insecurity of their profession (i.e., neophyte footballers). This insecurity is challenging and can cause concern for many young players. As all of the players would have already seen me present MFT (through which some form of deliverer-attendee relationship was a natural consequence) there was a balance to be found between building upon this relationship to elicit a research-led conversation surrounding their perceptions of MFT, whilst maintaining professional boundaries. It was the professional boundaries 'issue' which I gave particular consideration to before each interview as I wanted to ensure that the players were aware that within the interview process I was there to capture their thoughts, and not offer a continued form of support and development, nor could I offer any counsel. In this regard, my role was clearly identified to the players at the outset of the interview process, insomuch as I was not a trained counsellor or psychologist, our research encounter was designed for me to capture their perceptions of MFT, and as such, should not be considered as any form of therapy. Nor was I capable of offering them any advice within the interview, should

they ask. If, after the interview, they had specific questions about the support on offer to them then I could direct them to the relevant member of the LFE to support them. In line with the suggestions of Hickey (2015), the interview process sought to earn the trust of the participants through informed, considered and attentive questioning.

Prior to, and upon completion of, the interview, the players were signposted to various mental health and well-being support services they could access if they felt a general need for such a service. Or, if the topics of our interview had caused them undue distress and they required further support to help them navigate their current situations. Within 48 hours of initial interview, all players were contacted via text to their mobile phone. This text thanked them for their participation and highlighted the support systems available to them (e.g., PFA emotional well-being support services (Professional Footballers Association, 2019)).

This research was granted full ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores University. Within Study 2, Part B, ethical clearance was granted from the university upon the provision that I identified myself to the attending players clearly and precisely. Therefore, after the first scene of each MFT delivery, I introduced myself as a practitioner-researcher, explaining my role as having a dual focus for the day inasmuch as I would be delivering the workshop and conducting an ongoing research project. I briefly stated how my earlier (Study 1) project had helped to inform and plan the workshop, and that the next stage of the research would be in evaluating MFT, post-delivery. I told the players that none of them would be mentioned by name in any report and that they may be approached at a later date to take part in an interview regarding their perceptions of the day. Before each interview for Study 2, Part B, I reminded the participants of this information and informed them that this interview was the post-workshop interview I had referred to at the workshop. All of the players

were then invited to remove their participation if these circumstances made them feel uncomfortable. All 12 players agreed to participate within the interview process.

6.2.4 Interview Structure

The specific research focus of Study 2, Part B, was concerned with how attendees interpreted MFT in relation to their understanding of identity and PD. Therefore, the interview schedule was constructed with the central theme of eliciting apprentices' understanding in mind. The interview schedule for Study 2, Part B, is available within Appendix D. To begin, general questions were asked in regards to the participants' perceptions of the day, and why they thought such a workshop was delivered to them. From here, questions and visual prompts were used in tandem. The use of visual prompts, in this context, consisted of several pages from the MFT booklet. Figure 5.1 (activity 1 resource) and Figure 5.2 (activity 3 resource), as presented in the previous chapter, were used to start discussions within interview. Having placed the MFT booklet on the table in front of the interviewee, I would ask what they remembered about the page and corresponding task, before encouraging them to offer more information regarding their perceptions of the ideas behind the task. As an example, Figure 5.2 utilised some of the identity-related quotes from Study 1 and so this acted as a prompt for the interviewee to discuss identity and PD in relation to the players who originally made the statements through Study 1, but also their own thoughts surrounding the concepts. Fundamentally, the questions in the interview were constructed to encourage the players to talk about themselves, the workshop and the themes they perceived to be within the workshop.

Before a firm interview schedule was arrived upon, the first two interviews with players were treated as a form of pilot interview to trial certain questions and explore how the workbook prompts would work. These two interviews are included within the data as limited changes were made to the schedule, but this process (i.e., treating the interviews as pilots and having the freedom to explore themes and make ‘mistakes’) again proved invaluable. As an example, from these interviews I noted I could do better in utilising silence to encourage the participant to keep talking and explaining themselves. The neutrality of my questions also improved as a result of this process. Following the recommendations of Kvale (2008), a balance was sought that included a clear, gentle and sensitive approach to asking questions, whilst a critical level of engagement was maintained in regards to any inconsistencies presented by the player’s responses. The improvement in my abilities to conduct interviews was noticeable between Study 1 and Study 2, Part B, yet, in reality, every interview conducted throughout this whole thesis has presented me with learning opportunities and the opportunity to engage within reflective practice (Knowles et al., 2012), for it is not the experience alone through which we learn, it is reflecting upon the experience.

6.2.5 Data Representation

According to Sparkes and Smith (2014) the dominant approach to representing qualitative data is the foregrounding of participants’ voices and viewpoints, through written and direct quotations, within the results sections. Whilst dominant, this form of representation can, to varying degrees, be indicative of ‘interpretive omnipotence’ (p. 155) (Sparkes and Smith, 2014) with the author proposing they are an unbiased conduit for relaying the views of others. Yet, with practice and through reflection, this

can produce well-crafted work deemed compelling in capturing the experiences of individuals within various social contexts. At this stage of the thesis, and within my own development as a researcher and author, I felt capable of utilising this form of representation to offer the reader my interpretations of the interpretations of others concerning MFT and the related research themes.

The following section of this chapter presents data and discussion to explore how apprentice footballers perceived MFT and understood the themes of the workshop. If we consider MFT to be an informative intervention, then the data and discussion to be presented aims to equip the reader with more information through which to better review the effectiveness of the intervention.

6.3 Results And Discussion

A number of complex and diverse concepts emerged from the data that underpinned apprentices' perceptions of MFT in relation to their understanding of identity and PD. The following sections of this chapter offer the concepts (accompanied with supporting data and discussion) through which MFT can be evaluated. These concepts have been categorised as (i) narrative challenge (ii) alleviating guilt (iii) narrative support (iv) understanding in relation to loss and future (v) understanding in relation to now (vi) changes for now and (vii) changes for the future.

6.3.1 Narrative Challenge

Within the delivery of MFT, role models were purposefully used to challenge the 24/7 narrative by suggesting they were engaged in PD activities alongside their careers as footballers. These activities ranged from the seemingly simple (e.g., music enthusiast), to an engagement with a structured/formal process (e.g., becoming an author). All examples showed successful professional footballers doing/being/enjoying more than just their football. For a number of those interviewed post-event, it appeared the MFT narrative was perceived as different to their pre-workshop beliefs (i.e., surprising, new, or challenging). For Player 3:

Well, I think, that actually opened a lot of people's eyes... Like, Frank Lampard saying he loves books, you would never think that unless you knew. That was amazing for people to think, 'you know what? Yeah, he is a great footballer, but he is still normal. He's not just a footballer, he can do this as well'. So it was good. It started us off as well, this exercise, making us think that we are not just footballers... even though if you've been brought up into football, it doesn't define you as a person. You have still got more about you.

Here, Player 3, is discussing Frank Lampard (a famous footballer and role model within this example) and his PD activity of 'book enthusiast and author'. The suggestion that the example/exercise, 'opened a lot of people's eyes' proposes Player 3 sees this information as conflicting to some of his pre-existing beliefs surrounding the identities and PD activities of elite footballers. His statement proposes a process of reflection in relation to such ideas as his initial understanding appears challenged. Post-event, his understanding now moves to consider how being a footballer 'doesn't

define you as a person' and that 'you have still got more about you'. In effect, it appears from such a statement that he once assumed that being a footballer did define footballers, a view common amongst footballers according to Gearing (1999). Yet, MFT appears to ask him to consider if this is all they define themselves as. He further proposes how his fellow peers can see themselves as more than just footballers too, and that such an approach to PD is still possible for young players who have 'been brought up into football'. This phrase proposes a strong socialization process is evident throughout youth football, one through which young footballers can interpret as encouraging a narrow and football-related identity formation (Brown and Potrac, 2009). For Player 3, despite an early engagement within elite youth football, young players can still be encouraged to develop their understanding of identity, beyond that of football, if they have the requisite support. In this instance, it appears the challenge presented by the MFT narrative has been necessary to facilitate such personal reflections.

For Player 10, there is a similar suggestion of surprise caused by the alternative narrative presented:

Yeah, when I saw it, when we did it, I was a bit surprised... you don't really think that Frank Lampard would be the type to, I know he is a down-to-earth guy, but we wouldn't really think that Frank Lampard loves books. Being like a goal scoring, dominant, midfielder you would be thinking, 'this guy is probably at home watching his top hundred goals, or something like this'. So, it kind of makes you go, 'well, seeing him, especially being one of the best players ever in the Premier league, he makes you think, wow'.

The use of the word ‘wow’ offers an emotive response to the ideas presented by the workshop, perhaps indicating these ideas are impressive and/or very different to pre-conceived ideas. There is surprise that players such as Frank Lampard are not conforming to the 24/7 identity and instead actively participating within PD activities. Player 10 gives an interesting insight into his pre-MFT beliefs whereby elite players would navigate their careers by, even when away from work, continually watching footage of their performances, relentlessly. If this were in fact the case, then this type of behaviour would be a perfect practical example of the 24/7 narrative. For Balk et al. (2018) and Price et al. (2010), elite athletes enjoy multiple activities and hobbies away from the pitch to help them prepare for their next competition and enjoy their life outside of sport. Of course, the player in question, Frank Lampard, may well dedicate time to watching his performances when he is away from the club, however, the workshop has asked the player to think about what else he may do with his time and energy, and crucially, ask themselves why this may be the case.

The subtle contradiction to the 24/7 narrative presented within a (somewhat) simple example of Frank Lampard’s interests away from football, and a short sentence explaining why, challenges the more, more, more (football) mantra as being the only option to achieve success (Mitchell et al., 2014). The surprise that such examples cause young footballers supports Douglas and Carless (2014) suggestion that the dominant narratives, in this instance the 24/7 footballer, are readily available and often pushed onto young athletes, explicitly and implicitly, from many different areas, to the point it becomes accepted without question. That people have multiple interests to their work is not astonishing within the wider population, yet, it is not an idea that appears appreciated within athletic communities (Balk et al., 2018).

For Player 7, alongside a sense of surprise, there is insight as to how such views may have formed:

It's very inspirational... Because when you see them on the TV you just think, 'oh, they are just footballers', but when you, like, kind of get into their life, you just see that they're able to conduct their skills into a different, kind of, area in life. So, yeah...Because when you see someone like Frank Lampard, who is just a brilliant central midfield player, but you just wouldn't... It's not that nobody cares about that life... You just wouldn't see that in the media, so...

The media coverage of football and those that play the game appears to have influenced how Player 7 perceives the lives of those he watches. Douglas (2009) proposed how sport reporting through media outlets often perpetuates the performance narrative, failing to provide the counter stories that are available. News outlets may fail to show the performer as a person, instead choosing to report on them as a 'body' according to Hoberman (2001). The possible consequence of this is represented within the surprise several players are suggesting regarding quite simple off-field (PD) interests.

For Player 8, there is shock and reflection:

So, for me, that is saying, even though it is, like, Mata and Lampard, off the pitch they are different people... I think I was quite shocked... at the time... like Mata and Baines, you wouldn't have thought he goes home and plays music... It's a bit of a shock really...Because I've just grown up around football, and I don't really have another life. But this kind of proves that you do.

The suggestion that ‘I have just grown up around football, and I don’t really have another life’ is a powerful and challenging statement to consider within the context of elite youth football, especially given the low success rates for converting talented teenager, to seasoned professional. The cost (i.e., psychological distress) of this view for the young person involved could be problematic should release occur (Blakelock et al., 2016). Yet, further, it highlights how the 24/7 narrative has become a taken-for-granted assumption as to the journey that must be followed to become elite players.

The sense of surprise within some players’ interpretations of the messages inherent to the MFT narrative suggests their understanding of identity and PD has clearly been influenced by the 24/7 narrative, inasmuch as they perceive successful footballers as only being interested in football, and are surprised if shown information to the contrary. The MFT narrative has challenged the belief that successful footballers achieve success by only focusing on their careers, exclusively, at all times, and by encompassing the identity of a footballer, 24/7. The notion that such simple activities and interests away from the pitch are seen as so surprising and inspiring are perhaps indicative of the strength of influence the 24/7 narrative has had upon young footballers. In reality, players are ‘only’ expressing interests in reading, music and further education, activities large numbers of the general population enjoy. This surprise expressed by the attendees here, proposes that their understanding of identity and PD has been developed as a result of their attendance, the MFT narrative, and the reflections it has supported. In truth, the surprise players express regarding such simple PD activities demonstrates the challenges facing identity and PD work in an elite youth football context.

6.3.2 Alleviating Guilt

Exploring the merits of the MFT narrative in comparison to the 24/7 narrative causes surprise and challenge amongst some players. The concept of guilt was introduced by one player and it potentially helps to explain how the 24/7 narrative has become persuasive within the pre-MFT understanding of some players. For example, deviating from the 24/7 may cause some apprentices to believe they are not fully committing to the profession. For Player 4, the MFT narrative served to alleviate guilt:

A lot of people would feel guilty if they had other things, because then they may feel like they're not giving everything to football, but you are still doing everything, you just understand that when you are not giving everything to football, you can just give it to something else. And this shows that the best players do that...

Players interviewed within Study 1 suggested alternative interests to football are hidden for fear of being misrepresented by staff at their clubs as a lack of desire to improve, or 'make it' as a footballer. As one player proposed, 'clubs give the impression it is football only', this intimates there is no space for anything else in one's life. Naturally, the fear of misrepresentation may lead to the silencing of ideas and voices (Manley et al., 2016). According to Player 4, MFT, in bringing light and discussion to such topics will help break this silence and bring such ideas to the fore. For Jones and Denison (2017), within football cultures, any departure from the normalised behaviours are subject to punishment. It is perhaps this concern that forces any PD activities to be hidden and silenced by young players, for fear it may lead to punishment, ridicule or shaming.

