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Performing off the Pitch

An investigation of identity management strategies of professional footballers as part of their career transition from the Premier League

Colm Patrick Hickey

Thesis submitted for Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

School of Applied Social Science
Durham University
2015

Abstract

Tá athrú mór tagtha ar an bhealach a smaoinítear faoi ghairmeacha beatha le deich bliana anuas. Mar gheall ar éiginnteacht san áit oibre, tá níos mó daoine san lucht oibre domhanda ar thóir gairme nua. É sin ráite, níl rud ar bith nua faoina bheith ar thóir gairme eile i saol an pheileadóra gairmúla i Sásana. Is minic a phléitear scor na bpeileadóirí rathúla sna meáin chumarsáide agus san saol acadúil. I gcodarsnacht leis seo, níl móran ráite faoi na peileadóirí prófisiúnta a scaoiltear ó na clubanna móra, nó faoi na deacrachtaí atá acu saol nua a chruthú taobh thiar den pháirc peile. Déanann an staidéar seo peileadóirí óga a chur faoi agallamh agus a bhaint amach na scileanna a úsáideann siad chun déileáil leis an trasdul grod ón Phríomhroinn go dtí saol nua, taobh amuigh den fhoireann peile.

With an ever-increasing proportion of the global labour force having to change careers following a forced or unplanned end to their previous means of employment, the manner in which we view the idea of a career has dramatically changed in the last ten years. However, career change has always been present in the world of English professional football. Both press and academic enquiry regularly address the different aspects of retirement for those players who have been fortunate enough to enjoy relatively long sporting careers. In contrast, little is offered regarding the majority of professional players who get released from former clubs and experience an unplanned and early career transition away from their footballing profession.

This study is an investigation of the identity management strategies of professional footballers as part of their early career transition away from the English Premier League. Ten participants each took part in three individual vignette interviews (30 interviews). All participants had recently experienced their career transitions from their respective Premier League clubs. Additionally, single interviews were carried out with three Premier League Education and Welfare Officers. This study demonstrates how identity management and construction strategies can be understood

through the working theoretical partnership of Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgy and Marcus and Nurius's Possible Selves (1986).

This thesis illustrates the existence of multiple identities belonging to footballers, directly challenging the thematic positioning of past research that lays emphasis on the conception of an exclusive athletic identity. Players offer performances portraying these multiple identities: performances that are influenced by the presence of differing social audiences and a desire to attain positive future possible selves and equally avoid negative possible selves. The career transitions of study participants proved to be smoother when audiences legitimised these performances. Difficulty arises when performances portrayed by participants are not dramatically realised by their audiences or are not supported by the context of their cultural environment. The data within this study underscore the idea that there is more to footballers than their ability to kick a ball, and that when such a fact is both understood and recognised their journey though their career transition can be a positive one.

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Writing a thesis surrounding issues of identity management made the constant reflection upon my own identities an inevitable process and a task I seemed to undertake daily. As part of my acknowledgements I am grateful of the opportunity to thank those who have contributed to my study and supported me during the process of its completion. I am resolute in my belief that this support has not only contributed to the final conclusion of my project but has positively influenced me as person. Above all, the support I was so fortunate to receive has taught me the importance of diligently ensuring I treat others with the same patience, empathy and open-mindedness I have been so regularly a recipient of.

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I owe much of who I am to my father and mother, Patrick and Maura, my four brothers, Aodhán, Séamus, Tadhg and Cian and my extended family. Without their support I would have not thought it possible that I might study to attain my PhD. Since childhood my parents and brothers have believed in me and during times when I doubted myself have been the first to remind me to trust in my abilities. The type of support they give is hard hitting, not for the faint hearted and unique to them- I wouldn't have had it any other way.

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Abbreviations

Education and Welfare Officers	(EWO)
English Football Association	(EFA)
Football League	(FL)
Footballers' Further Education and Vocational Training Society	(FFEVTS)
General National Vocational Qualification	(GNVQ)
League Football Education	(LFE)
Professional Football Association	(PFA)
Out Placement	(OT)
Youth Training Scheme	(YTS)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The careers of all professional athletes are short lived. Within football a lengthy occupation as a professional player can be measured, in general terms, against a period of ten years. However such career longevity is rarely achieved. Roderick (2006) appears as the first major body of work to address the vulnerable nature of a career within professional football from an academic position. As means of employment he depicts how professional football subjects its workforce to varying degrees of professional stability and security (Roderick, 2006). This research project in contrast has sought to examine the experiences of players who have not been fortunate to obtain this professional security and achieve long lasting careers within one of the most competitive and lucrative football labour markets in the world, the English Premier League.

Since the foundation of the Premier League in 1992, Hamil and Walters (2010) explain how English football has embarked on an extraordinary expansion. Between the 1992/93 and the 2006/07 seasons the combined financial turnover of the clubs in the Premier League increased by 900% from £170m to £1530m. Hamil and Walters (2010) explain that there has not been a single year since its foundation when the combined Premier League clubs have made a collective pre-tax profit. English professional football is widely held as the definitive success story of European football over the last 15 years (Hamil and Walters, 2010). Drawing on data from the Deloitte Annual Review of Football Finance (2009; 2014) there is certainly a lot of evidence to support this contention, for example;

- The Premier League is the richest league in Europe by some margin in terms of financial turnover. Over the 10-year period 1996/97 to 2006/07 the combined turnover of the 20 clubs in the Premier League, when expressed in euros to allow cross-comparison with other European peer leagues, increased by 330% from €689m to €2273m.

- Last season (2013-14) the Premier League remained the world leader in revenue terms, by over €900m. The increase in attendance (up 4% to a record average of 35,903 spectators per game) drove an overall uplift in match day revenue of £34m (6%) to £585m in 2013/14, the highest in Europe.
- The Premier League has the most lucrative TV broadcasting deal of any football league in the world, with the 2016-19 seasons being sold for £5.136bn.

Across a range of key indicators it is therefore clear that English football should rightfully be considered as Europe's most successful league. However despite the success English football has experienced as a socio-economic institution, the vast majority of players, as individuals at the very centre of this globally consumed commercialised sport, are not the beneficiaries of such wealth and are subject to constant instability regarding their job security. Despite the large sums of money associated with professional football Roderick (2006) rightfully explains that the majority of players are signed on relatively short-fixed contracts. The enormous rewards commonly presumed to be associated to all players are in fact concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of employees. Szymanski and Kuypers (1999) explain how the majority of professional players, especially those in the early stages of their careers, fare comparatively poorly in economic terms. Speaking about the salaries of players, Roderick (2006:23) explains it is a common and "mostly mythical" assumption that footballers are paid vast excessive wages. While there are some players who do earn very large salaries, such a group of players are small in number. The majority of footballing professionals are not nearly as financially fortunate.

Regarding job security Roderick (2006:1) pronounces the work of professional footballers as a "labour of love" and continues by describing the playing career of a professional footballer as one that is highly "fragile" in its nature (Roderick, 2006:82). Footballers do not embark on

their careers anticipating lifelong, stable employment. There is neither a professional nor public perception of job security in this industry. Roderick (2006) explains that even young professionals understand that the possibility of the end to their footballing career is an ever-present threat. Since the beginning of the Premier League season in 2010-11 to January of the current 2014-15 seasons, a total of 636 full time professional players have been released from Premier League teams[1]. This figure does not account for elite youth team and scholarship players who are part of team structures. Speaking of these elite academy players, Brown and Potrac (2009) explain that despite devoting up to nine years in preparation within a professional club environment, the failure rate of elite youth players competing for a senior professional contract is 85%. Such a figure has increased from previous assumptions, such as when Taylor indicated that three out of four players (75%) who join the game at age sixteen have departed from professional football by the time they are twenty-one years of age (Harding, 2003:foreword).

As part of this study it is vital to recognise the desire most aspiring athletes have to become a professional. Within the work of Parker (2001) we see how this desire manifests itself as part of the lives of youth trainee footballers in an English professional club. Parker (2001) describes how for these young players, moving beyond their trainee status to full time professionalism within football was centrally about rising above the physical depression of injury, casting aside the psychological pressures of the team, resisting verbal chastisement and personal humiliation whilst fulfilling the stringencies of club 'officialdom'. Providing trainees readily adhered to these stipulated norms and values, and providing they developed and matured to expected levels of footballing competence, Parker (1996) argued that they then stood a reasonable chance of completing the transition from youth trainee/academy player to fulltime professional players. Speaking of the experiences of players who have been successful in their ambition to become professional players and the

[1] Premier League Release List 2011-2015

labours that such careers entail, Roderick (2006) explains how professional football is highly contingent in the sense of lacking long-term security and breeding a pervading sense of insecurity. Uncertainty is central to the lived experiences of players, for whom career advancement and attainment are never secure. Professional footballers' work histories are characteristically unstable and short-term (McGillivray et al, 2005): players gain quickly an understanding of the uncertainty of the marketplace, the limited tenure of average contracts, the surplus of quality labour and their own vulnerability to workplace injury and ageing.

The experiences of players whose tenure in the professional game is involuntary cut short according to Brown and Potrac (2009), are characterised by the onset of such feelings and emotions that are explained in relation to the concept of 'symbolic loss'. Describing forced retirement, Drahota and Eitzen (1998) explain, athletes lose what has been the focus of their *being* for most of their lives, the primary source of their identities, the physical prowess, the adulation bordering on worship of others, the money and the prerequisites of fame, the camaraderie with team-mates, and the intense "highs" of competition. It is important to acknowledge that respectively only a small number of professional footballers experience the sort of fame, adulation and vast salaries to which Drahota and Eitzen (1998) allude. However their remaining points ring true. Similarly, it has been argued that one of the most common symbolic losses experienced by retired athletes is the loss of some aspect of the self (Sparkes, 2000). In this respect, Sparkes (2000:16) suggests that involuntary retirement can be considered to be a source of "biographical disruption" that interrupts the narrative coherence of a person's life. Such a disruption exists within professional football as the event of a player's *release* from their respective club. In such instances, club officials inform a player that their contract will not be renewed for the coming season. To use more general terms, the player is essentially made redundant with their skillset no longer required or viewed as an asset by their employer.

While not addressing an unplanned or involuntary exit, Schwenk et al (2007) describe how retired professional football players experience levels of depressive symptoms similar to those of the general population. Schwenk et al (2007) continue to explain that this condition of depression is strongly predictive of significant difficulties with sleep, financial difficulties, exercise and fitness and social relationships. According to Drawer and Fuller (2002), the provision of socioeconomic services at professional soccer clubs for retiring players is inadequate, however, they do claim the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) provides significantly more help and advice to retired players on medical, financial, career, and educational matters than all other sporting organisations. Even so, despite this, Drawer and Fuller (2002) recommend the soccer industry should develop a long-term strategy for managing the needs of players who are forced to retire. Mitchell et al (2014) carried a quantitative cross sectional investigation of the 'athletic identity' of elite footballers. As part of their conclusion they call for qualitative orientated research that seeks to understand the environment that appears to shape the social identity of this especially unique and hard-to-reach population. Inspired by such literature and the call for further research, this study has sought to offer its own contribution towards the issue of career transitions, specifically in the field of the sociology of sport. Facilitating such a contribution this investigation seeks to answer the following research question:

How do Premier League footballers, who have not been fortunate enough to realise their dreams of a long lasting playing career, employ strategies of identity management during their career transitions following a short number of years in professional football?

In an effort to answer such a question this study has four central aims:

1. To gain a better understanding of how the event of being released is experienced by footballers through the analysis of data collected from participants.

2. To employ a unique and innovative method in order to approach a topic that has proven difficult for academics to research due to the sensitive nature of the subject.
3. To explore whether the identity management strategies of participants can be better understood through the mergence of the Dramaturgical Metaphor and notions of Possible Selves; thus offering a new perspective to identity studies within the sociology of sport.
4. And from the experiences shared by participants, to consider what social discourses, supportive structures and common interactions offer individuals the opportunity of a smoother career transition away from the English Premier League and professional football.

The task of seeking an answer to the research question and to address the accompanying research aims proved to be a difficult one. The dominant barrier that was faced mirrored the difficulties encountered by much of the existing literature that has sought to examine the cultural environments and discourses within professional football and the experiences of its players. This barrier exists as the issue of *access*. Roderick (2006:9) explains that football clubs and indeed players themselves are "closed to people who are perceived as outsiders". While exceptions exist (Parker 1996; Davies 1996; Roderick, 2006), other studies have manoeuvred such obstacles through investigations examining the practices and daily workings of professional football clubs' academies and the sporting biographies of their scholars and youth team players (Parker 2001, Brown and Potrac, 2009), or have provided insightful, but methodically 'distant' observations (Giulianotti, 1999). In addition to this closed door approach and sceptic attitude towards academic enquiry, the sensitive nature of the research topic offered yet another challenge for this investigation to overcome.

In the presentation of my thesis I have divided the research project into four subsequent sections all falling under traditional headings; Literature Review (chapter 2,3,4); Research Design, Methods and Methodology (chapter 5); Discussion (chapter 6,7,8,9); and Conclusion. These

headings provide the structure under which nine chapters and a conclusion contained within the project are presented.

In **Chapter 2** I present existing literature that has examined athletes' exit from elite and professional sport. Such conversations engage with gerontological, thantological and life course perspectives, as well as discussions concerning whether experiences surrounding the release of players from elite sport are best considered as singular or transitional events. By highlighting the theoretical positions employed by past research to frame the causes for athletes' *end to* or *exit from* sport, this chapter is able to consider the most fitting interpretations from which to view and examine the event of the release of participants from their former Premier League Clubs and, for some, exits from football.

In an attempt to demonstrate the characteristics of the environment in which players construct and manage their identities prior to and during their career transition, **Chapter 3** highlights the importance of gaining an understanding of the cultural context in which such identities are formed. I have already alluded to the difficulties surrounding issues of access when considering the cultural context of players within the professional game. Within this chapter I believe the extent of these challenges are brought to light as I engage with studies that have sought to navigate a path around such obstacles through their investigation of elite youth football academies or their observations of professional sporting experiences from a position of distance. With this in mind and in order to understand the environment and cultural context in which the footballing identities of participants were constructed and managed, **Chapter 3** addresses existing literature that examines the culture and lived experiences within professional football both as academy scholars and as full time senior players.

Sparkes (2000) calls for a wider consideration of Notions of Possible Selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) where appropriate within the academic enquiry of sport. In **Chapter 4** I illustrate the theoretical underpinning by

which I have examined the identity management strategies of research participants. By way of extending Goffman's (1956) Dramaturgy through time with the addition of the notion of Possible Selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986*)* and the dimensions of the future and past selves belonging to the concept, it is hoped this merging of perceptions may provide a fresh attempt to answer the traditional critiques of the sociology of Erving Goffman. If we consider that, through the development of a view which shapes the idea of the *Presentation of Possible Selves in Everyday Life,* and consider that the social front of participants is not only influenced by the expectations of audiences but by the motivational weight of future possible selves, then the dramaturgical metaphor gains a new element. This partnership of conceptual ideas has allowed for the investigation of activity beyond present face-to-face associations of research participants and responds to calls for the dramaturgical metaphor to consider more structural influences to which modern men and women are subject.

Mitchell et al (2014) end their quantitative cross sectional investigation of the athletic identity of elite footballers with a call for more qualitative orientated research that seeks to understand the environment that appears to shape the social identity of this especially unique and hard-to-reach population. In **Chapter 5** I have provided the research design and methodological positioning that has acted as the foundation of my research and theoretical argument. **Chapter 5** is best considered in two parts. Firstly, it provides the context within career transition enquiry to place this project's research design. I examine the research characteristics of previous investigations of career transitions from sport. Secondly, I stipulate the research design of this project. I provide descriptions of the sample, research method, the methodology that such a method implies, how data are analysed and the ethical considerations held by the study. It is within the latter section of the chapter I provide a detailed account of the construction of my instrumentation – vignettes – and the unique fashion in which I utilised it, and the reasoning behind the decision to do so.

Chapter 6 aims to provide evidence that supports the conception that the identities of research participants are appropriately understood through the use of the dramaturgical metaphor and notions of possible selves. In order to achieve this, the chapter provides data relating to the participants' time as players at their Premier League clubs. The analysis of these data will demonstrate the influence of the presences of an audience and their expectation of culturally legitimate performances; and participants' hoped for and feared possible selves. Throughout conversations with all participants the notion and, indeed, importance of *banter* within the cultural context of their professional careers was apparent. As part of **Chapter 6**, I aim to further describe the environment from which participants transitioned by addressing the use of *banter* – joking relations at work – as a key discourse within professional footballing culture.

Chapter 7 deals with the event of the release of research participants. Using appropriate data I attempt to illustrate that through the interpretation of the performances of club officials and teammates, participants recognised informally the likelihood of their fate as professional footballers well in advance of being released formally. Such an understanding initiated participants' own respective identity management and construction strategies. In **Chapter 7** participants' experiences are examined and discussed through the consideration of how they 'knew' that they were going to be released and how this news did not come as a shock or surprise to them. In this chapter I demonstrate how participants exercised their own agency in approaching club management to proactively find out if they were indeed going to be released. Following such illustration the chapter turns its attention to how interactions between participants, their coaches and their teammates change once news of their release has been made public. **Chapter 7** concludes with a discussion about how audiences outside of participants' footballing environment influence and dramatically realise the performance and identities of the players following their release and during their career transition.

With discussion concerning the identity management of participants during their career transitions concluding the previous chapter, **Chapter 8** seeks to address the research question central to the study. **Chapter 8** provides the understanding of identity as conveyed by participants in this research. Through the discussion of issues regarding the efforts of participants to maintain a reconstructed footballing identity, their engagement with non-footballing identities, and the influence of non-supportive audiences, I demonstrate the practicality of the dramaturgical metaphor and the notion of possible selves co-existing and working together. **Chapter 8** demonstrates how such a combination provides a working hypothesis of identities in flux following a career transition from Premier League football in England.

As the data collection and analysis phases of my investigation progressed it became clear that it is important to acknowledge the role played by Education and Welfare Officers (EWO). As part of this study the opportunity arose to speak with such officers from different clubs. **Chapter 9** turns to Goffman's first published work regarding adaptations to failure and the metaphor of *Cooling the Mark Out* (1952). **Chapter 9** seeks to understand this unique element found in the investigation's data through the use of such a metaphor. In the chapter I propose and support the notion that players are "cooled out" as part of their career transitions by EWOs encouraging players to engage with possible selves outside of a football environment. This chapter will illustrate (i) the importance of the social role EWOs can play in the identity management of individuals as they progress through their career transition; (ii) how such support can be understood using Goffman's cooling out metaphor; and (iii) explore how such an understanding can engage with similar literature within employability studies.

Throughout the process of completing this investigation I have continuously endeavoured to push myself and my own thinking in order to better my ability to shed light on a hidden population rarely discussed

within either lay or academic conversations of sport. I have not remained unchanged by the experience. Nor do I believe my research would have produced “better” results had I not brought the knowledge I have attained from my personal experiences of life as an elite athlete to bear upon my work. This was especially true during my data collection phase, when in an effort to express my genuineness to participants I shared my past experiences of life as an elite competitor with participants. Such sentiments complimented the main purpose of my instrumentation and encouraged participants to speak openly and in depth about highly personal events in their lives, knowing I had an appreciation of the demands, sacrifices, social struggles and the amount of physical and mental effort involved in trying to *make it*. I believe that while I shared my experiences, I consciously maintained a disposition appropriate to the role of a researcher. I assumed the function of a critical friend rather than a close confidant or a hostile enemy. In doing so my attitude toward the personal quality of *honesty* was quickly affirmed. I had to ensure the sentiments I chose to share with participants stemmed from my own real sporting biography. I never attempted to bend truths in order to elicit more conversations. Similarly I never stretched the reality of my past sporting experiences to better relate to those of my research participants.

I have strived to carry such a trait across in my writing. In the thesis that follows, I offer what I believe to be a worthwhile understanding of the events surrounding a professional footballer’s career transition from the English Premier League. I present my findings through an analysis of participants’ identity management strategies and postulate such experiences as better understood through the working theoretical partnership of Goffman’s Dramaturgical Metaphor (1959) and Markus and Nurius’s (1986) notions of Possible Selves. Key to such a position is the idea that participants held multiple identities inside and away from sport. These social identities were frequently in a state of flux, deemed legitimate or illegitimate by the audiences they were portrayed to and often authenticated by the cultural environment in which they existed. Much in a fashion similar to which I sought to collect my data, I support

and further develop these assertions within my thesis in the most authentic way I can. If this study was to be described by others, it is my hope that its future audiences will depict the honesty in which it is written.

Chapter 2

The Presentation Of Possible Selves In Everyday Life

2.1 Introduction

Lord (1997) explains that people who reflect on their individual characteristics also project themselves into the future. They think ahead to the kind of person they would like to become or the kind of person they are afraid they might become. Possible Selves are projections of future possibilities for the expected, desired and feared future self (Lord, 1997). Students may have a graduate possible self. An individual struggling with anorexia may have a thin possible self. Visitors to a doctor's surgery may have a seriously ill possible self. Although we generally experience ourselves as relatively consistent over time, it is nonetheless true that people do change. Indeed it is often gratifying to compare one's past self with the present self, for doing so will suggest that there has been improvement over time (Wilson and Ross, 2000). In fact, thinking about a *future self* that an individual may become can inspire them to forego current activities that are enjoyable, but will not help, or might even hinder, bringing about this improved self. Instead Baron et al (2006) explain an individual may invest in less immediately enjoyable activities in order to achieve in time the goal of becoming their desired possible self. Baron et al (2006) continue to ask us to consider what is involved in attaining a variety of social identities. Individuals give up years of having fun, in order to attain the status of college graduate, complete years of scholarship and long periods of study to be able to call themselves doctors. Lockwood and Kunda (1999) have found that role models can inspire individuals to invest in such long-term achievements, but to do so, the very same individuals must see the possible self that the role model represents as being potentially attainable and desirable. The image of a possible future self can influence an individual's motivation to study harder, give up drinking and invest in a pension, to the extent that they can imagine that a new and improved self will result from such changes.

The purpose of this initial chapter is first to address how previous research

has sought to approach investigations surrounding the identities of professional footballers. Secondly this chapter provides its own critique of previous literature through the provision of the social theoretical perspective this study has employed to understand the identity management strategies of its participants. Such a perspective is informed by the partnership of Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Metaphor and Markus and Nurius's (1986) Notions of Possible Selves.

2.2 Past Investigation of Identity within Football

In the most recent investigation of identity in elite-level English youth football, Mitchell et al (2014) begin by describing that, to excel in elite-level professional sport, athletes typically form a strong bond with their chosen occupation (i.e., a specific sport). Existing research describes how after participating at the beginner level (e.g., youth sport), most individuals choose to specialise in a sport that they are most skilled (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999). Wiechman and Williams (1997) explain how family, friends, coaches, teachers and in some cases differing media often support the goal of advancement in that sport, and consequently, young players, may begin to form what has been termed as 'athletic identity'. This notion has been defined as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" (Brewer et al,1993:237).

Previous research has illustrated that where athletic identity has been seen to be strong, long-lasting psychological benefits to the athlete have been evident, and include such things as enhancement in social interactions, more positive athletic experiences, and increased motivation (Brewer et al, 1993; Horton and Mack, 2000). In contrast, it has been noted that those who place too strong an emphasis on their athletic identity become somewhat one-dimensional, and in that sense may solely view themselves as a sports person at the expense of other social roles (Wiechman and Williams, 1997). The resultant effects of this latter perspective are that athletes may experience psychological or behavioural disturbance when unable to train because of injury or de-selection (Coen and Ogles, 1993; Higgins, 1987; Horton and Mack, 2000; Showers, 1992; Sparkes, 1998, 2000) and, with

greater relevance to this study, a lack of post-career planning (Blann, 1985; Marcia, 1966; Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer, 1996).

As players begin to form identities at an early age, the youth environments within professional football have proven to be an arena where previous investigations of identity in football have been carried out. The youth environment within professional football recognises that youth team footballers spend a high percentage of their time in duties that revolve around training and competition (McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006). Mitchell et al (2014) explain that historically, the mantra of 'live, breathe and eat' football has been strongly advocated within youth development environments. It is these deep cultural markers that are perceived to evoke increased levels of dedication and commitment to attaining professional status (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Holt and Dunn, 2004; Holt and Mitchell, 2006; Pain and Harwood, 2008; Parker, 2000). Moreover, the recent implementation of the Elite Player Performance Plan in English professional football advocates an increase in "time" spent training to achieve professional player status.

Therefore, echoing the work of Mitchell et al (2014) it can be suggested that if players are exposed to formally organised training and competition from a younger age such as 5 years (Football Association, 2010), some individuals may be at risk of developing an overly strong 'athletic identity' by the age of 18 years. Similar notions have been termed "identity foreclosure" (Marcia et al, 1993; Petitpas, 1978). According to Marcia (1966), foreclosure occurs when individuals prematurely make a commitment to an occupation or ideology, in the case of this study a career in professional football. Brown and Potrac (2009) did not specifically explore identity or the notion of its foreclosure; they comment that players would routinely sacrifice social and educational aspects of their lives in favour of becoming a professional footballer. This is in spite of 90% of youth players who embark on a professional football career failing to achieve professional status (Anderson and Miller, 2011). Mitchell et al (2014) use this high failure rate in the domain of youth professional football to advocate the importance of exploring levels of athletic identity in this specific population and within their study administer

the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001) to 168 teenagers aspiring to make it in professional football. Mitchell et al (2014) claim this is especially pertinent as those players who fail to make a professional career may be at risk of psychological effects and experience difficulties if their careers are prematurely terminated. The above literature has sought to investigate the identity of professional football from a psychological perspective, and in an effort to approach the hard to reach population of professional footballers, have recruited their samples from youth football academies.

