

**An exploration of the coach-player relationship
in performance football environments in
England and its integration into formal coach
education**

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Philosophy

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Abstract

The coach-player relationship (C-P) is central to effective coaching and can engender a myriad of positive benefits to both the coach and the athlete. The development of high-quality C-P relationships has been positively associated with athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avci et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023), well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder, 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). However, coach development courses have been criticised for failing to provide sufficient coverage of this phenomenon in their curricula. Therefore, study one (chapter 4) in this thesis seeks to explore what knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, is integrated into the curriculum of the English Football Association (FA) Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) A and B Licence courses. It does so by drawing on the perspectives of FA coach developers who design and deliver the courses. Semi-structured interviews were completed with nine experienced FA coach developers (9 male) alongside a document analysis of seven key course documents. Data was analysed through an inductive thematic analysis and five themes were generated; 1.) Coach developers understand the C-P relationship is built on trust, care and adaptive interpersonal approaches. 2.) The triad of knowledge impacts on the C-P relationship, not just interpersonal knowledge. 3.) The C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the formalised course content. 4.) In situ visits provide an effective medium to develop knowledge of the C-P relationship. 5.) The assessment framework does not align with the formalised course content. Findings demonstrate that the C-P relationship is introduced in a superficial manner in FA UEFA A and B Licence Courses, despite forming an integral part of the assessment framework.

The research moves beyond deconstructing existing curricula to reconstruct and identify the C-P relationship knowledge that could be incorporated into formal coach education courses to prepare coaches to operate effectively in performance-based football settings in

England. A rigorous multivocal approach is used to explore the perceptions of coach developers, coaches and athletes. Therefore, in the second study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven coaches (9 male and 2 female) who were sampled to represent a broad range of roles within professional first team, international and youth development positions within the men's and women's game in England. Inductive reflexive thematic analysis generated the following five themes; (1) An incongruence between the importance of the C-P relationship and its prominence in coach education (2) Interpersonal competencies and a progressive approach to the C-P relationship (3) Understand the unique needs of high-performance athletes (4) Build a culture conducive to high-quality C-P relationships. Findings provide further evidence that the C-P relationship is underrepresented in the main English FA Coaching Pathway and provides insights into the knowledge that could be incorporated into courses to meet the needs of coaches.

Importantly, study three (chapter 6) explores the athlete's perspective, a viewpoint that is typically underrepresented in coach education research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight male and female (4 male and 4 female) professional athletes who currently play, or have played, at the highest levels in club football including, the English Premier League, Women's Super League, and senior England internationals. Inductive reflexive thematic analysis generated the following five themes; (1) The C-P relationship matters (2) Self-awareness and clear values: The cornerstone of relationship building (3) The sweet spot: Balancing listening, guiding, and challenging (4) The interrelated nature of relationships and culture (5) Managing conflict within a highly micropolitical environment. Findings demonstrate that athletes positioned the C-P relationship as central to coaching effectiveness and believed that it should be an integral element of coach education curricula which sought to prepare coaches for performance football settings. Findings also provide

important insights into the knowledge that could be incorporated into courses to meet the needs of coaches.

Overall key findings demonstrate the C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the FA UEFA A and B course content, despite this facet of coaching being unanimously held in high regard, and perceived as central to effective coaching practice, by coach developers, coaches and athletes. Based on the findings across the three studies a set of first principles are developed, which require further research, but provide a starting point for understanding the knowledge coaches require to effectively develop and maintain C-P relationships: 1.) Clear personal values and beliefs that anchor consistent behaviours, enabling coaches to maintain relationships despite the rigours of performance football. .2.) Communicate clear expectations across large squads to enhance role clarity and co-construct expectations where appropriate. 3.) Maintain open and consistent individualised dialogue with players, particularly during periods of challenge such as loss of form or deselection. 4.) Understand and be responsive to players' broader life context, providing support to help them navigate the demands of performance football. 5.) Identify and meet player needs by balancing the coach's professional perceptions with the players' voiced needs. 6.) Ensure the relationship is rooted in high challenge and accountability, while ensuring an individualised, sustainable, and ethical approach. 7.) Use professional knowledge to establish credibility and connection in a highly demanding environment .8) Understand the impact of culture on the C-P relationship within performance football settings and influence it to cultivate high-quality C-P relationships. 9.) Engage in constructive conflict resolution approaches in a relationally complex and highly micropolitical environment. This extends the existing literature as, rather than focusing on the characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships, instead it provides a basis by which to understand the knowledge coaches require to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships in practice. This is particularly pertinent given these principles derive from

research contextualised within a specific sport and domain. This is in contrast to previous literature which has produced generic models developed across a variety of sports and coaching domains. The thesis produces a set of first principles for coaching practice to support the development of high-quality C-P relationships within the performance football domain in England. This provides an important starting point for future research, coach education curriculum development and a potential tool for effective coach reflection and coach mentorship.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

The coach- player (C-P) relationship is at the heart of effective coaching (Jowett, 2017). It has been defined as a unique interpersonal association in which emotions, thoughts and behaviours of the coach and the athlete are mutually and causally interconnected (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). This relationship has been researched from a variety of disciplines, drawing on psychological (Jowett, 2005; Mageau & Vallerand, 2002; Posczwardowski et al., 2002), sociological (Cushion & Jones, 2006 ; Jones et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2004, Potrac et al., 2002) and pedagogical (Cronin et al., 2018; Knust & Fisher, 2015) perspectives. Sociological informed research has explored how notions such as power and micropolitics influence the C-P relationship (Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2002; Potrac & Jones, 2009). More recently, research has drawn on educational theory to investigate the role of care within the C-P relationship (Cronin et al., 2018; Knust & Fisher, 2015). Therefore, this thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on literature from a range of disciplines to explore the C-P relationship. This approach aims to enrich our understanding of this complex and multifaceted concept by incorporating insights from foundational disciplines, each offering valuable and unique perspectives on coaching and the C-P relationship. While not all disciplines align with the paradigmatic position of the current research, we do not dismiss such work; instead, we draw on this strong foundational research base while recognising the philosophical and methodological strengths and limitations of previous studies in relation to our own paradigmatic stance.

High quality C-P relationships have been found to be positively associated with athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avci et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023), well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder, 2004),

collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). These findings are supported by anecdotal accounts from highly successful coaches who have espoused the merits of developing high quality C-P relationships and have positioned a relational approach to coaching as central to their practice. Examples include Jurgen Klopp the former Head Coach of the men's first team at Liverpool FC (Markham, 2020) and Sarina Wiegman the current England Women's Head Coach (Medlicott, 2022). Given the myriad of potential positive outcomes derived from high quality C-P relationships, one would assume this topic would feature significantly in coaching courses delivered by National Governing Bodies (NGBs). Particularly given this phenomenon could not be characterised as one that has received a disproportionate amount of attention within academia but fails to resonate with practitioners and performers. The C-P relationship generates significant amounts of discussion in popular outlets, the media and in practice (Markham, 2020; Medlicott, 2022). Furthermore, previous research has characterised the behaviours of high performing coaches as highly relational (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). However, coach development courses have been criticised for failing to provide sufficient coverage of this topic (Ferrar et al., 2018; Evans, 2015; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). Yet, there is a notable lack of empirical research to substantiate these claims. This points to a significant gap in the research which the current thesis aims to address. No research has specifically focused on the C-P relationship knowledge that is integrated into the formal coach education courses of the English Football Association (FA), which is one of the largest and most well-funded governing bodies in the country (Chapman et al., 2020). The English FA is an appropriate case study because it provides coach education to a large number of coaches nationally, across England (Chapman et al., 2020). The highest practical qualifications within the main coaching pathway are the UEFA A and B licence courses, which enable coaches to work within the performance domain, which is the focus for the current thesis. Given the significant volume of research relating to the C-P relationship,

which has been conducted over the last 30 years, it is important to acquire contemporary insights into the knowledge that is being explored and disseminated to coaches through formal coach education.

Furthermore, research pertaining to the C-P relationship has been carried out in a variety of sports and contexts and has produced generic models which provide an excellent starting point to develop the understanding of this phenomenon (Jowett, 2005; Rhind & Jowett, 2010). However, this is problematic within the context of the current thesis. Firstly, there is a subtle but important difference between understanding the features of high-quality C-P relationships and distilling the knowledge coaches require in relation to developing and maintaining these relationships in practice. Therefore, the current thesis seeks to progress our understanding on from research that has helped to define the C-P relationship and understand its impact, towards exploring the knowledge that can be incorporated into coach education to develop the proficiencies of coaches in relation to this facet of their practice. This is particularly relevant in the performance-based football domain, where discussions can lack complexity, nuance and sophistication and serve to perpetuate old tropes and clichés, where the C-P relationships is often reduced to a simple choice between the coach providing the athlete with a metaphorical “kick up the backside” or an “arm around the shoulder” (Peach, 2023, p. 1).

Secondly, the C-P relationship will be significantly influenced by the coaching context (Wagstaff, 2021). The notion that the C-P relationship would, or should, be the same across domains is problematic and unrealistic (Lyle, 2002) . The current thesis is underpinned by the premise that the C-P relationship is not universal and will be influenced specifically by the nature of the sport and the performance domain upon which it exists (Wagstaff 2021). Therefore, the performance domain in English football, which incorporates both youth development and first team environments, provides a unique setting by which to explore the C-P relationship and the knowledge and skills coaches require to operate effectively within it.

The notion that this domain is unique is supported by previous research characterising it as being cut-throat and uncaring (Potrac et al., 2012), where entrenched traditions and norms are rooted in archaic concepts of masculinity and hierarchy (Champ et al., 2021). The environment is characterised by power dynamics, with acts of dominance and authoritarianism commonplace (Cushion & Jones, 2006). They are highly micropolitical settings, where individuals often act in self-interest and demonstrate contrasting motivations, goals and ideologies (Potrac et al., 2012). This body of research delivers a strong basis by which to propose that performance football settings provide a unique context by which to explore the C-P relationship. Therefore, to better understand the knowledge coaches require to perform successfully within these contexts, research must be specifically embedded within this domain.

Several important gaps in the research have been identified including the lack of research exploring and providing contemporary insights into the knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, which is incorporated into English FA coach education courses. There is also a dearth of research that explores the knowledge that performance coaches would require, to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships within performance football settings. To address the gaps in the current literature, the thesis employs a multivocal approach, exploring the perceptions of coach developers, coaches and athletes. The following research aims and questions have been adopted to guide the current thesis.

1.2 Research aims and questions guiding the thesis

The overarching aim of the thesis was to:

Explore the content relating to the coach-plier relationship that is integrated into formal coach education courses delivered by the English Football Association, and identify the knowledge, related to the coach-player relationship, that coach developers, coaches, and

players perceive as important for coaches in performance-based football environments in England.

Five research questions informed the thesis:

1. What knowledge related to the C-P relationship is integrated into the content of the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses? (chapter 4)
2. What are performance coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education? (chapter 5)
3. From the perspective of FA coach developers, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (Chapter 4)
4. From the perspective of performance coaches, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (Chapter 5)
5. From the perspective of performance players, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (chapter 6)

1.3 An interdisciplinary approach

To answer these research questions, an interdisciplinary approach is adopted. The thesis will draw on theory from multiple academic disciplines, including, psychological, sociological, pedagogical and philosophically informed research. This approach aims to enrich our understanding of this complex and multifaceted concept, by drawing on a variety of foundational disciplines, which all offer valuable and unique perspectives into coaching and the C-P relationship. The interdisciplinary nature of the thesis is best exemplified in the synthesis of key findings and theoretical insights drawn from a range of academic disciplines,

culminating in a set of unified first principles to guide the development of high-quality C-P relationships in performance football settings (Chapter 7.4). Therefore, the work is interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary in nature. While multidisciplinary methods draw on multiple disciplines in parallel, the current thesis integrates knowledge from different disciplines to create new understandings of the C-P relationship in performance football settings. The paradigmatic, ontological, and epistemological position of the current thesis is outlined fully in chapter 3. This positioning provides a basis upon which to explore research from a variety of disciplines and influences the way the inherent strengths and limitations of this work are understood.

Throughout this thesis the term coach–player relationship is used rather than coach–athlete relationship. This distinction is intentional. The term coach–athlete relationship is strongly associated with the work of Sophia Jowett and with her 3C+1 model. While this thesis draws on aspects of Jowett’s research, the exploration of the relationship adopts a broader, interdisciplinary perspective, incorporating insights from sociological and philosophy of education literature. Consequently, references to the coach–player relationship are not intended to represent Jowett’s conceptualisation of the relationship as articulated in the 3C+1 model, but rather to signal a wider theoretical framing drawing on multiple disciplines. The term coach–athlete relationship is used in sections 2.2 and 2.2.1 of the literature review where previous research is explored.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The first chapter provides an overview of the research problem, and the underpinning aims and subsequent questions that will guide the research. Chapter 2 focuses on reviewing the relevant literature relating to the C-P relationship, formal coach education and the integration of the C-P relationship in formal coach education. Chapter 3 provides important information

pertaining to the underlying ontological and epistemological positioning of the thesis and the subsequent research methods utilised. Chapter 4 presents study one, which explores how the C-P relationship is integrated in the FA UEFA A and B Licence courses. Chapter 5 explores the perceptions of high-performance coaches in relation to their experiences of formal coach education and the knowledge coaches required to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships within performance-based football contexts. Chapter 6 has a similar focus but offers a contrasting perspective by capturing athletes' understanding of the C-P relationship and the relevant knowledge coaches require. Chapter 7 outlines the key implications derived from the findings of the three studies. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, which summarises the original and significant contribution of the research and proposes a future research agenda.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter commences with a review of seminal research which has sought to conceptualise sports coaching from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The chapter then examines the literature which has delineated the various coaching contexts. Research pertaining to the C-P relationship is then analysed, focusing on how psychologically, sociologically and educationally informed research has influenced our understanding of this phenomenon. The myriad of positive benefits derived from the C-P relationship are then identified. The chapter then progresses on to review previous literature which focuses on understanding the development of, and challenges inherent in, formal coach education, with a specific focus on the English Football Association. Lastly the chapter explores the integration of the C-P relationship in formal coach education curricular.

2.1 Conceptualising sports coaching

Researchers have sought to better understand and define coaching from a pedagogical, sociological, philosophical, and psychological perspective. Traditional views of coaching have positioned coaching within a bioscientific and product orientated discourse (Cushion et al., 2006). This resulted in theories, perspectives and designs that were underpinned by a narrow ontological and epistemological position, mainly within the positivistic paradigm (Crotty, 1998). Research viewed coaching from a rationalistic perspective, where it is driven by a set of clear, achievable goals which are simple and easy to manage. Naturally, this approach produced generalised conceptual models of sports coaching. An example being the work of Fairs (1987), who developed a model of the coaching process which characterised coaching as a dynamic, organised, systematic and deliberate phenomenon. According to this model the needs of the athlete could be met through five interrelated steps: data collection, diagnosis, action planning, implementation, and evaluation. Initially, Fairs' (1987) model was adopted,

and in widespread use, due to its systematic, logical and interrelated nature, which meant it could be more easily utilised as a guide for episodic coaching sessions. However, researchers were critical of Fairs (1987) work, and similar models produced during this period (Frank et al., 1986; Sherman et al; 1997), for failing to integrate and capture the complexity of sports coaching and taking account of the interpersonal relationships inherent within it (Cushion et al., 2006). Similarly, Jones and Wallace (2005) argue that positivist research rooted in psychology, biomechanics, and physiology presents an over-simplistic view of coaching. This reductionist approach resulted in coaches being perceived as technicians and coaching practice, and the underpinning knowledge, being viewed as unproblematic, which resulted in an oversimplistic ‘processing’ and ‘packaging’ of athletes to drive output (Cassidy et al., 2004). Jones et al. (2007) is equally critical, arguing for a rejection of approaches that perceive coaching as a ‘knowable sequence’ over which coaches have total control, as it results in a conceptualisation of coaching that ignores the many tensions and social dilemmas which characterise its complexity. Jones and Wallace (2005) conclude that these rationalistic representations have narrowed our understanding of coaching and have been of limited use for guiding practitioners in the field.

Bowes and Jones (2006) propose that coaching is more accurately characterised as a system where coaches work on the ‘edge of chaos’ (p. 235). This notion attempts to capture the fluid nature of coaching, which comprises endless dilemmas and decisions for the coach to navigate in the process of planning, observing, evaluating, and reacting (Bowes & Jones, 2006). From this chaotic metaphor for coaching, Bowes and Jones (2006) developed the notion of the coach as an ‘orchestrator’, attempting to more accurately conceptualise sports coaching. The concept of orchestration; drew on previous work in the field of complex educational change (Wallace, 2004). Jones et al. (2013) uses this metaphor for coaching to describe how the coach steers, what is a fluid and interactive process, towards desired objectives. It positions coaching

as a process where much of the coach's work is focused on the minutia and is done behind the scenes where they instigate, plan, organise, monitor and respond to complex situations in order to improve the individual and collective performance. Such conceptualisations successfully capture the breadth and complexity of coaching, whilst at the same time emphasising the order, by adopting the notion of the coach as the 'orchestrator' (Jowett, 2017). However, the extensiveness of these conceptualisations may prove problematic in terms of developing frameworks by which research can generate an organised and systematic body of knowledge, which advances our understanding of coaching and the coaching process (Jowett, 2017).

Côté and Gilbert (2009) proposed an integrative definition of coaching effectiveness that was conceptually grounded in coaching, teaching, positive psychology and athlete development literature. Côté and Gilbert (2009) assert that the variety of conceptual models, derived from a range of theoretical perspectives, including; leadership, expertise, the C-P relationship, motivation, and teaching, have helped to capture the complexity of coaching and the coach's work. However, they believed focusing on specific elements of coaching narrows and limits our overall understanding. They argue that the features uniting the existing models of coaching refer in some way to the coaches' knowledge, athlete outcome and the coaching context. Côté and Gilbert's (2009) model incorporates the integration of professional (technical, tactical and pedagogical knowledge), interpersonal (the coach's ability to connect and communicate with athletes and other stakeholders) and intrapersonal (reflective skills, self-awareness and introspection) abilities. Athlete outcomes were understood in terms of their competence (technical and tactical skills), confidence (perceptions of self-worth), connection (ability to relate to others) and character (demonstration of values such as respect and integrity). This knowledge and the subsequent outcomes were shaped by the context, which were either participation focused or performance focused. This coaching context is critical as coaching can

only be properly understood when considering the environment in which it takes place (Cushion, 2007).

2.1.1 Coaching Context

Coach effectiveness and expertise is premised upon the coaches' ability to apply their knowledge within the precise setting in which they operate (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). This notion is captured by Lyle (2002) who focuses on the different coaching domains. These domains can typically be differentiated by the wants and needs of the participants involved and the wider expectations of the organisations in which the coaching is taking place. Lyle (2010) devised three broad categories: participation, development, and performance. Participation coaching generally incorporates the individual's initiation into sport and involves the teaching of basic skills. Younger participants may move quickly through this phase, particularly if they demonstrate high levels of potential, whereas others may maintain their casual and recreational participation into adulthood. Developmental coaching typically involves working with young individuals who are progressing through performance standards. Here, coaching includes an intense focus on skill development, which is supported by involvement in a programme of competition. Lastly, performance coaching is characterised by intensive training and preparation to excel within competitive sports.

Côté et al. (2007) similarly classifies coaching contexts into participation and performance categories. However, they further divide each of these settings based on the age of the participants. This results in four categories: participation coach for children, participation coach for teens and adults, performance coaches for young adolescents and performance coaches for older adolescents and adults. Coaching in participation environments with children is characterised by an inclusive environment, focusing on mastery orientation and developing fundamental movement skills within a low-stakes, fun environment. Participation coaching

with teens and adults share many of these characteristics but may also promote a focus on fitness and health for the adult population. Performance coaching with young adolescents, typically, adopts an approach rooted in specialisation and deliberate practice with a more intense focus on the different facets of sports, including the development of physical, perceptual, technical and mental skills. Again, the performance environment with older adolescents and adults, shares many similarities, but is characterised by an increased commitment to deliberate practice with a view to prepare athletes for consistent, high level, competitive performance.

The characteristics, complexities, and challenges inherent in the coaching process are bespoke to each of these coaching settings (Lyle, 2010). It is, therefore, essential that researchers are precise about which of these settings they intend to evaluate and develop knowledge and understanding about. The current research focuses on the performance domain of coaching, more specifically, performance coaching within English football. The scope of the current thesis aims to explore both first team and youth development pathways. Within the context of English football, these programmes typically range from U5 to U23 age groups. These age groups are usually divided into the foundation phase (5-11 years of age), the youth development phase (12-16 years of age) and the professional development phase (17-23 years of age), as outlined by Webb et al. (2020). Clearly, the C-P relationship should evolve across these different phases, up to first-team level, in order to meet the changing needs of the athlete and the varying demands at each stage (Webb et al., 2020). However, for the current thesis to explore C-P relationships from the foundation phase to first-team settings was deemed to be too broad in scope. Therefore, the thesis focuses on the youth development phase (12-16 years of age), the professional development phase (17-23 years of age) and first-team environments. That is, not to suggest there should not be differences in the C-P relationship across these phases, but rather that they share more commonalities, with transitions between phases

potentially being fluid. For example, there are instances in the women's game in England of athletes transitioning to first-team environments in the Women's Super League at just 14 years of age (BBC, 2023). Similarly, in the men's game there are examples of athletes training in first-team Premier League settings aged just 15 years of age (White, 2023).

Many of the individual athletes and coaches who have participated in the current thesis could be described as working in the high-performance domain. Although this may be a contested term, characteristics such as competing in national or international events, intense performance pressure, high levels of accountability and the presence of large teams of highly skilled support staff, typify these environments (Sotiriadou & De-Bosscher, 2017). However, given the scope of the current thesis ranges from the youth development phase, where athletes may be aged just 12 years old, it may be somewhat controversial to classify these contexts as high performance, given the relative immaturity of the athletes. Therefore, for the purposes of the current thesis, we adopt the definition outlined by Côté et al. (2007) and use the phrase performance football environments to capture settings where coaches work alongside both younger adolescents, older adolescents and adults in both youth development and first team settings.

Regardless of the coaching context, the athlete and coach are ever-present components in the coaching process and have been described as "inseparable entities" (Jowett, 2017, p. 6). It has been argued that the nature and quality of this relationship will define coaching effectiveness (Jowett, 2017). In the next section we explore research pertaining to this unique dyad, with a particular focus on how research has enabled for a clearer definition and more informed understanding of the C-P relationship.

a more contextually grounded understanding.

2.2 The coach-athlete relationship

In the next two sections, we use the term coach–athlete relationship when discussing previous literature, as this is the terminology typically employed in that body of research.

In recent decades, the C-A relationship has been given an increasingly prominent position within the literature. Academics from a variety of disciplines have sought to better understand coaching by developing their appreciation and understanding of the relationship between athlete and coach. This section will explore how the research has evolved from an approach dominated by leadership models to one that developed to appreciate and understand the relational nature of coaching, and which positioned the C-A relationship at its heart. (Jowett, 2017). Initially, a psychological lens is adopted to examine the assorted conceptual models that have been developed to better understand the C-A relationship, whilst also exploring the various critiques of this work, characterising it as reductionist and producing an oversimplification of what is a complex phenomenon. The section moves on to exploring how sociologists have investigated the C-A relationship. This research positions coaching as a social endeavour and, therefore, one that emphasises the social competencies of the coach (Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2002; Potrac & Jones, 2009). This work places significant importance on the C-A relationship. However, attention is drawn to the complex and multifaceted environment, which is shaped by power and micropolitical factors, which influences this relationship in a multitude of ways (Potrac & Jones, 2009). Lastly, a focus on research which has explored the C-A relationship from a pedagogical perspective is adopted, with a specific focus on the role of care theory. These researchers have largely utilised the work of educational philosopher and theorist, Nel Noddings, to better understand how coaches can develop and

nurture caring C-A relationships in performance settings (Cronin et al., 2018; Knust & Fisher, 2015).

Traditionally, the interpersonal element of coaching practice had been researched through the lens of coach leadership. Therefore, the coach's behaviour and style had been researched through leadership models, such as the mediation model (Smoll & Smith, 1989) and the multidimensional model (Chelladurai, 1993). The mediation model (Smoll & Smith, 1989) is successful in demonstrating how coaching is influenced by contextual factors such as the athlete's age, gender or levels of self-esteem. Whilst the multidimensional model (Chelladurai, 1993) incorporates the notion that interactions between coach and athlete influence the athlete's satisfaction and performance levels. These models may have supported coaches in understanding how to better relate to athletes. However, their scope was seen as being limited as they failed to consider that coach leadership may, at times, be shared between the coach and athlete and coaching is not an act simply done to the athlete by the coach (Jowett, 2005). This would result in an oversimplification of the interpersonal dimension of coaching, if it simply assumed that this can be captured and understood by focusing on what one individual does to another (Jowett, 2005). It was this critique of previous work that paved the way for an increased focus on a relational approach to coaching, which sought to better understand the complex and multifaceted relationship which exists between the athlete and coach. Initially, there will be a focus on how psychology has attempted to conceptualise the C-A relationship by focusing on the development of five key conceptual models, which have helped develop our understanding of this phenomenon.

Poczwardowski et al. (2002) used a phenomenological approach to explore the C-A relationship. The research took place in-situ, where they used participant observation and interviews, with coaches and athletes within a NCAA Division 1 collegiate gymnastics programme. Poczwardowski et al. (2002) characterised the C-A relationship as dynamic,

multifaceted, interpersonal, and emphasised that the C-A relationship is a recurring pattern of reciprocated care between athlete and coach. These ongoing interactions were categorised as instructional or technical, with some being focused on sports specific tasks and goals and others focusing on the psycho-social elements of practice, which includes human emotions. Through these day-to-day interactions, the athlete and coach were creating meaning about their relationship in an ongoing process of social interaction, which was influenced, for example, by the wider team dynamic.

The notion of care emphasised by Poczwardowski et al. (2002), demonstrated similarities to a subsequent conceptual model developed by La Voi (2004). La Voi's (2004) model was premised on the human desire for connection to develop closeness in relationships, which enabled personal growth and development. La Voi (2004) used psychological interpretations of relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 2002) and instead of viewing human development as a means by which to achieve independence, this theory proposes that psychological development is achieved through connection and interdependence, within enriching relationships. La Voi (2004) therefore suggests that athletes would achieve more when closeness with their coach was at an optimal level. This closeness and interdependence can be understood through four constructs: authenticity, engagement, empowerment and dealing with difference and conflict. Authenticity refers to a person's genuine self-expression. Engagement focuses on notions of commitments and responsiveness. Empowerment captures the strengthening and encouragement received through the relationship. Lastly, dealing with difference and conflict refers to embracing the diversity that exists within the relationship.

Similarly to that of Poczwardowski et al. (2002), Wylleman's (2000) conceptual model emphasises the importance of reciprocity where behaviours within the relationship will attract appropriate responses. Wylleman's (2000) model categorises these interpersonal behaviours along three dimensions; an acceptance-rejection dimension, which captures a positive or

negative attitude towards the relationship, a dominance-submission dimension which depicts the strength of their position within the relationship, and a social-emotional dimension which reflect the extent to which a personal role within the relationship is adopted. The reciprocal nature of the model also means the behaviour of one half of the dyad may encourage an appropriate response. For example, within the dominance-submission dimension, dominant behaviours by the coach may attract a submissive response from the athlete. Jowett (2006) describes the model as ‘naturally appealing’ due to its illumination of the reciprocal nature of behaviour, between athlete and coach. Nevertheless, Jowett (2006) is critical of the lack of clarity as to when and how these behaviours may occur in practice.

The C-A relationship has also been investigated through motivational frameworks. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) utilised Self Determination Theory (SDT) to further develop our understanding of the C-A relationship. SDT is comprised of a number of mini theories, one of which focuses on Basic Psychological Needs (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This proposes that humans have three innate needs to feel motivated and experience positive levels of well-being, they are autonomy, competence and relatedness (Vallerand, 2007). Autonomy refers to an individual perceiving they have personal control over decisions in their lives. Competence is fulfilled when individuals experience mastery or have the feeling of being effective in a certain context. Lastly, relatedness refers to an individual’s sense of belonging and feeling significant in the eyes of others. Mageau and Vallerand’s (2003) motivational model of the C-A relationship, involves a motivational sequence whereby the behaviours of the coach influence the athletes’ intrinsic motivation through their impact on the athletes’ perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The model highlights the important role coaches have in providing autonomy, support, structure and involvement to their athletes. However, similarly to previous leadership models, there has been criticism as this motivational model views the C-A relationship through coach behaviours alone. Therefore, the emphasis is still placed on the behaviours of the coach,

which subsequently neglects other essential non-behavioural components that also impact on the relationship, such as thoughts and feelings (Jowett, 2005)

In contrast, Jowett's 3C+1 (2005) is based on the premise that the C-A relationship is a unique interpersonal association in which emotions, thoughts and behaviours of both the coach and the athlete are mutually and causally interconnected (Jowett, 2005). It is this model that has been the most widely used and cited to advance our understanding of the C-A relationship from a psychological perspective. The model draws upon Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958) and uses established constructs to develop an integrated model. The 3C+1 model uses four constructs to encapsulate the C-A relationship and the thoughts and feelings that are inherent within it. These components are closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation. Closeness describes the interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes and the emotional bond that exists between the two. This is built on respect, trust and liking for one another. Commitment reflects the interpersonal thoughts of the athlete and coach and their ability to maintain a tight and close relationship over time, despite the challenges they may face. Complementarity describes the interpersonal behaviours and the extent to which the coach and athletes work co-operatively. Lastly, co-orientation reflects the coaches' and athletes' levels of inter-dependence regarding their perspective and opinions on the quality of their relationship. Jowett (2007) explains that there are two potential perspectives by which to assess the C-A relationship. The first is the direct perspective which is the individual's own thoughts and feelings and the other is the meta-perspective which is their assessment of the other party's thoughts and feelings.

Jowett's (2005) model has received empirical support with athletes and coaches from a variety of ages, genders and levels of performance (Jowett & Nezeleck 2012). Research has also supported use of the model in a variety of sports (Rhind et al., 2012) and with a variety of cultural groups (Yang & Jowett, 2013). Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) found that C-A

relationships, where these four components were present, led to a strong and responsive relationship. However, in relationships where these components were lacking it led to higher levels of conflict. Jowett (2017) describes how in high quality C-A relationships both parties invest time, effort and energy to achieve agreed goals. In contrast, ineffective C-A relationships are characterised by a lack of commitment, an unwillingness to co-operate to overcome obstacles and a lack of desire to pursue ambitious goals. Jowett (2017) argues that when the C-A relationship is in its most optimum state, it is built on the key building blocks of respect, trust, commitment and collaboration, which are the active ingredients for effective coaching.

Rhind and Jowett (2010) sought to further develop our understanding of the C-A relationship by assessing how it could be optimised and maintained. They conducted interviews, with both coaches and athletes, which were structured and based on the constructs within the 3C+1 model. Athletes and coaches were included from a wide variety of individual and team sports, including football, hockey, rowing, athletics and ice-skating. Interviews focused on strategies that could be utilised to maintain high quality C-A relationships. Subsequently, they proposed the use of the COMPASS model to identify the maintenance strategies within a relationship that help support personal satisfaction and performance success. The model contains seven key communication strategies. Conflict management refers to coaches' and athletes' identification of and management of disagreement; openness ensures that clear lines of communication exist of which the athlete is fully aware and encouraged to access; motivation refers to the coach and athlete making a conscious effort to develop a rewarding partnership that inspires them to continue investing in it; preventative underlines the importance of setting out rules and expectations for behaviour and what actions would subsequently be taken if those rules were not met; assurance incorporates the sending of messages that imply one's commitment to the relationship; support refers to the way both coaches and athletes help and support each other through challenging times; social networks

reflect communication strategies to facilitate strong bonds with other key stakeholders, such as fellow members of the squad, parents and friends. This research was critical, as it was the first to explore how C-A relationships may be successfully maintained. It provided practical tools for sports psychologists and coaches to utilise in practice, to maintain relationships which enabled both well-being and performance to thrive.

Research which has adopted a psychological lens by which to investigate the C-A relationship has not been without criticism. Wagstaff (2021) describes how models, such as Jowett's 3C+1 model, idealise the C-A relationship in a clean and reductionist manner. He accepts conceptual models have been somewhat successful in capturing what promotes high quality C-A relationships, but argues these models lack practical utility. Within the context of the current thesis, this is an important critique. If coach education is going to develop coaches' knowledge of the C-A relationship, it must be presented in a manner that enables practical application. Wagstaff (2021) expands by suggesting that socio-cultural factors that would naturally impact the C-A relationship are ignored, which gives the impression that the C-A relationship exists within a 'bubble'. However, Jowett (2007) adopts a pragmatic position and describes how research that has sought to measure and quantify the C-A relationship, has provided a tangible foundation upon which further research can be undertaken. However, Wagstaff (2021) is critical of an approach, which he perceives, results in the complexity of the C-A relationship not being captured and component parts of the C-A relationship being portrayed as measurable and controllable (Wagstaff, 2021). The position of the current thesis is that, although Jowett's research is rooted in positivism, it has played an integral role in the development of our understanding of the C-A relationship. However, within the context of this thesis, this work is acknowledged as problematic. It is imperative that the sociocultural context in which C-A relationships exist is recognised. For example, such relationships would be fundamentally different in a primary-age participation setting compared with a high-

performance adult context, differences that are not incorporated into Jowett's (2005) work, given its philosophical and methodological limitations. However, in line with North's (2013) recommendation, this thesis does not dismiss research that stems from a different paradigmatic position. Instead, Jowett's work is acknowledged and explored as seminal within the field. However, within the context of the current thesis, it is perceived as somewhat reductionist and overly simplistic in capturing the complexity of the C-A relationship within a specific sport and domain. As such, the current thesis adopts an alternative paradigmatic position, outlined in Chapter 3.

To explore literature which more deliberately and readily embraces the complex social context in which the C-A relationship exists, research that has explored this relationship from a sociological perspective is assessed. The sociological study of sports coaching positions coaching as a fundamentally social activity (Jones et al., 2004). The C-A relationship, therefore, is deemed integral, but is only one of several important relationships within these environments. Performance settings are characterised by a complex web of relationships; indeed, this is represented in the notion of the coach as an 'orchestrator' (Jones & Bowes, 2006). Similarly, Wagstaff (2021) refers to the 'sea of relationships' that make up the wider high-performance milieu (p. 132). Therefore, coaches, and other athletes, must navigate relationships with other coaches, other athletes, support staff, parents, agents, media and fans. It is relationships between all the key agents that may dictate an organisations success (Wagstaff, 2021). Wagstaff (2021) also emphasises the relevance of the relationship of athletes with other athletes, particularly those with whom they share their training and competition space. Ronglan (2011) used Wenger's concept of 'communities of practice' to assess how athlete's influence each other and found that their interactions help them to understand and make sense of their experiences. Ronglan (2011) concludes that rather than simply viewing the C-A relationship in isolation, it should be explored and understood within a whole community

of relationships that operate within these settings, which are interrelated and influence each other in unique ways. This is particularly pertinent within the context of the current thesis, where performance-based football contexts are characterised by large squads of athletes, and extensive coaching and multidisciplinary teams.

The sociological study of the C-A relationship also emphasises how the C-A relationship is shaped by the wider culture, which has its own norms, values and practices (Ronglan, 2011). Within the context of the current thesis, this is critical, as the performance-based football environment is a specific milieu within which the C-A relationship operates. These conventions and the subsequent narrative that develops within these settings, act as cultural artefacts which serve as resources for navigating the organisational culture (Wagstaff et al. 2018). Cushion and Jones (2006), used the work of Pierre Bourdieu to analyse data collected ethnographically over a 10-month period within a professional football academy. The focus of their research was to investigate the C-A relationship and how it was influenced by the wider sociocultural context, specifically observing how issues of power and power difference, alongside hierarchical structure, shaped the relationship and interactions between coach and athlete. The findings illuminate, in practice, how these hypermasculine values were often uncritically adhered to by coaches on the basis they represented tradition. For example, athletes simply thought it was natural for abusive language and aggression to be directed towards them by coaches, which demonstrates the embedded nature of these traditions and norms (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Aggressive behaviours by the coach towards the athlete were perceived, by the coach, as the best way to prepare the athlete for the professional environment (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Similar findings were presented, more recently, by Champ et al. (2021), who also used ethnographic methods to explore the challenges of navigating professional football environments. Although they adopted a different disciplinary lens, they also found that coaches

were often reluctant to change their traditional beliefs, and subsequently this continuation of these behaviours, based on dominance and control, simply served to socialise other individuals into the environment (Champ et al., 2021). In fact, many coaches adhered to and embodied these norms, as they wanted to survive and thrive within these settings (Champ et al., 2020). The work of Champ et al. (2021) and Cushion and Jones (2006) suggests that often coaches own experiences within sport shaped their traditionally authoritarian approach towards the athletes. Coaches often based their behaviours upon an archaic and institutionalised understanding of effective coaching practice (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Therefore, this body of work has led researchers to conclude that the C-A relationship, in performance settings, was inseparably linked to issues of power, and, particularly, with whom this power resided (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Importantly, the athlete should not always be characterised as powerless (Cassidy et al., 2023), particularly, within the context of modern-day professional football in England. Here, power may often transfer to athletes, especially those with high levels of status (Potrac & Jones, 2010), who are able to form effective allegiances to exert influence over decisions and shape the dynamics of the C-A relationship to better suit their own interests.

Sociologically informed coaching research has also positioned coaching as a highly micropolitical endeavour (Jones et al., 2004; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Thomson et al., 2015). Micropolitics are defined as political interactions that take place between actors in organisational settings (Lindle, 1994). Coaching researchers have characterised performance-based football contexts as arenas of struggle which are rife with conflict (Thomson et al., 2015). Typically, individuals bring a multiplicity of different motivations and goals with them to these environments (Thomson et al., 2015). The micropolitical actions of coaches are therefore characterised as a constant and ongoing process as coaches attempt to improve their position of influence over athletes (Cushion & Jones, 2006). This may involve coaches using ‘white

lies', friendly personas, and 'face work' to encourage athletes to 'buy into' their coaching agenda (Jones et al., 2004). This may also involve coaches taking time to observe the behaviours of athletes within the squad to identify the most influential actors (Potrac et al., 2006). This research signifies the importance of the coach's micropolitical literacy to navigate the complexities of the C-A relationship within these settings.

Sociologists have also explored how coaches manage their behaviour and expressions with the C-A relationship, to effectively perform their role (Jones, 2006; Potrac et al., 2002). Research has utilised the work of Erving Goffman to explore coach-athlete interaction within professional performance contexts in football. Jones (2006) attempted to present a more authentic version of coaching within performance settings and adopted an autoethnographic approach utilising the work of Goffman (1959) to explain coaching as a performance aimed at managing the impressions. Jones (2006) uses Goffman's (1959) work on personal 'front', 'impression management' and 'presentations of the self' to explore coaching and the social dealings inherent within it. At the heart of coaching practice, within performance contexts, is maintaining the respect of the athletes (Jones, 2006). This involves the coach appearing confident and demonstrating proficiency, which enables them to develop C-A relationships that are imbedded in mutual respect. Jones (2006) emphasise how coaches prioritise presenting themselves as knowledgeable, whilst expressing themselves in a supremely confident manner by being suitably decisive. Jones (2006) therefore concludes that the coach's behaviours are guided by a fear of losing face or credibility. Jones (2006) links this to the work of Goffman (1959) who describes how individuals display a virtual, rather than an actual, social identity to manage the impressions of others and protect their self-image. The individual therefore prioritises being perceived as the person they want to be by controlling information about themselves and manipulating relationships, which in a coaching context would be their relationship with the athlete.

This resonates with research conducted by Potrac et al. (2002) who also used the work of Goffman (1959) to explore the behaviours of a single high-performance English football coach. The coach's behaviours were guided by a motivation to develop strong social bonds between himself and the athletes. To do this, the coach attempted to present an 'idealised image' of himself as a coach in the eyes of the audience, in this case, the athletes (Goffman, 1959). To do this, the coach attempted to demonstrate high levels of domain specific football knowledge to the athletes. The coach believed that athletes would expose any shortcoming in his professional knowledge, and this would have negative consequences for the C-A relationship (Potrac et al., 2002). The coach also attempted to marry high levels of technical and tactical knowledge with an ability to be perceived as approachable and able to relate to athletes as both performers and people. Getting to know the athletes enabled the coach to tailor their communication, which increased their chance of developing confidence, trust and loyalty within the C-A relationship. By constructing this 'front' in the eyes of the athletes, coaches are better able to ensure their power is accepted by the athlete and, therefore, legitimised. Potrac et al. (2002) conclude that the extent to which the coach perceives themselves as fulfilling their role, is based on the social bond that is developed with the athletes. This bond is ultimately based upon the coach engendering respect from the athletes, through being perceived as a competent and knowledgeable professional and as a well-rounded and approachable person. More recently, Partington and Cushion (2012) explored the match-day behaviours of professional English football youth coaches, by also using the work of Goffman as a lens by which to probe the data. Coaches described how their match-day behaviours were also influenced by impression management. Coaches were consciously thinking about how their behaviours would be perceived by the players, other coaches, and parents. This often-involved traditional coaching behaviours which were highly directive and prescriptive, with coaches admitting to shouting at players, even when they did not believe it was important, in order to

manage the perceptions of others. Again, this highlights the myriad factors that influence behaviours within the coach-athlete dyad in performance-based football domains.

Research which has adopted a sociological lens, has utilised the work of esteemed sociologists such as Bourdieu and Goffman to explore the complexities and unique nature of the C-A relationship. It has emphasised the importance of the complex web of relationships (Ronglan et al., 2011) that exist within these setting and how the prevailing culture, with its own peculiarities, micropolitics, traditions and norms, influences the C-A relationship (Cushion & Jones, 2006). It places notions of power, and the ability of the coach to gain respect, by maintaining face, at the heart of the decision-making process that guide the coach's behaviours towards athletes (Jones, 2006; Partington and Cushion, 2012; Potrac et al., 2002). This research has at times presented the approach adopted by coaches, within performance settings, as archaic, traditional, and authoritarian (Champ et al., 2021). However, other sociologically underpinned research has demonstrated the importance of the coach presenting a softer, more human side, to develop a strong social bond with the athlete (Potrac et al., 2002) including the importance of caring in the C-A relationship (Jones, 2009). This notion of care has also been implicitly or explicitly referred to in psychological research pertaining to the C-A relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Wyllemann, 2000). However, more recently, a body of research has developed that has sought to explore the C-A relationship through care theory and has largely drawn on the seminal work of Nel Noddings.

In 1988, Nel Noddings drew on feminist theory to argue that care should be at the heart of relationships between teachers and students. Nodding's central idea was that when we engage in care, we enter a relationship with others which should be nurturing and dialogic. Caring, therefore, should be viewed as a relational process between two human beings, the 'carer' and the 'cared for' (Noddings, 1992). Noddings (1988) differentiates between natural and ethical care. Natural care is when the carer acts spontaneously out of affection without a

conscious ethical effort (Noddings, 2002). Noddings (2002) exemplifies this by describing the typical relationship that occurs between mother and child as an example of natural care. In contrast, ethical care is where there is a conscious decision by the carer to offer care because it is appropriate and not simply because it easily fits with their instinctive preferences. According to Noddings (2003), ethical care can be characterised as engrossment, motivational displacement and reciprocity. Engrossment refers to the sustained and empathetic concern for the cared for. This includes the carer listening, understanding the concerns of, and empathising with the cared for, often through dialogue or observation. This requires motivational displacement, denoting that the needs of the cared for should be prioritised over that of the carer. If the carer is unable to immediately meet these needs, they must act in a manner that sustains the caring relationship and enables further dialogue (Noddings, 2012). For the relationship to be reciprocal the individual who is being cared for should engage with and accept the care. This may involve them demonstrating gratitude, a positive attitude or successfully achieving their goals. This signifies that an agreed understanding of care exists between both parties (Nodding, 2002).

Noddings (2005) recognises that the complexities of deducing the needs of the cared for and distinguishes between expressed and inferred needs. Expressed needs are directly conveyed by the cared for through actions or words. However, needs would be classed as inferred if they are not communicated by the cared for but are deduced by the carer through observation and dialogue (Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2002) is clear that the carer should not respond to every need expressed by the cared for. The cared for should provide a balance by meeting some needs and not others. However, Noddings (2002) emphasises that within educational settings the needs of the cared for are highly individualised and unique to their specific situation and context. Noddings (2018) argues that those who educate future leaders, whether in business, military or, in the case of the current thesis, sport, should focus on

instilling a caring approach and mindset. Noddings (2002) ethics of care has been utilised as a framework to explore the C-A relationship in performance domains within a variety of sports, including football. One could postulate that the adoption of Noddings' research into the coaching literature is due to parallels that exist between teaching and coaching, particularly in their capacity, when done effectively, to be relational and caring activities (Cronin & Armour, 2018)

Jones (2009) used autoethnography and self-narrative to present and explore his own experiences as a coach within a national age group boys football team. Jones (2009) sought to present coaching as a highly complex activity, characterised by endless dilemmas. He contrasts this characterisation of coaching against previous work, which he believes has provided a synthetic account of coaching, portraying it as being relatively unproblematic. Jones (2009) argues that the work of Noddings (1984) is a relevant and appropriate framework by which to interpret his coaching experiences. Jones (2009) positions coaching as an educational endeavour and therefore one that is reliant on the quality of the C-A relationship. Jones (2009) emphasises the notion of relationality, that is, the interaction and subsequent relationship established between athlete and coach and stresses the importance of the coach actively nurturing a caring C-A relationship. This relationship enables the coach to develop a social environment, where the athlete can learn from the coach, progress and thrive. Caring therefore occurs in connections and relationships that foster recognition, realisation and growth (Jones, 2009)

Given Noddings' (2003) work was rooted in educational settings and focused on the relationship between teachers and pupils, it is of prime importance to understand the ways in which care can be understood within the C-A relationship, particularly in the unique setting of high-performance sport. Knust and Fisher (2015) used NCAA Division 1 female head coaches to explore how they exemplified care in their relationship with their athletes, by using Noddings

care conceptual framework. Coaches were selected based on them being perceived by their colleagues as exemplar ‘caring coaching.’ Knust and Fisher (2015) reported how the coaches demonstrated ‘motivational displacement’ by considering their teams as ‘families’. Their coaching behaviours were guided by ways in which they would treat their own family and involved the coaches focusing on the needs of the athlete as a priority. Coaches compared their relationship to that of the coach as ‘parent’ and the athlete as ‘child.’ However, this also meant that coaches would ultimately take the final decision due to their elevated levels of expertise and experience. The concept of ‘engrossment’ was represented by the coaches adopting a holistic approach to care, which involved caring about athletes as people. Integral to this involved the coach taking time to listen and communicate with athletes about a variety of topics to better understand their perspective. More fundamentally, coaches described caring as a part of their personality and something they had developed through their real-life experiences, for example, when having children of their own.

Fisher et al. (2017) built upon this work to explore how NCAA Division 1 coaches defined and implemented care. They used semi-structured interviews, with eighteen male and female coaches from eight different sports, including baseball, rowing, soccer, softball, volleyball, golf, swimming and track and field. Coaches defined care as a focus on developing the whole person for life, providing athletes with what they needed not only to be successful but also to build lasting relationships. In terms of implementing care, being responsive to the athlete’s needs, individualising their responses, communicating regularly and ensuring the athlete was accountable for their own behaviour, were deemed to be critical. However, despite the numerous ways in which the coaches manifested care, they described how there were limits to the caring behaviours they could show towards the athletes, for example, the challenge of striking a balance between caring and winning. Coaches described a tension between their own definition of what it meant to be successful and the metrics by which success would be

measured by other key stakeholders. The coaches' own definitions often focused more heavily on athlete well-being and forming lasting relationships; however, this was often contrary to athletic directors who prioritised win percentage and championships. This challenge was further explored by Lindgren and Barker-Ruchti (2017) whose research used Noddings' (2003) ethics of care to investigate how coaches balanced caring with the organisational pressures to win medals, this time within a northern European international football context. They found that despite an intense pressure to win, the coaches reported adopting a holistic perspective to coaching and developing the athlete. These coaching strategies demonstrated a strong resemblance to Nodding's (2003) notion of engrossment and included developing athlete's well-being by listening to the players voice and engaging in dialogue which helped to create a positive environment. The coaches described a form of motivational displacement through 'bracketing off' of their own self-interests as they attempted to feel, hear and see situations from the athlete's perspectives,

Lindgren and Barker-Ruchti's (2017) work illuminates the potential conflict that exists between performance objectives, such as winning, and developing caring C-A relationships. This theme was further explored by Cronin et al. (2020), who contrasts research which has placed care as an essential aspect of coaching practice (Jones, 2009; Knust & Fisher, 2015; Lindgren & Barker-Ruchti, (2017) with research which has portrayed performance footballing environments as harsh, authoritarian, competitive and cutthroat (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Potrac et al., 2012). Cronin et al (2020) uses Noddings' (1988) work to explore the paradox of how coaches develop caring relationships with athletes in elite football contexts, in this case, an English Premier League club. The research utilises a case study approach, where a reflective diary of a strength and conditioning coach serves as the primary data source. The case study is based upon the experiences of the coach who worked alongside an injured player for a period of 6 months. Cronin et al. (2020) described how the coach demonstrated that he 'cared about'

the athlete's progress and 'cared for' their health. The coach demonstrated engrossment through their investment in the athlete's progress, by continuously seeking to serve the needs of the athlete. However, Cronin et al. (2020) describes how the coach's approach was not entirely consistent with Nodding's ethics of care. For example, the coach's care was not based on sharing emotions with the athlete, or empowering them, and the athlete did not always reciprocate the coach's care, as they quickly prioritised football sessions as they neared return to fitness. Therefore, Cronin et al. (2020) argues that this approach does not fully align with the maternal nature of care described by Noddings. Instead, the coach's care was rooted in scientific principles and statistical analysis that supported the athlete's recovery, and this approach was characterised as 'rules-based care.' Rather than the care being exemplified by feeling, listening and speaking to the athlete in a compassionate, empathetic and empowering manner, the care was more detached and based on scientific practice. However, keen not to adopt a dichotomised approach, Cronin et al. (2020) proposes that rule-based practice is not the antithesis of care, rather, simply a different mode of care, and distinctly different from the maternal care described by Noddings. Cronin et al. (2020), therefore, concludes that caring in a high-performance football environment occurs in different forms and may be constrained by this unique social environment.

Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2023) attempt to better contextualise the notion of care within high performance cultures. They describe the challenges of moving from the rhetoric of care to enactment, which is typically poorly expressed and rarely elaborated on within the high-performance context (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2023). In their study of serial winning coaches they propose the concept of caring determination. This involves a delicate interplay between a genuine desire to support athletes but in a considered and compassionate manner, which accounts for the caring element. This is balanced against the relentless pursuit to win, which refers to the determination aspect of the concept. They describe how caring can reflect a

genuine interest in people and a passion for helping others. This can be embodied through the coach developing a consistent and stable environment, the coach adapting their behaviour to the needs of the athlete and sharing leadership decisions where appropriate. This is balanced against a determined approach which requires maintaining a clear focus on goals, setting high standard and elevated levels of accountability.

More recently, Gearity et al. (2023) explore how the concept of ‘caring’, often seen as universally positive, can actually mask subtle forms of power, hierarchy and control within coaching contexts. While this care may be well intentioned, it often serves to further neoliberal goals related to performance success, results and accountability. It therefore reinforces traditional hierarchies in covert and subtle ways, and is thereby used as a means to legitimise the coach’s authority. Gearity (2023) provides specific examples such as coaches appearing to encourage autonomy and freedom among athletes, but really only within the culturally acceptable boundaries defined by the coach. Within the context of the current thesis, this work is pertinent as the performance football domain focuses on achieving optimal performance, meeting objectives and attaining outcomes (Cronin et al., 2020). Therefore, further exploration is needed into how coaches should be supported through formal coach education to develop their knowledge of caring C-A relationships and how this is influenced by the pragmatic nature of the performance domain.

Extant research, regardless of discipline, positions the C-P relationship as central to effective coaching. However, the manner in which success is defined may help further explain this link. Jowett (2005) used a taxonomy to describe the C-P relationship based on its effectiveness and success. In effective C-P relationships, there is a focus on personal development and satisfaction. Ineffective C-P relationships, in contrast, are characterised by a lack of personal development and extreme cases even abuse. Successful C-P relationships are those that have achieved performance success, whereas unsuccessful relationships do not

realise their performance goals. The importance of the C-P relationship for effective coaching then depends largely on how the aims of coaching are defined. For example, a C-P relationship could achieve performance success despite being deeply abusive and exploitative. According to Jowett's (2005) taxonomy, this relationship would be categorised as successful but highly ineffective. This means that performance success could be achieved within the context of a highly unethical and unsustainable C-P relationship. Therefore, the position of the current thesis is one that defines high quality C-P relationship as those that are characterised as both effective and successful, thereby supporting personal growth and performance success.

This section has explored research which has investigated the C-A relationship from a variety of philosophical and ontological perspectives. Initially, focusing on the psychological domain, which evolved from a focus on coach leadership (Chelladurai, 1993; Smoll & Smith, 1989) to a series of models (Mageau and Vallerand, 2003; Poczwadowski, et al. 2002; Wyllemann, 2000) which better incorporated the interrelated nature of the C-A relationship. Of most significance is the seminal work of Jowett (2005) who developed the 3C+1 model, which has been at the forefront of much of the research pertaining to the C-A relationship. To capture the complexity of the phenomenon, sociological research has utilised the work of Goffman and Bourdieu. Research has depicted the C-A relationship as a system phenomenon (Ronglan, 2011), influenced by the micropolitical nature of the environment and characterised by inherent power imbalances which has often characterised coach's behaviour as archaic and authoritarian (Champ et al., 2021; Cushion & Jones, 2006). Research has applied the work of Goffman (1959) to portray much of the coach's behaviour as an attempt to 'maintain face', by demonstrating competence and expertise with high levels of professional knowledge, whilst also appearing to demonstrate a softer side to legitimise their power (Jones, 2002; Potrac et al., 2002). More recently the work of Noddings (1988) has been used as a framework to explore how care is exemplified within the C-A relationship, particularly within the context of

challenging and highly competitive footballing environment (Jones, 2009; Knust & Fisher, 2015; Lindgren & Barker-Ruchti, 2017; Cronin et al., 2020). Research has demonstrated how coaches enact engrossment and motivational displacement in the C-A relationship, by prioritising the needs of the athlete through a compassionate and empathetic approach, rooted in listening to the athlete's voice, understanding the whole person and responding in an individualised manner (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Knust et al. 2017). However, caring coaching practices may also be compromised by highly demanding performance pressures, which typically characterise high-performance environments (Knust et al., 2017). Here, care may be perceived as being a more functional 'rules based' phenomenon, focused on meeting the athlete's needs through the diligent use of scientific approaches as a vehicle to help the athlete meet their sporting aims. (Cronin et al., 2020).

This research, derived from a diversity of disciplines, has explored the C-A relationship and made a unique contribution to our understanding and awareness. It provides a strong body of evidence from which formal coach education can draw to support coaches in developing their understanding of the C-A relationship. Psychologically informed literature has provided models that offer conceptual clarity and utility (Jowett, 2005); however, these models have been characterised as simplified, clean and reductionist (Wagstaff, 2020). While sociological research has focused on complexity and contextuality and thereby emphasise the context dependent nature of the C-A relationship, it may lack practical applicability for coaches. Research that has drawn on pedagogical literature related to care theory demonstrates a more progressive approach, challenging traditional, archaic and hierarchical coaching practices. However, it may be accused of being overly optimistic and misaligned with the realities of performance domains. Therefore, the position of the current thesis is to draw from all disciplines, whilst recognising their inherent strengths and limitations to develop research that is progressive and optimistic, whilst also being context specific and applicable in practice.

Despite the different theoretical positions adopted, a clear point of agreement is found when Jowett and Cockerill (2003) state, “Evidently, the C-A relationship in sport is too significant to neglect” (p. 49). In the next chapter the myriad of benefits that high quality C-A relationships can provide for both the athlete and the coach are outlined.

2.2.1 The positive outcomes associated with high-quality C-A relationships

This section seeks to position the C-A relationship as an integral aspect of effective coaching. To do this, the beneficial outcomes that can be achieved by developing and maintaining high quality C-A relationships are explored. Subsequently, much of the research drawn upon in this section adopts a positivist approach, which seeks to measure the quality of the C-A relationship and correlate this with other phenomena. This research largely does not align with the paradigmatic position of the current thesis. However, this work should not be dismissed; rather, it should be explored as research that demonstrates a plethora of positive associations that can be achieved through the development and maintenance of high-quality C-A relationships. It is hoped that this provides a strong basis upon which to demonstrate why the C–A relationship should be integrated into formal coach education courses in a meaningful and thoughtful manner.

Riley and Smith (2011) used Mageau and Vallerand’s (2003) motivational model of the C-A relationship to examine the perception of the C-A relationship and its impact on self-determined motivation in sport for young athletes. Participants included 211 basketball players between the ages of 12-15 years. Riley and Smith (2011) found fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs; autonomy, competence and relatedness, partially mediated the association between the C-A relationship and self-determined motivation. They highlighted a number of autonomy supporting coach behaviours that positively associated with the athlete’s level of intrinsic motivation. They included providing opportunities for choice and athlete

ownership, emphasising task relevance, explaining the underpinning rationale behind rules, acknowledging the athletes' feelings and emotions, providing non-controlling competence feedback, avoiding the use of controlling motivational strategies and preventing ego orientated interactions with their athletes. Riley and Smith (2011) conclude the C-A relationship is positively associated with basic needs satisfaction and therefore the self-determined motivation of the athlete. Subsequently, Felton and Jowett's (2013) research used a sample of 300 athletes, ranging from 15-30 years of age, who participated in a variety of sports and participation levels, ranging from club to international level. They found that athlete's perceptions of the C-A relationship, and the autonomy supportive behaviours demonstrated by the coach, led to the athlete's feeling more competent and experiencing high levels of vigour, particularly when the basic need of feeling competent was met. This led Felton and Jowett (2013) to conclude that athlete's perceptions of how coaches relate to them is vital to the satisfaction of their psychological needs and their optimum functioning.

Subsequently, research by Avci et al. (2018) sought to assess the impact the C-A relationship had on the motivational climate, using a sample of 96 Turkish club level volleyball players. Motivational climate denotes how the environment and achievement evaluations are perceived by athletes both in training and competition. According to Achievement Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986), there are two motivational environments, mastery orientated, and performance orientated. Mastery orientated environments are focused on the individual's progress in relation to their previous performances, skill development and the effort made during this process. In contrast, performance orientated environments focus on benchmarking performances against team mates or external standards. Avci et al. (2018) found that high quality C-A relationships were positively associated with a mastery orientated environment, which also supported the development of the athlete's intrinsic motivation. This is important as mastery orientated

environments have been found to increase athlete's enjoyment of the sport and contributed to performance success (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2012).

Within performance settings, athlete burnout has been a significant area of focus due to the challenging nature of these environments (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2016). Although there is still discussion as to the exact definition of burnout, it is typically characterised by athletes experiencing depression, low mood and frustration (Ecklung & Defreese, 2015). An athlete's perception of their environment can have a significant impact on their outlook and their mental well-being (Barcza-Renner et al., 2016). Coaches are a crucial constituent of that social environment and if the athlete perceives the C-A relationship to be poor, and characterised by controlling behaviours, it can intensify the athlete's perceived levels of stress and the development of burnout (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2016). Conversely, athletes who reported having a high-quality C-A relationship with their coach had a decreased chance of experiencing burnout (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2016). The C-A relationship has also been investigated in relation to its impact on athlete stress levels and cognitive function. Hanton, Neil and Mellalieu (2008) emphasise the potential negative impact of anxiety and stress on athletic performance. Nicholls et al. (2016) found that the C-A relationship could positively influence perceptions of stress amongst athletes. However, Davis et al. (2018) was critical of the use of self-report measures, used in many of these studies, and sought instead to probe the psychophysiological measures of stress, such as cortisol levels present within the athlete's saliva. Davis et al. (2018) undertook an assessment of the impact of the C-A relationship on cognitive functioning and the incidence of psychophysiological exhaustion amongst athletes. They found a positive association between high quality C-A relationships and cognitive functioning in athletes. Subsequently, they advocated that sports scientists and coaches could augment the athlete's level of performance through the development of high-quality C-A relationships.

The C-A relationship has also been investigated with regards to its relationship with athlete well-being. Keyes and Annas (2009) make the distinction between an individual's perceptions of their 'functioning in life' and their 'feelings towards life'. 'Functioning in life' refers to an individual flourishing and performing well in their life, whereas 'feeling towards life' refers to their experience of positive emotions and feelings. Gosai et al. (2023) used these constructs to assess how the C-A relationship impacted athlete well-being. Participants were largely student athletes from a variety of individual and team sports. They used the terms 'flourishing' and 'thriving' to represent 'functioning in life' and 'functioning towards life,' respectively. Gosai et al. (2023) found the quality of the C-A relationship predicted the athlete's flourishing. Relationships characterised by high levels of closeness, commitment and complementarity promoted the athlete's perceptions of flourishing. This enabled athletes to function more effectively on an interpersonal level, relating to their perception of the regard they are held in by others, and intrapersonal level, relating to their positive perceptions of their own capabilities. Subsequently, research by Ogden et al. (2023) supported these findings. Importantly, within the context of the current thesis, this research was undertaken within the high-performance domain of professional cricket. They found that coaches communicating effectively and investing in relationships had the potential to protect and enhance the athlete's mental health. Jowett et al. (2017) explored the impact of the C-A relationship on the performers well-being, utilising a sample of participants from five different countries, representing 40 different sports. Findings demonstrated that athletes who perceived high-quality C-A relationships experienced heightened levels of basic psychological needs fulfilment. This, also, predicted levels of self-determined motivation, which, in turn, improved levels of well-being amongst athletes. Jowett et al. (2017) concluded that their findings

highlighted the critical role interpersonal relationships, including that of the C-A relationship, played in promoting positive athlete well-being.

This body of research provides a strong evidence base on which to conclude that the C-A relationship can be positively associated with individual athletes' levels of motivation, mental health and general well-being. Given the increasing focus on athlete well-being and welfare in performance domains (Giles et al., 2020), this alone provides a strong basis for asserting that the C-A relationship should be integrated into formal coach education. However, the C-A relationship has also been found to be positively associated with effective group dynamics and the social dimension of team sports, which is particularly pertinent given that performance football settings are characterised by large squads of athletes. Carron et al. (2005) define cohesion as a process that involves a sports team forming a bond to achieve their performance goals or its members affective needs. They further divide cohesion into social cohesion and task cohesion. Social cohesion refers to the extent to which members of a team like each other. Whereas task cohesion refers to the team's effectiveness in cooperating to achieve performance goals. The research concerning links between group cohesion and sporting success are well established. Carron et al. (2002) carried out a review of 46 studies focused on this area and found a mid to large relationship between team success and performance in sport. Westre and Weiss (1991) was the first study to investigate the effects of coach leadership on team cohesion. The study focused specifically on task cohesion and utilised high school male football teams. They found social support, positive feedback and democratic decision-making to be important factors for increased task cohesion. These findings were supported by Pease and Kozub (1994) who used a sample of varsity basketball players. Turman (2003) focused specifically on the C-A relationship and found groups that experience a trusting and respectful relationship with their coaches are more likely to experience high

levels of team cohesion. On the other hand, low levels of team cohesion were associated with C-A relationships characterised by a lack of commitment, communication and understanding.

Greenleaf, Gould and Dieffenback (2001) studied Olympic teams and found that C-A relationships characterised by conflict and power struggles impacted negatively on team unity and subsequently on performance levels. Jowett and Chaundy (2004) used Jowett's 3C+1 model to assess the link to team cohesion. They found the athletes perspective of the 3Cs directly predicts task cohesion. Jowett and Chaundy (2004) argue in competitive sport C-A relationships are strong predictors of task cohesion as they influence teams to create a culture whereby individuals work together to help each other to bring about team success. Jowett and Chaundy (2004) found that coach's instruction and levels of commitment were the two aspects of the C-A relationship that had the greatest, positive association with a team's task cohesion. These findings were supported by qualitative research by Turman (2003) who found the leadership style and the coach's commitment to be key catalysts in the development of team connectedness and cohesion.

Collective efficacy is defined as a group's shared confidence in their conjoint capabilities to successfully perform collective tasks (Zaccaro et al., 1995). Initial research focused on coach leadership and its association with collective efficacy something which Jung and Sosik (2002) found was positively related to transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is generally associated with caring for the individuals you are working with and taking an active interest in their personal needs and development (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Bass (1985) proposed that because this type of leadership engenders feelings of trust, loyalty and respect, followers are, therefore, more likely to work harder towards a common goal. Keshtan et al. (2010) found that coach leadership such as training and instruction, democratic behaviour, social support and positive feedback were associated positively with collective efficacy. Hampson and Jowett (2014) used the 3C+1 model to assess the association between C-A

relationships and collective efficacy amongst combined male and female football players and found perceptions of commitment and closeness had the greatest influence on the level of collective efficacy. Research that has focused on both self-efficacy and group cohesion and its association with the C-A relationship have pointed to levels of commitment as being a key factor in predicting these two outcomes. Hampson and Jowett (2014) argue that athletes who perceive having a close relationship with their coach will last well into the long term and are more likely to invest in working alongside their teammates in order to complete collective tasks. Furthermore, because of this, they will develop increased confidence in their team's ability to achieve common goals.

Such is the intense focus on performance outcomes and winning within performance environments, for many practitioners it is the impact of the C-A relationship on performance that is of most interest. Earlier research examined the C-A relationship in regard to various facets of performance but typically it has been interpreted subjectively (Jowett, 2008; Jowett & Nezeleck, 2012). These studies used self-reported scales to reveal the athletes' perception, which can expose the result to potential bias. It is important that research avoids approaches based on data collection methods that may encourage socially desirable responses and, instead, focus on gathering accurate, on-field metrics to more rigorously assess the notion of performance (Phillips et al., 2023).

Reacting to these criticisms, Phillips et al. (2023) set out to explore the association between the C-A relationship quality and the actual, objective, on-field measure of sporting performance in high performance cricket. This involved a unique collaboration between sports psychology and performance analysis which, as a discipline, is rooted in objective data. The performance metric that Phillips et al. (2023) utilised was shot connection, which was seen as a key process indicator by which to objectively assess the performance of the batsmen or batswomen. A good shot connection was registered when the ball connected with the middle

of the player's bat which required both timing and technique. Phillips et al. (2023) used the 3C+1 model to propose that the quality of the C-A relationship, in relation to the closeness, commitment and complementarity, would predict batting performance. A total of 53 professional cricketers, of which 25 were male and 28 females, took part. Their findings demonstrated that commitment and complementarity were predictors of shot execution performance. Phillips et al. (2023) conclude, in relation to commitment, that athletes who work alongside coaches who are committed through the time and energy invested in the athlete are more likely to bat with greater consistency. The significance of complementarity suggests that athletes who are comfortable and responsive to the instruction of their coach, will bat more effectively. Phillips et al. (2023) accepts the inherent limitations within their research, as it fails to identify definitive causality between the C-A relationship and performance. One could argue that it is the increase in performance quality that influences the athlete's perception of the relationship quality they have with their coach. The findings could therefore be indicative of an association rather than causation. However, crucially, this research provided a starting point to establishing a link between C-A relationship quality and sport performance using a tangible, on-field measure of performance. When viewed alongside other research (Jowett, 2009; Jowett & Nezleck, 2012), which, albeit, also has some inherent limitations, but which produced similar findings, there is a body of evidence that has consistently identified a link between the quality of the C-A relationship and performance.

This section has explored the research which has identified a positive association between high quality C-A relationships and athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avci et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023) , well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder., 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). This body of work does not necessarily align with the paradigmatic position of the current thesis. It has inherent methodological and

philosophical limitations, for example, the use of utility-based conceptual models and attempts to quantitatively measure complex constructs. Nevertheless, it still represents a compelling argument for the importance of the C-A relationship. However, the current thesis proposes the C-A relationship should be explored within the unique context upon which it exists to provide

2.2.2 Performance-based football contexts in England

The current thesis proposes that the context shapes the C-P relationship and influences the knowledge coaches require to develop these relationships in practice. Some of the ways in which performance-based football contexts are unique have been explored in section 2.2, particularly when reviewing the sociologically informed C-P relationship related literature, much of which has been conducted within the performance football domain in England. However, up to this point other facets of this unique context have been less clearly outlined. Therefore, it is critical at this juncture to succinctly and explicitly demonstrate how performance-based football contexts provide a unique milieu for the C-P relationship.

Performance-based football environments have been characterised as cutthroat and competitive (Potrac et al., 2012), shaped by masculinity, authoritarianism, hierarchical deference, and traditional values (Champ et al., 2021; Cushion & Jones, 2006). Athletes are typically characterised as highly demanding, ambitious, and striving to seek and achieve excellence (Potrac et al., 2002). Athletes and coaches work in pressurised environments where their success is measured largely on performance outcomes, which results in typically transient and insecure employment (Cronin et al., 2020; Lindgren & Ruchti, 2017). These environments are also highly micropolitical and laden with power dynamics, with individuals and groups bringing a multitude of ideologies and motivations as they struggle for influence (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac et al., 2012). These highly pressured, micropolitical and hierarchical settings

can be contrasted against participation domains or sports which do not carry the same levels of performance pressure, scrutiny or rigid hierarchical structures.

The inherently micropolitical and competitive nature of performance-based football contexts in England are made more complex and challenging for coaches to navigate due to a variety of other factors. For example, the C-P relationship may be influenced by coaches' and athletes' prolonged cohabitation of these shared social and physical spaces which make performance environments unique. Also, the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity of staff and coaches within these settings may make relationships more complex to navigate, where both members seek to communicate effectively (Davis et al., 2019) and find common ground. The popularity and influence of professional football in England results in the development of coaches, athletes, owners and clubs who have extremely high levels of status, which often results in elevated levels of public and media based scrutiny. This complexity can be exemplified by how the increased status of athletes can influence the C-P relationship, potentially shifting power away from the coach and towards the athlete (Jones et al., 2010). The regularity of selection and deselection also has micropolitical implications (Brown et al., 2009). Deselection is often a precursor for conflict within these settings (Slade et al., 2024). Given that teams may be scheduled to play up to two games per week, this ensures a constant cycle of selection and potential de-selection. This may be contrasted to other sports where selection decisions are taken out of the hands of coaches and decided by a board or committee or sports where athletes work on much longer cycles of selection and deselection.

Performance-based football contexts are also characterised by large squads of athletes, which provides a different dynamic when compared to, for example, individual sports. This means that the C-P relationship sits within a complex web of relationships (Ronglan, 2013). This can be compared to individual sports, where athletes report feeling closer and more committed to their coach (Rhind et al., 2012). Also, performance-based football settings

typically have large multidisciplinary teams (Raya-Castellano et al., 2015). Again this provides another layer of complexity whereby the C-P relationship sits within an organisational structure comprising of myriad of interpersonal relationships from diverse disciplines including physiology, nutrition, psychology, performance analysts, player care and welfare (Jowett, 2024). This may be in stark contrast to participation domains or less well funded sports, where the team of multidisciplinary experts is much smaller or doesn't exist at all.

Although previous research has attempted to demystify these environments, there is still a lack of empirical research, generated in the performance domain, which makes it a particularly pertinent context by which to conduct the current research (Allen & Muir, 2020). Clearly positioning the research in, and for, this performance domain is critical so that the research produced helps to better understand coaching within different contexts and ensures the work produced is as impactful as possible.

So far in this chapter, a significant body of research that has sought to explore the C-P relationship, from a variety of disciplines, has been presented. Research has been examined which outlines the myriad potential benefits derived from the development of high quality C-P relationships. However, coach development courses have been criticised for failing to provide sufficient coverage of this topic (Ferrar et al., 2018; Evans, 2015; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). Therefore, the current thesis seeks to explore what knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, is integrated into FA UEFA A and B Licence courses. In the next chapter the research relating to formal coach education is explored, to better understand why it is a pertinent and important area of investigation.

2.3 Coach Learning and Formal coach education

Nelson et al. (2006) utilised the work of Coombs and Ahmed (1975) to illustrate how coaches learn through formal, informal and non-formal means and in a variety of contexts.

Formal learning, which is the focus of the current thesis, focuses on learning that takes place in a “institutionalised, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1975, p. 8). This form of learning usually has pre-requisite criteria prior to participation, enforces compulsory attendance, delivers a standardised curriculum and culminates in certification (Coombs & Ahmed, 1975). Within a coaching context this type of learning refers to large scale coaching qualifications, usually delivered by National Governing Bodies (NGBs), National Sport Organisations or national federations. Courses generally adopt a hierarchical structure with preliminary courses delivering content related to basic coaching and safety and more advanced courses addressing the technical and tactical nuances of the sport. Informal learning is described by Coombs and Ahmed (1975, p. 8) as “the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment”. This type of learning occurs in a wide variety of contexts, with most being beyond formal learning institutions. They may include informal mentoring, practical coaching experience, experiences as an athlete and interactions with other coaches. Non-formal learning referred to “any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide select types of learning to particular subgroups in the population” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1975, p. 8). Examples include coaching conferences, workshops and clinics.

The process of how coaches learn to coach has been the subject of significant academic scrutiny over the last 30 years. Coaches have reported a variety of means which have positively impacted on their learning, these include, formal education courses, workshops, reflections on practical experience, mentoring and observing others (Stoszowski & Collins, 2015). Similarly, high-performance coaches report value in professional development opportunities such as conferences and formal certifications (Gearity et al., 2013), self-directed reading, interacting with others (Rynne et al., 2010), learning by doing, and experience as athletes

(Rynne, 2014). A significant body of research suggests coaches report learning most substantially from unmediated, informal experience (Lyle & Cushion, 2016). That is, coaches tend to acquire a significant amount of knowledge from the ‘doing of coaching’, through dealing with challenges that practice provides them with and subsequently engaging in a process of trial and error and ongoing reflection (Rynne & Mallett, 2016). Despite this, formal coach education remains an important avenue for exploration, not least because National Governing Body (NGB) courses are often mandated qualifications that coaches must hold (Wang et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant in performance football contexts where professional academies and first-team environments expect coaches to hold UEFA qualifications. Despite the significant critique of the impact of formal coach education on coach learning, the position of the current thesis aligns with that of Lyle (2018), that is, coach education could and should do more to impact the learning of coaches.

Coach learning is complex and influenced by a multitude of factors including people, context, and their experiences, and cannot be fully understood through a single general theory (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Many studies highlight the importance of acknowledging the complexity of learning (Cushion et al., 2003). In formal coach education, a coach’s unique biography acts as a lens through which they interpret new knowledge, influencing what they learn (Trudel et al., 2013). This was illustrated in a study by Leduc et al. (2012), who found that coaches responded differently to the same course depending on their past experiences. Some coaches changed their practice because they were able to connect new ideas with current knowledge, while others did not change because they lacked the confidence to challenge their pre-existing ideas on coaching and therefore courses offered little value. Participants who encountered ideas that conflicted with their prior experience often rejected them, reverting to what they perceived had worked in practice in their own coaching contexts (Stodter & Cushion, 2014). Therefore, when exploring formal coach education, coaches have expressed a desire for

programs that are more personal, learner-centred and rooted in the reality of their daily challenges (Araya et al., 2015). Importantly, this links to the current thesis which aims to explore the knowledge coaches and athletes perceive as important for coaches to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships in performance football environments.

A limited number of studies have highlighted the positive outcomes that can be derived by coaches on formal coach education courses, for example, through coach developers modelling of good practice and providing coaches with constructive feedback (Cassidy et al., 2004). More recently, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) explored the development pathways of serial winning Olympic coaches – those who have achieved prolonged and significant performance success throughout their careers. These coaches reported valuing their formal coach education experiences as a foundational basis from which to develop their knowledge and practice. These experiences supported them with mental models and reference points to clarify the objectives and shape their coaching practices in order to achieve them. It also enabled them to interpret events that unfolded in practice and make sense of them. Consequently, all coaches identified these experiences as critical to their career success. However, most research characterises formal coach education as unfit for purpose (Piggott et al., 2015). It is the contrast between the proliferation and abundance of formal coach education courses, against the reported lack of impact on coaches' development, which makes formal coach education an important phenomenon to explore. It is important to note that this body of research is somewhat undermined by a lack of longitudinal studies, small scale projects and few studies exploring coach education's influence on practice.

Piggott (2012, p. 290) believes the model of formal coach education that has emerged in the UK is "one of standardised curricula presenting a 'toolbox' of professional knowledge and a 'gold standard' model coach which learners are expected to mimic". Cushion et al. (2003) agrees and asserts coaches are viewed as merely 'empty vessels' waiting to be filled

with technical, tactical and scientific information. Potrac et al. (2002) is similarly dismissive being critical of the assumption that coaching is a 'knowable sequence' to be learned by, and communicated to, future generations. Rossi and Cassidy (1999) are critical of the manner in which formal coach education is delivered - a top-down approach that relies on experienced tutors delivering pre-determined strategies to overcome challenges faced in a practical setting. Rossi and Cassidy (1999) argue although this approach may allow valuable information to be transferred between teacher and learners, they may not be clear on how to apply this knowledge in the context of their own practice. Nelson et al. (2006) also criticises the artificial nature of the practical delivery in many of these courses, claiming the use of peers or guest teams does not provide a realistic platform from which to observe and deliver the coaching process.

Pertinent to the current thesis, Jones and Allison (2014) focused specifically on coaches' reflection of elite coach education in football in the UK. The aim of this study was to explore the knowledge, development and experiences of 20 coaches enrolled on an eighteen-month elite level, professional, preparation programme. The research used focus groups and video diaries to assess the coaches' experiences throughout the process. Coaches reported that the content and outcomes simply impacted in minor ways but failed to stimulate or encourage new ideas or new ways of thinking. They perceived that the content lacked relevance to their personal roles and their day-to-day practice, implying it failed to "relate to the job we are actually doing" (Jones & Allison, 2014, p. 117). These findings are particularly pertinent to the current research, as if the C-P relationship is to be meaningfully addressed in formal coach education, it should closely align with the realities and challenges coaches face in practice. Similarly, Chesterfield et al. (2010) assessed perceptions of content, assessment and learning of six coaches who had undertaken the UEFA A Coaching Licence in England. The participants reported a prescriptive 'one size fits all' approach, a response that resonated with candidates critical of a delivery style adopted by tutors which was overly tutor-led and relied on them as

simply being recipients of the course content. The coaches reported being unlikely to discuss these concerns with tutors because of perceptions that it might negatively impact on their chances of passing the course.

Most research relating to formal coach education has assessed *how* coaches learn, or are taught, on coach education courses, however, most relevant to the current thesis, is research pertaining to *what* coaches learn on these courses (Dempsey et al., 2024). In this regard, very little is known about formal coach education (Dempsey et al., 2024). Given the multifaceted nature of coaching, which requires coaches to draw on knowledge from a variety of disciplines, what knowledge to include in formal coach education is a complex process. Typically, the knowledge included pertains to the sports specific technical and tactical knowledge, alongside content drawn from disciplines including physiology, psychology and pedagogy (Abraham, et al., 2006). Dempsey et al. (2023) carried out a study which investigated what content knowledge was included in the English FA Level 2 coaching course. Although this is not necessarily a course designed specifically for coaches working in performance environments, it provides an insight into a formal coach education curriculum, which is under researched. Dempsey et al. (2023) found content that was drawn from well-established disciplines such as psychology, physiology and to a lesser extent skill acquisition and pedagogy. They found that content drawn from psychology to be the most prevalent. Content relating to the C-P relationship was integrated within a workshop focusing on understanding player motivation, with the motivational model of Mageau and Vallerand (2003) referenced and referred to. Although it provided a welcome insight into formal coach education curricula, the focus of Dempsey's et al. (2023) work is significantly different from the current research. Firstly, the research focuses on the participation domain, which is fundamentally different from performance coaching settings. Coaching in participation environments is characterised by an inclusive focus, within a low-stakes, fun environment (Lyle, 2002). Whereas performance

coaching is characterised by an increased commitment to deliberate practice with a view to prepare athletes for consistent, high level, competitive performance (Côté et al., 2007). Secondly, Dempsey et al's (2023) research does not specifically aim to assess the integration of knowledge relating to the C-P relationship in formal coach education. The current thesis will seek to address this gap in the research.

Coach education curriculum development is a social and political act where specific knowledge is defined and developed by key stakeholders to distribute through courses and, therefore, influence practice (Dempsey, 2021). Dempsey et al. (2021) proposes that knowledge integrated in formal coach education curricula may be more representative of those in decision making positions, rather than necessarily representing the needs of the coaches attending the courses. Dempsey et al. (2021) draws on the work of educationalist Basil Bernstein, to better understand how a body of knowledge is selected for dissemination. This can often be characterised as an esoteric act; whereby selected individuals distinguish the relevant knowledge that should constitute the course content. This may, in part, explain why coaches have reported finding the content of formal coach education courses as decontextualised from the messy realities of practice and the challenges that coaches face (Jones & Allison, 2014; Piggot et al., 2015). Coaches must see the relevance of course material to their real-life coaching experiences, otherwise their motivation will be negatively influenced, and they will be unable to use this knowledge meaningfully in their practice (Piggot, 2012). It has, therefore, been a welcome development for NGBs to integrate in-situ visits within formal coach education courses (Chapman et al., 2020). The visits enable coach developers to see coaches at their place of work, thereby positioning learning and support in real-life situations. However, these visits only serve to supplement the main coaching curriculum, rather than replacing it. Many of the discussions surrounding in-situ visits are, naturally, framed by the course content, which coaches must believe to be relevant to them and their practice for it to have any impact.

As an alternative, Jacobs et al. (2015) proposes a ‘bottom-up approach’ to coach education content. Jacobs et al. (2015) advocates that, “an underlying tenet of a bottom-up approach to coach education is that the needs and wishes of coaches form the basis of the course” (p. 185). This may in some part address challenges relating to the content of coach education courses meeting the needs of coaches. Jacobs’ (2015) research focused on the development of interpersonal skills amongst volunteer coaches working in grassroots football. They used the input of coaches to support the design of the course, so it reflected their needs in their specific context. They report that the process of listening to the needs of coaches to develop course content may have enabled them to improve their interpersonal skills. This approach also positively impacted on the motivation of coaches to put into practice what they had learnt. Although the focus of, and domain in which, Jacobs’ (2015) research took place is different from the current thesis, it provides a basis from which formal coach education can be designed to meet the coach’s needs. The current research will initially investigate how the C-P relationship is currently integrated into FA UEFA A and B Licence courses. However, the thesis moves beyond deconstructing existing curricula by exploring the perspectives of high-performance coaches. It focuses on the knowledge relating to the C-P relationship that coaches deem important and believe could be integrated into coach education curricula, based on the challenges they face in practice (chapter 5). However, the current thesis also captures the athlete’s perspective (chapter 6). Given they are one half of this dyad, their perceptions relating to what information they believe is important for coaches to learn, relating to the C-P relationship, is also critical. The ‘voice’ of the athlete has typically been unheard within coaching research and findings are therefore often not grounded in the reality of athlete experience (Weissensteiner, 2015; Wilsson et al., 2022). Importantly, athlete voice is positioned as an important vehicle by which to create meaningful change within sporting organisations and systems (Hartill et al., 2019). To be clear, this approach does not propose a

position that formal coach education curricula should be decided exclusively by current coaches and athletes. However, these two key stakeholders have a unique perspective, particularly in relation to the C-P relationship (Jowett, 2017). Their viewpoint should therefore be captured and considered, alongside that of academics, coach developers and NGBs.

The research explored within this section characterises formal coach education as often failing to meet the specific needs of coaches. This research has characterised coaching as a ‘knowable sequence’ (Potrac et al., 2002) with coaches viewed as ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled (Cushion et al., 2003) by a standardised curricula (Piggott, 2012) whose contents is often divorced from the realities of practice (Jones & Allison, 2014). There is limited research focusing on the content that is deemed to be appropriate to constitute a ‘fit for purpose’ curriculum that meets the needs of coaches (Dempsey et al., 2023). In the next section the research relating to the integration of knowledge relating to the C-P relationship within formal coach education is explored. However, prior to this a focus on the specific case of English Football Association formal coach education is prioritised, to provide the reader with important contextual information regarding the coaching pathway and the specific courses that shape the focus of the current research.

2.3.1 The English Football Association (FA) Coaching Pathway

The English FA is the national governing body for football in England. They oversee both the participation and performance domains, where they are responsible for the development and progress of the game, a key tenant of which is coach education provision. The English FA is a significant provider of coach education and welcomes circa 30,000 coaches each year onto programmes nationwide (Dempsey et al., 2020). The English FA’s Coaching Pathway consists of five levels (Figure 1.). Level 1 and Level 2 attends primarily to the participation domain, also known as grassroots. This grassroots context focuses on providing people, from all

backgrounds, ages and abilities, with opportunities to play football in a safe and inclusive environment (The FA, 2018).

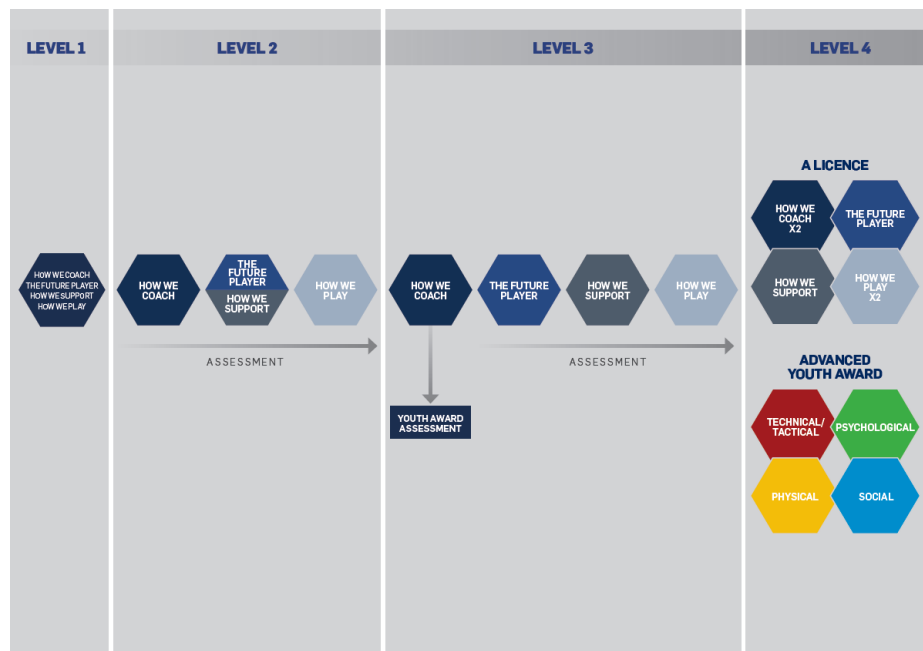


Figure 1. The FA Coaching Pathway

The UEFA B Coaching Licence has traditionally prepared coaches to work within performance environments with older adolescent and adult teams who play the 11v11 format of the game. However, in 2017 the course was relaunched following the newly designed level 1 and level 2 qualifications. At the time of writing this PhD, the qualification has been decentralised and is now under the control of local county FAs who deliver the courses. This has meant there has been an increase in the number of courses delivered and consequently an increased number of coaches taking the courses. This has included some coaches working within a grassroots context and those working with younger players in 7v7 and 9v9 formats. However, the UEFA B Licence course is still a significant qualification within the context of performance coaching in England. It is the minimum requirement for working in the male game in professional academies in England under the Elite Player Performance Plan, outlined by the English Premier League, which aims to increase standards and provide a long-term strategy for developing more and better homegrown English male players for the professional game. These

qualifications are also a minimum requirement for working within the newly developed Emerging Talent Centres and FA WSL Academies, which are the programmes primarily responsible for the development of talented female players within England. Within the adult male and female game in England, the UEFA B coaching qualification is commonly listed as the minimum requirement to work in a part time role within the professional game. The UEFA B Coaching Licence takes 9-12 months to complete and has 9 in person contact days over 4 blocks (The FA, 2024)

The UEFA A Licence qualification is a national course, which is delivered from the National Football Centre and St Georges Park in Burton upon Trent. The course is the highest practical coaching qualification within the FA Coaching Pathway. For coaches working within the male game, priority is given to coaches working in; 1.) the senior team in the Premier League or Football League (Step 1-4 in the male English football pyramid) 2.) an EPP academy 3.) the senior team in The National League down to the Regional Premier Divisions (Step 4-8 in the male English football pyramid). For coaches working within the female game, priority is given to coaches working in 1.) the senior team in the Women's Super League (WSL) or Champions (Step 1-2 in the female English football pyramid) 2.) a WSL academy 3.) the senior team in the National League North or South (Step 3 in the female English football pyramid). The UEFA A Coaching Licence takes a minimum of 12 months to complete and has 12 in person contact days over 6 blocks (The FA, 2023). For both the UEFA A and B Licence courses, UEFA mandate the minimum content which each NGB must incorporate within their courses.

The FA Coaching Pathway, and the courses within it, have gone through several changes in recent times. This is best articulated by Chapman et al. (2020) who analysed the changing nature of FA formal coach education from 1967 to the modern day. They depict a shift in the mid 1990's with the development of a new generation of courses, which was heavily

influenced by Craig Simmons, who introduced the four-corner model, and which drew on the work of Balyi (2001). This four-corner model proposed a holistic and multidimensional focus and integrates technical, physical, psychological and social aspects of player development and coaching. Chapman et al. (2020) describes how the four-corner model “remains a central feature within FA coach education today” (p. 19). More recent developments saw the introduction of the English Football DNA in late 2014 (FA, 2019). The objective of this blueprint was to support the development of homegrown English players to secure the future success of the England national teams at senior level. The England DNA provides a game model for how England teams are expected to play across the age groups and up to senior level, in both the male and female games. Chapman et al. (2020) describes how the England DNA was also used as a framework to structure the delivery of coach education and to encourage coaches to develop their own philosophy in a number of key areas, including ‘Who We are’, ‘How We Coach’, ‘How We Play’, ‘How We Support’ and ‘The Future Player’. Subsequently, the FA also devised the ‘DNA coaching fundamentals’ which provided a guide for best practice for coaches across the pathway (figure 2). Although these principles point to a broader conceptualisation of coaching, where coaches are encouraged to ‘value and work equally across the four corners,’ noticeably, these principles do not directly address the C-P relationship and how it should underpin the approach of coaches.



Figure 2. The England DNA coaching fundamentals

The most recent modifications to the UEFA A and B courses refer to major policy changes relating to how candidates are supported and assessed on these courses. Coaches are now supported in a much more individualised manner (Chapman et al., 2020). The use of in-situ visits by coach developers forms an integral part of both courses. These visits involve coaches being assigned a coach developer who visits them within their own coaching context, which can potentially enable them to collaborate in a more authentic and impactful way (McCarthy, 2024). One could speculate these changes are in light of criticisms within the literature pertaining to reports that coaches have traditionally struggled to be able to deploy what is taught during their formal coach education within their own practice (Chesterfield et al., 2010; Mesquita et al., 2014; Rossi & Cassidy, 1999). More progressive approaches have also been adopted with regards to assessment, with moves away from high stakes summative assessment, towards formative approaches. Coaches can now demonstrate their practical

coaching competencies over a period of time and are also assessed using more methods, such as, project-based assessments (Chapman et al., 2020). This is in stark contrast to previous approaches which included an, on course, end point practical assessment with other coaches performing the role of players during these practical examinations (Chapman, et al., 2020).

Coach education policy is influenced by several key stakeholders, including, but not limited to, policy makers, course designers and coach developers (Dempsey et al., 2021). These stakeholders have significant impact on course design (Chapman et al., 2019). Dempsey et al. (2020) uses the work of Basil Bernstein, as a theoretical underpinning, to better understand how coach education policy is formulated (Bernstein, 1971). This is pertinent in the context of the current thesis in relation to exploring what knowledge is included on coach education courses. Bernstein uses the notion of ‘distributive rule’ to identify the body of knowledge to be learnt. Bernstein describes how this often takes place in an esoteric fashion, whereby those in a position of power decide what knowledge learners require (Bernstein, 1971). Dempsey et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of understanding that the knowledge selected to disseminate reflects wider social, economic and political influences. In the context of the current thesis, UEFA endorse the UEFA A and B licence courses that are delivered by the English FA. These licences are issued by member associations such as the English FA, whose courses must meet UEFA criteria and standards, which are regularly revised and updated. UEFA mandates the minimum content that should be delivered through their formalised syllabus (UEFA, 2020). Therefore, although the question of who decides what knowledge is prioritised on formal coach education courses is not a key focus of the current thesis, it is still important to address the limited extent to which the English FA has authority over this content. Perhaps of more significance in the current thesis is the less esoteric approach adopted. This allows for the voice of coaches, athletes, and coach developers, to be given more prominence enabling a greater

awareness of the knowledge they view as being important to them within the framework of the C-P relationship.

The current thesis specifically focuses on the performance domain. Therefore, we identify the UEFA A and B Licence courses as key qualifications in this regard. Firstly, these are the qualifications that aim to prepare coaches to work within the performance domain (The FA, 2023; The FA, 2024). Secondly, these courses are also important for clubs, employers and the industry more generally, as they act as gateway qualifications to the professional game. They are listed as key qualifications for clubs to comply with external criteria such as EPPP and are explicitly outlined as a minimum criterion in job specifications for coaching roles within performance domains.

We have already explored the myriad of positive outcomes that can be achieved through developing and maintaining high quality C-P relationships. The literature pertaining to formal coach education and the inherent challenges relating to course content, delivery and perceptions of relevance amongst coaches is also assessed. In the next section research that has focused on the C-P relationship and how the topic is addressed and integrated into formal coach education is explored.

2.4 The C-P relationship and Formal Coach education

Lefebvre et al. (2016) used Côté and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching effectiveness to review the content of coach development programmes. Côté and Gilbert (2009) organised a coach's knowledge into three domains: professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Lefebvre et al. (2016) used the term 'coach development programmes' as an encompassing phrase to incorporate all learning activities applied systematically through education, social interaction, and personal reflection with the goal of changing coach behaviours. By using the broader term, development, they incorporate lectures, workshops, training modules and discussion groups

delivered by professionals, researchers or peers to change coach behaviour. Lefebvre et al. (2016) analysed 285 formal coach development programmes, across a variety of sports, and found that 261 focused on professional knowledge, with only 18 driven by the development of interpersonal skills and just 6 concentrated on the development of intrapersonal skills. Most coach development programmes were categorised as focusing on the technical and tactical knowledge of the coaches and these represented 149 of the courses reviewed. The 18 courses that focused on interpersonal knowledge were subdivided into three further categories. Two programmes focused on ‘interacting with the sport community, fifteen on ‘interpersonal and leadership styles’ and one course was dedicated to ‘team building and group dynamics. Although interpersonal knowledge is a distinct construct from the C–P relationship, we position coaches’ interpersonal knowledge as a critical feature that is closely related to the knowledge coaches require to develop high-quality C–P relationships. Lefebvre et al’s (2016) findings demonstrate how coach development programmes appear to have diverged from well-established literature which underscores the importance of professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, all of which underpin effective coaching practice (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Importantly, within the context of the current thesis, Lefebvre et al’s (2016) findings establish that the C-P relationship is underrepresented within coach development programmes.

These findings presented by Lefebvre et al. (2016) have also been supported by other researchers. Ferrar et al. (2018) describes how ‘coach education programmes have been criticised for not providing sufficient coverage of the topic or giving coaches opportunities to develop effective coach-player relationship building skills’ (p. 61). Ferrar et al (2018) adds that ‘rarely is the process of how coaches are taught to build effective coach-player relationships, and the impact of these efforts, described in the coach education literature’ (p. 60). Evans et al. (2015) describes interpersonal knowledge as being only ‘occasionally targeted’ as one of the numerous coach competencies on formal coach education courses (p. 871). Turnidge and

Côté (2017) report that coach development programmes can be improved by placing a greater emphasis on developing coaches' interpersonal behaviours. They assert that coaches' interpersonal knowledge 'remain underrepresented within the field of coach education' (p. 315). They conclude that professional knowledge is an integral aspect of coach effectiveness but is not reflective of the full range of behaviours exhibited by effective coaches. This body of research presents strong evidence that the C-P relationship has been underrepresented in coach education.

These findings are contrasted against research which has reported the positive outcomes of coach development programmes that seek to develop knowledge of the C-P relationship. Langan et al. (2013) conducted a systematic review to evaluate the effectiveness of four coach development programmes that targeted interpersonal skills within coaches. Until this point, no scholars have attempted to review the research concerning the effectiveness of coach education that specifically focuses on the interpersonal knowledge base of coaches. Langan et al. (2013) states that conclusions on effectiveness are limited by the intervention design, lack of control groups and the measurement of different coach and athlete outcomes. However, their conclusions suggest "some level of confidence" in the effectiveness of coach development programmes that sought to develop interpersonal skills and improve athlete outcomes (p. 47). They report several coach development programmes changed coaches' interpersonal behaviours and athletes reported a variety of positive outcomes in relation to anxiety, fear of failure, self-esteem and motivational orientation.