From an ethical perspective, Player 4's understanding of identity and PD may facilitate a chance of transition success when his career draws to a close, as, during his career, he expresses an ability to give himself to 'something else'. He proposes that another player's guilt may be linked to their lack of understanding of identity and PD, beyond being a footballer. Perhaps it can be suggested that silencing the MFT narrative, and promoting the 24/7 narrative, will lead to more players adopting the 24/7 identity, which in effect could make their transition much more distressing. The level of distress, in relation to identity loss, appears high according to Brown and Potrac (2009) and Blakelock et al. (2016). Further to this, creating a culture of guilt surrounding having a broader identity and interests outside of football may be, in the strongest possible terms, unethical, owing to the statistical likelihood of career failure at the apprenticeship phase. If the athletes feel guilty about exploring who they are outside of sport, whilst engaged in sport, then the only window to prepare athletes for life beyond is at the end of career, which does not appear to be optimal for the mental health of those involved (Douglas and Carless, 2009, Brownrigg et al., 2012).

6.3.3 Narrative Support

The narrative presented throughout MFT clearly challenges some of the interviewees' ideas regarding how successful footballers navigate their careers, from an identity and PD perspective. However, whilst the workshop offers a narrative challenge to some, for others, it appears to support their pre-existing beliefs (i.e., beliefs already formed before attending the workshop). For Player 4:

It (MFT) was ensuring that you realise football isn't the be all and end all of absolutely everything out there. Which for me, I already sort of knew that, but it was nice to know

that there are people, and a system set up, that will allow others who can't really see that...

The suggestion that, 'I already sort of knew', proposes that MFT has not presented any new ideas to him. His suggestion that 'football isn't the be all and end all of absolutely everything out there' is a strapline which clearly deviates from the 24/7 narrative. Player 4 proposes that other players who 'can't really see that' have not thought critically about the 24/7 approach in the same way that he has, and he believes sharing the MFT narrative is valuable amongst his peers to offer them the support they may require. Showing young footballers that there is support available, during any point of their career or transition from the game, should always be part of player development systems within the professional game according to Brownrigg et al. (2012).

Player 1 shared a similar idea:

It just brought home the message to me, again, that I have had the whole way through football really, that there is a bigger picture.

A young scholar proposing that there is 'a bigger picture' than football, highlights a broader and deeper understanding of identity and PD which extends beyond the somewhat narrow and all-encompassing 24/7 footballer identity. Carrying the idea 'the whole way through football' clearly highlights that MFT has not been the conduit for this belief; instead, he has attended MFT with this idea already in place and has interpreted the workshop as supporting this view. Hickey and Roderick (2017) made

similar assertions in suggesting that young players were aware and active within maintaining identities concurrent to their football.

6.3.4 Understanding In Relation To Loss And Future

The interpretations of MFT, for numerous players interviewed, positioned the workshop as a transition-supporting event (i.e., a workshop to support players moving from professional football into alternative employment). Support for a workshop interpreted by attendees in this fashion is in light of the moral and ethical requirements to support players into alternative careers given the slim possibility, statistically, for the majority of elite youth footballers to achieve success as professional footballers. For several players, they were able to express their understanding of the event in relation to their futures, and specifically within the concept of 'loss'. In this context, an idea whereby they proposed MFT asked them to consider how they might deal with 'losing' the game from their identity (in the professional sense), and the impact this may have on them.

When debating the merits of various identity-based quotes, quotes used in the workshop and re-introduced during interview, Player 8 made the following suggestion:

The top guy [quote], he is definitely, 'football'. So, if he is ever not going to get a pro, he is going to be a bit messed up really... He's definitely got all his eggs in one basket...

This apprentice proposes how the player from the quote is 'football'. A simple label, it proposes the player from the quote is consumed with the game and has potentially

adopted the 24/7 identity. The interviewee logically suggests that if football is ever removed from the person making the quote, then there will be an emotional impact. For Player 8, heavily investing within the football or 24/7 identity clearly comes with a 'cost' to the individual should this identity be lost due to a lack of progression. The term 'a bit messed up' is somewhat crude, however, his suggestion as to the likely transition issues for young players being released, as they 'lose' the footballer identity, is supported academically by Brown and Potrac (2009) and Blakelock et al. (2016).

There is a similar suggestion of potential loss, followed by the emotional distress caused by the feeling of loss. For Player 10:

You can't just stick yourself onto one thing because that can send you crazy over time, if things don't go too well... You know, people have breakdowns and stuff like that...

Player 10's language suggests he is applying the understanding of the event to himself as he indicates that a 24/7 approach to being a footballer 'can send you crazy over time, if things don't go too well'. Here, he is referring to being released and the impact that could have on the general mental health of a person if all they identify with is being a footballer. Research by Goutteborge and Aoki (2014) and Goutteborge et al. (2015) has suggested that the mental health of professional footballers can be compromised through their retirement and is often related to the lack of preparation, or support, for the players in dealing with such changes to identity. Player 10 appears to understand the connotations associated with a narrow and one-dimensional awareness of identity, in the context of elite youth football, through the potential for loss. In effect, he understands identity in the context of loss, release and how this future self (Hickey and Roderick, 2017) might feel without football. He asks, if all that exists

is football, and football is taken away, what will be left for him in the future. It is the loss of this identity that players, through interview, are proposing could cause severe transition issues. Within the work of Brown and Potrac (2009) and Blakelock et al. (2016) it appears young players only understood this concept of loss after their release from the game, and had to react to their position, as opposed to during their career, with the ability to be proactive.

This view is eloquently discussed, by Player 4:

If I was only football, obviously a lot of people are only football, and there's nothing wrong with being only football, but when football is not there you turn around and there is nothing there. And you think, 'Christ, what have I done'... So, I've always thought that when I turn around and say, 'football, I can't do it any more', whether that's retirement or nobody wants me, I want to turn around and be able to walk back into a normal life where I know I can be a success... If football did go wrong I know that I could still be happy. It's not the end of the world... there is nothing wrong with having your life revolve around it at all, but as long as when it stops revolving you can get off, and go into another life...

This personal and emotive offering as to how one young man understands his identity in relation to his football aspirations, provides powerful insight into how he navigates the uncertainty of his neophyte career. Clearly, if football is 'lost' to this player as he fails to progress, he understands his identity as more than being a footballer, and is confident his transition will be supported by this understanding. He questions how his peers can function through transition if their identities are narrow, one-dimensional and exclusively attached to football. This position is championed for Jones and

Denison (2017) who propose that the footballing identity can no longer be sustained, post-career, and suggests that an ‘alternative understanding of one’s role becomes a necessity’ (p. 929). For several players interviewed post-MFT they are addressing the potential for transition distress by considering how this transition will leave them, and others, feeling once their football is ‘lost’, if football is all they have. If offering apprentice footballers transition support is crucial (Lavallee, 2005), then it appears asking them to reflect on ‘life without football’, from an identity perspective, supports a process whereby they are no longer complicit (McGillivray et al., 2005) or helpless within the transition issues identified.

Player 10 proposes that he has already begun the process of future planning as he is aware that his career may not work out as hoped:

I have had this conversation here, with the physio’s, and also at home with friends and family, and obviously I would like a professional contract, that’s why I’m here, but I’m very comfortable with seeing myself in other situations... So if things don’t quite work out, I’m very comfortable with doing something else.

During his apprenticeship, the player is thinking and starting conversations about life outside of football. He is considering this before it happens, which is a proactive strategy. McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) proposed how footballers are complicit in their own oppression regarding their lack of future career planning, however, it appears the narrative presented by MFT helps to break this oppression as it positions post-career planning as helpful within the context of identity and loss. The suggestion that Player 10 is not relying on football to make him happy, is a clear deviation from previous literature in this field (Roderick, 2014). To be happy without football requires

an understanding of identity whereby a player constructs his identity without using football as the primary reference. Here, the player is not just talking about the superficial or logistical questions around employment post-career, he is talking more philosophically with an assertion that he could be happy without football. He can see a successful future, with meaning and purpose in an alternative profession. His ability to view and understand identity in multiple ways, and not exclusively related to football, means he can see success in multiple ways too. It would appear that many footballers are hopeful of a smooth transition when their careers end, yet are not particularly active within this situation (Park et al., 2013). For Vucic and Bolton (2019), individuals with a clearer idea of their future self, reported higher levels of proactive behaviours.

6.3.5 Understanding In Relation To Now

The planning and delivery of MFT (Chapter 5) detailed the rationale attached to the various decisions employed, and outlined a desire to move the workshop from solely occupying a 'Plan B', or alternative career position, within the views of attendees. The chapter proposed that if the workshop was understood in this way by attending players, then there was the potential for a lack of engagement and/or reflection should the attendee feel confident of progressing within the game. The data presented thus far appears to suggest that MFT has encouraged young players to consider their transition through understanding identity and PD. For some, this understanding appeared to be against the backdrop of a potential identity loss and the issues this may cause. However, this level of understanding fails to appreciate any of the potential benefits to be accrued through identity development and ongoing PD activities during a sporting career as

identified by Pink et al. (2014). For many players, during their apprenticeships, their concerns are related to their current performance and progression; asking them to think beyond this may be unreasonable given the environments they exist within each day (Parker, 2001). However, for some of those interviewed, they did understand identity and PD in relation to current performance, not just the future without football; their understanding went beyond transition support.

For Player 8, in debating one of the quotes used through interview:

I mean, Frank Lampard wouldn't be saying, the 'focus is everything' one [quote], because he obviously doesn't. He is probably going to be the one saying he is hard-working. He is trying to develop himself on and off the pitch. At the end of the day, he has probably relaxed himself by doing that [becoming an author], not just stressing himself out.

According to this interviewee, Frank Lampard not saying the 'focus is everything' (i.e., focusing everything on football) does not mean that he is thinking of a future without football, it means that he is thinking this way to support him in the immediate sense. The player's interpretation of the ideas presented through MFT propose how developing off the pitch (i.e., not being the 24/7 footballer) can be supportive. He suggests this famous role model will be more relaxed by having a tangible PD activity away from football. Activities which help athletes find balance can help to reduce stress (which according to Price et al. (2010) and Balk et al. (2018) is important for the long-term performance of elite athletes). Supporting young players' immediate aims of becoming professional footballers is the currency that underpins all of their

interactions at football clubs, according to Cushion and Jones (2014), and for some of the attendees, the MFT narrative is interpreted as helpful in this regard.

The use of role modelling appeared useful in encouraging interviewees' opinions about the workshop. Player 2 utilises the stories of multiple role models to offer his perceptions:

I think it's good because it shows that they are not all just focused on football, they've got something else in their life that they can focus on. Like Baines and his music, I think it just helps him to switch off, but it will just help him as well to stay happy. Because that's just the main thing in sport to boost your performance, really... So, it's finding hobbies that can take you away from football, so you are not like one-dimensional. You're not just football, you've got something about you, personality-wise, and when you go home you've got something you can fall back on. Whether it's reading or something else like that.

For this player the performance link is explicit in proposing that footballers with something else in their lives (i.e., engaged within PD activities), can, at times, focus on this activity to help them stay 'happy'. The player then proposes this emotional state is crucial for performance at football. Such statements position embracing PD as common sense and potentially being viewed in the same way as other proposed performance-enhancing interventions prevalent within the game, despite this approach clearly deviating from the 24/7 approach.

The perceived wisdom to encourage young footballers to follow a 24/7 narrative is challenged by this player's proposal that finding hobbies that help 'take you away from football' and prevent a 'one-dimensional' view of self as 'just football', will help

the performance of the player. There is depth to this understanding as it proposes a broad identity, supported through PD activities, can support current performance. Clearly, there is no sense of guilt expressed here when proposing how PD activities are helpful to the individual; in fact they are presented as a necessity to make football performances more successful. The research of Aquilina (2013) and Balk et al. (2018) supports this position, one of PD activities being supportive to performance, in the immediate sense.

The support that PD activities can offer to top performers is central to Player 1's interpretation of the workshop:

If these players made it to the top, and still have other things going on, then it shows that younger players can still have other things going on, and can still reach their goals in football and become some of the best players in the world... Because, whether you're playing well or badly, your performance is good or bad, if you're riding high on success, you've still got the reality that football is not... You can still ground yourself... And then if you're not playing so well, you've always got that release of something else in your life. Whether that's College, just going out with friends, socially, you've always got that release to go and ground yourself and think that it's not all about football. Football is not the end of the world.

There is clear suggestion that having a life and identity that does not solely revolve around football is healthy for performance. Having 'other things going on' is helpful as a reminder that 'it's not all about football'. Stambulova et al. (2014), report that young athletes are often trying to find some sense of balance between their sporting pursuits and other important life spheres. Within Player 1's idea, there is a clear

recognition that having an understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of a 24/7 footballer, by engaging in ‘other things’, will automatically allow for a greater perspective throughout the elite football journey. This greater perspective (i.e., maintaining a balanced view of football to be part of life, not all of life) is presented as providing a release from the pressures of football. Any pressure experienced is perhaps released through not having to fulfil the role of a footballer, exclusively, as one understands football is not everything in life. As an explanation, Player 1 proposes that engaging within PD activities will help to ‘ground yourself’ when things are going well, and offer a ‘release’ when things are not going well, both of which will support continued performance by maintaining perspective, and increase the likelihood of returning to strong performances when poor form is experienced. The suggestion that younger players can still have ‘other things going on’ alongside their football, and how ‘some of the best players in the world’ adopt this approach, outlines how engaging with other interests will help players to flourish at work.

Player 4 proposes that the messages inherent to MFT can also support the performance agenda:

It's a useful exercise because it shows that the best people in the profession understand that there is more to it than just football. And so although they accept that it is important, and that you have got to be driven, it's not the 'be all and end all' because they have found something else which they love to do, and they want to do. It shows people who think that, if you are just 100% driven to football that's the only way to success, it shows them that you can actually say, 'I'm going to be driven, but I'm going to make sure that there is something else that I love to do'. This shows that it works.