Within their findings Mitchell et al (2014) describe how considering apprenticeships with football academies, first-year players reported significantly higher levels of social identity. It would appear that those players in the first year of their apprenticeship viewed themselves more as a footballer than those in their second year. This observation supports previous work on the saliency of athletic identity and its dependency on current athletic circumstance (Grove et al, 2004; Lavellee et al 1997). Mitchell et al (2014) suggest that first-year players perceive themselves, at a deeper level, as being a footballer, due to their more recent positive transition from a schoolboy (i.e., part-time) to a full-time football player (League Football Education, 2010). Mitchell et al (2014) point out that this observation might also be explained by players who are in the latter stage of the role (i.e., second-year apprentice) becoming more aware of the reality of low progression rates to the professional environment (Anderson and Miller, 2011). According to Mitchell et al (2014), players may start to realise that they might not “make the grade” of a professional footballer. In addition, this observation may also be explained in terms of some form of divestment from athletic identity, as a defence mechanism to protect their ego (Snyder, 1988). While previous research has focused on rejected academy football players (Mitchell et al 2014; Brown and Potrac, 2009), the aim of this study was to gain a critical understanding of the identity management and construction of professional Premier League players following the event of their release. While acknowledging the academic use of the notion of Athletic Identity in the past (especially within sport psychology research), the sociological

perspective of this study seeks to approach *the Self* belonging to participants as one that exists as a working arrangement of multiple identities (e.g. the footballing identity, the identity of a son, the identity of a friend) all of which are in a constant state of flux.

The reasoning behind such a decision is founded upon a strong belief that the conceptual idea of identity does lend itself to the characteristics of a notion that can be measured through a survey (e.g. Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, Brewer and Cornelius, 2001). This study contests that such instrumentation does not adequately address the complexity of identity, and that much of the complexity and depth of meaning surrounding the identities of their respective participants is lost in much of the existing literature that has been addressed above. Therefore, this project has sought to realise the scope and breadth of its participants' identities that pertain to their lives both inside and away from football, and not as they fit the mechanics of quantitative instrumentation or the characteristics of the exclusive nature of athletic identity, a concept that stipulates the perception of participants as only footballers who have nothing outside of their ability to kick a ball. In order to achieve such an understanding this study has employed Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Metaphor, and Markus and Nurius's (1986) notion of Possible Selves. Thus, in a modest way, I attempt to answer the call of Mitchel et al (2014) for more qualitatively orientated research that shifts in methodological and epistemological approaches from existing research to explore the lived experiences and formation of identity in professional football environments.

2.3 The Dramaturgical Metaphor

In order to consider whether the notion of possible selves can be used to extend Goffman's theatrical metaphor, a call to revisit his notion of Dramaturgy is required. Trevino (2002) explains, in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman employs the dramaturgical or theatrical metaphor as a means of describing the organisation of face-to-face interaction. Goffman's focus here on self-presentation, or the notion that people as social actors endeavour to engineer a particular conceptualisation

of themselves *before others*, seems centrally relevant to our discussion concerning the manner in which professional footballers might manage, construct, and present their identities in front of significant others. Through the dramaturgical metaphor Goffman develops a view of everyday social life as something like a staged drama, a theatrical production, in which social actors, on the basis of their appearance and manner, attempt to form favourable impressions of themselves before audiences.

Consider David Beckham for example: in the twilight of his successful and global sporting biography Beckham accompanied England's World Cup team to South Africa in 2014. Both his teammates and the greater public saw him undoubtedly as a veteran of the changing room. Inactive as a playing member of the previous England World Cup team, Beckham, whose official position was dubbed "Player Liaison" appeared playing the part of the 'older brother' and 'mentor' to his younger teammates. Beckham's sense of national pride while representing his country is well documented, however it is hard not to, at the very least, consider portraying a role of strong nationalism and support for 'the cause' was no doubt acted out in the knowledge of how well it would be received by a greater social and sporting audience. Thus in turn, generating a positive return for the *David Beckham Self* as a brand.

Like professional actors on a stage, footballers aspiring to attain their possible selves as social actors will enact roles, assume characters, and play through scenes when engaging within their social environments. Goffman portrays the focused interactions, as those of a playwright, producer, actor and part. There is importantly an inner "I" that distinguishes between an actor's self-image and the misconception of themselves which they feel their behaviour must be forming among others, or retreats even from the self-image into wondering, as Burns (1992) uncomplicatedly asks, "Is this really me?" The inner "I" then manages the social self. It is both tactician and strategist, directing the social role-playing self into and through social situations, establishments and settings. Burns (1992) depicts that what we encounter in the dramaturgic model is a series of selves, one 'inside' the

other, much like the fashion of a Russian doll. There is an 'inner self' lurking inside the self which is present, or presented, to the outside world of others. According to Ritzer (2008), Goffman's sense of the self was shaped by his dramaturgical approach. To Goffman (1959:252-253) the self is:

> "Not an organic thing that has a specific location... In analysing the self then we are drawn from its possessor, from one person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time... The means of producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg."

Ritzer (2008) suggests that Goffman perceived the self, not as a possession of the actor, but rather as the product of the dramatic interaction between actor and audience. The self "is a dramatic effect arising... from a scene that is presented" (Goffman, 1959:253). Ritzer continues that although the bulk of his discussion focuses on these dramaturgical contingencies, Goffman pointed out that most everyday performances are successful. Goffman explained the idea of 'performance' as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion that serves to influence in any way any of the interacting participants. Performance refers to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by their continuous presence before a particular set of observers, and which has some influence on the observers (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman's notion of 'dramatic realisation' suggest that while in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses their activity with signs that dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory acts, which might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure. For, if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he or she must mobilise their activity so that during interactions it will express what they wish to convey (Goffman, 1959). The performer may be required not only to express their claimed capacities during the interaction but also to do so during a split second in the interaction. Goffman turns our attention to an example given by Pinelli (1953) to make his point. If a baseball umpire is to give the impression he is sure of

his judgement, he must forgo the moment of thought in which he might make sure of his judgement; he must give an instantaneous decision so that the audience will be sure that *he* is sure of his judgement. Goffman (1959) suggests that a performance of a routine presents through an individual's 'front' some rather abstract claims upon the audience, claims that are likely to be presented to them during the performance of other routines. This constitutes one way in which an individual's performance is socialised, moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of society in which it is presented. Goffman considers another important aspect of this socialisation process; namely, the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealised in several ways. The notion that a performance presents an idealised view of the situation is, of course, quite common. Goffman highlights Cooley's view (1922:353) as a means of good illustration of this point:

> "If we never tried to seem a little better than we are, how could we improve or 'train ourselves from the outside inward'? And the same impulse to show the world a better idealised aspect of ourselves finds an organised expression in the various professions and classes, each of which has to some extent a cant or pose, which its members assume unconsciously, for the most part, but which has the effect of a conspiracy to work upon the credulity of the rest of the world. There is a cant not only of theology and of philanthropy, but also of law, medicine and teaching."

Thus, according to Goffman, when an individual presents themselves before others, their performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the official accredited values of the society, more so in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole.

The individual in question must demonstrate their conviction that what is enacted is "the real reality" while sustaining a viable front of appropriate facial expressions and role attitudes. A person's front is a set of "abstract stereotyped expectations" that prepares the audience for the ensuing performance (Goffman, 1959:28-37). Manning (1992) explains fronts add

“dramatic realisation” to performances, which help performers convey everything they wish to convey in any given interaction. Manning (1992) continues by suggesting that performances are not only dramatically realised, they are also “idealised”, that is to say, put in the best possible light and shown to be fully compatible with a culture’s general norms and values. If we think of former Manchester United FC player, Ryan Giggs, prior to 2010, he was continually presented as a “clean cut”, loyal, family man in the national media (e.g. Baker, 1997; Corrigan, 2005). The actions and performance he expressed to the world, through his interaction with the media, was one of a sports star who made the correct moral choices in every aspect of his life. We are led to believe that he listened to the guidance of his manager, expressed his loyalty to his wife, and worked hard in order to achieve success. In later years the extent of loyalty toward his family and clean-cut image would be brought into serious disrepute (Tozer and Thomas, 2011; Brown, 2014). Manning (1992) explains that, whenever possible, we maintain expressive control of our actions so as to safeguard our fragile sense of worth.

According to Williams (1986) several basic criticisms of interactionism are pertinent when discussing Goffman's work, namely, that it is ahistorical, non-economic, culturally limited, ideologically biased and has a limited view of social power and paints an odd picture of social reality. Many of these comments collapse into a more general criticism, namely, that symbolic interactionism [2]lacks a proper appreciation of social organization and social structure. This, of course, is simply another way of stating that Goffman’s interactionism may have a structural or microscopic bias and that a perspective with an *astructural* bias is one that, by definition, will tend to be non-economic, ahistorical and apolitical, with reference to power and politics.

Blumer (1972) suggests the weaknesses with the Dramaturgical Metaphor stem from the narrowly constructed area of human group life that he stakes

[2] I acknowledge that for many sociologists/interactionists, there is a difference between the work of Goffman and classic interactionists such as Blumer. In the context of this thesis I consider these as only minor differences.

out for study. He has limited the area of face-to-face association with a corresponding exclusion of the vast sum of human activity falling outside such association. Further he confined the study of face-to-face association to the interplay of personal positioning at the cost of ignoring what participants are doing. That is to say, for Bulmer, the dramaturgical approach ignores the macrocosm within which its micro-level concerns are imbedded. Similarly, the approach overlooks the actual substantive content of human encounters in its concern exclusively with the expressive forms of focused encounters. The resultant image of the human condition is partial and truncated. Blumer argues that without minimizing the fact that human beings in one another's presence are sensitive to how they are being regarded, it is far-fetched to assume that this form of self-awareness constitutes the major concern of individuals in handling themselves. Williams highlights the critique of Goffman belonging to Gouldner (1971) as important to consider because it is frequently cited as a means of dismissing Goffman's work as either trivial or marginal. Gouldner elaborates upon several interrelated sources of the dramaturgical metaphor. He points out that modern men and women are likely to be functionaries or clients of large-scale bureaucratic organizations over which they have little influence. This being the case, Goffman pays little attention to the efforts of people to alter the structure of such organizations. Further, in such organizations individuals tend to become readily interchangeable units whose sense of social worth and power is consequently impaired. Lacking impact on the organizational structure and its functioning, they bend their efforts to the management of impressions that will maintain or enhance status. The newer, salaried middle classes are those directly vulnerable to the above conditions. Gouldner (1971:386) characterises Goffman's dramaturgy as “a revealing symptom of the latest phase in the long-term tension between the middle class's orientation to morality and its concern with utility”.

Gouldner suggests that Goffman focuses upon the episodic or situational, upon micro-analysis or brief encounters, without reference to historical circumstances or institutional frameworks. While Williams highlights this feature of Goffman's imagery, it is, of course, common to all varieties of

contemporary symbolic interactionism. That is to say, for Gouldner, Goffman displays an ahistorical and an astructural bias. Gouldner (1971:379) expresses his opinion of Goffman's work when he describes how he believes, "it is a social theory that dwells upon the episodic and sees life only as it is lived in a narrow interpersonal circumference, ahistorical and non-institutional, an existence beyond history and society and one which comes alive only in the fluid transient 'encounter'." Critiquing the dramaturgical metaphor, Sedgwick (1982) contends that Goffman's method consists of a precocious sensitivity toward those elements of social living, which involves the face-to-face adjacency of persons. On all other aspects of the social process, that is to say, on the institution or happening that receives its meaning from outside this immediately shared space among individuals within shouting distance of one another, Sedgwick highlights Goffman is virtually silent. According to Sedgwick's critique, Goffman's constant tendency, therefore, is to dissolve society into 'setting', practising a methodological localism, which is doomed to fail if it is intended to express more than the 'cliché', 'only people make history'. In analysing Goffman's theory of the narrowly interpersonal, Sedgwick (1982:64) affirms that such a way of thinking, "...will not provide us with enough grit even to digest the logic of the small-scale setting or encounter."

To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs, Goffman suggests we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown; that is, as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community. Furthermore, in so far as the expressive bias of performances comes to be accepted as reality, then that which is accepted at the moment as reality will have some characteristic of the celebration. Then using Goffman's analogy, to stay in one's room away from the place where the party is given, is to stay away from where the reality is being performed.

This investigation's answer to such criticisms be can found in its use of Notions of Possible Selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The following sections dealing with the Possible Selves will demonstrate that the *visions*

individuals hold of themselves in the future have a direct impact on how they act in the present. Such visions derive from their past experiences. Thus with the appreciation of an individual in the past, present and future this investigation's conception of identity cannot be considered *ahistorical*. Equally, using the partnership of Dramaturgy and Possible Selves, this thesis deals with the issue of *banter* as an appropriate vehicle to gain an understanding of the cultural and professional environment within Premier League football clubs. It is these bureaucratic organisations that participants played/worked for. Such a perspective therefore provides an answer to the *astructural* criticism of the Dramaturgical metaphor.

With its critics acknowledged and the well-known Dramaturgical Metaphor revisited, attention is drawn to the notion of Possible Selves and how this perspective, in working partnership with the notion of Dramaturgy, answers such criticism.

2.4 Possible Selves

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the concept of Possible Selves in an attempt to compliment conceptions of self-knowledge with regard to psychology. Markus and Nurius explain how possible selves derive from representations of the self in the past, and they include representation of the self in the future. They are different and separable from the current or 'now' selves, yet are ultimately connected to them. Possible future selves however are not just any set of imagined roles or states of being. Instead, as Markus and Nurius explain, they represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears and fantasies; for example, I am now in school, but I could be in a football academy, I could be a professional player. These possible selves are individualised or personalised but, more importantly to their involvement in this investigation, they are social. Many possible selves are the direct result of previous social comparisons in which an individual's own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviours have been contrasted to those of salient others - "What others are now, I could become" (Markus and Nurius, 1986:954). According to the thinking of Markus and Nurius, an individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves

derives from the categories made salient by an individual's particular socio-cultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences. Thus possible selves have the potential to reveal the inventive and constructive nature of the self, belonging to a Premier League footballer experiencing a career transition, but they also reflect the extent to which this self is socially determined and constrained.

Before continuing further it is important to acknowledge the original cognitive approach to the notion of possible selves. Markus and Nurius explain that individuals also have ideas about themselves that are not as well anchored in social reality. They have ideas, beliefs and images about their potential and about their goals, hopes and fears. This is particularly so in those domains which are important for self-definition. This self-knowledge is of a different type than the self-knowledge of one's gender or race, or the self-knowledge of one's preferences or habits. Most obviously, as representations of the self in future states, possible selves are views an individual holds that have not been verified or confirmed by social experience (Epstein 1973). Yet self-knowledge of this type should not be dismissed, for it is entirely possible that this variety of self-knowledge also exerts a significant influence on individual functioning, a point which will be addressed shortly.

Within their discussion of possible selves, Hoyle and Sherrill (2006) highlight the importance of the underpinning idea of the Working Self-Concept as part of understanding the origins of possible selves. The self-concept reflects the potential for growth and change, and all the values that are attached to these possible future states or statuses. Markus and Nurius explain the value of considering the nature and function of possible selves is most apparent if we examine not the self-concept, which is typically regarded as a single, generalised view of the self, but rather the current or working self-concept. Not all self knowledge is available for thinking about the self at any one time, the working self concept derives from the set of self conceptions that are presently active in thought and memory. It can be viewed as a continually active, shifting array of available self knowledge. The array changes as

individuals experience variation in the internal states and social circumstances. Much like the sentiments of Goffman, the content of the working self concept depends on what self conceptions have been active just before, on what has been elicited or made dominant by the particular social environment, and on what has been more purposefully invoked by individuals in response to a given experience, event or situation.

In a similar formulation, Burke (1980) proposed that it is the self-image which can be viewed as current working copies of the basic identities that guide performance. According to Markus and Nurius, under some circumstances, perhaps following a defeat, a loss or a lapse in will power, the working self concept will be dominated by conceptions of negative possibility. The working self-concept of the professional footballer, for instance, who succumbs to drinking multiple units of alcohol during the night before training will include not only some actual representations of self, but also a variety of self-conceptions of negative possibility. Some of these are quite likely to be realised (e.g. tomorrow's self being sluggish in training), whereas others may be quite improbable and relatively impoverished (e.g. an alcoholic self, an out-of-control self).

Function of Possible Selves

Possible selves are important for two reasons according to Markus and Nurius. Firstly, they function as incentives for future behaviours (e.g. the selves to be approached or avoided); and secondly, because they provide an evaluative role and interpretative context for the current view of the self. The first function deals with self knowledge that not only provides a set of interpretative frameworks for making sense of past behaviours, it also provides the means-ends patterns for new behaviour. Individuals' self knowledge of what is possible for them to achieve is motivation as it is particularised and individualised; it serves to frame behaviour and to guide its course. In this role possible selves function as personalised carriers (representations) of general aspirations, motives and threats and of affective states. They serve to select among future behaviours (i.e. they are selves to be approached or avoided). The Second important function of possible

selves derives from their role in providing a context of additional meaning for an individual's current behaviour. Attributes, abilities and actions of the self are not evaluated in isolation. Their interpretation depends on the surrounding context of possibility. Thus, the championship footballer with a possible self of playing in the Premier League will attach a different interpretation to a Premier League club who has expressed some interest in signing the player than someone without this possible self or aspiration. Similarly, the person with a weak or poorly skilled footballing possible self is likely to imbue being 'let go' from a football club with much greater significance than someone without this negative possible self. Thus, possible selves help furnish criteria against which outcomes are evaluated.

Possible selves are hypothesised to serve several important functions. Most importantly as Osyerman and Markus (1990) explain, they serve as incentives for future behaviour; they are selves to be approached or avoided. Hoped-for possible selves provide the individual with futures to dream or fantasise about. Individuals may not view these selves as truly attainable and will not feel a great loss if they are not achieved. When positive possible selves are viewed as attainable and when specific scripts, plans and behavioural control strategies are attached to them, they become expected selves. For example, when a new football player, fresh after signing their first contract, claims that he expects to do well at the club, this possible self may include images of himself being praised by his coaches, scoring goals, or bragging to his teammates about his accomplishments. Speaking of their own research dealing with youth delinquency, Osyerman and Markus (1990) suggest while many expected possible selves are desirable ones that youths are working to maintain, others can be negative. Often the negative expected selves are those that are currently self descriptive and that seem inevitable. Feared selves are those an individual wants to avoid, such as being released from a Premier League club and the associated images of *not playing football at the highest level* or *not being offered a new contract with a new club.* As in the case for expected selves, feared selves can also include those selves an individual wishes to avoid yet views as inevitable.

In any particular instance of behaviour, a variety of possible selves may be implicated. Osyerman and Markus (1990) propose that any given possible self will have maximal motivational effectiveness when it is off-set or balanced by a countervailing possible self in the same domain. Thus a feared possible self will be most effective as a motivational resource when it is balanced with a self-relevant positive possible self that provides the outlines of what one might do to avoid the feared state (e.g., I might never play at a professional level again if I don't get picked up by a club soon and play better). Likewise, positive expected selves will be stronger motivational resources, and maximally effective, when they are linked with feared representations of what could happen if the desired state is not realised. Although people cannot always control what becomes active in the self-concept, Osyerman and Markus (1990) suggest we should assume that individuals are able to deliberate in order to recruit and deploy possible selves in order to motivate themselves. A vivid representation of oneself in a relevant positive and desired state (a player having a long career with a club) can be used to counter the representation of the self in an undesired state (a player being let go by a club after only a short time) and to prevent the inaction that occurs when a dreaded possible self dominates the working self concept. This implies, for example, that an image of oneself being released from a professional club or not having that club offer a new contract is unlikely to have any systematic effect on behaviour unless a representation of oneself having a legitimate long term and successful career with that club or within the Premier League can be recruited to challenge these feared selves.

Following the work of Oyserman and Markus and commenting on the position held by Markus and Nurius that possible selves have two functions resulting in the direction of current behaviour, Hamman et al (2010) explain that because these future-oriented selves represent what one would like to become (i.e., hoped-for selves) and what one wants to avoid (i.e., feared selves), they act as "behavioural blueprints" (Robinson and Davis, 2001:5) or roadmaps that inform and guide judgments about present behaviours in light of whether they move the individual toward or away from the target outcome

(Frazier and Hooker, 2006). In addition to this informational feature, possible selves may also exert a motivational influence (Stahan and Wilson, 2006). Individuals with foresight of what they want to become, may be more likely to persevere in pursuing their goals and aspirations. When an individual considers their possible self, the future becomes the "primary motivational space" (Nuttin, 1984:54) for acting to achieve goals and avoid undesirable outcomes. Of course, these two functions of possible selves are interrelated. Markus and Wurf (1987) suggested that possible selves are like self-schemata that are influenced by the contingencies of intra-personal goals and inter-personal activity. Possible selves may influence the regulation of an individual's behaviour (Erikson, 2007). Moreover, past achievement and other behavioural outcomes associated with possible selves may also become potential self-representations stored in long-term memory ready to be activated at another time and in another setting. As such, according to Hamman et al (2010), possible selves are dynamic and their origins and longevity influence and are influenced by personal goals, interactions, and outcomes that occur within a relevant environment.

Additions to the Possible Selves

Although possible selves initially were characterised as constituents of a dynamic self-system with implications for behaviour, Hoyle and Sherrill (2006) suggest the specific characteristics of possible selves that give rise to behaviour have not been specified. Hoyle and Sherrill highlight that in subsequent characterizations of the construct, Markus and colleagues extended their original conceptualization to make more explicit the basis for the hypothesized link between future oriented self-representations and current behaviour (e.g., Oyserman and Markus, 1990; Ruvolo and Markus, 1989). Possible selves, described as "action-oriented representations" (Markus and Ruvolo, 1989:213) and "cognitive/affective elements that incite and direct one's self-relevant actions" (p. 217), were characterised with reference to more general models of information processing. From this perspective, possible selves were hypothesized to produce behaviour because they provide individuals with an image of themselves engaged in behaviours relevant to those self-representations and, in so doing, render

accessible more cues significant to these behaviours (Gollwitzer, 1999). The accessibility of these cues is attributable to the fact that information processing is biased by the content of the currently activated representation of self (i.e., the working self-concept). As such, the emergent goals, unlike goals that are widely shared or imposed by others, are specific and self defining. Hoyle and Sherrill (2006) suggest that although all possible selves have the potential to influence current behaviour, some are more likely to do so than others. Possible selves most likely to influence behaviour have been termed self-regulatory possible selves (Oyserman et al, 2004). Self-regulatory possible selves are those that represent a self-defining goal and include specific behavioural strategies for pursuing the goal. Self-regulatory possible selves can be distinguished from self-enhancing possible selves, which contribute to positive feelings about the self but do not have direct relevance for current behaviour. For instance, footballing possible selves that envision the self training and avoiding distractions are likely to motivate current behaviour, whereas those that envision the self simply playing professional football might engender positive feeling about the self but are not likely to motivate current behaviour (Oyserman et al, 2004).

Erikson (2007) explains that the concept of possible selves has been further enriched by the emphasis on its function in motivation through the work of Markus and Ruvolo (1989:212):

> "These thoughts, images, or senses of one's self in the end state and in the intermediate states. . . me wearing a red shirt or me doing rounds at the hospital, or me being made fun of by co-workers, or me as a bored and underpaid clerk—are viewed as the individualised carrier of motivation."

In this sense, possible selves function as goals, having an incentive power to pull us toward a desired end state, sometimes helped by an undesired negative possible self to be avoided (although, according to Oyserman and Markus (1990), a negative possible self is not in itself motivating except in the role of balancing and boosting a positive possible self). Erikson (2007) holds that possible selves function as goals and provide a theoretical link

between cognition and motivation, and also between social environment and motivation, because the mental structures involved include such cognitive representations as self schema, which are strongly influenced by social processes. Possible Selves are not the only theoretical model of conceptions of the future for the self, there are theoretical concepts similar to possible selves, although they include more vague notions such as an ideal self (e.g., Harter and Marold, 1991). An ideal self in this sense is a future self that one wishes to become in comparison with what one is today (Harter and Marold, 1991). Although this model of ideal selves is in a sense broader than the model of possible selves (including conceptions more rightly labelled life tasks than possible selves), it is in another sense narrower (in its scope of emotional value).

One conclusion that can be made from what has been said so far is that possible selves are manifest through experienced meaning. According to Markus (2006), it was also a goal of the original creators to use the concept of possible selves as an approach to the study of meaning making. The meaning dimension is mentioned by Markus and Nurius (1986) as an important aspect of the concept of possible selves, in particular in relation to making actions meaningful. Still, the meaning dimension of possible selves, to a substantial degree, has been implicit only in the literature. Erikson (2007) argues that by an explicit discussion of how possible selves can be seen in relation to meaning and meaning making, we can attain a better understanding of both the functioning and the construction of possible selves. This could, in particular, be the case if the theory of possible selves was related to a model of meaning making emphasizing the role of social and cultural context, because the relation between possible selves and their social and cultural context can be further elucidated. Erikson (2007) continued describing that one way of explicating the role of meaning with an eye to social and cultural contexts is to look at models of cultural and social frameworks that give the context-dependent meaning to conceptions such as possible selves. One model of meaning making is suggested by Bruner (1995), who pointed out a set of aspects that can easily be connected with possible selves. One such framework is our assumptions about inter-

subjectivity, and Bruner sees it as how we understand events, interactions, and expressions as being shared with other people. These understandings influence possible selves in that they are largely about situations in which we are interacting with others, and these interactions are very dependent on a mutual understanding or the achieving of a mutual understanding. As Marshall, Young, and Domene (2006) put it, possible selves are in many cases joints action, a point that, perhaps, offers an idea similar to Goffman's notion of the unspoken understanding between an audience and performer.