Araya et al. (2015) assessed how coaches developed knowledge on a postgraduate tertiary coach education course and focused particularly on the changes coaches made to their behaviours and coaching practice as a result of their studies. Coaches reported significant development in their communication skills, a better understanding of how to deliver messages, increased emotional connection with athletes and use of effective body language. In a finding

particularly significant to the current research, Araya et al. (2015) reported that coaches believed they had acquired skills which enabled them to be more proficient at developing high quality C-P relationships through being more focused on the individual needs of their athletes. Significantly, participants also stated that coach education courses, delivered by NGBs, often do not explain how to deal with real life challenges, such as deselection. Subsequent research by Vinson et al. (2016) explored female coaches' perceptions of formal coach education across four sports: cycling, equestrian, gymnastics, and rowing. Coaches reported positive experiences of formal coach education in relation to their perceived coaching competence and confidence. Vinson et al. (2016) propose that coaches' confidence and perceptions of coaching may be further improved by an increased focus on the coach's role in developing the C-P relationship, rather than a singular focus on technical knowledge of the sport. Importantly, the findings also demonstrated that coaches were passionate about opportunities that had the potential to improve the quality of their C-P relationships.

Most pertinent to the current research is the work of Ferrar et al. (2018), who specifically focused on the high-performance domain. Their research focused on sharing the design and impact of a coach education seminar designed to develop coaches' knowledge of the C-P relationship. The seminar was delivered as part of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) National Team Coach Leadership Education Programme (NTCLEP). The NTCLEP is the USOC's blueprint for high-performance coach development. The programme is designed to assist Team USA coaches and athletes to achieve sustained performance success through unique professional development opportunities. Coaches were working in a variety of Summer Olympic, Winter Olympic and Paralympic sports, such as archery and BMX cycling. The programme focused on developing self-awareness, self-management and empathy as well as tailoring communication and understanding high performance cultures. The authors captured the accounts of the coaches who took part in the programme and reported that their

findings provided strong evidence to include this type of content in formal coach education. However, these findings are based on short term temporal perceptions, which lack longitudinal data collection to make these claims more robust. Despite this, coaches reported developing their knowledge and understanding in meaningful ways that had a tangible impact on their practice. This included being able to more effectively conduct challenging conversations with athletes, understanding and meeting the individual needs of the athlete and developing a culture underpinned by clear values. Ferrar et al. (2018, p. 69) concludes that “It is our hope that the accounts shared in this article will facilitate efforts to incorporate interpersonal and intrapersonal skills into coach development programmes. This type of coach-player relationship coach education programming has strong potential to positively affect coaches, athletes, sport stakeholders and team culture.”

A clear body of research suggests that the C-P relationship is underrepresented in coach education (Evans et al., 2015; Lefebvre et al. 2016; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). This is despite the plethora of benefits that can be achieved by both the athlete and coach, when the relationship is of a high quality (Jowett, 2017). The lack of prevalence of the C-P relationship in coach education is also contrasted against research that suggests that coaches’ knowledge and understanding of the C-P relationship can be developed through coach education courses (Araya et al., 2015; Ferrar et al., 2018; Langan et al., 2013). Therefore, the overarching aim of the current thesis is to explore the content relating to the C-P relationship that is integrated into formal coach education courses delivered by the English Football Association, and identify the knowledge, related to the C-P relationship, that coach developers, coaches, and athletes perceive as important for coaches in performance-based football environments in England.

Five research questions informed the thesis:

1. What knowledge related to the C-P relationship is integrated into the content of the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses? (chapter 4)
2. What are performance coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education? (chapter 5)
3. From the perspective of FA coach developers, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (Chapter 4)
4. From the perspective of performance coaches, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (Chapter 5)
5. From the perspective of performance athletes, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (chapter 6)

Chapter 3 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the philosophical underpinnings of the research methods adopted in the thesis and to demonstrate their adequacy in answering the main research question. To carry out clear, precise and meaningful research, the researcher must primarily have a clear understanding of the philosophical bedrock that informs their choice of research questions and methods (Grix, 2004). By providing a transparent account of the philosophical position and methodological process, it is hoped this will add to the credibility of the current thesis, where readers will gain a better understanding of the research process and the interpretation of findings. This chapter provides an account of the rationale behind the choices that were made and how this led to the production of three studies that serve to explore the C-P relationships in performance football and inform formal coach education content. This section is written in the third person, but at any point where positionality and reflexivity are discussed, particularly in section 3.3, it is deemed appropriate to write in first person.

3.1 Paradigmatic position

The current thesis is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm. In this section research is explored pertaining to both positivism and interpretivism and provide a rationale behind the paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological position adopted in the current thesis and how the I sought to ensure coherence throughout the research process (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), research paradigms are ‘belief systems’ that are framed by hierarchical and interconnected philosophical assumptions that shape the researchers’ ontological, epistemological and methodological decisions. Ontological assumptions refer to beliefs about the nature of reality, how reality is believed to exist and what can be known about it (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In other words, ontology encourages

researchers to question if reality exists in a single verifiable truth or is socially constructed in multiple realities. (Patton, 2002). Epistemology meanwhile refers to the nature of knowledge, how it can be known (Punch, 2012). It prompts researchers to explore the possibility of objectivity, subjectivity, causality, validity and generalisability (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the ontological and epistemological position adopted by the researcher becomes integral in presenting the researchers' fundamental beliefs about reality and knowledge which will ultimately decide the methodology, that is, the type of design and data gathered in the pursuit of knowledge (Patton, 2002).

The debate regarding subjective versus objective data is reflected in positivism and interpretivism, which offers differing perspectives relating to ontology. The term positivism was first coined by the French philosopher, Auguste Comte who believed that knowledge can only be advanced through surveillance and experimentation (Cohen et al., 2007). Positivism advocates that the researcher is an observer of objective reality with the positivist paradigm being based on proving or disproving a hypothesis (Mack, 2010). It is underpinned by the notion of there being only one truth, which exists independently of human perception, and that is discovered through empirical research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe how positivists believe "inquiry takes place through a one-way mirror" (p. 110). As a result, the subject under investigation and the investigator are two entirely separate entities. Positivism centres on causal relationships between selected variables thereby requiring the positivist paradigm to have a control group and an experimental group (Park et al., 2020). The positivist researcher focuses on quantitative approaches that use randomisation and highly structured research protocols; for example, ensuring that questionnaires embrace a large sample size to satisfy validity and providing respondents with a limited range of answers (Park et al., 2020). However, these positivist approaches, typically used within the natural sciences, may be unsuitable for environments where individuals construct meaning and may not provide sufficient depth to

capture the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Schein, 2014). Schein (2014) describes how positivist methodologies are unable to penetrate beyond the superficial rendering them incapable of probing the values and beliefs that underpin behaviour. Parker (2014) believes social phenomena are unsuited to the techniques of quantitative analysis and cannot be researched in the same manner as natural science. In fact, some authors argue that it is impossible for any theory in social science to be clear cut, simple and concise as, by its very nature, the world we live in is based on different perspectives and interpretations that are made by its inhabitants (Mack, 2010).

The interpretivist paradigm was developed in reaction to positivism. It focuses on the ability of the individual to construct meaning. Interpretivism embodies the need to consider human beings and their subjective interpretations of the world around them to understand social science (Ernest, 1994). It is based on the notion that there are multiple realities founded on a person's perception and understanding of reality (Ernest, 1994). Because of this, reality is constantly changing and in a permanent state of flux. Interpretivists believe that to assess reality, the researcher must gain an insight into the respondent's mindset to gain understanding. Cohen (2007) describes that the role of the interpretivist is to "understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (p. 19). It is underpinned by an understanding that social sciences are naturally complicated and chaotic. The current thesis attempts to develop understanding of the C-P relationship, in performance football. The research attempts to explore and capture the complex and chaotic nature of coaching practice and, most importantly, the knowledge required by the coach to develop high quality C-P relationships. To do this, interviews with coach developers (chapter 4), coaches (chapter 5), and athletes (chapter 6) are utilised to explore their experiences, the reality of their day-to-day practice, the challenges they face and the knowledge they perceive coaches require. Therefore,

the current thesis is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, underpinned by a relativist ontology, which views reality as subjective and socially constructed (Ernest, 1994).

Given the interpretivist nature of the research and the relativist ontology, the thesis adopted an epistemological stance underpinned by social constructionism. Many forms of constructionism have emerged, making it challenging to distinguish between them, with definitions becoming blurred and ideas conflated which presents a challenging theoretical landscape to navigate. This is depicted by Ernest (1994), who states “There are as many varieties of constructionism as there are researchers” (p. 495). The purpose is to clarify the epistemological position of the current thesis, rather than solve broader theoretical dilemmas within the literature. Social constructionism is based on the notion that reality is developed through human activity (Derry, 1999). Individuals create meaning through their interactions with others and their environment (Ernest, 1994). Therefore, it emphasises the importance of culture and context in the process of knowledge construction and development and understands reality as a subjective creation (Derry, 1999). The emphasis on culture and context is of critical importance within the current thesis. The current thesis is culturally situated in three ways. Firstly, it is rooted in the performance domain, which is fundamentally different from participation settings (Lyle, 2002). Secondly, the research is situated in the sport of football which provides its own unique context, culture and norms (Potrac et al., 2012). Lastly, it takes place within the context of English football, with nationality being found to provide cultural disparities in relation to the C-P relationship (Wang et al., 2023). Social constructionism, within the current research, enables the research team to capture, explore and attempt to understand the individual construction of knowledge by coach developers, coaches and athletes. This knowledge is constructed from their own unique experiences, which is shaped by the culture they inhabit. The participants are encouraged to tell their story, in their own terms, and share their reality as it is lived on a daily basis with coach developers (chapter 4), coaches (chapter

5) and athletes (chapter 6) all providing unique perspectives. The thesis aims to bring these individual perspectives together around a common consensus, which enables a further development in our understanding of the C-P relationship in performance football.

Prior to presenting the rationale underpinning the selected research methods within the current thesis, the way in which research in sports coaching has evolved is explored. The philosophical underpinnings of research within the burgeoning discipline of sports coaching is examined, including how this has developed over time. This enables the research team to position the current thesis within the broader philosophical debate into the nature of research in sports coaching.

3.2 Research paradigms in sports coaching research

Sports coaching is a relatively new and under-researched discipline, particularly compared to other domains within sports science. However, since 2000 there has been an increase in specific sports coaching research and so it has become a more established topic for academic study. During this time there have been philosophical debates within the literature pertaining to the appropriate research paradigms by which to explore sports coaching (North, 2013). As already outlined, much of the research in sports coaching has been carried out through the disciplines of psychology and sociology. The aim here is not to rehash a discussion on how psychological and sociological research has influenced our understanding of sports coaching and the C-P relationship, as this was a key focus in chapter 2. Rather, the aim is to explore more deeply the philosophical underpinnings of the research in sports coaching. Inevitably, this will include a discussion of research rooted in psychology and sociology, but this will be done to explore the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this work, with the aim of providing important context to better outline the position of the current thesis.

North (2013) examined the key research published between 1976 and 2006 looking for emerging patterns and trends relating to the philosophical content that underpinned the findings of the research during this period. North (2013) selected 17 research articles and a single book, all of which were judged to be of seminal importance by virtue of the number of times they had been cited. Much of the research that is rooted in psychology is underpinned by positivism, with the sociological research founded in interpretivism. However, North (2013) does concede that the approach of classifying research based on its psychological or sociological roots, and therefore its philosophical underpinnings, may be oversimplistic and a conveniently ‘clean’ process. This dichotomy becomes ‘muddier,’ when, for example, some researchers may only be vaguely aware of their adopted philosophical frameworks, or on other occasions, when coaching research that uses psychology as a discipline may have a variety of ontological and epistemological perspectives. It should be noted that since 2006 there has been a notable increase in research adopting post-positivist, post-structuralist and critical perspectives, which were not captured in North’s (2013) review. However, it does provide a basis upon which to understand how research in the discipline has evolved. North (2013) found that papers demonstrated a bias towards a psychological focus over that of a sociological orientation. Interestingly, the review established that all papers using quantitative research methods had been published prior to 2000 but, notably after the millennium 11 papers had used qualitative research methods. This research suggests a more recent shift towards qualitative research as a basis to explore various facets of the broader sports coaching discipline.

Early research focusing on coaching practice was underpinned by positivism. Research used behavioural and social psychological concepts to investigate coach behaviours, coach leadership and effectiveness (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Lyle 2002; Tharpe & Gallimore, 1976). Due to its philosophical underpinnings, this research used instruments such as questionnaires or coach observation tools to identify effective coach behaviours in relation to

planning, instruction, observation and feedback. Even though this was not necessarily the intention of the research, assumptions were made that these findings would provide a 'gold standard' that could be simply applied by coaches and professionals in their own practice (North, 2013). However, these approaches were criticised as oversimplifying the complexity of the coaching process due to an overreliance on quantitative research techniques (Côté et al., 1995). Naturally, this early research was a product of its philosophical basis, namely positivism. Critics argue this oversimplified approach led to a de-contextualised depiction of the coaching process, which was used to uncritically influence coach development interventions (North, 2013)

As a result of the perceived shortcomings within the early quantitative work, a methodological shift took place, whereby researchers developed models of coaching that were better adapted to the situational and contextual factors present within the coaching environment (North, 2013). Although this work was still rooted in psychology, crucially research used qualitative methods to investigate various phenomena. Important publications like that of Côté et al. (1995) utilised 'mental models' to develop our understanding of how coaches organised their knowledge relating to training, competition, level of performance and characteristics of their athletes to meet the unique demands of the coaching context. North (2013) also describes a shift to cognitive psychology with researchers exploring the notion of coaching as a decision-making process whereby coaches organise knowledge relating to sports science, planning, session design and the creation of an effective coaching environment (Abraham et al., 2006). Qualitative methods have also been used alongside social psychology to explore the C-P relationship (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Poczwadowski et al., 2000). Despite the use of qualitative research which is often utilised in interpretivist approaches, North (2013) described this work as utilising a more positivist approach, characterised by simplicity, order and utility

and producing relatively simple and decontextualised descriptions of coaching practice (North, 2013).

In reaction, a strand of research emerged which sought to, more adequately, capture the inherent complexities of coaching practice (d'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998; d'Arripe-Longueville et al., 2001; Saury & Durand, 1998). Researchers were critical of the work published by Côté et al. (1995) and the overly simplistic models inherent within their work (Saury & Durand, 1998). In terms of the disciplinary and paradigmatic positioning, this research drew on psychology and qualitative research designs. For example, d'Arripe-Longueville et al. (1998) and Saury and Durand (1998) used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1998), which seeks to understand the individual's own interpretations and explanations relating to their interactions, social actions, and experiences. This research produced a more nuanced and contextual account of coaching. The research was rooted in specific sports, such as sailing and archery, and the philosophical positioning of the work meant that the authors questioned whether the findings could be generalised to other sports or coaching domains. Despite this work drawing on psychological concepts and qualitative research designs, it focused more on the complexities of coaching practice rather than previous research which focused on the commonalities (Côté et al., 1995). North (2013) explains that to understand the differences in output, one must appreciate the different objectives of the research, for example, whether the research is attempting to describe coaching practice or develop models for coach development. Although this may be an oversimplified dichotomy, it has important implications when reflecting upon the paradigmatic position and objectives of the current thesis, which attempts to do both, but with an appreciation that this knowledge is culturally situated, based on the domain, sport and country in which it is taking place.

It was sociology that provided the most comprehensive challenge to the dominance of psychological scientism research in coaching. Scholars viewed previous research through a

paradigmatic lens, with previous research being described as positivist, reductionist, fragmented, technocratic and rational (Jones, 2000). The sociological approach, which was adopted, was founded in interpretivism and qualitative research methods. The focus of the work was to illuminate the holistic nature of coaching as human, relational and situated practice (Jones et al., 2003). It was the exploration of rules, roles, interactions and power relations that facilitated this more in-depth biographical approach to research (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Research viewed coaching through the institutional, cultural and structural forces that were shaping it (Jones & Wallace, 2005). This interpretative research did not focus on developing formal structured models of coaching, and coach development, instead it attempted to capture the unique and descriptive stories of those studied through the lens of theorists such as Bourdieu and Foucault (Jones et al., 2011).

Research rooted in positivism and interpretivism both have inherent limitations. On one hand, the work of positivists is accused of being reductionist and producing oversimplified models that do not incorporate contextual and situational variables (Macdonald et al., 2002). In contrast, Lyle (2007) is disapproving of the interpretivist approach and claims those researchers who push for a focus on the complexity of coaching overstate its importance. Lyle (2007) argues psychological positivist-based research provides models of coaching that can be simply transferred to the 'front line' of coaching and are integral to moving the profession forward. Lyle (2007), also, claims the politicised complexity that interpretivist researchers argue is inherent within coaching serves only to paint a picture of coaching practices that fail to resonate with practitioners within the field. North (2013) attempts to provide a more balanced analysis, stating that sociological interpretivists make a fair observation when arguing that models of coaching derived from psychological scientism fail to capture the complexity of coaching. However, he acknowledges that this was never the intention of the researchers. On the other hand, when interpretivist approaches are critiqued for focusing too heavily and

overplaying the complexity of coaching practice, psychologists are entitled to point to the structure and clarity their models of coaching provide.

In contrast to previously entrenched disciplinary positions, more recent developments within the field have seen an interdisciplinary approach. Sociological and psychological perspectives have been combined with other disciplinary positions to produce a more pragmatic philosophical position upon which to base coaching research (North, 2013). North (2017) describes how mono-disciplinary approaches have dominated the research agenda in sports coaching. However, this approach often results in unhelpful militant tendencies towards other disciplines which tends to fracture the research field and is often over restrictive (North, 2017). This is because individual disciplines lose sight or ignore a range of phenomena that doesn't fit with their limited worldview (Chettiparamb, 2007). Disciplinary approaches used in isolation have been argued to be inadequate to solve real world problems, resulting in knowledge perceived as highly abstract and removed from everyday experience, with real world research problems rarely arising within orderly disciplinary categories (Chettiparamb, 2007). Cushion (2001, p.51) describes how a great deal of research in sports coaching has been "fragmented along disciplinary lines, when arguably the demands of sports coaching are interdisciplinary". This is particularly pertinent within the current thesis where the focus is exploring what knowledge could be disseminated through formal coach education to support coaches to improve their practice. The position of the current thesis aligns with that proposed by North (2017), which suggests that the answer lies in adopting an interdisciplinary approach, underpinned by the premise that the demands of coaching are interdisciplinary and therefore the formal coach education curriculum used to support coaches should also draw on a variety of disciplines. This should involve incorporating the good work from existing disciplinary approaches (North, 2017), which are clearly evident in relation to the C-P relationship.

The current thesis adopts an interpretivist stance, underpinned by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology. The thesis focuses on understanding how coach developers, coaches and athletes make sense of the C-P relationship within their unique socio-cultural context of performance-based football. However, despite the paradigmatic position of the current thesis, it adopts an approach that draws on research from a variety of disciplines and paradigms. This allows for an exploration of these studies within the context of their inherent strengths and limitations, as informed by our own positionality. For example, the work of Sophia Jowett is rooted in positivist approaches, through the development of conceptual models and the use of measurement tools. Despite the contrasting paradigmatic position adopted in the current thesis, we still explore her research and relate our findings to it, whilst also recognising its inherent limitations assessed according to our own paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological position.

3.3 A reflexive approach

Throughout the research I have strived to recognise how my own subjectivity and experiences have influenced the research process. Therefore, I adopted a reflexive approach, pertaining to the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality and experiences and how these will impact the research process and outcomes (Berger, 2015). This also comes with an acceptance that I am a central part of the research, rather than perceiving myself to be an outsider (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Central to this idea is the understanding of the role of the self in the creation of knowledge, and monitoring this role and the impact of biases, beliefs and experiences (Berger, 2015). This section illustrates the reflexive approach adopted by providing an authentic and honest account of how my own personal and professional beliefs and experiences have shaped the research. This provides the reader with transparency to draw their own conclusions based on a deeper understanding of the researcher and their influences (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). It is not my

intent to describe my personal and professional background, rather, I intend to draw the reader's attention to specific and poignant factors that have influenced the research process.

The first influence was my practitioner background and perspectives, which shaped my area of focus, data collection, analysis and writing (Everett, 2002). My motivations for carrying out the research were based on my experiences as a teacher and coach. Identifying my experiences as a teacher, as well as that of a coach, as a key motivator is underpinned by my understanding that coaching is a form of teaching and shares many similarities. My formal training as a teacher influenced my understanding of coaching and my coaching background influenced my formative years as a teacher. Having worked for 14 years as a coach and 12 years as a teacher, this provided me with a range of significant experiences to reflect upon and make sense of. Wherever I had perceived my coaching or teaching to be influential and impactful, the relationship between myself and the athlete, or pupils, lay at the heart of the process. For me, the correlation between the effectiveness of my practice and the relationship that existed with the learner was clear to see. As a practitioner, the C-P relationship was something I was consciously aware of and sought to tend to and nurture. However, at the same time I struggled to demystify and define it in tangible terms. I was entering the PhD as a convert, a practitioner who was convinced of the importance of the C-P relationship in high quality coaching practice. Charmaz (2005) explains how familiarity, derived from personal experiences, is often the foundation for qualitative research to take place and this certainly resonated with my own experience. However, it is also likely that I made assumptions about the data founded on those experiences and the subsequent biases that I have developed from my practitioner role.

Prior to starting the PhD process, I had not studied sports coaching as an academic discipline. My undergraduate and postgraduate studies had focused on sports science and education, respectively. Given the C-P relationship had not featured heavily within my formal

coach education experiences, my knowledge of the topic was largely experiential. My understanding of the C-P relationship was tacit and based on my direct experiences of teaching and coaching and other informal means such as the reading of books and informal discussions I have had with other professionals. I held the C-P relationship in high regard, as an essential component of high-quality coaching practice, but was unfamiliar with much of the relevant literature. This resulted in a narrow understanding of the C-P relationship, which lacked complexity and nuance. At this point in time, I viewed the C-P relationship as more of a ‘bolt on’ aspect of coaching. However, by engaging more thoroughly with academic literature I began to view coaching as a relational activity, an activity that happened between two or more people and therefore was inherently interpersonal in nature. I had also developed a dichotomised approach whereby the technical and tactical aspects of coaching were deemed as separate from the relationship between the coach and athlete. During my data collection for study one (chapter 4), the responses had challenged this position. At this time, Dr Colum Cronin, who is a member of my supervisory team, also directed me towards the work of sociologically positioned researchers such as Robyn Jones and Paul Potrac. This developed my understanding of how a coach’s professional knowledge was of critical importance to the C-P relationship, particularly in performance settings. It provided the coach with capital upon which to foster respect from the athlete, something which is of huge significance within the realms of performance-based football.

This changed the manner of the data collection, analysis and the writing process. I analysed more deeply coaches’ comments in relation to professional knowledge and how it influenced their relationship with athletes. It also changed my questioning for study two (chapter 5), where I was keen to explore further, coaches’ perceptions as to how professional knowledge influenced their relationship with athletes. My early reading also made me reflect on the multifaceted nature of high-quality C-P relationships in performance environments. I

was introduced to the work of Nel Noddings, by Dr Colum Cronin, specifically relating to her research on the ethics of care. Initially, I was dubious of its applicability and suitability within performance settings. To apply this theory to high-performance sport appeared idealistic and somewhat naïve to the realities of this harsh and competitive milieu, which I had experienced firsthand as a coach. However, after exploring the research which had used this care theory as a lens by which to understand practice in performance-based sporting settings, alongside several challenging discussions with my supervisory team, who operated as ‘critical’ friends’ (Smith & Sparkes 2016), my outlook was evolving. I began to see care as a significant, but context dependent, feature of the C-P relationship. At the same time, I was conducting data collection with coach developers and coaches for study one (chapter 4) and two (chapter 5). My understanding of the C-P relationship was becoming more nuanced. For me, not only did these relationships require care, understanding and empathy, but also role clarity, high challenge, accountability, and perhaps even conflict. It forced me to look more closely, and more critically, upon my own relationships with athletes whom I had regarded as being of high quality. On reflection, these relationships required me to walk a tight rope, always finding the right balance and striking an appropriate tone - to consistently adapt my responses, behaviours and communication to the evolving needs of the athlete. But this was also highly individualised, which meant I was moving away from a ‘one size fits all’ gold standard C-P relationship. Again, this changed the way I analysed the data, which involved looking more closely at the blend of coach behaviours which provided support and challenge for athletes. This also influenced the interview questions for study two (chapter 5) and three (chapter 6), as I wanted to further investigate how coaches effectively balanced these approaches to find the ‘sweet spot’. My own understanding of the C-P relationship has evolved and is still evolving. It has become more complex, nuanced and critical. It is important to map this evolutionary process

as it has, naturally, influenced the questions I have asked the participants as well as the way in which I have interpreted the data and the meaning I have taken from it.

I completed the UEFA B course in 2016 and the UEFA A Licence course immediately prior to commencing my PhD in 2020 and this certainly influenced the research process. Study one (chapter 4) sought to assess how the topic of the C-P relationship integrated within these courses. Having recently completed them, I was conscious that my own experiences would influence the ways in which I interpreted the data. On one hand, my own intimate experience as a candidate on the courses would aid my understanding of the course structure, terminology, content and teaching methods. However, it was important that I reflected on my own subjectivity to produce a piece of research that was fair, balanced and nuanced. As part of this reflexive approach, following discussions with my supervisory team, prompted also by peer reviewers, we decided to conduct a document analysis as part of the study. The key documents either directly supported the on-course delivery and assessment by coach developers (e.g. PowerPoint slides, learner journals and assessment frameworks) or mapped the course content (e.g. course curriculum documents). Given the ontological and epistemological position of the current thesis, we reject the notion of pure objectivity. However, the document analysis provided credibility to the research and for many readers it would represent a more rigorous research process.

I also adopted a reflexive approach when reflecting on my relationship with the participants in all three studies and how this may impact the research. It is typically difficult to gain access to performance football environments and the coaches and athletes who operate within them. My experiences as a coach provided me with capital, having been able to develop trusting relationships with a range of coach developers, coaches and athletes over several years. These relationships enabled me to gain access to a range of individuals that may not have otherwise agreed to take part in a research project of this type. Being a coach meant that I could

relate and better understand the language used and the contextual meaning in which it was spoken. I believe this has enhanced the quality and uniqueness of the thesis, enabling me to explore the lives of individuals who may not otherwise have shared their thoughts and experiences. May and Perry (2002) describes how the social distance (e.g., the closeness of characteristics) between the research and researched can influence the response from participants. I believe that the relationship and trust I have built with many of the participants meant they were more likely to provide deep, honest and authentic accounts of what can be a highly personal and private topic. However, my relationship with the participants may also have influenced the research in more undesirable ways. For study two (chapter 5), I purposefully sampled a variety of coaches working in performance settings. Some I knew personally and some I was introduced to by other coaches. Having worked alongside some of them and observed them working with athletes over a prolonged period, I had a strong sense of their ideas about coaching. Perhaps consciously, or unconsciously, I was drawn into recruiting these coaches because I perceived them to hold the C-P relationship in high regard or felt them to be particularly competent in this area of practice. Was I still in contact with these coaches simply because we shared similar worldviews? Or, because we had similar ideas of what constituted effective coaching? These were certainly pertinent questions that I was reflecting upon during the research process.

3.4 A qualitative approach

Given the ontological and epistemological positioning of the current thesis, a qualitative research methodology was deemed appropriate. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 25) describe qualitative research as multiple methods that involve an "...interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them." It is challenging to clearly define qualitative research due to its interdisciplinary and

transdisciplinary nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It has developed and adopted numerous identities and is the subject of contradictions, tensions, and various interpretations (Flick, 2007). Ultimately, qualitative research is concerned with how human behaviour can be explained within the social structures it takes place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research prioritises the perspectives of the participants and seeks to illuminate the subjective meanings, actions and context of those being researched and is utilised to enable exploration of cultural and social phenomenon (McIntyre, 2005).

Qualitative research has long been thought of as a credible methodology by which to understand complex human behaviour within sporting contexts (North, 2013). This was explicitly stated by Streat (1998, p. 335) who describes how qualitative inquiry affords researchers the ability to “describe, interpret, verify and evaluate phenomena of interest”. More recently, articles have demonstrated the increasing importance and prevalence of qualitative research in sports coaching (Griffo et al., 2019) and sports psychology (McGannon et al., 2021). Kane (2014) describe how qualitative research can reveal the detailed and complex nature of a phenomena. Therefore, in the current thesis, qualitative research is deemed an appropriate method by which to explore the C-P relationship based on the ontological and epistemological stance adopted. It enables the prioritisation of the perspectives of coach developers, coaches, and athletes, who each have their own unique interpretations, shaped by the social environment in which they exist.

Qualitative research incorporates a variety of methods such as focus groups, semi-structured interviews, digital methods, ethnography and more recently mixed methodologies. This now provides qualitative researchers with a “...rich menu of ways to access both private, concealed realities and the public faces of humanness” (Morse, 2019, p.1). Semi-structured interviews were deemed an appropriate research method and used throughout the three studies. This enabled an exploration of the thoughts, feelings, reasoning and sense making of coach

developers, coaches and athletes (Archer, 2003). It also allowed a diversion from the schedule to discuss fruitful lines of enquiry and further probe participants and encourage them to substantiate claims (Patton, 2015). Specific details regarding the aim and structure of the semi-structured interviews are provided for each study in the following three chapters. All interviews took place on video calling software. After discussions with the supervisory team and individual participants, it was concluded that they would be more comfortable talking about highly personal issues, such as the C-P relationship, within the privacy of their own home (Gray et al., 2020). Accessibility to participants was also a key factor in this decision. It was deemed to be unrealistic to arrange face to face interviews with high profile coach developers, coaches and athletes, due to their demanding roles and the requirement for them to work within extremely tight schedules.

Other qualitative methods were explored but were deemed inappropriate. Focus groups were discussed with the supervisory team. But it was agreed they were unsuitable as confidentiality and anonymity could not be guaranteed due to the difficulty controlling what participants may communicate from outside the group (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Also, due to the nature of the topic, it was assumed that coaches and athletes would be less likely to provide honest, authentic accounts within a group setting (Smithson, 2000). For example, in study two (chapter 5) and three (chapter 6) the coaches and athletes likely perceived other participants as rivals. The notion that they would discuss complex and private information about relationships with players or coaches, or their own vulnerabilities, was deemed to be unrealistic. Using observational data to complement the findings of interviews for study two (chapter 5) was also discussed. However, given they were volunteering to take part on an individual basis, without the involvement of their club, it was decided that the likelihood of accessing training sessions, within these high-performance environments, was extremely low. However, alternative qualitative methods were used in study one (chapter 4), with the use of document analysis.

Document analysis is the systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic material (Bowen, 2009). It involves the documents being examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, and gain understanding (Bowen, 2009). Within the context they were deemed a valuable source by which to develop a deeper understanding of the FA UEFA A and B Licence courses that could be used alongside interview data collected from coach developers and designers.

In the next section the rationale underpinning the sample of participants selected to complete the semi-structured interviews for each study within the thesis are detailed.

3.5 Sampling and participants

Researchers can distinguish between two broad modes of sampling within qualitative research – probability or purposeful sampling (Kemper et al., 2003). Probability sampling incorporates an element of randomness and takes some of the choice away from the researcher. This type of sampling can be useful when the researcher attempts to access a typical cross section of a group to more effectively generalise the findings (Tracy, 2024). In contrast, purposeful sampling focuses on the participants being able to meet the aims of the research project. This approach has the potential to enable the researcher to use their own expertise and judgement to select participants that would provide rich data, relevant to their specific research goals (Emmel, 2013). Purposeful sampling more closely aligns with the paradigmatic position of the current thesis, as it allows for the selection of individuals who have relevant experiences and insights that can be explored in a contextually rich and meaningful way. As the current research is situated in the performance football domain in England, purposeful sampling was a necessity to access high profile coach developers, coaches, and athletes. High-performance footballing environments, and the individuals who work within them, are typically challenging to gain access to. Tracy (2013, p.135) describes how qualitative researchers “...rightfully turn

to their personal networks for research inspiration, resources and sample of convenience.” Having worked as a coach within the performance domain it provided them with an opportunistic avenue for recruitment. This involved reflecting upon the participants that would provide the richest and most relevant accounts to help answer the research questions (Emmel, 2013). A more detailed account of the criteria set, and the specifics of the participants involved for each of the three studies are included in subsequent chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6)

Sample size is a key area of focus in discussions regarding the value of the qualitative research produced and the subsequent impact it can have on a given field of study. Reviews suggest that qualitative researchers demonstrate a lack of transparency regarding the rationale underpinning the sample size (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). Mason (2010) argues that qualitative researchers should provide a robust and defensible position relating to why and how decisions on sampling were made. Often data saturation is used as a justification for sample size (Boddy, 2016). This infers that data collection is complete when saturation was reached, which denotes the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data from the completion of additional interviews or cases (Guest et al., 2006) However, research often fails to explain how data saturation was assessed (Malterud et al., 2015). Malterud et al. (2015) offer a pragmatic model for assessment of sample size in qualitative studies, underpinned by the concept of informational power. Informational power indicates that the more information a sample holds, relevant to the actual study, the lower the number of participants required. Malterud et al. (2015) identify five items that have an impact on the informational power of a sample: study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue and analysis strategy. This provided a basis upon which to use the model, prior to, and, during the research to provide a rationale for the sample size used, which is set out below.

Malterud et al., (2015) explains how the nature of the research aims directly impacts on the sample size required. Therefore, narrow research aims requires a smaller sample, which

would offer sufficient informational power. The current thesis is founded on research aims that relate to a specific topic, the C-P relationship. The research aims are also culturally situated within the performance-based domain in English football. Therefore, the experiences and knowledge of the participants are critical, and the sample must be highly specific. Malterud et al. (2015) describes how a smaller sample is needed when the participants are classified as highly specific for the studies stated aims. Because purposeful sampling was utilised for all three studies, with specific criteria, this meant the informational power was potentially high. In relation to study one (chapter 4), nine FA Coach Developers were purposefully sampled which is significant because there are very few employed in the organisation. The only National Lead Coach Developer employed by the FA was also interviewed, exemplifying the highly specified nature of the sample. In study two (chapter 5) and three (chapter 6), coaches and athletes were again purposefully sampled from a highly specific criterion, with each of them having recently played or coached in performance football environments in England (Details in chapter 5 and 6). Malterud et al. (2015) describe how participants sampled should be highly specific to the research question, but also emphasised the importance of ensuring diversity of experiences among the participants. The criteria specified that coaches and athletes had to have been working recently in the professional game in England. Diversity of experiences was achieved by including coaches and athletes from the men's and women's game, both female and male coaches, as well as coaches and athletes with experience of first team and youth team development. This evidence suggested all three samples had high informational power, and therefore a smaller sample would be required. The extent of the theoretical underpinning of the research area under question will also influence the required sample size (Malterud et al., 2015). As already outlined, the C-P relationship has well established theoretical and conceptual foundations which are largely rooted in the disciplines of psychology and sociology. But there is a lack of research focusing on the C-P relationship in performance-based football settings in

England and its integration into formal coach education. This strong theoretical basis, therefore, means that the thesis is not developing theory from ‘scratch’. The findings from the current thesis could be compared with those from other well established peer reviewed research papers. Although the current thesis could be described as novel in terms of its focus, it is positioned as a piece of research that builds upon the already high quality and diverse work in the field. Again, according to Malterud et al.’s (2015) model, this suggests a smaller sample would be required.

The quality of the dialogue during interviews also has implications for the sample size (Malterud et al., 2015). However, this was challenging to predict in advance and was therefore monitored throughout the data collection process for all three studies. The criteria for high quality dialogue related to the quality of the communication, interaction and questioning and the levels of rapport and trust between the researcher and participants, which would aim to provoke rich and in-depth accounts. Once this data has been collected, the last part of Malterud et al.’s (2015) model relates to the nature of the data analysis. Again, given the current research utilises an analysis process which focusing on an in-depth examination and exploration of narratives from a highly specific and targeted sample of participants, according to the model, this suggests a lower sample size would be required.

Malterud et al. (2015) argues that the adequacy of the sample size must be evaluated continuously during the research process, with the data collection process being ended when sufficient informational power is gained, based on the above criteria. However, they also suggest that an initial appraisal of the sample size should be made, based on the information that is known prior to data collection commencing. Given that the research questions were narrow, and the sample was highly specific, knowledgeable and experienced, a sample size of between 8 and 12 was used as a starting point for each of the three studies. This was agreed prior to data collection commencing.

3.6 Reflexive thematic analysis

Each study within the thesis was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021). An explanation is provided of how the process was used within the context of each individual study (Chapter 4, 5 and 6). In this section a rationale is provided regarding the selection of TA as an appropriate method by which to analyse the data collected.

TA is a family of methods used to analyse qualitative research that seeks to find patterns and meaning within data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The nature of TA depends on the research's context, aims and philosophical underpinnings (Finlay, 2021). Finlay (2021) loosely deciphers between TA that is underpinned by a more scientific positivist philosophy and the methods adopted by research underpinned by interpretivism. The former typically seeks to minimise human subjectivity and bias in a search for objectivity. For example, by adopting systematic and reliable coding procedures, where themes are seen as valid and accurately representing the manifest data. In contrast, researchers who adopt an interpretivist position view subjectivity as an influence not sought to be constrained, but, instead, celebrated as a resource rather than a threat to validity. In reality, Finlay (2021) remarks that most researchers adopt a position that draws on both sides of this dichotomy. However, researchers should explicitly position their work and their values as this has clear implications for the suitability of the TA adopted and the general coherence of the research, with high quality TA characterised by an alignment between the researcher's beliefs, goals and methodology.

Although there are a variety of methods by which to conduct TA, Braun and Clarke's (2013) provide an accessible six-part approach to utilising TA. These six stages include familiarisation of data, generation of codes, combining codes into themes, reviewing themes, determining significance of the theme and reporting of the findings. Braun and Clarke (2013) describe how these stages are not designed to be followed in a linear manner and can be

returned to throughout the process. The analysis procedure requires a continual ‘bending back on oneself’ and researchers are encouraged to continually question their assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.13). In the current thesis, the data was re-read after initial themes were generated and the themes were discussed and tweaked throughout the process. This meant that the process of data analysis involved constant discussion, challenge, and refinement. An example of this in study one (chapter 4), where the sub theme named ‘broader curriculum’ was used to describe how the UEFA A and B licence curriculum had moved beyond simply incorporating professional knowledge. However, the second author’s expertise in sports psychology meant they were able to identify, in the data, that pseudoscientific concepts had been integrated during this expanding of curriculum content. In the writing up phase, this meant that the final sub-theme now contained a more nuanced and complex understanding of how a broadening of knowledge in the curriculum had enabled a more holistic conceptualisation of coaching, but also may have enabled the infiltration of pseudo-scientific concepts.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) seminal paper outlined an approach to TA which was utilised regardless of the paradigmatic basis of the research being undertaken. However, more recently they have further clarified, and elaborated on, their original work (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021). They have sought to draw researchers’ attention to the notion of ‘reflexivity’ and have subsequently changed the name of the approach to ‘reflexive thematic analysis,’ to position it more clearly as a non-positivist qualitative approach. Reflexivity refers to the self-critical awareness of the researcher to understand themselves, and others, and how these preconceptions influence the research they produce (Finlay, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2019) articulate that qualitative research is about inferring meaning and viewing this meaning as contextual, positioned and situated. Qualitative data analysis is therefore about interpreting, and creating, not discovering, and finding a single truth present within the data. Therefore, they reject the notion of themes emerging, rather, they are created. The development of themes from

coded data is an active process and one that places the researcher front and centre. Therefore, researcher subjectivity is a resource rather than a threat to credibility (Braun & Clarke, 2020). There is an inevitability that my own subjectivity and experiences would shape and influence the research process, and this is discussed in chapter 3.

For all three studies, the framing and questioning was shaped by previous literature. However, the data analysis was inductive, rather than starting with pre-existing theory as a starting point for analysis. This may seem paradoxical, however, exploring the data inductively enabled us to provide rich, grounded insights from performance football contexts in England, rather than simply testing existing theory. Existing theory was then utilised after data analysis to support interpretation and discussion.

3.7 Rigour and judging quality

Discussions about how qualitative researchers should judge the quality of their work are long standing and challenging (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021). This section seeks to rationalise the decisions made when attempting to achieve rigour whilst maintaining a position that aligned with the paradigmatic stance already set out (chapter 3)

Qualitative research, particularly when underpinned by interpretivism has attempted to defend itself from accusations that it is too subjective, personal and is not generalisable (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021). This has led to qualitative researchers adopting strategies to demonstrate that rigour is derived from positivist and quantitative research (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Assessment criteria based on positivist ideals of objectivity and truth, do not align with the philosophical principles of interpretivist research. This has led researchers to argue that traditional terms such as validity are not always coherent with the principles of qualitative research and therefore are inappropriate concepts by which to judge research underpinned by interpretivism (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Instead, terms such as trustworthiness

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985), rigour (Smith & McGannon, 2005) and quality (Tracy, 2010) have been deemed more appropriate. Although the criteria by which to judge good practice in qualitative research is complex and, therefore, fiercely debated, engagement in these discussions is vital to develop trust within the current research.

Tracy and Hinrich (2017) advocated the need for standardised criteria to judge the quality of qualitative research. Drawing on a range of research, Tracy (2010) had earlier produced the eight 'big tent' criteria as a means of assessing quality which was followed by a subsequent publication building upon that initial work (Tracy & Hinrich, 2017). The model is designed to serve as a benchmark to demonstrate rigour and credibility in qualitative research. The eight criteria consist of, worthy topic, rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence. The model is designed to combine the notion of a 'big tent,' providing an expansive model, whilst also being able to incorporate the complexities of work deriving from different research paradigms. Tracy and Hinrich (2017, p.1) state that the model "...creates standards by which scholars from a variety of paradigms, backgrounds, and communities can consider and evaluate qualitative research with common understanding and acknowledgment.". This has resulted in Tracy (2010) becoming the benchmark for judging quality in qualitative research (Burke, 2016).

Tracy's (2010) model is premised on the belief that there should be universal markers of quality for qualitative research regardless of its philosophical underpinnings. However, others have questioned the value of a universal set of standard criteria to judge the quality of the research underpinned by interpretivism (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Smith and McGannon (2017) argue that the criteriological approach adopted by models such as Tracy's (2010) assumes that criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research can be pre-determined, permanent and applied regardless of the research aims. Given the positionality of the current research, which is underpinned by the premise that reality is multiple and constructed by the

individual, the notion of pre-set criteria may be problematic, given all criteria would be socially constructed. Adopting universal criteria may risk producing a pre-determined closed system of judgement, which results in narrow forms of research being deemed of a high quality, risking research becoming a stagnant and technical exercise (Burke, 2016). Therefore, the notion of a universal approach to judging the quality of qualitative research is rejected, as this would require the use all eight of Tracy's (2010) criteria. This enables the research team to draw on various markers of quality that Tracy (2010) highlights, without accepting claims of universality (Smith & McGannon, 2017). This is particularly pertinent given that Tracy's (2010) criteria are not created or owned by the researcher, rather it was drawn from the work of others. Given the positionality, a balance is sought. The notion that 'anything goes' in relation to research underpinned by interpretivism is rejected, as judgements always need to be made about research (Smith & McGannon, 2017). However, it is also assumed that using criteria from pre-determined and rigid lists would not be appropriate, as the judging criteria should be dependent on the context and purposes of the research being judged. The intention of the current research was not simply to adopt a specific universal set of standardised criteria, as this would be counterintuitive given the interpretivist and subjective nature of the current thesis. Rather, the work of Tracy (2010) was used to bring such considerations to the fore and to decide which of the criteria would be most appropriate for the current research, given its ontological and epistemological positions. Within each of the following chapters (chapter 4,5,6) a specific section addressing rigour is included. However, for the remainder of this section an overview is provided which outlines the main criteria that were deemed appropriate for the current thesis.

The C-P relationship in performance football provides a worthy topic given its timely and significant nature. The C-P relationship has developed increased focus and importance over time both in the field and through academic study (Jowett, 2017) and, as such, has received

more research attention in the last decade. High quality C-P relationships have been found to be positively associated with athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avci et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023), well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder., 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). Given the plethora of benefits, any research, such as the current thesis, which seeks to support coach education and coaches to develop high-quality relationships to support athletes would constitute a topic of high worth.

Sincerity was deemed an important criteria given the paradigmatic positioning of the current research. Sincerity is achieved through reflexivity, honesty and transparency throughout the process. This includes honesty about the researcher's background, motivations for the research and their biases and the way this might impact data analysis (chapter 3). The use of a reflexive journal was also a key feature in working towards sincerity. Although I did not appreciate at first instance I was, in fact, keeping a reflexive journal, until I subsequently broadened my reading and was able to better understand and formalise this process. Subsequently, the journal was used throughout the data collection process. The content of the journal related to my thoughts and feelings before and after data collection and the continual development of my understanding of the C-P relationship, which evolved throughout the thesis. It also enabled them to manage their position in relation to other participants. For example, coaches they had previously worked with, including some situations where they had been in a more senior position than them. It was important to ensure they recognised the power dynamics, not wanting to overshadow or subjugate their experiences, which would have negatively impacted the findings. This assisted in recognising my own voice, thoughts and feelings, enabling me to shift from passive to dynamic mode, not only being involved in the research but also influencing it throughout.

The notion of credibility is deemed to be a relevant criterion by which to judge the current thesis. Credibility refers to the reliability, replicability, and accuracy of the research (Tracy & Hinrich, 2017). Each of the coach developers, coaches and athletes have unique experiences from which they develop meaning about the C-P relationship. The credibility of the data can be better assured by providing thick descriptions and extensive accounts of the interviews conducted and the data analysed. This enables the research team to demonstrate the complexity of the data and allows the reader to come to their own conclusions regarding its meaning and value. The credibility of the thesis was also enhanced by the role of multivocality delivered by the inclusion of multiple voices that were integral to the research topic. The current thesis incorporates the voices of coach developers (chapter 4), coaches (chapter 5) and, crucially, athletes (chapter 6). Discussions and research relating to formal coach education can often become overly technocratic (Dempsey, et al., 2021). Too often it is the athlete's experience and voice that is largely absent from coach education research (Chapman et al., 2020). A bizarre oversight given the athlete forms such a critical part of the C-P relationship (Chapman et al., 2020). The inclusion of coach developers, coaches and athletes demonstrates rigour, and due diligence has been undertaken to capture multiple experiences. It allows for a variety of perspectives, which, in the case of the athlete diverges from that of the author, which is critical and another example of how the lead research's reflexivity shaped the approach to sampling.

Resonance links closely with generalisability and the extent to which the research impacts the reader and can be generalised to their own lives or to other areas of research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). The notion of generalisability is often understood through a post positivist lens, focusing on statistical probabilistic generalisability, which focuses on the representative nature of the sample for broader inferences to be made (Smith, 2018). However, to apply this type of generalisability, given the ontological and epistemological stance of the current thesis,

would make little sense. This thesis is culturally situated within the performance-based footballing domain in England, therefore, the type of generalisation considered appropriate is naturalistic generalisability (Stake, 1995). This type of generalisability is the extent to which the research resonates with the reader's personal experiences and their own intuitive understanding and is, therefore, more in keeping with the paradigmatic position of the current thesis. To enable naturalistic generalisability, contextual details about the participants' lives (Chapter 4, 5 and 6) are provided alongside substantial interview quotations enabling the reader to reflect upon these and draw connections to their own lives and experiences. This combination of gathering direct testimonies and writing in an accessible manner invites the reader to make sense of the research and draw personal and appropriate conclusions (Tracy, 2010).

Lastly, the research makes significant contributions in both the theoretical and practical domain (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). The well-established topic of the C-P relationship was investigated, adopting an interdisciplinary approach and drawing upon research from a variety of domains, to consider it within the context of performance-based football in England. The specificity of the context also provides originality and important practical implications for formal coach education. The nature of the contributions to the academic field, by the current thesis, is perhaps best evidenced by the publications in peer review journals.

3.8 Ethics

Statutory ethical procedures were followed throughout the research. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee at Liverpool John Moores University, the details of which are provided for each study (Chapter 4, 5 and 6). This process included completing university ethics applications and gaining approvals prior to commencing data collection. Participant information sheets were provided for each study, and informed consent was granted by all

coach developers, coaches and athletes. Additionally, ethics were viewed as a continual and ongoing process (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). It was essential that respect and trust were built between the researcher and the researched (Ellis, 2007). This was achieved by transparency about the research aims, securing informed consent and engaging in informal dialogue before the interview began. Given the high-profile nature of the participants, and the subject content that was discussed, it was deemed of particular importance that anonymity be prioritised. However, this can, at times, be difficult to guarantee as there will always be the potential for participant and contact recognition (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, participants were informed that the research team would do their utmost to maximise their anonymity. Participants' names and clubs were replaced by pseudonyms in all three studies to protect participants' identity. Alongside this, assurances relating to the secure storage and utilisation of the collected data was always adhered to. This included all information being stored on a password protected computer and all data being stored on Nvivo for the duration of the project only.

**Chapter 4 Developing coaches' knowledge of the coach-player relationship
through formal coach education: the perceptions of FA Coach Developers**

The next three chapters contain the three empirical studies that comprise this thesis. Relevant extant literature will be discussed within these three chapters, rather than being reserved for the final discussion at the end of the thesis.