This statement, 'it shows people who think that, if you are just 100% driven to football that's the only way to success', suggests that MFT directly challenges the 24/7 narrative by proposing that there are alternative methods to achieving success within the game. Suggesting that footballers can and should engage with other PD activities to find something else that they 'love to do' alongside football, suggests that MFT can be the catalyst for young footballers to apply a degree of critical thinking to the 24/7 narrative. The ability to think critically about identity and PD appears to be missing within the current development journey for young players, however, in encouraging this critical thinking and reflection, players may then wish to make changes as to how they approach their neophyte careers and plan for life beyond football.

6.3.6 Action For Now

It was evident within all interviews how the workshop had encouraged players to reflect upon the ideas they had perceived as central. This process of reflection had stimulated a number of players to initiate certain changes to their behaviours in the post-workshop period. For some, these definitive actions were directed towards how they approached performing at football. For Player 5, the workshop had offered much cause for reflection:

Well, yeah... I mean, I live and breathe it. It is everything; it's football everything.

Q. How do you feel about football being everything?

I'm... I'm not happy with it, to be honest. Well, before the day I was just like, 'yeah this is normal' ... I was just watching football, playing football, talking to my dad about football, and stuff like that... you still want it to be everything in a way, but you don't

always want to think about it... I used to over-think it... A lot. I just used to, like, think about football all the time... So, if I was just staring out the window or something, I used to just think about it too much... I get to football and try and do what I need to do on the pitch. You don't need to be thinking about it all the time...

For this player, MFT has clearly offered thought-provoking ideas which appear to challenge some of his existing beliefs surrounding how best to navigate life as an elite youth footballer. The assertion that 'football is everything' and the implication that, pre-MFT, he found it a natural occurrence to think about football relentlessly, appears to be a common understanding of identity for elite youth footballers (Mitchell et al., 2014). Before the workshop, this view is presented as 'normal' as he 'thinks about football all of the time'. Upon reflection, the young player has instigated change, fighting against some of the taken for granted assumptions regarding how best to achieve success.

Before the workshop the player suggests he was thinking about football 'too much', and that his own actions were causing him to 'over-think it'. For him, thinking about football all the time, clearly an approach which resembled the 24/7 identity, is now identified as being unhelpful to his performances and subsequent progression. He relates overthinking as being performance inhibiting, as opposed to being performance enhancing. This is an interesting point given the game-wide assumption that positions the 24/7 approach as the only way to achieve success as a neophyte professional (Cushion and Jones, 2014). Here, the player is looking to find greater balance from a cognitive perspective (i.e., not always thinking about football). This approach of searching for balance, or finding a way to 'switch off' as identified within Study 1, is

also supported by Hickey and Roderick (2017) who proposed that young professional footballers were keen to ‘leave football at football’. According to Stambulova et al. (2014) it is possible for young athletes to find a sense of balance, yet it needs to be worked at, as opposed to hopefully waiting for it to manifest naturally. For this player, a connotation to the 24/7 approach is overthinking about football, something he is keen to avoid, and so he begins to take action in how he thinks about football, which will help in the immediate sense regarding his progression.

6.3.7 Action For The Future

For numerous players, the reflections caused by MFT, appeared to play a crucial role in how they were planning for their futures. The workshop appeared to act as a catalyst in encouraging them to change their behaviours, specifically regarding how they were considering and preparing for their post-apprenticeship futures. For Player 7, the reflections caused by MFT had a tangible impact; in this instance, a renewed focus upon his formal education during his scholarship:

Well, for me, I think I've started to work much harder in college. Because before... I wasn't, not taking it seriously, but now I've started to work a bit harder knowing that the work I'm doing now could help me in the future...

The distinct change in his educational effort due to the reflection caused by MFT is a positive outcome for the event, especially in consideration of the LFE's core business to support scholars' formal education during their apprenticeships. Platts (2012) provided the most comprehensive review of education within elite youth football and

proposed educational provision was failing to engage already sceptical young men as to the potential benefits for engagement. The work suggested that whilst attainment of qualifications is high amongst Football League scholars, the players involved subjectively reported engagement and effort levels as low. In reaction to the reflection caused by MFT, Player 7 has interpreted that improved educational effort will be helpful for his future.

For Player 10, the reflections caused by MFT have also stimulated a change in behaviour, this time a pragmatic approach to transition planning:

It made me think, 'actually, I don't have very long and if things don't work out my way'... Whereas, before the meeting I was thinking, 'I'll deal with it when it comes', sort of thing, afterwards I thought, 'I need to think about it now'. You know, asking myself, 'what do you like to do?' And I have actually even made a note page on my phone, and put about 8 to 10 different things that I could do if I wasn't to get a professional contract. And I don't think that list would have been as long, I don't think I would have taken things so seriously, if it wasn't for the event...

The MFT narrative is interpreted by this player so that he thinks it sensible to give more thought to his transition plans. He feels this will give him the ability to take further action should the upcoming professional contract decision be a negative one. The perceived question interpreted from the event, 'what do you like to do?' helps him in starting the process of planning for a potential life away from professional football. Such a proactive approach to post-career planning moves players away from the oppressed and disempowered physical asset (McGillivray et al., 2005), to young men who are not as dependent upon the game of professional football to offer them a

successful and fulfilling future. Player 10 is becoming responsible and proactive in creating a life beyond football. However, this action plan appears to exist only through an understanding of identity that goes beyond football. Within the area of athlete transition/retirement, it would appear that the re-defining of identity once the sport/career is over, occurs in the period of post-release; beforehand, this identity understanding appears to get limited attention (Park et al., 2013). However, Player 10, having considered such ideas surrounding identity and his future away from football, during his career, would appear to be well-equipped to experience less transition distress. Further, his proactive planning strategy regarding his transition appears to move beyond the more practical elements (i.e., getting a job) to consider what will be enjoyed and what will carry a greater sense of meaning (i.e., getting a job that meets likes and interests).

Taking action to protect one's future, in the form of a proactive post-career plan, was prevalent amongst a number of interviewees. However, for Player 3, within this proactive transition planning he concurrently perceived this to be supporting his current performances within football:

I was one of the lads that stayed behind afterwards and I looked into it a bit. I'm a big person on always having a Plan B. Don't focus on it, focus on your Plan A, but it is always good to have a backup and I think it was good that I found out personal things about me that I'd never even considered before... I've looked into personal training, because, like I say, the characteristics that I've learned... I like helping people and it's something that I enjoy. And it's linked to sport...I mean, knowing myself as a person, and knowing that I could do this, all this, that makes me relax a lot more and doesn't put as much pressure on me. I mean, don't get me wrong, I've never taken my

eye off the ball and I still want to be a footballer, but it's a lot of... It's almost composure; you almost relax within your performance.

The proactive nature of second career planning is an interesting reaction to experiencing MFT. Encouraging young footballers to be more proactive in regards to their inevitable transition from the game is an area of support that governing bodies, player unions and individual clubs have struggled with according to Brownrigg et al. (2012). Player 3 is certainly comfortable in taking the lead in this regard; waiting behind after the event to seek more information and contemplating other areas outside of football that he would enjoy suggests that MFT has played a role in him accepting that action may be required. The uncertain nature of football as work is a feature of sociological research in this area (Roderick, 2006b, Roderick and Schumacker, 2016), and perhaps MFT is being interpreted in such a way that encourages players to address this uncertainty in finding something more 'certain'. Perhaps, having a plan or option for post-football progression, no matter how small, is something certain that gives them greater perspective surrounding their futures. Player 3 proposes this perspective around his future is generated from his post-apprenticeship contingency planning and this is helpful to him from a performance perspective.

There is clear suggestion that MFT encourages apprentices to become responsible in considering their futures, and for some, this responsibility leads to a proactive plan, which in turn perhaps supports current performance through offering the individual a degree of certainty about their future. In regards to attendees of the workshop and planning for a life without football, the reflections caused by MFT appear to help them consider life without football, and for them to take control in mitigating against this

loss; not just from an identity perspective, but also in regards to the practicalities involved in moving on (i.e., finding new employment opportunities). For Mitchell (2015), it takes great courage for young players to plan for a life outside of professional football, the data considered here proposes that MFT is a valuable resource to them in this regard as it appears they start to accept that action is required.

6.4 Conclusions

The preceding sections of this chapter sought to offer the reader an evaluation of MFT through my interpretations of the interpretations of a select group of attendees throughout the 2015/16 season. In offering the data above through a number of key themes, synthesised with important academic literature in the field, it is hoped the reader can more effectively appreciate the workshop and evaluate its merits regarding the central aim: to develop and support apprentices understanding of identity and PD.

In offering a conclusion to the evidence presented here, there appears to be something of a 'continuum of understanding' in relation to players' understanding of identity and PD within the context of elite youth football. For many players, without an intervention, such as MFT, there appears to be a lack of understanding of identity and PD that goes beyond the 24/7 footballer and identity. This level of understanding appears somewhat one-dimensional and deviating from this approach, without an intervention such as MFT, appears to cause some players unease. The workshop of MFT then appears to move players further forward on the continuum whereby they begin to understand identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 identity. This is achieved either by offering the individual a challenging narrative to the 24/7 narrative, or by

offering them support to their pre-existing understandings. From here, players underpin their understanding of the themes in relation to their futures after football; they appear to appreciate the potential loss of identity that might accompany being released and mitigate against this by developing a broader understanding, during career. Alternatively, they understand identity and PD, beyond the 24/7, through a belief that this understanding will support them and their performances, as footballers, in the immediate sense through the potential performance benefits to be accrued.

The concept of loss emerged as a strong theme throughout the data. It is hoped this concept was used to educate young players as to the potential pitfalls associated with identity understanding and identity loss, as opposed to scaring them unduly regarding their potential futures without football. Regardless, this idea of loss appeared helpful for the players to understand the themes of the workshop and, further, a player proposing that 'football is not the end of the world' is telling of the impact of the workshop. This is a simple, yet uncommon view within elite football (Mitchell et al., 2014), however, it would appear there is one significant benefit to statements of this ilk. Fundamentally, most of the children engaged within elite youth football, and most of the apprentices throughout the various leagues, will fail to become footballers despite their considerable investment. As such, MFT supports an ethical duty in helping young players understand themselves beyond the confines of the football pitch.

Another theme to emerge was in respect to the potential performance benefits potentially associated within a broader understanding of identity and engaging within concurrent PD during a football career. Here, the interpretation of MFT shifted slightly, from considering how developing an understanding of identity and PD may support apprentices during their transition, to how this understanding can support the central aim of achieving success as a footballer. This is an important distinction within the

context of the professional game. Young players at football clubs are continually interacting with adults to elicit some form of performance gain, from the strength and conditioning work, physiological preparation, tactical analysis, technique development and nutritional education (Williams, 2013). Further, the psychological support offered to footballers is inherently linked to performance (Nesti and Littlewood, 2010). All such interventions help to fulfil the performance agenda central to many sporting institutions (Douglas and Carless, 2014). The skills necessary to perform have been given centrality to the research landscape (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2015), yet the identity-related research has focused on the transition difficulties associated with rejection from the game (Blakelock et al., 2016). However, the suggestion within some post-MFT interviews is that developing an understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, will support performance. Proof that any of the aforementioned interventions ‘work’ to sufficiently affect performance, including MFT, would be open to wildly contrasting interpretations depending upon the philosophical underpinning of those offering critique (Bryman, 2015). However, this performance-related intimation regarding MFT, and its inherent ideas, potentially helps to move identity and PD understanding from a ‘nice to have’, as a means of transition-support, to an important part of the football journey. Put simply, it appears that players attending the event were asking themselves if the 24/7 narrative is the only, and best, way to achieve performance success. Indeed, for some of those interviewed, the 24/7 narrative was not seen as being conducive to performance. This is a novel suggestion within the culture of professional football.

There were numerous examples of MFT prompting enough reflection amongst attendees that it was the catalyst for them to change their approach to either navigating their apprenticeship, or in making plans for the future. The MFT narrative had real

impact upon these young footballers because it positioned the ideas inherent to the workshop as helpful. From a purely ethical position, at a minimum, MFT appeared to develop or support apprentices understanding of identity and PD in such a way that they were better equipped to deal with the dramatic change in identity that being released from their contracts might cause them. Their broader understanding of identity, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, means that they can appreciate more fully how life without football might affect them, and make alternative plans during their career. The capabilities of the workshop, a stand-alone and one-day workshop within a two year apprenticeship, in eliciting understanding, highlights what can be achieved and the importance of education surrounding the topics of identity and PD within the context of elite youth football.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7. Findings, Reflections And Implications

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter will conclude the thesis by presenting three important sections. The first section of this chapter will offer a synthesis of the key findings of the research. Within this section, there will be a brief summary of the research journey, followed by suggestions as to how the thesis builds upon, and extends, existing research findings. The first section will conclude with the new knowledge generated as a result of the research project. The second section will present personal reflections; namely, reflections on the research journey and the methodological challenges experienced, and my development as an academic researcher. This section will conclude with the strengths and limitations of the research presented throughout the thesis and discuss ideas regarding future research in this area. The third and final section of this chapter will complete the thesis. To begin this section, an updated personal biography is presented. This is important, within the context of this research, as it includes my switch to part-time PhD student, in 2017, due to taking a role, full-time, in the football industry to work with elite youth footballers on a day-to-day basis. This updated biography and the related experiences, in conjunction with the findings presented within this thesis, prompt suggestions surrounding the implications (i.e., future policy) for the industry of elite youth football moving forward.

7.2 Findings

To summarise the journey of this thesis, it firstly presented the sociological research to consider ‘football as work’, and proposed how football culture exerts a strong influence upon footballers.