Erikson (2007) suggests that this is a key point in the meanings we give all possible selves that involve communication. However, he argues that the role of inter-subjectivity is even more fundamental. Without our assumptions about inter-subjectivity, phenomena such as role expectations, anticipated shame, or anticipated rewards would be meaningless because they are based on the assumption that we can understand each other and that others relate to what we do or do not do. For Erikson (2007) the role of inter-subjectivity is a fundamental feature of our conception in possible selves. We do not need to go further than this to make the claim that all cognition is social cognition, in the sense that these fundamental assumptions are inherent in all our meaning constructions, regardless of whether or not the possible selves are about futures shared with others or about private moments. Further, some of our possible selves we are ready to acknowledge and share while others are kept very private, regardless of whether they are about private moments or not. This is because they derive their meaning from a social context; possible selves kept private are private because of their social implications. There is also a social dimension in possible selves about private moments. The meaning of a possible self of being alone is given its meaning from a social context in which this aloneness is defined in terms of, or in relation to, absent people. An individual can have a possible self of opening a dance school as an alternative to playing professional football, but the meaning of this possible self is influenced by whether the individual thinks that this is an idea that will be applauded or derided by others. These social aspects must not always be the most influential part of the meaning of a possible self, but they are there and sometimes they are

very influential. Erikson (2007) further explains all our cognitions are also cultural. In other words, everyday conceptions of the world and of human nature are communicated through culture. This is of importance as much of the research employing possible selves is focused on an individual, which puts the influence of cultural structures in the background.

With an explanation and description of the concept of Possible Selves now provided, and the surrounding literature examined, we now move our attention to the discussion of a marriage between the ideas of Markus and Nurius' Possible Selves and the Dramaturgical Metaphor of Erving Goffman.

2.5 A Working Partnership: The Presentation of Possible Selves in Everyday Life

Placing the notions of possible selves more thoroughly in the realm of the social, Osyerman, Ager and Grant (1995:1216) explain how socially constructed selves rely heavily on the backing of important others in their social environment as purveyors of important messages about which characteristics of the self are valued and important and as resources, providing experiences of success and competence in roles relevant to adult statuses and attainment (e.g. "what others are now, I can become"). (Oyserman and Markus, 1993). Oakes and Turner (1990) contribute and explain that others in the social environment provide information about how to be; for example, and as the discussion chapters will illustrate, how research participants learned during their academy experiences to play the role of a footballer from the more senior players at their respective clubs. These *others* according to Oyserman and Marcus (1993) provide models for emulation and feedback about the kind of self one might become and here we see clear similarities to Dramaturgy's emphasis on *audience* and *dramaturgical idealisation*. The social environment of a club house, training pitch or changing room are also the contexts in which footballers are provided with educational, economic and other resources, sometimes termed cultural capital, which will enable them to learn the skills and characteristics necessary to become the kind of individual valued in their socio-cultural niche. However this investigation seeks to go beyond the cultural context of

the footballing environment while acknowledging its substantial significance. In short, this study will demonstrate the importance of social others outside the footballing environment. The influence of the families of participants, time spent with non footballing friends, and the office of education and welfare officers are all considered interconnected social environments where participants received education, feedback, models of emulation of dramatically realised identities outside and away from the footballing realm. In conversations about the socio-cultural context of the self, Osyermann, Ager and Grant (1995) explain how identities are constructed from the scaffolding of one's social contexts and are represented and reproduced in relationships with others. Derived from one's experiences in the social context of the family, their team, and coaches, these knowledge structures or self-schema are not only generalisations of one's past characteristics, actions and skills but also claims of responsibility for current and future characteristics, action and skills in a particular domain.

With regard to possible selves, concerns exist regarding whether there is a single underlying authentic self that is the essence of the person, or whether the self is a collection of masks each tied to a particular set of social circumstances (Wai-Ling Packard and Conway, 2006). Much like how the dramaturgical metaphor implies an individual may perform as many acts within their own respective front stages as they have social audiences and interactions, Markus and Nurius ask us to consider possible selves as systematic components of the self concept. We can conceive therefore of a self-concept that is diverse and multifaceted without being fake or incoherent. Possible selves provide for a complex and variable self concept but are authentic in the sense that they represent the individual's persistent hopes and fears and indicate what could be realised given the appropriate social conditions. To suggest that there is a single self to which one *can be true* or an *authentic self* that one can know is to deny the rich network of potential that surrounds individuals and that is important in identifying them and in their description. The merging of the notion of possible selves and the presentation of the appropriate self contribute to the fluidity or flexibility of the self because they are differentially activated by the social situation and

determine the nature of an individual's performance. At the same time the individual's hopes and fears, goals and threats, and the cognitive structures that carry them are defining features of the working self-concept, these features possibly provide some of the most compelling evidence of continuity of identity across time, thus helping to counter critics of Goffman's original dramaturgical metaphor.

Similar to the manner in which possible selves regulate an individual's current behaviour, within dramaturgical thinking, so too do the expectations of audiences and different social environments influence an individual's presentation of their own appropriate self. The conceptual idea of the self involved with possible selves holds many distinct similarities to the self that is presented to others in the front stage of Goffman's thinking. Erikson (2007) highlights how some possible selves are easily seen as predominately important for the self concept, in particular those that are connected with the experiences of becoming or avoiding becoming something in an area that is central to the self-concept. Erikson asks us to consider that, part of the self concept defining oneself, is influenced by the striving one indulges in, as suggested by Cantor et al (1986). My view of myself today is enormously influenced by my belief of what will happen to me in the future. Am I changing or stable? Am I changing in a positive or negative direction, or is it negative or positive features that are stable? These are crucial questions when it comes to defining one's present self concept, and an individual answers these questions according to what possible selves they see as likely or unlikely in their relevant domains, such as a professional football career.

Examining the identity management of Premier League players following the event of their release, the work of Markus and Nurius and their notion of individuals' possible selves would seem to exert a portion of influence on the social front performed by an individual. If the events of an end to a professional sporting biography activate an 'unsuccessful' professional self, the failure may temporally be devastating if this possible self comes complete with thoughts of not deserving a place at a club because of the underlying incompetence, images of being bested by his former teammates,

or fears of never getting the chance to play in that league again or of playing quietly and bitterly in a much lower division. Given this context of negative possibility, the individual is likely to experience at least momentary feelings of low self-esteem. According to Markus and Nurius, for a period of time some behavioural outcomes will seem more probable, for example not getting signed or recruited by another team, whereas other outcomes and the behavioural paths leading to them will seem less likely and perhaps impossible to pursue. For instance, actions that require a self-presentation as competent or confident are difficult to negotiate when behaviour is mediated by a working self-concept that features the 'unsuccessful professional footballer' possible self as a focal point. However in contrast, achieving a desired goal, perhaps being asked to come for a trail at a new club after being released by another, is likely to activate positive possibilities such as the 'successful professional' possible self. In this context, taking part in the trail and conversations with potential managers, coaches and teammates takes on a very distinctive set of meanings. For some period of time, the self is not just a self that has been asked to trail, but a self that could work themselves into an important player on that team, be named captain or win a league title. The individual's feelings and immediate actions, according to the work of Markus and Nurius, are likely to be markedly influenced by the nature of this context of possibility. Therefore, if the overall aim of this study is to investigate the identity management and construction of Premier League players following the event of their release, then this study contends the aspects of understanding and enlightenment brought to the inquiry through the employment of the notions of possible selves to be a vital one. Considering how sporting professionals view themselves, as described in this thesis, such a view is inherently influenced by the possible selves an individual can see themselves as, and as mentioned before such possible selves influence current behaviour.

The nature of their front stage performances can be determined not only by the expectation of differing audiences and social environments but by the motivational function of possible selves. Following the opinions expressed by Hamman et al (2010), the addition of the "possible" to self-concept, provides

a lens for examining self-views that encompass a future orientation. There are advantages to considering a footballer's identity and self-presentation in terms of possible selves, especially if one is concerned with the developmental and contextual questions surrounding their strategies of identity construction and management. The value-added of possible selves as a lens includes the implication of a goal that is anticipated and may be realised. The possible self, unlike identity, provides an additional mechanism for self-evaluation that reveals discrepancies between the present and future selves (Buss, 2001). Examining potential participants' views of themselves in terms of possible selves, therefore, provides useful information about identity in the present, as well as including information about identity in the future. Markus (2006:xii) argues that: "Knowing how people think about themselves currently is of some help, but knowing what they hope and fear should refine this understanding [because] possible selves are not applied as frames after experience; rather they are used in the on going constitution of experience".

1.6 Conclusion

I acknowledge that this thesis could have been carried out using different social theories. For example, the sociology of Michel Foucault could be employed to underpin an investigation considering the event of a player's release in terms of the power dynamics between club management and players. However in choosing such a perspective I would have required access to a sample of Premier League managers. Due the closed nature of Premier League football I was not able to gain such access. Equally, one could have examined the possible selves held by participants as constructions of their *habitus*, informed by their *taste*, thus utilising the work of Pierre Bourdieu. However due the characteristics of my sample following the snowball method I employed, participants came from varying social backgrounds and thus had dissimilar and non-relatable habitus and tastes, making such a perspective less applicable. With this in mind, my reasoning for choosing to use *Dramaturgy* and *Possible Selves* is motivated by; the fact an interactionist perspective has proven to be relevant to the issues surrounding retirement of professional footballers in the past (Roderick, 2006); the kind of access I gained to world of Premier League Football; the

background of the individuals within my sample; and my own conviction in the appropriateness of the two theories in discussions of identity management.

By way of extending Goffman's *Dramaturgy* through time with the addition of *Possible Selves* and the dimensions of the *future* and *past* selves belonging to the concept, it is hoped this merging of concepts may provide a fresh attempt to answer critical theorists like of Sedgwick and continue to think innovatively about the use of theoretical perspectives offered by Goffman; and Markus and Nurius. If we consider that, through the development of a view which shapes the idea of the *Presentation of Possible Selves in Everyday Life,* and consider that the social front is not only influenced by the expectations of audiences but by the motivational weight of possible selves in the future, then the dramaturgical metaphor gains a new element. This partnership of theses allows for the investigation of activity beyond present face-to-face associations. As the future possible selves of professional footballers will involved being a paid player of a Premier League club (or not-as the case maybe with this particular research), this study responds to calls for the dramaturgical metaphor to consider modern men and women as functionaries of bureaucratic organisations. Thus providing a new dimension to consider the sporting biographies of professional footballers that past research for the most part has failed to reveal (Brown and Potrac, 2009 and Michelle et al, 2014) and perhaps uncovering the *grit* which Sedgwick (1982) asks for.

Chapter 3

Understanding Career Transitions From The Cultural Environment Of Football

3.1 Introduction

The chapter intends to outline the existing literature surrounding athletes' experiences of exiting elite or professional sport. Using such literature allows this project determine the most appropriate interpretations of the experiences belonging to participants following their release from their respective clubs. Such conversations engage gerontological, thantological and life course perspectives, as well as discussions concerning whether such experiences are best considered as singular or transitional events. The chapter continues by highlighting past research that has framed the causes for athletes exists from sport and also examines previous literature concerning the reactions of athletes to such events.

3.2 Theoretical Explanations of Exits from Athletic Careers

Drahota and Eitzen (1998) describe how sports scholars have employed several different approaches in order to understand the end to an athlete's professional or elite career. Such approaches involve interpreting the event through three main themes, which include Gerontological theories, Thanatological theories, and Transition and Life Course theories. The three streams of theory are described below.

Career Termination and Ageing: Gerontological Theories - Athletes who experience career termination are different from other retirees, who typically are elderly and leaving the occupational world altogether. In contrast, for example, all participants within this project were still relatively young adults (18-33) and held intentions to either attempt to play Premier League football once again or to seek to find new employment within a new discipline other than football. Gerontological theories have been used by sport sociologists to understand the adjustments athletes must

make to their new roles outside of sport. The most common Gerontological theory, disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961), argues that disengagement is an inevitable process where individuals reduce the number of social roles in their later years. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) explain that the theory implies a mutual withdrawal between the individual and society. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) go on to highlight however that this theory has not been supported by research findings on ex-athletes (Lerch, 1984), and generally has been disregarded in contemporary research as applicable to sports retirement (McPherson, 1980; Swain, 1991). Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) note that gerontological theories offer some insight in certain instances but, similar to the position of this research project, are highly sceptical of this conceptual approach to the study of ending athletic careers.

Career Termination as Death: Thanatology - Thanatology, the study of death and dying, has also been applied to sporting career termination. Using this perspective, retired athletes have been described as experiencing "social death" (Ogilvie and Taylor, 1993:766). They are socially isolated and rejected from the former in-group. This dying metaphor has also been employed to understand the occurrences when athletes are given their unconditional release from a team or as they slide downward during their sporting careers (Lerch, 1984). Drahota and Eitzen (1998) warn that a major problem with the use of the death metaphor for ex-athletes is that it assumes that athletes experience serious adjustment problems after leaving the sport role. While some ex-athletes do experience various manifestations of trauma associated with their withdrawal from sport, others do not. Wylleman et al (2004) point out when considering career terminations as singular events using a thanatological perspective the results often involve describing athletic retirement in the series of stages experienced when facing death (Kubler-Ross, 1969). If applied to this study these stages would have included; denial and isolation, in which players initially refuse to acknowledge the inevitability of their career termination and pending release; anger, in which released players would have become disturbed at the overall

changing of their situation; bargaining, in which they try to negotiate for a lengthened career in the professional arena, players would seek out contracts from other lower league clubs; depression, in which they experience a distress reaction to the fact they are no longer able to consider themselves Premier League players; and acceptance, in which players come finally to accept their release and career termination. It is important to note despite their intuitive appeal, thanatological models are criticised especially because of the lack of analogy between terminal illness and career termination (Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985). Another flaw belonging to this approach is that it is not applicable to ex-athletes who are making a mid-life change, nor an end-of-life change. In thanatology theory there is no adjustment period for the individual after death. There is after exiting from professional sports. Although exiting a role, professional athletes have not exited from life. They are relatively young and may well begin second careers (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998). This study will demonstrate how the *self* belonging to participants consists of multiple identities, that co-exist fluidly as the individual moves from one social environment to the next. While the legitimacy of their identity as a professional footballer may be threatened following their release, the fluid self of participants ensures they do not die (socially or physically) when one of their identities may not be recognised by a social audience in a fashion it once was. There was more to participants than just football, thus thanatological theories fall short in their relevance to this study.

Career Termination as Normal: Transition and Life Course Theories – Retirement from sport can be conceived as a process of transition, as part of a lifelong development (Taylor, 1972). This developmental perspective is process oriented rather than problem oriented. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) describe how this approach calls for longitudinal research designs, which are superior to cross-sectional studies for understanding choices made by social actors and the social environment affecting those choices. The developmental approach focuses on the individual rather than the patterns that emerge among those experiencing

this exiting process from sports (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998). Each individual has a unique set of circumstances affecting his or her choices, adjustments, and behaviours. Swain (1991), for example, applied Schlossberg's (1981) model for analysing human adaptation to transition to the withdrawal of athletes from sport. He argued that individuals have different experiences in their transitions, and these cannot be generalised to fit into patterns or stages. Career transitions perspectives have now become the widely accepted interpretation for understanding the exits of athletes from sport (Gorely et al, 2001; Lavellee and Wylleman, 2000; Wylleman et al, 2004).

3.3 The Release: Singular or Transitional Event

Wylleman et al (2004) suggest that central to the debate regarding the position from which it is best to examine the event of athletes' exit from sport is a question of whether to consider such experiences as either a Singular or Transitional event. Wylleman et al (2004) describe how considering the end of an athletic career as a singular event led to "paralleling" such an event to that of retirement from the workforce, or even to the process of dying. Thus researchers sought ideas from fields such as gerontology, the study of the aging process, and thanatology, the study of dying and death. Early studies that considered the end of an athletic career as a singular event included well-publicised negative or even traumatic experiences among athletes retiring from elite sports. Blinde and Stratta (1992) expressed concern for the number of athletes who experienced traumatic effects upon athletic career termination, including alcohol and substance abuse, acute depression, eating disorders, identity confusion, decreased self-confidence, and attempted suicide. Another study that viewed athletes' exit from sport as a singular and traumatic event was that of Mihovilovic (1968). Mihovilovic's (1968) survey of Yugoslavian former first-league football players showed that not only 95% ended their football career involuntarily and suddenly, but also that this end was perceived to be very negative by those players without another profession on retirement.

It should be noted that the importance of Mihovilovic's (1968) investigation goes beyond that of an appropriate example of a study that employed the view of an exit from elite sport as a singular and traumatic event. It is one of the most cited pieces of scholarship in regards to athletes' exit from sport and acts as a point genesis for this topic of research. Mihovilovic asked 44 male Yugoslavian football players, through questionnaires and interviews, about their post-athletic careers. The three-part study analysed the reasons for career termination, the reactions of peers, and the ways the effects of retirement could be eased. Mihovilovic's (1968) study found that only 5% of the players retired voluntarily; retirement for the remainder was a result of injury, age, club conditions, or elimination by younger players. Mihovilovic describes how attempts to block the success of younger players were regular, through the use of sabotage or boycotting, indicating the unwillingness of the older players to accept the new team members. For those whose transition from active play was gradual, Mihovilovic (1968) offered two explanations. The first was that the players were simply holding on for as long as they could. The second was that the gradual transition was an easier one for the footballer to accept and was, therefore, the preferred one. In the end, though, the athlete who stayed on "despite declining skills left his career planning in the hands of management", making a sudden cut all the more likely (Mihovilovic, 1968:91). Mihovilovic's (1968) subjects suggested that a smooth transition for an athlete could be facilitated by maintaining contact with his former club, by participating in tournaments, by public recognition from the clubs, or by being used in coaching or other capacities that made use of their experience. Mihovilovic (1968) concluded that the move from active sports to other employment was a serious social problem that required recognition and correction.

In contrast to Mihovilovic's (1968) study, Coakley (1983) put forth the notion that that athletic career termination could serve as an opportunity for social rebirth, rather than a social death. Such a notion led

researchers to suggest that athletic career termination should be seen as a transitional process rather than as a singular event. ‘Transition models’ (e.g. Schlossberg, 1981, 1984) involve a transition being defined as “an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981:5). In these models three major sets of factors interact during a transition; (i) the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (e.g., gender, age, previous experience with a transition of a similar nature), (ii) the perception of the particular transition (e.g. role change, affect, occurrence of stress), and (iii) the characteristics of the pre and post-transition environments (e.g. the evaluation of internal support systems, institutional support). A number of researchers have used this model in an attempt to understand the career transition process of athletes (e.g. Baillie and Danish, 1992; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993; Swain, 1991). This approach to research led to the notion that the adjustment process to post-athletic life was mediated by, among others, the voluntariness with which athletes retired and their preparation for a life after sport (Wylleman et al, 2004).

Sinclair and Orlick (1993) describe transitions as inevitable and often unpredictable. Human life is characterised by various life changes, discontinuities, or turning points (Schlossberg et al, 1989). Transitional events include career changes, the death of a spouse, having children, moving to another city, or getting married. Every transition has the potential to be a crisis, a relief, or a combination of both, depending on the individual's perception of the situation. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) suggest one particular type of transition that has the potential to illuminate these complex patterns of change and stability is an exit from high-performance sport, in the case of this study a player’s release and career transition from a Premier League club. The event of retirement, or change, is a normal consequence of elite participation. A career in sport is much shorter than most other careers or occupations, as most athletes retire, voluntarily or involuntarily. All athletes, whether they compete internationally or professionally, must eventually move from elite

participation in sport (Sinclair and Orlick, 1993). Any transition, whether smooth or rough, necessitates a degree of adjustment (Coakley, 1983) but Sinclair and Orlick (1993: 139) ask the questions, “What becomes of athletes upon their exit from high performance sport?” and, more specifically, “Whether or not they leave sport satisfied with their memories of participation and enthusiastic about the new challenges that await them?”

Sinclair and Orlick (1993) debate whether an exit from high-performance sport is an event which allows the pursuit of other opportunities, or one which leads to negative outcomes such as unhappiness, addictions, and identity crises. In contrast to the studies previously mentioned that portray the post elite sport lives of athletes as traumatic, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) and Coakley (1983) have taken an alternative view of the retirement process. These studies and those similar to them assert that former athletes do not face the avalanche of adjustment difficulties leaving sport, as other studies have suggested, and may be a pleasantly anticipated event because it allows new opportunities for personal growth and development. Such a perspective asserts too that athletes may actually experience relief from the pressures and heavy time commitment of sport as a result of their withdrawal.

McPherson (1984: 225) states that this problem-oriented perspective “must be replaced by a process-oriented approach”. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) suggest that too frequently athletic transition has been looked at as an event that automatically causes trauma or relief rather than as initiating a transitional process, a process that each individual perceives differently and therefore adjusts to differently. A multitude of behavioural patterns are associated with athletic transition (Werthner and Orlick, 1986) simply because individuals bring their own perceptions of stress, personal resources, coping strategies, and socialization experiences to their particular transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Sinclair and Orlick (1993) stress that it is a combination of the individual, the resources available to and used by that individual, and the type of transition encountered, that

influences whether or not a career transition is successful. Wylleman et al (2004) explain how the concept of 'transition' has been related during the past decades to a variety of topics including individual life span development, occupational planning, educational processes, social support, and the processes of aging, retirement, and dying. In general, a transition has been related to the occurrence of one or more specific events which bring about, not only in an individual 'a change in assumptions about oneself' (Schlossberg, 1981:5), but also a social disequilibrium (Wapner and Craig-Bay, 1992) that goes beyond the on-going changes of everyday life (Sharf, 1997). The concept of transition was introduced in the wake of psychologists and social scientists' interest during the 1970s–early 1980s in how (former) athletes coped with the event of retirement from high-level competitive and professional sports (e.g. Mihovilovic, 1968). According to Wylleman et al (2004), since then, the focus of research has evolved in different phases. The athletic career end was originally seen as a singular event, the transitional approach was later implemented to other phases and events occurring during the athletic career, and resulted in the current holistic, life-span perspective on (athletic as well as non-athletic) transitions faced by athletes.

Acknowledging the critiques mentioned above, this project applies a process orientated perspective and examines the event of participants' release from professional Premier League clubs as a transitional process. When referring to the event of participants' release from their clubs this project will herein address the topic as *Career Transitions*. The reasoning to assume this position lies in the understanding that participants within this study are members of a sporting population that all must continue living their lives following their departure from professional football. Their existence does not end once they have been released, nor do they quietly wait for the inevitable end to old age. Labelling an end to a sporting career as a singular event does not allow the findings of this project to be of relevance or practical help in understanding how players move on with their lives following an end to their sporting biography as Premier League players. Considering such events as a process and as a

career transition allows the study to illustrate that, while some players may understandably experience saddened emotions following their release, such an event is one of many junctures in their lives. Not only is the transition perspective the most appropriate theoretical position from which to acknowledge the multiple and fluid identities of participants, it also allows the event to be considered a doorway to the attainment of positive future possible selves that lie outside the lines of a pitch.

3.4 Causes of Career Transitions

Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) describe how there are multiple reasons for career transition. Alfermann et al (2004) contend that these seem to play a crucial role for adjustment to post-career life. Causes in career transitions in sport have been found to be a function of a variety of involuntary and voluntary reasons. Although it has been suggested that the causes are influenced by the structure of sport, both Ogilvie and Taylor (1993), and Alfermann et al (2004), have demonstrated that the most common of these casual factors are career ending injuries, age, de-selection and personal choice. Alfermann et al explain that the first three causes underline that athletes are unable to continue competition due to performance decrements. Thus they seem to have no choice about withdrawal and are being forced to do so.

Describing *Involuntary Reasons* for exiting elite competition, Lavellee (2000) explains that due to its unexpected and sudden nature, career transitions out of competitive sport often arise from injury. For an injury or injuries to be career ending the transition is rarely sudden and is often a long drawn out and emotional experience (Roderick, 2006). Empirical research supports the notion that athletic retirement is difficult when caused by injury because it is something for which individuals are seldom prepared (e.g. Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Roderick, 2006). Kleiber and Brock (1992) explain that an injury need not be severe enough to force athletes out of continued practice of competitive sport. Ogilive and Taylor (1993: 766) have proposed that “elite athletes perform at such a high level that even small reductions in their physical capabilities may be

sufficient to make them no longer competitive at the elite level". Consequently Lavellee and Wylleman (2000) explain that injuries have the potential to be the most distressful reason for athletic career transitions. A career transition from sport is also a function of the advancement of *Chronological Age*. This is evident from the research by Mihovilovic (1968) with former professional Yugoslavian footballers. In this descriptive survey of former professional players, the decline in performance accompanying the aging process was identified as one of the major causes for ending careers in the world of sport. Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) describe that a transition from sport due to age is one of the most significant reasons because psychological motivation, social status and physical capabilities can all complicate an athlete's ability to continue competing at an elite level. Related to the physiological consequences of chronological age is the structural factor of failing to progress to the next highest level of elite competition. This *Deselection* process is largely a function of a "survival of the fittest" philosophy, or what Lavellee and Wylleman (2000:16) has so elegantly phrased *Athletic Darwinism*. Such a process of (de)selection occurs at most levels of competitive sport (Stevenson, 1989). McInally et al's (1992) research illustrates the relevance of this cause of career transition; describing 27% of their sample were deselected from their teams due to their lesser ability compared to teammates.