4.1 Abstract

Developing high quality C-P relationships improves both athlete performance and well-being. However, content relating to the C-P relationship has been underrepresented within coach education. The study evaluates how coaches completing the English FA's UEFA A and B Licences develop knowledge of the C-P relationship. It does so by drawing on the perspectives of those who design and deliver the courses. Semi structured interviews were completed with nine experienced FA coach developers alongside a document analysis of seven key course documents. Data was analysed through an inductive thematic analysis and five themes were generated; 1.) Coach developers understand the C-P relationship is built on trust, care and adaptive interpersonal approaches. 2.) The triad of knowledge impacts on the C-P relationship, not just interpersonal knowledge. 3.) The C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the formalised course content. 4.) In situ visits provide an effective medium to develop knowledge of the C-P relationship. 5.) The assessment framework does not align with the formalised course content. Findings demonstrate despite a diversification in content, the C-P relationship is introduced in a superficial manner. Future research should clarify the knowledge coaches require to develop high quality C-P relationships within performance-based footballing contexts.

4.2 Introduction

The C-P relationship is at the heart of effective coaching (Jowett, 2017). For coaching to be successful and effective, the responsibility resides within the coach and athlete to form a

high-quality relationship (Jowett, 2017). Researchers suggest expectations of the C-P relationship are evolving (Ferrar et al., 2018). Coaches are expected to employ a broad, well developed, set of knowledge and skills to foster relationships that meet the expectations and values of this new generation of athletes (Ferrar et al., 2018).

A coach's knowledge embraces the integration of professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). However, Lefebvre et al. (2016) analysed 285 formal coach development programmes, across a variety of sports, and found that 261 focused on professional knowledge, such as technical and tactical skills, with only 18 driven by the development of interpersonal skills and just 6 concentrated on the development of intrapersonal skills. Turnnidge and Côté (2017) concluded that interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge remained under-represented within formal coach education. Evans et al. (2015) agree and describe how interpersonal behaviours are only "occasionally targeted" as one of the coaching competencies in certification programmes (p. 871). Ferrar et al. (2018) state that, "Coach education programmes have been criticised for not providing sufficient coverage of this topic or giving coaches opportunities to develop effective coach-player relationship building skills" (p. 61). Ferrar et al. (2018) point to a paucity of research in the area, stating "Rarely is the process of how coaches are taught to build effective coach-player relationships and the impact of these efforts, described in the coach education literature" (p. 60). This paper aims to help address this gap in the research.

Coaches develop their professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge through a variety of means (Nelson et al., 2006). Nelson et al. (2006) utilised Coombs and Ahmed's (1974) conceptual framework which highlights that people learn through formal, informal and non-formal methods and in a variety of contexts. Evans et al. (2015) described how formal coach education, mandated by governing bodies, is going through a period of growth. Dempsey et al. (2022) describes how the ever-changing nature of coaching practice requires coach

education courses to aid coaches in drawing upon multiple disciplines of knowledge to navigate these complexities. However, Allan et al. (2018) argued that there is, typically, little research regarding the content delivered within the courses. Dempsey et al. (2022) also argued that it is common for studies to assess how coaches learn rather than what they learn. This makes exploring how the C-P relationship is integrated, within a formal coach education course, a pertinent area of study.

The lack of integration of the C-P relationship in coach education contrasts with a recent surge in empirical and theoretical research which has positioned the C-P relationship as integral to effective coaching (Jowett, 2017). These conceptual models have helped develop understanding regarding the characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships and the strategies coaches may utilise to develop and maintain them. Jowett and Cockerill (2003) argue that coach education programmes, such as those delivered by the English Football Association (FA), should not focus only on providing information that concentrates on the technical, strategic and tactical skills, but also providing coaches with information that would assist them to develop effective relationships with their athletes.

The English FA is an appropriate case study because it provides coach education to a large number of coaches, nationally, across England (circa 30,000 per annum) (Chapman et al., 2020). Further, the FA has attempted to adopt a broader conceptualisation of coaching, beginning with the introduction of the four-corner model by Simmons (2005). This model adopts a holistic view of player development and considers the technical, physical, social and psychological needs of players (Chapman et al., 2020). Subsequently, there has been substantial changes made to the content integrated within FA courses over recent years (Chapman et al., 2020). More recently, Dempsey et al. (2022) explored the subject matter incorporated in the FA's introductory courses and found the curriculum was partially informed by research which adopted concepts mainly from sports psychology, physiology and, to a lesser

extent, pedagogy and skill acquisition. The current research aims to further explore performance-based coach education. It is unique, not only in its focus on the C-P relationship within formal coach education, but that it captures the perceptions of a variety of highly experienced coach developers within the English FA, who have both designed and delivered these courses. The research seeks to explore the following three key questions:

1. What are the coach developers' understanding of the C-P relationship, given they are an integral part of the course delivery?
2. From the perspective of FA coach developers, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England?
3. What knowledge related to the C-P relationship is integrated into the content of the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses?

This may have significant implications for NGBs, coach developers and course designers as they seek to better understand how to incorporate this topic within well balanced and comprehensive coach education curricula. By using a specific case study, it provides an up-to-date account of the current situation regarding how this content is currently being integrated within the flagship courses of one of the leading providers of coach education within England.

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Context

The English FA considers formal coach education as an opportunity to improve the standard of coaching practice. Coaches in England are certified by the FA through UEFA (the Union of European Football Associations). The FA's formal coaching pathway starts at Level 1 and progresses through to Level 5, with each stage providing greater detail and requiring additional commitment from candidates (The FA, 2017). Courses are delivered from a centralised venue and contain a mix of practical and classroom-based sessions, which are

delivered by FA coach developers. The current research will specifically focus on performance coaching and the UEFA B (Level 3) and UEFA A (Level 4) courses within the FA Coaching Pathway (The FA, 2017). Completion of these courses provides coaches with a gateway to full time employment in the professional game. The details of these courses are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. UEFA A and B Licence Course details

Course Details	UEFA B Coaching Licence	UEFA A Coaching Licence
Pre-requisite criteria	Hold an FA Level 2 in Coaching Football or UEFA C in Coaching Football Be actively coaching a team in a season-long competition. Introduction to First Aid in Football and Safeguarding Children Course Reside in England	Hold a UEFA B in Coaching Football Applications are vetted by the course director. Priority given to: Coaches currently working in England. Full time coaches working within the senior male or female professional game. Those who need the qualification to meet EPP (auditing of professional academies) criteria. Part time professional academy coaches.
Duration	9-12 months	12 months
Number of face-to-face	9 days	12 days
Number of blocks	4 blocks	6 blocks
Number of In-situ visits	A minimum of 3 in-situ visits	A minimum of 3 in-situ visits

4.3.2 Paradigm Positioning

The current research explores the understanding and perceptions of FA coach developers on how the FA UEFA A and B Licence courses integrate the topic of the C-P relationship. The research is underpinned by interpretivism along with ontological relativism which suggests “social reality is humanly constructed and shaped in a way that makes it fluid and multifaceted” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 11). Epistemologically a constructivist position

is adopted which proposes that knowledge is both constructed and subjective. Following these paradigmatic assumptions, a qualitative instrumental design was chosen (Stake, 1995).

4.3.3 Participants

We purposefully sampled nine male participants aged 42 to 67 (mean age=53, SD=9.31). All were of white British ethnicity. There is a small number of FA National Coach Developers to sample from, hence the lack of diversity amongst participants. The participants were selected based on meeting the following criteria: (1) they had delivered on the UEFA A or UEFA B Licence courses for a minimum of three years; (2) they had delivered on the UEFA A or UEFA B Licence courses within the last two years; (3) they had delivered on a minimum of five UEFA A or UEFA B courses. Meeting all three criteria ensured participants had substantial, and recent, experience of the courses, giving them the capability to compare developments and changes made to the courses over time. At the time of the study, participants held several different roles within the FA (Table 2). Some are employed as part time Affiliate Tutors who deliver and assess the UEFA B Licence courses through local County Football Associations. Others were National Coach Developers who tutor UEFA A licence courses from the FA National Football Centre. Some participants were, also, involved in the design of the UEFA B and UEFA A Licence. The sample size is based on the point at which data saturation was reached, meaning no new information or themes were observed in the data. The sample size of 9 participants was deemed sufficient based on Malterud et al.'s (2015) concept of "informational power" (p. 1753). Given that the study's research questions were narrow, and the participants interviewed held significant information, due to their vast experiences and relevance, with the sample being highly specific to the research questions posed.

Table 2. Representation of coach developer’s current role and experience in coach education

Coach Educator (pseudonym)	Course involvement	Current Role	Years in current role	Years in coach education
Tony	UEFA B	Part time FA Affiliate Tutor	27 years	27 years
Rob	UEFA B	Part time FA Affiliate Tutor	35 years	35 years
Ste	UEFA B	Part time FA Affiliate Tutor	31 years	31 years
Mark	UEFA B	Part time FA Affiliate Tutor	16 years	16 years
Lee	UEFA B	FA Course Designer	11 months	17 years
Andy	UEFA A	FA National Youth Coach Developer	8 years	18 years
Mike	UEFA A	FA National Youth Coach Developer	3 years	3 years
John	UEFA A	FA National Youth Coach Developer	7 years	20 years
Russ	UEFA A	FA National Youth Coach Developer	7 years	13 years

4.3.4 Data Collection

4.3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Prior to commencing data collection, institutional ethical approval was provided. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview guide was developed with open ended questions. The guide enabled participants to be asked the same set of core questions while also enabling them to lead the conversations and to elaborate and share their lived experience (Patton, 2002). The interview guide was shaped by the three research questions and consisted of the following areas: (1) Background information (career history, coaching history and experience in coach education). This was a brief section that aimed to provide the interviewer with some context of the coach developers’ experiences, that they may draw upon in later questions. (2) Personal understanding of the C-P relationship (key skills relating to the C-P relationship, pertinent personal experiences of the C-P relationship, perceptions of the ‘best’ coach with regards to relationships developed with their athletes). This section focused on collecting data on the first

two research questions. It was important to assess the coach developers understanding of the C-P relationship, given they are an integral part of the course delivery, and their knowledge would shape the course content. Given their vast experiences, the coach developers' perceptions relating to the important knowledge required for coaches to be proficient at developing and maintaining high quality C-P relationships was explored. By drawing this information from the coach developers, it enabled the utilisation of this information to subsequently pose questions about how the courses aimed to develop the specific content outlined within their previous answers. Coaches were also encouraged to reflect on their past coaching and playing experiences to exemplify their responses and provide richer data. (3) Current perceptions of the UEFA licence course and content relating to the C-P relationship (Content relating to professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, relevant workshops, use of conceptual models, key skills developed in coaches on course, methods of delivery, assessment and key competencies). This was the largest section and formed the main body of the interview. It aimed to collect data for the third research question which focused on how the topic of the C-P relationship was integrated within the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses. (4) Personal perceptions on the future direction of the UEFA A and B Licence course and content relating to the C-P relationship (Content relating to professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, relevant workshops, use of conceptual models, key skills developed in coaches on course, methods of delivery, assessment and key competencies). This was a short section but offered an opportunity, if required, for coach developers to articulate their views on the integration of content relating to the C-P relationship as courses evolve in the future. Fellow authors reviewed the interview guide and provided relevant feedback. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews took place on video calling software and were audio recorded and transcribed. Prior to each interview commencing, the aims of the

research were discussed whilst also assuring participants of confidentiality and anonymity. In total 363 minutes (mean 40.22, SD=17.17) of audio recorded interview data was collected.

Table 3. UEFA A and B course documents analysed

UEFA B Licence Syllabus
UEFA A Licence syllabus
The FA UEFA B Licence workshop PowerPoint slides
The FA UEFA A Licence PowerPoint slides containing all course tasks
The FA UEFA A Licence Learner Journal
The FA UEFA B Licence Coach Competency Framework
The FA UEFA A Licence Coach Competency Framework

4.3.4.2 Document analysis

A document analysis was used to consider resources that impacted the content and delivery of the courses. These key documents either directly supported the on-course delivery and assessment by coach developers (e.g. PowerPoint slides, learner journals and assessment frameworks) or mapped the course content (e.g. course curriculum documents). This supplemented the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and developed a more robust understanding of the FA UEFA A and B Licence courses. Documents were analysed to understand the course content that related to developing coaches understanding of the C-P relationship. A total of 5 documents were analysed, totalling 114 pages. Alongside this, 328 PowerPoint presentation slides from 14 workshops were analysed, that form part of the FA's UEFA B Licence course. All course tasks required to complete the FA's UEFA A Coaching Licence, documented on 44 PowerPoint slides, were also analysed.

4.3.5 Data analysis

Data was analysed using inductive reflexive thematic analysis given recommendations for use in qualitative descriptive methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2019). NVivo software was used to code and manage data. Thematic analysis was utilised as it is an accessible method to identify patterns in qualitative data whilst also maintaining theoretical flexibility (Braun &

Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis was carried out by following the step-by-step guide outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013).

Audio recorded interview data was immediately transcribed with minor changes to ensure clarity and anonymity of the participants. Familiarisation began by listening to the audio recording and reading each transcribed interview. Initial succinct codes were then generated which provided preliminary categories. Categories were then collated into five provisional themes. Examples of provisional themes included “The importance of interpersonal communication within the C-P relationship,” “The importance of understanding personal values within the C-P relationship” and “The dominance of professional knowledge in UEFA courses.” Provisional themes were carefully reviewed by checking back to the entire data set. During the process, the team sought to reflexively consider the data whilst being mindful of their own subjectivity. For example, the lead author has completed both the UEFA B and UEFA A Coaching Licences through the English FA’s Coaching Pathway, and these subjective experiences were relevant to the coding process. To encourage a reflexive consideration, throughout the analysis the second author acted as a ‘critical friend,’ thereby challenging the first author’s understanding and perception of the data (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The second author’s expertise in sports psychology allowed them to highlight the need for the inclusion of sub themes to capture the adoption of pseudoscientific concepts within the course curricula. Other examples of the influence of a critical friend included emphasising significant quotes linking to the importance of the coaches’ intrapersonal skills in developing high quality C-P relationships. Overarching themes were then summarised by writing a detailed description which captured their essence and meaning. Finally, the writing involved using the participants’ accounts to present their perceptions of the courses relating to the key aims of the research. Given the emphasis on coach developers’ understandings and perceptions, the data was approached ‘theory free.’

For the document analysis, initially, meaningful and relevant passages were identified based on the three central research questions (Bowen, 2009). Documents were annotated and coded based on whether they evidenced the development of professional, interpersonal or intrapersonal knowledge. An example of this is the coding of workshops in the UEFA B Licence (Table 4). Any documents which made specific reference to the C-P relationship were also categorised. Following the recommendations of Bowen (2009), the themes developed through the semi-structured interviews were also applied to the analysis of documents. This enabled a more rigorous approach and allowed the comparison of interview data against the content of the documents.

4.3.6 Rigour

Rigour was conceived in terms of Tracy and Hinrichs (2017) criteria with a particular emphasis on a worthy topic, rich rigour, and meaningful coherence. Purposeful sampling was utilised to ensure the most appropriate practitioners were recruited to fully answer the key research questions providing rich rigour and coherence. Methodological rigour was ensured by conducting a pilot interview. Feedback was provided with regards to sequencing of questioning and the clarity of wording and minor adjustments were made. An example of a change in the order of the interview guide was the addition of a question which encouraged the participants to reflect on high quality C-P relationships they had experienced, prior to then discussing the key skills and attributes required by the coach. The revised interview schedule was used and in line with the recommendations of Tracy and Hinrichs (2017), the number and mean length of interviews are reported

During the analysis of these interviews a relativist perspective was adopted. Consistent with this there is an acceptance that subjectivity will influence data interpretation. Reflexivity was encouraged by co-authors acting as a critical friend, which served to challenge the

interpretations made and explore alternative explanations (Smith & McGannon, 2018). An example of this was the notion of ‘care’ within the C-P relationship. Co-authors encouraged the lead author to critically analyse the different conceptions of this worthy topic and how it may be understood within performance environments. Providing substantial examples from the data provides meaningful coherence and facilitates naturalistic generalisability enabling the reader to draw their own conclusions from the data (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

4.4 Findings and discussion

There are five themes in this section. Themes one and two relate to the first two research questions, respectively. Themes three, four and five align to the third research question.

4.4.1 Theme 1: The C-P relationship is built on trust, care and adaptive interpersonal approaches

It was important that the coach developer’s understanding of the C-P relationship was explored, given they play an integral role in the course delivery and their knowledge and understanding would shape the course. Coach developers were encouraged to reflect on their vast experiences within coaching, to better exemplify these characteristics. The coach developers believed high quality relationships were built on trust, care and the use of adaptive interpersonal approaches by the coach.

4.4.1.1 Trust

Coach developers described how a trust-based relationship would enable a coach to assist the athlete to develop and improve.

“So, I think the biggest characteristic would be honesty, and the honesty probably builds the trusting relationship between the coach and a player. If you've got the trust between each other that you are trying to help them, you try to develop them or what you tell them is true. I think you need that honesty and trust as a foundation. Without that, I

don't think they sort of buy into you as a coach and you struggle to help them as a player.” (Mark)

“I think it's really important that we establish a culture where there is trust and respect and that's going to be earned and so I think it's a given that that needs to happen with players and coaches. Because if you want the players to be good performers, they've got to buy in to what it is you're trying to achieve with them. And within that, there's a lot of core values start to come in about, for example, trust. It requires respect and listening” (Ste)

Coach developers believe coaches must develop trusting relationships with athletes and the current research adds to the existing literature which positions trust as a key indicator of high-quality C-P relationships and subsequently athletic performance (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Trust is built upon the athlete believing the coach will fulfil their commitment to the relationship (Kao et al., 2017). Fulfilling their commitment requires the coach not only to demonstrate competence, but, as Ste describes, also communicating this effectively to players to encourage them to commit to a trusting relationship. Kao et al. (2017) found that trust between coach and athlete was impacted by coach competency in four areas; motivation (capacity to motivate athletes), game strategy (tactical strategy during competition), technique (instruction and feedback during training session) and character building (positive attitude towards sports).

4.4.1.2 Care

Several participants described the importance of coaches developing a strong understanding of the notion of care to develop a relationship founded on trust.

“Caring, looking after them. So, their welfare is in my hands, and they will be looked after, regardless. There is a genuine warmth towards seeing an improvement. Because

the players have got to see and feel...it's a feeling they'll get. If they sense you care for them, they'll want to come back. You're adding value to their life." (Rob)

This notion of building caring relationships was a key theme within the findings even though it appears to be at odds with the harsh and competitive environment portrayed within performance football settings (Cronin et al., 2020). Recent research has drawn upon Noddings' theory of care, to better understand how coaches can develop caring relationships with athletes (Noddings, 1988). To 'care for' an athlete is characterised by engrossment (sustained attention), motivational displacement (meeting the athlete's needs ahead of that of the coach's) and reciprocity (the care is acknowledged by the athlete). Cronin and Armour (2018) argue that when coaching is done well it is a caring activity where athletes flourish as people and performers. Data from the coach developers support this position.

4.4.1.3 Adaptive interpersonal approaches

Coach developers provided a nuanced account of relationships with former coaches who also adopted more robust interpersonal approaches within the C-P relationship.

"So, when I was a player with (Youth Team Coach) in those days, the coaches were stern, they weren't your mate that was for sure. You know, you were a bit in fear of them a little bit. But you respected them massively. Now I respected him because everything he said happened on the pitch." (Mike)

Mike describes firmer interpersonal approaches as being an integral part of the C-P relationship. This may be specific to performance environments. Firmer interpersonal approaches include players being accountable to high standards, robust feedback processes, clarifying expectations and attention to detail. Similarly, Sarkar and Page (2022) focus on the notion of challenge and support to create the optimum environment for athletes to thrive. Challenge refers to high expectations to build accountability, responsibility, and support focuses on promoting learning and building trust. Mike describes that high performing athletes

may want or require coaches to adopt robust approaches. If the coach does not adopt these approaches, athletes may perform with reduced accountability or not feel appropriately challenged. Instead, it may be the case that care, within performance environments, may be perceived by ambitious athletes as an investment of time and effort from the coach in the athlete's development. Cronin et al. (2020) are clear that 'caring' coaching does not simply involve coaches pandering incessantly to the 'wants' of athletes. Instead, it involves using their knowledge and expertise alongside constructive dialogue to meet the expressed 'needs' of the athletes they work with. This will, without doubt, involve providing elevated levels of challenge and requires accountability from the athlete, but these processes should operate within a relationship rooted in care. This is a sentiment Mike also expresses.

“(First Team Manager) had the same thing (referring to demonstrating “sternness”), he did the same, but he had the real care. It was a sort of...a little bit you, you didn't want to let him down, for sure, you didn't want the hairdryer. But you also had the massive respect because this guy was giving you an opportunity. So, you wanted to work hard for him and so on.” (Mike)

Critically, it is important to recognise that Mike's understanding of high-quality C-P relationships may be shaped by survivor bias. Mike had a relatively successful career as a player and, subsequently, he was provided with coaching opportunities and mentored by the very coaches that he is now reflecting upon. These interpersonal approaches may have been perceived differently by other athletes and Cronin (2022) rightly points to the fact that, for some, they may be used as an excuse for abusive coaching practices.

Coach developers understanding of the C-P relationship, is that coaches developing a strong understanding of the notions of trust and care are integral ingredients. But they believe, in performance environments, these relationships are characterised by coaches also

demonstrating adaptive interpersonal approaches which provide athletes with appropriate support whilst also holding them to high standards.

4.4.2 Theme 2: The triad of knowledge impacts on the C-P relationship

This section related to the second research question of the study, which explores what coach developers perceive to be the important knowledge required for coaches to be proficient at developing and maintaining high quality C-P relationships in a performance-based footballing setting. Coach developers were, again, encouraged to exemplify their points by using practical examples. They believed coaches needed to enhance their professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, all of which operate in an integrated manner, to become competent at fostering high quality relationships with athletes.

4.4.2.1 Intrapersonal knowledge

Coach developers believed developing a strong understanding of personal values to be a critical skill in shaping a coach's interaction and relationship with athletes.

“It's the biggest challenge of all is working across your own beliefs, across your own values and what you believe to be right. How you should treat people...it's challenging.” (Rob)

“So, you have a feeling of what good support and good development of people looks like which links back to your own values and philosophy of how you've been brought up.” (John)

Côté and Gilbert (2009) position intrapersonal skills as a pivotal element that enables coaches to manage relationships with their athletes and describe how the development of reflective skills aids self-understanding for coaches. Ferrar et al. (2018) highlights the connection between understanding of the self and the impact on others when asserting “Our

case studies show that while having a deep understanding of oneself is crucial, it is not the entire equation. Coaches must recognise how their actions and behaviours impact all of their athletes and adjust appropriately” (p. 69). The coach developers believed a key element of this self-understanding involves coaches developing a clear and robust knowledge of their own values which helps to shape their interactions with athletes.

4.4.2.2 Interpersonal knowledge

The importance of coaches’ developing strong communication skills to foster high quality C-P relationships, was a key theme.

“Communication, versatility of communication, that will be probably something I repeat loads of times I would have thought in this particular discussion. An ability to transmit your message to a wide range of people with clarity. The best coaches that I see have that ability and I think it's a real, it's a real skill that we don't work on enough.”

(Andy)

Martindale et al. (2007) found open and honest communication was crucial in developing relationships and, importantly, enabled the building of trust between the coach and the athlete. However, Mike was keen to highlight that interpersonal skills need to be underpinned by high levels of professional knowledge and used an example of a coach he had played for to exemplify this.

“It wasn't like he was pally with you, it was not laughing and joking. You know, you were slightly afraid, but you knew he taught you the fundamentals that you needed for a lifetime in football. So, you know you could have somebody else who is a really nice great person, you really get on well with them, but they don't do that. So, they're not like...they're not that useful to you. They might be a great guy; you know so there's got to be a balance of both (professional and interpersonal skills).” (Mike).

Without strong professional knowledge, athletes may perceive a coach as a nice person but somebody who is unable to improve and develop them, which would likely undermine the quality of the C-P relationship. However, these findings point to a broader challenge around defining interpersonal skills within a sports coaching context. His explanation may point to an understanding of a coaches' interpersonal skills which is both restrictive and over-simplistic. These skills are more complex than simply being a "great person" or deemed as being "pally." Gilbert and Côté (2013) understand coaches' interpersonal skills as their ability to identify, use, understand and manage emotions. Further research is required to capture the broad nature of interpersonal skills required by coaches to be successful within performance environments. Further conceptualisation is required which captures the nuance and complexity of these skills, specific to coaches operating in performance environments, so they can be targeted through formal coach education.

4.4.2.3 Professional knowledge

When reflecting on his own experience as a player, Mike believes professional knowledge was an integral aspect of the high-quality relationships he shared with coaches.

"They've got to be good at coaching (technical and tactical). You know, they've got to be good at making the game simple and clear so that you get the messages. You know because the biggest thing the player wants to do is progress. Now I respected him (previous coach) because everything he said happened on the pitch. If he said we come short to go long, it worked. Everything he said worked. Everything made sense and it was clear and easy. Not easy, but he made it simple and work well. So, you were really happy with him." (Mike)

Jowett and Cockerill (2003) criticise coach education courses for focusing too heavily on professional knowledge instead of "providing coaches with information that would assist them to develop effective relationships with their athletes" (p. 328). This falsely assumes that

professional knowledge is not an effective C-P relationship building skill. It creates a kind of false dichotomy, whereby coaches can either develop technical and tactical skills or build relationships. Mike describes how he perceives high quality C-P relationships as being underpinned by trust in the coaches' ability to enable the athlete to progress and flourish, with professional knowledge being integral in this process. Mike's responses resonated with the work of Potrac et al. (2002) who explored 'power' and 'social role' using the work of Goffman (1959). They portray athletes, within high-performance settings, as highly demanding of the coach and, subsequently, if the athlete does not perceive a coach to have the ability to enable them to progress, the relationship will deteriorate. They use the work of Goffman (1959) to explain how the coach must seek to present themselves as competent, with professional knowledge used as a key vehicle upon which to display their capabilities. Mike describes how professional knowledge, for the coach to 'read the game,' worked in an integrated manner with pedagogical and interpersonal skills to communicate this information in a clear and easy manner for players to digest.

Our findings re-assert the importance of a coach's professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge operating in an integrated manner (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). It is a combination of these skills that facilitates the development and maintenance of high-quality C-P relationships.

4.4.3 Theme 3: The C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the formalised course content

This section relates to the third research question which is to assess how the topic of the C-P relationship integrated within the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses. It specifically focuses on the content that is delivered during face-to-face, on course, contact days.

4.4.3.1 The C-P relationship is not formalised within the course curriculum

Methods of delivery and assessment included PowerPoint presentations, workshops, pre and post course tasks, group discussion, reflection tasks, in situ visits, practical coaching sessions and a final project and presentation. Course content was largely delivered by staff with a technical coaching background, but the UEFA A Licence course also involved the use of guest speakers and sports science specialists. None of the coach developers reported the C-P relationship as being formalised as a stand-alone workshop, the focus of a specific assignment or targeted formally within the teaching on the courses. This is reflected in Lee's comments relating to the UEFA B licence qualification.

"It doesn't (does the C-P relationship get covered formally within the course content?) ...there's no particular workshops. I would say it's probably more of a subtle aspect of the course. But probably we get overwhelmed with the technical and tactical corners, to be honest with you. Yeah, I just feel that that the four corners is something that we could really improve upon. And again, it comes back round, in my opinion, to trying to squeeze too much into a course and not recognising that we can learn through a number of different elements and aspects. Probably with the courses at the moment we've taken an approach where we squeeze a lot in just in case coaches need it. And so I think, I think the coach-player relationship, probably in situ (coach educator visits the coach in their own setting). I think coaches will probably get more when they're in situ. I think, on course itself, they'll be stuff that gets mentioned. I'm not really sure how beneficial it is in the format we're in at the moment. I sound quite critical don't I, but I always want us to be better!" (Lee)

This was supported by the findings of the document analysis (Table 4). Having analysed the PowerPoints from 14 workshops on the UEFA B qualification, they focused primarily on the development of professional knowledge. The workshops do integrate the four-corner model, offering a broader conceptualisation of the impact of coaching and the potential outcomes for

the athlete (Chapman et al. 2020). The workshops also contained reflective tasks, which requires the coaches to review, for example, a session they had delivered, However, this is largely with a view to developing professional knowledge. The C-P relationship is briefly touched upon in workshop 2 which contained a task that required coaches to “In pairs or groups of three, discuss the questions posed by the prompt cards”. There were 11 cards which focused on a variety of topics. One of the cards asked the coaches to discuss “How do you develop relationships and trust within your players and team?.” The task was delivered in the process of attempting, through the workshop, to understand the FA four corner model for long term player development. However, none of the workshops primarily targeted the topic of the C-P relationship, referred to the C-P relationship in the learning outcomes or had integrated any research-based content on this topic. This was also the case in the syllabus for A and B Licence qualification, designed by UEFA, which sets out the minimum content required to be delivered by each country’s NGB. Although broad in its diversification from traditional professional knowledge, it makes no mention of the C-P relationships. The findings suggest that although academic research has developed our understanding of the characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships and the practical strategies that may be used by coaches to develop and maintain these relationships, this research appears not to have made it to the front line of formal coach education in performance football in England.

Other coach developers suggest that content related to the C-P relationship is implicitly, rather than explicitly, integrated into the courses.

“So, I think this is done on more on an informal. I think we just show good practice. So, there's obviously good practice within when we deliver practically. There's good practice the way that we facilitate group work... So, so showing good practice and how you would work and develop relationships. Just as simple as you, you have a group for the first time on A licence coming in to provide some work to show the candidate. It's

how you then try and create rapport with the individual players in the group, whether that may be in a you know, initial greeting, asking about the individual just one to one, maybe having a laugh and a joke with the group at a certain stage just to lighten the atmosphere. Initially, in the session, pointing out really good practice, which again, increases your self-esteem, which increases motivation, which then brings the whole session to a new level. The way that you structure the session for enjoyment and motivation, high ball rolling, not standing around too much. Engaging the players with questions linked into the idea that if you get the wrong answer, you ask the wrong question. So, let's ask another one. So, you should really just be showing good practice.”

(John)

John appears to be conflating a basic superficial level of rapport with athletes with the complex and multifaceted nature of the C-P relationship and describes how these skills can be modelled informally. Rossi and Cassidy (1999) argue that modelling may be beneficial because this approach may allow valuable information to be transferred between teacher and learners. Learners may not, however, be clear on how to apply this knowledge in the context of their own practice. Nelson et al. (2006) also criticises the artificial nature of the practical delivery in many of these courses, claiming the use of peers or guest teams does not provide a realistic platform from which to observe and deliver the coaching process. These practices may be problematic because high quality C-P relationships require time and authenticity and are highly contextualised based on the given individuals and environment (Jowett, 2007). The approach described, of modelling through practical delivery, may not capture the complexity of the topic and may fail to integrate up to date applied research which could benefit coaches. Without explicitly teaching the underlying strategies, coaches may struggle to develop high quality relationships in their own context.

4.4.3.2 A broader curriculum

Despite the C-P relationship not being formalised within the course curriculum, coach developers painted a picture of courses that, in recent times, have broadened their outlook and adopted a multi-disciplinary approach.

“I think, currently, it's probably as much emphasis placed on it as I can remember. So certainly, you know, the psychological component. You know, as part of some of the blocks that we do, where there's a lot of work done on reflection, reflecting models, understanding different personality types. And it's not necessarily everybody's cup of tea, those type of models and different behaviours and personality types. But there's certainly reference to that. And probably getting, you know, getting coaches to really reflect on the way that they communicate and connect. So, I think there's a much bigger part played now on the current UEFA A Licence as it stands.” (Andy)

Andy describes courses that have adopted an increased focus on the psychological components of coaching. This is supported by the analysis of the UEFA A learner's journal (Figure 3), which outlines the course outcomes. Although heavily focused on professional knowledge it does aim to develop “reflection skills” and “self-awareness” amongst coaches. Although, noticeably, it makes no mention of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship. The findings resonate with the work of Chapman et al. (2020) who analysed the changing nature of FA formal coach education from 1967 to the modern day. They explain a shift in the mid 1990's with the development of a new generation of courses adopting a broader conceptualisation of coaching to address the social and psychological needs of the player.

Table 4. Document analysis of 14 UEFA B Licence workshops

No.	Title	Learning Outcomes (as set out within PowerPoint)	Primary disciplinary knowledge	Is the C-P relationship addressed?
1	Introduction to the FA UEFA B in Coaching Football	Share ideas and experiences from our own context and journey to date. Establish our individual start point.	N/A	No
2	The future Player	Consider player development from an FA 4 Corner Development Model perspective. Discuss how integrated coaching aids player development. Recognise the impact of integrated coaching across practice/competition. Undertake player and team profiling activities.	Professional Interpersonal intrapersonal	Yes
3	How we play	England DNA & Principles of Play – Theory and Practical	Professional	No
4	The Future Player – Working with the Individual	Retain & Build playing out from the back including the goalkeeper Introduce tactics, supporting team strategies Design practices linked to session objective incorporating the goalkeeper. Consider the role of the goalkeeper within units of the team.	Professional	No
5	The Future Player – Working with the individual	Winning the ball high up the pitch in the attacking third Introduce tactics, supporting team strategies Design practices linked to session objective incorporating the goalkeeper. Consider the role of the goalkeeper within units of the team.	Professional	No
6	Journey review	Plan-Do-Review – Time to reflect and take a moment Identify your own strategies, tactics and primary players to inform team programme. Review where you are now. Action planning.	Professional	No

7	Plan do review	Review coaching behaviours and practice – focus on organisation and constraints to support Technical/Tactical and Physical corner intentions Revisiting Principles of play in relation to individuals and units of players. Focusing on Playing into Midfield. Consider Relationship between four corners and player development.	Professional	No
8	The Future Player – Units with Units	Commence planning a medium-term coaching programme. Review your coaching behaviour and practice. Consider Relationship between four corners and player development. Explore Principles of play in relation to individuals and units of players. Identify your coaching strengths and areas for development.	Professional	No
9	Units with Units	Building upon Principles of Play in relation to 'Tactics to support strategies.' Focus upon Out of Possession – Midfield areas Building upon Behaviours and practice – organisation and constraints to support Technical/Tactical and Physical corner intentions to develop Individuals and Units. Relationship between the FA four Corners when planning and delivering Defending within the Midfield third.	Professional	No
10	Review and plan	Commence planning a medium-term coaching programme. Review your coaching behaviour and practice. Identify intentions across the FA four corners for your players. Identify how Principles of play in relation to individuals and units of players can support technical/tactical development your players. Identify your coaching strengths and areas for development.	Professional	No
11	Plan Do Review	Review coaching behaviours and practice – focus on organisation and constraints to support Technical/Tactical and Physical corner intentions. Revisiting Principles of play in relation to individuals and units working with units. Consider Relationship between four corners and player development.	Professional	No
12	How We Coach – Blended Practice -	Highlight a variety of considerations when designing a practice for units within the team.	Professional	No

	Units within Teams	<p>Relate the Plan, Do, Review cycle to our own coaching context. Design and deliver a practice focusing on units of players within the team. Observe delivery of a practice focusing on units of players within the team.</p>		
13	Plan Do Review	<p>Continue the theme of developing practices around units within the team. Plan and deliver game-related practices linking units of players within the team. Consider in and out of possession, and transition priorities.</p>	Professional	No
14	Team and Match Analysis	<p>Unpack how profiling and analysis can support training and match-day preparation. Review coaching project and action plan for post block 3 progress.</p>	Professional	No

Course overview

WHO IS THE COURSE FOR?	Coaches working or aspiring to work within the professional game in senior and/or youth development (5-21) environments.
COURSE AIM	To develop technically and tactically excellent coaches to effectively support player development in the modern game.
COURSE OUTCOMES	<p>Coaches will gain an understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the strategic tactical and technical components of the game the current trends of the game as appropriate to the coach's context positional requirements within different systems of play. <p>They'll also develop their decision-making and adaptable expertise (in context) through studying:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; text-align: center;"> <div style="background-color: #e61e20; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Playing and coaching philosophy</div> <div style="background-color: #e61e20; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Problem-solving skills</div> <div style="background-color: #e61e20; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Practice design and coaching behaviour</div> <div style="background-color: #e61e20; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Reflection skills</div> <div style="background-color: #e61e20; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Self-awareness</div> <div style="background-color: #e61e20; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Observation skills</div> </div>

Figure 3. Course outcomes for the UEFA A Coaching Licence from the learner's journal document

In an attempt to develop social and psychological skills, coach developers described workshops which focused on personality types and utilised Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to help coaches better understand their own personality traits and that of their players. Despite being extensively used in educational and business settings, it is not widely endorsed as a rigorous model (Christiansen & Tett, 2013). In fact, Domino and Domino (2006) describe the model as being based on 'Jung's typology of personality' which has "long being discarded by psychological science" (p. 641). In line with the recommendations of Piggot (2015), where formal coach education courses seek to evolve and integrate psycho-social components of coaching, it is imperative the work presented to candidates is up to date and rigorous. Alongside this, coach developers outlined challenges regarding the practicalities of delivering a broader curriculum, particularly if they were not familiar with the content. If the C-P relationship is to be more heavily integrated within course curricula, it must be evidence based and not allow

space for pseudoscience to infiltrate and coach developers must be supported to deliver this content effectively.

4.4.3.3 Continued dominance of professional knowledge

Despite these enhancements coach developers still describe an intense focus on professional knowledge within the courses.

“Certainly, you know, the County FA I was working with I think the learners get bogged down with a technical/tactical sort of understanding of shapes and systems and roles and responsibilities, as opposed to understanding the players and how to get more out of players.” (Mark)

“It starts with awareness for me you've got to.... the coach has to be aware of the importance of it in order to then develop it and target it. And I think, you know, football, quite rightly places a massive emphasis on technical tactical development of players. Of course it does, and knowledge and game understanding. Of course, it does and so it should. I'm not sure it places as much importance on messaging and the ability to communicate that. I'm not convinced it does as an industry I'm talking about. And yeah, I think it's crucial. Absolutely crucial.” (Andy)

These findings are unsurprising given that the importance of developing the professional knowledge of coaches is so well established (Bloom et al., 1999). The current research certainly does not seek to underplay the importance of professional knowledge, believing it should be at the heart of formal coach education programmes. In fact, it is proposed that the importance of coaches' professional knowledge within the C-P relationship, particularly in performance environments, has been underplayed. Wherever the topic of the C-P relationship is integrated within formal coach education, the importance of professional knowledge should be a key part of the messaging to candidates. However, as already discussed

in this paper, relationship building skills are diverse, with high quality C-P relationships requiring a coach's professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to work in an integrated manner. The content of coach development programmes should not be reduced to be a question of 'either/or' and professional knowledge should not be diluted. The point is for courses to address the C-P relationship in a meaningful and impactful way, which is research informed, and allows coaches to utilise this content in their day-to-day practice.

4.4.4 Theme 4: In situ visits, an effective medium to develop knowledge of the C-P relationship

This theme continues to explore the third research question, assessing how the topic of the C-P relationship is integrated within the courses, but specifically focuses on the in-situ element of the courses. Coach developers believed that visiting the coaches in their own coaching environments, known as 'in situ', visits, was one of the most productive methods in helping coaches to develop their understanding of the C-P relationship.

The coach developers described how these visits provided more authentic opportunities to see the coaches in action.

“When the in-situs were introduced, I thought it was a fantastic idea. Because you see them coach in the real world or in their real world, as opposed to with the adults on the course who will behave perfectly or do whatever they want and that falseness.” (Mark)

Coach developers considered 'in situ' visits as an opportunity for them to capture the real-life challenges athletes can present to coaches. This resonates with the work of Chapman et al. (2020) who describes how 'in situ' visits help “situate learning in the lives of the coaches” (p. 2). This may be particularly relevant when focusing on aspects of coaching practice such as the C-P relationship, which may be viewed by candidates as being abstract and highly personal.

These views were echoed by Tony.

“But now we actually go out and observe an in-situ practice with their own team and that gives me an opportunity to feedback and see whether they've got good relationships with the players, and how they communicate with the players, how they manage them.”

(Tony)

Coach developers describe how using these real-life examples acted as a catalyst by which to frame discussions, relevant to the C-P relationship, with candidates. This concurs with the views of Chapman et al. (2020) who describes how in-situ visits enable learning to be more personal, and include regular opportunities for reflection, in which coaches can consider the relevance of new knowledge to their own practice. Tony specifically reflects on the opportunity to provide feedback to coaches on the nature of their interactions and overall relationship with the players they coach. However, if content relating to the C-P relationship is not targeted and formalised in the course curriculum then the impact of this feedback and the shared reflections may be limited. For example, if coaches engaged in workshops on the courses which presented them with up to date and rigorous research focusing on the C-P relationships, then these in-situ visits and the subsequent feedback would be more likely to be framed by this content and therefore may be more impactful.

4.4.5 Theme 5: The assessment framework does not align with the course content

Our last theme again focuses on the third research question, but specifically explores the courses assessment framework. Relating to the C-P relationship, the content of the Coach Competency Framework does not necessarily align with the formalised course content.

In situ visits from coach developers form a key part of the assessment process on both courses. As part of the document analysis the FA’s “Coach Competency Framework” (Figure 4) used for the UEFA A and B qualifications was analysed. These documents provide a basis for which coach developers can assess and feedback on the abilities of the coach against a set

of pre-determined competencies. “Building Relationships” is listed as a key competency within the FA Coach Competency Framework for the UEFA A and B Coaching Licences. Given content relating to the C-P relationship does not significantly feature on either course, this would point to an apparent incongruence between the course curriculum and the coach competencies being assessed.

Coaches were subsequently questioned on the behaviours they looked for to assess coaches against the competency relating to “Building Relationships.”

“I like getting there early. Early is good for me. Not because I like being punctual. Because there is lots of signals given away about what’s happened and what is to come next. I’m watching what interactions are taking place as the player is actually coming through the gate or walking up the path. How does the coach deliver that first interaction? With energy? Is it with lethargy? Is it dour? That gives away a great deal. The coach’s demeanour, how they communicate verbally, choice of language, tonality, volume...smiles, touches and connection, thumbs up.” (Rob)

Rob also explained how he continues to assess the coach’s ability to build relationships during the coaching session.

“It’s a constant (assessing the C-P relationship throughout the session), now once the session has started we’ve got to have a bit more content. If you don’t have the connection, they are going to switch off. That connection gets you closer. Now we can start putting in a bit of layers of detail. The real value comes from players thinking that was the best coach I have ever had because he helped me learn. In the session it could be picking off individuals and meeting their needs of what is required for that specific age and position. The player can come off with some information that helps them.” (Rob)

Rob describes observing the coach's interpersonal behaviours, and the athletes' reactions, before and after the main coaching session as integral in assessing their competency at building relationships. However, he also focuses on the relationship building skills that happen during the coaching session. If competent, the coach would demonstrate well-developed professional technical and tactical knowledge combined with strong interpersonal skills. This is ultimately about the coach having the knowledge to meet the needs of the athlete, as outlined by Cronin et al. (2020). Within performance settings, the needs of the athlete would be focused on a strong desire to progress and improve. Professional knowledge is integral in underpinning a high-quality C-P relationship within performance settings.

Other coach developers describe assessing and feeding back to coaches on the C-P relationship competencies as challenging.

If you are now talking about what is my understanding of the theory and of the background of the C-P relationship, probably not great. Because I've been doing it so long, I just seem to have an idea of what works and what doesn't. (John)

"I don't think I'm qualified, as highly qualified as I am, as a coach educated teacher, sports teacher, whatever. I don't think I'm qualified to look on the psychological side of how you deal with every player's needs" (Tony)

FA COACH COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK (LEVEL 4)

COMPONENT AND FUNCTION	MODULE	COMPETENCIES	DEFINITION	LEVEL 4 BEHAVIOURS	
HOW WE COACH	SELF	ROLE OF THE COACH	Explains the role of the coach in their context	Explains their vision, values and philosophy, why they coach and how their approach and behaviours have an impact on players and their development	Implements a clear and coherent vision, values, and both playing and coaching philosophies. Can explain how the beliefs, values and intentions of a coach informs coaching practice and behaviour
		REFLECTIVE PRACTICE	Is reflective and committed to learning and development	Takes responsibility for their own development, showing a readiness to learn from a variety of sources	Manages their own behaviour effectively and deals with stressful situations calmly and consistently
		DECISION-MAKING AND SOLVING PROBLEMS	Demonstrates decision making and problem solving skills	Focuses on solutions, and makes timely, well-informed decisions	Engages in reflective practice and demonstrates critical self-awareness throughout their coaching
		LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	Demonstrates leadership and management skills	Leads and manages people and process to achieve success	Adopts a creative approach to solving problems
		ENGAGING PLAYERS	Engages, motivates and inspires individuals and groups	Displays the necessary positive characteristics and presence to lead the behaviours of others towards success	Makes effective and informed decisions to improve the performance of individuals, components and teams
		HOW PLAYERS LEARN	Uses the appropriate coaching and learning methods for the context	Delivers effective coaching using methods based on the needs of the player and derived from an informed understanding of player learning	Leads and influences others to deliver a coaching strategy
		COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Applies a range of communication skills	Conveys messages in a succinct, easily understood way to influence others	Adapts sessions to meet the needs of individual players, components and teams and tailors their motivational strategies to meet these needs
THE FUTURE PLAYER	PLAYER	LONG TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT (LTPD)	Understands four corner development	Adapts coaching to meet the needs of the whole player based on The FA 4 Corner Model	Selects the appropriate intervention strategy to suit the needs of the players
		DEALING WITH DIFFERENCE	Understands player difference and can evaluate potential	Makes informed judgments about the all-round abilities and future potential of a player and gives effective and relevant feedback	Explains how players learn and designs learning opportunities to suit the players' needs
		PLAYER OWNERSHIP	Develops player independence and personal ownership	Provides players with the opportunity to develop independence in order to take increasing responsibility for their own improvement	Blends communication styles and adopts effective listening methods to communicate with a variety of individuals and groups
HOW WE SUPPORT	ENVIRONMENT	CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT	Provides an appropriate environment	Provides players with the opportunity to learn in an environment suitable to their context and stage of development	Evaluates an individual player, component or team, demonstrating a detailed, in-depth knowledge of the four corners and designs appropriate practices to meet the needs of all players
		BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS	Builds and maintains effective relationships	Recognises that coaching is a complex, social process that requires positive behaviours to develop relationships with individual players and groups	Analyses player potential, relative to opportunity and experience
		WORKING WITH OTHERS	Adopts a multi-disciplinary approach	Successfully integrates knowledge of other related disciplines to improve performance	Can observe, analyse and diagnose performance and give effective feedback to improve performance and behaviour
HOW WE PLAY	GAME	THE GAME	Demonstrates technical and tactical understanding of the game	Demonstrates knowledge of the game and adjusts coaching to the context in which it is played	Ensures all players have ownership of their personal development and understand what they need to do to improve
		LINKING PRACTICE TO COMPETITION	Can link practice to competition	Transfers player learning from practice into competition	Creates a secure learning environment utilising well defined behaviour management strategies and the 4 stage learning cycle
		PLAN, DO, REVIEW	Can plan, do and review coaching sessions and/or programmes	Can plan, do and review coaching sessions and/or programmes aligned to individual and group learning outcomes	Demonstrates positive relationships with players, parents, colleagues, visitors and officials
					Makes use of performance analysis, sports science and psychology to gather and disseminate information to support individual players, components and teams
					Applies technical and tactical content knowledge relative to the attacking and defending principles of play to develop individual players, components and teams in the 11v11 game
					Demonstrates knowledge of the position-specific technical and tactical requirements of players in relation to their developmental stage and experience
					Effectively links their playing and coaching philosophy to meet the needs of players and context in both practice and competition environments
					Can plan, deliver and review a range of short, medium and long term coaching sessions from across the practice spectrum that challenge the needs of the individual, component and team
					Uses knowledge and experience to adapt or change the delivery of programmes based on player, component and team response, in order to improve performance

Figure 4. The FA Coach Competency Framework for the UEFA A Licence course

This challenge is not specific to sports coaching with other professions such as nursing describing proficiencies, such as interpersonal skills, as difficult to define and uncomfortable to assess (Meier et al., 2014). John suggested his knowledge of the C-P relationship is tacit, but generally there appears to be a lack of clarity as to the exact behaviours required for coaches to be deemed competent at “building relationships” with athletes. There was also a feeling amongst coaches that these skills are harder to develop within coaches.

“If I was helping a coach, I probably could help them and tell them what they need to do tactically or technically, and I could tell them with what they need to do personally. But I think people find it harder to change or develop their personal skills.” (Mark)

This is contrary to research that has successfully targeted these skills for development (Ferrar et al., 2018). Most recently, Ferrar et al. (2018) captured the learning journeys of high-performance archery and cycling coaches who attended a coach development seminar through the United States Olympics Committee’s Leadership Programme. The programme specifically focused on the development of coaches’ relationship building knowledge and skills and captured positive accounts of the impact of the seminar from both the coach’s and athlete’s perspective. After completing the programme, coaches were better able to adapt their communication, develop self-awareness and build team culture, all of which helped to develop and maintain high quality relationships with the athletes they coach.