Specifically, how this influence affects behaviour at work and identity understanding amongst players (Parker, 2000, Roderick, 2006b, Cushion and Jones, 2014). AI is the dominant focus of the research-base; however, it is critiqued as being overly simplistic in offering research understanding within a population such as elite footballers (Hickey and Roderick, 2017). Research to consider elite sport, and professional football, proposes the environments created support the development of limited identity understanding, beyond that of athlete or footballer, amongst those performing within them (Carless and Douglas, 2013b, Mitchell et al., 2014)

Personal Development (PD), defined through an emphasis for the continued growth of the whole person (Danish et al., 1993), not just the athlete, was presented as one concept through which athletes can be encouraged to develop their understanding of identity, beyond the athlete, by engaging within practical activities outside of sport whilst concurrently employed within sport (Stambulova et al., 2014). Within football, the PD of apprentice footballers’ predominantly focuses upon formal education as part of the scholarship, however, Platts (2012) suggested this was poorly delivered and poorly positioned to the apprentices themselves.

The relationship with LFE eventually permitted for the identity and PD understanding of apprentice footballers to become a focus of the thesis; moving this research to become practical, original and creative. Study 1 of the thesis proposed numerous areas of interest to discuss. Firstly, numerous players interpreted their club environments as

encouraging them to view themselves as footballers, constantly, become a 24hr athlete (24/7 footballer), behave accordingly, and to prioritise their career progression above all else. Collectively, they were not encouraged to value, or develop, themselves away from the training/match pitch, or to explore an alternative understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer. Secondly, the notion of separation, or 'switching off', and all of the players' agreement that finding separation would support them within their football careers, suggested a basic appreciation as to the possible benefits to be accrued by adopting PD initiatives/activities. However, the players were confused and/or concerned as to how this desire to switch off may be perceived by significant others. As a result, they often chose to hide their preferred efforts to action their separation. The findings from Study 1, suggested the apprentice footballers considered, in the main, displayed a lack of understanding as to identity and PD, beyond that of being a footballer.

These themes and concepts led to the thesis occupying a lead role in the planning and delivery (Study 2, Part A) of an informative workshop delivered to apprentice footballers for the 2015/16 season entitled My Future Today (MFT). The attention of this thesis therefore switched as it attempted to translate the vast amount of (often) complicated research to consider the identities and PD of athletes and footballers, and the relevant ideas from Study 1, into an informative workshop, which could engage and offer extended support. The aim of the workshop was to support and develop apprentices' understanding of identity and PD. To achieve this, the MFT narrative was created to challenge the 24/7 narrative. It was hoped the MFT narrative would promote reflection amongst attendees regarding their current understanding.

The evaluation of MFT (Study 2, Part B) suggested that players' understanding of identity and PD can be supported and developed, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer,

within their career. The interviewees' understanding was placed on a 'continuum of understanding'. For many players, without an intervention, such as MFT, there appeared to be a lack of understanding of identity and PD beyond the 24/7 footballer and identity (despite a desire to 'switch off'). The workshop of MFT then appeared to move players further forward on the continuum whereby they began to understand identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 identity. This was achieved either by offering the individual a challenging narrative to the 24/7 narrative, or by offering them support to their pre-existing understandings (which already aligned to the MFT narrative). The players' understanding was underpinned in relation to their futures after football (i.e., appreciating the potential loss of identity that might accompany being released) and/or through a belief that this understanding would support them and their performances, as footballers, in the immediate sense. The result of this understanding resulted in numerous interviewees becoming more active and proactive in their post-apprenticeship transition planning.

7.2.1 Building Upon Existing Research

The thesis is an amalgamation of previous research, in an effort to address key issues facing apprentice footballers, in relation to identity and PD. The research builds upon numerous areas of important investigation. Firstly, it builds upon research to consider the broad sociology of football as work, and the identity-related development of athletes and footballers in relation to their interpretations of such environments (Parker, 2000, Roderick, 2006c). Roderick (2006b) and (2014) framed the social influences prevalent within professional football and proposed the heavily prescribed workplace identities developed and encouraged through the powerful influence

exerted by club staff, upon players. In short, the players involved within such environments, in an effort to show a 'good attitude' to their work, adopted many of the demanded behaviours; such behaviours demanded that football was elevated to be the dominant source of identity, and any wider sources of identity were marginalised. Hickey and Roderick (2017) built upon identity-related research to propose how young footballers, against the backdrop of their release from an EPL club, were willing and active participants within constructing identities outside of football, whilst employed as footballers. The term, 'leave football at football', offered insight and suggested that young footballers were active in the multiplicity of identity, and were open to exploring and discussing this idea.

Identity-related research to consider transition from elite sport, and into retirement, proposed that an individual's understanding of identity was influential within their ability to transition effectively (Park et al., 2013). Indeed, multiple studies have shown the severe psychological challenges young footballers may experience as they transition from the game in relation to the 'loss' of football, and the football-related identity (Brown and Potrac, 2009, Blakelock et al., 2016). In short, this suggests that when footballers understand their identity in relation to their football progress, when/if this identity is lost (or under threat), it can cause emotional distress. Whilst apprentice footballers may well understand themselves in broader terms within alternative contexts (e.g., family or social relationships) (Hickey and Roderick, 2017), when navigating the professional football world, it would appear their understanding of identity can be influenced to become singular and football-related.

The narrative work of Douglas and Carless (2009) and Carless and Douglas (2012) was crucial in helping to understand how these potential consequences might be

developing. The performance narrative, as termed by Carless and Douglas (2013a), proposes elite athletes are influenced to construct a one-dimensional understanding of identity in relation to their performances at their sport. In a football context, the performance narrative suggests all interactions, personal worth and definitions of self, revolve around performance outcomes; in effect, ‘football is everything and nothing else matters’. This is despite the suggestion of Carless and Douglas (2013b) that alternative narratives surrounding identity and sport are available, yet are often silenced, potentially causing further distress to athletes, during and after sport. A method to help athletes develop alternative understandings of identity is PD. Predominantly, the PD of athletes has been addressed through dual career initiatives (Stambulova and Ryba, 2013), which have been shown to offer athletes an understanding of identity beyond sport, support transitions, and offer performance support/enhancement during career (Aquilina, 2013).

This thesis builds upon the above research through interpreting and amalgamating multiple theories and ideas to offer a practical initiative to provide additional support to apprentice footballers. Firstly, research is extended by proposing the creation of the 24hr or 24/7 footballer identity, as described by multiple interviewees through Study 1, in relation to their perceptions of the elite youth football environment. This phrase, the 24/7 footballer, may be an appropriate term for inclusion within identity-related research to consider apprentice footballers moving forward. However, in support of Hickey and Roderick (2017), this 24/7 identity understanding sat alongside players’ perceived desire to switch off from football, yet, multiple players from Study 1 expressed unease and confusion within their desire to be a footballer (i.e., adopt the 24/7 approach) versus their desire to switch off.

Secondly, the research above was extended through the creation and delivery of MFT. Here, research concerning identity-related issues in transition for elite youth footballers, the potential (and multiple) benefits associated within PD activities for athletes, and the narratives surrounding elite sport, were utilised to inform MFT. The MFT narrative, one designed to support and develop apprentices understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, and promote reflection, built upon the research concerns and produced an informative intervention that appeared worthwhile.

For the research community, broadly interested within the support and development of young people within elite youth football, research of this nature is at a precipice. The suggestion is now to move beyond further research designed to offer more context and understanding of the elite youth football industry. In short, whilst further context and understanding will always be helpful, there is enough understanding to propose that action is required to create initiatives that try to address research concerns. A critique of existing research is that it is more comment, more theory, more postulating, and not enough action. In building upon existing research, this thesis attempted to merge several ideas in relation to identity and PD; to understand what was happening; to appreciate the potential consequences; to be aware of some of the reasons behind why potential issues might be happening; and to develop a solution. The solution, to create an informative workshop to support and develop apprentices understanding of identity and PD; My Future Today 2015/16.

7.2.2 New Knowledge

During the course of this research, several new areas of understanding have emerged for consideration within the themes of identity, PD and elite youth football. Firstly, identity and PD understanding can be supported and developed, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, through informative resources delivered within career to apprentice footballers. Recognising that this type of work can be done during an apprenticeship is important; it means that, as an industry, elite youth football does not need to wait for an apprentice to experience transition before trying to encourage the broader understanding of identity is necessary in smoothing transition experiences. Relatedly, developing this level of understanding during career underpins post-apprenticeship transition planning amongst apprentices, yet, importantly, this can be the by-product of developing identity and PD understanding, as opposed to an aim. Expecting apprentices to plan for a second career, without an intervention such as MFT, appears improbable for apprentices.

Achieving second career (or transition) planning amongst apprentice footballers, as a by-product or an aim of an intervention, can be understood within the context of 'show or tell'. Previous initiatives may have told apprentices to prepare for life after football (e.g., a member of the education/coaching team may tell a player that education is important in case they fail as footballers). Yet, without support work, like MFT, apprentices may not be ready to plan for life after football. However, showing apprentices and helping them to explore their understanding of the potential issues associated with career transition in regards to identity loss, and/or presenting them with alternative narratives that ask them to consider the potential benefits for performance to be accrued through adopting PD initiatives, encouraged a number of

players to plan for alternative careers. Focusing upon second career planning, whilst an ethically sound initiative owing to the attrition rates associated within professional football, may not have the desired impact. Instead, focusing upon identity and PD understanding appears to help achieve the same outcome as the players within Study 2, Part B, were proactive in their second career planning as a result of the workshop. To encourage second career planning, this research proposes that the adults surrounding apprentices should be showing alternatives (i.e., educating them to understand identity and PD), not telling them they are likely to fail in becoming a professional footballer and should, therefore, plan contingencies accordingly.

An understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, also generates knowledge surrounding how apprentices perceive performance. Previously, it appeared that the 24/7 approach was the only method through which young players could improve (i.e., a total obsession with the game, 24/7, and by focusing on nothing else). This demand is pushed upon the players, yet it can become much more than a performance enhancement tool, it becomes a way to dictate behaviour and constrain identity (Cushion and Jones, 2014). However, evidence within this research would suggest that young players do not perceive this idea as conducive to performance. Firstly, the players within Study 1 were unanimous in their desire to switch off from football; by definition, this approach does not align with the 24/7 approach. Secondly, the players within Study 2, Part B, were confident in suggesting the PD activities of role model players were helpful in them maintaining performance. Further, they suggested they too were active in developing themselves away from the football pitch, through varied PD activities, allowing them to not be ‘one-dimensional’ and to view football as ‘not the end of the world’. The performance-supporting suggestions from

players potentially helps to move identity and PD understanding from a ‘nice to have’, as a means of transition-support, to an important part of the football journey.

Within MFT, players were encouraged to think and debate the merits of the 24/7 narrative against the MFT narrative, this then supported or developed their understanding of identity and PD. However, without an intervention such as MFT, apprentices’ understanding may be left to chance, which also means their post-apprenticeship planning, and their ability to cope with transition, is also left to chance. Their broader understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, means they can appreciate how life without football might affect them, and make alternative plans during their career. For some, they also saw performance benefits within this approach. In short, MFT encouraged them to make a choice in how they navigated their careers, and planned for their futures. The capabilities of the workshop, a stand-alone and one-day workshop within a two-year apprenticeship, in eliciting understanding and promoting reflection, highlights what can be achieved. Further, it highlights the importance of providing information surrounding the topics of identity and PD, to all involved within the world of elite youth football.

This thesis has moved the research-base forward by simplifying complicated ideas surrounding football as work, identity and PD and has influenced the young people who the research-base is concerned with, the players themselves. This project provides an example of the greater (and necessary) support that can be offered to apprentice footballers during their career. This support can have profound influence upon how apprentices understand identity and PD; as is summarized within the final quote of this thesis:

Personal Development, is just like, what you can do to develop yourself... I know what it is but it's hard to get into words... So, I think, the best way I can describe it... if you

just purely think about one thing and one thing only, and that's your everything, you're not very well developed, I don't think. If you've got wider and more expanded views, then you're a bit more open-minded and you like other things, I think that means obviously then you are more well-developed and you've got more of a well-rounded person but, yeah, it's quite hard to describe... Without saying, 'it's how you develop yourself personally!' That's what they used to say in school!

7.3 Reflections

This thesis has presented a raft of challenges from inception, to conclusion. As the project reaches its end, it is important to offer a discussion of these challenges, and the subsequent reflections the challenges have promoted. The following section offers personal reflections regarding my development as a researcher and the methodological challenges associated with conducting research of this nature. Following this, auto-ethnographic reflections provide the reader with important context and additional information regarding the research. Offering the reader a combination of multiple methodological practices, including empirical data, observations, and personal (researcher) reflections and perspectives, can add rigor, breadth and credibility to any inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). This section of the chapter will conclude with the strengths and limitations, methodologically, of the thesis, and proposals for future research in this area.

7.3.1 Developing As A Researcher

To help me reflect upon this research journey, and provide added insight for the reader, I will attempt to outline my thoughts surrounding my development as a researcher. However, the dominant philosophical limitation to this work is, in fact, me. In dedicating large parts of my life to this project over 5 years, whilst it began in an effort to support apprentice footballers, it has transpired to be as much about me, as it has been about them. However, perhaps what has been the greatest limitation to this work, has concurrently been its greatest strength, for the project would not have travelled or pushed the research in this area so far without my ability to ‘unlock’ the door to famously closed research populations, and without my desire to help.