Webb et al (1998:341) divide the causes of career termination "into two categories – transitions that are freely chosen and those that are forced by circumstances". Alfermann et al (2004) describe how the subjective feeling of control over events is a crucial part of social psychological theories of health and illness and the perception of control not only fosters mental health and a successful development but also is strongly correlated to heightened feelings of self-efficacy, which play a key role in behavioural change and adjustment. Therefore this would seem to imply that free choice versus forced career transition would influence athletes' adjustment to it. Alfermann et al (2004) hypothesised that planned sporting exits will lead to better emotional and behavioural adjustment to

career transitions. The results produced by Alfermann et al (2004) support the reflections belonging to Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) regarding the adaptive function of controlled planned exits from sport contributing to a better and more positive adaptation to life after the sport career compared to unexpected, involuntary career transitions. Alfermann et al (2004) described how planned exits should be associated with more positive and less negative emotional reactions to sport career transitions, shorter duration of the transitional period, lesser use of distraction strategies, and higher current life satisfaction. From their study it can be interpreted that athletes who plan retirement in advance, do not waste their energy in wrong directions and hence are able to mobilise and use their resources more effectively than athletes who do not plan their exit from sport. Alfermann et al (2004) emphasised the point that planning for retirement or an early departure from a sporting career gives an athlete a feeling of subjective control over the situation and increases his/her self-efficacy with regard to successful post-career adaptation. Alfermann et al (2004) also hypothesised that athletes who plan retirement have a higher level of readiness for that career transition.

Consistent with previous findings of Wylleman et al (1999), Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) explain within their study of professional Czech athletes experiencing career transitions that, with regard to their participants, there was no single factor that held the primary responsibility for ceasing their participation in sport. According to Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) the reasons for an end to an athletic career are numerous. Each of their participants referred to a combination of at least two main reasons for athletic career termination. Eight out of eleven participants terminated their career voluntarily, which Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) note indicates a decrease in motivation to compete and train as the most frequent reason. In line with previous research findings (Werthner and Orlick, 1986), eight out of eleven athletes named injury as one of the main reasons for career termination. On the other hand, chronological age and de-selection, which have previously been found to be among the four most common causes for termination (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994) were mentioned only

once (age) and not mentioned at all (de-selection). The relatively low frequency of the age issue can be related to the structure of respondents, where the highest age of career termination did not exceed 28 years. Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) explain the absence of 'de-selection' as a reason can be explained as an output of different sport systems in the west and the Czech Republic. Kadlcik and Flemr's (2008) relevance to this study lies within its collection of data and sample size, for this current investigation has also utilised qualitative methods and generated its data from a similar sample size. Like Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) this project has worked exclusively with professional athletes but, unlike their study, which recruited athletes from a collection of different sports, this project has placed itself firmly in the arena of Premier League Football. (It is also important to frame that all of the career transitions that participants of this study experienced occurred due to their de-selection from their Premier League Teams.)

Like all professional athletes, football players experience injuries that effect their ability to compete for team selection, and this was no different for some of the participants within this study. However considering the causes of career transition, the link between the aforementioned notions of Athletic Darwinism and Free Choice are of particular relevance to the experiences of participants. Taking what appears to be the next conventional step forward from the existing literature, this study will demonstrate within its discussion chapters how participants were all too aware of the saturation of quality players within their profession, as described by Roderick (2006). The causes of career transitions are considered in this investigation not as the separate categories of *forced* and *freely chosen* transitions, but circumstances that are linked closely together with one leading to the other.

Park et al (2012) examine the decision making process athletes undertake as part of their retirement from competitive sports and their career transition. In their study Park et al (2012) demonstrate how their results indicate that athletes experienced a series of steps during the decision-making process and four stages (i.e., pre- contemplation,

contemplation, preparation, and action) from the transtheoretical model were used to explain the steps they experienced.

Pre-contemplation- Park et al (2012) described how, when their participants were engaged in conversation regarding the pre-contemplation stage, the data showed that there was little readiness for retirement because the majority of participants did not consider their retirement from sport or acknowledge the need for pre-retirement planning. In addition, similar to the transtheoretical model (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1984), denial or mental disengagement appeared as a coping strategy in the form of concentrating on their sporting roles or high performance. For Park et al (2012), athletes showed a high degree of 'athletic identity' in the pre-contemplation stage. This identity was illustrated by a high commitment to their sport accompanied by few other interests or non sporting roles.

Contemplation - Park et al (2012) describe how participants were in the contemplation stage when they seriously started to think about their retirement from sport. Athletes considered their retirement for several different reasons in the contemplation stage, including loss of sporting goals, aging, injuries, bad relationships with their coaches, post-sport career opportunities, and significant life changes (e.g., planning to marry).

Preparation - In the preparation stage, Park et al (2012) explain participants showed small changes in behaviours (e.g., trying to find other interests), and made the actual retirement decision. Compared to earlier stages, participants in the preparation stage tended to exert more effort in preparing for their retirement. Park et al (2012) suggest that athletes built-up their confidence for dealing with post-sport life through several strategies that include self-re-evaluation (assessing their preparation for post-sport lives or psychological readiness), environmental re-evaluation (identifying job opportunities or approval from significant others), social liberation (gaining information from former teammates), self- liberation (acquiring skills for a post-sport career via learning courses), and counter-conditioning (engaging with other activities outside of sport).

Action - Park et al (2012) explain how the action stage refers to athletes' actual retirement from their sports. Compared to earlier stages, the participants within their study showed a higher degree of readiness for retirement in the action stage, including higher confidence to adjust to post-sport life and the perception of more pros than cons. Athletes within Park et al's (2012) study however experienced difficulties in adjusting to their new careers, whether the career was related to their sport or not, and they attributed their difficulties to a lack of preparation, a lack of life skill development, or no supporting systems.

Previous studies (e.g., Kadlcik and Flemr, 2008; Lavellee and Robinson, 2007) have highlighted that athletes' lack of life skills and a strong athletic identity are significant sources of career transition difficulties. For example, athletes who lack life skills may have difficulties in finding post-sport careers, and athletes with a strong athletic identity may experience an identity crisis. The results from the current study revealed that athletes' level of athletic identity and life skills development also influenced their retirement decision. In addition, a strong athletic identity and a lack of life skills were sources of athletes' negative emotions and low perceived readiness for retirement during their decision-making attempts. For example, six participants reported a reluctance to make their retirement decisions because of a high attachment to their sport, a lack of preparation, and fears of an uncertain future, and five of them postponed their retirement decision for up to 2 years. From more general transtheoretical research, when investigations have examined the amount of time that people spend in each stage, participants have been found to be in the contemplation stage for longer than any other stage (Prochaska et al, 1992). For Park et al (2012), participants appeared to remain in the preparation stage longer to negotiate decisional balance-related issues (e.g., weighing losses and gains). Athletes tended to stay in the preparation stage for longer than other stages, unless they needed to make decisions in a short time period (e.g., a post-sport career offer). Also, they perhaps stayed longer in the preparation stage because they needed additional preparation time before they left their sport.

Participants also decreased their athletic identity during the preparation stage by developing other interests outside of sport or focusing on preparing for their post-sport lives rather than concentrating on sport. Although a decrease in athletic identity among retired athletes has been reported in the literature as a process of identity shift (e.g., Kadlcik and Flemr, 2008; Lavellee and Robinson, 2007), a decrease in athletic identity during a sports career has not been widely discussed. Lally (2007) revealed that collegiate athletes consciously decreased their athletic identity in the final stages of their sport careers and tried to engage with student roles over athletic roles because they had additional roles as students alongside their athletic roles. One of the purposes of the study by Park et al (2012) was to identify factors influencing the retirement decision-making process. Readiness for retirement, including athletes' perceived gains and losses of consequences of retirement and a degree of self-confidence, was found as one of the major influences. When athletes started considering retirement (contemplation stage), they were aware of the need for post-sport careers and secure jobs and tried to prepare for such eventualities. Overall, the results revealed that athletes changed their perceptions and behaviours toward their sports and retirement after they had made their retirement decisions. It is this theme for this study that is the main point of contention with the work of Park et al (2012). The discussion chapter will demonstrate how participants of this study regularly engaged with different identities prior to, during and after their career transition, during the similar time period their perceptions of and attitudes toward football also were in a constant state of construction and reconstruction.

3.5 Reactions to Career Transitions

This study and its findings strongly contest the notion of an exclusive athletic identity, however in dealing with past research (North and Lavellee, 2004; Baillie and Danish, 1992; Messner, 1992, Grove et al 1997) athletic identity appears as an important concept within conversations of surrounding exits from sport and sporting career transitions. Grove et al (1997) examine the relationship between sport-

role identification and the quality of adjustment after an exit from elite sport. Identity constructs are viewed as important correlates of athlete behaviour by both sociologists and psychologists (e.g., Curry, 1993; Hughes and Coakley, 1991) and they have been explicitly linked to retirement behaviour by several theorists (e.g., Baillie and Danish, 1992; Messner, 1992). The construct of athletic identity, previously described as the degree to which one defines themselves in terms of the athlete role, is described by Grove et al (1997) to be particularly important in this regard. Individuals with a 'strong and exclusive' athletic identity may be prone to experience a variety of emotional and social adjustment difficulties upon career termination (Baillie and Danish, 1992). Furthermore, those who strongly commit themselves to the athlete role may be less likely to plan for post-athletic career opportunities prior to their retirement from sport (Grove et al 1997). Crook and Robertson (1991) have stated that individuals with a strong and exclusive athletic identity may fail to develop appropriate coping resources, and several other theorists have suggested that athletes who derive their self-identity primarily from a sporting role may lack the necessary social support networks after retirement (e.g., Baillie and Danish, 1992; Grove et al,1997; Ogilvie and Taylor, 1993).

Grove et al (1997) suggest that individuals who maintain a strong and exclusive athletic identity up to the point at which they exit sport may be vulnerable to career transition difficulties. As suggested by Brewer et al (1993), athletic identity is strongly related both to the degree of psychological adjustment needed and the time taken to make that adjustment. Grove et al (1997) explain that these relationships were more apparent for social and emotional aspects of adjustment than for financial and occupational aspects of adjustment. More specifically they highlight a strong and exclusive athletic identity during the time at which athletes exited elite sport was found to be associated with an increased reliance on denial following the exit. Individuals within Grove et al's (1997) study who showed strong athletic identities were reported as using mental disengagement, behavioural disengagement, and venting of emotions more than those with low athletic identity. Although these four strategies

might be adaptive in the early stages of coping with severe stress, Grove et al's research agrees that prolonged use of these strategies may interfere with the use of more productive, problem-focused strategies. Denial, for example, may have stress-reducing properties at certain points in the career transition process (Baillie and Danish, 1992; Blinde and Stratta, 1992) but prolonged use of denial may exacerbate distress reactions (Carver et al, 1989).

In their investigation of users of career transition services in the UK, North and Lavellee (2004) administered questionnaires and received valid responses from 561 elite athletes across 23 different individual and team sports. North and Lavellee (2004) explain the Athletic, Career and Education, (ACE) UK programme was established in 1999 to provide elite athletes across the UK with career, education and personal development guidance. This programme is based on the notion that athletes with a balanced lifestyle are more likely to achieve their sporting goals, cope better with problems such as injury and retirement, and have more confidence in their future after sport (UK Sport, 1999). North and Lavellee (2004) describe how athletes' thinking in relation to their retirement from sport was considered by specifically investigating their participants' plans after their careers have ended, as well as their short-term plans. Results associated with planning a retirement age highlighted an unwillingness among younger athletes, and those who perceive themselves to have a significant amount of time before they retire, to develop concrete plans about their future career prior to their retirement; an outcome which supports previous research (e.g. Gorely et al, 2001).

North and Lavellee (2004) unsurprisingly describe that competitive athletes in UK are increasing the amount of time they devote to training and competition. Based on the results of their study, it appears that of participating athletes, most were content with their balance between sport and non-sporting activities in relation to educational and career development. North and Lavellee (2004) add as the demands of the performance environment increase, the tendency to pursue sport in all its

senses may also increase, affecting to a greater extent the younger athletes coming through the elite athlete system. It is this reasoning that North and Lavellee (2004) recommend that research be conducted to assess the career development needs of competitive athletes across Europe. This illustrates the need for career transition programmes in providing athletes with a focus with which to consider their long-term career development needs. While contending the notion of athletic identity, this study and its investigation seek to contribute to the work of North and Lavellee (2004). Compared to its vast sample, this study has chosen to take a qualitative approach and sought to successfully gather rich in-depth data from a smaller sample. Of the 475 elite athletes across 23 different sports, North and Lavellee (2004) record no football players or professional athletes as part of their sample. This project worked exclusively with former Premier League players who had experienced an early career transition from professional football.

In a discussion of the notion of readiness for career transition, Alfermann et al (2004) apply a structure to the state of readiness suggested Hanin (2000), to the idea of athletic retirement. Alfermann et al (2004) conceptualises the notions of transition barriers and transition resources to accompany their hypothesis of a state of readiness for athletic retirement. Applying such a strand of thought to this study would contend that all factors that would positively influence the state of readiness to the transition out of a career as a footballer might be considered as ‘transition resources’; examples of these resources would hypothetically include career transition planning, opportune and voluntary exits from clubs and even health improvement following the exit from professional sport. The implication is that all factors that have a negative impact upon the state of readiness for example, unplanned, involuntary, too early or too late transition, health deterioration, unemployment and delay in vocational and educational training, might work as ‘transition barriers’. According to Alfermann et al (2004), for an athlete to have a successful transition then he or she must endeavour to effectively mobilise the transition resources needed as well as avoidance or coping with transition barriers. This

implies that the degree of readiness a player may possess for a smooth transition through the event of being released from their club is determined by an individual's balance of transition resources and transition barriers. Thus those footballers that attempt to plan their career transition in advance have "higher cognitive, emotional, and behavioural readiness to last sport career transition" than footballers who have not planned (Alfermann et al, 2004:71).

Werthner and Orlick (1986) found that feeling a sense of accomplishment contributes to a smooth transition out of sport, for example, achieving ones sporting goals. In their research of elite Canadian athletes, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) explain that positive adjustment to retirement from high-performance sport was related either to achieving one's sport-related goals or to having achieved one's goals in sport. Within their study athletes who accomplished what they had set out to do in sport (i.e., achieved a specific performance time or goal) and who retired both with satisfaction and on their own terms, tended to adjust with ease. Such outcomes in relation to this project's investigation are not wholly applicable, as participants will not have had the length of time as professional players to achieve their sporting goals. The positions of Sinclair and Orlick (1993) and Werthner and Orlick (1986) also do not take into account that many athletes never achieve their goals but yet don't feel any less fulfilled. Many participants would have perhaps held the ambition to play for England in a football world cup, but yet they understood they did not have the appropriate ability to play at such a level. The fact however they did not achieve this goal did not interfere with notions of what it meant to be a footballer. Nor did it interfere with their footballing performance and leave them feeling unfulfilled. Similarly the comments of Sinclair and Orlick (1993) and Werthner and Orlick (1986) do not allow for the athletes using the sport as their profession and a means to earn their living.

Following administering questionnaires to 85 Slovenian elite athletes, predominately alpine skiers, Cecic-Erpic et al (2002) explain that their

findings suggest the quality of athletic retirement is expressed within their study as sports career termination difficulties. Cecic-Erpic et al (2002) suggest that such termination difficulties consist of struggles at the psychological, psychosocial, and occupational level, and of difficulties with organizing post-sports life. Voluntariness, as one athletic factor, significantly affects the quality of retirement from an active sports career process according to Cecic-Erpic et al (2002). The results of Cecic-Erpic et al (2002) study show that an athlete's greater perception of control over the decision to retire leads to a less difficult sports career transition and a smoother transition to the post-sports career life. These results are congruent with the findings of other studies (e.g. Alfermann, 2000; Alfermann and Gross, 1997; McPherson, 1980; Werthner and Orlick, 1986). The findings discussed later in this thesis extend this notion of readiness by offering the concept that athletes' have multiple identities, some pertain to football and others do not. These identities are constantly in flux depending on the presence of a social audience and the particular possible selves that are available to that individual within their different social environments.

Lavellee and Robinson (2007) explain how a strong commitment to sport, along with retirement at an early age, limits an individual's ability to try out different roles and hinders decision-making skills. Examining the exits of gymnasts from elite sport, Lavellee and Robinson (2007) describe how the majority of their participants (all gymnasts) felt incredibly lost in a world without gymnastics. Their revelations resembled Kerr and Dacyshyn's (2000: 122) conceptualization of ''nowhere land'', which arose from their participants ''descriptions of being disoriented and confused after their retirement''. Whilst attempting to explain this situation in greater depth, Lavellee and Robinson's (2007:136) participants emphasised how they had experienced difficulties ''fitting-in'' and ''starting again'' in the real world and had consequently felt very isolated. As these individuals had been particularly susceptible to role restriction (Taylor et al, 2005) throughout their careers, their accounts are supportive of Greendorfer and Blinde's (1985) contention that athletes who succumb to

this condition can be left feeling isolated, lonely, and socially un-sustained in a world without sport.

Due to the time commitments of their training schedule, Lavellee and Robinson (2007) continue to explain that these same participants only learnt how to assume a few highly specific sport-related roles during their sporting careers and were therefore left with a severely inhibited ability to interact with new people and adopt different roles when they eventually retired. In contrast to the majority of athletes taking part in their study, Lavellee and Robinson (2007) found two participants who both appeared to by-pass this period of disorientation, as they had purposefully engaged in pre-retirement planning from a very early age. These participants were able to move on to the next stage of their lives quickly and easily and, as a result, their accounts are supportive of the notion that readiness can broaden an athlete's social identity (Grove et al, 1997; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993) and ultimately ease their transition into a world without sport (Gordon and Lavellee, 2004; Taylor et al, 2005).

Lally (2007) examined the issue of identity during athletic retirement. Lally's (2007) study had a sample size of six university athletes, 3 male and 3 female. The findings indicated the participants, with one exception smoothly navigated through the retirement transition. They did not experience an identity crisis following sport career termination, consistent with earlier work suggesting athletic retirement is one of many life transitions (Perna et al, 1996; Perna et al, 1999). Lally (2007) describes how sport career termination did prompt participants to explore neglected, abandoned, or entirely novel identity dimensions, but they flourished in this opportunity for self-exploration. In fact, one of the most relevant findings of Lally's (2007) study was that the athletes proactively decreased the prominence of their athletic identities as retirement approached. They consciously elected to shift the athlete role from its central to a subordinate status in their identity hierarchies and explore other available roles. Lally (2007) seeks to drive home the point that this shift away from their athlete identity and exploration of other available identities prior to retirement and redirection of self into graduate studies

and full-time employment immediately upon retirement prevented a major identity crisis or loss of identity. This safeguarding of one's identity prior to disengagement according to Lally (2007) reflects the dynamic and relational nature of identity, and although it has not emerged specifically in the athletic retirement literature, this management of identity as self-protection has been documented in the sport literature before. Brewer et al (1999), in their study of identity and loss, found male student-athletes reduced their identification with the athlete role following disappointing sporting seasons.

Lally's (2007) findings suggest that the more predictable the nature of her participants' athletic retirement may have allowed those athletes to prepare for career termination. It may also be that athletes in the study had more educational and career preparation than elite athletes in other studies who were not occupying student roles alongside their athlete roles. Coupled with the predictability of their retirement and the immediacy of the student role, the athletes in Lally's (2007) study may have been more primed to divest from the athlete role in favour of other roles. The sample size in this project's investigation is double that of Lally (2007) and, instead of engaging with university athletes, who have had the benefit of a higher education to illicit positive future selves, the investigation sample of this investigation is drawn from professional footballers playing in the highest profile football league in the world and who, prior to their release, had no higher education experience. As part of the discussion chapters to follow, the themes identified by Lally (2007) will be extended. Issues regarding the fashion by which participants successfully understood their release as imminent related to the notion of a predictable career transition.

With regard to their participants' reaction to the end of their career, Lavellee and Robinson (2007) explain that their participants following the loss of their role as a gymnast, knew very little about who they were and what they wanted to do and as a result were catapulted into an extremely unpleasant and directionless phase of their lives. In order to escape this disconcerting stage, they had to make appropriate life changes needed to

embark on their search for a new identity. However, in accordance with Miller and Kerr's (2002) contention that athletes who over-invest in the sporting role tend to experience problems with decision-making, they found this process extremely difficult. Lavellee and Robinson (2007) suggest that participants who had engaged in pre-retirement planning, however, were able to bypass this stage completely, because they had considered these decisions well in advance and were, therefore, able to make the necessary changes almost immediately. In order to adjust to their post-sporting careers, four of the participants had to distance themselves from their gymnastic past. The degree to which they had to distance themselves was dependent on a number of factors. Those who felt worthless and resentful at the time of retirement had to distance themselves completely from gymnastics. Those who had taken control of their gymnastic career and enjoyed fruitful coach–gymnast relationships were able to develop a new sense of self whilst still remembering their past.

An inductive analysis of their participants' accounts led Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) to conclude that, in order to adjust, retiring gymnasts must not only establish a new identity apart from gymnastics, but must also work through the painful aspects of their sporting experience. By taking a more detailed look at this transition, however, and considering the conceptual models of sports career transition (Gordon and Lavellee, 2004; Taylor et al, 2005), Lavellee and Robinson (2007) proposed that these two challenges must be dealt with separately. The participants in their study who were harbouring negative emotions directly after retiring were unable to deal with these feelings straight away perhaps because they felt too weak. It was only after they had established a new identity, apart from their past, that they were finally strong enough to re-engage with their gymnastics career and work through its negative aftermath. With the benefit of a new perspective these participants were able to see gymnastics in a positive light, and were, therefore, finally able to acknowledge it as part of their new identity (Lavellee and Robinson, 2007). This study will seek to extend further the research of Lavellee and

Robinson (2007) and Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) through a sociological perspective. Empowered by such a perspective and utilizing its conception of identity, this thesis will make such a contribution by demonstrating that while professional footballers indeed found elements of their career transition traumatic, their *self* consisted of identities they held both within and outside of a footballing environment. Another feature of this study that offers a new dimension to the work of Lavellee and Robinson (2007) and others e.g. (Park et al, 2012; Lally, 2000) is that all participants spoke of how they knew they were going to be released before the event happened and such knowledge influenced their social interactions within the club and their footballing environments. Such actions across a period of time can be offered in a similar light to what Lavellee and Robinson (2007) describe as pre-retirement planning. The difference being, only two of the gymnasts in the study by Lavellee and Robinson (2007) presented such sentiments, while the entire sample of professional Premier League football players involved in this study acknowledged their understanding of their release prior to receiving official confirmation of their professional fate.

Sparkes (2000) explains that during the last 30 years there has been a substantial growth in the empirical and theoretical literature addressing the process of athlete disengagement from top-level sport. Brown and Potrac (2009) describe how to date this body of work highlights how athletes often experience considerable emotional and adjustment difficulties when they retire from sport. In particular, Webb (1998) highlights that it is these transitional difficulties that are particularly problematic for athletes who are forced to retire from sport through injury or de-selection. Indeed, the available literature has suggested that athletes who retire involuntarily are more likely to experience psychological difficulties such as low self-respect, low self-confidence, and feelings of anger, anxiety and depression (Alfermann, 2000; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993). According to Brown and Potrac (2009) the onset of such feelings and emotions has been partly explained in relation to the

concept of ‘symbolic loss’. Here, Drahota and Eitzen (1998: 263) note that upon forced retirement, athletes “*lose* what has been the focus of their being for most of their lives, the primary source of their identities, the physical prowess, the adulation bordering on worship of others, the money and the prerequisites of fame, the camaraderie with team-mates, and the intense highs of competition”. In particular, it has been argued that one of the most common symbolic losses experienced by retired athletes is the loss of some aspect of the self (Sparkes, 2000). In this respect, Sparkes (2000:16) suggests that involuntary retirement can be considered to be a source of “biographical disruption that interrupts the narrative coherence of a person’s life”.

Brown and Potrac (2009) utilise in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of young former footballers whose respective professional careers were prematurely cut short as a consequence of de-selection. Brown and Potrac (2009) assert that the significance of their research is grounded in a need for investigation and examination into the concepts of symbolic loss and athletic identity in the context of elite youth sport. Participants for their study had all experienced de-selection from elite level football academies; specifically the participants had all undertaken a three year scholarship at a professional club. Brown and Potrac (2009) describe how after successfully obtaining a full-time scholarship at a professional club, the respondents firmly pinned their hopes on advancing to become a full professional player. Indeed, their immersion in the professional environment led to greater acts of discipline, sacrifice and an ever-increasing affinity with the role of footballer. This affinity was reinforced as a consequence of the respondents training with established professional players within the club environment. In this respect, the respondents highlighted how the day-to-day interactions with first team players gave them a sense of “*having made it*” (Brown and Potrac, 2009:149). This finding is in keeping with the work of Stevenson (1989) who highlighted the critical role that significant others play in the socialisation process. In this respect Brown and Potrac (2009) highlight that it could be suggested that what the professional coaches and other

significant others said really mattered to the respondents in terms of confirming their athletic identities within the surrounding subculture, similar to the work of Donnelly and Young (1988). Furthermore they go on to explain that the recognition of others could also be understood in relation to Adler and Adler's (1989) concept of the 'glorified self'. According to Adler and Adler, this sense of self emanates from an individual receiving public recognition, praise and rewards for his or her sporting performances, and can ascend in importance to cast aside other self-dimensions as it grows. Sparkes (2000:25) describes how the glorified-self may lead athletes to "sacrifice both the multidimensionality of their current selves and the potential breadth of their future selves as various dimensions of their identities are either diminished, detached, or somehow changed as a result of their increasing investment in a glorified self". This is most interesting as Brown and Potrac (2009) highlight that despite spending up to nine years preparing in a professional club environment, the failure rate of elite youth players competing for a senior professional contract was 85%.