Despite these challenges some coaches suggested it was those coaches that were most effective at developing high quality C-P relationships as their most competent on UEFA courses.

The best learners or the best candidates I've had on the course, are the ones who've got those skills. And I often say to them, this is something that we don't give you, but your relationship with the players is fantastic. They hang on every word you say, they trust you. (Mark)

Rob was also keen to emphasise the importance of these skills.

The building of the relationships and how that connection takes place...That is the starting point if you don't build that how are we going to make people feel good about themselves? That should be...where they put in 5 or 6 further down (on the Coach Competency Framework). That should be big and bold and stuck on everybody's forehead! That's including bloody coach educators! (Rob)

Coach developers acknowledge these skills as being a critical, differentiating feature of high-performance coaches. They are considered to be a key quality, identified in the most able of those who attend their UEFA courses. But in contrast, these skills are also, characterised as somewhat intangible and elusive, whilst also being difficult to feedback on and challenging to assess.

4.5 Strength and Limitations

Our research is based on the perceptions of a limited, albeit well informed, group of coach developers and course designers. It captures the participants experiences of working on the front line in performance-based football coach education in England. However, the participant's views may not be representative of all coach developers currently working within the FA and generalisations of the findings may therefore be limited. The research, also, does not capture the views of the course candidates who will, no doubt, have their own unique reflections on their experiences of the course and its content. Despite this, football coach education in England is well established over many decades and it may be the case that the findings are reasonably likely to be replicated in large scale coach education programmes across other nations and sports. At the very least, the research provides a starting point upon which to develop further research within other contexts.

4.6 Conclusion

Researchers have argued that the C-P relationship had not been given sufficient coverage within formal coach education (Ferrar et al., 2018; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). The key findings add to our understanding by demonstrating that.

- 1.) High quality C-P relationships, in performance settings, are perceived by coach developers to be built on trust, care and necessitate coaches to expertly adopt adaptive interpersonal approaches.

- 2.) To develop high quality C-P relationships in performance settings, coach developers believe coaches are required to develop a diverse set of attributes that incorporate and integrate professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge.
- 3.) Formalised content relating to the C-P relationship is introduced in an implicit and superficial manner. The findings support previous research that suggested this topic of the C-P relationship is underrepresented within formal coach education.
- 4.) There has been diversification in the FA's UEFA courses away from a sole focus on professional knowledge. However, where course content is diversified it has, at times, embraced pseudoscientific concepts that lack scientific validity and robustness. If the C-P relationship is to be more heavily integrated, content must be research based, and coach developers must be provided the relevant support to deliver and assess.
- 5.) 'In situ' visits provide an effective vehicle by which to develop coaches' knowledge relating to the C-P relationship by capturing authentic coaching experiences.
- 6.) There is an incongruence between the content delivered on both courses and the assessment framework, which specifically outlines the coach's competencies at building relationships with athletes.

Our recommendations include the integration of up to date and robust research focused on the C-P relationship to be meaningfully integrated within coach education courses. Course content should capture the complexity of the C-P relationship and focus on how coaches demonstrate care, develop trust and integrate both 'soft' and 'hard' interpersonal interactions. Relationship building skills should be perceived as requiring professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, which operate in an integrated manner. Coach developers should be liaised with and supported to integrate and deliver this more diverse content. Assessment frameworks should align to formalised course content, thereby facilitating more impactful discussions and feedback on in situ visits. Future research should further develop our

understanding of the C-P relationship in performance footballing settings, thereby shaping the content of coach education curricula to meet the needs of coaches.

Chapter 5 What do performance football coaches need to know about the coach-player relationship? Implications for formal coach education.

The first study (chapter 4) in the thesis found that the C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the formalised course content on UEFA A or B Licence courses, despite it featuring on the assessment framework for both courses. Therefore, the second study (chapter 5) explores the perceptions of performance coaches to identify the C-P relationship knowledge that could be incorporated into formal coach education courses to prepare coaches to operate effectively in performance-based football settings in England.

5.1 Abstract

A high-quality coach-player (C-P) relationship improves athlete well-being and performance but has been underrepresented in formal coach education. Eleven football coaches, working in some of the highest profile positions in England, were interviewed. The extent their formal coach education experiences influenced their understanding of the C-P relationship is investigated. Their perceptions of the knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, which could be included in formal coach education courses are explored. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven coaches. Inductive reflexive thematic analysis generated the following five themes; (1) An incongruence between the importance of the C-P relationship and its prominence in coach education (2) Interpersonal competencies and a progressive approach to the C-P relationship (3) Understand the unique needs of high-performance athletes (4) Build a culture conducive to high quality C-P relationships. Findings demonstrate the C-P relationship is underrepresented in the main English FA Coaching Pathway and provides insights into the knowledge that could be incorporated into courses to meet the needs of coaches. Future research should explore the athlete's perspective, relating to the knowledge coaches require to develop high quality C-P relationships within high-performance football settings.

5.2 Introduction

The coach-player (C-P) relationship forms the basis of successful coaching (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006). It is a bond in which emotions, thoughts and behaviours of the coach and the athlete are mutually and causally interconnected (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). High quality C-P relationships have been found to positively influence athletes' well-being (Gosai et al., 2023) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). Research suggests that performance coaches are characterised by their ability to develop and maintain high-quality relationships with the athletes they coach (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

Despite research enhancing the understanding of the C-P relationship and emphasising its importance, coach education courses have typically failed to provide sufficient coverage of this topic within their curriculum (Ferrar et al., 2018; Lefebvre et al., 2016). The first study in this thesis (chapter 4) focused on how knowledge of the C-P relationship is developed within the English Football Association's (FA) UEFA A and B Licence qualifications, which are the highest practical coaching courses within the pathway. Study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) analysed key course documents and carried out semi-structured interviews with highly experienced FA coach developers, who both deliver and design the courses. The C-P relationship was not meaningfully addressed within the courses, and where it was referred to, it was introduced in an implicit and superficial manner. In contrast, the C-P relationship was perceived, by coach developers, as an integral aspect of effective practice and was a key feature within the competency framework which was used to assess coaches. Study one (chapter 4) indicates that the C-P relationship is underrepresented within the context of performance-based football coach education in England.

Naturally, this leads one to question what content, relating to the C-P relationship, should be incorporated into these courses. Conceptual models such as the 3C+1 model (Jowett, 2005) provide an excellent foundation to better understand the importance and characteristics of high-

quality C-P relationships by explicitly detailing the nature of these psychological constructs which comprise the model. However, further research is needed to understand the knowledge and skills coaches require to develop high quality C-P relationships in specific coaching contexts. This is particularly relevant given previous research has been conducted with coaches and athletes from a range of sports and in variety of coaching contexts (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). It is important to consider that the C-P relationship is highly contextualised and is shaped and influenced by the unique environment in which it exists, which is typified by specific characteristics, idiosyncrasies, and ambiguities (Wagstaff, 2021). The current research is firmly rooted in the performance-based footballing domain in England, with these environments typically characterised as volatile and ruthless (Champ et al., 2021). To date, there has been a lack of research that has focused on the C-P relationship in performance-based football environments in England. Therefore, to better understand the C-P relationship in this context, and the content that could be included in formal coach education, it is important to conduct research with those working in this unique domain. Particularly given that if coach education is to be effective, it should not be perceived by coaches as decontextualised and divorced from the realities of practice (Chapman et al., 2020). To that end, the current research captures the perceptions of a variety of high performing coaches currently working in professional youth development and first team footballing environments in both the men's and women's game in England. Exploring the perspectives of high-performance coaches is important as it provides insights into the challenges and struggles they face. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to learn from credible experts and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the practices of successful coaches, which could help inform coach development. Therefore, the research seeks to explore the following questions:

1. What are performance coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education?

2. From the perspective of performance coaches, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England?

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Paradigm Positioning

The research is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm which assumes the perspectives of individuals are diverse and developed over time through interactions with cultural contexts (Patton, 2015). The research is also underpinned by epistemological constructivism which proposes that knowledge is both constructed and subjective. Consequently, a relativist ontology is emphasised. This presumes individual perceptions depend on interactions with varying sociocultural settings (Patton, 2015). Aligned with these paradigmatic assumptions, a qualitative instrumental design was selected to explore coaches' perspectives, meaning, and understanding relating to the C-P relationship (Stake, 1995)

5.3.2 Participants

Nine male and two female participants aged 31 to 62 (mean age=43, SD=7.73) of white British ethnicity were purposefully sampled (Table 5). Inclusion criteria required participants to have worked in a coaching role in one, or more, of the following environments for the last 10 years.

- First team in the men's English Premier League or Football League (top four divisions in England).
- Academy in the men's English Premier League or Football League (top four divisions in England).
- England men's national youth teams (U16s to U21s)
- First team in the Women's Super League one or two (top two divisions in England).
- Academy in the Women's Super League one or two (top two divisions in England).

- England women's national youth teams (U16s to U23s)

These are the environments for which the FA prepare coaches to work in after they have completed the most advanced practical qualifications within the English FA's coaching pathway. All coaches had taken their coaching qualifications through the English FA and, as a minimum requirement, completed the UEFA A Licence. Coaches had completed these qualifications at different points in time, with the earliest completing their first UEFA licence in 2005 and the most recent in 2018. This provides an appropriate range of time to understand more recent iterations of these courses and how they may have differed over time in relation to the incorporation of knowledge of the C-P relationship. Participants were purposefully sampled to represent a broad range of roles within professional first team and youth development positions within the men's and women's game in England. This linked to the ontological and epistemological stance adopted, as the lived experience of coaches who were currently working in these roles was explored, which enabled them to provide rich accounts of the realities of practice within these settings. The notion of informational power was adopted which was developed by Malterud et al. (2016). Therefore, due to the narrow focus of the research, the highly selective sampling, and the significant levels of expertise amongst the coaches, a sample size of 11 coaches was initially deemed adequate.

Table 5. Representation of coaches' current roles

Coach (pseudonym)	Current/most recent role	Years in current/most recent role	Year UEFA B License completed	Year UEFA A License completed
John	First Team Assistant Head Coach, English Football League Championship	7 months	2005	2010
Edward	First Team Coach, English Football League One	2 years 11 months	2012	2016
Mike	Head of Coaching, English Premier League Academy	3 years 10 months	2009	2014
Andy	Head of Coaching, English Premier League Academy	4 months	2010	2014
Jim	Assistant Head of Coaching, English Premier League Academy	2 years	2010	2016
Gordon	U23 Head Coach, English Premier League Academy	1 year and 2 months	2015	2017
Phil	Academy Coach, English Premier League Academy	8 years	Before current FA coaching pathway model	
Rachel	First Team Manager, Women's Super League One	2 months	2009	2016
Susan	First Team Assistant Manager, Women's Super League One	11 months	2014	2018
Ron	First Team Assistant Manager, Women's Super League One	3 years, 3 months	2014	2017
Jack	Senior role (used to protect anonymity), England Women's National Team	6 months	2010	2015

5.3.3 Data Collection

Institutional ethical approval was provided prior to data collection. Semi-structured interviews were selected as an appropriate tool, given the paradigmatic positioning, to explore the reasoning and sense making of the participants (Archer, 2003). The semi-structured

interview guide was shaped by the two key research questions and utilised open questions to engender rich responses from participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Because coach education has previously been described as divorced from the realities of practice (Chapman et al., 2020), to ascertain the knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, that could be included in formal coach education courses, it was deemed important to frame discussions about formal coach education through the lens of the coaches' experiences and practice. Therefore, this section focused on the coaches' understanding of the C-P relationship, the importance they place on the C-P relationship, the role the C-P relationship plays in their day-to-day practice, the challenges they face concerning the C-P relationship and the knowledge they require to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships. Throughout this section coaches were asked to relate their experiences back to the knowledge that was deemed important for formal coach education to address. Placing the coach's experiences at the centre of the interview better ensured that the content that was proposed as being important was authentic and appropriately represented the experiences and challenges of performances coaches. An example of a question from this section was "How important is the C-P relationship in your daily practice?" a follow up included "What knowledge does coach education need to address to support coaches to develop high quality C-P relationships?." In the second half of the interview, the coaches' own formal coach education experiences were explored more deeply. The section of the interview focused on the coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education, how well they had been prepared through their formal coach education experiences and what C-P relationship knowledge would have helped them perform more effectively. An example of a questions from this section was "Was the C-P relationship ever covered in coach education courses that you attended?" a follow up included "Can you tell me how well these formal coach education experiences prepared you to develop high quality relationships with athletes?."

We intended to spend an equal amount of time on each of the two sections, but this was also influenced by the nature of the responses of the participants. The semi-structured nature of the interview encouraged flexibility and enabled the interactions to diverge into other pertinent areas, dependent on the responses of the participants. In total 490 minutes (M=44.55, SD=15.78) of audio recorded interview data were collected. Interviews took place on video calling software. The unique benefits of using video conferencing tools have been outlined by Gray et al. (2020) who argue that participants may be more comfortable talking about highly personal issues, such as the C-P relationship, within the privacy of their own home. Accessibility of participants is also an important benefit. This is particularly relevant in the current research, as this approach proved effective when attempting to access interviews with high profile coaches, in very demanding roles, whose schedules may not have allowed for the travel requirements to complete interviews in person.

5.3.4 Data analysis

A reflexive thematic analysis process was selected based on its suitability for research rooted in social constructivism (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis model was used throughout the process. Progression through the stages was developed in a non-rigid manner, which included data familiarisation, coding, developing themes, refining themes, naming themes, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Initially, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, and a familiarisation process took place. This involved an immersion in the interview transcripts, by carefully reading and making notes on relevant extracts that could help answer the two key research questions. The transcripts were then uploaded into Nvivo12 pro to effectively order and analyse the data. Once all relevant extracts were labelled, this enabled the generation of initial codes. Coding was carried out inductively, thereby being driven by the data and allowing the data to guide the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). From here, themes were subsequently developed from across the data by

analysing and combining the relevant codes together. This involved identifying key passages that were interpreted to be linked by their shared meaning in relation to the two research questions. For example, the initial codes of ‘managing conflict’ ‘listening,’ ‘open communication’ and ‘regular communication’ were combined to form the theme ‘interpersonal competencies and a progressive approach to the C-P relationship.’ This theme served to answer the second research question, which related to the knowledge coaches perceived to be important and could be incorporated into coach education. The content of each of the other main themes and subthemes were precisely captured by a concise phrase. In the writing up process pertinent data extracts were selected which exemplified the themes for the reader.

Braun and Clarke (2019) urge researchers to critically reflect on their own impact on the research process. In the interests of transparency, it is important to disclose the lead author’s biography, in terms of coaching experience (10 years in performance domains) and qualifications (UEFA A Licence coach). The lead author has also worked alongside some of the participants in a coaching capacity. This was deemed to encourage rapport and trust and lead to a more honest and rich account from the participants (Greene, 2014). Given the paradigmatic positioning of the current research, the meaning and knowledge is perceived to be contextually situated and, therefore, one views researcher subjectivity as a resource for the research, rather than a threat to be controlled (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Prior to each interview commencing, the aims of the research were discussed whilst also assuring participants of confidentiality and anonymity.

5.3.5 Rigour

The work of Tracy and Hinrich (2017) was used to establish methodological rigour. The research is a worthy topic seeking to explore the potentially mis-understood and overlooked realities of coaching practice, within challenging and multi-faceted performance-based environments, to question commonly accepted practices in coach education. Given the

number of reports recently produced (Whyte, 2022; Swim England, 2023) where widespread abusive cultures are described in performance pathways, how coaches are supported to develop their knowledge about the C-P relationship is a worthy focus.

Rich rigour is demonstrated through the appropriateness of the interview sample alongside the number and length of interviews all being reported. Also, multiple cycles of coding was undertaken as part of the reflexive thematic analysis and a reflexive journal was kept which enabled a mapping of ideas over time in relation to the interpretation of the data. Sincerity is demonstrated through honesty about the researcher's background, which are reported within the data collection section. This largely related to the researcher's coaching background and therefore recognising how this influenced the interpretation of the data. Thick descriptions are used in the findings section to encourage credibility, enabling the readers to draw their own conclusions from the data, thereby encouraging resonance. Procedural ethics were ensured through gaining institutional ethical approval. The key research questions aligned to the selected research methods and shaped the key findings. The use of interviews enabled us to draw on the experience of coaches and explore their lived experiences thereby ensuring meaningful coherence throughout the paper.

5.4 Findings and discussion

There are four themes in this section. The first theme relates to the first research question and explores coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education. The next three themes focus on the coaches' perspectives relating to the knowledge that could be included within formal coach education courses to support coaches to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships within performance-based football environments. Such is the nature of the research, and the belief that coach education should support coaches and address the challenges they face in practice, coaches

were asked to relate their answers, as much as possible, to their current role and real-life coaching experiences.

5.4.1 Theme 1 – An incongruence between the importance of the C-P relationship and its prominence in coach education

Coaches reflected on their experiences of coach education delivered by the English FA. Despite believing the C-P relationship was integral to their practice, they report little content pertaining to this within the courses on the main coaching pathway. This was exemplified when coaches were asked to reflect on their experiences on FA UEFA A and B licence courses.

B licence zero, A licence zero [Did the C-P relationship feature?]. I'd say it was...I mean that might be deliberate; they may think that we don't need to cover that. (Jim)

I would say the mainstream awards, the UEFA B and the UEFA A licence, I didn't get much from them in terms of player and coach relationship. (John)

The findings support those of the first study (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) in this thesis, which found the C-P relationship was not addressed in a meaningful manner on the UEFA A and B Licence courses. In the first study, interviews were conducted with coach developers and carried out a document analysis of key documents across both courses. None of the coach developers reported the C-P relationship as being formalised as a stand-alone workshop, the focus of a specific assignment or targeted formally within the teaching on the courses. Study one (chapter 4) concludes that although academic research has developed an understanding of the characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships, this research appears not to have made it to the front line of formal coach education in performance-based football in England. The findings of this study add further evidence to the notion that the C-P relationship has not been given sufficient coverage within formal coach education (Ferrar et al., 2018; Lefebvre et al., 2016). This is despite all coaches within the current research believing that developing a strong

understanding of the C-P relationship, along with the relevant knowledge and skills, was vital in their current role.

For me, the coach-player relationship I think is at the heart of everything and doesn't get anywhere near as enough prominence in coach education as it should. (Andy)

And in essence, that is... that is coaching. So, if anyone defines what we do, it's exactly that. It's having an coach-player relationship that enables people within our system to thrive and achieve their potential. (Mike)

It's huge, it's everything. If you don't have that relationship with the players, then you've got no chance of improving and helping them improve. If you don't strike up these relationships, then very little is going to land with the players. There's got to be a total element of trust between the two of you. (John)

Coaches described a misalignment between the importance of the C-P relationship and the extent to which it features on the main FA coaching pathway. Coaches reported that these courses adopted an intense focus on professional knowledge. However, it is posited that it should not be a question of either or with regards to the types of knowledge covered in coach education programmes. Highly developed professional knowledge is imperative (Bloom et al., 1999), particularly in performance-based environments (Newland et al., 2023) and should not be diluted to broaden the scope of courses or result in courses losing prestige or being deemed easier to pass. However, the decontextualised nature of formal coach education is a long-standing challenge (Chapman et al., 2020). If formal coach education is to meet the needs of coaches, then it must be built on an understanding of the diverse knowledge required for coaches to operate effectively in performance-based environments (Côté & Gilbert, 2009)

Despite a lack of content relating to the C-P relationship in the UEFA A and B licence qualifications, for those coaches who had completed it, the Advanced Youth Award (AYA) was deemed to be an important course in developing their knowledge in this regard. The AYA

is a level 4 course with a specific focus on developing coaches working with young male players in boys' professional academies in England.

Then you get the Advanced Youth Award, which covers that player-coach relationship in depth. So, you get a four-day social block, you get four-day psychological block, a four-day physical block, and then a four-day blending block, where you then stitch the technical into those four areas. But then you will go into a whole world of academia with regards social attachment theory and those types of aspects around how you interact with the person. You look at the teenage brain, you look at understanding how young people develop neurologically... so there's depth that they dive into in the Advanced Youth Award. But those courses are only accessible once you're in the roles [boys academy coaching role]. (Mike)

You do your UEFA A licence for football knowledge. You do a AYA for player relationships and connection knowledge. (Jim)

Jim describes a compartmentalised approach to formal coach education. The UEFA A and B Licence provide the professional knowledge, and the Advanced Youth Award offers a broader focus, particularly on the psycho-social elements of coaching and therefore covering content that would relate more closely to the C-P relationship. This was something that Mike was also keen to emphasise.

I know you mentioned the UEFA pathway to begin with the A's and the B's. But for me, there's a misunderstanding then in what those courses are standardised and designed for. They're a test of technical and tactical knowledge of the game and the principles of the game. So that's what they're testing. They're not there to test your coaching holistic abilities. They're not there to develop the person or the player, they're there to develop your tactical knowledge of the game. (Mike)

We believe the approach described by Jim and Mike may be problematic on several fronts. Firstly, whether the different types of coaching knowledge should be partly compartmentalised on different courses may be contrary to evidence which suggests professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge can be effectively developed in unison through formal coach education (Araya et al., 2015). This is particularly pertinent given it would take most coaches well over a decade to reach the AYA after starting their coaching journey. Secondly, the AYA is focused exclusively on the coaching of young male athletes in academy environments, suggesting the C-P relationship is only important in this context, which is contrary to research on the topic (Phillips et al., 2023). Lastly, and perhaps most concerning of all, it creates a two-tiered system of coach education. Coaches may simply choose not to complete the qualification and, most important of all, many coaches do not have access to the AYA qualification. This is because the qualification is only available to those working in the boy's game in a professional academy. That means those working in the performance-based female game or adult game, have no access. Even within the sample of coaches, all of whom are working in the most high-profile coaching roles in England, many had been unable to access the AYA qualification. This had led them to feel they were less prepared for the requirements demanded in performance-based coaching environments than would otherwise have been the case.

In a way, you've probably been failed as a coach, because you haven't been given the essentials, and probably the prereqs [prerequisites] that you're required as a coach to actually go and perform any job. They'll actually give us the technical and tactical knowledge or parts of that. But have dismissed the other side of the game, which is really important. (Ron)

Given that the C-P relationship is an essential aspect of practice for coaches working in all performance-based environments, regardless of the gender or age of the athletes (Jowett &

Shanmugam, 2016), it would be imperative that the C-P relationship be integrated within the main coaching pathway on UEFA A and B licence qualifications. These are, after all, the core gateway qualifications accessible to all coaches seeking to work within performance-based settings. Failure to integrate the C-P relationship risks creating a lottery for coaches based on what formal education opportunities they can access, subject to the gender and age of the athletes with whom they are working. This could result in some being left to develop this element of their practice in an exclusively unmediated manner, which has been the experience of many of the coaches interviewed. Having not formally explored the development of competence through formal coach education suggests the means by which coaches have developed some knowledge, for themselves, has been recognised as being both acceptable and surprisingly unimportant. However, the position adopted in the current thesis is that coaches should not develop their competencies in spite of their formal coach education experiences, but rather their formal coach education experiences should actively support them by addressing this content in a meaningful manner. Just because coaches have developed these competencies largely independently, does not exonerate formal coach education of its responsibility to deliver a meaningful and broad curriculum.

These findings naturally lead to the second research question, which focuses on what knowledge could be included within formal coach education courses to support coaches to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships, within performance based professional football environments. The findings are presented in the next three themes.

5.4.2 Theme 2 – Interpersonal competencies and a progressive approach to the C-P relationship

Coaches described the evolving nature of the C-P relationship and the importance of adopting a progressive approach to meet the needs of the modern-day athlete. Coaches

identified effective communication as a key enabling factor in the development of high-quality C-P relationships. They recognised the ability to observe the behaviour of athletes as integral in informing this communication. Communicating with empathy, which was underpinned by well-developed listening skills was perceived to be critical. Coaches deemed conflict inevitable within performance-based environments, with deselection identified as an important pre-cursor to conflict. However, effective communication and feedback was perceived to be a mediating factor to ensure that conflict could be effectively resolved. Throughout the theme coaches were asked to exemplify their thoughts and perceptions with examples from their lived experiences.

5.4.2.1 Observation, communication, listening skills and empathy

Well-developed observation skills, alongside the art of noticing, were deemed as critical factors which underpinned effective communication. John believed this was a topic worthy of focus within coach education courses. He illustrated how these skills influenced his practice.

The importance of watching like a hawk all the time [what should coaches learn?]. So, we're fortunate we have a big gym, and they all would congregate in the gym in the morning, they go through their pre-activation. I watch relationships or watch for people that are isolated and watch for changing behaviours in people. I've just got my eye on them all the time. And you can sense once you get to know them, you can sense those suddenly going through a bit of a tough time or isolating themselves. And I make an effort to get around to every player every morning and just ask how they are? 'Are they okay?' Once again, most of the time - 99% of the time - is a high five and a hug and everything's fine, there's no problem. But every now and then you get one that maybe avoids eye contact or something that gives you a little feel that there's something not quite right. (John)

Jones et al. (2013) draws on the work of Mason (2002) and positions noticing as the basis of coaching action and one that could be seen as a purposeful and powerful development tool for practitioners. The quality of the observations often “distinguishes the ordinary coaches from the really good ones” with the most competent coaches “really capable of seeing what is going on both on and off the court” (Ronglan & Havang, 2011, p. 92). However, coaches need to understand what to look for and notice and how this could influence their actions and behaviours. Study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) suggests that the noticing of technical and tactical nuances of performance is, quite rightly, well established within football-based formal coach education. However, John emphasises the importance of noticing the athletes’ behaviours more generally and in a wide variety of contexts. He observes for changes in behaviours, such as how athletes relate to one another, or may be isolating themselves from others. In this regard, coach education could support coaches to understand how observation and noticing can help the coach be responsive to the needs of the athlete and thereby strengthen the C-P relationship. This would require coaches to reflect on their own coaching context, the situations in which noticing may be important and how this could influence their communication and interactions with athletes.

Coaches described how these observation skills, along with an appreciation of the importance of empathy, should drive the communication between the coach and athlete. Andy provided an example of what this may look like in practice.

So last night, we had a game, we got beat in the cup two one. One of the lads who was sub, who didn't get on, he was fuming. They would normally do some box to box runs at the end if they didn't play. I ran with him to talk about what he was thinking, what he was feeling, what he was going to do next. So that wasn't technical or tactical, putting down cones, you know, there was none of that. But that for me was coach-player relationship stuff. Trying to make sure that he was okay. Trying to understand how he

felt, trying to understand what he was going to do about it, and manage that moment in a way that was helpful for him and helpful for the team. (Andy)

Andy's empathetic approach, and his ability to notice an appropriate opportunity to engage with the athlete, provides the foundations for effective coach-player communication. Given the relational nature of coaching, the interpersonal competencies of high-performance coaches are imperative (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Effective communication strategies, such as that used by Andy, which focus on support, motivation, and conflict management play a significant role in the development of high-quality C-P relationships (Davis et al., 2019). Coaches believed it was of fundamental importance that coach education supported coaches to reflect upon how, where, and when to initiate these conversations and how to ensure the coach's approach is underpinned by well-developed listening skills and an empathetic approach.

And whilst they are speaking, you've got to show empathy. That's really key. You're going to have to really listen to them whilst they talk, and you've got to gather information from them and then reflect on what they're saying. Then try and direct them along the path of what's the right way for them. So, it's all about your listening skills, I think, and then how you communicate back with what you're hearing.

(Rachel)

Rachel describes utilising techniques drawn from counselling and therapeutic practices. She emphasises the importance of reflective listening, which focuses on providing sharp attention to the individual's statements to infer underlying meaning (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). She also emphasises the notion of accurate empathy, which refers to the sincere desire to understand the individual's experiences and needs (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). That is not to say that these interactions were always characterised by gentler, more supportive approaches, with coaches also reporting that they provided challenging and probing responses, where appropriate. However, coaches believed it was important for formal coach education to support coaches to

better understand how to utilise strategies, such as these, to support effective interpersonal communication with athletes.

5.4.2.2 Managing conflict

Coaches perceived conflict with athletes to be inevitable and believed it was essential that coach education approached this topic in a meaningful manner. This is unsurprising given previous research has characterised performance-based footballing environments as highly competitive (Potrac et al., 2012) and shaped by micropolitics (Thomson et al., 2015). A key challenge faced by coaches, which is particularly pertinent in team sports such as football, is that of deselection, which can be a pre-cursor for coach-player conflict (Slade et al., 2024).

Like I said to you, until probably February time, I was able to support those first team players [who weren't playing regularly] with player development plans, you know, we're going to support you with this, we'll do clips. But they get to a point where they don't give a shit what you can give them, they just want to play. So, then it's managing them when they're disgruntled. I felt like I fucking got the graveyard shift here because every week I've got the same players [to coach] who aren't starting and I'm asking them this week to play like Chelsea, today like Man City [in matchday preparation sessions], and it gets harder and again, if you don't have that relationship with those players, they don't want to do it. (Susan)

Susan describes an inevitability relating to the athlete's growing frustrations if they are not selected to play in matches over a prolonged period. However, she also explains how high-quality relationship with the athlete can help support athletes through potential conflict situations, such as deselection. Initially, she describes effectively adopting a task orientated approach to supporting the athlete, which focused on practical solutions and feedback and required a combination of interpersonal and professional knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Coaches believed it was essential that coach education supported coaches to reflect on ways in which they could empathise with athletes, but, also, use video clips and objective data, to exemplify the reasons the athlete was not being selected and, subsequently, support one to one coaching and individualised feedback sessions. This not only developed a sense of individualised support and care for the athlete, but, also, enabled the athlete to have clear and objective aims to work towards, thereby potentially decreasing the likelihood of deselection having an erosive effect on the C-P relationship.

Several coaches reported that coach education could support coaches to develop a strong understanding of the evolving nature of the C-P relationship, which could impact on the nature of their communication during times of potential conflict.

Coaches have got to be a lot more aware of how you do things, when you do things and how you approach certain situations. Compared to previously, I might just have gone straight in and gone, 'No, that's wrong, they can't do that.' You've probably lost four or five players, and you're probably getting told off because of the tone you've used. Whereas now I'm more aware to go, I need to take a step back and approach it in this way. Be aware of the consequences, and the impact I can have if I do it well. And that's why I think I have totally changed compared to what I used to be like. It's not as direct, it's a lot more question and answer, sit in and have a conversation and come to a solution and find solutions rather than just being me conducting the orchestra and just going bang, bang, bang. Yeah, it doesn't work anymore. (Ron)

The importance of the coach operating as a mediator by engaging in frequent communication, shared decision making, and diplomacy aligns with previous research which focused on effective conflict prevention strategies used by coaches (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). Coaches need to develop intrapersonal skills that enable them to down-regulate their emotions and respond in a measured and thoughtful manner (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). This was emphasised

by Mallet and Lara-Bercial (2023) in their study of serial winning coaches. They found serial winning coaches had high levels of cognitive and emotional flexibility which enabled them to adapt their thinking and respond appropriately even in highly charged and complex environments.

Ron's comments also resonated with the work of Ferrar et al. (2018) who described how coach's approach to coaching, and the C-P relationship, must adapt to meet the evolving needs, values and expectations of the modern athlete. That is, not to say that the coach should not act decisively when required (Lara-Bercial, & Mallett, 2016), particularly relating to examples of behaviour misconduct or when key judgement calls are needed. Here, coaches could use their authority where definitive action may be needed (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). However, coaches must understand that every generation brings a unique set of characteristics, behaviours, challenges and needs to the workplace (Schroth, 2019) which is shaped by a myriad of cultural and environmental factors. Coaching is no different (Gould et al., 2019) and performance-based football cannot, and should not, operate in a bubble – perceiving itself exempt from the changes and evolution of wider society. Coaches believed that coach education could support coaches to adopt a modern and progressive approach to developing high quality relationships with athletes, and not become over reliant on exploiting power imbalances by adopting a traditional autocratic approach.

5.4.3 Theme 3 - Understand the unique needs of high-performance athletes

Understanding and meeting the unique and diverse needs of high-performance athletes was identified as a key competency for coach education to consider when developing coaches' proficiencies relative to the C-P relationship. Coaches highlighted the importance of understanding the different types of C-P relationships that may prove optimum for different athletes, whilst also developing relationships that enabled the coach to provide high levels of challenge. Coaches also emphasised the importance of having well developed professional

knowledge, which helped strengthen the C-P relationship, particularly within a performance-based context.

5.4.3.1 Understand the different types of relationships

The importance of coaches gaining a comprehensive understanding of athletes as holistic individuals, including the contextual factors that impact their broader lives beyond their athletic identity, has been well documented (Davis & Jowett, 2014), and the present findings reinforce this notion. Coaches believed this was important to meet the potentially complex and multifaceted needs of these individuals. Examples included appreciating the importance and influence of the athlete's biography, nationality, religion, family dynamics, support network, motivations, goals, and mental health. Coaches believed these factors were inextricably linked to performance on the pitch. However, Mike was keen to paint a more nuanced picture regarding the unique nature of such relationships, believing it was important that coach education supports coaches to develop an understanding of the various types of C-P relationships that exist in performance-based footballing settings.

Not everyone wants to open up, not everyone wants to have those types of relationships. People potentially just want to come to work, get the job done and move on. And that's okay. Like I say, it only becomes a problem when it becomes misaligned. (Mike)

Jowett (2007) captures this notion of an alignment of expectations between athlete and coach in the 3C+1 model, within the concept of co-orientation which refers to how the athlete and coach's perceptions of the relationship are interconnected. Mike argues there may be optimal characteristics, within relationships, which enable both the athlete and coach to thrive, but that they will be different for each athlete. Mike believes coaches must move away from the notion of a 'one size fits all' relationship. The relationship should be shaped by the needs of the athlete,

which are, naturally, all different. This supports previous research which explored the behaviours of serial winning coaches and emphasised the ability to adapt their approach to each individual (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016)

Mike provided more detail on the different types of C-P relationship that he believed coaches needed to better understand and navigate to become more effective in practice.

So, I talked about the potential energy that you need to invest in a relationship to get a certain type of trust that you're getting back. So, I've got four definitions that I talk to our coaches about [within in-house coach development sessions at his club]. I've got a parasitic relationship, service level provider, professional and family as the four layers. And in essence, it's about me knowing the type of relationship that I'm going to have with that person on one of those definitions. But then it goes to the type of energy that I've got to invest and potentially the type of energy that's going to get mirrored back to me. And I think if you get that clarity that you potentially don't get the misalignment and the frustrations. Coaches need to understand the level of energy you've got to put into it. But also, the level of energy they're prepared to expect back. (Mike)

Mike references four different relationship types and these are based on his vast experience working with athletes, in performance environments, over several decades. This resonates with the work of Jowett (2005) who used a taxonomy to describe the C-P relationship based on its effectiveness and success. In effective C-P relationships, there is a focus on personal development and satisfaction through empathy, honesty, and encouragement. Ineffective C-P relationships, in contrast, are characterised by an increased remoteness, lack of empathy or even abuse. Successful C-P relationships are those that have achieved performance success, whereas unsuccessful relationships do not realise their performance goals. The usefulness of taxonomies may be limited by their propensity to oversimplify complex phenomenon. However, this resonates with Mike's comments, for example, some athletes may not need the

same level of interpersonal liking, captured in the construct of closeness in the 3C+1 model, to achieve success and instead mutual trust and respect may take precedent for some athletes. That is not to demean the importance of the C-P relationship, but, rather, to emphasise its personalised nature. This requires the coach to understand this and manage their expectations appropriately for the relationship. However, Mike's model is, not necessarily, based on, or underpinned by, rigorous evidence or empirical research. Bailey et al. (2018) describes how, due to the pressures of competitive success, coaches are continually searching for new and advantageous methods to develop and improve athletes and, in this case, other coaches. Indeed, Mike spoke about using this model to deliver staff training for coaches at his current Premier League club. However, this pressure may increase their vulnerability to pseudoscientific ideas. Given previous findings in study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) one would postulate that this may be the result of coach education failing to provide sufficient information to coaches regarding topics such as the C-P relationship, which, in turn, may mean that coaches, through their own ingenuity, develop their own theories. It is important that coach education supports coaches, with research informed information, enabling them to build their own ideas from a robust evidence base.

5.4.3.2 Developing relationships rooted in high challenge

Coaches described how C-P relationships that enabled coaches to provide elevated levels of challenge were essential for performance-based environments to be successful, whether that be in producing professional athletes in talent development settings or results in first team environments. Jack reflected on this within the women's national team environment.

We're striving for the endpoint; it's about being world champions. So, coaches have to know how to keep pushing it, we have to keep saying this is good, but it can be better, like this is the next step. So, there is a bit of inevitability of high expectations. There is no hiding from that and actually I think that's probably a quality through all of our work

is to nurture and guide players through our pathway. There is an inevitability that some players just aren't okay with that high challenge, it's not something they're comfortable with (Jack)

Although Jack is keen to emphasise the importance of coaches having a relationship with their athletes that is rooted in high levels of challenge, he also focuses on the importance of nurturing and guiding. High quality C-P relationships have the potential to help pave the way for increased levels of challenge (Jowett & Felton, 2024). Within the performance-based domain, the coach will be required to deliver critical feedback, make difficult decisions and be highly demanding. High performance athletes often expect these elevated levels of challenge, but a high-quality C-P relationship may help mediate this by ensuring it is delivered in a caring, sustainable and ethical manner, where the coach's strong understanding of the individual athlete, enables them to increase challenge in an effective and appropriate manner. Our findings support those of previous research that explored the practices of serial winning coaches, where efforts to balance challenge and support within the C-P relationship were a central tenet of their practice (Mallett & Bercial, 2016).

Coaches further illuminated and demystified the ways in which they ensured that high levels of challenge were an integral part of the C-P relationship.

For me, whenever I'm working with players I think first of all, I want the absolute best for them. And I think quite often, because of experience, coaches generally have a much better idea of what that looks like than the player. You know, they have the dream, but do they have the habits to try and give them the best possible chance of achieving the dream? But I think coaches have got to ...you've got to understand them, you've got to work out quickly what type of character they are. What drives them? What motivates them? Where do they sit socially in the group? I think it's always quite interesting in terms of their own ego, or their own self-awareness and insecurities because that can

play a big part in the day to day of developing players, and also their backgrounds. You know, the family and you know, how many clubs have they been at? What's their history? Academy wise, football wise, training wise, injury wise, and just get to know them really. And I think when they understand and feel that this is well documented, you know, when you actually care about them, you're passionate about developing them, and they can feel that you're committing a huge part of your life sacrificing family time and stuff like that to really invest in them. But coaches have to understand it means you're going to push them. If I'm doing that as a coach and investing that time and making sacrifices to try and be the best that I can be, maybe me being the best I can be, is making the players the best they can be or helping them to understand what that looks like. So, pushing them really hard is a key part of that. And you have to build that and develop an understanding that I'm there to help them become what they want to become.

(Gordon)

Gordon emphasises the importance of challenging athletes. He highlights the critical role of the coach's expertise and experience in deciphering the nature and level of this challenge. However, he also underscores the necessity of providing space for the athlete to be understood. Gordon's response resonated with the work of Cronin and Armour (2018), who use Noddings' (1988) theory of care to explore the role of the coach in developing nurturing and caring relationships with athletes. A caring approach is underpinned by the 'carer' meeting the needs of the 'cared for,' in this case the athlete (Cronin, 2023). In a performance-based contexts, athletes require elevated levels of challenge to meet their needs, progress and achieve performance success. However, Nodding's (2002) differentiates between 'expressed' and 'inferred' needs, which resonates with the description Gordon provides. Within a coaching context, the former is directly asked for by the athlete, the latter is assumed by the coach. By using this notion of 'inferred' and 'expressed' needs, it provides a basis upon which coaches

can better understand how to provide increased levels of challenge in a dialogic and democratic manner. Therefore, coach education could support coaches to reflect upon how they provide high levels of challenge by drawing on their own expertise, combined with methods by which to capture the expressed needs of the athlete, to ensure high quality C-P relationships help facilitate the significant levels of challenge required in the performance-based domain.

5.4.3.3 High levels of professional knowledge

When coaches were asked about the knowledge, within coach education courses, that would support them to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships within performance based professional football environments, professional knowledge was a key theme. Although this may appear contrary to the focus of the paper, this was also a key finding in our study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) and one it is important to re-iterate.

We had a coach, Andy. He's a Head of Performance now, he's like a sports scientist. But as they do, they tend to drift into the coaching side. Early in Craig's [first team manager] tenure here with us he was doing part of the coaching and then he started doing some of the defending work, tactically a little bit. And he just got absolutely annihilated, like annihilated. After the first week he'd been in, the players were into Craig [first team manager] and just like 'he doesn't coach us again'. Every time they said, 'I don't think that works' or 'this is what we think' he didn't have an answer to go well 'I'm doing it because of this.' He didn't enable himself to back it up, so you've now not built any trust with those players, because they don't think you know enough.

(Ron)

Potrac et al. (2002) used the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman, using the notion of 'the presentation of the self' to understand the coaching practice of a high-performance English football coach. Ron's comments resonate with the findings of Potrac et al. (2002), with performance athletes depicted as extremely demanding of the coach. In this sense, the notion

of ‘high challenge’, in performance-based contexts, may work in both directions of the dyad. Potrac et al. (2002) describes how the coach’s behaviours were shaped by the perceived need to develop high quality relationships with the athletes. This required the coach to demonstrate proficiency in terms of their professional knowledge to garner the respect of the athletes. Ron describes how coaches must have well developed professional knowledge to preserve and strengthen the C-P relationship, otherwise they risk being perceived, by the athlete, as unable to help them thrive and progress. Therefore, performance-based coach education, in the process of broadening its outlook, should not seek to dilute expectations relating to the standards of professional knowledge expected from coaches to be deemed appropriate to pass the courses. Otherwise, situations, such as the one described by Ron, will hinder coaches in their ability to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships. The findings, therefore, move away from a dichotomised approach, which presents professional knowledge and relationship building skills as separate, to one that positions professional knowledge as central to the C-P relationship in the performance domain.

5.4.4 Theme 4 – Build a culture conducive to high quality C-P relationships

Coaches identified their ability to influence the culture of the working environment to be of critical importance to enable high quality C-P relationships to thrive. Research has been criticised for focusing on the C-P relationship in isolation and, thereby, ignoring many of the wider contextual factors that would influence it (Wagstaff, 2021). Indeed, Wagstaff (2021) argues that the C-P relationship does not operate in a bubble. He rejects Jowett’s (2017) notion that the success of coaching resides simply in the coach and the athlete and the relationship they develop. Therefore, the C-P relationship does not operate independently from the wider culture it functions within. By accepting this, the role of the coach becomes even more pertinent, as they must understand how to influence and shape a high performing and supportive culture (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). That is, not to present this endeavour as a

simplistic and unproblematic one, or to naively suggest that coaches have control over all facets of the culture within the environments that they operate, particularly when sports organisations are vulnerable to evolving and conflicting motivations, ideologies and goals of the individuals within them (Thomson et al., 2015). However, the sociocultural dimension is pertinent given its impact on the C-P relationship (Wagstaff, 2021) and that football-based coach education programmes have been accused of failing to prepare coaches to deal with the complex political and emotional realities of working with others in these contexts (Gibson & Groom, 2018)

5.4.4.1 Communicating and co-constructing expectations

Coaches recognised that a successful culture, which assisted the development of high-quality C-P relationships, started with the coach understanding how to effectively communicate and co-construct a vision, including expectations and objectives for coaches, athletes, and the wider team of staff. This was described by Susan.

It comes [high quality C-P relationships] from a collective understanding of what we accept and what we don't accept. Coaches have to very much set it out in pre-season. When we went on pre-season tour last season, it was very much around, well, what do we want to do this season? What is success this season? And as a group collectively, what do we want to achieve? And it was like, right, we want to achieve this, this and this, they're great. So, if we want to achieve this, this and this, what are the behaviours, as a group, that we need to show every day? (Susan)

Research which has adopted a sociological lens has sought to better understand the ambiguity and complexity of organisational life within professional sports settings (Jones et al., 2009). The metaphor of orchestration, drawn from research focusing on managing change in educational institutions (Wallace, 2004) has been used to explain the complex and dynamic nature of coaching practice (Jones et al., 2009). Gibson and Groom (2018) used the notion of

orchestration to explore the practices of an Academy Manager in an English Premier League club. Similarly to Susan, they reported the importance of the coach's ability to communicate an overarching vision for the club, particularly given the contradictory goals and expectations that exist within sporting organisations (Jones & Wallace, 2006). Susan identifies pre-season as a key strategic period to carry out the preparatory work, which will better enable a collective understanding and agreement of the type and nature of the behaviours that will underpin all relationships, but particularly that of the C-P relationship. The notion of establishing rules to pre-empt conflict and facilitate high quality C-P relationships is well established (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015). However, of paramount importance is the coach's ability to forge a culture of acceptance for their vision (Gibson & Groom, 2018). To encourage this, Andy believed the athlete could adopt an active role in shaping the culture.

I will probably say that that's co-created. So, the values and behaviours that us as a collective- players, staff etc, I would say they're co-created as a group, and then the real strength and power comes when the players hold each other accountable to them. But you still have a framework that you operate in, and people know what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. (Andy)

The degree to which the athlete's voice shapes these early interactions, may, to an extent, depend on contextual factors and the individual preferences of the coach. This was perceived by coaches as a complex act, by which they had to foster a sense of authority whilst also demonstrating a democratic approach. Coaches emphasised that this process of outlining and sharing expectations was used to develop clearly defined expectations for coaches, athletes and staff which would better ensure transparency and accountability, which was deemed as conducive to developing high quality C-P relationships.

5.4.4.2 Integrating meaningful athlete leadership

Central to cultivating high-quality C-P relationships, was developing a culture whereby

athletes can communicate their thoughts and feelings clearly and regularly to the coaching team. To formally integrate this into the culture, leadership groups were perceived to be an effective strategy to facilitate this process. Coaches described leadership groups that were usually made up of between four and six individuals. Coaches conveyed the importance of the leadership team being representative of the whole squad in terms of capturing perspectives from different social groups, age groups, nationalities and ethnicities. Gordon expanded on the role of leadership groups.

"If I was concerned about another player, sometimes I'd put it to the leadership group and say, 'How's Billy? Is he alright? He didn't seem himself this morning.' Or, yesterday, there was an issue with this, 'Is everything alright? Anything going on there in the changing room?' They might say 'he's had a nightmare with his Mrs and then you just pick him off [speak one to one]. 'Everything alright?' If he wants to go into it, he would. So, there are different ways of doing it. But you do consciously sort of plan to have these two or three conversations." (Gordon)

Gordon explains how the leadership team operate as external leaders in that they provide a link between the squad and the coaching and management team, but this also had a social function to promote positive relationships between the athlete and coach (Fransen et al., 2014). Gordon describes how athlete leadership enabled him to gain a better understanding of the contextual factors impacting individuals within the squad and support the development of an environment that encourages open communication, athlete voice and high-quality C-P relationships. For this to be effective, coaches must develop a culture that educates, empowers and encourages athletes to speak up, in ways that are honest and candid. However, in return, athletes should communicate in a manner that is respectful and appropriate. Therefore, the athletes' interpersonal knowledge and skills, and not just that of coaches, are significant for the development of high-quality C-P relationships (Jowett et al., 2023).

Such was the importance coaches placed on athlete leadership; Rachel describes how meetings with the leadership team are formally planned into their weekly programme.

We've got five people now in our leadership group. They meet every matchday minus one with myself and Jane (first team manager). We have a coffee and they will have three things that they want to bring up and it may be like 'we all feel really tired we haven't had a day off last week because we were in for recovery after the game' and we will listen and sometimes we will go, 'do you know what, we will actually give you a day off here because we agree'. But then we'll give them targets that we want them to do and it may be something simple like we've noticed that people, or it's been fed back into us that people are going into the gym with coffees ,for example, something as simple as that. Like you spoke about taking care of our building so if you see somebody in with a coffee like it's your duty to make sure you police it and they're like 'yeah okay we'll be on it' and stuff like that really, little things. (Rachel)

Rachel describes a relational approach to these meetings that are built upon a shared understanding and empathy from both parties. However, the objectives of the meeting were also to hold athletes to high standards with regards to their behaviours and conduct. Specifically related to the C-P relationship was the idea that members of the leadership group could be used to 'self-police' behaviours and attitudes that were deemed not to be in keeping with the desired standards previously agreed. This is not to say that coaches were unwilling to have difficult conversations, which challenged athletes, if behaviours were deemed inappropriate. However, Rachel believed this process of empowering the athletes to hold each to account could positively influence the C-P relationship, as this 'outsourcing' meant coaches may not, necessarily, have to conduct these conversations with individuals which could risk eroding the quality of the C-P relationship. Rachel describes how coach education could also support

coaches to understand how to utilise the power of athlete leadership, to strengthen the overall culture, thereby having a potentially preventative impact on conflict between athlete and coach.