I began this research journey armed with some ideas and a zest for capturing a phenomenon that held personal meaning. This is often how research projects begin according to Bryman (2015), and whilst I needed to develop my skills as a researcher, I felt capable of achieving a suitable standard as a qualitative researcher. This would form the platform from which I could produce high-level research. However, as my journey through this thesis comes to its natural conclusion, I end in a slightly different philosophical position than when I started. Perhaps, before even a word was written and certainly before an interview was conducted, I had assumed that if anyone could find the ‘answer’, in regards to what is happening within elite youth football, and what should be done about it, then it was me. I was unaware of the journey I was embarking upon, as a researcher (Sparkes, 2002). My biography is unique, not in substance, but in the journey I have undertaken from leaving home at 14 to become the ‘footballer’, to having a 15-year professional career, to concurrently studying part-time at university and becoming a husband and father, to retirement, and then to this thesis. I

began this journey thinking I could find the truth. Now, some year's later, as the research has unfolded and I became the practitioner-researcher, underpinning my philosophical position to conducting research into the lives of young footballers is the phrase 'interpreting the interpretations of others' (p.12) (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). This short, simplified and precise statement has helped me immensely. For, there is no truth, only experience, and as the qualitative researcher, we are the conduit to transmit the interpretations of others. Yet, what we transmit is still our interpretations of their interpretations. I started the research journey without really understanding this, perhaps reading about it and agreeing with it, but not really understanding it. Now, I believe that I understand it.

I have concluded that this style of research, from this philosophical position, is messy, uncomfortable, and problematic. We cannot find the truth in any human experience, yet we can find some information to help understanding and then we can push ourselves to use this information to help others. I have met hundreds of apprentice footballers throughout this research project, and spoken to twenty-four of them, in-depth, and there is no universal truth in experience. Some of them appear to be coping well with the challenges associated with the industry, and some of them I have had very real concerns for, regarding their capabilities to cope. The industry is awash with what I call 'truth-seekers', the S&C coach who can guarantee a stronger physique, to the recruiter who can talent spot a 9 year old and proclaim him to be the 'one'. Perhaps I was one too, when this began, sure in my ability to find the answer. Perhaps it is a more ethical question to ask (i.e., how best to support apprentice players, during and post-career?), but I was still guilty of thinking I could find the answer. However, every young person I spent time with throughout this project has shown me similarities and differences in how they perceive their experiences, yet, nobody told the same story.

There was no truth, no one answer, however, the experience of interviewing young players certainly ‘lit the fire’ for me to challenge myself regarding what could be done to support and develop them as young people alongside their football. What I have tried to do is collect some information about an experience, make it accessible to the players it concerns, and support them to consider alternative ideas. Once they have considered this information, and its relevance to them, then they will show us what they make of the information as and when it makes sense, to them, not to us. That, in essence, is learning, and I have departed this thesis in trying to teach apprentice footballers about the challenges associated with the industry and presented them with some ideas to help. That is it, no more and no less. The lack of fact and truth perhaps puts many people off exploring the world in this way, especially within football, but I contest, that this is the most important of all research when the development and support of young people is at stake. There is no answer, only information, education and support.

The following auto-ethnographic sections outline further reflections surrounding conducting research of this nature with apprentice footballers, and managing myself within this process.

7.3.2 Extracting Information

The process of interviewing apprentice footballers, effectively talking to them about their neophyte careers and aims to succeed, took a great deal of management and large amount of self-control. However, at times, even speaking to them at all, felt immoral. To explain, from the outset, it was anticipated that interviewing elite young players before, during, and after, their professional status was assured, would be a challenge.

Certainly, at times, I experienced the interview process as uncomfortable, provocative and emotionally draining. My ethos throughout, as an effective qualitative researcher (Tracy, 2010), was to leave the scene as I had found it, as if nothing had happened, with the aim of the participant going about their daily lives as if we had never met. In reality, the execution of this was far from simple and required far greater emotional control than I expected. In part, the control required was due to the feeling I had at various interviews: that I was extracting information from them, using them, for my own gain as a researcher. When, it looked as if most of them needed help, not some sort of clinical interaction whereby I would extract information from them, thank them, and wish them luck for the future. The whole experience left me deeply troubled.

My troubles were that I could see myself in them, sat there, waiting, hoping, possibly praying, that their professional dreams would be realised. I think I needed saving, much earlier in my career, and so their struggles resonated deeply. Listening to them explain their lives to me, often identifying football as their sole pursuit in life, detailing all of the sacrifices they had made in the quest to become a professional, was most challenging. Especially so as the interviewers role is to maintain professional distance and to ask questions that might elicit interesting responses (Kvale, 2008). It sounds so simple, but then I was sat in front of another human being, a young man, and in all honesty, they did not need more questions, they probably just needed a hug. A cup of tea and slice of cake with someone who would listen, not to extract information, but to help them, as a person. I actually listened to some answers thinking how interesting a research theme those words would provide, then felt immensely guilty when realising what I had done. Even though their words have been used to help others, I wonder who was there to help them, and throughout the MFT journey, the ethical dilemmas have challenged me immensely, and at times, haunted me.

7.3.3 Save Me Or Help Me?

Throughout every interaction with an apprentice footballer, either through interview or through delivering MFT, the cultural narratives of total dedication, conformity and sacrifice, were rarely absent (Cushion and Jones, 2014). As I listened to these ideas, underpinned by the very same narratives I had believed in and espoused for so many years, my own journey came flooding back to me. Upon every occasion that I interpreted their words in this way, a question leaped to the front of my mind, ‘should I save them?’ I knew how much time I had wasted convincing myself of what was required to be a professional, and what must be sacrificed to achieve a career. Often, as I sat with them, I was feeling emotional about my wasted youth, of feeling used and underprepared for my inevitable transition away from the game. Yet, when I was in their position (and a lot older) I too did not listen to any alternative stories about success or consider developing myself as anything but a footballer. I was young and naïve, committed and giving it everything I had to make the breakthrough. To get the yes. I was lost for a long time, caught up and in by the beautiful game, according to McGillivray et al. (2005). I can see it, a controlling career with the potential for great success, but more likely early retirement.

As I later reflected, I knew the answer to these dilemmas; nobody can be saved. I was putting myself in their shoes and in reality, perhaps trying to save myself. They did not want saving, they did not see the need for it, and that must be respected, regardless of how it made me feel. However, maybe my intuition misinterpreted their communication; maybe it was not saving they required, maybe it was help. Perhaps, they did not want saving from the game, as if it was some sort of mythical beast that would chew them up and spit them out, perhaps they spoke to me as they wanted help

to be successful. This idea, I felt more comfortable with, as the ambiguity allowed me to work, not to help them be successful as footballers, to help them enjoy successful lives, both now and in the future. This future success, in part, I felt could be supported by understanding identity and PD, beyond football, whilst still in football, and so it provided me solace and let me keep working. My part in MFT, at first, was probably fuelled by the 'save me' idea, particularly after the first round of interviews as part of Study 1. I think, deep down, I was aiming to get them out of the industry, as unscathed as possible, and away from the beast. However, over time, and through reflection, I have settled on reframing my concerns to 'help me', and that I think I can do.

7.3.4 Strengths And Limitations

As Sparkes and Smith (2014) note, there are advantages to researchers already being a member of the group or sub-culture they wish to study. The advantages mainly involve an ease of access and the swift and authentic development of trust and rapport deemed vital for qualitative research (Douglas and Carless, 2009). For this project, the insider role was crucial. The role helped gain access to players and clubs, often seamlessly, which is counter to an issue that many academics have noted in trying to work with such populations (Richardson et al., 2013). Further, it afforded me the opportunity to start discussions with LFE from early in the research journey. In effect, the insider role provided a 'foot in the door' and the credibility necessary so that people would listen. If access was not granted to interview individuals, or engage with stakeholders, this thesis would look entirely different. In fact, the research project may not have been extended to doctorate-level at all. As I stood/sat in front of the players, either at an interview or in delivering MFT, my ex-professional status immediately

afforded me some credibility. The players themselves may have been more willing to talk with me, in an open and engaging manner, because of my playing background, and being 'one of them'. These circumstances can be viewed in a positive fashion within this research. However, such circumstances require careful negotiation and continual reflexivity (Knowles et al., 2012).

An example of this reflexivity, leads to a limitation of this research. As I sat to interview players as part of the MFT evaluation, it dawned on me that whilst I may not recognise the players involved, they would likely recognise me. To explain, the interviews were always after MFT, and so the individual would have listened to me deliver a workshop to him for several hours, at which I would undoubtedly have given some insight as to my thoughts surrounding identity and PD within elite youth football. It would have been impossible for them not to notice this, or for me to keep my thoughts hidden. Effectively, they could have arrived at interview knowing the answers they perceived I would want to hear. This was a big challenge for me as a neophyte researcher (Kvale, 2008). In trying to address this, I was upfront at the start of each interview (i.e., I said this interview is not for you to tell me what you think I want to hear). Further, throughout interview, I was attuned to anything I felt was insincere or said to appease. From here, I would probe their responses more thoroughly. However, it was a difficult and challenging experience, both personally and from a research perspective, as I was interviewing them, in part, regarding the usefulness of a programme I had developed and delivered. Whenever I felt reluctant to probe, I pushed myself to do so.

Champ et al. (2019) identified a similar limitation to researchers interviewing young footballers regarding the effectiveness of an intervention designed and delivered by the individual asking the questions. A sensible solution is to have a different researcher

conduct the post-MFT interviews. However, this was not feasible within the constraints of this project. I considered the likelihood of receiving critique from cohorts of young footballers, already existing within environments that encourage conformity and silence (Manley et al., 2016), about a workshop I had delivered, and was now asking them questions about, to be slim. In being aware of this, I tried to mitigate when possible.

7.3.5 Future Research

The research presented here prompts a number of interesting future research ideas. Firstly, it positions the necessity for more longitudinal research to better understand the transitions of apprentice footballers, or indeed any young person leaving the academy system. The interviewees from Study 1 offered some challenging statements, from a humanistic perspective, for consideration. One such statement was the proposal that, ‘I relate who I am to football... this is my job, so I don’t need to worry about anything else’, made by a 2nd year scholar in the weeks before his contract decision. I have since come to learn that this player was released without being offered a contract. This begs the questions: how did his understanding of identity and PD support his transition? At present, there is information to suggest that transitions for young footballers are challenging psychologically, yet these studies provide a snapshot over a short period (Brown and Potrac, 2009, Blakelock et al., 2016). However, we do not understand the longer-term (i.e., over several years) effects of transition, in relation to understanding identity. Longitudinal tracking of players engaged within the elite youth football system would provide interesting information.

Secondly, a more integrated approach to understanding identity and PD within elite youth football would be helpful. Future research should consider coaches' and parents' understanding and perceptions of such concepts. At one point, early in the research process, it was debated if the current thesis should explore these areas with the important supporters of young footballers. As MFT became an option, it was decided that a player-focused intervention should take priority, however, coaching and parental influences were prevalent within most of the stories the players gave at interview. Accessing current coach and parent understanding of identity and PD would allow interventions to target more of the environmental factors that surround young players and influence their understanding and development.

Thirdly, concerning the development of any intervention, a holistic approach is encouraged within future research. The most effective interventions should consider young athletes within, rather than devoid, of the context in which they exist (Larsen et al., 2014). The work of Larsen et al. (2014) targeted the psychosocial development of young players through multiple sources: the players directly, the coaches, the culture of the club and on-pitch training interventions. They suggest that applied work, where possible, should be developed from an environmental perspective and structured to influence a range of adults who influence and support young footballers. According to Nesti and Sulley (2014), the best practice youth academies included within their research consultancy project adopted an integrated, or ecological, approach to player development which included all relevant stakeholders (e.g., coaching staff, parents and schools). Research to consider how best to engage multiple stakeholders to support and develop identity and PD amongst elite youth footballers would be a welcomed addition to the research-base.

7.4 Updated Biography

It is May 2017 and a job becomes available at an EPL club in their newly formed Player Care department. I am immediately interested, but my thesis is not complete, and I know that leaving a full-time mode of study will slow the completion down considerably. However, I decide to go for it and I am invited to interview. The Player Care department is completely new; therefore, there appears confusion surrounding the terminology and the job specification. I believe that some people see this role as player liaison, some as player welfare, some as well-being support and some as transition support. One of the questions at the interview is for me to outline how I see the role and how I would want to work. The perfect question for me to discuss this research project, my journey through the game, my journey through education and introduce the panel to my belief of the importance in addressing identity and PD understanding amongst young players. I suggest that I would take the themes explored through MFT, understanding identity and PD, but that I would slow down the delivery and exploration of the ideas. I propose how once the players understood the ideas, this would act as the foundation for me to extend the themes of identity and PD in to the day-to-day fabric of the club environment. We discuss how this approach could help to support players in transition, performance and their general well-being throughout the challenges of elite youth football. Thankfully, they offered me the job and I was delighted to accept. Therefore, I have spent the last two years thinking, developing, extending and evaluating all of the ideas presented within this project. I have written numerous curriculums to address understanding of identity and to encourage ongoing PD activities alongside football. I have worked with every player from the Under 23 squad, down to the Under 12 squad. I have developed parental workshops, dramas and resources. I have provided transition support to players who have been released, but

the work with them starts within their time at the club. I have presented to staff, formally, and worked with lead coaches to develop understanding and collaborate, informally. All of these activities are based on this thesis, but a constantly evolving edition. The challenges are immense, but the rewards (in regards to supporting and developing the young players as people) are closer by the day. I can feel it. In light of this new role, plus the learning and experiences afforded me through this thesis, I am now better equipped to propose a number of implications for consideration within the elite youth football industry than I have ever been.

7.4.1 Implications For Consideration

When concluding research projects, it is important to offer the implications of the research. Research implications suggest how the findings may be important for policy, practice, theory, and/or subsequent research (Cushion et al., 2012). The key finding of this thesis is that apprentices' understanding of identity and PD, beyond that of the 24/7 footballer, can be developed and supported within career. This understanding appears to support post-apprenticeship transition planning and the on-field performance of the individual. Therefore, the implications of this research point to a number of policy suggestions.