Roderick (2006) explains how professional football is a form of entertainment work that is highly contingent in the sense of lacking long-term security and breeding a pervading sense of insecurity. Uncertainty is central to the lived experiences of players, for whom career advancement and attainment are never secure. Research into understanding the difficulties experienced by athletes during career transitions has now been a focus of differing fields of sport scholarship for over two decades.

3.6 Conclusion

In the consideration of career transitions of Premier League footballers, this study wishes to contribute to and further extend the existing literature surrounding the theoretical perspectives of career transitions. Standing on the shoulders of such literature, this project regards the causes of career transitions not as the unconnected categories of *forced* or *freely chosen* transitions independent of each other. In contrast, this study regards such circumstances as closely linked together with one leading to

another. This interdependent relationship is examined and illustrated as part of the discussion section within this thesis, in conversations dealing with participants' understanding of the performance of others within their football club and how such interpretations act as the ignition for *their* career transition. Continuing to reflect on pre-existing knowledge, the study offers the notion that non-footballing identities of participants come to the fore of their identity management and construction strategies during their career transitions. The conceptualisation that certain performances by audiences legitimise these types of identities and possible selves held by participants outside of football, is offered as contribution to what Alferman et al (2000), Hanin (2000), and Sinclair and Orlick (1993) termed transition identity resources.

Too often athletic transitions have been looked at as events that happen suddenly without warning and that automatically causes trauma or indeed relief, rather than events that initiate a transitional process, a process that each individual can perceive differently and therefore adjust to differently. Recognising the critiques mentioned as part of this section, the study has tried to clearly explain its reasoning for examining the exit of former Premier League players from professional football from a process-orientated perspective. Considering such events as a Career Transition allow the study to illustrate that while some individuals may understandably experience upsetting and uncomfortable emotional responses following their release, such an event is only one of many junctures in their lives. The transition perspective is the most appropriate theoretical position for this study to employ in order to critique the idea of an exclusive athletic identity, which has underpinned much of the existing literature surrounding athletes' transitions and exits from sport. An appreciation of the multiple identities of participants enables this study to consider the career transition of participants as a path to the attainment of future possible selves outside of football, and recognises the influence such future selves have on an individual's identity management and construction.

Chapter 4

THE "TRAINING GROUND" - Understanding The Cultural Environment In Which A Footballing Identity Is Constructed

4.1 Introduction

In order to consider the identity management and construction strategies of professional football players during their career transitions, it is important to gain an understanding of the cultural environment from which they are transitioning. These footballing environments and the social audiences within them are influential in shaping those identities of participants that centre round the social and cultural values of professional football. Considering the cultural context of players within the professional game proves to be a difficult task. Whilst there are numerous biographies, autobiographies and journalistic accounts of life within the realm of professional football in England, these prove either to be ghost written (and seek to settle old scores) or are romanticized accounts produced for mass consumption (e.g. Hornby, 1992; Ferguson, 2014; Keane, 2011). In terms of an academic inquiry specific to a sociological perspective however, publications written from within this tightly closed environment, notoriously wary of any outsiders, are few in number. This is a subculture that is renowned for its closed approach to any interest in examining issues that are deeper than what is offered on the surface. While few in number, there are those who have examined the cultural environment of senior professional football and how players navigate through such an environment. As an alternative to penetrating a "harder to reach" sample of full time professionals, more frequently existing research has sought to engage youth academies belonging to professional clubs in the United Kingdom.

Participants for this study were young Premier League professional players, all of whom had experienced life as a trainee or scholar player within their respective club academies. Following their departure from professional football, both their experiences as full time professionals and their experiences of the academy environment were often still fresh in

their minds. With this in mind, and in order to understand the environment and cultural context within which the footballing identities of participants were constructed and managed, the chapter that follows seeks to address the existing literature that examines the culture and lived experiences within professional football both as academy scholars and as full time senior players.

4.2 The Beginning of a Footballing Identity

The status that sports hold is undeniable, from the most famous footballers of the Premier League that serve as (questionable) role models, to the top goal scorers in lower divisions who act as local heroes. Sport permeates both our society and our consciousness (Repucci, 1987). In a physiological centre investigation of professional athletes and their career transitions, Baille and Danish (1992) note the importance of understanding athletes' first involvement with sport. Many young children experience the attraction of wanting to be a sports hero and to hold the status associated with that role.

Danish et al (1990) explain that the process of identifying oneself as an athlete (or in the case of this project 'a footballer') may begin early and with good intentions. Danish et al (1990) continue to describe how, for young participants, at all levels of sport, the physical activity, teamwork and competition have important implications for social activity and personal development. Developmentally, the major task for the adolescent is the acquisition of a sense of autonomy, achievement, and initiative (Newman and Newman, 1979). According to Nelson (1983), sport participation contributes to the development of physical abilities that in turn result in more effective peer and family interaction. Leadership skills can be enhanced by sports participation because more athletic children are more likely to be seen as leaders (Ambron and Brodzinksy, 1979). Therefore, according to the work of McPherson (1980), early participation in football as with many sports may lead to accomplishing certain developmental tasks and, at the same time, develop a heightened sense of self or, in line with this investigation, a footballing identity.

Most people's initial participation in football occurs on common greens, estate streets or in the schoolyard at lunch. Such an introduction maybe an individual's first experience of sport in an environment that is competitively and emotionally charged. In the case of this study's participants, the majority recalled beginning their football by playing with a family member, joining a Sunday children's team for fun and then progressing into school leagues before being approached and recruited by the academies of Premier League clubs. Baille and Danish (1992) explain that intrinsic factors may promote increased involvement and, for some players, this intrinsic value of football and indeed sport may carry on throughout their lives. This has proved to be the case with participants who, following their release and career transition, have sought careers or studied higher education courses related to sport.

Gould and Horn (1984) have provided six motives that promote sports involvement in children as young as eight years old. They have suggested that children enjoy sports because of the potential for improving skills, having fun, playing with friends, experiencing certain thrills and pleasures, achieving and maintaining a level of fitness and achieving success in a socially desirable realm. Gould (1987) continued this line of research further suggesting that children continue their involvement in sports until such time as their motives are no longer being met. As children move into adolescence and the pressures of sports achievement become greater, there may be a shift from internal to external motives. For other players, and although an assumption, we can presuppose for those who wish to make a career from the game, early intrinsic motivators are replaced by extrinsic factors (e.g., income, prestige, expectations of privilege and opportunities). Roderick (2006) explains the prestige associated with professional status in football is a well-understood aspect of a rhetoric in which young footballers aspire to emanate local and national heroes. McGill (2001) asserts that athletes are motivated by the chance to earn millions of pounds playing a game they love. Within the discussion chapters sentiments from participants

contest this notion from McGill (2001), participants were all aware how narrow the chances were to be the recipient of such wages.

With regard to sporting career transitions, Ballie and Danish (1992) suggest that it is necessary to understand the environments and cultural contexts of young athletes' participation in sports. All participants shared the commonality of being academy players at their respective clubs before signing their first professional contracts. Here they spent several years developing and learning the appropriate elements of their footballing identities. Such an identity was continually shaped by the performances of participants and how such performance were approved and dramatically realised by senior players, teammates, coaching staff and club officials. Similarly participants recognised the performances offered by these members of their footballing environments. Such performances also contributed to shaping the identities of participants. Also, the cultural values and norms within a footballing environment lend themselves to the formation of the hoped for and feared possible selves of participants that this thesis will demonstrate contribute to notions of identity management and construction. Therefore following the advice of Ballie and Danish (1992) it is important to understand the structure of such academies, in order to better comprehend the complexity of the footballing identities of players.

4.3 The Evolution of Football Academies and Modern Apprenticeship/ Football Scholarship

According to Monk and Russell (2000: 63), prior to the 1960s, the recruitment and training of young players "appears to have been typified by a lack of any coherent structures or formal schemes across the sport". Generally, there was a lack of consideration given to the education of players. The dominant perception was that junior players constituted a useful form of cheap labour. They were used as a means of servicing the clubs' needs in such areas as ground maintenance. In this period it was illegal for clubs to take on boys under-17 as fulltime professionals and, therefore, hiring them for other purposes was a means by which the clubs

attempted to circumvent the prevailing regulations (Monk and Russell, 2000).

During the course of 1960s the Football Association (FA) modified their regulations to allow clubs to enrol players at the age of fifteen under the status of 'apprentice' and, as Monk and Russell (2000) indicate, there was no formal requirement for football clubs to provide education for apprentice players. The FA insisted that these apprentices should be allowed to undertake any form of educational activity they wished. Platts (2007) asserts that, in reality, this informal requirement seems to have been insufficient to persuade clubs to incorporate an educational component into their apprenticeship schemes. Notwithstanding this pressure from the FA, and later from the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), throughout the 1960s and 1970s it seemed that clubs continued to treat young players in their traditional way, that is as a source of cheap manual labour (Dabschenk, 1986). In a further attempt to enhance the prospects of footballers finding alternative careers away from football, in the late 1970s, the PFA and the Football League (FL) established the Footballers' Further Education and Vocational Training Society (FFEVTS) (Dabscheck, 1986). Its supporters sought to ensure "that post career educational/vocational preparation … not only [became] a compulsory element of a football trainee's life, but [also] a heavily subsidised … feature of professional player status" (Parker, 2000: 63). While this initiative was primarily a reaction to the growing concern about the low number of apprentices being recruited by clubs, an attempt was also made to monitor the impact it had upon the educational experiences of young players. Platts (2007) describes how, prior to the 1970s, rarely, if ever, does there seem to have been any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of any policy or measure introduced to improve the educational provision for apprentices. Even after the introduction of the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) awards into professional football in the 1990s, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how, if at all, these developments have impacted upon the education of young players. Despite the lack of available evidence on the consequences of

the introduction of the FFEVTS on educational provisions of young players, what is clear is that organisations such as the FA, FL, and the PFA were placing greater emphasis on the educational dimension on the apprenticeship schemes of professional football clubs (Platts, 2007).

In 1983, with the aim of improving youth unemployment, the Conservative Government introduced the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) and in the following year the football authorities adopted the scheme (Stewart and Sutherland, 1996). It was widely accepted as providing "the essential framework that the game had lacked for so long" (Monk and Russell, 2000: 64). Unlike the mostly *ad hoc* apprentice schemes of previous decades, the YTS was underpinned by three central and interrelated objectives. Firstly, it allowed participants access to training, education and work experience and did so in an attempt to provide a superior form of entry into the labour market. Secondly, it aimed at providing employers with young workers who were better equipped for life in the workplace. Finally, it was intended that, in combination, these two objectives would benefit the economy as a whole by producing a more adaptable, highly motivated and productive workforce (Stewart and Sutherland, 1996). It is clear that this Government initiative was in the first instance aimed at reducing youth unemployment figures. Monk and Russell legitimately suggest that these broader intentions were of concern to football clubs. For them, and in particular those clubs in perilous financial circumstances, it offered a lifeline. It helped them to recruit young players and, at the same time, provided some much needed income. Much in the same way as previous schemes were characterised by an absence of monitoring, there is little evidence to indicate that the money the clubs received was in practice used by them to fund the academic education of their apprentices.

During the 1980s, seeking to develop a progressive youth training policy, the English Football Association (EFA) developed a national school of excellence at Lilleshall National Sports Centre in Shropshire, along with 147 regional centres of excellence throughout the country. Holt (2002)

explains that, in the past, the EFA was primarily responsible for talent development through its national team programmes and schools of excellence, but some professional clubs had independent youth development systems. As a result, talent development was conducted in a bit-by-bit fashion, lacking structure and an overall framework (Fisher and Dean, 1998). Fynn and Guest (1989) speculated that disagreements over the control of youth development during the late 1980s impaired the progress of young players in England. By the mid-1990s, in the face of intense media pressure after England failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup finals in the USA, the EFA recognised that their current system was inadequate for serving the needs (both footballing and educational) of young players (Holt, 2002). It was apparent that the English talent development system was considerably different from successful systems in mainland Europe (Fisher and Dean, 1998). As a result of these concerns, the English system was remodelled based on successful youth development programmes at top European clubs (e.g. Auxerre, France; Ajax, the Netherlands).

In the mid-1990s the Government expressed serious doubts about the way in which football clubs were administering YTS. It seems these doubts were engendered by the belief that it had been devalued by the clubs and that a substantial number of the participants had come to view the scheme as having little intrinsic interest for them. Therefore an innovative Football Scholarship was developed. The new Football Scholarship, Platts (2007) explains, lasts three years as opposed to the two years of YTS and the claim is that it is better tailored to the individual needs of players. Furthermore, this Scholarship programme made it mandatory for players to receive funding for three years even if clubs decide to release players from their contracts after only two years. It also requires players to undertake twelve hours of academic study per week in a range of A-Levels, GNVQs and NVQs, depending on the grades they attained at secondary GCSE level. Platts (2007) asserts that in short, the Football Scholarship is intended to persuade players of the importance of undertaking educational qualifications of one kind or another. It is aimed

at achieving this through offering qualifications that are considered more useful in the hope that the 'scholars' will be more inclined to study. The question arises therefore; *Are these objectives being realised in practice?* The research by Monk and Russell (2001) commenting on the training received by modern academy players (both educationally and footballing); together with research undertaken by Parker (1996, 2000) regarding apprentices' ambitions and efforts to earn professional contracts and the educational provisions they receive along the way, to point to the marginal impact made by the educational initiatives within professional football. The findings of such research (Monk and Russell, 2001; Parker, 1996, 2000) portray an image of a cultural environment that permits footballing orientated interactions centre around player and team performances. Interests and ambitions and, indeed, outside of the footballing realm seem to have little place in such a environment.

It is difficult to avoid the main thrust of the conclusions made by Platts (2007) that, over the years, the various schemes that have been designed to improve the range of educational opportunities available to young players have not, for the most part, achieved their objectives. Claims that young players will not play competitive matches or even be allowed to train if they do not comply with and complete all their required educational responsibilities are untrue. Those that choose to accept such claims are unfortunately naïve to do so. Elite sport is ultimately about winning. The best young footballers will play (at their respective level; be that academy, reserve or first team football) while at any particular club, because a club's very competitive existence dictates that it must win matches. In order to win matches, the best players will play. This project however will contend that while the overall attitude of a club towards the provision of educational opportunities may come second to the drive to achieve competitive and commercial success, as part of the most recent schemes, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) play an important role in the careers of professional players, especially during times of career transition. These individuals are fully aware of the importance of the role

they play. While other club officials may not appropriately support them, they are often the chief contact players turn to following the event of their release. Such a role is examined later in the thesis, and offers a fresh perspective to the conclusions of the existing research (Platts, 2007; Monk and Russell 2001; Parker, 1996, 2000).

4.4 The Cultural Context of Academy Football

Gaining a detailed or accurate perspective of the lived experiences of professional footballers has proven to be a difficult task both for past literature and indeed this study. In order to overcome such difficulty, the majority of academic literature dealing with the social experiences of players examines their time as academy players/scholars. Within such academies the lived experiences of these young footballers are represented by concepts from social research such as masculine identities, power relations and the financial cost of such a lifestyle, issues surrounding mental toughness and the fear of failure (e.g. Parker, 2000, 2001; Cushion and Jones, 2006; Skeleton, 2000; Monks and Russell 2000; Fisher and Dean, 1998; Sagar et al, 2010; Crust et al, 2010).

The Influence of Notions of Masculinity on a Footballing Identity within the Cultural Context of Football

Parker (2001) describes the English professional football world as a strictly gendered affair. Parker's (2001) ethnographic research examines a cohort of academy players aged 16-19 and how the everyday routines of occupational indenture served to shape the masculine identities of these trainees. Within his ethnographic study of a league club's academy, in accordance with both 'official' (i.e. explicitly, regulatory) and 'unofficial' (implicit and voluntary) institutional norms, Parker (2001: 61) asserts that the hegemonic masculine ideals in the club academy setting were defined in terms of an obvious institutional logic that incorporated notions of personal integrity, conscientiousness, discipline and the development of what was considered a healthy "professional attitude". Such values, in themselves, strongly reflect the previous work of Taylor (1971) who explains that a masculine working-class legacy has come to shape the

historical contours of English professional football. In particular Parker (2001) notes that the whole notion of 'professional attitude' held specific importance in terms of how well trainees were seen to accept traditional working practices in that its assessment was based around the extent to which individuals accommodated both the routines of occupational duty (i.e. the fulfilment of menial/domestic chores around the club) and the physical and psychological rigours of personal performance both during training sessions and youth team fixtures. Parker (2001:61) describes trainees demonstrating a keen and "hardy" enthusiasm for the game itself, a forceful "will-to-win", an acceptance of workplace relations based on authoritarianism/subservience, an ability to conform to institutional ('official') rules, regulations and disciplinary codes, and a commitment to social and professional notions of solidarity and group cohesion was crucial in that sense. Such a description will be reinforced by the sentiments of the participants within this study, who considered demonstrating these characteristics as an important requisite in order to 'make it'. Such sentiments are also understood by this thesis as important elements of how a footballing identity is constructed, managed and performed by its participants. Providing trainees readily adhered to these stipulated norms and values, and providing also that they developed and matured to expected levels of footballing competence, they then stood a reasonable chance, it seemed, of successfully completing the transitional phase from Youth Trainee to professional player.

Within the professional academy Parker (2001) explains that although levels of enthusiasm and motivation fluctuated amongst youth team members as regards their overall attitude towards the rigours of training and playing, what was central to the occupational identities of all, was a general commitment to a successful career in football and a psychological acceptance of institutionally defined hegemonic masculine requirements. In conjunction with these ideals, however, traineeships were also lived out in relation to a number of 'unofficial' behavioural norms and values, which collectively informed and impinged upon individual masculine constructions. Issues and experiences stressed by

Holland (1990) concerning heterosexual relations, wealth and consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, for example, all had a part to play in these unofficial behavioural norms. Added to this, the hyper-masculine behaviours of a selection of professional players also had a significant (if distanced) impact on trainee life patterns. According to Parker (2001) what this meant in terms of the formation of individual masculine identities was that, whilst being obliged to consider the occupational standards promoted by club officials, trainees were also under obligation to adhere to the social expectations of the all-male sub-culture within which they lived and worked. Because degrees of individual investment within 'official' and 'unofficial' behaviours varied, these somewhat contradictory circumstances necessarily led to the generation of a range of divergent trainee masculinities.

It is clear from Parker's (2001) extensive ethnography and his accompanying explanations that once trainees had both the confidence and the monetary freedom to express their personal desires they did so via lifestyle areas which they regarded as synonymous with professional player status – sexual endeavour, conspicuous consumption and excessive socializing. Parker (2000:77) argued that these areas were considered appropriate and obligatory, and was implicitly linked to a process of "occupational inheritance" whereby trainees carefully observed and adhered to the social habits of professional players, thus readily resisting the domestic inferiority of early institutional life and further anticipating their complete socialization into that full-time occupational role.

The explanations of Parker (2001) are both justified and insightful. [3] Informed by data collected from its in-depth vignette interviewing, later

[3] This thesis considers the work of Parker (2001) as a valuable and insightful study; the concentration of his work around notions of gender is wholly justified and this thesis acknowledges the masculine environment of professional football. However the nature of participants' possible hyper masculine gendered identities was a line of enquiry this project was not designed to address given the already sensitive nature of the research topic.

chapters of this study contest two themes within Parker's explanations; firstly, the notion of complete socialisation into a full-time role that ensures an adherence to the official behaviours of a hardy and robust sport ethic; and, secondly, that players also fully embrace the unofficial behaviours of sexual endeavours, conspicuous consumption and excessive socialising.

The Influence of Coaching and Management within the Cultural Context of Football

Examining the coach–athlete relationship in terms of power, structure, and accompanying discourse within the existing social milieu, Cushion and Jones (2006) describe the relationship between coaches and players within football academies. Here conversations between the two parties were heavily authoritarian in nature, while the general context was almost exclusively coach-led. Such language shaped the contours of the observed coaching process and affected how the coaches and players behaved towards each other. Consequently, the interaction and subsequent relations of domination between the parties were made, unmade and remade in and by this discourse (Cushion and Jones, 2006). Such a finding is generally consistent with earlier work highlighting the use of authoritarian behaviour as a long-featured and highly pervasive facet of professional football coaching (e.g. Nelson, 1995; Parker, 1996). Existing literature has previously indicated that, although often recognised as aggressive, such methods reflect traditional institutional discourse within the sport and, hence, have been accepted as a kind of occupational hallmark. Such beliefs are deeply rooted in the culture of professional football, with harsh, authoritarian, and, often, confrontational coaching behaviour viewed as a necessary aspect of preparing young players for the rigours of the game (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 1991). Holt (2002) explains how the majority of English coaches are former professional players who do not possess other education beyond their coaching certification. Fisher and Dean (1998) suggested that English clubs historically have not placed particular importance on recruiting coaches with educational and developmental knowledge. Some authors

have suggested there is a disaffected attitude towards education and post career planning in English football (Parker, 1996; Skeleton, 2000). This project will further elaborated on the role played by Education and Welfare Officers in the facilitation of post career planning and how this not only encourages a smoother transition for players exiting professional football but legitimise new and existing identities beyond the football industry.

Cushion and Jones describe how the primary medium for this imposition of symbolism and meaning (culture) was the behaviour of the coaches during sessions and games. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) termed this cultural enforcement pedagogic action (Jenkins, 2002), and it was not only responsible for reproducing an arbitrary culture but also the power structures reflecting the interests of the dominant group (i.e., the coaches). Such “work” was constantly in evidence at the club in which Cushion and Jones (2006) carried out their observations, players were continually berated for their performances and attitude with no right to respond. In contrast to the findings of Cushion and Jones (2006), the comments of participants within this project will demonstrate how, when coaches would ‘lose their cool’ and shout at individual players if they made a mistake, some participants depicted times when they felt they needed to respond equally to coaches if the fault lay with another player.

Cushion and Jones (2006) describe how players within their study of academy players were given little autonomy on a daily basis while being treated as members of an undifferentiated group. Consequently, the players usually moved as a group, both during training and in their spare time (e.g., during meal times), with individual activity directed by specific instruction—for example, to carry out allocated “jobs” or when rehabilitating from injury. Alongside a curtailment of individuality was a lack of privacy; changing, showering, and eating were communal experiences. Thus, few opportunities existed in their daily work routine for personal escape from the collectively of the squad. This study’s contests such a notion, instead data and its interpretation within the this study

paints a picture of players feeling more isolated and moving singularly when in their footballing environment.

Recounting further observed practices, Cushion and Jones (2006) noted how players also used being “busy” as a form of impression management. For the players, this meant secretly conserving effort during training. Their data, generated from focus group interviews, showed that any player who acted “too eager” or did “too much” was labelled as “busy” and, hence, had the potential to be marginalized by his peers. To maintain good relations with each other, players tried not to appear over-keen, thus engaging in a degree of “output restriction” (Collinson, 1992; Parker, 1996). Such action was also viewed as a means of collective resistance against the control of coaches, as it stopped players from volunteering and asking questions during coaching sessions. Contributing to such a notion, this project will describe the similar ploy of the “the stitch up” to regulate against players who were *too busy* and thus offer an extension to this element of cultural environment of football upon which Cushion and Jones (2006) shed light.

The Influence of Fear on a Footballing Identity within the Cultural Context of Football

Under the English *Charter for Excellence*, adolescent players are restricted to a maximum of 30 competitive games per season, and if this rule is violated the offending club is liable to have its academy licence revoked (EFA, 1998). In the past, the English system has been criticised for an overemphasis on competitive games that has resulted in increased incidence of injury (Fisher and Dean, 1998; Roderick et al, 2000). Holt (2002) describes how reducing the number of competitive games young English players participate in is an integral part of the redevelopment of English football, based on the belief that young English players do not practise technical skills enough. However Holt (2002) asserts, English coaches still believe that how a player performs in a competitive game is the measure by which young players are judged, so competitive exposure remains a crucial part of talent development in the English system. As

one academy coach and a participant in Holt's (2002: 179) study said: "The importance of a Saturday is still crucial in the eyes of all English coaches. It's the guide that everybody uses to make their assessment to choose players". Sport is a significant achievement domain for adolescents (Treasure, 2001) and the increasing pressure to achieve top sporting performances can bring with it an increase in fear of failure among athletes (Hosek and Man, 1989). The possibility of under performing during a competitive game is an ever-present fear for players.

While discussing the presence of a fear of failure, Sagar et al (2010) speculated that adolescent football players who are in highly competitive environments, such as football academies where the pressure to succeed from academy managers, coaches, and parents is great, are likely to fear failure. Sagar et al (2010) undertook a mixed method approach to their research, carrying out a survey with 81 young footballers with an average age of 16 years then selecting 4 players with whom (after a *preparation meeting*) a single interview was carried out. Although this project contests the methodological assumptions of mixed methods research, the qualitative data presented by Sagar et al (2010) revealed several 'situational factors' that contribute to players' thoughts of failure and to fearing *it* (e.g., performing badly, competing against a strong opponent, feeling pressure from self and others to succeed). Sagar et al (2010) describe how fearing failure appears to affect players' performances in competitions, preventing them from performing to their optimal levels. It also seems to affect their interpersonal behaviour in the short term. These findings are in line with those reported earlier by Sagar et al (2009) who examined fear of failure among seven elite adolescent athletes aged 14-1,7 from a variety of sports. It appears that fear of failure can have adverse effects on elite adolescent athletes in football and across sports. In light of this Sagar et al (2010) echo Mellor and Murphy (2007) and recommend that football academies should focus on young players' personal development rather than on competition results.