5.4.4.3 The role of the coaching and multidisciplinary team

Coaches believed that the substantial technical coaching team typical of performance-based footballing environments, were integral to developing a caring coaching climate, which would enable C-P relationships to thrive. Depending on the context and club, there are a variety of roles adopted by coaches, for example, manager, assistant manager, head coach, assistant coach, and specialist coach (e.g., goalkeeper or set pieces). It was important coaches understood how to complement one another and how their role may influence the relationship they develop to support and meet the needs of a large and diverse squad of athletes. This was articulated by Ron who is a first team assistant coach.

My relationship with the players is slightly different [from the first team manager]. They're more likely going to come to me at times when they're not playing and ask why they're not playing and what do I need to do? Because going to your manager and asking that can be probably a bit tough. So, my role is different in that way, they'll approach me differently. A lot of them do come to me for a lot of feedback, as I said, review of games, review of training, wanting individual work, a lot of them do come to me for that and I understand why because of my position. (Ron)

When I first came in, the manager was going to let Emma Jones [pseudonym for current England international player] go the first year I was there due to attitude and her...I wouldn't say a poor mentality it's more her mentality to deal with difficult situations. But I spent time investing time in her to understand what were the reasons why she was always frustrated, and she wasn't able to lose that in certain moments in a game. Training she was fine, but then building that relationship to understand where she wants to go, how we can work together to establish some sort of process that would enable

her to switch off in those moments, she was getting frustrated, or there was a small process which enabled her to calm back down. I built that over the last probably two to three years working with her now. And I think I have a good understanding of what she needs at certain moments when she needs an arm [support], when she doesn't and when she needs putting in line[challenge]. (Ron)

Since his intervention, the player Ron is referring to has developed into a high performer for both her club and on the international stage for her country. Ron emphasises the importance of the coach's ability to regulate their emotional response dependent on the athlete's needs. However, the notion that the head coach or first team manager, can develop and maintain high quality relationships with all individuals within a squad, may be unrealistic and could place an impractical burden on the coach (Cronin et al., 2018). Particularly when emotional labour has been linked to psychological distress and burnout for the coach (Potrac et al., 2017). Research pertaining to the C-P relationship has not distinguished between the different coaching roles within performance-based contexts, and therefore future research should explore this further. Meanwhile, coach education could support coaches to develop a stronger understanding of the different coaching roles within performance-based environments and explore how this may impact their relationships with athletes. Conceptually, this moves beyond understanding the coach and athlete as single entities and instead positions technical coaches as working within teams. This raises several important considerations for coaches such as how relational roles are clarified within coaching teams and how coaches understand their individual relational attributes and co-operate with one another to develop high quality C-P relationships. Given Rob also describes how he was able to connect with an individual where the first team manager had failed to do so, raises important questions about the personality and demographic make-up of coaching teams to effectively meet the relational needs of athletes.

Performance football is also somewhat unique in the size of the multi-disciplinary teams (MDT) that collaborate with athletes. These include practitioners who specialise in physiology and sports science, analysis, psychology and player welfare and care. Mike believed coaches should understand how to work effectively with the MDT, within the parameters of ethical guidelines and confidentiality, to develop a collegiate culture that would support the development of high-quality C-P relationships.

But you know, one of the things I did recently was bring as many of the MDT staff into one office as I possibly could because walls become barriers in terms of sharing. So, bringing everyone into the same office meant that even then simple conversations you have every day, get around the entire office and just keeps everybody in the loop. So, I think it's important for us in the way that we want to work [developing high quality C-P relationships] that we share information on players and relationships that we're having. Obviously, there's some stuff that can't be shared. There's some stuff that's going to be confidential along the way. But as much as possible, if you know if we're working on or I've been working on something with a particular player, I'll share that with the other staff so that they're in the loop and whenever they're working with them, they can bring them things forward as well. (Mike)

Mike moves beyond thinking about the C-P relationship in isolation, reflecting on its connections to a broader system that comprises of individuals, dyads, teams, and departments (Wagstaff, 2021). Cronin et al. (2018) emphasises the importance of the multidisciplinary nature of 'gold standard' caring coaching climates, which establish a 'web of care' around athletes (p.95). Therefore, the coach's role is to skilfully build alliances, exert influence and attempt to unify individuals behind these strategic goals (Potrac & Jones, 2009), which, in this regard, is to ensure effective collaboration between staff (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016) to facilitate high quality C-P relationships. This enables the coach to draw on a wide variety of

expertise, with each practitioner having their own unique perceptions and understanding of the individual athlete. This exchange of information could enhance the coach's decision making, behaviours and interactions with the athlete, enabling them to better address the athlete's needs and strengthen the C-P relationship.

5.5 Strength and Limitations

We captured the perceptions of high-performance coaches working in some of the most prestigious and important roles in English football. This is a strength of the research as gaining access to these practitioners is typically difficult. Coaches were also working in a range of roles in the men's and women's game and across youth development and first team environments, which gave a variety of perspectives that will have been shaped by these contextual factors. However, the participants views may not be representative of all coaches currently working within performance-based settings in England. The sample does not demonstrate diversity in relation to race, ethnicity, or sex and this is a limitation of the research. This is, at least in part, due to the overrepresentation of white British males in both the men's and women's professional game in England. This reflects long-standing concerns about the lack of diversity within high-profile coaching roles across various sports (Vinson et al., 2016). Lastly, it would be remiss not to highlight the importance of the athlete's voice in the process of shaping coach education content, particularly as they are one half of the coach-player dyad. This viewpoint is missing from the current research and, as such, is a limitation of the work.

5.6 Conclusion

Formal coach education courses have typically failed to provide sufficient coverage of C-P relationship within their curriculum (Ferrar et al., 2018; Lefebvre et al., 2016) Indeed, study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) found the C-P relationship was delivered in a superficial manner in the English FA's UEFA A and B Licence qualifications. The key findings

provide further evidence that the C-P relationship is underrepresented in formal coach education. However, further research is required to assess whether this is also the case across other sports and NGBs. Performance coaches perceived developing a strong understanding of the C-P relationship is integral to their current role. This points to an incongruence between its importance and the extent to which it features in formal coach education. Therefore, it is concluded that the C-P relationship should be given greater prominence in coach education curricula.

Given a relatively small number of coaches were interviewed, who described what they perceive to be important in their context, these approaches may not transfer effectively to other coaching settings or that some of the ideas expressed by coaches may not necessarily be evidenced based. However, these coaches are both practitioners and credible experts and are therefore uniquely placed to inform the research which provides a starting point by which to understand the content that could be included in courses to support coaches to develop high quality C-P relationships in performance-based settings. Supporting the findings of previous research, coaches reported that it was essential that coach education supported the development of a progressive understanding of the C-P relationship underpinned by effective interpersonal competencies and communication skills (Davis et al., 2019). Observations skills and the art of noticing (Jones et al., 2013) were deemed imperative, alongside the importance of interactions shaped by the coach's empathy and listening skills and their ability to manage conflict.

Coach education could support coaches to understand the individual nature of the C-P relationship, which is shaped by the unique needs of the athlete. This moves beyond a 'one size fits all' approach towards a more nuanced understanding of the different C-P relationships that typically exist within these settings. The findings further support the notion that high quality C-P relationships have the potential to help pave the way for increased levels of challenge, in a sustainable and ethical manner (Jowett & Felton, 2024). The findings also emphasise the

importance of the coach's professional knowledge in order to gain credibility and respect, a feature of the C-P relationship which is particularly pertinent to the performance-based domain (Potrac et al., 2002)

The C-P relationship exists within, and is influenced by, a wider system of relationships (Wagstaff, 2021). Therefore, coaches are required to develop expertise in building a culture conducive to high quality C-P relationships. The findings support previous research which highlights the importance of coaches communicating an overarching vision for the environment and their ability to forge a culture of acceptance (Gibson & Groom, 2018). Effectively utilising athlete leadership could also support the development of an environment that encourages open communication, athlete voice and high-quality C-P relationships (Jowett et al., 2023). Coach education could support coaches to reflect on how the different roles that make up a performance-based coaching team could influence the nature of the C-P relationships that are developed. Coaches should understand how to effectively work alongside the MDT, and develop a culture of collaboration, to inform the coach's behaviours to facilitate higher quality C-P relationships. Finally, to further explore the knowledge coaches require to develop high quality C-P relationships in performance-based football in England, subsequent research should capture the athlete's perspective, given they form one half of the C-P dyad, and their voices are largely absent from coach education research (Chapman et al., 2020).

Chapter 6 An arm around the shoulder or a kick up the backside? Using athlete voice for a more informed understanding of the C-P relationship in performance football environments and formal coach education

The key findings from study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) in the thesis indicate that the C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the formalised course content on UEFA A or B Licence courses. Study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) explored the perceptions of eleven performance coaches currently working across a range of contexts in England. The findings provided significant insights into the knowledge that could be incorporated into formal coach education courses to prepare coaches to operate effectively in performance-based football settings in England. The final study captures the perceptions of the athletes themselves. This is important as not only do they represent one half of the coach-player dyad, but also because the views of athletes have typically been under-researched within the coaching literature (Weissensteiner, 2015; Wilsson et al., 2022). Together, the perspectives of coach developers, coaches and athletes provide multivocality to the thesis with the aim of developing a holistic understanding of the C-P relationship in performance-based contexts in England.

6.1 Abstract

A high-quality coach-player (C-P) relationship is at the heart of effective coaching and can produce a myriad of positive benefits for both members of the dyad. Contrary to the myriad of benefits high-quality C-P relationships bring to the coach and athlete, this topic has been underrepresented in formal coach education courses. Therefore, the knowledge that could be integrated into formal coach education courses to develop coaches' knowledge of the C-P relationship is investigated. Importantly, this was explored from the athlete's perspective, a viewpoint that is absent from coach education research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight male and female (4 male and 4 female) professional athletes who

currently play, or have played, at the highest levels in club football including, the English Premier League, Women's Super League, and senior England internationals. Inductive reflexive thematic analysis generated the following five themes; (1) The C-P relationship matters (2) Self-awareness and clear values: The cornerstone of relationship building (3) The sweet spot: Balancing listening, guiding, and challenging (4) The interrelated nature of relationships and culture (5) Managing conflict within a highly micropolitical environment. Findings demonstrate that athletes positioned the C-P relationship as central to coaching effectiveness and believed that it should be an integral element of coach education curricula which sought to prepare coaches for performance settings. They provide important insights into the knowledge that could be incorporated into courses to meet the needs of coaches.

6.2 Introduction

The C-P relationship has been reported to be underrepresented in formal coach education curricula (Ferrar et al., 2018; Lefebvre et al. 2016; Newland et al., 2023; Newland et al., 2024; Turnbridge and Côté, 2017). This is despite calls for coach education to focus on raising awareness of the importance of the C-P relationship and assist coaches to build more effective working partnerships with athletes (Jowett, 2017). Study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) explored the knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, which was integrated in the English FA's highest practical coaching qualifications. These courses are designed to prepare coaches to work in the performance domain in both youth development and first team environments. Study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) found the C-P relationship was not meaningfully addressed within those courses and, where it was referred to, it was not underpinned by relevant research and was introduced in an implicit and superficial manner. This was despite coach developers reporting it as an integral aspect of coaching practice. This raises important questions as to the knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, that should be integrated into English football coach education, to prepare coaches for performance

environments. However, there is a lack of research that explores the phenomenon within these settings. This is problematic as the C-P relationship will be influenced specifically by the nature of the sport and the performance domain upon which it exists (Wagstaff, 2021). The performance domain in English football, provides a unique setting by which to explore the C-P relationship and the knowledge and skills coaches require to operate effectively within it. The notion that this domain is unique is supported by previous research which characterises these environments as cut-throat and uncaring (Potrac et al., 2012), where entrenched traditions and norms are rooted in archaic concepts of masculinity and hierarchy (Champ et al., 2021). Therefore, to better understand the knowledge coaches require to perform successfully within these contexts, it is proposed that research should be specifically rooted within this domain.

Subsequently, study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) captured the perceptions of some of the highest profile coaches in England to develop our understanding of the C-P relationship in these settings and what knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship, should be included in formal coach education courses. Coaches reported that the C-P relationship was integral in their current role. However, they point to a misalignment between its importance and the extent to which it features in formal coach education. Performance coaches identified several key areas, pertaining to the C-P relationship, where knowledge and competencies could be developed through coach education (Newland et al., 2024). Consistent with previous research, coaches emphasised the crucial role of coach education in fostering a progressive understanding of the C-P relationship, grounded in effective interpersonal competencies and communication skills (Davis et al., 2019). They highlighted the necessity of observational skills and the art of noticing (Jones et al., 2013), alongside the significance of interactions guided by the coach's empathy and well-developed listening skills. Coach education could support coaches to appreciate the individualised nature of C-P relationships, shaped by the distinct needs of each athlete. This approach moves beyond a uniform strategy and instead embraces a

nuanced understanding of the diverse C-P dynamics typically found in performance settings. These findings reinforce that high-quality C-P relationships can facilitate increased high levels of challenge, which is imperative in the performance-based domain, in a more sustainable and ethical manner (Jowett & Felton, 2024). Additionally, this research underscores the importance of coaches' professional knowledge in establishing credibility and respect, particularly crucial in performance-based contexts (Potrac et al., 2002). The C-P relationship operates within a broader network of relationships (Wagstaff, 2021) and consequently coaches reported the need to develop expertise in influencing the culture to ensure it is conducive to developing and maintaining high quality C-P relationships. These findings also highlight the role of coaches in communicating a cohesive vision for the environment and fostering a culture of acceptance (Gibson & Groom, 2018). Leveraging athlete leadership can further promote an environment that encourages open communication, amplifies the athlete's voice, and supports high-quality C-P relationships (Jowett et al., 2023). Lastly, coaches believed coach education programmes could encourage reflection on how different coaching roles, within performance-based coaching teams, shape the nature of C-P relationships. Coaches should also be supported to understand how to work effectively with the multidisciplinary team (MDT), typical of performance-based footballing environments, to develop a culture of collaboration, informing their behaviours to potentially enhance the quality of C-P relationships (Newland et al., 2024)

Study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) and study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) provide a starting point in terms of exploring the C-P relationship in the unique context of performance-based football in England and provides important insights into the content that could be integrated into formal coach education courses (Newland et al., 2023; Newland et al., 2024). However, it also essential to explore the athlete's perspective. The 'voice' of the athlete has typically been unheard within coaching research and findings are therefore often not grounded in the reality of athlete experience (Weissensteiner, 2015; Wilsson

et al., 2022). Athlete voice is positioned as an important vehicle by which to create meaningful change within sporting organisations and systems (Hartill et al., 2019). Examples such as the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) athlete commission demonstrate how organisations are capturing the perspectives of athletes to shape their organisational policy (Wassong, 2018). More recently, the Whyte Review (Whyte, 2022) in gymnastics and the 'Heart of Aquatics' (Swim England, 2023) report in swimming were commissioned due to widespread abusive cultures and both reports placed the athlete voice as integral to organisational reform. Within the current study, an exploration of the athlete voice is particularly pertinent given that the athlete constitutes one half of the dyad in the C-P relationship. Furthermore, the athlete's perspectives are absent from coach education research (Chapman et al., 2020). Quite simply, if the C-P relationship is to be meaningfully addressed in coach education curricula, the nature of the content, and framing, should be influenced by the voice of athletes. From an ethical perspective, it is important to emphasise the athlete's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and to ensure their voice is heard, particularly in contexts such as high-performance sports, where power imbalances exist (Champ et al., 2021).

Therefore, the athlete's voice serves as a critical counterbalance to study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) which focused on the coaches' perspective, enhancing our ability to achieve a thorough and more comprehensive understanding of the knowledge coaches may require. This is particularly relevant in the performance-based football domain, where discussions often lack complexity, nuance and sophistication and serve to perpetuate old tropes and clichés, where the coach's role in the C-P relationships is often reduced to a simple choice between providing the athlete with a metaphorical "kick up the backside" or an "arm around the shoulder" (Peach, 2023). Consequently, the current research intends to improve and advance our understanding by capturing the perceptions and observations of a variety of current

high-performance football players from both the men's and women's game and seeks to explore the following question:

From the perspective of performance athletes, what knowledge related to the coach-player relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England?

6.3 Method

6.3.1 Paradigm Positioning

The research adopts an interpretivist paradigm which embodies the need to consider human beings and their subjective interpretations of the world around them to understand social science (Alharahsheh et al., 2020). The research is also underpinned by epistemological constructivism which assumes that knowledge is both constructed and subjective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is deemed an appropriate paradigmatic position as to capture, explore and better understand the athlete's construction of knowledge relating to their reality as it is lived on a daily basis. Additionally, my background as a performance coach (12 years in performance domains) and qualifications (UEFA A Licence coach) provides me with a unique lens by which to interpret the data and understand the nature of the C-P relationship.

6.3.2 Participants

We used purposeful sampling, with specific criteria, to represent a broad range of contexts within professional first team and youth development environments within the men's and women's game in England, and to answer two narrow research questions. Four male and four female participants aged 19 to 35 (mean age=26.9, SD=5.25) of white British ethnicity were purposefully sampled (Table 6). Participants played in one of the following settings during their careers:

- First team in the Men's English Premier League or Football League (top four divisions in England).

- Academy in the Men’s English Premier League or Football League (top four divisions in England).
- England men’s national youth teams (U16s to U21s)
- First team in the Women’s Super League one or two (top two divisions in England).
- Academy in the Women’s Super League one or two (top two divisions in England).
- England Women’s national youth teams (U16s to U20s)

Participants were purposefully sampled to represent a broad range of contexts within professional first team and youth development environments within the men’s and women’s game in England. Malterud’s (2015) notion of informational power was used to guide the decisions in relation to the sample size. Purposeful sampling, with specific criteria, was used to help answer two narrow research questions. Malterud et al. (2015) describes how a smaller sample is needed when the participants are classified as highly specific for the studies stated aims. Therefore, a sample size of 8 was deemed to be appropriate.

Table 6. Representation of athletes’ playing experience

Athlete(pseudonym)	Experience	Age
Seb	England Under 21s, English Premier League,	32
John	English Football League Championship	24
James	English Premier League U21s	27
Ben	English Premier League U18s	32
Susan	Senior England, Women’s Super League One	Not stated to protect anonymity
Carole	Senior England, Women’s Super League One	Not stated to protect anonymity
Margaret	Senior England, Women’s Super League One	Not stated to protect anonymity

Robyn	England U23s, Women's Super League One	19
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6.3.3 Data Collection

Given the ontological and epistemological positioning of the current thesis, semi-structured interviews enabled the exploration of the thoughts, feelings, reasoning, and sense making of the participants (Jamshed, 2014). The interview guide was underpinned by the two key research questions. The first section focuses on the athletes' understanding of the C-P relationship, the importance they place on the C-P relationship, the role the C-P relationship plays in their day-to-day experiences, the challenges they face concerning the C-P relationship, the knowledge they believe coaches require to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships and whether they believe the C-P relationship should feature in formal coach education curricula. An example of a question from this section is "What do performance football coaches need to know about the C-P relationship?" The second part of the interview focuses on the key themes identified by performance coaches in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and attempts to explore the athlete's perspective in relation to these themes. Questions focused on capturing the athlete's understanding of the knowledge coaches require to effectively co-construct expectations of the C-P relationship, understand important contextual factors in the athlete's life, balance expressed and inferred needs, balance high challenge and high support, use technical and tactical knowledge to strengthen the C-P relationship and shape a culture conducive to high quality C-P relationships. An example of a question from this section is "How do coaches effectively develop relationships rooted in high challenge and high support?." In total 443 minutes (M=55.45, SD=13.16) of audio recorded interview data was collected.

The decision to conduct interviews on video calling software was made on the basis that participants would be more comfortable talking about highly personal issues, such as the

C-P relationship, within the privacy of their own home (Gray et al., 2020). Accessibility to participants was also a key factor in this decision. It was deemed to be unrealistic to arrange face to face interviews with high profile athletes, due to their demanding roles.

6.3.4 Data analysis

Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) and by employing NVivo Version 12 software. Given the paradigmatic positioning of the current research, meaning and knowledge is perceived to be contextually situated and, therefore, view researcher subjectivity as a resource for the research, rather than a threat to be controlled (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis was conducted by the first author, following the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020). The stages of analysis were not followed in a linear manner and were returned to throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Initially the first author became familiar with the content, highlighting and annotating areas of interest. Second, initial codes were generated which provided preliminary categories. Third, initial themes were generated from the coding process. For example, the codes “self-awareness,” “reflective skills,” “clear values and beliefs” and “predictable and consistent behaviour” became the theme “self-awareness and clear values: the cornerstone of relationship building.” The fourth stage involved the review and refinement of themes to check they were coherent and distinctive (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The fifth phase involved naming themes. The final stage was the write up and the reporting of the data.

6.3.5 Rigour

The intention of the current research was not simply to adopt a specific universal set of standardised criteria, as this would be counterintuitive given the interpretivist nature of the current study. Rather, the work of Tracy (2010) was used to bring such considerations to the fore and to decide which of the criteria would be most appropriate for the current research,

given its ontological and epistemological positions. Rigour was conceived with a particular emphasis on the following constructs: worthy topic, sincerity, credibility and significant contribution (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

The C-P relationship in performance football provides a worthy topic given its timely and significant nature with high quality C-P relationships having been found to positively influence well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), Therefore, any research that seeks to support coach education and coaches to develop high-quality relationships to support athletes would constitute a topic of high worth. The use of a reflexive journal was a key feature that supported a sincere approach. The journal was used throughout the data collection process. The content of the journal related to the authors thoughts and feelings before and after data collection. It helped towards the initial generation of codes and the continual development of the authors understanding of the C-P relationship, which evolved throughout the study. For example, journal notes enabled the recognition of important themes emerging that had not been anticipated, particularly relating to the coach's understanding of self. This was unexpected given the research was focused on the athlete's perspective but encouraged an appreciation of the importance the athlete placed on their perceptions that the coach's behaviours and communication was underpinned by a stable set of values and beliefs. This insight led to the development codes relating to "self-awareness," "reflective skills," "clear values and beliefs" and "predictable and consistent behaviour." The notion of credibility was also enhanced by the role of multivocality. The current study incorporates the voices of athletes, a perspective that has been absent from coach education research (Chapman et al., 2020). Consequently, this allows for a variety of perspectives which diverge from that of the author. Lastly, the research makes a significant contribution. The specificity of the context upon which the research is situated provides originality and important practical implications for performance-based football coach education in England.

6.4 Findings and discussion

6.4.1 Theme 1: *The C-P relationship matters*

All athletes placed significant importance on the C-P relationship and believed that it should be an integral element of coach education curricula which sought to prepare coaches for performance settings.

Yeah, I do, I do (do you think the C-P relationship should feature in coach education?). I actually think it's the biggest part of coaching. I think it's the biggest part of it because like I said, if you feel important and you feel valued the likelihood is you're going to perform better. I mean, look, it's not to say that that's a guarantee, but, speaking as a player, when I knew I was valued you would go out and play, you just feel bigger, you feel, I guess, more empowered to do things. More invested in it because you know that someone is invested in you. But yeah, I think it's the biggest part of sport is having that relationship or having someone that is willing to invest in a relationship (Ben)

100% yeah (do you think the C-P relationship should feature in coach education?). I think truthfully that part (the C-P relationship) is the most important part. So yeah, you can sign the best players in the world, but if you don't know how to manage those players I think you've lost the battle already. So, I think that should be first and foremost. If I ever went into coaching that is something you would really need to focus on developing a strong understanding of, but it's complicated (Carole)

The findings of all three studies in this thesis present a strong body of evidence, with coach developers in study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023), coaches in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and now athletes in study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) perceiving the C-P relationship as central to coaching effectiveness within performance football settings. This is coherent with the findings of previous, well established, research

which positions the C-P relationship at the heart of the coaching process and vital to performance success in a variety of high-performance sporting domains (Jowett, 2017). However, this is contrasted against reports that the C-P relationship is underrepresented in formal coach education (Ferrar et al.,2018; Lefebvre et al. 2016; Newland et al., 2023; Newland et al., 2024; Turnbridge and Côté, 2017). This is surprising given the C-P relationship is not a phenomenon that could be characterised as receiving disproportionate attention within the academic literature, but that ultimately fails to resonate with coaches and athletes in practice. Rather, the C-P relationship is regularly discussed within the popular media, by journalists, athletes, and coaches through the medium of newspaper and website articles, autobiographical books and interviews. This theme further highlights that the C-P relationship matters to athletes and, therefore, it has been somewhat surprising that some NGBs and formal coach education courses, have not already sought to explore, conceptualise, and teach coaches about it in a meaningful way, which has resulted in some coaches reporting that they were left to develop their knowledge of the C-P relationship in an unmediated manner (Newland et al.,2023). What knowledge should be developed, relating to the C-P relationship, is a question the study seeks to answer in the remainder of this section, by exploring the perceptions of highly experienced athletes.

6.4.2 Theme 2: Self-awareness and clear values: The cornerstone of relationship building

Across the sample athletes described how a coach's apparent capacity for introspection enabled them to develop a clearly defined philosophical foundation which underpins and guides their practice. Athletes perceived that coaches were, therefore, better able to communicate and interact with athletes in an authentic, consistent, and predictable manner which was considered integral to the development of high-quality C-P relationships.

For example, Seb has played for six different clubs, to date, over a 15-year professional career. This includes playing in the English Premier League and in the lower divisions of English football, where he now performs. During his career, he has worked alongside a range of coaches and reflected on their perceived levels of self-awareness and how this influenced their ability to connect with athletes.

If you can't go into a room, as a coach, and somebody says, who are you? What do you stand for? And you can't answer it pretty quickly, there's a problem. I think that's the starting block for what you need to start off with. You know that's the start. You can't build a relationship, I don't think, genuinely with anybody else unless you have an understanding of who you currently are, where you need to be, where you want to go and what you need to do to get there. They are all important questions to ask yourself and then once you start to figure them things out, it'll give you a greater understanding and a better way of connecting with other people. (Seb)

Seb emphasises the importance of coaches developing a strong understanding of themselves and their philosophical approach that underpins their practice. In this regard, Seb underscores how the self-awareness achieved through introspection and reflection skills afforded coaches to develop a clear sense of self and a well-defined philosophical approach which he believed enabled coaches to engage with athletes in a more confident, coherent, and meaningful manner which helped facilitate the development of high-quality C-P relationships. This may be of particular importance within the performance-based football domain, where the authority of the coach may be tested by highly demanding athletes. Coaches are required to respond by projecting confidence and acting decisively and consistently to maintain their credibility in the eyes of the athletes (Jones, 2006). Seb describes how he perceives this to be shaped by the coach's intrapersonal skills and their capacity for reflection and introspection, which are identified as fundamental tenets of coaching expertise (Cassidy et al., 2009) and effectiveness

(Côté & Gilbert, 2009). In study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) it was encouraging to see “reflection skills” and “self-awareness” explicitly stated as course outcomes for coaches completing the highest qualification within the English Football Association coaching pathway. However, reflective practice has been accused of evolving into a catch-all term used to describe various approaches that coaches adopt, making it a contested concept (Cushion, 2018). Therefore, it is important to understand and contextualise how these skills could influence coaches’ abilities to develop high quality C-P relationships.

Research suggests that coaches’ understanding of a coaching philosophy has traditionally been dominated by technical and tactical principles aimed at developing a style of play or game model (Partington & Cushion, 2024). This focus often overshadows a philosophical approach to coaching that is based on a clear set of values, beliefs, or principles that underpin effective learning (Partington & Cushion, 2024). However, in the context of the C-P relationship, Seb described how the most effective coaches had developed clear values and beliefs which supported the development of high-quality C-P relationships.

I think the good coaches just have clear values, which I like as well. You know, like honesty, responsibility, and accountability. Being accountable for your own actions, hard work and you know there's a few I see in myself and how I operate. So, obviously that has to come from, and be grown by, the coach. If I see the coach has clear values, it makes it a lot easier to obviously, from my side, to build that connection and the best ones that I've seen all have that. (Seb)

A coach’s philosophy should be influenced by three key themes; ontological questions relating to the nature of reality, epistemological matters which consider the basis of knowledge and axiological concerns which relate to what is deemed of value (Cushion & Partington, 2016). In relation to the C-P relationship, Seb particularly emphasises the importance of the coach

exploring their understanding of axiology, which supports them to recognise which values are most important to them and why and how they may be enacted in practice. This would also encompass an exploration of ethics, which would relate to morality and the implementation of the right action (Hardman & Jones, 2013). This is particularly relevant in the context of the C-P relationships where coaches could reflect on the manner in which athletes should be treated and how athletes should interact with the coach in return. However, developing a considered philosophical position based on one's axiology is far from straightforward and should be conceived as a complex endeavour fraught with ethical and moral considerations (Cassidy et al., 2023). This may be particularly pronounced with performance football contexts, where factors such as performance pressures (Lindgren et al., 2017), financial incentives and job insecurity (Morton, 2014) may make adhering to one's own ethical beliefs particularly challenging. Coaches, who work in performance contexts, should move beyond adopting fashionable and superficial phrases or slogans that adorn changing room walls, but which are rarely enacted in practice. Instead, it would require coach education to support coaches to explore their own values and beliefs, moral and ethical principles, and decision-making frameworks to better understand the role the C-P relationship plays in their own coaching philosophy and to ensure their behaviours, demonstrated within this relationship, are authentic and align with their philosophical approach.

John described how coaches who they perceived to have had developed a clear philosophical framework that underpinned their practice were more likely to demonstrate a consistent and predictable nature, which was conducive to the development of high-quality C-P relationships.

Being predictable (what do coaches need to understand about the C-P relationship) because the worst thing that you can have, I think from a coach, is an unpredictable nature where you go into an interaction and you're going "I have no idea what I'm

getting from him today” I might get something that's distant. I might get something that's really philosophical. I might get something that's angry. I might get something that's soft. If I can understand, I'm going to get a consistent approach in whatever capacity that is and that should, I think, be attributed to their personality as a person. So being a coach shouldn't come before being a human. It should be that their coaching is what they do and who they are. (John)

John described the potentially erosive effects of unpredictability in a coach's behaviour and how this can potentially undermine the C-P relationship. Given the high stakes nature of high-performance football (Thompson et al., 2015), it is likely, at least in part, that the unpredictable nature of the responses are the results of the extreme levels of pressure coaches often experience in these settings. However, previous research, which focused on the behaviours of coaches with a history of repeated performance success, demonstrated how the behaviours of expert coaches were underpinned by a clear philosophical standpoint (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). They describe how this framework serves as an ‘anchor’ providing a sense of purpose and direction for the coach. John describes how this ‘anchoring’, to their values and beliefs, could also provide a sense of stability to ensure consistency and predictability in the coach's communication and interactions with the athlete. This has important implications for coach education, which could support coaches to explore the relationships between their own philosophical standpoint and how this may influence the consistency and predictability of their behaviours and the nature and quality of the relationships they are able to develop with athletes.

6.4.3 Theme 3: The sweet spot: balancing listening, guiding and challenging

Athletes identified coaches who were most proficient at developing high-quality C-P relationships as adopting a complex blend of methods which sometimes emphasised gentler dispositions and, at other times, required the coach to communicate more demanding

approaches. They described coaches with deep knowledge and understanding of the athlete and were highly skilled at observing and interpreting athletes' behaviours and adapting their responses accordingly.

Athletes reflected on the myriad of contextual factors that influenced their life outside of their professional role as a high-performance athlete. John provided the following example.

My dad was arrested by the police when I was 19. I made the choice that the next day I went in (to training). I went in and didn't say anything. I just got on with it. I actually trained the night that he got arrested and the next day I went to training again. On Saturday I went to play a game, and I sort of neglected it. Now this was at a time when I was in the first team, but I wasn't really involved. I was training and stuff like that, but I wasn't really playing. But I thought I was close (to getting a first team appearance) and so I thought just get on with it. But clearly, I'd changed somewhat because Phil Jones (Pseudonym), my coach said "oh, let's come and do some video analysis, John, in the room." So, he got arrested on the Thursday and then Phil pulled me in on the Monday on the ruse of let's do some video analysis and then sat me down and basically just said "look, the doors closed most people have gone, what's going on at home?" And I just sort of broke down. Because clearly...he just knew that there was something and I think that's because I had such a close relationship (John)

John's narrative underscores the importance of coaches understanding the influence of contextual factors in the athletes' lives. It is important to state, the extent to which athletes wanted, or needed, coaches to develop an understanding of their broader lives was highly dependent on the individual. However, John, and many other athletes, reported this as imperative, supporting previous research which identifies it as a significant tenet of caring

coaching practice (Cronin & Armour, 2018; Knust & Fischer, 2015). John emphasises the importance of his coach observing changes in his behaviours which supports previous research which positions noticing as the basis of coaching action (Jones et al., 2013). However, it was the closeness of the relationship John shared with his coach that enabled him to effectively observe these changes in his behaviour. John describes himself as a tough, resilient, and self-sufficient character, which is exemplified by his determination to continue to perform despite the emotional turmoil he was experiencing. However, he identified the gentler approach adopted by his coach, which enabled him to make sense and reflect on the challenge he was facing, as critical to his future career development and progression.

Similarly, James identifies a critical incident in his own career that came shortly after he signed a contract for one of the most well-established professional clubs in the country.

I was struggling in training, because David Jones (pseudonym for teammate) used to always moan that the keepers weren't good enough, which is mad. So, he'd score a goal past me, and he'd be like "No, you've got to save that" and I was like "what you on about?." He used to grill me in training for like a spell of two or three weeks. He was drilling me every day in training because I wasn't saving enough of his shots. And I was like "you're a ***** Premier League England international, I can't save that" but it was rattling my head, so I went to see the psychologists and I was like Craig (pseudonym) "How do I get on top of this? like he's battering me in training. I can't save some of the shots, I know my level and I've seen his level, there's a difference." So, I had a good chat with him, and he went and spoke to the manager...The gaffer (slang for manager) pulled me in the next day, and he was like "How is everything? How are you?" I was like, "yeah, I'm alright" and he was like, "What about your chat with Craig (sports psychologist) yesterday?" So, I just kind of opened up and he really

listened. ...I just thought he listened and understood. Like for me, I walked out of that meeting thinking like I feel ***** amazing now. (James)

It is important to state that adhering to ethical guidelines and maintaining confidentiality is essential in such situations and James later stated that he had specifically requested the sports psychologist relay this information to his coach. James describes the importance of the coach providing an opportunity where he could be open and discuss his concerns. Specifically, James describes the coach's ability to listen and understand. James' account aligns with previous research findings in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024), where coaches highlighted the importance of regular one to one communication and active listening techniques that ensure the athlete feels both heard and understood. Findings from study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) also emphasise the importance of reflective listening and accurate empathy as key skills that coach education courses could support coaches to develop. Reflective listening focuses on providing attention to the individual's statements to infer underlying meaning (Miller & Rollnick, 2013) and empathetic accuracy is the capacity to accurately perceive, from moment to moment, the psychological condition of another, such as thoughts, feelings and mood, and the motivation and reasoning behind behaviours (Ickes et al., 2000). James and John describe how coaches were able to adopt gentler approaches at key moments in their careers. These approaches may be particularly important in acting as a counterbalance to performance football environments which are characterised as harsh, competitive and micropolitical (Thompson et al., 2013). Coach education should therefore support coaches to understand, not only how to enact these approaches, but also the key moments in athletes' careers, and lives more generally, where these approaches may enable them to navigate the challenges provided by these inherently intense and unforgiving environments.

Athletes also identified critical moments where coaches adopted more demanding

approaches. Athletes described how they perceived high expectations, challenge, and accountability to be desirable features of the C-P relationship within performance-based contexts.

Coaches should understand there is still a place for people to be called out if the standards are dropping. If the performance isn't good enough., if they are letting themselves down, team mates down, people. In a sport where there's so much money at the top level and there's so much pressure on everyone's jobs, people have to be held accountable for their performances, their actions. (James)

James describes how coaches need to understand how to appropriately and effectively communicate with athletes when their performance standards drop, or they fail to meet expectations. The ability for coaches to act decisively when faced with perceived complacency was also reported in an examination of the practices of some of the most successful Olympic coaches across a variety of sports (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Without addressing this reality, research risks presenting an inaccurate and sanitised depiction of the C-P relationship in performance football, which would likely fail to resonate with coaches on coach education courses. However, caution is urged, and authors should be highly selective and sensitive in their use of language. Without this, unintended consequences and 'lethal mutations' develop, deriving from the misinterpretation of theoretical ideas into practice. Performance football has a historic record of coaches engaging in aggressive interpersonal behaviours towards athletes (Cushion & Jones, 2006). These practices form part of the traditions and norms of the culture and are often based on a replication of the coach's own experiences as an athlete (Champ et al., 2021). Therefore, coach education could support coaches to understand how high-quality C-P relationships can facilitate high expectations, increased levels of challenge and accountability, but support coaches to do this in a sustainable and ethical manner.

Challenges can take many forms for athletes, some of which are within the coach's control and others that are not. Where coaches can exert some element of control over the challenges athletes experience, it is important that high expectations, challenge and accountability are provided within a healthy, consensual and high-quality C-P relationship. Athletes described how this included building a trusting relationship where athletes felt the coach had their best interests at heart, as well as offering opportunities for athletes to voice their input on the challenges they faced. John articulated how high-quality C-P relationship can help the coach increase levels of challenge in a more impactful manner due to the coach's intimate knowledge of the individual athlete which is an inherent part of high-quality C-P relationships.

He focused on the relationship between him and I and knew me. He would give me more responsibility and challenge in the youth team set up. So, I met that challenge, I matured quite quickly. I've always liked to think that I've been quite mature. He sort of guided me and gave me more responsibility, even though there were older lads in the team, so would sort of put more things on my shoulders, would encourage me to try and come out my skin a little bit more as a person. He would give me more responsibility in the team, which I needed. (John)

John describes how the relationship he had with his coach enabled him to increase the levels of responsibility incrementally and in an appropriate, and ethical manner. The importance of elevated levels of challenge in achieving high performance is well established in the literature (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2017). However, it is imperative that the extent of the challenge to which the athlete is exposed is proportionate to their abilities and the support system accessible to the athlete (Sarkar & Page, 2022). In this regard, John explains how the C-P relationship had a number of important functions. Firstly, the trust established within the C-P relationship has the potential to encourage athletes to embrace greater challenges, believing that the coach has their

best interests at heart. Also, the closeness inherent in high-quality C-P relationships may better enable the coach to appropriately pitch the level of challenge and subsequent accountability. This will be highly individualised based on a myriad of factors, such as, the athlete's age, maturity, levels of resilience, general abilities, and external life circumstance and therefore would require the coach to have a deep knowledge of the athlete, the nature of which is typically seen in high quality C-P relationships. Therefore, coach education could support coaches to explore the ways in which elevated levels of challenge are an inherent part of the C-P relationship in performance contexts and, also, the essential connection between challenge and the C-P relationship. High quality C-P relationships should not thwart high levels of challenge, rather coaches could be encouraged to reflect upon the ways in which they can, in fact, facilitate this.

6.4.4 Theme 4 The interrelated nature of relationships and culture

Athletes described the interconnectedness of relationships and culture. This was perceived as particularly important in performance football settings. When contrasted against less well funded or individual sports, football environments consist of large squads of athletes, as well as significant coaching and multidisciplinary teams. The theme exemplifies a constant balancing act in which coaches must understand how to foster a culture that meaningfully integrates athlete voice, whilst simultaneously establishing clear expectations for the values, norms, and behaviours, thereby shaping an orderly and productive environment for high quality relationships to flourish.

The importance of coaches developing a culture that enables openness between the coach and athlete through the facilitation of regular communication was deemed to have a significant influence on the quality of the C-P relationship.

I think as a player if you're getting asked to come in and asked for your opinion, I think it instantly allows you to feel free and that you can go and approach a member of the coaching team you feel closest to. Having one to one meetings to get a feel for the player, get his opinions on the place. How can we help each other? How can we help the individual? As the player you start to understand what the coaches wants from me as an individual and the group. (Seb)

Jowett et al. (2023), draws on the work of Edmondson (2019) to emphasise the importance of a "climate of voice" (p. 142) where athletes are encouraged to engage in meaningful dialogue with their coaches regarding a range of pertinent issues. Athletes described how this could include feedback related to performance in training and games, discussing contextual issues in their lives, or seeking clarification on matters such as de-selection. A culture which encourages and facilitates this dialogue was deemed as being critical to build trust within the C-P relationship. Trust is identified as an integral component within the construct of closeness in the 3C+1 model (Jowett, 2005) and correlates with high quality C-P relationships (Lee et al., 2023) whilst also positively influencing team performance (Dirks, 2000). Typically, athletes described there being individual members of the coaching team with whom they felt more connected and, therefore, more inclined to engage with. This resonates with the findings of study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) where coaches emphasised the importance of the coaching team working in unison to develop high quality C-P relationships with large squads of athletes (Newland et al., 2024). This should move researchers beyond thinking about the coach working in isolation and instead towards an understanding of how the technical coaching team can work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for developing high quality C-P relationships (chapter 5, Newland et al.,2024). This exemplifies the reductionist nature of the 3C+1 model (Jowett, 2005), which only focuses on complementarity between the coach and athlete. However, complementarity within the coaching team, to develop high quality C-P

relationships, is reported to be important within performance based football contexts where large technical coaching teams are commonplace. Coaches could be encouraged to reflect on the relational responsibilities of their individual coaching roles, and how to complement one another by sharing the relational burden. This may also raise important questions relating to the demographics, personalities, and attributes of coaches that make-up the technical coaching teams and how this best enables them to meet the relational needs of all athletes in the squad.

In study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024), coaches emphasised the importance of developing a culture that promotes athlete voice, however, athletes provided a more nuanced perspective. John describes having experienced coaches who create the illusion of encouraging athlete input, where the coach feigns collaboration with the athlete even when specific outcomes have already been predetermined by the coaches.

You lose players doing that (superficially engaging with athlete voice), at least in the dressing rooms that I've been in. When that happened, people go “what a load of rubbish” you know because it doesn't feel authentic when you do things like that it feels very much choreographed. It feels like there's an end point that the manager's trying to get you to because you know what the right answers are when people ask you those questions you know what coaches are expecting of you and especially in a time where it's a new coach. So, everyone's like oh this is a fresh chance for me to get in the team no one is going to rock the boat. (John)

In their study of the dynamics of cultural reproduction in professional football environments Cushion and Jones (2014) observe a similar phenomenon as that explained by John. They describe “perfunctory requests for player input” by the coach, with these tokenistic gestures existing within a broader culture that did not encourage player voice (p.287). Athletes identified that coaches were driven by a desire to secure "buy-in" from athletes and projected a

considerate demeanour to achieve desired outcomes, a concept well-established in the literature (Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2002). However, athletes perceived this behaviour as patronising and potentially detrimental to the C-P relationship, due to its lack of authenticity and the perceived disrespect it entails. Instead, athletes suggest that coaches should be transparent and clearly distinguish between aspects of the C-P relationship, and overall culture, that they are willing to genuinely co-construct and those that are indisputable. Athletes indicated that while they find an authentic culture of athlete voice highly beneficial for the development of high-quality C-P relationships, they also appreciate the clarity provided by coaches who delineate some specific expectations and are able to decisively make decisions, as they believed this created a sense that they 'knew where they stood' in the relationship.

It's also important...letting people know how we want to do it here and this is the way forward and these are the basic fundamentals of the group, which you can define as you said previously at the start, this is what this [culture and C-P relationship] is, who I am, and this is what it looks like. (Margaret)

Tracie, (Pseudonym first team manager) she's got enough sort of experience, and she's been successful to say I've built this here at (current club) for years. We built this from the ground up. This is proven to have worked...This is what we expect from you, this is the culture, and you come away thinking, if I was asked, I'm extremely clear. (Susan)

Seb and Susan emphasise the value of the coach establishing clarity by communicating expectations in a direct manner, thereby developing a shared understanding and appreciation of the organisational values and norms that should be embodied by individuals and serve to underpin the overall culture. Within the C-P relationship, rules have been found to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and interpersonal conflict (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015). Performance-based football environments are characterised by large squads of athletes and

extensive teams of multidisciplinary staff. These environments are highly political, characterised by diverse agendas, intense competition, and strong personalities, which combine to create an environment ripe for conflict and disagreement (Thompson et al., 2015). Seb describes how unambiguous expectations provide a framework that individuals can coalesce around potentially leading to greater coherence and unity. The challenge for coach education, therefore, is to support coaches to strike a balance where the athletes' voice is integrated in a meaningful manner, whilst also acknowledging and addressing the requirement for decisive leadership where expectations for the cultural norms are communicated effectively.

6.4.5 Theme 5: Managing conflict within a highly micropolitical environment

Athletes described conflict between coach and athletes as commonplace within performance football settings due to their highly micropolitical nature (Champ et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2015). They recognised the importance of coaches using proactive approaches to reduce the likelihood of conflict occurring, such as, maintaining regular communication and clearly defining roles and expectations. Where conflict cannot be avoided, Robyn reflected on the potentially negative influence this can have if it is not dealt with effectively.

If they're not playing (athlete), they may have lost respect for each other and then that kind of impacts the team because they're moaning then they're being negative when you don't need the negativity and then it can kind of like loom over the group and just kind of be there. They need to just sort it before it affects everything else cause like last season when I was on loan that did happen, and it did affect the team. You look at it and go that's a problem for the team that's affecting me, it's affecting the rest of us, it needs sorting. The coach needs to restore the relationship through a conversation, like that's done now, clean slate. If it's just going to keep going on and on, it's just getting bigger, and it doesn't need to be there. (Robyn)

Robyn identified the antecedent of the conflict, which related to the deselection of the athlete. Deselection is a particularly pertinent issue within performance football as coaches are regularly selecting starting line ups for matches, with substitutes generally only receiving a limited number of playing minutes. However, athletes described a variety of other potential causes of conflict within performance football settings, which related to power dynamics, performance pressures, personality clashes and tactical disagreements. Critically, Robyn describes the importance of coaches understanding how to deal with conflict in a timely and efficient manner. This resonates with previous research that outlines the potentially detrimental impact of coach and athlete conflict persisting for long periods of time (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Robyn emphasises the importance of the coach and athlete opening a dialogue as a means of finding a resolution. Previous research suggests these conversations may be most effective when conducted in private, and with the coach and athlete adopting a collaborative and dialogical approach (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). When faced with these potentially highly emotional situations, it is important the coach's behaviour and communication aligns with their philosophical beliefs, particularly relating to their axiological and ethical principles to ensure consistency and predictability in both the coach's communication and response. This requires the coach to demonstrate empathy and active listening skills (Newland et al., 2024) and to understand how to effectively and emotionally regulate their responses (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). For example, the coach may adopt a more gentle, less emotional response in order to down regulate the emotions of the athlete. In contrast, coaches may upregulate their emotional responses when they believe a passionate or energised response is appropriate to demonstrate their dissatisfaction. A key feature, perhaps not sufficiently addressed within the extant literature, is the importance of the coach understanding how to uphold standards and enforce expectations where athletes have demonstrated behaviour not aligned with agreed and established rules (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Coaches should understand how to do this in

a thoughtful manner, for example, where they explore, alongside the athlete, the underlying causes of their inappropriate behaviour. However, without addressing this, coaches risk the relationship evolving into one typified by a lack of accountability and respect, where the coach is perceived as being weak, inconsistent, and contradictory, which risks the development of a culture characterised by low standards and low expectations.

Similarly to Robyn, James describes how individual conflict between the coach and athlete has the potential to adversely influence the broader environment and culture.

You have to move on. You don't want things to fester, because if you have fallen out with the player it's mad how much like gossiping goes on and there's little cliques in changing rooms every change room in the world full of cliques. So, if you lose a player and you don't deal with something properly, it's mad how quickly things can spread like wildfire in changing rooms. So, I think it's so important that you always hear in the press that a managers lost the dressing room. Chances are, he's lost the player who's lost a clique, who's then lost the dressing room. That's how it is like. (James)

James' account supports the findings of previous research which characterises performance football environments as being highly micropolitical (Champ et al., 2021; Thomson, et al., 2015). James explains how coaches should understand the ways in which conflict with individual athletes can influence the wider culture. He describes the prevalence of cliques, or subgroups, which are deemed an inevitable feature of sports teams, where individuals are drawn towards one another through sharing similar personalities, interests, or cultural and social backgrounds (Martin et al., 2015). However, previous literature describes how coaches decipher between subgroups and cliques (Martin et al., 2016). The former being perceived as a natural coming together of athletes who feel more comfortable in each other's presence, with cliques identified as more likely to demonstrate exclusionary behaviours and oppose collective team goals and norms (Martin et al., 2016). James refers to the potentially debilitating impact

of cliques within the squads in which he has been involved. His account particularly resonates with previous literature which portrays the C-P relationship research as oversimplified and reductionist and instead positions the C-P relationship within a web of interrelated relationships that exists within these settings (Wagstaff et al., 2021). James describes a kind of ripple effect where coach-player conflict occurred with athletes who exerted high levels of influence and how this risked the coach 'losing the dressing room.' Here one is reminded of the fact that, although not always obvious, athletes always have some power in their dealings with coaches (Potrac & Jones, 2012). Athletes may resist the coach's power by withdrawing their best effort (Shogan, 1999), using derogatory nicknames for the coach (Purdy et al., 2008) or, in this case, influencing their team mates to oppose the coach. In performance football, one would postulate that the extent to which athletes can exert their power in the C-P relationship may become more pronounced in U23 or professional team environments, where athletes potentially have higher status, hold greater influence or even popularity with the fan base. The coach therefore must attempt to maintain "face" and garner the respect of athletes, in a context characterised by power dynamics and ambiguity (Jones, 2006). James described how the coach's authority and influence was undermined, leading to a loss of credibility and respect and potentially resulting in diminished athlete compliance. This, therefore, provides a highly complex and intricate challenge for coaches. Coach education should seek to support coaches to explore the complexities of conflict prevention and resolution, whilst also reflecting on the impact of this conflict on the wider culture and environment.