Firstly, practical work to support and develop footballers understanding of identity and PD requires investment and priority within reviewed EPPP policies. Investing in this area, providing the work is delivered appropriately (i.e., consideration is given to age of the player, stage of career, number of professional appearances and level of performance), may support a proactive approach to second career planning and current performance amongst footballers. According to Goutteborge et al. (2018), policy

change on the world stage must happen quickly as during their career, professional footballers are given lots of care, time and attention. However, the support offered tends to be physical in nature, and once they leave a club, or the profession, this support ends. To better support players in retirement, Gouttebarga et al. (2018) developed a model whereby retired footballers were offered education and support surrounding the various health related issues facing players in retirement (e.g., the high prevalence of osteoarthritis (Gouttebarga and Aoki, 2014)). Regarding MFT, the numbers of attendees were small in relation to the total numbers of currently playing and retired footballers, therefore, in line with the suggestion of Gouttebarga et al. (2018), appropriate investment is required to better support more/all footballers, in the areas of identity and PD, as this may support transition. This investment could up-skill staff within the areas of identity and PD, and prioritise the delivery of such ideas within the journey of professional football.

Secondly, to maximise the investment required to deliver the MFT ideas to more footballers, the concepts of identity and PD must move from the periphery of the industry and become central and integral alongside other core elements (e.g., coaching programmes, video analysis, S&C). To achieve this, a wider education piece is necessary to support and develop both parents and key club staffs' understanding of identity and PD, beyond football. Presently, my sense is that these groups exhibit a limited understanding of such topics. As an example, within my new role at a professional club, one important coach has outlined his concern surrounding helping young players to explore interests outside of football as this may 'put ideas in their head' (i.e., this may make them think about failing and transition). Such a statement evidences a clear lack of understanding and is detrimental to moving identity and PD understanding from the periphery, to become central. Addressing this through wider

education programmes must be a focus for policy makers, as, in reality, the research presented here contradicts such a statement in the strongest possible terms. That is, engaging within PD activities during career can support current performance on the pitch, not detract from it.

Thirdly, an important research implication is that policy makers must continue to engage with academic research to inform, however, academic research must ‘meet’ the policy makers with research that is accessible and easily understandable. For example, identity-related research is written in such a way that makes it almost impossible for it to be used outside of academic circles. Part of the success of MFT has been its ability to translate research into an applied and simplified message. At times, simple is better and does not imply a lack of expertise or ability, in fact it suggests the opposite, as the point of research is to make a difference within the lives of those under investigation.

My role at the professional football club has continually pushed me to find simple and relatable methods of translating academic research so that young footballers can understand it. One example of this is the ‘and vs or’ idea. To explain, when looking to better explain my work to people at work, parents and/or players themselves, I have managed to summarise this entire thesis within one simple idea. I aim to encourage players to consider the potential benefits to using the word *and* (i.e., I am a footballer *and* there is more to me) versus the potential consequences associated with using the word *or* (i.e., I can only be a footballer *or* I can have an interest outside of football). Considering the potential benefits of using the word ‘and’ is taken from the research that presents the potential benefits surrounding PD in elite sport (Aquilina, 2013), whilst the potential consequences when using the word ‘or’ is taken from the identity-related transition issues associated with loss (Blakelock et al., 2016). The idea is

research informed, however it is simplified in such a way that means it is accessible to everyone within the industry. One of the key implications of this thesis is for academic research to make a difference in the lives of those it considers, to achieve this policy makers must engage with academia, however, academia must provide accessible and understandable ideas.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview schedule. Study 1.

1. Talk me through your early experiences of football? From start to now...
2. How important is football? Why are you here?
3. How do your experiences make you feel? What impact?
4. Talk to me about yourself... Look over the fence and describe that person?
Who are you?
5. What does a successful you look like?
6. How committed are you?
7. Tell me about your family? What impact do they have on you? How do they see you?
8. Go wider... How do others see you? What impact?
9. Club environment- what is it like to be a young player here?
10. What type of young man are they trying to create? How?
11. Is it important how others see you? What do you want them to see?
12. Do you like football to be 24/7 or do you like to separate you from football?
13. Education. Your perceptions? Is it important? Are the club supportive?
14. Can you define/explain what PD mean to you?
15. Have you developed personally through this journey?
16. Do you have interests outside of football?
17. Talk to me about now? Describe it? How do you manage not knowing?
18. Is not knowing having an impact on you?
19. Do you think will get offered a pro?
20. If you get a pro- how will this feel? What next?
21. If you get released- how will this feel? What next?
22. Are you well-prepared for the future?

Appendix B: My Future Today 2015/16 Script

SCENARIO 1: CREATING A CONTEXT

- Bradley
- James L
- James

SCENARIO 2: I'M OK

- All

SCENARIO 3: INTRO INTO EXPLORING PERSONALITY WORKSHOP

- Bradley
- James L

SCENARIO 4: OUTRO FROM EXPLORING PERSONALITY WORKSHOP

- Bradley
- James L

SCENARIO 5 BEING LET GO

- Bradley
- James L
- Jay

LUNCH

SCENARIO 6: OUTRO- SKILLS FOR SUCCESS. INTRO- PROFILING & GOAL SETTING

- James L
- Bradley

SCENARIO 7: OUTRO- PROFILING & GOAL SETTING. INTRO- 30- SECOND PITCH

- Jay
- James L
- Bradley

SCENARIO 8: 30-SECOND PITCH AND WRAP UP

- Bradley
- James L
- Jay

INPUT 1 CREATING A CONTEXT

Bradley is on his own interacting with his phone

Jay and JL see Bradley

Bradley and start doing a 'Hey Baby' type chant at him e.g.

Jay&JL: Hey! Bradley Thompson. Oo aa etc...

Jay: Your goal...

JL: Yeh – your goal – that was a beast!

Jay: I hate losing but if I'm going to lose I don't mind as much if it's one like that

JL: Yeh – if that was on FIFA I'd be watching it on replay all the time. LFE Goal of the Season that!

Jay: *(to Bradley)* We saw your bus outside so we knew you were going to be here.

Bradley: Hey – we're on the same points now aren't we?

JL: Yeh, but we're ahead on goal difference

Jay: Thanks to me!

JL: A goal's not a goal without an assist

Bradley: Listen – how come we've all come down here today? What's this about?

JL: I dunno I wasn't listening when they said...

Jay: Yes you were. You listen to everything. This is *that thing* the academy coach was complaining about...

JL: Oh. This is *that thing!* Yeh – this thing... this thing is a waste of bloomin time if you ask me (mimicking coach)

Jay: Well yeh. It is a waste of time for me but it's not for you is it?

JL: What do you mean?

Jay: What do you think I mean?

JL: I don't know what you mean.

Jay: You *do* know what I mean. I mean I don't need to know this stuff cos everyone knows that I'm getting kept on. But you?

JL: I might get kept on. (*indicating Bradley*) He might get kept on too...

Bradley: What are you two talking about?

Jay: What we're talking about Bradley is that we're all here because this is "My Future Today"

Bradley: "My future today?" How can it be my future today? It can be your future tomorrow but it can't be your future today can it?

Jay: No. "My future today" – that's just what this event's called...

Bradley: Did you just say that this is for the apprentices that aren't going to get kept on?

JL: Don't be soft. This is the day that LFE put on every year for all the apprentices.

Bradley: Who's LFE?

JL: LFE – League Football Education. They put together the entire apprentice programme that we're on.

Bradley: Oh

JL: And today is all about helping you be better and more successful

Jay: It's all about having your 'plan B'.

Bradley: What's your plan B?

Jay: Basically – *this* is plan A. Professional football. Anything else – that's plan B – and that's why you two are here

Bradley looks confused

Bradley: Seriously – they've brought us here today to drop us?

JL: Don't listen to him. They brought us here to give us confidence

Bradley: I am confident

JL: Maybe that's true when you're on the pitch but look at you now. Are you telling me that this is *really* being confident?

Bradley: Well...

Jay: The way you play you shouldn't have anything to worry about. Are you training with your senior squad?

Bradley: What me? No – I don't think I'm ready for that...

JL: Not ready? If you were in our place you'd well be up there with them. You should be knocking on doors and having words mate

Bradley: Yeh – but that'd mean talking to people I don't know. I hate talking to people I don't know...

Jay: You need to have more confidence in yourself mate. That's the reason I'm playing with the senior squad – you've got to make things happen for yourself. You're only an apprentice for a few more months. What are you going to do if you don't get a 'yes' from your club?

Bradley: I don't even think about it cos this is it for me. What about you guys?

Jay: Look – you only get what you want with 100% focus. That's what our coaches keep drilling into us anyway. That's why I think it's sound that we're doing this today cos in football let's face it – there's more jockeys than seats

Bradley: You what?

JL: He means there's not enough jobs going in football for all of us to get one of them

Bradley: Oh...

JL: But listen – don't let him wind you up. He's worse than Costa. They reckon that if you develop yourself as a person it helps you succeed in football as well

Bradley: That sounds like it might be alright. I could do with something like that

Jay: I tell you what does sound alright about today is they've got some people in from the Dame Kelly Homes Trust

Bradley: Dame Kelly Homes Trust? Do they sell houses?

Jay: No, the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust are professional athletes. It was started by Kelly Holmes

Bradley: Should I have heard of her?

JL: She's a retired British middle distance runner – she was a double Olympic champion in Athens in 2004 who's so inspiring she's been honoured as a 'Dame'. Do you know nothing?

Bradley: And she's here is she, this Dame??

JL: Kelly Holmes? No, but her *people* are

Bradley: Her people? Who are her people? And what are they doing here?

JL Well today there's Dru Spinks, Chris McCready and Craig Heap / Adam Whitehead

Bradley: And who are Dru Spinks, Chris McCready and Craig Heap / Adam Whitehead

JL Well...

Dru Spinks was the longest-serving British professional basketball player, winning 27 caps playing for England

Chris McCready played a full professional career in football for teams like Crewe, Tranmere and Morecombe – and since then he's gone back to university and he's studying for his Masters

Craig Heap had a 20-year career as a gymnast captaining England to team gold in the Commonwealth Games, not once, but twice! And he competed in the 2000 Olympic Games

Adam Whitehead is a former European and Commonwealth Swimming Champion and represented Great Britain for 10 years. And he was in the 2000 Olympics when Craig was there too!

Bradley You well looked that up on Google!

JL Er no, it was because I talked to them on the way in cos I'm confident like that which is what you need to be. I'll introduce you – it'll be good practice for ya

Bradley Stop it – you're making a show of me *(Bradley leaves as quick as he can)*

JL No, look they're sound *(shouts them both up)*

JL and Jay shake hands with athletes

DKHT Athletes briefly intro themselves – team effort

INPUT 2 I'M OK

Jay: One or two of you are looking a little bit confused with us right now – but that's ok!

Bradley: No it's not ok, I'm not ok but who cares?

JL: I care

Jay I should care

JL: I'm doing my apprenticeship – of course I care

Bradley: If they let me go – then I'll care

Jay: And I don't care anymore

Jay: Everybody knew there was a problem

JL: Anybody could have helped

Jay: Somebody needed to tell someone

Bradley: Nobody did anything

Jay: Everybody knew there was a problem

Bradley: The problem is that football is the only thing I want to do

JL: The problem is that *I think* football is the only thing I *can* do

Jay: The problem is if I don't get a contract – my dad's going to kill me

JL: The problem is that everyone's going to be disappointed in me if I don't make it

Jay: The problem is there are 1500 apprentices hoping to be professional footballers and by the time they're 21, 90% of them won't be playing pro anymore

JL: Anybody could have helped

Jay: They keep telling me I need another option – but there is no other option as far as I'm concerned – it's football or nothing

Bradley: If you even think about possible interests outside of football it's like you're admitting defeat

- JL: I was the golden boy in our place until the new manager came in and it's like my face didn't fit. And he didn't rate me much as a footballer either
- Bradley: Lately I'm thinking that maybe football isn't for me but I'm scared of doing anything about it. I tried to talk to my dad about it – he didn't speak to me for weeks
- JL: The club has a duty to apprentices – to equip them with the life skills to cope with life inside – and outside – of the 'football bubble' – but do they always succeed?
- Jay Somebody needed to tell someone**
- JL: They try to encourage apprentices to think about life outside of football but some of us just don't want to
- Bradley: I do. I love doing the NVQ, BTEC and theory sessions – even if I get a pro contract I'll still be interested in things outside of football – but do me a favour? Don't let on to them (indicates the Jay and JL) that I said that...
- JL: Everyone keeps telling me I'm good enough to have a full pro career – but the problem is – what do I do if I'm not?
- Bradley: They say it's important to develop a broad sense of identity – it support your football performance and your personal well-being
- Jay: Yeh but I don't do anything other than football. I haven't got the time or the energy – so how's that going to help me?
- Bradley: Nobody did anything**
- JL: When I play football I feel dead confident – I know what I'm doing. Football's the only thing that makes me feel like that.

- Bradley: Our gaffer hates us doing anything to do with education he says it's a distraction, and it's detrimental to our football
- Jay: When I got an ankle injury and they knew it was bad, they didn't want to know me – it was like I didn't exist anymore
- JL: The trouble is that the apprentices need to take the opportunity to learn and develop off the pitch – it makes us better on it
- Bradley: I have 6-week reviews but we only talk about my performance on the pitch – not my personal qualities
- JL: The trouble is if I only get to play pro for one season that I've got to be ready for what comes next
- Jay: The trouble is I thought that your strength of character was all about what you do on the football field but it's much more than that...

The trouble is,

The trouble is

- Bradley: The trouble is that I feel like I'm under loads of pressure at the moment. Pressure from my coach, pressure from the family, pressure from my mates, pressure from myself – and it's all about pressure to succeed. That's what we all want isn't it? I do everything I can so that I fit in here and show them that I'm committed and show them that I belong.