The work of Sagar et al (2010), while situated in notions of fearing failure, holds relevance for this study's uses of possible selves particular in terms of how players' identities are influenced by their motivation to avoid a feared future possible self. Sagar et al's (2010) work deals with young adolescent players but this study found that the types of fears described within their study are still felt by players even after they progress from an academy. Within the discussion chapters this study address how these feared possible selves play an even greater role in the behaviour and identity management of players away from the pitch than first previously described in past literature. Sagar et al (2010) describe the fear of failure related to the weekend matches of academy players. Unlike the work of Sagar et al (2009) and Sagar et al (2010), this study examines individuals exiting adolescence, who had signed their first full time professional contracts following their academy careers and interprets the data related to participants' self-proclaimed fears as feared possible selves. The position of this thesis firmly within qualitative research has produced data of a greater depth than the four interviews conducted by Sagar et al (2010) and will provide evidence that suggests these feared possible selves are understood to not just influence how an individual might play on match day or in training, but how they deal with the every day performances they must deliver to their social audiences in and away from the cultural context of their footballing environment.

4.5 The Cultural Context of Senior Professional Football

Crust et al (2010) describe how the environment of elite professional football academies tend to act as a natural filter, with more participants at the younger end of the age range, and fewer older individuals. Towards the end of each season, decisions are made whether to retain or release players with fewer players progressing to the older age groupings. Crust et al (2010) explain that the older participants tend to have experienced and withstood the challenges of the academy and have been deemed to possess the requisite qualities necessary to progress to higher levels of competition. Management and coaches consider psychological factors to

be important in relation to the decision whether players are retained or released (Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006); other predominant factors include physique, technique, and tactical awareness. Harwood (2008) highlights the importance of concentration, commitment, emotional control, confidence and communication as part of his consultancy work in a professional football academy. Harwood's (2008) research appears closely related to the work of Clough et al (2002), and suggests that football coaches acknowledge the importance of several factors that appear central to Clough et al's (2002) Four C's model. Considering the above literature as a means of describing what it takes to *make it* is primarily based within the field of applied sport psychology, this project will assert too that players must not only successfully perform on the pitch and training ground (demonstrating the traits highlighted by Clough et al 2002, 2008; Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006; Crust et al, 2010), but also within the social and cultural context of their footballing environment and to the audiences found within these environments.

Sociological investigations of professional football have proven to be harder to carry out compared with other forms of investigation, such as sport psychology or biomechanics/physiological studies. This can predominately be considered as an issue of access. Earlier in the chapter existing literature that has sought to navigate such issues by carrying out their investigations within football academies rather than with full time professionals have been discussed. While few in number there are those who have sought to provide an insight into the cultural environments of full time professional footballers.

The work of Giulianotti (1999) was one such analysis that attempted to address the cultural context of senior professional football by offering an understanding of player/club relations. This bares a strong similarity with the work of Foucault (1977) and Bourdieu (1977) on subjugation and discipline. Though highly rewarded for their labour, leading professional players still experience top clubs as "carceral organisations". In these

settings, the individual is removed from routine social relations and relocated within a confined space. The body is subjected to new and rigid disciplines, and examined by 'experts' or other figures of scientific authority (Foucault 1977; Goffman 1961). While at the club training ground Giulianotti (1999) describes the manner in which players are driven through complete regimens of repetitive exercise, day-after-day; failure to arrive on time or finish a drill results in their downgrading. For Giulianotti (1999) a manager's corporeal control of the football institution mirrors that of the governor inside a prison or a sergeant inside a barracks, who favours obedient, true professionals, and who practice careful fitness and training regimes in order to stay sharp both on and off the field. Wacquant's (1995) famous investigation of black boxers provides an interpretation that athletes are entrepreneurs in bodily capital. Giulianotti (1999:109) extends this line of thinking stating that it is also the physical capital of players that is central to their productive nature with clubs, "failure to pass a medical examination and no contract is offered". In preseason training, the body is refined into footballing capital; during the season it is fine-tuned by training and ascetics of sacrifice. In describing a player's career, the body is thought of as a machine, a "dead labour" asset with a finite existence. Players with 'big engines' keep running until the final whistle, while those slowing down have 'nothing left in the tank'. These mechanical metaphors foretell a conclusion offered by Baudrillard (1993: 159) that is both fatal and very definite: "A machine works or it does not. Thus the machine is either dead or alive".

4.5. Occupational Subculture

Giulianotti (1999) notes that the occupational subculture of players emerges from common industrial, social and cultural characteristics. The recruitment and educational practices of clubs contribute towards this occupational subculture. Traditionally, most UK clubs mixed the recruitment of youth players and the buying of more experienced players from other clubs. Modern UK clubs view their employees exclusively as footballers, ignoring the other educational needs of these young men. More post-modern holistic educational techniques have proved

successful in gaining results and helping players prepare for life outside football.

Giulianotti (1999) claims that two buffers exist to protect players from the downside of retirement, the first relates to the cultural status of footballers; the second concerns the financial freedoms that top players enjoy. These two points or buffers have been true in the past and to an extent still bare serious recognition when discussing the modern superstar of the Premier League or even, perhaps, the experiences of players luckily enough to carve out a 10-13 year career as a professional player. The Premier League however is not filled entirely with global icons or even players that will last a decade. Contrary to Giulianotti's (1999) assertions, participants involved as part of this thesis did not earn salaries comparable to those of superstar players and while some were known to some members of the footballing fandom, they were not held with the cultural regard described by Giulianotti (1999). Giulianotti (1999) does include a caveat when he mentions "top players". Few teams in English football are filled with what is meant by "top players"[4]. The majority of footballers' experiences of the professional game are fleeting in relation to their life course. The majority of players are forced to undergo career transitions following their release by a club due to the competitive nature of their skilled labour market. As explained in previous chapters it is this sample of the population that this study has investigated.

Commenting on the nature of what he describes as the "post football phase" for players, Giulianotti (1999) suggests that no matter how professional a club or organization might be in preparing players for that moment, the actual experience of retirement can be akin to a form of public death. 'Hanging up the boots' may grant the privacy and mental relaxation that players had earlier craved. More commonly, it ushers in the end of an institutionalized camaraderie with teammates, and the shattering of a public looking-glass self with which they had become so

[4] It should be noted that this study considers the feat of all of its participants who have spent even the shortest length of time with a Premier League club as one that validates their footballing ability beyond that of what is commonly considered an average player.

positively familiar. For the majority, the gilded option of moving into management, coaching or media work is not available. Giulianotti goes as far as to employ Brain Glanville's novel, *The Dying of the Light* (1976:21), to reinforce this point.

> "While I walk and jog along and run, I play though matches; I'm at Wembley again, in Rome, in Liverpool and Budapest. There's no substitute for playing; don't let anybody fool you. Once you've been as good as I am, once you have got the taste for success, you never lose it. The day I packed up I cried; I mean it. Sat there in the dressing room and blubbered like a baby."

For Giulianotti (1990), this public death of retired footballers is given added weight by the sense of loss that spectators feel. Football supporters pass on their personalised memories, slipping into nostalgia, as the past becomes romanticized before the mundaneness of the present. The subject of these mythologies meanwhile slips into public obscurity. While Glanville's (1976) quote conjures powerful feelings towards the end of a professional career in football, it is indicative of the dominant ideology of departures from the game and career. Here again this study differs from the view of Giulianotti (1999). Firstly, as already described, an exit from the professional game is not approached with such a thanatological perspective. None of the participants in this study actually died following the release nor did they cease to have an identity, rather these individuals experienced a career transition. Secondly, there is no doubt of the existence of die-hard fans, and that such fans will know every player their club has 'on the books'. However this is a very rare scenario, the average fan will not notice the release or absence of players who are not consistently playing in the first team, the exception perhaps being those top flight players out with injuries. Finally, the Glanville (1976 quote employed by Giulianotti (1999) does not offer an acknowledgement towards the stresses of everyday life as professional footballer. This thesis will offer evidence that players can consider their departure from the game as a positive experience. Instead of looking back at their past experiences on the pitch and yearning to relive such events, this thesis

offers evidence that demonstrate how individuals can be excited by the possibilities their futures hold beyond the football industry.

The work of Giulianotti (1999) is an academic commentary that considers how professional players must maximize their own body capital in order to successfully navigate through the sport's distinctive occupational subculture. It cannot be considered as something that gives a unique insight into the true cultural context of the professional footballing environment, especially from a player's perspective. Giulianotti (1999) however does not claim to provide such a portrait. Rather, his commentary on the aspect of the social endeavour of football is best considered as a commentary that casts its gaze from a position outside of the social world in which professional footballers engage. One distinct portion of work within the sociology of sport that does successfully achieve the type of unique insight and understanding that is important in order to inform this study's conception of identity construction and management is that of Roderick (2006a, 2006b, 2013). The nature of the insight provided by Roderick is strengthened firstly by the access he achieved into the world of professional football, interviewing not only participants who are employed within professional football but players themselves. Secondly, his own unique position as a former insider who had experienced this cultural context first hand, and finally, the non-judgmental and ultimately honest stance with which Roderick approaches and presents his data. This analysis at times can be painful to read for the first time, as it provides a very truthful account of professional sport. Such accounts seem to dispel elements of football that are often romanticized in wider media.

4.5 Junctures of Self and Identity Transformation

Roderick (2006) uses the process of players transferring from one club to another, as a means of addressing transformations of identity and self-conception. Players must learn to deal with the status transformation, which such events may force upon them. Roderick's (2006) participants describe how all players dream of moves to big clubs. From the players'

position these are, understandably, associated with the high expectations such moves can generate. However it can be assumed that most, if not all, players perceive such moves positively. Referring back to quotations of positive possible selves, sentiments expressed by this study's own participants would seem to support such a notion. Moves to big clubs are what players see as a 'positive' transformation of identity and status. They may also be thought of as benchmarks of 'progress' in terms of their careers and in most cases lead to an enhancement of 'self'.

One of the unique features of the football industry is that trained employees can be sold and this will, obviously, affect the willingness of football clubs to undertake training, even though attrition rates are so high. Using the terminology of Becker (1962), the training given is not just firm specific; it is general and therefore of interest to other employers in the same industry. That may explain why football clubs are willing to undertake so much training at considerable costs to themselves; they are gambling on the possibility that they will make a considerable profit if they are able to sell just one or two players at a very high price. However, from the players' perspective, such attrition rates present a different picture. Players as employees have to accept an implicit cost in the form of reduced wages. Monks and Russell (2000) explain that a young player might trade off minimal gains in the short term (a low wage), for maximum chance of a successful outcome. However, the chances of a successful outcome are slender. Roderick (2006) describes the event of a transfer as a significant turning point or a distinctive juncture in the biography of individuals employed as professional footballers. This project contends that the same punctuation should be considered when addressing the release of players. Roderick (2006) would seem to support this sentiment when he suggests that other moves are more complex in terms of the transformation of self. They involve rejection of one kind or another. For example; a player may be dropped from the first team for an extended period of time, or never really establish himself as a first team player, or even think he is being used in one way or another by the manager. Roderick (2006) explains that during these times players experience a

heightened sense of uncertainty about their future and a loss of self-esteem and status. They feel unwanted, isolated from their teammates and let down, often by the manager with whom they have attempted to identify and establish a relationship. This then implies that players are required to learn to cope with this questioning of their self during periods of de-selection (as referred to by Roderick) or release (as is the interest of this study) as they are denied access to the one activity that enables them to reinforce their sense of identity as players. Players are forced therefore to engage in their own identity management and (re)construction.

With great relevance to this project's comprehension of how the self-identities of players are constructed, Roderick (2006: 2014) addresses player attitudes to their work. Roderick (2006) explains that an integral element in the construction of identity and what is considered a good footballing attitude is the willingness of a player to sacrifice personal achievement for the greater good of his respective team and club. It is necessary for players to demonstrate and to prove to social others that they possess the 'right attitude' to the game. Players need to display and make their attitudes to the game evident to others in a manner that is acknowledged and approved. It is a workplace quality that is socially constructed and reinforced. The praise received from significant others to players who display a good attitude serves directly to heighten their self-confidence and reinforces their existing identity construction. This characteristic is sociologically complex because whilst players recognise that it is important that they are seen to be team players, many within Roderick's (2006, 2006b, 2013) research spoke of the personal conflicts that arise as a result of their daily lives. A player must convey their convictions to their team but in order to warrant their selection they must play selfishly in order to demonstrate their skill and, perhaps, at times, act selfishly in order show their teammates in a lesser light. These 'individual versus club' conflicts arise mostly when players are unable to play, whether because of injury or when they are left out of the starting elven. This notion links closely to one of the earlier mentioned points of

contention with the work of Cushion and Jones (2006) referring how players constantly move together a *team*. For some players this will constrain them to engage in a degree of Goffman's (1959) 'impression management', as they are expected to act and behave in a certain way that contributes to, first and foremost, the moral of the team.

Such personal conflicts occur when players are dropped or are unfit for selection and are forced to watch their team play without them. In these respects, the attitudes and behaviours of players reflect the importance attached to playing as a central value in football culture. Active participation in matches seems to be the context though which the identities are given meaning. Roderick (2006) indicates this can be imagined in relation to Goffman's (1967:181) analysis of 'action', and the people who want and need a 'piece of it'. Roderick (2006) conveys in detail and with a sense of genuineness, the significance and meaning invested in what, in professional football, is considered a good attitude. The central difficulty in this task, he explains has been brought about by the ambiguous nature of the term and by the variety of ways in which the term is applied by coaches, managers and players in the context of football clubs. The respective attitudes and values of players reflect the informal and cultural norms, which emphasize the values of masculinity, active participation, and victory (Taylor, 1970). These may guide behaviour and feelings and are an aspect of the taken for granted perspective in terms of how the game ought to be played and of how players are expected to conduct themselves. Failure to conform to these values can, for young players in particular, threaten career prospects, and for all players there may be unintended consequences in terms of status within the club. These values are embedded in professional football culture and Roderick (2006) explains that, for players, they are unavoidable. Professional football is arguably a work role that provides a capacity for demonstrating the characteristics of courage and confidence for establishing 'self' through 'action'. Unemployment in general may lead to a diminished sense of self, particularly among men (Morgan, 1992). A career transition, as an event in the biography of a professional footballer,

is likely then to foster a lost sense of self importance as well as high levels of anxiety for individuals. The discussion chapters in this thesis collectively offer an extension to this section of Roderick's (2006, 2006b, 2014) work by exploring whether or not a participant's footballing identity, and the role that such an identity plays in fashioning how they engage with society, evolves or transforms as part of the process of their career transition.

4.6 Conclusion

In order to investigate and interpret the identity management and construction of Premier League players, and answer the call for further investigation of player identity as proposed by Brown and Potrac (2009), this chapter sought to review existing literature that provided an interpretation of the cultural context of life for professional footballers. Such an understanding of this footballing environment is important to this study because it is in this arena that participants of this study would have begun to devote greater amounts of energy towards the construction and management of their *footballing identity*. Such management strategies are understood within this thesis as the working relationship between the performances of not only the participants but also their audiences and how such performance were condoned or deemed illegitimate; how participants saw themselves in the future, whether that was positive or negative; and how such hopes and fears influenced the performances they offered.

Through examining existing literature it is clear that access to this environment, especially at the upper echelons of professional football, has proven to be difficult to attain. While few in number there are some exceptions. The majority of relevant sociological literature addressing life as a professional player has come to examine the experiences of academy players. Participants of this investigation were individuals who had signed their first professional contracts following their successful graduation from academies. The contracts belonging to participants were between one and three years in length. At the time of their release, both

their experiences as full time professionals and their experiences of the academy environment were often still fresh in their minds. Therefore such a source of knowledge regarding the life and experiences of academy players found in existing literature has proven to be most helpful to this study. In relation to published knowledge dealing with the day-to-day lives of full time senior professionals, Giulianotti (1999) provides an interesting perspective, which is representative of opinions held by those outside of the footballing profession. It is the work of Roderick (2006) that has proven to be the most enlightening in relation to how players experience career transitions and their subsequent identity management.

As pointed out throughout this section the intention of the discussion chapters of this study and the data within them is to contribute and further extend pre-existing literature. A study of professional football has yet to be carried out using in-depth vignette interviewing until this investigation. The data generated and its interpretation will seek to answer some of the questions posed in previous studies, while at the same time, utilizing its own unique access to a hard to reach sample of individuals. The data generated from such access offers a fresh and distinctive understanding of the identity management and construction of Premier League players experiencing a career transition. In doing so, this investigation will critique certain aspects of the notion of an athletic identity. By stressing to its readers how players manage a footballing identity that comes to the fore of their presentation of self depending upon the audience present and the particular possible selves held by the player, this investigation will demonstrate that participants did not simply succumb to an all encompassing athletic identity. The *Self* belonging to participants of this investigation is made up of more than their ability to 'kick a ball'. The discussion chapters will examine topics highlighted throughout the literature review by illustrating:

- A footballing identity is only one part of a more socially complex self that participants manage and construct following their career transition

- That the event of the release of participants did not take these players by surprise
- How such an event occurs and how such a process changes the dynamics of social interactions for players, their coaches and their team mates
- The importance of the role played by EWO's in the legitimisation of identities outside of the footballing environment

Ultimately the discussion within this thesis will seek to contribute to and further extend existing knowledge through the honest and sincere interpretation of the data it has worked so hard to collect.

Chapter 5

Research Design, Methods & Methodology

5.1 Introduction

Mitchell et al (2014) end their quantitative investigation of the athletic identity of elite footballers with a call for more qualitative orientated research that seeks to understand the social identity of this especially unique and hard-to-reach population. To respond to such an invitation requires a shift in methodology and epistemology. While this investigation strongly contests the concluding notions of Mitchell et al (2014) regarding their assertion that football players possess a highly exclusive athletic identity, it does seek to humbly offer its answer to the call for an investigation with a shift in methodological and epistemological approaches.

This chapter outlines and justifies the research design and methodological positioning that has acted as the foundation for the research and theoretical argument presented. The chapter is best considered in two parts. Firstly, it provides the context within career transition enquiry to place this project's research design. In doing so, the research characteristics of previous investigations of career transitions from sport are examined. Secondly, it stipulates the research design of this project. It provides descriptions of the sample, research method, the methodology that such a method implies, how data are analysed and the ethical considerations held by the study. Within this latter section, the chapter provides a detailed account of the construction of my instrumentation - vignettes – and the unique fashion in which they utilised it, and the reasoning behind the decision to do so.

5.2 Sporting Career Transitions & Previous Research Designs

Research on career transitions in sport has been growing gradually over the past three decades, and as a result investigators have found various predictors of the quality of the career transition for athletes such as

athletic identity and the voluntary control over the decision to retire (e.g., Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007). In the early stages of such a stream of research, investigators focused on the consequences of athletes' career transition out of sport, but more recently they have distinguished between specific types of transitions, such as young athletes' disengagement/withdrawal from sport, and within-sport career transitions (e.g. Brown and Potrac, 2009). Since the 1990s, researchers have attempted to developed models describing athletes' career transitions (e.g., Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994), and several review papers have also been published on the phenomenon providing guidance for future research directions (e.g., Baillie and Danish, 1992; Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavellee, 2004).

Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013) constructed a systematic review of studies on athletes' career transitions out of sport from 1968 until the end of 2010. A total of 126 studies were evaluated and organised into three sections; sample characteristics; research designs; and correlates of athletes' career transition adjustment. Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013) findings provide an excellent frame within which to place both this study's research methods and methodology, and also to offer a point from which to depart.

Previous Research Designs

Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013) evaluate the characteristics of research designs belonging to 126 studies and explain that researchers have used qualitative methods (55), quantitative methods (56), or a combination of both (15) to examine athletes' career transition experiences. Three studies which examined the effectiveness of athletes' support programme involvement were conducted via experiments (Lavellee, 2005; Selden, 1997; Stankovich, 1998). Investigators used longitudinal designs in 13 studies and employed cross sectional methods in 113 studies. Slightly over half of the studies (68) collected data via interviews and the rest (58) via questionnaires. Discussing the type of questionnaires used, Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013) explain that it can be divided into three

categories: (a) questionnaires developed for assessing athletes' career transitions (10); (b) instruments which examine general psychological variables (15); and (c) surveys developed for the purpose of the particular study (33). The most frequently used questionnaire was the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder, 1993). It is employed in nine studies (Blackburn, 2003; Fraser et al, 2010; Grove et al, 1997; Herman, 2002; Lavellee et al, 1997; Selden, 1997; Shachar et al, 2004; Stronach and Adair, 2010; Zaichkowsky et al, 2000).

Previous Sample Characteristics

The total number of participants from all 126 studies was 13,511 and the range of sample sizes was between 1-1617. Across the samples, 1909 of the participants were current athletes, 51 were participant members of an athlete's entourage (such as families and coaches), and 219 participants were non-athletes, while 11,332 were retired athletes. The number of studies with fewer than 50 participants was 71, and 36 studies were conducted with samples between 51 and 200 participants. Eleven studies had samples between 201 and 500, seven studies examined over 500 participants. Most studies (121) investigated athletes' career transition experiences or compared experiences between athlete and non-athlete groups, and five included both athletes and their entourages (Gilmore, 2008; Kane, 1991; Redmond et al, 2007; Stambulova, 1994; Zaichkowsky et al, 2000). These five studies aimed to discover how athletes' families, coaches and administrators influence or are influenced by, athletes' career termination (Park, Lavellee and Tod, 2013).

Across the studies, 56 investigations contained participants of both genders, 38 contained male athletes only, 24 contained female athletes only, and gender was unspecified in eight studies. The studies included a wide range of competitive levels, including student (32), club (7), professional (27) and elite/Olympic-level athletes (50). Mixed-level athletes were examined in six studies, two studies were conducted with disabled athletes and in two studies the level was not identified.

Researchers have examined team sports (36), individual sports (26), or a combination of both (59), and five did not report the type of sport. In 53 studies the athletes were aged between 16 and 26, in 21 studies athletes were aged between 27 and 40 and in five studies the athletes were over 40. A wide range of age groups (aged between 15 and 84) were examined in 17 studies, two studies were done with athletes aged under 16, and 28 studies did not report the age of participants. The majority of studies were conducted in Western countries (60 in North America, 45 in Europe and 10 in Australia). Three studies had been conducted in Asia and South America, and two studies had been done in the Middle East. One study existed with African athletes, and two studies did not identify where data originated. It should be noted that one limitation of the extensive work of Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013) is that their review, while thorough, only consisted of studies written and published in English.

Correlations & Consequences of past Career Transition Research

Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013) describe how just under half (55) of the studies investigated as part of their review explored the psychological, emotional, social and physical consequences of athletes' retirement from sport. The other studies examined variables that influence the quality of athletes' career transition out of sport. Among the 13,511 participants, 11,332 (84%) of them had experienced termination from their sport and 1768 (16%) of them reported that their career transition experiences had accompanied adjustment difficulties or problems. In addition, the majority of studies (86) reported that some of their participants expressed career transition difficulties or negative emotions, including feelings of loss, identity crisis and distress, when they ended their career and adjusted to post- sport life (e.g., Baillie, 1992; Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; McKenna and Thomas, 2007). Four studies reported that the career transition process for athletes was neither a positive nor negative event for them (e.g., Alfermann, 1995; Johns et al, 1990; Schwendener-Holt, 1994; Torregrosa et al, 2003). Park et al (2013) identified 63 studies that correlated to issues related to the quality of athletes' career transitions. Following what Park, Lavellee and Tod (2013:32) describe as "further

analysis", this number was reduced to 19 and then categorized into two themes based on two existing models (e.g., Gordon, 1995; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994): (a) factors related to the quality of career transition; and (b) available resources during the career transition.
(insert on pp.104 before section 5.3)

Criteria for assessing Existing Research:

In the consideration of past research designs and the examination of previous literature (discussed as part of the literature review section), this investigation turned to the direction Sparkes and Smith (2013) offer researchers when engaging with existing qualitative research through the use of appropriate *criteria*. Tracy (2010:837) reminds us that the quality of social research, like all social knowledge, "is ever changing…as such, it is important to regularly dialogue about what makes good qualitative research". Sparkes and Smith (2013) explain how the meanings attached to the concepts of reliability, objectivity, generalisability and validity in qualitative research vary. It is also important to keep in mind that approaches to different research persuasions address such concepts in different ways. Sparkes and Smith (2013) explore and promote the notion of *criteria*, as characterising traits that might best be developed in a list-like fashion as a practical mode of engagement according to the purpose of any given study.

Acknowledging the variety of criteria now available to judge qualitative research, Sparkes and Smith (2013) encourage researchers to make fair and ethical judgments of the qualitative research in question. In this sense, criteria are used as tools to help us learn and form a basis for communication across traditions and paradigms. Sparkes and Smith (2013) call for scholars to challenge both their own prejudices and the prejudices of others when it comes to judging the goodness of research. In doing so researchers will be encouraged to engage in dialogue across differences as part of the process of becoming reflexive qualitative researchers.

This investigation sought to view existing research through the eight

criteria of *qualitative quality* offered by Tracy (2010), which she explains may be achieved through a variety of craft skills that are flexible depending on the goals of the study and preferences/skills of the researcher. Tracy (2010) describes how high quality qualitative methodological research is marked by and should be measured against (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. This conceptualization is designed to provide a "parsimonious pedagogical tool"; develop a platform from which qualitative scholars can join together in unified voice when desired; and encourage dialogue amongst qualitative methodologists from various paradigms when judging the quality of research (Tracy, 2010:837) .