6.5 Strength and Limitations

The current research plays an important role in exploring the C-P relationship in the unique setting of performance-based football in England. Importantly, the research explores athlete's perceptions, which is pertinent given their voice is typically absent from coaching research (Weissensteiner, 2015; Wilsson et al., 2022) and high-performance professional

football players are typically difficult to reach. The perceptions of high-performance athletes who have played in various performance contexts in England were explored, including, senior international teams, the English Premier League, the Women's Super League, as well as performance contexts further down the English football pyramid. Importantly, an equal number of athletes from across the men's and women's game were sampled, which gave a variety of perspectives. However, the views of other multidisciplinary staff were not explored, which would undoubtedly provide an alternative outlook. It is also accepted that, given the relatively small sample size, the participants' views may not be representative of all high-performance professional footballers based in England. Whilst also recognising that the sample does not demonstrate diversity in relation to race or ethnicity and this is a limitation of the research.

6.6 Conclusion

The C-P relationship is recognised as integral to coaching effectiveness (Jowett, 2017). This has been supported by research which has demonstrated a plethora of benefits associated to the development of high quality C-P relationships, including, athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avci et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023), well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder, 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). Despite this, findings from study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) demonstrated that the C-P relationship was delivered in a superficial manner on the courses administered by the English FA's main coaching pathway. To better understand the knowledge that could be included in formal coach education curricula, it is imperative that the lived experience and voice of the athlete are foregrounded in research (Weissensteiner, 2015), particularly given athlete voice has been identified as an important vehicle to create meaningful change within sporting systems (Hartill et al., 2019). The findings provide further support for the integration of the C-P relationship into coach education curricula, with both high-performance coaches in study two (chapter 5,

Newland et al., 2024) and now athletes advocating for it to be a core component of course content.

Athletes reported that it was important for coaches to develop a capacity for introspection, which allowed them to develop a clearly defined philosophical foundation that guided their practice. Coach education could therefore support coaches to explore key themes relating to their axiology and ethical considerations inherent in their coaching practice (Cushion & Partington, 2016). Athletes described how a clear axiological and ethical foundation helps coaches maintain clarity and consistency and a sense of assuredness in their actions and decisions thereby potentially supporting the development of high-quality C-P relationships.

Athletes identified that coach education could better support coaches to understand how to adopt a more nuanced, adaptive approach which focus on listening, guiding and challenging. Coaches could explore how the multifaceted levels of interpersonal understanding inherent in high quality C-P relationships (Jowett, 2005) enabled coaches to better observe and notice changes in athlete behaviour. Additionally intimate knowledge of the athlete could enable the coach to present the athlete with appropriate levels of challenge. Athletes reported this balanced approach helped coaches to cultivate a relationship that both supported and assisted them in their pursuit of high performance.

Athletes emphasised the importance of coaches being supported to better understand how to develop a culture conducive to the development of high-quality C-P relationships. This was deemed to be critical as it influenced how coaches, athletes and other members of staff interact with each other and influences the nature of the C-P relationship (Jowett et al., 2023). This is a potentially complex undertaking given the micropolitical nature of performance-based football settings (Gibson & Groom, 2019). However, coaches could be better supported in developing a balance that enables them to adopt a culture that meaningfully integrates athlete

voice, while at the same time establishing clear expectations for the values, norms and behaviours that shape the environment and the system of relationships that exists within it.

Managing conflict within highly micropolitical performance-based football environments was also identified as significant by athletes. Athletes described the potentially erosive effects of conflict on the C-P relationship and believed coach education should support coaches to understand how to adopt pro-active strategies to reduce the likelihood of conflict occurring, these included regular and open communication and clear delineation of roles (Davis & Jowett, 2014). Where conflict was unavoidable, coaches should understand how to adopt a collaborative and dialogic approach to conflict resolution (Wachsmuth et al., 2017), but also uphold high standards and ensure accountability. They should understand how to effectively regulate their emotions and align their behaviours with their axiological and ethical belief system. Athletes believed coaches also needed to understand how coach-player conflict could influence the wider culture in these highly micropolitical environments (Champ et al., 2021; Thomson, et al., 2015) and the impact this may have on the coach's credibility and legitimacy.

Chapter 7 Discussion

This chapter initially provides a synthesis of the key findings of this thesis. The inherent challenges relating to translating theory to practice are explored, which has important implications for the presentation of the findings. The chapter then progresses to explaining how the presentation of the findings aligns with the paradigmatic position. Lastly, nine principles to better understand the key knowledge coaches require to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships in practice are presented. These principles are positioned as a platform from which to conduct future research, but also provide a starting point for coach and curriculum development.

7.1 A synthesis of the research studies and key findings

The aim of the current thesis was to explore the content relating to the C-P relationship that is integrated into formal coach education courses delivered by the English Football Association, and identify the knowledge, related to the C-P relationship, that coach developers, coaches, and athletes perceive as important for coaches in performance-based football environments in England. Study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) sought to explore how the topic of the C-P relationship was integrated within the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses within the English FA Coaching Pathway. Completion of these courses provides coaches with a gateway to full time employment in the professional game. Eleven highly experienced FA coach developers were interviewed, alongside a document analysis of seven key course documents. The findings demonstrated that content relating to the C-P relationship in these courses was introduced in an implicit and superficial manner and supported previous research that suggested the C-P relationship is underrepresented within formal coach education (Ferrar et al., 2018; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). This is despite coach developers acknowledging that a coach's ability to develop high quality C-P relationships is a differentiating feature of high-

performance coaches, which provides further support to the notion that the C-P relationship lies at the heart of coaching effectiveness (Jowett, 2017). The findings also highlighted an incongruence between the content delivered and the assessment framework for both courses, which specifically outlines the coach's competencies at building relationships with athletes.

The findings from study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) compelled reflection on an important question, if the C-P relationship is not meaningfully addressed in the course content, what knowledge do performance-based football coaches in England require to develop and maintain high quality relationships with the athletes they coach? While previous studies have detailed the characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships, such as those outlined in the 3C+1 model (Jowett, 2005), they have not necessarily focused on the knowledge coaches are required to develop. Where studies have explored maintenance strategies, they specifically focused on the nature of the communication within the C-P relationship (Jowett & Rhind, 2010). Importantly, much of this research has also focused on coaches and athletes from a variety of sports and coaching environments (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Given the adherence to the notion that the C-P relationship is both culturally and contextually situated (Wagstaff, 2020), study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) was specifically aimed at understanding the knowledge high performance football coaches in England considered essential to the development of these relationships. This would have important implications for the content that coach education courses could implement to address the topic in a more meaningful manner.

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perception of eleven football coaches, working in some of the highest profile positions in England. Coaches reported that developing a strong understanding of the C-P relationship was integral to their current role. However, supporting the findings of study one (chapter 4), coaches described how the UEFA A and B Licence courses did not address the C-P relationship in a meaningful way, highlighting

an incongruence between the importance of the C-P relationship and the extent to which it features in the main FA coaching pathway. Aligning with previous research, coaches believed coach education should support coaches to develop a progressive understanding of the C-P relationship, underpinned by high levels of interpersonal and social competence and well-developed communication skills (Davis et al., 2019). The significance of the coach's empathy and listening skills were also deemed imperative with coaches referring to the value of skills drawn from therapeutic practices such as reflective listening and accurate empathy (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Understanding the individual nature of the C-P relationship was also emphasised as being shaped by the unique needs of the athlete. The importance of developing relationships rooted in high levels of challenge was also stressed, coupled with the value of the coach's professional knowledge in order to gain credibility and respect (Potrac et al., 2002). Lastly, coaches described how coach education could support them to understand how the C-P relationship exists within a wider system of relationships (Wagstaff, 2021). This would require coaches to develop skills to build a culture conducive to high quality C-P relationships, as well as an understanding of how to communicate an overarching vision, within the operational environment, along with an ability to develop a culture of acceptance (Gibson & Groom, 2018). Coaches could also be supported to develop their understanding of how to effectively use impactful athlete leadership to encourage open communication and athlete voice (Jowett et al., 2023). Alongside this, coaches could explore and reflect on how the coaching team, with their different skills and backgrounds, could work together to meet the needs of individual athletes. The ability to effectively collaborate with the MDT to better meet the need of the athlete and facilitate higher quality C-P relationships was also deemed important.

The findings study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) provided a basis upon which to better understand the knowledge coaches require to develop high quality C-P relationship in performance settings in England. However, to develop a more comprehensive appreciation it

was essential that the athlete's perspective was explored. This was particularly pertinent given that the athlete constituted the other half of the coach-player dyad, and their voice is reported to be largely absent from coach education research (Chapman et al., 2020). Therefore, study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) explored the perceptions and observations of a variety of current, high-performance football players from both the men's and women's game. Semi-structured interviews with eight male and female professional athletes were conducted. This included athletes who currently play, or have played, at the highest levels in club football including, the English Premier League, Women's Super League, and senior England internationals. The research aims were similar to that of study two which sought to investigate athletes' perceptions relating to the extent to which the C-P relationship should feature in formal coach education courses and the knowledge they consider to be important to prepare coaches to develop high quality C-P relationships in practice.

Athletes placed a high level of importance on the C-P relationship and believed it should be an integral part of the formalised curriculum of coach education courses that aim to prepare coaches to work in performance football in England. These findings provide further evidence for the integration of the C-P relationship into coach education courses, with both high-performance coaches in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes in study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) advocating for it to be meaningfully addressed in those courses. Athletes emphasised the importance of a coach's ability for introspection, which facilitated the development of a clearly defined philosophical foundation for their coaching practice. Of particular importance was the coach's axiology and their ethical approach, with the former referring to the values they perceived to be most important to them and their practice and the latter relating to questions of morality concerning the actions and behaviours of both themselves and others (Cushion & Partington, 2016; Hardman & Jones, 2013). Athletes this foundation would enable coaches to act in both a predictable and consistent

manner, which athletes deemed as integral for the development of high-quality C-P relationships. Athletes believed that coach education should support coaches to develop their ability to use supportive, caring, and nurturing interpersonal approaches alongside ensuring high expectations, specifying elevated levels of challenge, and enforcing accountability. These findings supported the conclusions drawn from study one (chapter 4, Newland et al.,2023) and study two (chapter 5, Newland et al.,2024) which emphasised the importance of high levels of challenge in the C-P relationships, which was deemed unique to the performance-based domain. Also, in support of the findings from study two (chapter 5, Newland et al.,2024) athletes underscored the importance of coaches developing an overall culture to advance the development of high-quality C-P relationships. This required the coach to understand how to expertly balance the development of a culture which appropriately and meaningfully integrated the athlete voice (Jowett et al., 2023). alongside asserting clear expectations for the values, norms and behaviours that would underpin the overall culture and the web of relationships within it. Athletes also recognised the importance of coach education supporting coaches to manage conflict in an effective manner. This included adopting dialogic approaches (Wachsmuth et al., 2018), using emotional regulation (Wachsmuth et al., 2017) and adhering to their values and beliefs system. Coaches could also be supported to explore the impact of conflict on the micropolitical (Potrac & Jones, 2009) nature of these settings and the ways in which this could influence the overall culture.

Our findings provide a strong body of evidence for the meaningful inclusion of the C-P relationship in the formalised course curriculum of coaching courses that aim to best prepare football coaches to work in the performance-based domain in England (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023; chapter 5, Newland et al.,2024). The findings also provide a basis upon which to better understand the knowledge coaches require to develop this aspect of their practice, which has important implications for the content that comprises formalised coach education curricula.

7.2 Bridging the theory to practice divide

The integration of academic research into coach education is a longstanding challenge, with several studies highlighting that sports coaching research is not being meaningfully used by practitioners or incorporated into coach education courses (Bush et al., 2013; Cushion and Lyle, 2010; Lyle, 2018). Despite the overwhelming evidence that has established a myriad of positive benefits associated with the development of high-quality C-P relationships, including athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avcı et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023), well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder, 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023), it was found in study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) that the topic is not addressed in a meaningful manner in the main FA coaching pathway. Therefore, the findings add to the existing literature which demonstrates a significant gap between sports coaching related academic research and its utilisation in practice (Bush et al., 2013; Cushion and Lyle, 2010; Lyle, 2018).

Given that the intention of the current thesis is to appropriately influence the nature and content of formal coach education, it is important to consider the contemporary challenges within sport coaching in relation to transferring theory to practice. Lyle (2018) describes how research outputs are often characterised as lacking immediate relevance or transferability to the reality of coaches' practice. However, the findings of the current thesis demonstrate that coaches and athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) perceive the C-P relationship as central to coaching effectiveness within performance football settings. These findings are supported by accounts from the highest profile and successful coaches in both youth development and first team environments who have espoused the value and merits of developing high quality C-P relationships and have positioned a relational approach to coaching as central to their practice. Examples include Jurgen Pea the former Head Coach of

the men's first team at Liverpool FC (Markham, 2020) and Sarina Wiegman the current England Women's Head Coach (Medlicott, 2022). This provides a strong body of evidence, drawn from both research and practice, to conclude that the C-P relationship does have an obvious and immediate relevance to the realities of coaches' practice. This strengthens previous calls for the C-P relationship to be meaningfully integrated into the formalised coach education curricula (Evans, 2015; Ferrar et al., 2018; Turnnidge and Côté, 2017), particularly where NGBs seek to adopt an evidence-based approach to the development of coaches.

Lyle, (2018) also proposes that sports coaching research adopts a "more realistic appreciation of the particularity of role, domain and context" (p.420). Previous research pertaining to the C-P relationship has been conducted with coaches and athletes from a range of sports and in variety of coaching contexts (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). The current thesis seeks to specifically address this, particularly given the adherence to the notion that the C-P relationship is shaped and influenced by the unique environment in which it exists (Wagstaff, 2021). The current research is highly contextualised, being specifically rooted in the performance domain, within a single sport and in a specific nation. Consequently, progressing beyond the broad conceptual models (Jowett, 2005) that have been developed to characterise this phenomenon within a variety of sporting contexts and sports to one that is locally situated. The hope is this will intensify the significance of the findings of the current theses with coaches and coach educators, who can be re-assured by the cultural specificity of the research and can meaningfully use the findings when operating in similar contexts.

Lastly, it is also important to look to other professions for inspiration by which to better understand how to effectively influence practice through academic research. Therefore, teaching is proposed as an appropriate profession by which to do this, with education often acting as a donor discipline for coaching research and literature (Jones, 2006). There are also many similarities between the education of teachers and sports coaches with initial teacher

education using a model which combines theoretical teaching alongside ‘hands on’ practical experience in school settings, which is similar to the nature of more advanced formal coach education courses, such as those delivered by the English FA. Harris et al. (2013) bemoans a similar problem faced in education, where high quality research does not sufficiently influence practice and is effectively “lost in translation”. They diagnose the problem as researchers’ inability to make findings accessible to practitioners. Harriss et al., (2013) notes that “distilling complex research findings into more digestible forms and repeating the message is a more effective way of influencing policy and practice than constant talk of complexity” (p. 15). This may be contrary to many of the calls within sports coaching literature which encourages researchers to embrace and further emphasise the inherent complexity of coaching practice (Cushion et al., 2006; Jones & Wallace, 2005). We also recognise that research is done with a variety of end points and audiences in mind. However, given the practical nature of the current thesis we believe that complexity and nuance can, and should, be communicated in a manner that is accessible to practitioners.

For inspiration, we look to the research that has arguably been most successful in shaping the pedagogical practices of teachers and schools in England over the last decade, particularly the work of Barak Rosenshine, who proposed 10 principles to guide the instructional practices of teachers. That is, not to necessarily advocate for the content of Rosenshine’s work, nor to ignore the political and ideological basis upon which this research has been advanced in schools across England, but rather to explore why it has seemingly been so readily adopted by practitioners (Sherrington, 2020). In this regard, we highlight several important implications for the presentation of the findings of the current thesis. Rosenshine’s research is based upon a well-developed field of cognitive science and the study of ‘master teachers’, defined as those whose pupils made the highest achievement gains on tests (Rosenshine, 2012). This provides practitioners with a sense of trustworthiness in the findings

and therefore presents teachers with an entirely recognisable set of ideas (Sherrington, 2020). Similarly, the current thesis is based on a well-established area of research, namely the C-P relationship, and the thesis findings are derived from the practice of highly effective coaches (chapter 5) and the everyday experiences of athletes (chapter 6). Therefore, the key findings should not necessarily be new for performance coaches or coach educators. In fact, similarly to the principles proposed by Rosenshine, we would argue that highly effective practitioners may be doing many of the things we propose on a daily basis. Instead, we hope to somewhat demystify an important facet of coaching practice and potentially enable coach educators in performance football to approach this topic in a meaningful, coherent, and evidenced based manner and support coaches to adopt these approaches with greater fluency, intensity, regularity and confidence.

We are also influenced by how Rosenshine uses a series of principles which are proposed in a simplistic and accessible manner (Rosenshine, 2012). He resists the use of complex academic language, so commonly used, which often prohibits coaches from engaging in academic research (Farrow, 2013). That is, not to adopt an anti-intellectual stance, too often observed in the coaching profession (Taylor & Garratt, 2010), but rather to capture a set of comprehensive, complex, and nuanced principles in a clear and understandable manner. However, we also accept the principles are based on the perceptions of a relatively small number of coach developers, coaches, and athletes. Consequently, they are put forward with the view that further research is necessary, post completion of this thesis, to both upscale sample sizes and to further scrutinise and refine the principles to improve the rigour, reliability and validity of the research findings thus enabling practitioners to engage with confidence and conviction.

7.3 Aligning the presentation of the findings with the paradigmatic position.

The current thesis is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm. Given interpretivism's assumptions relating to the nuanced and context dependent nature of knowledge (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020), presenting the findings of the current thesis in a set of principles may seem incongruent with this paradigmatic position. Therefore, prior to detailing and exploring the nature of these principles, it is important to clarify how they align with the paradigmatic position of the current thesis.

Interpretivism focuses on the ability of the individual to construct meaning about the world around them (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It is, therefore, important to appreciate that the principles set out in the current thesis are the subjective experiences of coach developers, coaches, and athletes alike. Qualitative methods were used to ensure rich and contextualised accounts were provided, when participants described, in detail, their understanding and experiences of the C-P relationship. We, therefore, sought to demystify the C-P relationships through the eyes of these different participants. Given interpretivism emphasises the importance of culture and context in the process of knowledge construction (Derry, 1999) it is also important to note that the current thesis, and therefore the principles produced, are culturally situated and highly contextualised within the performance domain of English football. Therefore, these principles are contextually grounded insights rather than universal truths or prescriptive rules. They seek to provide an important starting point and highlight important areas for future research; however, they will continue to evolve based on the findings of subsequent research and the fluid social and political landscape upon which the C-P relationships exist. They are also written to be broad enough to enable coaches to adapt the principles to their own unique sub-context. For example, it is essential that the nature of the C-P relationship varies according to the age of the athletes and the nature of the environment e.g. youth development or first team setting. Therefore, they are not intended to be a 'playbook' for coaches, or to encourage a 'paint by numbers' approach. Neither are they intended to be a

prescriptive checklist by which to assess coaches for certification on coach education courses. Rather we have proposed a set of principles, which are designed to guide future research to understand and develop these initial principles more fully. Subsequently, they are intended to be interpreted by coaches and coach educators and employed appropriately in accordance with their own unique situation. In this regard, we position these principles as broadly applicable and locally adaptable, in line with the paradigmatic position of the current thesis. Ultimately, they seek to provide a platform for understanding what really matters and what coaches need to know about the C-P relationship and provide a framework for curriculum development in formal coach education.

7.4 Principles for the development and maintenance of high-quality C-P relationships

In this section we will present each of the nine coaching principles for the development of high-quality C-P relationships in performance football in England (Table 7). For each principle we will explore the findings of the three studies that comprise the current thesis alongside existing literature. It is important at this juncture to be clear about the purpose of these principles. These are first principles which provide a set of foundational evidence-based ideas relating to effective coaching practice to develop high quality C-P relationships in performance-based football settings. In terms of purpose, firstly they provide an important guiding framework for future research. Each of the nine principles requires further exploration, refinement and validation via high quality research, the nature of which is set out in chapter 8.4. The principles have the potential to provide an evidence-based framework for curriculum development within formal coach education in order to support coaches to develop their knowledge and understanding of the C-P relationship. It is, therefore, important that these principles are written in a manner that is perceived, by practitioners, as actionable to best influence coaching practice. These principles could also provide an important tool for coach reflection, enabling coaches to reflect on their experiences of the C-P relationship in a purposeful and targeted manner through

a set evidence-based principles. They could also become an important basis for coach developer feedback, relating to the C-P relationship, during in-situ visits, where authentic coaching episodes can be explored (Newland et al., 2023). More broadly, they could be utilised by clubs or NGBs as a set of guiding principles to influence coaching philosophies, culture statements or organisational policy.

The principles were developed through a review of the data from the three studies that comprise this thesis. For each study, a reflexive thematic analysis was conducted, through which key themes were developed from the data. The common themes that emerged across all three studies were then used to formulate the nine principles. These principles require further development, for example, through a Delphi study, to refine and develop them. At this stage, however, they represent the key themes from our three studies that were perceived to be important in relation to the knowledge coaches need to develop high-quality coach-athlete relationships within this context.

Table 7. Principles for the development and maintenance of high-quality C-P relationship

Principle	Applicability of principle for coaches
<p>Clear personal values and beliefs that anchor consistent behaviours, enabling coaches to maintain relationships despite the rigours of performance football.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and clearly communicate core values to staff and players. • Use values to guide decisions, particularly in high pressure situations. • Model values consistently through behaviours E.g. after poor results. • Maintain predictable and fair interactions across the whole squad. E.g. sanctions and discipline. • Recognise and reflect on environmental pressures that challenge adherence to values. E.g. performance pressures.
<p>Communicate clear expectations across large squads to enhance role clarity and co-construct expectations where appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct squad meetings at key points – e.g., pre-season or where expectations weren't met. State/re-state expectations for training, behaviour, roles, and professionalism. • Individual communication – clarify each player's role and answer questions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-create by involving players in aspects genuinely open to input. E.g. changing room conduct, or match-day routines.
<p>Maintain open and consistent individualised dialogue with players, particularly during periods of challenge such as loss of form or deselection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe changes in players' demeanour to identify emerging needs/challenges e.g. during gymnasium sessions, team mealtimes, when other coaches are leading sessions. • Conduct individual meetings following drops in performance, deselection, or other challenging periods to provide clarity, support and guidance. • Utilise objective evidence (e.g. video, performance data, feedback) to justify selection decisions and enhance player understanding. • During individual meetings use reflective listening and accurate empathy to demonstrate understanding, empathy and develop trust.
<p>Understand and be responsive to players' broader life context, providing support to help them navigate the demands of performance football.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the athlete holistically. E.g. culture, family, education, support networks, and mental health. • Encourage players to share concerns and challenges in their broader life context. • Understand that the extent to which individual players may want the coach to know about their broader life context may differ. • Notice changes in mood, behaviour, or demeanour as potential signs of personal difficulties. • Use a dialogic approach with the player to modify the approach when athletes face personal stress or life challenges e.g. reduced demand in training. • Collaborate with MDT, where appropriate, to share relevant information about player's broader life context.
<p>Identify and meet player needs by balancing the coach's professional perceptions with the players' voiced needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop mechanisms for athletes to express their voice e.g. through one-to-one communication, leadership groups etc. • Engage in dialogue by actively listening to the player's perspective e.g. a player may feel an injury developing and ask to miss training to see the physiotherapist. • Where appropriate, the coach should adopt a dominant role to meet needs that the athlete may not recognise themselves e.g. deselection to enable a period of reduced pressure. • When decisions are guided by the coach's professional knowledge, communicate the rationale behind the decision by explaining the choices to the athlete.

<p>Ensure the relationship is rooted in high challenge and accountability, while ensuring an individualised, sustainable, and ethical approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a dialogic approach to understand the long-term aspirations of the player. • Provide honest, constructive feedback. E.g. giving direct guidance on technical or positional mistakes during match analysis. • Dialogically develop individual learning plans that are aspirational and challenging. • Ensure accountability. E.g. addressing reductions in effort through deselection, whilst also explaining these decisions. • Support athletes through challenges that are more difficult to control, such as injury or personal issues, by adjusting training or communicating encouragement and support. • Ensure challenge is sustainable and ethical by reflecting on the player’s abilities, age, maturity, resilience, and life circumstances. e.g. tailoring session intensity for a player returning from injury • Develop a deep understanding of the athlete so challenge can be pitched appropriately. E.g. recognising positive developments in personality/leadership skills and increasing challenge by offering a captaincy or leadership role
<p>Use professional knowledge to establish credibility and connection in a highly demanding environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop high levels of technical and tactical knowledge. • Be aware that perceived gaps in professional knowledge may undermine relational credibility with athletes. • Possess sufficient professional knowledge to respond confidently and coherently to challenging athlete questions. • Demonstrate professional knowledge through high-quality practice. E.g. through effective session design, tactical planning, and the provision of purposeful feedback. • Engage in ongoing professional learning that develops and updates their professional knowledge in line with evolving technical and tactical trends. • Invest in individual performance analysis and practical coaching sessions with players as an opportunity to demonstrate value in the achievement of their goals.
<p>Understand the impact of culture on the C-P relationship within performance football settings and influence it to cultivate high-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how socio-cultural factors influence the C-P relationship. E.g. power (the coach has the power to deselect) and micropolitics (players influence others to withdraw efforts due to relational breakdown with the coach)

<p>quality C-P relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate a ‘climate of voice’. E.g. use athlete leadership to facilitate communication between players and coaching staff. • Balance a ‘climate of voice’ with clear, coach led expectations and boundaries. • Distribute relational responsibilities across technical coach teams. E.g. build coaching teams that can meet the relational needs of large squads of players. • Collaborate with MDT incorporating their unique insights to inform athlete-specific strategies and decisions. E.g. physiotherapists may offer perspectives on the player’s emotional state during injury.
<p>Engage in constructive conflict resolution approaches in a relationally complex and highly micropolitical environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive strategies are essential to minimise conflict. E.g. agreeing expectations and maintaining regular communication. • Early intervention is critical. Monitor players’ behaviour for signs of emerging issues and engage in dialogue promptly to address potential conflicts before they escalate. • Discussions with players should focus on behaviours or incidents rather than personal attributes and should be conducted privately. • During conflict the coach’s behaviour should be aligned with their values. This may involve significant emotional regulation, which supports measured and effective intervention. • Engagement with athlete leaders and the MDT can provide insight into potential issues, facilitating timely and informed interventions. • Act decisively when athletes breach agreed expectations or rules. Avoiding conflict can undermine authority and erode respect. • Awareness of squad dynamics, including cliques and informal power structures, is essential. Conflict involving influential athletes requires particular attention to prevent negative impacts on other C-P relationships. • Recognise when terminating a relationship is in the best interests of both parties to preserve professional integrity and squad environment.

7.4.1 Clear personal values and beliefs that anchor consistent behaviours, enabling coaches to maintain relationships despite the rigours of performance football.

The importance of coaches developing a clearly established set of values and beliefs was particularly emphasised in the study of coach developers (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Performance football is characterised by large squads of athletes and the development of clear values and beliefs appeared particularly important in relation to how it shaped the consistency and predictability of the coach's behaviours and interactions with the vast number of individual athletes that make-up the squad. Participants reported that these values appeared to provide a critical foundation which shaped the coach's decision making, behaviours and interactions with athletes, and served as an 'anchor' providing a sense of purpose and direction for the coach (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). This subsequently influenced the nature of the C-P relationship by enabling coaches to communicate and interact with athletes in an authentic, consistent, and predictable manner (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review).

To better understand the role of values on the C-P relationship, we can draw on research focusing on values-based leadership approaches. Although it is important to recognise that the C-P relationship is a separate entity to that of coach leadership (Jowett, 2005), the nature of coach leadership undoubtedly influences the quality and characteristics of the C-P relationship (Jowett, 2017). Although a somewhat disputed term, values-based leaders are characterised as leaders with an underlying moral and ethical foundation (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Leadership models which adopt values-based approaches include that of authentic leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership and transformational leadership (Crossan et al., 2023). Although all unique, these approaches emphasise the importance of leader's self-awareness (Brown & Trevino, 2006), empathetic and fair behaviours (Constandt, et al., 2018), the leader's moral character (Hammermeister et al., 2008) and their ability to appeal to the moral values of those

they lead (Burns, 1978). Values based leadership approaches have been explored within the context of sports coaching (Crossan et al., 2023) and findings have important implications for the nature of the C-P relationship, including developing increased levels of trust and athlete motivation (Bandura & Kavussano, 2018), alongside fostering elevated level of athlete satisfaction, and respect within the C-P relationship (Hammermeister et al., 2008; Kao & Tsai, 2016). Given the gap in the current literature, we would encourage future research to specifically focus on the role and influence of values in the context of the C-P relationship. However, despite this, both the research findings of the current thesis and the existing literature on values-based leadership in sports coaching (Crossan et al., 2023) provides a strong evidence base which illuminates the importance of values-based approaches to leadership and relationships in sports coaching, and one that could be further explored with coaches through formal coach education.

Findings of study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) emphasised the importance of coaches' capacity for introspection which appeared to enable them to develop a strong understanding of self and, subsequently, the values and beliefs that would shape their practice. These findings are supported by previous research which identified self-awareness as a key attribute of serial winning coaches (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Within the context of performance-based football settings, it enabled the coach to develop a sense of competency, assuredness and confidence in the eyes of the athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review), which is particularly important in an environment that is characterised as ruthless and where power plays a significant role (Champ et al., 2021). This also supports the findings of previous research which has emphasised the importance of coaches' impression management and the presentations of the self to maintain the respect of the athletes (Jones, 2006). This notion is also captured in the 3C+1 model (Jowett, 2005), within the construct of complementarity which emphasises the importance of perceptions of competence within the C-P relationship. However,

the current research seeks to move beyond characteristics and instead focus on how coaches' knowledge and skills, relating to the C-P relationship, can be developed. In this regard, formal coach education could support coaches to develop a considered and comprehensive understanding of their own philosophical position. This moves beyond coaching philosophies which simply focus on game models and technical and tactical nuances of the sport (Partington & Cushion, 2024). In the context of the C-P relationship, matters of axiology and ethics are particularly relevant (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). This may be particularly pronounced within performance football contexts where we would propose that factors such as performance pressures (Lindgren & Barker-Ruchti, 2017), financial incentives and job insecurity (Morton, 2014) may make adhering to one's own ethical beliefs particularly challenging. Coaches could initially explore what role the C-P relationship plays in their coaching methodology. Coaches could be supported to explore their own values and beliefs and how they could shape the nature of the C-P relationship that the coach seeks to pursue and how these values could be enacted within the relationship. An exploration of ethics could provide a stronger framework and basis by which to make decisions within the C-P relationship. For example, managing player welfare against the pressure to win, an ethical dilemma which is particularly pertinent in the context of high-performance football domain in England (Dowling et al., 2018). Coaches could also be supported to explore their epistemological beliefs and reflect on how this would influence the nature of the C-P relationship, particularly relating to pertinent issues, for example, such as how they perceive knowledge is best transmitted between both members of the dyad or the role of athlete autonomy in the learning process.

7.4.2 Communicate clear expectations across large squads to enhance role clarity and co-construct expectations where appropriate.

The importance of the coach communicating clear expectations for the C-P relationship was particularly prevalent within studies which focused on the perspectives of high-performance coaches in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes in study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Coaches emphasised this process of communicating distinct expectations helped to develop role clarity for coaches and athletes, which increased transparency and accountability, both deemed as critical for the development of high-quality C-P relationships (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Within the COMPASS model, these approaches are referred to as proactive strategies, which seek to reduce the likelihood of dysfunctional conflict occurring within the relationship. (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). For athletes, this approach developed a sense that they 'knew where they stood' in the relationship which was contrasted against the toxicity of C-P relationships where the expectations and boundaries appeared to be constantly changing (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). The importance of the development of role clarity is exemplified in the construct of complementarity within the 3C+1 model which emphasises the reciprocal interpersonal behaviours that coaches and athletes are expected to demonstrate towards one another (Jowett, 2005). The C-P relationship is most likely to flourish when both members of the dyad know and understand the rules that have been agreed (Jowett, 2008; Jowett, 2009). The findings demonstrate that athletes appreciated clarity of expectations as long as they were deemed as fair and ethical, which may, once again, emphasise the importance of the coach reflecting on clear and appropriate values which both members of the dyad can coalesce around. For formal coach education, this could mean supporting coaches to explore their own expectations for the C-P relationship, and how best to communicate them. These expectations would be linked to the context upon which the coach is working and the age of the athletes, but could relate to key aspects such as training, performance, professionalism, personal conduct, and team dynamics.

Our findings demonstrate that the development of clear expectations for the C-P relationship was crucial, however, deciding the role the athlete could play in this process was more complex. As already outlined, the communication of clear expectations helps to develop role clarity for coaches and athletes as reported in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Typically, this involves the athlete adopting a more submissive role and the coach, a more dominant one (Yang & Jowett, 2013). Importantly, this should not be conflated with the notion of controlling coaching behaviours, which can have a negative influence on the quality of the C-P relationship (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Instead, the coach communicating expectations decisively and clearly should be perceived as a desirable behaviour which promotes structure and organisation (Jowett & Carpenter, 2004). This is particularly important within the context of performance-based football, where coaches are expected to develop high quality relationships with large squads of athletes, each of whom will have their own personal agenda, perspectives, and personality (Potrac & Jones, 2009). This requires the coach to lead with confidence, decisiveness, and authority to foster respect from athletes (Jones, 2006). Therefore, we should be honest about the asymmetrical nature of C-P relationships within performance-based football contexts. However, if coaches are to fulfil the basic psychological needs of athletes and operate in an ethical manner, particularly relating to autonomy and athlete voice, athletes should play some role in co-constructing these expectations for the relationship (Wachsmuth, et al., 2017). This then requires a complex and nuanced approach where the coach should balance the athletes need for autonomy whilst also meeting their needs for structure and guidance. Importantly, athletes reported that when coaches adopt approaches where they engage in a kind of faux co-construction of expectations, where pre-determined outcomes have already been decided by the coach, this can be damaging for the C-P relationship and may be deemed as inauthentic and insulting (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Therefore, coaches should be open and honest about the areas of expectations they are genuinely willing

to co-construct and should encourage athletes to communicate their perceptions openly and respectfully too. For coach education, this could mean working with coaches to decide what ‘appropriate’ co-construction of expectation looks like within their context and with the athletes they are working with. Coach education should encourage coaches to think about how they balance clear communication of expectations with the athlete’s basic psychological need for autonomy and a voice within this process. This provides a complex and ethical quandary for coach education to support coaches to explore.

7.4.3 Maintain open and consistent individualised dialogue with players, particularly during periods of challenge such as loss of form or deselection.

The importance of effective communication for the development of high-quality C-P relationships was emphasised by coach developers (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023), coaches (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). This adds to evidence from existing literature, with Gilbert (2017) positioning communication as “the most effective strategy for building and sustaining quality C-P relationships” (P.78) and Davis et al. (2019) describing communication as the ‘fuel’ for high quality C-P relationships.

The notion of openness is captured within the COMPASS model, which focuses on communication strategies to maintain high quality C- A relationships (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Within this theoretical model openness refers to the mutual understanding that the coach and athlete are willing and able to talk to each other about relevant issues (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). In this regard, performance football may have some unique challenges, compared to, for example, individual sports where lines of communication may be much simpler between athlete and coach. In performance football settings coaches must manage effective lines of communication with large squads of athletes which becomes a complex endeavour when one considers the micropolitical nature of these environments and the various personalities,

agendas and perspectives that may exist (Jones & Potrac, 2009). It requires the coach to establish expectations and norms that encourage athletes to share their thoughts and feelings in an honest but respectful manner (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This may be formalised through the use of leadership groups, or regular coach-player meetings. However, coaches also reported the importance of informal and responsive communication (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This was often based on the coach's well-developed observational skills (chapter, 5 Newland et al., 2024). The findings support that of Jones et al. (2013) who positions noticing as the basis of coaching action. Relational coaches understood a key tenet of their role was to notice the sometimes-subtle changes in the demeanour, mood or emotions exhibited by athletes (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Coaches were therefore better able to be attentive to the needs of athletes and initiate timely conversations which helped to build trust (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). For formal coach education this could mean supporting coaches to explore how they use formal and informal means to develop consistent and open dialogue with athletes, which serves as the catalyst for high quality C-P relationships to be developed and maintained.

The consistency of communication between coaches and athletes was of particular importance to the C-P relationship (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This was especially influential during times where athletes may have experienced a drop in performance or had been deselected (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Deselection is a pertinent issue in performance football settings and is often a pre-cursor to conflict (Slade et al., 2024). Football can be contrasted to other sports where these decisions are made by a selection board or governing bodies or where coaches rotate athletes regularly within the game and therefore deselection naturally is less definitive or permanent. Athletes described how communication often waned at key moments where they perceived it was needed most, particularly when they had experienced a loss of form or deselection (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review).

Interestingly, coaches also recognised these moments as critical and described how it was important to utilise their intrapersonal skills to reflect and empathise on the challenging nature of these experiences for athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Alongside this emotional support, they identified the ability of the coach to use objective data, supported by video footage and individualised feedback, which clearly articulated the rationale behind the coaching team's decisions. This was perceived as critical to preserve the C-P relationship during these potentially challenging moments (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024).

Lastly, coaches described the importance of communication strategies which derived from counselling and therapeutic practices. The importance of reflective listening and accurate empathy was emphasised (Miller & Rollnick, 2013) which focused on providing sharp attention to the individual's statements to infer underlying meaning and to understand the individual's experiences and needs (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Athletes also stressed the importance of the listening skills of the coach which helped them feel both heard and understood, which was particularly important when they were going through challenging periods both on and off the pitch (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). These approaches appeared to support the development of high-quality C-P relationship by building a sense of care and trust that may operate as an important counterpoint to an overall context previously characterised as masculine and cut-throat (Champ et al., 2021; Potrac et al., 2012). It enabled the coach to more effectively understand and meet the needs of the athlete, which is deemed to be a core component of caring C-P relationships (Cronin et al., 2020). These skills could be explored and through formal coach education, to support the effective development of the interpersonal communication skills of coaches.

7.4.4 Understand and be responsive to players' broader life context, providing support to help them navigate the demands of performance football.

In study two (chapter 5, Newland et al. 2024) and study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) both coaches and athletes emphasised the importance of the coach developing an understanding of the athlete's broader life context. Coaches believed this enabled them to both recognise and be responsive to the evolving needs of the athlete, which was deemed imperative for the development of a high-quality relationship. These findings were supported by previous research by Becker (2009) who explored athletes' experiences of "great coaching" across a variety of sports in Division 1 NCAA programmes. Athletes described how they "could talk to their coach about anything whether it was related to their sport or private lives" (p.103). Similarly, Knust and Fischer (2015) explored the caring coaching practices of a variety of coaches from an assortment of sports within the Division 1 NCAA programmes and described the holistic care that coaches provided for athletes, which was shaped by their concern for the "person" before that of the "athlete". This requires the coach to take an active and authentic interest by listening and understanding not just to issues related to sport but also to the athlete's life more generally. This is an approach that has also been found to be beneficial when applied in performance-based football environments. Lindgren and Barker-Ruchti, (2017) explored the approaches of Swedish national football team coaches, specifically focusing on how they balanced caring coaching practices with the organisational pressure to win medals. They found coaches adopted a more individualised approach to understanding their athletes as 'humans,' with their coaching behaviours heavily influenced by their moral principles relating to how they believed young athletes should be treated and cared for. Overall, previous research, alongside the findings of the current thesis, provide a strong basis upon which to position the holistic understanding of the athlete as a key tenet in the development of high-quality C-P relationships. Coaches may need to understand and be responsive to a myriad of contextual and biographical factors that influence the athlete's broader life such as their nationality, religion, culture, family

dynamics, schooling and education, support network and mental health challenges. This may be particularly challenging in English professional first team football environments where individuals from a variety of different cultures, nationalities and religions are typically represented. Although not a key theme that emerged within the current thesis, coaches may also reflect on the extent to which they wish to share details of their own personal lives with athletes and how this may influence the C-P relationship. This is a complex and multifaceted challenge for coaches and one that formal coach education courses could support coaches to explore and understand further.

In the study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) athletes described specific examples where coaches had been responsive and supported them with challenges that arose in their private lives. One participant reflected on a critical period in the formative years of their career when they were playing in the youth team of a professional club. Their father had been arrested, and the athlete described the significant internal turmoil they experienced. However, due to the nature of the relationship they had developed with their coach, the coach was able to provide them with the appropriate support to help them navigate these challenges (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). The responsiveness of the coach may take a variety of guises. Coaches could demonstrate responsiveness by simply being attuned and adapting to the athlete's cultural, religious or national values and practices. Alternatively, when athletes are experiencing specific challenges, coaches could respond by being observant and noticing changes in responsiveness in their mood, behaviours or demeanour (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). They could adopt a more proactive approach by engaging in open and regular communication, demonstrating empathy and utilising active listening skills to empower the athlete to communicate their needs during particularly challenging periods (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Responsiveness may also include the coach varying the demands they place on the athlete at a time when they are experiencing high levels of stress in their broader lives. This

provides a significant and complex challenge for coaches, in relation to how they implement responsiveness when potentially facing personal and sensitive issues that the athlete might be experiencing in their private life.

However, this encroachment into the lives of athletes also provides further significant challenges for coaches within the performance-based footballing context where coaches will be working alongside large squads of athletes, with transfers, loans and the releasing of players making these environments potentially highly transient (Nesti et al., 2012). Therefore, the notion that one coach is able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the broader life context of all the athletes within the squad is both impractical and unreasonable (Cronin & Armour, 2017). Particularly when coaching has been positioned as a pursuit rooted in emotional labour and often associated with psychological distress and burnout for the coach (Potrac et al., 2017). This may partly explain why athletes' experiences of care, within these environments, does not always appear authentic and can become highly superficial (Lewis et al., 2023). Quite simply, overstretched, and overworked coaches may not have the bandwidth or capacity to work alongside athletes in this way even if they aspire to do so. Therefore, coach education could support coaches to explore how they can support both the person and the performer by adopting a holistic approach in a sustainable manner. The current research suggests there should be a shift in accountability, where the burden does not simply rely on the coach but where an inclusive culture of care is introduced, enabling all practitioners to be responsible for the well-being of athletes (Cronin et al., 2018). The coach could empower the extended coaching staff and MDT teams, typical of performance-based football environments, to develop their own relationships with athletes, which could include a comprehensive understanding of the athlete's broader life context. Regular communication between coaches could help them work alongside the athlete in an informed manner, better enabling them to understand their needs and thereby potentially strengthening the C-P relationship.

7.4.5 Identify and meet player needs by balancing the coach's professional perceptions with the players' voiced needs

In the study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) one of the key themes related to how coaches effectively identified the needs of the athlete. Coaches recognised that using their own judgement, which was informed by their significant levels of coaching experience and knowledge, was of critical importance. However, they also described the importance of being acutely aware of the needs conveyed by the athletes, appreciating how this might significantly influence their thinking and practice (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This resonated with the work of Noddings (2005) who positions the fulfilment of needs as the basis of a caring relationship in educational contexts. Despite this research deriving from education, Cronin et al. (2020) notes how Noddings' work has many parallels with the extant coaching literature. As already outlined, an integral component of Noddings' (2005) care theory is the delineation of inferred and expressed needs. There is a dearth of research that focuses on understanding the C-P relationship through the lens of inferred and expressed needs and we would encourage researchers to explore this notion further. However, we propose that this framework may provide a promising starting point to enable coach education to support coaches to explore how the needs of athletes are fulfilled, through inferred and expressed means, within the context of a high-quality C-P relationship. Importantly, we have utilised alternative expressions to that used by Noddings (2005). Instead, of "inferred" and "expressed" the terms "perceived" and "voiced" needs are used. Given the inherent challenges relating to the theory to practice divide, we have sought to use vernacular language that we hope will resonate and be perceived as accessible for coaches. As Noddings (2005) rightly emphasises, not all expressed needs are literally "voiced" by the athlete, and they may be demonstrated by words or behaviours. Therefore, we use this term in its broadest sense to mean opinions, attitudes or behaviours expressed by the athlete. The notion of "athlete voice" is already well established within the

academic literature (Weissenstiner, 2015) and in coaching practice and therefore we deemed it an appropriate term for the aims of this thesis.

The notion that the C-P relationship, and coaching practices more generally, can be shaped by the athlete voice is a seductive one. Here we can draw on the psychologically informed coaching literature which refers to the concept of autonomy supportive coaching behaviours (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). There are a variety of different facets that comprise this concept, but one of the key tenets is that the coach acknowledges and provides opportunities to explore athlete's feelings and perspectives (Carrol & Allen, 2021) which links closely to Noddings (2005) notion of "expressed needs". These autonomy supportive behaviours have been found to augment psychological needs satisfaction (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009), autonomous motivation (Almagro, 2010) and enhanced performance (Gillet et al., 2010). However, within the context of performance-based football, coaches should also explore the inherent challenges when the C-P relationship, and the coach's decisions and behaviours more generally, are driven by the voiced needs of the athlete. For example, within study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) coaches described how athletes may misdiagnose their own needs, particularly younger athletes who do not have significant amounts of experience to draw upon. Or perhaps the athlete might be motivated by self-interest and the needs they express may be contrary to the needs of the wider team or squad (Collins et al., 2013; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Coaches may also become bogged down in the process of exploring the multiplicity of expressions of needs within a large squad of athletes which could potentially result in a loss of focus, direction and clarity for the team and a subsequent erosion of the quality of the C-P relationship (Collins et al., 2013). Here performance-based football contexts are somewhat unique and compared with individual sports where the process of incorporating the voiced needs of one athlete may be a much simpler and more efficient process or compared with participation domains where the coach is under

significantly less pressure for performance success and the consequences for misguided decisions are less stark.

Therefore, we argue that within the context of performance-based football, coaches need to carefully and skilfully balance both the perceived and voiced needs of athletes. At times, this will necessitate the coach adopting a more dominant role and making decisions on behalf of the athletes. This should not be conflated with the notion of controlling coaching behaviours (Wachsmuth et al., 2017), simply put, within these contexts coaches are required to act decisively and utilise their high levels of experience and knowledge to meet the needs of athletes in a timely, efficient and effective manner (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). An example may be a coach's decision to de-select an athlete from the starting line-up as they believe the athlete may benefit from a period of reflection away from the pressure and scrutiny associated with match-day performance. Another example could relate to the coach who decides an athlete could thrive if they adopted a leadership role, such as team captain, although the athlete may not perceive themselves as ready for this challenge. In both of these examples the athlete may be unlikely to voice these needs and although the intervention of the coach may cause some short-term conflict in the C-P relationship, in the longer term, it may be strengthened as the athlete reaps the rewards of the coach's decision. At the same time, we must not perceive the coach's options as being a simple dichotomy. In these examples, the coach should engage in open and regular communication with the athlete to explain their decision and give the athlete an opportunity to voice their perspectives (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024), but ultimately the final decision may lie with the coach. When coaches do explore and act on the voiced needs of the athlete, they should do so in an authentic and transparent manner. Athletes described how this process can become tokenistic (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). To legitimise their power and create 'buy in' from athletes, coaches may at times feign a dialogic approach, where, in fact, decisions that are arrived at are often pre-

determined by the coach (Cushion & Jones, 2014). Instead, coaches should be supported to explore ways in which the voiced needs of the athlete can meaningfully influence their practice and how this process could positively influence the C-P relationship, within the constraints and realities of performance-based football environments.

7.4.6 Ensure the relationship is rooted in high challenge and accountability, while ensuring an individualised, sustainable, and ethical approach.