So what's all this stuff about personal development supposed to be then? And when am I supposed to find the time to do it? If this 'personal development' day means thinking about things that aren't going to be good for my football then I don't want to know. I'm supposed to be developing professionally, I'm supposed to be all or nothing about football and that's been my focus because I don't want to let everyone else down and I don't want to let myself down either of course.

But then again – if all I think about is my football, when do I get to think about me and who I am? I mean – if I make it – what kind of player am I

going to be? Can I even handle success? And if I only get to play pro for a year – or even not that long – what kind of a person am I going to be at the end of it?

To be honest with you right now I'm not ok – I'm really not. But how can I get to where I am ok? My coach is focused 100% on getting me a contract and that's good but I'm nervous, I'm anxious and I'm thinking about it most days. I bottle it up but I'm not speaking to anyone about it. Some of the other lads have said that I need to learn to switch off but you know it's difficult to escape isn't it? I struggle to separate football out when I get home. Sometimes all I want to do is chill out with my dad and watch a film or something but I can't remember the last time we did that.

Right now football is everything right? And it might be tomorrow and the next day but it's not always going to be everything and I need to be prepared for the future. So yeh now I get why they're calling this My Future Today... That sounds ok.

DKHT TO PROCESS OUT OF I'M OK

DKHT PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Activity

- High profile elite athletes – some from football
- The apprentices have to match the out-of-sport activity and quote to the athlete

INPUT 3: INTRO TO EXPLORING PERSONALITY WORKSHOP

Bradley: Juan Mata has 2 degrees?

JL: I'm impressed

Bradley: Can I ask you something?

JL: Yeh what is it?

Bradley: Who am I?

JL: You're Bradley

Bradley: Yeh but. Who am I?

JL: Bradley.

Bradley: Yeh. But. Who is Bradley?

JL: You're Bradley, you "muppet."

Bradley: No. What I mean is – what sort of person am I? What's my personality?

JL: Muppet

Bradley: Ok I'll give you that. But what are the characteristics that make me a muppet? What are my traits?

JL: Your traits? What are traits?

Bradley: Traits are the qualities that make up your personality. Now you know me so what would you say my traits are?

JL: Erm. Football

Bradley: Yeh

JL: Football

Bradley: Yeh

JL: And, football.

Bradley: Yeh – that’s ALL I came up with us as well

JL: Why are you asking me about your personality, and characteristics and traits??

Bradley: It’s what we’re doing in the next session. It’s about beginning to understand yourself. Finding out what characteristics from your personality.

JL: Well you’ve got that thing you do...

JL does an impression of one of Bradley’s mannerisms

JL: I’d say that’s your characteristic. I’d say mine’s my goal celebration. In fact I’d say my goal celebration is the stuff of legends...

Bradley: I’d say the goal celebration is something that you do but is that your personality?

JL: Ah. I think I see what you mean. Let’s think – ok well, when I get taken out on a field I never stay down I always get right back up again and carry on don’t I – even when I’m in agony? Our coach says that’s because I’m resilient – is that what you think this is getting at?

Bradley: Yes, I agree you are resilient – that is a characteristic of yours. But you’ve also got determination. And you’re competitive. And you’re always on time – I’ve never known you be late for anything

JL: Thanks. Yeh – yeh, I am aren’t I? And that’s the reason that I’m an apprentice and I’ve stayed an apprentice – but’s that’s the same for us all here isn’t it?

Bradley: Well yes, – but, we’re all different

JL: Ah, but are we?

Bradley: Yeh – we are, take Errol in our team. He’s really good at teamwork, he’s enthusiastic and he’s versatile. That’s why he can play well in so many different positions

JL: Ok. I can see that

Bradley: And there’s Ollie. I’d say he loves working with people

JL: He’s dead ambitious

Bradley: And he’s a natural leader. That’s what makes him so good as a captain

JL: Do you know what mate – you are really starting to make sense! So, you say that I’m determined, I’m competitive and I’m resilient?

Bradley: Yeh definitely.

JL Ah thanks mate – sound

JL goes to leave

Bradley Oi! Oi! Hold on, what about me? I can see all of those qualities in you but I don’t really know what mine are - that’s why I’m asking you ...

JL: Ah sorry mate – well, seeing as you’re asking. You Bradders are...a crocodile!

JL goes to run out of the room

Bradley: You what?

Bradley digs JL in the arm as JL runs into the room shouting muppet-related abuse at him and asking what's happening next...

JL: You're a giraffe! No a bear! No you're a flappy bird!

INPUT 4 OUTRO FROM EXPLORING PERSONALITY WORKSHOP

JL: Hey – where were you in that exercise just before?

Bradley: What do you mean?

JL: I was looking on the animal chart for a muppet but you weren't on there!

Bradley: Very funny

JL: I tell you what – there were some boss skills in that passing game then weren't there?

Bradley: Yeh – we didn't get close to being as good as that (*points to the winning group*) in our group. We had two lions as well...

JL: Ah yeh – but that exercise wasn't just about who had the most lions was it? It was like they were saying – it's about being in your group and everyone's different characteristics coming together. I think I get what it is that makes me the active and enthusiastic simian I that am

Bradley: What's a simian?

JL: It's a monkey you muppet. Do you when I first looked at those pictures I thought "lion" – yeh that's me. But everyone else in my group goes "nah James – you're definitely a monkey mate" and I'm like "Nah I'm a lion" and they're like...

Bradley: "nah"

- JL: Yeh – how did you know? Anyway I’m happy with people seeing the monkey in me. What about you? What was your inner animal?
- Bradley: I went for the bear. I looked at it and I thought “yeh – I can relate to that”
- JL: Cos you’re all grizzly?
- Bradley: Nah. I dunno. I just did. But then when we read the characteristics I thought “actually that does sound like me.” It said that bears take pleasure in other people achieving things – that’s me – that’s why I reckon I’m satisfied when I play midfield. I love creating the glory moments for whoever’s upfront. It’s a buzz when I get an assist on players like you scoring goals – even if it does mean having to see daft goal celebrations like yours
- JL: Erm – legendary goal celebration you mean.
- Bradley: And, Jay was in our group. It made sense that he identified with a giraffe.
- JL: Cos of his massive long neck?
- Bradley: Nah... cos of the way that he organises the defence and plans for all the different outcomes. Those are the decisive qualities of the giraffe. That’s the point of this exercise isn’t it? In a squad everyone reacts differently to each cos they’ve got different qualities that blend together. And if I know who I am better – and what I react to – that makes me better in the squad
- JL: Ah but this isn’t just about our football is it? This is also about how we are outside of football?
- Bradley: It’s about what we do at the same time as we do football. That’s what real personal development is
- JL: Do you know something I thought with identifying with the animals there? I thought I can definitely see me as a monkey when I’m at the club cos, you know, I’m trying to keep the energy going and I always want the coaches to see that I’m making an effort but I’m not like that at home

Bradley: You're not?

JL: Nah – I'm completely different. I'm dead chilled at home – it's like – that's the real me whereas when I'm at the club it's a different me – it's the football apprentice version of me. Is it like that for you?

Bradley: Kind of. But with me I find it hard to switch off even when I'm at home. It's so important to my dad that I succeed that sometimes I'm still being what everyone expects me to be there too. Maybe I could be a bit more like a snake and be calm under pressure and relaxed...

JL: What do you do to chill out?

Bradley: Play FIFA

JL: Play anything on your phone?

Bradley: Football manager

JL: What do you talk to your dad about?

Bradley: Football

JL: What do you talk to your mum about?

Bradley: My dad

JL: Do you ever think you need something so you can take your mind off it for a bit?

Bradley: All the time!

JL: You know what I think we should do now?

Bradley: What?

JL: I think all of us should have a 10 minute break and find you something else to think about...

JL and Bradley continue talking as they go out with JL asking whether Bradley does any one of a long list of things

Break

INPUT 5

BEING 'LET GO'

Bradley: So, what do you think of it so far then?

Jay: Still not for me

Bradley: What do you mean, not for you?

Jay: Well, like I said before, I don't have to worry about all of this do I? I'm being kept on

Bradley: Yeh?

Jay: Yeh. Reckon you'll get a contract?

Bradley: I think so. You can't be certain though can you? Anyway, like they're saying – all this stuff today is not just about if you don't get kept on is it? It's about growing your skills in life as well as your skills on the pitch

Jay: What are you on about? On the pitch is all that matters.

Bradley: So this is everything for you?

Jay: Why else would I be here? Our gaffer says you even think about not making it then you won't – it's a sign of weakness

James L: Yeh, but let's face it how many of us apprentices are there?

Bradley: I think there's about 1500 across years 1 and 2

James L: And how many are still playing when they're 21

Jay: They said about 10%

Bradley: So that means – there's 40 (*or however many are there on the day*) apprentices in the room today so (*works it out in his head*) only 4 of us will still be playing?

Jay: And I've told you I'll be one of the 4

James L: Yeh. But what if you don't or if you get an injury?

Jay: Don't even think about it!

James L: But I do think about it – yes I think about what life will be like as a Premier League first team player – who doesn't? But I think as well – what will it be like if I'm not even getting regular games for a League 2 team that's about to get relegated? You need to be ready for what life throws at you. The people from LFE – they're people you can talk to about your life skills – about what you learn from your football and how you can use that in sport and out of sport

Jay: You're weird

James L: And you're deluded mate if you think that you don't have to think about yourself beyond football. We're only apprentices for two years

Bradley: Don't even say it!

James L: But we have to mate – first or second years – at some point someone makes a decision about us that's out of our hands

Jay: Didn't you hear him? We don't want to talk about it?

James L But that's the problem – nobody talks about it – everybody thinks about it. Everyone worries about it. But nobody says anything about it. C'mon – if football got taken away from you tomorrow what would you do?

Jay: It won't

James L: But if it was...

Jay: Seriously?

James L: Yeh, seriously

Jay: Right – look at me on the pitch. I'm a good organiser, I communicate clearly, I've got a strong sense of visual space, I'm focused, determined, have a serious amount of stamina and on top of that I'm damn handsome. If football disappeared tomorrow I'd transfer all of that across to something else and I'd be damn good at that too. Just look at it – all of us that have made it to this point – where thousands and thousands of lads have been let go – all of us are exceptional and all of us have got exceptional skills. Everyone here has succeeded just by getting to this level so we know what it's like to succeed. When you've had success once you've got the experience of what it took to be a success. So you just transfer what you did to be this successful to something else in your life – and you'll be successful with that too, whatever it is. That's what I'd do if football got taken away from me tomorrow. What do you think about that?

Bradley: I think you're more like an Alan Sugar apprentice than a football apprentice...

Jay: You're fired

Jay and Bradley exit

James L I don't know about you but I'm really scared about *the decision*. Everyone keeps telling me that I'm going to be kept on and do you know what I probably will be – but what if I don't? What if they let me go? How am I going to feel then? My Dad says "you'll cope with it lad" but will he? He's spent most of his life driving me round – he's made sacrifices. And my

girlfriend says she'll still want to go out with me even if I'm not playing football – but will she?

Do you know what? I'm scared of letting everyone down – no one's putting me under pressure but I wake up in the middle of the night worrying about it. It's like Bradley going "who am I? What is it that I do well besides kicking a ball?" I've got skills in football but have I got skills in life?

But it's not like you can talk to anyone about it is it? How many of you talk to each other like that? The other lads in my year, we all muck around like we always have done but no one talks seriously about it but that's all I'm thinking about. I just don't know who to talk to...

DKH / LFE / PFA MESSAGES AROUND SUPPORT AVAILABLE

DKH SKILLS IN LIFE WORKSHOP

- Set of cards
- Pick top 6 and talk about those
- List of words exercise – what do you think are the most important skills for you to have in life?

Linking to this moment (decision) and how personal development can get you through it

INPUT 6: OUTRO SKILLS IN LIFE SESSION AND MOVE INTO PROFILING AND GOAL SETTING

Jay: That's been good so far that hasn't it? All that stuff about your personality traits and your skills in life. I know the way I come across sometimes it's like I know it all but I'm exactly the same as them two you know – it's just that I don't show it. It's like – one of the words just then that's important to me is 'confidence' – did many of you pick that one out? But confidence – it's like

Chris McCready said – your confidence feels different in different situations.

Bradley's got no confidence in going up and talking to people he doesn't know and James, he hasn't got confidence if he has to make a decision about something. Me? There's loads of situations where I don't feel confident and do you know what? That's good. Cos if I know what they are I know where I can develop myself until I *am* as confident in those situations as I am when I'm doing football.

So I like that idea that you can take the skills that you have in football – like your enthusiasm and your leadership – and you can apply them to skills in your life. That's what I was saying before wasn't it? Like Frank Lampard writing books as well as playing football. He's brave on the pitch and when he writes he's brave about people reading his books – could I be brave like that? Or start doing a university degree? Or volunteering for something?

It's all food for thought isn't it? Speaking of which it's probably a good time to have a break for lunch. The food is over there and we've got a break until x:00pm

INPUT 7: INTRO TO PROFILING AND GOAL SETTING

JL: So – what do you think about the day now then?

Jay: It's like I said to you at the beginning of the day didn't I? It's how important it is to have skill in life,,,

JL: To be fair – you were saying that all you needed was skills in football...

Bradley: Yeh – that's true...

Jay: No, no, no – you're just quoting me out of context... Anyway this isn't about me – it's about Bradley isn't?

JL: Yeh it is. *(To Bradley)* Are you starting to get that you don't have to worry about everything so much?

Bradley: I am a bit but – it's a bit weird talking to other people about it isn't it? And it's a bit personal talking about things like your confidence

Jay: Of course it's personal that's why it's called personal development! So when are the times you feel confident?

Bradley: When I'm on the pitch

Jay: And when are you not confident?

Bradley: When I'm talking about myself

JL: Yeh – but you can learn to be confident talking about yourself.