One of the eight criteria offered by Tracy (2010) that resonated with this investigation was a particular element in her account of the criteria (d) *Credibility*. In her explanation of credibility Tracy (2010) explains one of the most important means for achieving said credibility in qualitative research is "thick description" (pp.843). By thick description Tracy (2010) refers to in-depth illustration that explicates culturally situated meanings and abundant concrete detail (Bochner, 2000; Geertz, 1973). Thick description, as understood and explained by Tracy (2010), requires that the researcher account for the complex specificity and circumstantiality of their data. In portraying thick descriptions Tracy (2010:843) describes how researchers must ascertain *Tacit Knowledge*. Tacit Knowledge can be understood as that which is considered to be taken-for-granted and which goes largely unarticulated. It is a "contextual understanding that is often manifested in nods, silences, humor, and naughty nuances" (Altheide and Johnson, 1994:492). For Tracy (2010) learning a culture's basic vocabulary and grammar is one thing, but understanding its implied jokes and idioms is an entirely more difficult matter. Tracey (2010:843) argues that "Hidden assumptions and meanings guide individuals' actions whether or not participants explicitly say so". However, as pointed out by Tracy (2010), the significant role of tacit knowledge transcends the immediate surface of speech, texts, or discursive materials.

Accessing tacit knowledge takes significant time in the field. The longer researchers are present and closely watching, the more likely they are to notice the values of a culture. Furthermore, researchers can access tacit knowledge not only by taking note of who is talking, and what they are talking about, but also who is *not* talking and what is *not* said. Indeed, good qualitative research delves beneath the surface to explore issues that are assumed, implicit, and have become part of participants' common sense. Noticing, analyzing, and unpacking this knowledge is key to understanding interaction and behavior in the scene. It is here that this investigation felt previous research (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Cushion and Jones, 2006; Sager et al. 2010) did not scratch beneath the surface of what was presented to researchers within the cultural environment of football. Reflecting on my own experiences as an elite team sport athlete, much of what existing research portrayed appeared to me as athletes offering a 'party line' that they had become accustom to providing to those they considered outsiders. The sentiments of this portion of existing research spoke very little to my previous experiences of elite competition or my knowledge of the cultural environments as understood from the perspective an athlete. While there are exceptions (Roderick, 2006; Parker 2000), employing the criteria suggested by Tracy (2010) and motivated by Sparkes and Smith (2013), it was my view that much of the empirical evidence offered by existing research contained very little in the way tacit knowledge. Perhaps in their attempts to overcome the barriers of access to elite and professional athletes; or with athletes perceiving the researchers as outsiders and never truly offering their own genuine opinions; or possibly with the researchers unfortunately unable to comprehend the nuances of the cultural environments they were investigating; a proportion of existing research falls short in offering tacit knowledge that reflects the experiences of elite and professional athletes. Having engaged with existing literature and previous research designs through the eight criteria offered by Tracy (2010), this investigation encourages its readers to measure the findings and data presented against a similar criteria in the hopes that in doing so a dialogue is opened across differences as part of the process to ensure reflexive

qualitative research.

Having outlined the characteristics of past research designs examining sporting career transitions and the criteria by which it was judged, I now turn my attention to this study's own design.

5.3 Sample and Sample Strategy

Regarding Vignettes, the research method employed by this study and described shortly, Torres (2009) explains that sampling is one of the areas that must be addressed, but is one that is seldom mentioned in vignette literature. Torres (2009) continues by indicating that sampling should not be disregarded, especially when used within qualitative research, since this data collection instrument demands a slightly different type of concentration from respondents. The construction of a participating sample has proven to be one of the most challenging tasks of this research project. Finding a very hidden section of the sporting and wider societal population; and second, securing the willing cooperation of a number of these individuals to generate a sufficient sample, has always been at the forefront of conversations regarding potential for the successful completion of the research. Such a concern arose from two prevalent factors. Firstly, players may be highly sensitive (and understandably so) to the research topic, e.g. they may perceive their release and inability to secure a new professional contract as both a personal and public sporting failure, and this may be accompanied with emotions of shame and embarrassment. Secondly, professional football, let alone Premier League football, is notorious for its scepticism towards academic research and operates a very closed door approach to outsiders. Those that do gain access are often fed a *'party line'* with regard to players' *'positive'* experiences within professional clubs.

As part of the initial proposal for this project, a small sample of former Premier League players had agreed to take part in the investigation. However it would later be decided that their contribution to this study would not be to the main volume of data but to act as an 'expert panel'

and help in the construction of the data collection instruments, the vignettes (this will be discussed shortly). In order to construct the necessary sample, the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), who act as the union for all professional footballer players in England, was contacted via their formal channels. The project's aims and objectives were outlined and comprehensively explained. Following significant correspondence, and along with the cooperation of League Football Education (LFE - a partnership set up by The Football League and PFA concerned with player welfare and education), a plan to construct a sample of players was generated to take part in the research. However, shortly before the data collection process was scheduled to begin both the PFA and LFE unexpectedly and suddenly withdrew from the project, taking with them a potential sample of players.

Following these disappointing events, I contacted all 20 Premier League clubs of the 2013/14 season, again through formal channels. Each club was provided with a hard and digital copy of a document that summarised the intentions and purpose of the investigation. The document outlined my request for the club to consider passing on the details of players who they had recently released or players they intended to release at the end of season. Six clubs responded and two offered an invitation to travel to the clubs in order to meet with players and speak with their respective welfare officers. Additionally, players who had been released from Premier League clubs were contacted independently. A sample of willing participants was eventually generated from all the information collected; from the information provided by clubs, and also participants passing on the contact information of other individuals who had experienced a career transition following their release from Premier League clubs, and these were often former teammates and friends.

This study recognises that this sample type was not randomly selected and therefore it cannot and should not be considered representative of a broader population of footballers in the statistical sense of the term. Much like the work of Roderick (2006) it more closely resembles a panel of

expert informants, which results in a body of coherent testimony. Though the group of informants may not meet the technical criteria of a statistically representative sample, it is hoped that the qualitative data the sample has produced will be considered comparatively rare in football studies.

Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) explain that snowball or chain referral sampling is a method that has been widely used in qualitative sociological research. The method yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest. This method is well suited for a number of research purposes and is particularly applicable when the focus of study is on a sensitive issue, possibly concerning a relatively private matter, and thus requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study. In a different context, Coleman (1958) has even argued that this is a method uniquely designed for sociological research because it allows for sampling of natural interactional units. Browne (2005) explains that recruiting research participants can be problematic when research focuses upon specific individuals, groups or experiences that are not validated by society. These individuals and groups are often 'hidden' because openly identifying with specific factions or lifestyles can result in discrimination. As the participants of this study may have considered their unplanned and early exit from Premier League football as a failure, the study must be empathic to the sensitive nature of the research topic. Much like the recruitment strategy within this investigation, Browne (2005) highlights how studies involving sensitive subjects have employed participants' social networks in order to access 'hard to reach' and 'sensitive' populations (e.g. Bergeron and Senn, 1998; Eland-Goossensen et al, 1997; Sarantakos, 1998; Valentine, 1993). Faugier and Sargeant (1997:791) argue that the “more sensitive or threatening the phenomenon under study” the more difficult sampling will be. Valentine (1993) used social networks to recruit participants and outlines her use of the snowball sampling method as 'contacting one participant via the other'. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981:151) described their chain

referral sample as one “created through a series of referrals that were made within a circle of people who know each other”.

It is important to note the comments of Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) who warn that the snowball method of sampling should not be considered as a self-contained and self-propelled phenomenon; in that once it is started it somehow magically proceeds on its own. Rather, as Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) describe, the researcher must actively and deliberately develop and control the sample’s initiation, progress and termination. It is also significant to acknowledge that snowball sampling can be seen as a biased sampling technique because it is not random and it selects individuals on the basis of social networks. Miles and Huberman (1984:235) argue that representativeness should be striven for and they define representativeness as “an instance of a general phenomena”. However, representative studies of sporting professionals are problematic because of the issues of sensitivity, which make for difficulties in establishing sampling frames and problems in defining an end to an athlete’s sporting biography. Browne (2005) suggests snowball sampling (as with most sampling techniques) relies on the willingness of individuals to be involved in research, and consequently some people will always be excluded.

The method of snowball sampling used for this study is similar to that of Kadlcik and Flemr (2008), who also carried out a qualitative investigation of athletic career transitions and employed a snowball sampling strategy due to the difficulty the project experienced in “securing individuals who were willing to participate in the study.” For this research project, snowball sampling strategy generated 10 participants. Participants were met with three times, with meetings range from 1 - 2.5 hours, however 3 participants where unable to attend all three meetings and so the data collection process was carried out over the course of two meetings. Criteria for selection required these individuals to have been released from Premier League clubs and to have experienced their career transitions away from the club or football for no longer than seven years,

in order to minimize recall bias (Kadlcik and Flemr, 2008). A total of six out of ten participants were within the first year of the transition, with the event of their release still fresh in their memories. All participants were male, ranged in age from 18-33 years, and experienced their release from Premier League clubs between the ages of 18-26. Further demographic data has as been omitted in order to protect and ensure participants anonymity. The number of the participants within the sample reflects a similar number of participants contained in other qualitative research investigating sporting career transitions (e.g., Kadlcik and Flemr, 2008; Clemmet, Hanrahan, and Murray, 2010). Sharing the sentiments of these studies, and those of Roderick (2006), the number of participants was considered a large enough sample size to provide a desired insight into the phenomenon, yet not so large, given the logistical difficulty of a thorough qualitative study (Patton, 1990), that the project became too large in scope to be undertaken by one primary researcher.

5.4 Research Method

As a sociological research tool, vignettes have been defined as: “A technique used in structured, semi structured and in-depth interviews, as well as focus groups, providing sketches of fictional or fictionalised scenarios” (Bloor and Wood, 2006: 183). The respondent is then invited to imagine, drawing on his or her own experience, how the central character in the scenario will behave. Bloor and Wood (2006) continue and explain that vignettes thus collect situated data on group values, group beliefs and group norms of behaviour. While in structured interviews respondents must choose from a multiple-choice menu of possible answers to a vignette, as used in semi structured in-depth interviews and focus groups, vignettes act as a stimulus to extend discussion of the scenario in question.

At many points within this thesis the closed nature of professional football is acknowledged. This closed nature does not merely pertain to the organisational, bureaucratic and managerial structures of the Premier League. This *closed* feature is also inherent in the daily culture of

professional Premier League players. In this particular social environment many of the opinions and sentiments players may hold are internalised when such feelings lie beyond the accepted and expected day-to-day interactions with professional contemporaries. This investigation goes to great length to clarify the sensitivity of the research topic to readers. Discussion chapters illustrate how, when players were released, their peers only briefly acknowledge such an event with a very general and very detached conversation. As part of such interactions this thesis will demonstrate how it was socially unacceptable for the released player to talk too openly about their disappointment of being released or of how such an event might prove difficult for them, socially, emotional and indeed from a financial standpoint. Great care and empathy was needed when approaching such a topic. Vignettes offered a research method that provided an approach that both proved sensitive to the experiences of participants and most helpful in the collection of data as an elicitation device.

Within the following sections of this chapter, the great length to which the research project went in order to construct genuine and authentic vignettes is both depicted and explained. This research project advanced participants' engagement with vignettes in order to stimulate further discussions (with the scenarios present in vignettes in question acting as the point of departure). It was this ability of vignettes that offered the researcher an opportunity to approach sensitive topics that are not regularly addressed within a footballing environment without participants experiencing feelings of vulnerability. Scenarios presented within the different elements of each vignette acted as potential opportunities for discussion that participants could either chose to engage with or disregard, thus offering opportunities to extend conversations. This particular aspect of the research method enabled the investigation to respectfully approach delicate topics within the professional footballing environment without participants experiencing feelings of insecurity or uncomfortable exposure. The uniqueness and richness of the data

collected within this investigation was in no small part a result of the decision to employ vignettes as a research method and the role vignettes played as elicitation devices.

Jenkins et al (2010) explain the first step in utilising vignettes from an interpretative perspective is to clarify their purpose. Jenkins et al (2010) continue that the aim of qualitative vignette interviewing should not be to arrive at an accurate prediction of an interviewee's behaviour but instead to achieve insight into the social components of the participant's interpretative framework and perceptual processes. In doing so, the researcher should reject the somewhat reductionist notion that 'beliefs' and 'actions' are binary opposites, instead conceiving of interviewees' responses to vignette stimuli as social actions in their own right. In this investigation of the influences on participants' identities following an early or unplanned career transition from their professional clubs, the purpose of the vignettes was to allow me to negotiate the potential sensitivity of the research topic; i.e. participants' perceptions of personal and public failure following their release from their respective clubs and not having their professional contracts renewed. Offering vignettes as a platform for extended discussion provides a strategy to lessen participants' feelings of vulnerability, and enables them to engage with the topic and explore their own feelings about these events without initially being an 'open book'.

As the interpretative processes in which individuals engage are qualitatively different when responding to vignettes as opposed to 'real life' situations, Jenkins et al (2010) highlight the argument that a methodological distinction must be drawn between how a participant believes a vignette situation would unfold, and how they would themselves act if presented with a similar set of events. Finch (1999: 113) for example argues that: 'It is in the area of the relationship between belief and action that I see the biggest danger of the misuse of vignettes'. Jenkins et al (2010) contend the separation of participants' responses to vignettes from other forms of their behaviour is something of a methodological fallacy. As Mills (1940:907) argues, "… there is not a

discrepancy between an act and 'its' verbalization, but a difference between two disparate actions, motor-social and verbal".

In the administration of this project's vignettes to participating footballers, these situations did not merely involve actors recalling previous experiences or speculating about future ones, but were social actions in-and-of themselves. As such, the behaviour that occurred as part of the qualitative interview (generated as it is by the specific relationship between interviewer and interviewee) can be as illuminating as any other form of social action (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002). If therefore, as proposed by Jenkins et al (2010), one rejects the notion that vignettes either stand or fall on their ability to predict behaviour, then discrepancies in participants' verbal and motor-social forms of action can lead to a greater richness of data rather than diminish them.

5.5 Construction of Vignettes

In the construction of the vignettes necessary for this research project and following the direction of Hughes and Huby (2004), points of particular importance in considering the development and construction included the internal validity of the vignettes, their appropriateness to the research topic, the kinds of participants involved, and the interest, relevance, realism and timing of the vignettes in the research encounter. The internal validity of vignettes refers to the extent to which vignette content captures the research topics under question (Gould, 1996; Flaskerud, 1979). Internal validity has been explicitly considered in the development and construction of vignettes (Gould, 1996; Lanza and Carifio, 1992; Flaskerud, 1979). Criticism has been levelled at studies that fail to address these issues. This research project addresses such matters via the issue of Plausibility.

Plausibility is a crucial factor in constructing vignettes. Scenarios that are viewed by participants as highly plausible are more likely to produce rich data about how actors interpret lived-experiences than those that invite astonishment, incredulity or disbelief (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002; Hughes,

1998; Jenkins et al, 2010; Mills, 1940). As such, the more plausible the protagonist's situation is in a vignette, the greater the likelihood of interviewees being able to put themselves in the character's place. While this is the case, the issue of plausibility affects more than the potential for interviewees to engage in specific acts of orientation. As Hughes (1998) argues, implausible developments in a scenario can produce negative reactions from participants, producing feelings of confusion; distress; embarrassment; anger or disinterest. Jenkins et al (2010) calls the researcher's attention to the nature of the interaction between themselves and the participant in the vignette interview. When participants are asked to complete a vignette exercise, an implicit aspect of the relationship that exists between interviewer and interviewee is that the participant adopts the role either of the 'expert' or 'well-informed citizen' (Schutz, 1964). The interviewee possesses some degree of expertise in relation to the events that the scenario depicts. As such, if the vignette contradicts the interviewee's account of what would (or could) feasibly happen then the vignette represents an implicit challenge to the interviewee's position. In this context, it could be argued that the anger, confusion or embarrassment participants may experience is a result of the vignette bringing the interviewee's expertise into question.

The question then arose for me, "How do researchers confront the issue of plausibility in vignette design and respond to conditions where the interviewee feels the events being depicted are out of the ordinary of the everyday workings of the professional football environment?" Atkinson and Coffey (2002) suggest one possible solution would be that through extensive piloting, adaptation and re-piloting, the researcher seeks to construct scenarios that are perceived as highly plausible by any-and-all participants who may be exposed to them.

In order to achieve the high standard of plausibility required I (as the researcher) made a concerted effort to ensure that;

- I drew from case study material to develop each scenario presented,

- I had the vignettes vetted by a expert panel whose members have sufficient knowledge and experience to comment on their suitability,
- I made sure that the question asked in relation to the vignettes had been adequately constructed and formed.

Wilson and While (1998) stress the importance of collaboration with a project's consultants and these consultants' own professional and individual experiences. In considering the construction of the vignettes, the issue of plausibly and the need for an expert panel, as well as case study material, I had what I felt was a tough decision to make. As part of my initial research and funding proposal I had included that I had already attained the cooperation of a small sample of former professional players who had experienced the type of career transitions I wished to investigate. (These initial participants were referred to in the past section). Throughout the course of my project I have found that mainly due to the nature of the topic, I am seeking out a hidden population of players who are sensitive, hard to reach, and possibly not the most willing individuals to talk about their "sporting failures". So this tough decision was whether or not to utilise my initial participants as an expert panel and draw from case study material generated from in depth interviews with them, or consider them as contributors to my main bulk of data. I choose to employ their knowledge, experiences and help in order to construct my vignettes.

This reflects the efforts made by pre existing literature that has also employed vignettes. Vignettes are usually piloted prior to their application, as is the case in most research. Similarly, professionals may be used to assess the extent to which vignettes are representative of situations relevant to participants and research topics (Flaskerud, 1979). Study group members have also been used to pilot vignettes (McKeganey et al, 1996; Kalafat, 1994). These procedures can strengthen the internal validity of vignettes, especially when the study requires vignettes to be as realistic as possible (Gould, 1996; Flaskerud, 1979). Having already

spent a year compiling my literature review and developing my social theoretical framework with which I intended to organise and understand the collected data, a semi structured interview plan was developed drawing from this knowledge. I approached each of my five initial participants separately and discussed at length their career transition away from football. As part of this discussion, issues that were addressed included:

- What it was first like to be at a particular club and be a professional player?
- The daily *goings on* at training and in the changing room.
- What was the experience of being told you would not be signed like, both emotionally and socially?
- How they reacted upon receiving the news of their release?
- How they acted post release in front of friends, family and former teammates?
- How they thought about themselves in the future ahead of them and how did that motivate their behaviour at the time?

From the experiences shared by the initial participants collected as case study material I made the decision to build three vignettes. In the construction of vignettes and in collaboration with initial participants acting as an expert panel, I had three specific aims. I wanted the vignettes to demonstrate authenticity in order to achieve plausibility. I wanted the vignettes to show participants the greater understanding that my research and I had about career transition and life as a footballer in general. Most importantly I wanted to create points of discussion within the stories contained in the vignettes that players could relate to in order to encourage conversation around topics that might be of a sensitive nature.

Three vignettes were developed, each one the owner of a particular theme or narrative. These themes reflect the work of Arthur Frank (1995) in The Wounded Storyteller, and take the work of Smith and Sparkes

(2004) and their vignettes used in dealing with sporting spinal cord injuries as their departure point. In light of this, a singular vignette was devoted to a Restitution Narrative, a Quest Narrative and, finally, a Chaos Narrative. Characters named Paul, Peter and Mark were the protagonist of each of these narratives. The themes and narratives of the vignettes informed the actions and emotions of its protagonist accordingly;

Restitution Narrative: According to Frank (1995:77), the plot of this narrative has the basic storyline: “Yesterday I was healthy, today I’m sick, but tomorrow I’ll be healthy again”. In the case of participants within this study, this was translated as Paul, the vignette’s protagonist, depicting a story along the lines of, “Yesterday I was a footballer, today I am not a footballer, tomorrow I will be a footballer again”. Smith and Sparkes (2004) suggest that such a narrative has a similarity with the restored self and the entrenched self as described by Charmaz (1987) that lock the individual into their past self-relationships and ways of being in the world with the hope that they will return to this state.

Quest Narrative: Smith and Sparkes (2004) describe how quest stories meet challenges head on, with the characters accepting adversary and opposition, seeking to use them as motivation and catalysts for change. Frank (1995) points out that just what is quested for may never be entirely clear, but the quest is defined by the person’s belief that something is to be gained from the experience. Informed by the opinion of their participants, Smith and Sparkes describe such a quest as a rebirth. Whilst never easy or straightforward, such an attitude will enable individuals an opportunity to explore different identities and possible selves as the need arises and circumstances allow. This translated to Peter, the vignette’s protagonist, depicting a story to participants that, “Being deselected was hard but it might be the best thing that ever happened to me, I have the chance to go back and get a University degree and then who knows what I could achieve”.

Chaos Narrative: According to Frank, the chaos narrative is the inverse of restitution narratives, since here the plot imagines life never getting better.

For participants in this study this would translate to Mark, the vignettes protagonist, depicting how, “Losing my professional contract was the worst thing that has ever happened to me, I will never be happy and never will be able to be happy without playing for a big club, my life is a mess”. Smith and Sparkes describe how such outlooks are characterised when exploring any sense of self, or any other identity-formation, becomes extremely problematic as the individual is entrapped in confusion and sadness.

The mechanics of each of the vignettes contained four types of components, and these included;

- The protagonists story at the club- this was included in order to first provide respondents with material they could easily relate to and promote plausibility (these parts of the narratives where taken from the initial participants’ ‘off the cuff’ stories as life as a budding professional).
- This was followed by the event of the player’s release; how they felt and how they acted.
- Then the narrative dealt with how players saw themselves in the face of others, such as family, former teammates and friends.
- The narrative would then close with how the player saw themselves in the future, and whether this future self was seen in a positive or negative light.

After the first component, the three remaining elements relate to the theoretical framework which I am using to examine notions of identity management, these include relevance to Goffman’s Dramaturgial Metaphor (1959), Markus and Nurius’ Notion of Possible Selves (1986), and the idea to consider the release from a club not as a career termination but as a transition.

Hughes and Huby (2002) explain that language used in vignettes must also match what can be expected in terms of informants’ literacy skills and backgrounds (i.e. age, gender, education and class). Hughes and

Huby (2002) continue and offer the reminder that the quality of the data gathered through this kind of research method is always contingent on the quality of the vignettes that have been used. Appreciating that participants may have been removed from traditional and formal education systems at a young age through their involvement in football academies, I sought to present the vignettes in the most engaging format as possible. Informed by the work within educational psychology particularly dealing with the engagement of written word (Jeanes et al, 1997; Wilkins et al, 2001), each vignette is presented on single A4 sheet. In order to make it easier to read for those participants who may have had some literacy issues, one side the vignette is presented, with an off white background, surrounded by a bold colour border and with the entire text in a specific font. The other side of the page is the vignette cover, containing a picture and title. However what I was most concerned with is that players would engage with the story of the vignette and not be put off by the process of reading it, therefore each of the vignettes is accompanied with its own audio sound bite. Following the completion of the data collection process a number participants explained how this seemed to make the stories all the more real for them, as if one of their own contemporaries was present and telling their own story.[5]

5.6 Delivery

With regard to of use of the instrumentation, as part of in-depth semi structured vignette interviewing, participants were met individually with one meeting devoted to each of the vignettes. The order in which the vignettes were chosen to be delivered was influenced, again by an appreciation of the potential sensitivity of the participants toward the research topic. Therefore considering that most participants are still young men, whom at the time of interviewing I assumed would still be trying to carve out a career in professional football (whether that was in the top flight or its lower leagues) the restitution narrative was discussed first. It is important to acknowledge that this wasn't always the case;

[5] The three vignettes are included as Appendix 1; 2; 3

many participants while understandably shaken by their release were equally excited by events in their lives outside of football. However at the time, I hoped participants would relate most easily to this story of once again returning to football, and we could navigate through this thin reality at the beginning of our relationship before feeling at greater ease with the experience of being interviewed. The quest narrative was delivered second, and the final vignette to be discussed was the chaos narrative.

As part of each interview, I started by explaining the vignette and its story to participants. Players would then listen to the vignette via headphones and once this was finished I asked them their thoughts on the individual in the story. Here respondents commonly seemed to focus on the actions of the protagonist. Next I would provide participants with a pen and while listening to the vignette a second time, I asked them to underline five points they either agreed or disagreed with. The ratio didn't matter, it could be 4 points they agreed with and 1 that they didn't, vice versa or any combination. We then discussed those points and it was here most participants would begin to seem most comfortable starting to relate the story of the vignette to their own experiences.

As this conversion developed the interview transitioned from the participants providing informed comments about the events within the vignette to providing their own personal reflections and sharing their experiences of their respective career transition. As we entered this part of the interview process I would then turn to the relevant points of my interview plan. As I have mentioned before this plan reflected both my theoretical framework and also the components of the vignette. The semi-structured nature of the plan meant the questions could be moulded in an order that could suitably match the on-going conversion with participants.[6]

5.7 Methodology

According to Hughes (1998), vignettes demand attention and represent a growing sense of understanding within the realm of qualitative

[6] For semi structured interview plan see appendix 4

investigations. Due to the placement of vignettes within qualitative research methods and the manner in which they draw out participants' own personal perceptions and experiences, it would appear that an investigation that values such a research method would hold an ontological position contrary to the belief that there are physical beings 'out there' moving around in a real physical world that are independent of living individuals. The interpretations and descriptions this research project offers of the movements and actions as described by its participants are not 'out there' in the sense of being independent of its interests, knowledge, and purposes. They are dependent on it. There are, thus, multiple realities created by individuals. This investigation being one that takes advantage of the type of data provided by vignettes, would seemingly hold an epistemological belief that knowledge is constructed. The participants and myself (as the researcher) are 'makers' rather than 'discovers'. The distance between this investigation and its participants can be considered minimised and small, and knowledge is subjectively constructed.