Coach developers (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023), coaches (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) unanimously portrayed elevated levels of challenge as a fundamental component of high-quality C-P relationships within performance settings. We believe this is a feature of the C-P relationship that has previously been understated, which is perhaps not surprising given research has developed conceptual models of the C-P relationship designed to be applied across a variety of domains and performance levels (Jowett, 2005). For relative success to be achieved in the latter phases of youth development or first team settings, coaches are required to adopt a highly demanding approach, providing high levels of challenge for athletes (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Without positioning elevated levels of challenge as an inherent component of the C-P relationship we risk presenting a false characterisation of the C-P relationship in performance-based football settings, potentially, serving only to increase the theory to practice divide (Lyle, 2018). However, given the norms relating to aggressive interpersonal behaviours from the coach to the athlete, which have historically been embedded within performance football domains (Cushion & Jones, 2006), it is important that researchers confront this content in a responsible manner.

The connection between the C-P relationship and the level of challenge is complex. Coaches should not refrain from providing elevated levels of challenge or providing critical feedback simply to placate the athlete in order to preserve the C-P relationship. Such an

approach would be anomalous as the coach would be failing to communicate with honesty and failing to provide feedback that would enable the athlete to improve, two key features of high-quality C-P relationships (Jowett, 2005). Some of the challenges experienced by the athlete may be outside of the coach's control, such as injury or issues in the athlete's private life (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016). Here, the coach may be required to provide the athlete with the appropriate support, to help them navigate external challenges (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). However, many of the challenges that athletes face will be significantly influenced by the action of the coach, such as the goals that are set, the intensity of the training load, the psychological demands placed on the athlete, the technical and tactical information provided, the emotional nature of the feedback and, of course, deselection. This demonstrates the pivotal role of the coach in shaping the challenge that athletes must contend with.

To further explore the notion of sustainable and ethical challenge, Jowett's (2005) conceptualisation, which described how C-P relationships can be categorised by their success and effectiveness, provides an important starting point. Successful C-P relationships support the athlete to achieve performance success. However, to be effective the relationship should also support personal growth and refrain from becoming controlling or abusive (Jowett, 2005). Similarly, high quality C-P relationship in the performance football domain should provide high levels of challenge to increase the likelihood that success is achieved, but the coach also needs to establish a relationship that is characterised by effectiveness by supporting this to be done in an ethical and sustainable manner (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This may also require coaches to explore the power dynamics inherent in coaching and the C-P relationship and consider how they ethically exert power over athletes (Jones et al., 2010)

A starting point may involve the coach reflecting on whether the level of challenge the athlete experiences is proportionate to their abilities, resources and the support system that is available to them (Sarkar & Page, 2022). Here the C-P relationship has several important

functions. The construct of closeness within the 3C+1 model captures the importance of trust within the C-P relationship (Jowett, 2005). Coaches described how through a caring approach, which is enacted through their investment of time and effort into the relationship, they can develop a more trusting rapport which they perceived encouraged athletes to embrace the high levels of challenge provided by the coach (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Also, through this notion of closeness, coaches may develop a more intimate knowledge of the athlete, both as a performer and a person, and be better able to tailor the level of challenge more suitably to the athlete's needs. This would be highly individualised and based on influences, such as, the athlete's age, maturity, levels of resilience, and external life circumstances. However, if challenge is to be sustainable and ethical, it should not be based solely on the coach's perceptions of the athlete's needs (Cronin & Armour, 2018). Here Nodding's (2005) ethics of care can be used as a framework to explore this. The voiced needs of the athlete must be inherent in determining the type and intensity of challenge facing them (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This dialogic approach can provide the coach with an important understanding of the athlete's experiences (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This may offer them an insight into the athlete's struggles, potentially leading to a reduction in the level of challenge (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Also, the concept of high challenge should be reciprocal within the C-P dyad, giving the athlete the opportunity to request more challenge from the coach to support their pursuit of excellence, particularly if they feel they are stagnating (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023). Managing this aspect of coaching effectively is a highly complex task for coaches and the wider coaching team, particularly in team sports, such as football, where the coaches are working with large squad numbers making it more problematic for them to develop a bespoke level of challenge for each individual athlete.

7.4.7 Use professional knowledge to establish credibility and connection in a highly demanding environment

Jowett and Cockerill (2003) criticise coach education courses for focusing too heavily on professional knowledge instead of supporting coaches to develop knowledge that would better enable them to foster high quality C-P relationships. However, in study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) and study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) coach developers and coaches positioned the coach's professional knowledge as integral for the development of high-quality C-P relationships within the performance football domain. Coaches' professional knowledge is poorly defined within the literature, but broadly refers to the body of specialised knowledge required to coach effectively (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). In the current thesis, reference to professional knowledge refers simply to the technical and tactical aspects of the sport, which will be significantly influenced by an understanding of the different disciplines of sports science, and the knowledge of effective pedagogical approaches by which to teach this content (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). For example, a coach's technical and tactical knowledge of football may enable them to develop a complex and nuanced understanding of the positional requirements of the right back position and how it is influenced by the team's game model. Their knowledge of sports science, in this case physiology, enables the coach to better understand the physical demands of the position, for example, the ability of the athlete to produce repeated sprints. The pedagogical knowledge of the coach enables them to effectively teach these concepts to the athlete and, when delivered effectively, are inherently relational, social, and interpersonal (Jones, 2006). For example, this could take the form of an individual meeting where the coach and athlete review a series of clips and the coach utilises effective questioning as a basis to discuss the athlete's recent match-day performance, or, when the coach effectively 'chunks' information in a pre-match tactical meeting which enables the athletes to execute the game plan effectively. If these approaches are to be successful, they are, in large part, reliant on the coach having high levels of technical and tactical knowledge to underpin high quality discussions that are deemed of value by the athlete. But they also require

a strong understanding of pedagogical approaches that act as a vehicle by which to communicate and transmit this knowledge (Bennet & Culpan, 2014). Therefore, if the relationship is to be one that enables the athlete to thrive and reach their performance goals (Jowett, 2017), we must recognise that professional knowledge, particularly in the performance domain, is integral to the coach's ability to develop high quality C-P relationships (chapter 4 Newland et al., 2023; chapter 5 Newland et al., 2024).

Performance football settings are characterised as ruthless, highly pressured, and volatile (Champ et al., 2021). Previously we emphasised the importance of coaches providing high levels of challenge for the athlete. However, high performance athletes are typically extremely demanding of their coach (Potrac et al., 2002) perceiving them as a key resource in their pursuit of excellence (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023). Coaches described examples where the C-P relationship had been undermined by the coach's inability to design and deliver realistic coaching sessions or by their insufficient technical and tactical knowledge which meant they were unable to effectively answer questions posed by the athlete (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Coaches believed that in these moments they risked losing credibility and respect from the athletes, demonstrating the unforgiving nature of the C-P relationship within the performance-based football context (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Quite simply, within these environments, if the coach is not perceived by the athlete as adding value or contributing meaningfully, the quality of the C-P relationship risks being undermined (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). The findings resonated with the research of Jones (2006), who used Goffman's (1959) notions of personal 'front', 'impression management' and 'presentations of the self' to explore coaching within performance football settings. Coaches perceived their role as performative and their behaviours were often aimed at managing the impressions of the athletes, with a view to developing and maintaining their respect through demonstrating high levels of professional knowledge (Jones, 2006). Other research has also emphasised the

importance of professional knowledge in developing trust between the coach and athlete, particularly related to the coach's ability to set out a coherent game strategy during competition and their ability to instruct and provide effective feedback during training sessions (Kao et al., 2017). The notions of respect and trust are integral aspects within the construct of closeness in the 3C+1 model (Jowett, 2005). Jowett (2017) describes them as 'active ingredients' providing the foundation for effective C-P relationships. Both the findings of the current research and the previous work of Jones (2006), exemplify the importance of professional knowledge as a means by which to engender respect and trust within performance-based contexts.

Our findings support the view that professional knowledge should be a central pillar of coach education curricular for courses that aim to prepare coaches to work within the performance football domain. This knowledge is not only important in and of itself but is integral for coaches who seek to develop high quality C-P relationships within these performance-based contexts. In an attempt to diversify their curricula, coach education courses should not dilute the complexity of professional knowledge. But should similarly support coaches to understand, and develop, the diverse range of knowledge required to foster high quality C-P relationships, which includes interpersonal, intrapersonal, and professional knowledge (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023).

7.4.8 Understand the impact of culture on the C-P relationship within performance football settings and influence it to cultivate high-quality C-P relationships.

In the study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). coaches and athletes both emphasised the interrelated nature of the C-P relationship and the wider sociocultural context. Previous research has been critical of the sports psychology literature for focusing on the C-P relationship in isolation and, thereby, ignoring many of the wider contextual factors that would influence it, leading to this research being characterised as clean and reductionist (Wagstaff, 2021). This aligns to long-standing

calls for researchers to incorporate a greater appreciation of the peculiarities, intricacies, and ambiguities of the environment upon which the C-P relationships exist (Bowe & Jones, 2006). Indeed, Wagstaff (2021) proposes that the C-P relationship does not operate in a bubble and rejects Jowett's (2017) notion that the success of coaching resides simply in the coach, the athlete, and the relationship they develop. The current findings provide compelling evidence emphasising the importance of the C-P relationship in performance football contexts, with coach developers (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023), coaches (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) all in agreement as to its significance. However, the current findings also support previous research which has emphasised that the C-P relationship is located within a complex social and cultural system (Cushion & Jones, 2006). This has important implications for the current thesis. If formal coach education is to deliberately focus on supporting coaches to develop their understanding of the C-P relationship, then coaches must recognise how this relationship is influenced by the broader socio-cultural context. Clearly there are aspects within the socio-cultural context that it may be difficult for coaches to control. Such environments are characterised by large groups of individuals often with competing interests and agendas (Wagstaff, 2016) and shaped by historic and entrenched norms, such as traditional conceptions of masculinity and toughness (Thomson et al., 2015). Hence, we adopt the phrase, influence, to capture the difficulty inherent within this endeavour and to understand the limits of the coach's control and agency in this regard. However, the current findings demonstrate that coaches recognised themselves as key agents for cultural change and identified this as a central element of their role and an important factor in determining their success and, therefore, should be addressed through coach education in a meaningful manner (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This is supported by previous research involving serial winning coaches, where developing a high performing culture, which

everybody understood and brought into, was perceived as critical for performance success (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

The C-P relationship is just one of a number of key relationships within performance football settings (Ronglan, 2011). For example, additional key stakeholders could include other athletes and coaches, the multidisciplinary team, parents and agents (Wagstaff, 2021). Their influence on the C-P relationships is dependent on a myriad of factors, for example, the athlete's age may influence the level of parental involvement (Jowett & Katchiss, 2005) or the profile of the athlete may increase the likelihood that an agent becomes a significant stakeholder. Within performance football settings, which are typically made up of large squads of athletes, the role of the other athletes becomes particularly important. In the current research, coaches described the value of incorporating meaningful athlete leadership in developing a culture conducive to the advancement of high-quality C-P relationships (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Coaches described how this had the potential to open clear lines of communication between the playing squad and the coaching team. Coaches perceived that this enabled athlete leaders to feedback pertinent information to coaches relating to individual athletes within the squad. Coaches reflected how this helped them tailor their communication and behaviours towards athletes in order to better meet their needs and strengthen their relationship (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). However, this is not an approach without its inherent challenges. Coaches described how they had to take account of the micropolitical nature of these settings (Potrac & Jones, 2009) and ensure the selected athlete leaders were not motivated purely by their own self-interests.

Coaches and athletes also recognised the importance of other members of the technical coaching team. Within performance football settings, it is standard practice for clubs to retain large technical coaching teams. Depending on the context and club, there are a variety of roles adopted by these coaches, for example, manager, assistant manager, head coach, assistant

coach, goalkeeper coach, individual coach, set piece coach and head of coaching. Coaches and athletes emphasised the importance of coaches working collaboratively to develop high quality C-P relationships (Newland et al., 2024; chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Conceptually, this challenges the notion of the singular coach-player dyad, espoused in conceptual models (Jowett, 2005). Instead, it raises important questions about the nature of the different coaching roles and how this influences the C-P relationship. It also requires further exploration around the harmonization and co-operation that exists within coaching teams to effectively distribute the relational burden. This demands high levels of trust between the technical coaching staff. They need to have confidence that they are not being undermined by a colleague who may have their own agenda, as they struggle for power and influence - a situation which was described within the previous literature (Potrac & Jones, 2009). This may also highlight pertinent questions relating to the demographics, personalities, and attributes of coaches that make-up the technical coaching teams and how this best enables them to meet the relational needs of all athletes in the squad.

Similarly, coaches also stressed the importance of the role of the MDT in this regard (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Previous research, focusing on the behaviour of serial winning coaches, particularly emphasised the importance of the management of the performance team, including that of coaches and support staff (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Findings of the current thesis demonstrated that coaches should seek to break down perceived, and actual, barriers between multidisciplinary staff, with one coach describing how he had simply changed the office configuration to encourage a sense of unity and collaboration between staff (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). The aim was to ensure, where appropriate, that the MDT were communicating with the technical coaching staff to share their unique insights into individual athletes. Such insights, which are influenced by the practitioner's discipline, provide coaches with an alternative assessment by which to better understand the athletes and

one which may also be fundamentally different from that of the technical coaching team. For example, the physiotherapist who is working with an injured athlete may have unique insights into their current mental state, given they are likely to be the member of staff spending most time with the athlete during this period. Coaches deemed this collaboration with the MDT as critical in ensuring that the technical coaching team were able to make informed decisions when attempting to meet the needs of individual athletes (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024)

Performance football contexts may also provide a unique socio-cultural context due to the influence of power (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Potrac et al., 2007) and micropolitics (Potrac et al., 2009; Potrac & Jones, 2009). Performance football has deep rooted traditions and norms rooted in masculinity and hierarchy (Champ et al., 2021). Naturally, this influences the manner in which coaches and athletes behave in these settings, with demonstrations of power, control and dominance commonplace (Champ et al., 2020). This may be influenced by a belief that coaches need to be seen 'doing the job properly' (Wagstaff, 2021). Others may embody these social norms as a technique to survive and thrive within an environment where high staff turnover is widespread (Champ et al., 2020). In contrast, the findings of the current research demonstrate that coaches believed it was important to develop a culture influenced by the voice and perspective of the athlete (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This resonates with the work of Jowett et al. (2023), who emphasise the importance of a "climate of voice", where athletes are encouraged to engage in dialogue with coaches regarding a range of pertinent issues. This may require the coach to re-educate athletes as to the expectations for the values and norms that underpin the culture. They could enact this by modelling appropriate ethical, empathetic and respectful behaviour or by encouraging athletes to communicate honestly and openly where appropriate. However, this should also be balanced against the requirement for clear and decisive leadership, which ensure athletes are clear on expectations and 'know where they stand' (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review), which was perceived as important for reducing

the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflict. This should not be conflated with controlling coaching behaviours, which can negatively influence the quality of the C-P relationship but should be perceived by coaches as an important approach when managing large groups of individuals, in highly micropolitical environments (Wachsmuth et al., 2017).

For coach education, this may mean supporting coaches to recognise the impact of the socio-cultural context on the C-P relationship and, crucially, supporting them to understand how to actively influence and shape this context into one that fosters high-quality C-P relationships.

7.4.9 Engage in constructive conflict resolution approaches in a relationally complex and highly micropolitical environment.

Our findings support previous research which underscores the importance of coaches adopting pro-active approaches that seek to ensure the likelihood of conflict is minimised. These include, agreeing expectations and developing role clarity, regular and open communication, demonstrating empathy and active listening skills (Rhind & Jowett, 2010; Wachsmuth et al., 2017). However, both coaches and athletes deemed conflict inevitable within performance football contexts (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This is not surprising given these are highly micropolitical environments (Potrac et al., 2009) comprised of supremely competitive individuals with potentially competing agendas (Champ et al., 2020). Combine this with the highly emotional and pressurised nature of performance sport, and this has the potential to produce an environment ripe for conflict (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Athletes described a variety of situations where conflict could occur within performance football contexts, including deselection, performance pressure, personality incompatibility or simply perceptions of unmet needs by either member of the dyad, which could include a lack of praise or recognition from the coach to the athlete or the athlete failing or refusing to follow the coach's tactical instructions (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review).

Effective conflict resolution often begins with early intervention (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). This could simply involve the coach and athlete being in regular and open communication and being aware of each other's thoughts, feelings and emotions (Jowett, 2005). Alternatively, the coach's ability to notice changes in the athlete's behaviour could encourage them to open up dialogue with the athlete (Jones et al., 2013). It can be helpful if the coach has developed a culture that enables athlete leaders to freely and candidly express the thoughts and feelings of their team mates to the coaching team. This can ensure the coaching team are made aware of potential issues before they develop into more deep-rooted resentment and conflict (chapter, 5 Newland et al., 2024). Similarly, when the MDT regularly communicate with the coaching team, offering their unique insight on individual athletes, it provides the coach with the opportunity to intervene and potentially address the concerns of athletes in a more efficient and prompt manner (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024).

When conflict does occur, athletes described how it is essential the coach behaves in a consistent manner, which aligns with their values and belief system (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). In these potentially highly stressful and emotional situations the coach's understanding and adherence to their axiological and ethical value system provides an anchor and framework by which to guide their communication and behaviours and better enables them to behave and respond in a predictable manner (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). This may require the coach to upregulate or downregulate their emotional response, depending on their assessment of the requirements of the situation enabling them to respond in a measured and thoughtful manner (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). For example, the coach may demonstrate softer emotional responses to down regulate the emotions of the athlete. On the other hand, they may upregulate their emotions when they feel a passionate or energised response is appropriate or they want to demonstrate their disappointment. Where possible, coaches should adopt a collaborative and dialogic approach to conflict resolution, using private structured

meetings to discuss these issues (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Coaches should understand how to skilfully focus the dialogue on the nature of the behaviour or incident rather than focusing on the individual, as this approach is less likely to lead to personal affront (Holt et al., 2012). However, if athletes have breached basic and agreed expectations or rules, for individuals or the overall team, or have demonstrated entitlement or complacency, coaches should act decisively (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). This may involve the coach administering disciplinary action, where appropriate. Crucially, coaches should not attempt to avoid conflict as a means by which to preserve the relationship. If coaches do this, they risk the relationship evolving into one characterised by a lack of accountability and respect, where the coach is perceived as inconsistent and contradictory, potentially resulting in the development of a culture of low standards and expectations. Coaches also have to understand when it may be appropriate to terminate the relationship, when it is perceived as irretrievable and is in the interests of both members of the dyad.

Our findings support previous research which emphasised the importance of coaches and athletes not allowing disagreements to linger on (Wachsmuth et al., 2017; Wachsmuth et al., 2018). Within environments, such as performance football settings, characterised by large squads of athletes, they described how conflict with individual members of the squad can spread and negatively influence the overall culture and environment (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Athletes described the micropolitical nature of performance environments, where individuals typically form into ‘cliques’ (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Athletes may align themselves with others based on shared religious beliefs, nationalities, ethnicities, or common interests. Athletes may also associate themselves with other athletes who are perceived to hold power, influence, or authority (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). This could simply be older, more experienced athletes, or those with high status, for example due to their personality or playing abilities (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review).

Athletes described situations where coaches have failed to work with athletes to resolve conflict in a timely manner. Where this involved athletes who have high levels of power or influence, they risked 'losing the dressing room.' In these situations, the coach's authority and influence is undermined, potentially leading to a loss of credibility and respect, potentially resulting in diminished athlete compliance (Jones, 2006).

Coach education could therefore support coaches to explore the antecedents of conflict and support them to develop proactive approaches to minimise their negative effect. Where conflict is unavoidable, coaches should understand how to deal with it efficiently and effectively through early intervention, dialogic approaches, emotional regulation and adherence to their values and beliefs system. Coaches should develop an understanding of the potential influence of conflict on the micropolitical nature of these environments and ensure it does not negatively influence the overall culture.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This chapter commences with a summary of the main objectives of the thesis, including the key research questions. The chapter progresses to outline the novel contributions made by the research followed by a discussion of the key limitations of the thesis. Lastly, the suggested future research agenda and recommendations are proposed.

8.1 Summary of the central objectives of the thesis.

The current thesis has explored the integration of content relating to the C-P relationship in English Football Association formal coach education courses and identified knowledge required by coaches to develop and maintain these relationships in practice. Previous research has developed our understanding of the C-P relationship by drawing on psychological (Mageau & Vallerand, 2002; Poszwardowski et al., 2002; Jowett, 2005), sociological (Potrac et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2004, Cushion & Jones, 2006) and educational (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Cronin et al., 2018) perspectives. High quality C-P relationships have been found to be positively associated with athlete motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), the motivational climate (Avci et al., 2018), mental health (Ogden et al. 2023), well-being (Gosai et al, 2023), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaunder, 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and performance (Phillips et al., 2023). However, coach development courses have been criticised for failing to provide sufficient coverage of this topic (Ferrari et al., 2018; Evans, 2015; Turnnidge and Côté, 2017) although these claims have been largely unsubstantiated by empirical research. Therefore, the current thesis sought to explore what knowledge, relating to the C-P relationship had been incorporated into FA UEFA A and B licence courses.

This thesis moves beyond deconstructing existing curricula and seeks to support the reconstruction of coach education curricula to benefit performance-based football coaches in England. To that end, it was recognised that while models of the C-P relationship exist (Jowett,

2007) and provide an excellent starting point for the current thesis, they identify the essential characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships, rather than demonstrate what coaches need to know and understand about this phenomenon in practice. Furthermore, performance-based English football provides a unique socio-cultural setting by which to explore the C-P relationship. These environments are characterised by hierarchical norms (Champ et al., 2021) micropolitics (Potrac & Jones, 2009), and conflicting motivations (Potrac et al., 2012) and also provide a challenge relating to selection and deselection, managing large squads of athletes and multidisciplinary teams and intense performance pressures (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Accordingly, there is a need to explore the knowledge performance football coaches need to have, relating to the C-P relationship. Therefore, the thesis focused on exploring the content relating to the C-P relationship that is integrated into formal coach education courses delivered by the English Football Association, and identifying the knowledge, related to the C-P relationship, that coach developers, coaches, and athletes perceive as important for coaches in performance-based football environments in England.

Five research questions informed the thesis:

1. What knowledge related to the C-P relationship is integrated into the content of the current FA UEFA A and B Licence courses? (chapter 4)
2. What are performance coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education? (chapter 5)
3. From the perspective of FA coach developers, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (Chapter 4)
4. From the perspective of performance coaches, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (Chapter 5)

5. From the perspective of performance athletes, what knowledge related to the C-P relationship do they perceive as important for coaches working in performance-based football environments in England? (chapter 6)

8.2 Original contribution of the thesis.

The first original contributions address the integration of content related to the C-P relationship in the FA UEFA A and B Licence courses:

- Coach developers (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023), coaches (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and athletes perceived the C-P relationship as central to coaching effectiveness within performance football settings. They unanimously supported the integration of this topic into coach education curricula.
- The findings provide empirical evidence, and contemporary insights, to support the previous assertions of authors that the C-P relationship is underrepresented within formal coach education curricula (Ferrar et al., 2018; Evans, 2015; Turnnidge and Côté, 2017). The current research demonstrated that formalised content, pertaining to the C-P relationship, was introduced in an implicit and superficial manner in both the UEFA A and B Licence courses (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023)
- Professional knowledge continued to be the dominant theme on the UEFA A and B Licence courses (Chapman et al., 2020). However, there was evidence of a move towards introducing some diversification into the curriculum content, away from the sole focus being on professional knowledge. Examples include elements of the UEFA A licence course focusing on the development of intrapersonal skills, such as self-reflection and self-awareness (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023).

- Where UEFA A and B Licence courses have diversified their content they have, at times, embraced pseudoscientific concepts that lack scientific validity and robustness, this particularly related to psycho-social content (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023). An example included a workshop which focused on personality types and utilised Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to help coaches better understand their own personality traits and that of their players. The findings provide empirical support for previous assertions claiming that pseudoscientific have pervaded coach education courses (Bailey et al., 2018; Stoszkowski et al., 2021).
- Some coach developers feel underprepared and underqualified to effectively deliver content relating to the C-P relationship (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023). Although highly regarded by coach developers, interpersonal skills, similar to that in other professions such as nursing, are deemed as difficult to define and uncomfortable to assess (Meier et al., 2014). Coach developers demonstrated an understanding of interpersonal skills that was often narrow and oversimplistic (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023)
- There is a misalignment between the content delivered and the assessment framework for both the UEFA A and B Licence courses (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023). The assessment framework for both courses specifically identified the coach's ability to build relationships with athletes as an area to be assessed, although content relating to this topic was absent in the formalised curriculum (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023).

- Coach developers identify in situ' visits as an effective tool in developing the coaches' knowledge relating to the C-P relationship by capturing authentic coaching experiences as well as interactions with athletes (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023).

The thesis makes original contributions to improve understanding of coaches' experiences of developing knowledge of the C-P relationship through formal coach education:

- High-performance coaches in England describe developing their knowledge and competencies, relating the C-P relationship, in a mainly unmediated manner which was largely unsupported by their formal coach education experiences (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024)
- Coaches described a compartmentalised approach to formal coach education in terms of their experience of the curriculum. Coaches reported that the UEFA A and B Licence courses provided a significant focus on professional knowledge, particularly technical and tactical knowledge (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). The FA Advanced Youth Award, which is also a level 4 qualification is targeted specifically on the coaching and development of young athletes (FA, 2024), and is reported to offer broader focus, particularly on the psycho-social elements of coaching and therefore embraces content that would relate more closely to the C-P relationship (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). But, for many coaches this is problematic due to the significant amount of time it takes for them to reach the point in their career where they would be accepted for this qualification. The course is also limited in that it only accepts applicants currently

working in boys' academies in England. This has resulted in many of the coaches, in the sample, being unable to access this qualification (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024)

Lastly, the thesis makes an original contribution by demonstrating the knowledge coaches require to develop high quality C-P relationships within performance-based football environments.

- The thesis furthers previous research, which explored the key characteristics and features of high-quality C-P relationships (Wylleman, 200; Poczwadowski et al. 2002; Jowett, 2005), and instead explores the knowledge coaches require in relation to developing and maintaining these relationships in practice (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023; chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). The thesis identified nine key principles, which require further research, but provide a starting point for understanding the knowledge coaches require to effectively develop and maintain C-P relationships in practice: 1.) Establish clear personal values that guide consistent decision making and behaviours. 2.) Communicate clear expectations and co-construct where appropriate. 3.) Maintain and encourage consistent and open dialogue with players. 4.) Recognise and be responsive to the player's broader life context. 5.) Balance the perceived and voiced needs of the player. 6.) Provide high levels of challenge in an individualised, sustainable and ethical manner. 7.) Use professional knowledge as a medium for connection. 8.) Influence a culture that is conducive to high quality C-P relationships. 9.) Engage in constructive conflict resolution approaches.

In each of the nine areas identified the thesis makes the following original contributions.

- Findings demonstrated the importance of the coach's philosophical position particularly relating to their axiology and ethics (study 4, Newland et al., 2023; chapter

6, Newland et al., under review). This influenced the C-P relationship by enabling coaches to communicate with athletes in an authentic, consistent, and predictable manner (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) and appear competent, assured and confident in the eyes of the athletes (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). This is important in an environment characterised as ruthless (Champ et al., 2021) and where impression management (Jones, 2006) is critical and factors such as performance pressures (Lindgren & Barker-Ruchti, 2017), financial incentives and job insecurity (Morton, 2014) may make adhering to one's own ethical beliefs particularly challenging.

- The significance of the proactive agreement of expectations for the relationship between the coach and athlete is well established (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). However, the findings demonstrated a more complex and nuanced approach whereby coaches and athletes explained the importance of the co-construction of these expectations, to fulfil the basic psychological needs of athletes and also the value of the coach providing clear and explicit expectations for the athlete (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review)). This is particularly important within the context of performance football where coaches are expected to develop high quality relationships with large squads of athletes each of whom have their own personal agenda, perspectives and motivations (Potrac & Jones, 2009) and where ambiguous messaging could be fatal for the coach (Jones, 2006).
- Our findings provide important insights into C-P communication within the high-performance football domain where coaches must open effective lines of communication with large squads of athletes which is a complex endeavour considering the micropolitical nature of these settings (Jones & Potrac, 2009). The findings

demonstrate the consistency of communication is particularly important if the athlete has experienced a drop in performance or has been deselected (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) which is often a pre-cursor to conflict (Slade et al., 2024). Deselection is a particularly pertinent issue in performance football settings when compared to individual sports or sports where squad decisions are driven by a selection board (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). The findings also presented pertinent insights regarding the importance of the coach's observational skills to notice changes in athlete's behaviours, which guided their communication as well as the value of the coach's listening skills when communicating with the athlete (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

- The importance of the coach developing an understanding of the athlete's broader life context was re-iterated (Knust & Fischer, 2015; Cronin & Armour, 2018). However, within the performance-based footballing context the extent to which athletes wanted, or needed, coaches to develop an understanding of their broader lives was dependent on the individual (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) and may have been influenced by their career stage (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Also, where coaches are working with large squads of athletes in highly transient environments (Nesti et al., 2012) and where coaches are often overstretched, they report it can be challenging to develop a holistic understanding of all athletes within the squad. The findings provide new insights into the importance of coaches working as a coaching team to appreciate the variety of different coaching roles within performance-based contexts and how they can work collaboratively to develop a deeper understanding of athletes (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This moves beyond conceptualising the C-P relationship as a

single entity, and instead moves it towards a more interconnected understanding of how coaching teams can work effectively together.

- Coaches and athletes acknowledge the importance of identifying and fulfilling the needs of the athlete through the coach drawing on their knowledge and experience while at the same time providing the athlete with the opportunity to express their own thoughts (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). However, the findings provided important insights into the challenge coaches face within the context of performance football. For example, young athletes, lacking in experience and maturity, as well as athletes in general, may misdiagnose their own needs, leading to choices that could be detrimental to their future careers (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). Athletes might be motivated by self-interest and the needs they express may be contrary to the needs of the wider team (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Or simply coaches may become hindered in the process of exploring the variety of expressed needs within a large squad of athletes which could potentially result in a loss of focus, direction and clarity (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024).
- The findings presented several important insights with regards to how challenge could be provided in an individualised, ethical and sustainable manner (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Coaches and athletes described how, through an investment of time and effort into the relationship, coaches can develop a more trusting rapport which encouraged athletes to embrace the high levels of challenge (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Through the construct of closeness (Jowett, 2005), coaches may develop a more intimate knowledge of the athlete, both as a performer and a person, and be better able

to tailor the level of challenge to the athlete's needs (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). The voiced needs of the athlete, captured through a dialogic approach, was also perceived as central in determining the type and intensity of challenge facing them (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024).

- The findings demonstrate the importance of the coach's professional knowledge in developing high quality C-P relationships within the performance football domain (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023; chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). This moves beyond a dichotomised approach which presents professional knowledge and relationship building skills as separate entities (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), to one that positions professional knowledge as central to the C-P relationship in the performance domain. Not only does this enable coaches to be perceived by the athlete as a key resource to support the athlete in pursuit of excellence (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023), it also enables the coach to garner respect and credibility from the athlete, critical in highly demanding and unforgiving environments (Champ et al., 2021) where coaches must work to maintain face and manage the impression of the athletes they work alongside (Jones, 2006).
- Our findings demonstrate that the C-P relationship is located within a complex social and cultural system (chapter 5 Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review) which builds on previous research (Jowett, 2005), characterised as clean and reductionist (Wagstaff et al., 2021). Coaches are identified as important actors who can influence the broader culture to promote development of high-quality C-P relationships (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). When seeking to shape this culture, coaches should understand the influence of entrenched traditions and norms rooted in masculinity and hierarchy that typically exists within

performance football settings (Champ et al., 2021) and how they impact the nature of the C-P relationship. To shape a culture of openness and trust, which promotes athlete voice and high quality communication between the coach and athlete, may require coaches to clearly articulate and role model team values and re-educate athletes as to these expectations, for example, through the meaningful use of athlete leadership teams (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review)).

- Coaches should also appreciate how the C-P relationship operates within a web of other important relationships, within the performance football domain, such as other athletes and coaches, the MDT, parents and agents. The findings demonstrate the importance of the coach encouraging a collaborative culture. An integral part of this is exploring the C-P relationship in the context of coaching teams. Coaches could be encouraged to reflect on the relational responsibilities of their individual coaching roles, and how to complement one another by sharing the relational burden. This may also raise important questions relating to the demographics, personalities, and attributes of coaches that make-up of the technical coaching teams and how this best enables them to meet the relational needs of all athletes in the squad. Similarly, MDT staff should appropriately share information and insights about athletes to better inform the behaviours of coaches to further develop and strengthen the C-P relationship (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024).
- Our findings identify several important areas by which coaches must develop their knowledge in relation to coach-player conflict. These include proactive approaches to reduce the likelihood of conflict, demonstrating predictable and consistent behaviour, high levels of emotional regulation and a focus on collaborative conflict resolution approaches (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review).

The findings also provided novel insights into the complex nature of coach-player conflict in performance football, particularly relating to ways in which this conflict can negatively influence team cohesion (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). The findings emphasise the coach's understanding of the individual personalities and general dynamics of the squad and the importance of attempting to resolve conflict in a timely manner (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). Where this involves athletes who have high levels of influence, coaches risked 'losing the dressing room' (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review), and maybe losing face (Jones, 2006), thereby putting their credibility and respect at risk.

8.3 Limitations

The limitations of each individual study are explored in the relevant chapters (chapter 4, 5 and 6). Therefore, in this section a more general summary of the limitations of this thesis will be provided.

The samples used in all three studies of coach developers, coaches and athletes were relatively small. This enabled rich and deep accounts (Bearman, 2019) of their experiences of coach education and the C-P relationship in performance football settings. However, due to the small sample sizes their views and perceptions may not be representative of all coach developers, coaches and athletes working in performance football environments (Boddy, 2016). The current thesis was also premised on the notion that the nature and characteristics of high-quality C-P relationship are specific to the domain and sport in which it exists. Therefore, the findings were not necessarily designed to be transferable to other domains and sports, for example participation domain or individual sports, and therefore is a limitation of the current thesis when compared to research that has developed generic conceptual models of the C-P relationship (Jowett, 2005). It is also accepted that the notion of 'performance-based football'

may be a contested term and cover a wide variety of contexts ranging from foundation phase youth academy settings to first team environments. The C-P relationship would, and should, be different within these settings and therefore the research does not explicitly differentiate between these contexts which is a limitation of the current thesis.

In all three studies in the thesis the main research used semi-structured interviews which is a limitation of the research due to their reliance on self-report. The responses of participants may be influenced by social desirability bias, whereby their responses are shaped by their perceptions of what they believe the interviewer may want to hear (Krug & Sell, 2013). Within study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) the research team did attempt to use a document analysis to negate this and corroborate the findings of the semi-structured interviews with coach developers to develop a more robust approach. However, in study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024) where high-performance coaches were asked to discuss the C-P relationship and provide examples from practice, one could speculate they may not have felt comfortable sharing the details of more undesirable relationships they may have had with athletes. The interviews may also be influenced by the coach's relationship with the first researcher (Karatsareas, 2022). Although one would propose this may have had a positive influence on the levels of honesty and sincerity with which they felt able to speak, it could also have had a negative impact such as acquiescence bias, where participants agree with statements or questions regardless of their real opinions (Mehrani et al., 2018)

To counteract this the thesis could have incorporated observational work such as ethnographic approaches. For example, attendance at UEFA A and B Licence courses to witness the enactment of the curriculum in practice, including how coach developers may have referred to the C-P relationships informally during course delivery. However, this would have been particularly difficult given the research was not funded or conducted in collaboration with the English FA. In the studies of high-performance athletes and coaches, using observational

methodologies could have enabled the corroboration of interview data against observational data (O'Reilly, 2012). It may have also enabled a deeper exploration to capture the full richness of the C-P relationship, including the subtle dynamics and interactions that take place in practice or aspects of the relationship that coaches and athletes may have perceived as being inappropriate to share in an interview. However, it is extremely difficult to access performance football settings in England and, therefore, to have gained high level access to athletes and coaches working in these areas is a significant achievement and positions the current research as distinctive and valuable.

Although a concerted effort was made to represent both male and female practitioners and athletes to an equal extent, some studies were more successful than others in this regard. In study three (chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). the sample of athletes was evenly split with regards to gender. However, male coach developers and coaches were overrepresented in study one (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023) and study two (chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024). This is partly due to the overrepresentation of male coaches and coach developers in the professional game in England and reflects long-standing concerns about the lack of diversity within high-profile coaching roles across various sports (Vinson et al., 2016). There is a recognition this would negatively influence the transferability of the results of these studies and may have underrepresented gender specific nuances in the findings. This is particularly pertinent given previous research has emphasised the impact of gender on the C-P relationship. Same gender C-P relationships appear to be perceived as having high levels of satisfaction (Jowett & Nezleck, 2012). Jowett (2017) proposes that this is because individuals typically develop stronger bonds to those that are similar to themselves. Therefore, coaches and athletes who are similar may feel they have more in common, thereby strengthening reported levels of closeness, commitment and complementarity (Jowett & Nezleck, 2012). This could be enacted through the sharing of beliefs, values, common interests that have manifested because of the

shared gender of the individuals. Furthermore, Norman (2016) describes that even though male and female athletes share many similarities in what they want in terms of their coaching needs, there are specific nuances and complexities that need to be explored to support the development of high-quality relationships. For example, Norman (2016) demonstrates that male coaches further perpetuate stereotypes of female athletes as less able, less competitive and frailer. Norman (2016) therefore calls for an increased focus on gender-responsive coaching and for coaches to become relational experts they must explore how gender influences the C-P relationship and the knowledge coaches require. Given this research, the lack of focus on the impact of gender in the perception, development and manifestation of this relationship is a key limitation of the current thesis.

Samples also did not demonstrate diversity in relation to race or ethnicity and this is a limitation of the research. Again, this is, in part, due to the overrepresentation of white British coach developers and coaches in the men's and women's professional game in England but is clearly a limitation of the current thesis. Lastly, there is also missing voices in relation to neurodiversity and disability. That is not to say that any coach developers, coaches, and athletes that participated were not neurodiverse, but this was not a focus of our questioning during interviews and not something that was disclosed. Given research which has explored the complexity of the experience of neurodiverse individuals in high performance sport (Wood et al., 2025), one could postulate that this would impact the C-P relationship and may have been an interesting line of inquiry.

8.4 Future research agenda and recommendations

In this section a series of key areas for future research are identified, which are born out of the findings of the current thesis. Future research methodologies by which to explore these research areas are also tentatively considered.

8.4.1 Domain specific C-P relationship research

Given the underpinning premise of the current thesis, future research should continue to explore the C-P relationship within the unique context of performance football settings in England. Previous research has provided an excellent foundation, particularly with the development of generic conceptual models that explore the characteristics and nature of the C-P relationship (Jowett, 2005). However, further exploration of these relationships would develop a more complex and nuanced understanding (Wagstaff, 2021). The findings of the current thesis demonstrated facets of the C-P relationship which were particularly important within the performance football domain. For example, relationships which facilitated high levels of challenge between the coach and athlete were deemed imperative (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023; chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review). When compared against participation domains, where the outcomes and motivations are likely to be different and performance pressures do not exist to the same extent, high levels of challenge may be less important (Jowett, 2007). Similarly, the coach's ability to understand and shape the deep-rooted socio-cultural factors that influence the C-P relationships were deemed as essential in the performance football domain. These environments are characterised as hierarchical, masculine and cut-throat, which would typically be in stark contrast to the participation domain (Champ et al., 2021; Potrac et al., 2012) or other sports where the dominant discourse may differ, for example, in swimming social expectations about body image dominate and in alternative sport such as windsurfing or snowboarding an 'alternative' image is valued (Thorpe, 2006; Wheaton, 2000). In performance football, the C-P relationship is also influenced by large squads of athletes and the significant coaching and MDT which are typical of these settings, and which may also make them unique compared to, for example, individual or less well funded sports. Therefore, future research could continue to explore the C-P relationship and how it interacts with, and is influenced by, this unique milieu. Research could go further by exploring the range of settings within the performance football domain in

England, for example youth phase and first team settings, and how this could, and should, change the C-P relationship.

8.4.2 A focus on coach development

Over a 30-year period research has been successful in developing a comprehensive understanding of the C-P relationship. This has included research which has been able to define (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016) measure (Jowett, 2009) and conceptualise (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002) this phenomenon. This has enabled researchers to demonstrate the plethora of positive outcomes associated with the development of high-quality C-P relationships (Riley & Smith, 2011; Avci et al., 2018; Gosai et al, 2023; Ogden et al. 2023; Phillips et al., 2023). Concurrently sociological work has explored the complexity and nuance, particularly relating to the ways that the sociocultural context influences this relationship (Jones et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2004, Cushion & Jones, 2006; Potrac et al., 2002). This provides a strong body of interdisciplinary research to draw upon and, therefore, research should now focus on influencing practice in meaningful ways. Of course, bridging the theory to practice divide is a highly complex endeavour (Lyle, 2018). But those who would benefit from this research the most are coaches and athletes, who should be supported to enable them to experience the transformative benefits of high-quality C-P relationships (Jowett, 2017). That is not to suggest that high quality C-P relationships, do not or have not always existed, but there is evidence that coaches and athletes are still experiencing, ineffective, unethical and even abusive relationships, particularly within the performance domain (Whyte, 2022; Swim England, 2023). Therefore, researchers have a duty to focus and influence practice in a significant and meaningful manner. Of course, this can be done in a variety of ways, such as the dissemination of content through digital platforms or infographics. Most importantly, researchers should focus on working collaboratively with NGBs to create policy change, educate athletes and influence the content of formal coach education programmes. It is the latter strategy that is of most concern within the context of the

current thesis, as one would hope coach development could be an important catalyst for more informed, evidence-based discussion of this phenomenon (The Independent, 2023). Particularly given that the current thesis provides a basis by which to demonstrate that various key stakeholders, including coach developers, coaches and athletes, within the performance football domain, not only hold the C-P relationship in extremely high regard, but also believe it should be an integral constituent of formal coach education curricula (chapter 4, Newland et al., 2023; chapter 5, Newland et al., 2024; chapter 6, Newland et al., under review).

High quality C-P relationships also have important outcomes for the wellbeing of coaches. There has been a growing body of literature which has highlighted the poor well-being of coaches, who are often overworked and reach burnout (Olusoga et al., 2019). However, research has demonstrated that coaches who had developed high quality relationships with athletes reported lower incidence of burnout (Westfall et al., 2018). Therefore, supporting coaches to develop their knowledge of how to develop high quality C-P relationship may enable them to reduce the levels of stress and burnout they experience, which is another important line of enquiry in future research.

8.4.3 Development, refinement and validation of the nine principles

The current thesis produced nine key principles, derived from the perspectives of coach developers, coaches and athletes, which identified aspects of coaching practice that could support coaches to develop high quality C-P relationships in practice. However, additional research is required to further validate these principles. This may result in the alteration or refinement of existing principles and the development of new principles. To further validate these findings, conducting research with larger scale samples could be utilised to enhance the rigour of the findings. Alternatively, a DELPHI study embracing a panel of experts from coaching, coach development, academia along with athletes could engage in a series of

questionnaires and subsequent feedback, to identify key trends relating to these principles, which could then be compared with the findings of the current study.

Each of the nine principles could be explored further using observational methods such as ethnographic research. This would enable the researcher to immerse themselves in performance-based football settings where they could observe the behaviours, practices and interactions of coaches, athletes and the wider MDT (Townsend & Cushion 2021). This would enable the researcher to observe these principles in practice and notice the nuances of these complex relationships, including the hidden elements that may not be sufficiently captured through other research methods (O'Reilly, 2012). This would allow for a more in-depth study of the principles in action and potentially serve to refine or even alter the current principles, producing more robust, complex and nuanced findings.

In the process of identifying principles for the development and maintenance of high-quality C-P relationships, a variety of significant research questions also arose. For each of the nine principles, key research questions are identified that could be explored by future research.

Establish personal values and beliefs that guide consistent decision making and behaviours.

- How do the axiological and ethical beliefs of performance-based football coaches influence the C-P relationship?
- What are the inherent challenges of performance football environments that make it challenging for coaches to adhere to their axiological and ethical beliefs and how does this impact their interactions and relationship with athletes?

Communicate clear expectations and co-construct were appropriate.

- What factors, in the performance-based football domain, influence the appropriateness of co-constructing expectations for the C-P relationship?

Maintain and encourage consistent and open dialogue with players.

- What are the key moments (stage of season, significant event, phase of career) where high quality communication between the coach and athlete are most critical?
- How do the therapeutic skills of performance-based football coaches influence the quality of coach-player communication?
- How can performance football coaches effectively educate athletes and encourage them to engage in consistent, open, honest and respectful communication practices?

Recognise and be responsive to the player's broader life context.

- How can performance coaches most effectively respond to critical incidents in the athlete's broader life context?
- What elements of the athlete's broader life context is it most important for performance football coaches to know, understand and be responsive to and what factors influences this for each individual athlete?
- What factors influence the extent to which athletes in performance football settings, need the coach to recognise and be responsive to their broader life context?

Balance the perceived and voiced needs of the player.

- What are the key considerations, in the performance-based football domain, which influence how the coach balances the perceived and voiced needs of the athlete and how does this impact the C-P relationship?

Provide a high level of challenge in an individualised, sustainable and ethical manner.

- How can performance football coaches ensure high levels of challenge for the athlete in an individualised, sustainable and ethical manner?

Use professional knowledge as a medium for connection.

- How do performance football coaches use professional knowledge as a medium to develop trust and credibility with athletes?
- How does the professional, intrapersonal and interpersonal knowledge of the coach interact to influence the C-P relationship in performance football domains?

Influence a culture that is conducive to high quality C-P relationships.

- How do the different technical coaching roles in performance-based football contexts influence the C-P relationship?
- How can technical coaching teams co-operate together to develop high quality C-P relationships?

- How does the demographics, personalities and attributes of the technical coaching team contribute to the development of high quality C-P relationships?
- How can performance football coaches work collaboratively with the MDT to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships?

Engage in constructive conflict resolution approaches.

- What factors, specific to the performance-based football domain, make coach-player conflict more likely to occur?
- In what ways does athlete power influence the C-P relationship in performance football settings?
- What approaches can performance football coaches adopt to effectively resolve coach-player conflict?

8.4.4 Measuring the impact of coach development interventions

Once research has been conducted which further develops, refines and validates the nine principles outlined in the current thesis, research should seek to explore the impact of coach education seminars, workshops and programmes that seek to support coaches to develop this facet of their practice. The translation of knowledge into a curriculum is a complex act (Dempsey et al., 2020). The research should explore how these findings can be interpreted and structured into a coherent, well sequenced and impactful curriculum to support performance coaches develop their understanding and knowledge of the C-P relationship. To measure the

impact of these interventions, the research could utilise the RE-AIM framework to evaluate interventions based on their reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and effectiveness (Evans, et al., 2015). From here, researchers are in a stronger position by which to present findings to appropriate NGBs, not only to demonstrate the validity of the principles, but also evidence the ways in which they can be used to design and formulate curriculum that positively impacts the practices of performance-based coaches in England.

8.5 Concluding remarks

The thesis has explored how the C-P relationship is integrated into the curriculum of the English FA UEFA A and B Licence courses and has identified the knowledge that could be incorporated into formal coach education courses to prepare coaches to develop and maintain high quality C-P relationships in practice. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the thesis has drawn on previous research from psychological (Jowett, 2005; Jowett and Rhind, 2010), sociological (Potrac et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2004, Cushion & Jones, 2006) and educational (Noddings, 2005; Knust & Fisher, 2015; Cronin et al., 2018) perspectives. The current thesis builds on previous research which has explored the features and characteristics of high-quality C-P relationships and has produced generic conceptual models (Jowett, 2005). Instead, the thesis focussed on exploring the C-P relationship within the unique performance football domain in England, and has a specific focus on coach development, through the identification of the essential knowledge that coaches require to perform effectively within this context. Based on the findings key principles are identified, which require further research, but provide a starting point for understanding the knowledge coaches require to effectively develop and maintain C-P relationships. This provides a basis to conduct further research which explores the C-P relationship within this specific domain and seeks to develop, refine and validate these principles further using multiple research methods.

From here, research should investigate the integration of these principles into coach education curriculum and seek to measure the impact of these interventions.

To conclude, the current thesis has provided compelling evidence for the justification of the C-P relationship as a central component of formal coach education curricula in the performance-based football domain, in England. The research will hopefully help to stimulate more informed discussions about the C-P relationship in performance-based football. It is hoped that practitioners move beyond old tropes and deep rooted clichés, where the C-P relationship is reduced to a simple choice between the coach providing the athlete with a metaphorical “kick up the backside” or an “arm around the shoulder”, which only serves to undermine the complexity and importance of this phenomenon. Instead, it will hopefully contribute towards a more meaningful discussion that supports the development of coaches and enable all of those who operate within this domain to experience the importance, value and transformative benefits of a high-quality C-P relationship.

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