Bradley: You two seem like you're ok doing that. What's personal development to you then?

JL: Well his personal development is about controlling his massive ego, obviously, whereas I think mine is about my ability to work under pressure, initiative-taking and decision-making. Actually I'm not sure about that last one.

Jay: What you both need to do is come up with some goals that you can develop yourself against

JL: I need some goals on the pitch mate!

Bradley: I see what you mean – set yourself a task to do so you can measure yourself against it...

JL: Like what?

Jay Well, from today think of what you'd like to achieve in the future – say in 3 months' time

JL Apart from a pro contract?

Jay Yes, apart from a pro contract

JL Well, I'd like to pass my driving test and I'd like to learn some Spanish

Jay & Bradley: Learn Spanish?

JL Yes, me and my girlfriend are going to Spain for our holidays in August and I want to impress her with my por favors!

Bradley Sound

JL And eh, it'll come in useful when I play for Barcelona won't it? What about you?

Bradley: I might learn how to plaster

JL & Jay: Plaster?

JL: Why plastering?

Bradley: Well my dad's a joiner and my brother's an electrician. If I learned to plaster then between the three of us we could go around doing up old houses and selling them on. I like spending time with my dad.

JL: Ah. That sounds cool. What about you Jay?

Jay: Nothing – I've told you! I'm the total package

JL&Jay: Shut up! Etc.

Jay: Alright, alright. There is something. I keep promising to go into this school that my auntie works in with all these special needs kids. I keep telling her that I'll do some coaching with them cos she says they'd love it. I could write that down that in 3 months I'll have definitely gone in and done it.

Bradley: Aw. Now that's the nicest goal I've ever seen from you!

They all adlib on the way out about how often they do nice things for other people (or not!)...

DKH PROFILING AND GOAL SETTING WORKSHOP

Highlight the 3 that are most important

And then narrow it down to one – focus on that it will have most impact

Set a goal against it that they can put in place in next three months

INPUT 8: OUTRO PROFILING AND GOAL SETTING & INTRO TO 30-SECOND "TELL US WHO YOU ARE"

Bradley is gently bouncing on the spot as if preparing for a boxing bout

JL: Right then Bradley – what's happening next?

Bradley: Whatever it is – I'm ready for it!

JL: Even if it's more stuff with how many times you can catch a ball?

Bradley: Even if it's that – I'm ready!

JL Even if it's someone that telling you to think like a zebra and write words down on a profile wheel?

Bradley: Yep – bring it on – I’m ready!

JL Bloomin eck – have you been eating the M&Ms again!

Bradley: Nah, It’s not that. It’s what we did this morning. I just feel...motivated you know? Don’t you?

JL: Yeh – I feel good about setting personal goals for myself – I just need to make sure that I remember to work on them after today so that I achieve them. It’s nice to know that you can actually talk about all this

Bradley: Yeh – and that it’s not just about what you bring to football – it’s what football brings to you. I’m thinking about the other things it means that I can do. Whatever I do I’m bringing who I am, my traits, my skills.

Before this morning that was, like, the unknown. But now? Now I can

JL: What can you see?

Bradley: I can see that I love football – but there’s other things about me as well as football. Remember before when I was asking about my characteristics? Well now I know what some of those are. I’m good with people, I’m loyal, I’m reliable, I’m a good son, brother, mate – those are skills and qualities that go with me wherever I go. I can put that into words now, you know?

JL I never thought until today how our personal skills affect the way we play our footie. I thought it was just down to being born with talent and practicing a lot...

Bradley Exactly – I see it in Benno when he’s playing

JL: Benno in the under 16s? He has to be the calmest player on the planet

Bradley: Yes but he’s passionate as well isn’t he? And even though he is passionate, when he gets brought down by another player – no matter how bad the foul – he always keeps himself from lashing out

JL: I don’t know how he does that. When someone takes me out the red mist comes down and I totally lose it!

Bradley: Yeh – and the red card comes out and you get sent off and then we’re down to 10 men! How many times has Benno been sent off?

JL: I’ve never seen him sent off now you mention it

Bradley: There you go. That’s because he did this stuff at his club called ‘mindfulness’ – you focus your brain on ‘living in the moment’. He says that’s what’s made him develop that calm quality he has as a person – and as a player. No matter what you throw at Benno he keeps it together doesn’t he?

JL: And that’s why he’s dead popular with the bosses isn’t he? He’s the kind of rounded player they want see in front of them instead of someone who throws a wobbler every time things go wrong...

Bradley: And they do go wrong...

JL: Yeh they do go wrong. That’s one of my goals that came out of the profile wheel you know – I need to be better at making decisions

Bradley: Like a crocodile – you need to consider the best option before making decisions...

JL: Oh yeh – I see what they were doing there...

Bradley: That’s the personal development isn’t it? Having different sides to you that you can bring out when you need them. I’ve always focused on developing Bradley the footballer but this is all about developing Bradley the man.

JL: The man?

Bradley: Yeh the man. The total person

JL: Tell me about Bradley the man

Bradley: What do you mean?

JL Imagine you had 30 seconds to make an impression on someone by telling them all about Bradley the Man – what would you say?

Bradley: I'd say... I'd say... erm. I don't know...

JL Well, it's a good job the Dame Kelly Homes people are doing a workshop on giving a 30 second pitch – and we are going...

30 SECONDS TELL US WHO YOU ARE - DKH

INPUT 9: 30-SECONDS TELL US WHO YOU ARE AND INTO FEEDBACK

Coming back in after the session

Sky Sports doing feature on apprentice of the year

JL Go on show us

Bradley Nah,

JL Come on mate – if it's that fantastic let's hear it – let's hear you make an impression talking about Bradley the Man in 30 seconds

Bradley Ok, if you insist

Hi. I am Bradley Thompson.

I'm a quality football apprentice at a professional Academy.

I'm respected as a dedicated, enthusiastic team player with a proven track record of understanding how to make sure that, collectively, everyone achieves their goal.

My personality means I'm always interested in developing my self-knowledge and self-confidence in situations that are new to me and with people who are new to me.

My goal is to fulfil my potential in every aspect of my personal development and my performance skills – I'm hungry to learn more. What I develop in myself off the pitch, I'll apply to my football on the pitch. What I develop in my football on the pitch I'll apply to myself off the pitch.

My name is Bradley – this is who I am and this is where I'm going!

BUILD IN CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK SESSION FROM JAY > BRADLEY

Applause!!!

JL That was boss that – hey that's the best I've ever seen you on a pitch!

Bradley Very funny...

JL: Nah, seriously I like that it made me feel like I know you – you sounded like someone who was aware of other people saw you and how you saw yourself. Nice one!

Bradley: Thanks! So come on then ... let's hear yours

JL Thought you'd never ask...are you ready for this?

Hi I'm James Ledsham.

Why am I apprentice of the year?

Got this far but I'm not stopping here

I've got a simian personality when I'm turning up for training
But I'm different when I'm at home cos if I wasn't it'd be draining

Traits – I'm go-ahead, driving and bold

Skills – seen the footage of my goals? That kills!

But I'm more than this, my self-esteem's like this

I got the best goal celebration you've ever seen like this

So what's next for the golden boy?

I've got a plan to be a golden man!

Outside of football I continue to grow

For my future goals? Yo entiendo Espanol!

Gracias!

De nada etc...

Bradley Wasted lad – proper wasted – if the boss doesn't sign you you've got a whole new career ahead of you – and it isn't rapping!

JL You're only jealous because mine was sick and yours was not!

Bradley Ah no seriously that was sound that. You didn't just say enthusiastic you did enthusiastic. Right then. Are we ready for the last session then?

JL: Yeh – but we're missing someone – there he is... Jay where have you been?

Jay: I've been developing my skills at independent enquiry

JL and Bradley look at each

Jay: And remember at the start of today I said that this wasn't for me? Well I've realised that actually it is. And it's for the lions. It's for the hippos. It's for the birds. It's for all the apprentices. It's for those of us in this room that'll have a full pro career. It's for those of us that'll only play for a year or two. It's for those of us that'll go off and do things that have got nothing to do with football.

Bradley: I'm impressed. And there was me thinking you were just arrogant and full of yourself

Jay: Well yeh I'm that as well. What about you two – what have you got out of it?

Bradley: Alright then – what I've realised today is that football is what makes me happy. But other things do as well. So my goal is that in three months from now I want to know what all the other things are in my life that make me happy – and what really motivates me

JL: Wow man, that's deep

Bradley: What about you?

JL: Well it's not far off the end of the day but I'm just thinking about one word – 'the start'

Jay: Ok. That's two words. But what's that supposed to mean?

JL: It means that in about three months my apprenticeship is going to end isn't it? But I didn't want to write 'the end' cos that sounds dead negative so I wrote 'the start' instead cos that's what it's going to be. The start of my pro career. Or the start of you volunteering with them kids at your auntie's school. Or you learning to plaster so you can spend time with your dad. Even if you're a first year apprentice this is the start of developing yourself and your life. Do you know I wish I'd done this a year ago cos I'd have done things differently this year. So anyway that's my goal – I want to be ready for the start of the rest of my life...

Bradley: And you said I was being deep!

JL: But if it's not a pro contract I am deffo going to cry my eyes out!

Jay: You heard though that even if you don't get a pro contract you're still part of all of this

JL: Yeh! What was that again?

Jay: The clubs are still there to help us. We can talk to Simon and Sam from LFE about it at the end of the session today – and Sam gives everyone single apprentice, every one of us a phone call in a year's time to see if there's anything they can do

JL: Sam – is that for real? You're going to give us a phone call? Well don't go calling me on a match day mate – I'll be busy playing for a Premier league club ok?

Jay: But you don't have to wait till next year to talk to Sam – you can go to the club Education Welfare Officer and talk to them. They've worked with apprentices so they know what happens to us – and they know what how to help us be prepared for what comes next

Bradley: Today I realised that "football is what I *do* – it's not who I am". Do you get that?

Jay & JL: Yup – s'pose so etc.

They all go quiet

Jay: But I am football!

JL: No – I am football!

Bradley: Yes but that's just it – I'm more than football – I'm a good mate, a good son, and one day I hope to be a good husband and a good Dad. I can try doing things I haven't done before even if it scares me – like talking to people at the club that I don't already know. I can be someone with that kind of confidence. I can be someone who learns to plaster and does a university degree, and plays the guitar.... I can do all of these things because I am Bradley – the total person in the making!

Jay/JL

One Bradley Thompson – there's only one Bradley Thompson – one Bradley Thompson!!!

Appendix C: My Future Today 2015/16 Booklet

League Football Education

My Future Today #MFT

Name

AFTA Thought
BRINGING THOUGHT TO LIFE

In conjunction with **DAME KELLY HOLMES TRUST**

League Football Education
EFL House,
10-12 West Cliff,
Preston PR1 8HU
T 01772 326870
F 01772 736872
info@lfe.org.uk
www.lfe.org.uk

Give us your feedback on the session
Please scan the code or type into your web browser (case sensitive): bit.ly/1DwWUlb8

Choose who you want to be...

"I don't do anything other than football. I don't have the time or the energy. I focus everything on football."

"I'm not an idiot who thinks there is only football. I do not put all of my eggs in one basket. I base success on happiness."

"My life revolves around football. When I was injured, I think I was depressed, but I didn't tell anyone."

"The more I can learn and develop off the pitch makes me better on it."

"I don't know how to define personal development or know what I would work on."

"I am hard working in everything. I want to be the best I can everywhere and the best all round person I can be."



Getting to know yourself

(Words that describe you...)



What others think of you

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

What you have...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What you want to get...

Wordle Definitions

- COURAGEOUS**
Willing to overcome fears, taking risks, taking on challenges, standing up for what is right
- CREATIVE**
Having the ability to think of new ideas, original, imaginative
- CURIOUS**
Desire to learn or understand
- FOCUSED**
Concentrating on a task or goal
- HARD WORKING**
Putting in a lot of effort
- POSITIVE**
Optimistic, hopeful
- COMPETITIVE**
Desire to win or be the best
- ACCOUNTABLE**
Taking responsibility for your actions
- RESILIENT**
Recovering from setbacks, bouncing back from adversity
- CONFIDENT**
Self-assured
- DISCIPLINED**
Self-regulating
- ENTHUSIASTIC**
Showing excitement and interest
- MOTIVATED**
Having a strong purpose or drive
- HUMBLE**
Modest, unpretentious
- LOYAL**
Faithful, devoted
- UNSELFISH**
Putting others before self
- HONEST**
Telling the truth
- RESPECTFUL**
Showing consideration
- APPRECIATIVE**
Recognizing the good in someone or something
- TRUSTING**
Believing in others
- TRUSTWORTHY**
Being reliable
- ENCOURAGING**
Giving confidence and support
- SOCIALLY AWARE**
Understanding social issues and needs
- CARING**
Showing concern for others
- PATIENT**
Waiting calmly for something
- EMPATHETIC**
Understanding the feelings of others



Areas of personal interest



What is important to you and provides an opportunity to develop yourself?

Appendix D: Interview Schedule. Study 2, Part B.

1. What was the day about? What did you think of it?
2. Why do you think you were asked to do the workshop?
3. Have you thought about it since?
4. Talk to me about yourself... Look over the fence and describe that person?
5. How do you see yourself?
6. How do your football experiences make you feel? What impact?
7. What does a successful you look like?
8. What do you understand about this (identity quotes page in booklet)?
9. Which statements make sense to you?
10. What might happen in the future to these players?
11. What are the dominant views in football?
12. Debate the phrase '24/7 footballer'...
13. What does the phrase Personal Development mean to you?
14. What do you understand about this (PD activity page in booklet)
15. What do you think about footballers having other things in their lives?
16. Why do you think some footballers might have other things in their lives?
17. If you progress, would you have other things in your life? Why/why not?
18. Have you done anything differently after the event?