It would seem therefore that the use of vignettes as a social research tool, would imply an epistemological position conducive of interpretivism. This entails the researcher holding beliefs in a world of multiple, constructed, subjective, and mind-dependent realties. As Smith (1989:150) points out, how we interpret people's utterances and movements, "the meanings we assign to the motivations, intentions, and so on of ourselves and others, becomes social reality as it is for us: it is an interpretation". Epistemologically speaking, the nature of knowledge produced following the use of vignettes would be subjective and relative in the sense that that there can be no one *God's eye* view or *all embracing truth* concerning the social world. Rather, as Smith (1989:171) comments, "truth…or what we come to accept as true in terms of intentions, purposes, and meanings…is the result of socially conditioned agreement, arising from dialogue and reasoned discourse". Thus, knowledge claims are partial and contingent, as opposed to having the

status of timeless truths that can be detached from the particular social context in which they are constructed.

Keeping in line with the work of Smith (1989), the data generated from this project's vignettes of a social reality of a former Premier League footballer experiencing an unplanned and early career transition following their release from their respective club offer a constructed reality, based on the meanings people (including the researcher involved in the study) give to their own intentions, motives and actions and those of others. As a result, my preference to use vignettes may be considered an interpretive-orientated inquiry and, therefore, positions my project within a different relationship to its subject matter than its empiricist counterparts. For the former, what is studied is 'not out there' independent of the inquirers. On the contrary, inquirers, both in their day-to-day lives and as professionals, are "thoroughly and inseparably a part of what is studied" (Smith, 1989:64).

5.8 Acknowledging Narrative Methodology

Before beginning to discuss the conceptualization of identity construction and management of participants it is important first to provide a significant preface. Such a prologue seeks to address the issue of narratives, and whether the findings of this project and its methods are similar, if not in fact a clear example of narrative work in and of itself. Narrative is a primary means by which an individual assigns meaning to his or her experiences, understands time (Abbott, 2002; Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988) and constructs identity (McAdams, 1993; MacIntyre, 1981; Mishler, 1999; Sarbin, 1986). Linde (1993) explains that the distinctness of narratives, as a form of discourse and meaning making, lies in the principle of narrative ordering or, as previously explained by Polkinghorne (1988), narratives make events and actions meaningful by linking them temporally. They are particularly salient in understanding careers, which are also temporal constructions that focus on sequences (Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1990). From the perspective of identity, narratives accomplish the cultural expectations of what it means to have

a self: they construct the continuity of the self across time, distinguish identity from others and assign moral value to the self (Linde, 1993). Life stories as well as the so-called short-range narratives about one's life and career are the prototypical, canonical narratives that accomplish such expectations (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Linde, 1993).

The reason I highlight that the collected data for this thesis should not be considered as narrative in nature is to acknowledge that such a methodology could be considered as a viable alternative to the approach taken. Indeed the literature cited above would fully support such an alternative approach. Such literature (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 2000) would suggest that although life stories are always particular to one's trajectory, they are never of our own making. Narratives are always co-constructed through sociocultural master narratives and the interactional situation. The conventional approach to narrative identity has focused on narratives as self-contained units and the role of master narratives in representing or constructing the narrators' identities (McAdams, 1993). However, attention has shifted to the dynamic, performative and situated nature of narratives and identities as practice (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Wortham and Gadsden, 2006). In other words, master narratives and discourses are always adopted in specific situations. They are negotiated with the audience, itself an active participant in resisting, modifying and supporting the narration (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008). Therefore, a practice-based approach to narratives and identities takes into account both the local and the wider sociocultural contexts in the construction of narrative identities. However, with regard to this project, narrative investigation as just mentioned was not an employed method. While the narratives within the vignettes may rightfully be considered as short-range narratives, as explained such stories were carefully constructed, informed by experiences shared by an original group of participants, in order to elicit conversation and help engage a vulnerable and hard to reach sample. The three assigned narratives within the vignettes acted as a platform to present specific material that was hoped might provide points of

conversation from which to approach these sensitive topics. When participants responded to the different sections of the vignettes the data generated were not approached as narrative. While discussion of hopes and fears in the past and in the future are acknowledged as being similar to those of a biographical story being told, the identities of participants are being understood in a fashion that is felt as equally apt as a narrative study. The narrative approaches such as those just mentioned are by no means being questioned or discredited, what is simply being made clear to readers at this juncture is that the manner in which identity is to be understood and explained within this project is not one of narrative methodology. In the following section I make clear my approach.

5.9 Data Analysis

The proposed analysis of data in this study was influenced by the direction taken by Chapman (2009) and Dahlberg et al (2001). These authors describe data analysis as a tripartite structure with movement between whole-parts-whole. In accordance with this method and using the qualitative software programme NVivo 8, as an aid in dealing with associated analysis tasks, such as classifying, sorting and arranging information, data were examined so as to become familiar with the whole text, and as a way of uncovering overall themes. Influenced by the direction of Chapman (2009), next the essential meaning units of the experiences participants shared in interview were distinguished and outlined. Following this, the meaning units were arranged into meaning clusters; clusters with similar meaning were then linked together. Chapman (2009) describes how this holistic and dynamic process allows change within the configuration of meaning clusters as the relationship and networks between participants and the individuals within their differing social environments were further identified and developed. In the final step, the text was treated as a whole with the aim of revealing the essential general structure of the issues being investigated. Throughout this period the investigation's theoretical framework underpinned the process of analysis.

An interactionist approach has proven to be relevant in relation to interpreting the issues surrounding the exits of professional footballers from their trade in the past (e.g. Roderick, 2006). Blumer (1969) explains objects are socially defined through the physical, the social and the abstract. Beal (2002) explains how these objects are defined socially through the representation of various social roles and social relations people have. In the case of this investigation, I am referring to the roles and relationships participants have or had with teammates, family, friends and club officials. Beal (2002) notes that Blumer's social objects are constantly being modified and challenged through various forms of social interactions, with an unplanned exist from professional football inherently affecting the social interactions of participants; thus, they themselves may be considered as objects experiencing a changing of self and existence. This then would seem to imply that their surrounding relationships with other social groups are also being modified during this transition. The processes by which symbolic interaction describes how people create identities, meanings and relations again reinforces the justification to employ this sociological method.

Employing the sociological perspective of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Metaphor, I interpreted and analysed the experiences belonging to participants through the concepts of (i) Performance and (ii) Dramatic Realisation, and further explored professional footballers' notions of Possible Selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Goffman (1959) uses the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual that occurs during a period marked by his or her continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. When talking of performance, Goffman (1959) explains that when an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. An audience is asked to believe that the character they see actually posseses the attributes they appear to posses. In line with this, Goffman explains, there is a popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people'. He continues and suggests that

as a part of the consideration of performances it is convenient to begin such a discussion by turning the question around and looking at an individual's own belief in the impression of reality they attempt to engender in those among whom they find themselves.

Lawler (2008) describes how individuals are constantly playing various parts, but what those parts add up to is our-selves. This would seem to imply that to be a person is to perform being a person. Occasionally, but especially in new situations, we might be conscious of this, but mostly we are not. Goffman nevertheless argues that we are continuously doing our various, shifting and possibly contradictory roles. Further, there are many ways in which one might try to make the invisible visible in order to dramatise their roles. Put simply, it's no good doing or being something if no one recognises that we are doing or being it. So we need to spend energy not only on action but also on making that action apparent. For Goffman this is dramatic realisation and it rests on impression management. A participant as a player being elaborately attentive to their manager's directions, the coach sighing and looking at his watch as they wait for late-arriving players, the manager who pulls the face when their team makes a mistake on the pitch; all of these individuals are engaging in dramatic realisation. Even so, Lawler (2008) suggests that this is not to say they are being fraudulent in any meaningful sense. Rather, it indicates that much of what we do, consciously or not, is done for the benefit of the social group of which we are part, whether or not there is any one there to actually witness us. With great relevance to this project, perhaps this is most obvious when it fails. In other words, when people are not recognised in ways in which they want or expect to be recognised. In the case of this investigation, for example, I am considering former professional footballers who are no longer seen or considered by family or coaches as 'footballers' after involuntary retirement.

Examining the identity management of individuals following their unplanned career transition away from Premier League football, the work

of Markus and Nurius (1996) and their notion of an individual's possible selves would seem to exert a portion of influence on the social front performed by an individual. If the events of an early and unplanned end to a sporting biography activate an 'unsuccessful professional self', the failure may temporally be devastating if this possible self comes complete with thoughts of underlying incompetence, and fears of playing quietly and bitterly in a much lower division. Given this context of negative possibility, the individual is likely to experience at least momentary feelings of low self-esteem. According to Markus and Nurius (1986), for a period of time some behavioural outcomes will seem more probable, for example not getting recruited by another team, whereas other outcomes and the behavioural paths leading to them will seem less likely and perhaps impossible to pursue. For instance, actions that require a self-presentation as competent or confident are difficult to negotiate when behaviour is mediated by a working self-concept that features the 'unsuccessful professional footballer' possible self as a focal point. Even so, in contrast, achieving a desired goal outside of football. Perhaps after their release a player applies and is offered the opportunity to attend university. Such an opportunity is likely to activate positive possible selves, such as the 'successful higher education student'. In this context, the prospect of attending class and studying at university takes on a distinctive set of meanings. The self is not just a self that has been offered a place on an undergraduate degree, but also a self that could graduate with a first class degree, secure a professional graduate job, and continue to climb the professional corporate ladder. The individual's feelings and immediate actions, according to the work of Markus and Nurius, are likely to be markedly influence by the nature of this context of possibility.

Therefore the nature of performances given by participants can be determined not only by the expectation of differing audiences and social environments but by the motivational function of possible selves. Following the opinions expressed by Hamman et al (2010), the addition of the "possible" to self-concept, provides a lens for examining self-views

that encompass a future orientation. There are advantages to considering a footballer's identity and self-presentation in terms of possible selves, especially if one is concerned with the developmental and contextual questions surrounding their identity management and construction. The value-added of possible selves as a lens includes the fact that casting the self in terms of the future and possible also implies a goal that is anticipated and may be realised. The possible self provides an additional mechanism for self-evaluation that reveals discrepancies between the present and future selves (Buss, 2001). Examining potential participants' views of themselves in terms of possible selves, therefore, provides useful information about identity in the present, as well as includes information about identity in the future. Markus (2006: xii) notes in this regard: "Knowing how people think about themselves currently is of some help, but knowing what they hope and fear should refine this understanding [because] possible selves are not applied as frames after experience; rather they are used in the on going constitution of experience".

Such a theoretical underpinning helped inform the creation of meaning units and clusters of meanings as described previously. Fifteen significant clusters where identified and created, all informed and supported with differing degrees of strength by relevant data. Of these clusters, three meaning units where created, with 11 of the 15 clusters divided between these units. While ultimately it was felt that many of the clusters where connected and co existed together within the networks of personal relationships between participants and those within their differing social environments, four clusters that where not organised within NVivo 8 under a meaning unit were considered suitably robust to (for want of a more appropriate term) exist independently of meaning units. The diagram below (Table 1) is an illustration of how the data analysis process was organised. It is import to note the diagram is not offered as a theoretical model or explanation for which to enter or consign the experiences of athletes who experience career transitions from their

respective sporting professions, rather it is meant as an example of how data within this study were organised in order to help analysis.

Table 1: Organisation of Data Analysis

Performance	**Possible Selves**	**Release**	clusters that where considered suitably robust to (for want of a more appropriate term) independently of meaning units.	**Football Experiences**
In front of Others	*Positive P/S*	*Saw it Coming*		**Beginnings**
In front of Family	*Feared P/S*	*Emotions*		**Club as a Social Environment**
In front of Friends	*Past P/S*	*What is coming Next*		**Banter**
In front of Club Members				

***** 3 meaning units and 4 cluster independent of meaning units highlighted in bold font

5.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations of this project stemmed from an appreciation of the concerns, dilemmas, and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research. Ethics help to describe what is or is not legitimate to do, or what 'moral' research procedure involves. This investigation was at all times fully aware that the researcher's authority to conduct social research and to earn the trust of others is accompanied by an unyielding ethical responsibility to guide, protect and oversee the interests of the participants involved. I endeavoured to avoid unnecessary or irreversible harm to subjects; I secured prior voluntary consent and never unnecessarily humiliated, degraded or released harmful information about specific individuals that have be gathered as part of this project. I recognise that verbal permission/agreement from individuals to participate in the study alone is not enough, and acknowledge that prior to their participation, individuals must know what they are being asked to take part in so they have the ability to make an informed decision when considering to take part or not (Neuman, 2007). I obtained written

informed consent before the research began and debriefed the participants afterward[7].

Participants have been assured that their privacy will be protected by not disclosing any information about their identities during any phase of the research. Anonymity has been ensured through the use of fictitious names (pseudonyms) and locations and altering characteristics, thus the subject's identity will be protected and the individual will remain unknown and anonymous. Confidentiality can include information with participants' names attached, therefore the study will hold this knowledge in the confidence of the participants and keep it from public disclosure. When the findings of the study are released it will be done in a way that does not permit linking specific individuals to responses. Former teammates, clubs and club officials mention in interview have also been assigned pseudonyms and are unrecognisable. Recordings of the interviews carried out with participants were stored exclusively on a secure hard drive storage device and following their transcription and analysis were deleted.

5.11 Reflexivity

From the initial moments of first meetings with participants it became apparent that it was important for them to realise that I was motivated, first and foremost, by a love of sport and a passion for its betterment rather than an intellectual distaste for football's less appealing characteristics. I was fortunate enough to achieve such status with my participants through a process within the data collection I had not consciously prepared for. As part of the semi structured interviews I found I was visiting my past experiences of elite sporting competition and swapping experiences with participants (e.g. games lost, time spent training away from family and friends). Upon reflection of my own research notes and appropriate reading I would later come to know this, as the stance of Gouldner (1970) on the nature of reflexivity.

[7] for relevant consent form refer to appendix 5

Prior to beginning my doctoral thesis, I had the opportunity to experience sport as an elite competitor for a number of years. I have represented my country (Ireland) as a basketball player at international competitions over a ten-year period; at European Championships, Home Nations Tournaments and two tours of North America. Drawing from and sharing my experiences as a not-so-long-ago elite athlete helped to assure those belonging to the sporting world I am trying to research of my genuineness. By participants seeing me as not only the post graduate student from Durham University but as a former competitor who understands the world of sport, including the bravado of a changing room and the pressures to consistently perform, a relationship was built where these individuals were able to express candidly what their transition was like for them. I also considered the fact that my sporting experience was not based in football removed the expectation upon participants to feel it necessary to offer a "legitimate" footballing performance. My own sporting experiences brought me closer to participants and at the same time did not allow me to get too close. By participants regarding me as a critical friend who understood the physical, emotional and social demands of sport rather than a hostile enemy, I was able to push and challenge them to reflect on their own experiences and how they thought and felt about their identity.

Through my own experiences I was very much aware of the practice of athletes, in all sports, to offer sentiments that generally "towed a party line". Such *a party line* may refer to comments that paint a good picture of a footballer's club or their current professional situation, for example. More generally such comments adhere to cultural norms and help shore-up and reinforce the expectations of audiences. One does not have to look too far to find evidence of this, within most interviews with Premier League players, the player will usually only offer generalized and well-rehearsed sporting rhetoric. Sentiments along the lines of: "at the end of the day, I have to do better", "things are tough yes, but we will work hard and bounce back" are repeated time after time, with the athlete saying

very little about their own experiences and opinions. Reflecting on my own experiences as a former elite athlete, much of the sentiments offered by existing academic literature reflected this and seemed generally inconsistent with my experiences as an elite competitor.

Often I would be frustrated reading such work that promised to provide depth and insight to the investigation of the lived experiences of athletes, but when it came to the data offered by the authors I was continually left feeling that it did not reflect my own story or those I had witnessed. The sentiments of participants within such investigations appeared routine and almost rehearsed. I often felt that the interviewer was being told the types of things athletes had become expected to say to those outside of their own cultural environment. Additionally, in my own experiences, I have in the past along with numerous contemporaries chosen to not speak openly to those outside of my own sporting world. As athletes, the reasoning behind such a discourse lay in an assumption that the experiences and expectation of elite athletes are so distinct to members of this particular subculture that outsiders cannot understand or truly comprehends such experiences. Unless the conversation is with an individual from a similar sporting background and level of competition, they will not comprehend comments that stray from a "party line," nor have they earned the trust of athletes to share the intimate stories of the sporting lives. From reading previous literature, I felt past authors lacked an understanding or perspective of elite sport from a more authentic or true point of view of an athlete and thus were unable to identify when their own participants were engaging with their investigations in a very controlled or limited sense.

The stories I shared of my own background in elite sport with participants help demonstrate to them that I warranted more than the types of feigning comments I felt athletes offered in previous literature. As part of the vignette interviewing process, when I choose to share my own stories of elite sport such a decision reassured participants of my knowledge of the demands and pressures on players. Participants began to speak more

openly of their own experience and opinions. Participants deemed my background as legitimate. In turn, this allowed me as an interviewer to enquire further than the surface understanding offered within previous studies. The same legitimacy was brought to bear prior to the main investigation of my thesis, in the construction of the vignettes employed as a research method. Similar to the fashion in which I have just described how my background acted as almost a badge of legitimacy that encouraged participants to speak, I called upon my own stories to engage and illicit conversation with initial participants in order to collect appropriate data to construct the investigation's vignettes. Again calling on my experiences as an elite athlete, I recognized the importance of inserting and crafting different elements of the stories initial participants shared into the vignettes. As previously mentioned the amalgamation of such events into different components of the three narratives within the vignettes helped offer more points in which participants could recognize legitimate stories that either reflected their own experiences or those of others within the cultural environment of Premier League football. Offering such reference points, which conveyed the legitimacy and genuineness of this investigation to participants, is an advantage the thesis's storied approach has in comparison to previous studies that employed non-storied approaches. What I describe in my research is in no way uninfluenced or unshaped by my involvement in it. I have neither remained detached nor have I chosen to ignore my own experiences, both sporting and social, in the context of the research process. I have not remained unchanged by the experiences and people I have encountered and I believe my data are the better for it.

Additionally, I recognise that issues surrounding gender, class and ethnicity are not addressed within the thesis; the reason for this is three fold. Firstly, in conversation with the initial participants who acted as the expert panel that contributed to the construction of the vignettes, these individuals offered little if any comments or depictions surrounding issues of gender, class and ethnicity when describing their career transitions. Equally any one of these three issues is worthy of an investigation in its

own right (e.g. Parker, 2001; McGillivray et al 2005). Secondly, as described in this chapter the project was forced to employ a snowball sample. This meant that it had to grasp the opportunity to speak to any player who was willing to take part in the research. Thus the sample was made up of players from differing social backgrounds in relations to social class and ethnicity. Given these particular characteristics, I felt my investigation did not have the appropriate foundation to offer informed and meaningful observations on such issues.

Finally, the project has sought to portray to its readers the potential sensitivity of participants during the data collection process. When discussing the end of their Premier League careers with participants it was important for me as the researcher to hold an appreciation of how the topic had the potential to be tightly packed with deep-rooted emotions. As the researcher, I was the beneficiary of good fortune in that participants choose to engage with the investigation in a very genuine, frank and honest fashion. I felt that with such good fortune came a great obligation and responsibility to ensure I approached my research with the appropriate measure of empathy, sensitivity and tact. In my role as a 'critical friend' within the data collection process, I was at times able to push participants to consider events that for any number of the participants had the potential to be associated with a sense of public shame and failure. I was asking individuals to comment and reflect on highly personal events. Combined with the two fore mention reasons, I felt that proceeding to question participants on issues that challenged their conception of their own personal gender, class or ethnicity would have pressed participants too far.

5.12 Conclusion

This investigation has sought to offer its own answer to the call for a shift in methodological, epistemological approaches when conducting research into sporting career transitions. This chapter has described its use of qualitative research methods and outlined the study's own research design offering descriptions of the investigation's sampling,

research method, the methodology that such a method implies, how data were analysed and the ethical considerations held by the study. In so doing, it is hoped that such a design will offer the reader clarity when questions arise about how the data presented in the following chapters have been collected, interpreted and analysed.

Chapter 6

Dramaturgy and Possible Selves in the Cultural Environment of Professional Football

6.1 Introduction

Reflecting on their experiences within Premier League Football prior to their release, all participants spoke of what it meant to be a footballer. Discussions of physical ability and skill often occurred but these were regularly short lived and brief in nature. Dealing with what it meant to be a footballer, conversations regularly began regarding a player's individual skill or technique but such elements of the discussion seemed to act as prologue. For participants an important part of what it meant to be a footballer was often rooted in their social experiences within the cultural environments of their club. Participants often conveyed these components of the collected data in the form of numerous anecdotes. It is in these first accounts of participants' experiences of professional football we begin to see the influence that their social audiences had on their identities combined with the influence of the hopes and fears participants held for the future.

Gary played for his Premier League team from an early age and like so many players came through the clubs academy system. He had spent close to ten years with the club, through his entire adolescence and into early adulthood. As part of the interview process Gary began by departing from commenting on the actions of protagonists within the vignettes to his own experiences by describing what his favourite times as a player were. Speaking of his earlier experiences within his Premier League club, Gary recalled his time in the club's academy. His recollection does not involve an account of his goal scoring record or his number of appearances, rather he offers an insight about the people he was surrounded by and the relationships he had with those people.

> "Some of my best memories were back when you were at in the academy like early on. We headed off to the clubs mini soccer world cup and just had an unbelievable time. Our coaches were just so proud of how we did and pure bigged us up in front of everyone at the club when we got back. Which was class because everyone was saying, "well done lads" and people were saying that you had done good. The coaches were great. Decent banter and treated me really well and fairly. You could have a bad day and they might get into you but they were just really knowledgeable and not too strict but…like we were still kids- but when it came down to it they were able to say "lads come on" and you then just knew it was time to straighten up. The squad we had like just everyone got on, there was no 'Big-Time Charlies' and we just had the banter nonstop. I had a great time just out in the training pitch and then about the canteen and stuff with the lads. We were all there trying our best to make it. Two lads are still like some of my best football mates, ones was over at XXXXXXX FC for a spell and the other he's over to the US on scholarship once he got released."

In his early experiences of football within a professional environment Gary portrays accounts that deal very much with the social features of what it meant to be a footballer. He describes the significance of others in his comments, telling us of how his academy team was applauded by others in the club upon their return from a tournament; how when his coaches issued orders to players to "straighten up" players would respond accordingly; and how, if a player was not performing well, their coach would "get into them" (shout aggressively). In light of this study's theoretical position, these three discourses are considered as social performances offered by actors that are dramatically realised by their audiences.

Gary also alludes to a term used by many participants, *making* it (what this meant to a participant will be addressed at a point further within the discussion chapters, however more generally this term implies making a career as a Premier League player and achieving regular selection for first team football). In this instance, *making it* refers to the hopes Gary

held as a younger player. To avoid the unnecessary confusion of participants when addressing theoretical issues concerning possible selves, the project's interview questions referred to the hopes and fears held by participants. While only mentioned briefly by Gary in this data exert, the notion of *making it* is a central theme within initial discussions of participants' possible selves. Gary describes how his teammates all held the shared hopes and ambitions of earning their professional contracts at the club following their academy experience.

Finally in recalling his fondest memories, Gary mentions the "banter" – the workplace joking culture – shared with teammates and coaches while at the club. This social discourse refers to hazing/slagging/dreging/joking as it occurs primarily between players not just in the changing room as traditionally expected, but as Gary points out, in the club environment in general, for example "on the training pitch" and "in the canteen". Interestingly Gary mentions how his coaches were "decent banter". It will become clear as the discussion chapters progress other participants refer to banter with coaches. Coaches' knowledge, understanding of and partaking in banter can be understood through an appreciation of their commonly shared past, as players themselves. From the shared sentiments of participants it is clear that banter plays an important role in the cultural environment of football, an environment that at one time legitimised their footballing identities.

This chapter aims to provide evidence that supports the conception that participants' identities are appropriately understood through the use of the dramaturgical metaphor and notions of possible selves. In order to achieve this, the chapter will provide data relating to participants time as players at Premier League clubs. These examples of data will illustrate how participants constructed and managed their footballing identities. Central in these processes, the analysis of these data will demonstrate the influence of both, (i) the presence of an audience and their expectations of culturally legitimate performances; and (ii) participants' hoped for and feared possible selves. Such examples collectively paint a

picture of the cultural environment participants must transition from following their release. The chapter aims to further describe the environment from which participants transitioned by addressing the use of banter as a key discourse within the footballing environment.

6.2 Justifying the use of Dramaturgy

Further reinforcing the decisions to employ Goffman's Dramaturgical metaphor, participants described how the people around the club influenced the way they themselves behaved and acted. Shared sentiments from participants painted a picture that described a culture whereby for those who had been offered contracts following their time as academy players, an important part of life as a young professional was to observe and recognise the way more experienced players acted. This included how such players performed in front of each other in the absence of coaches and other staff, how they treated other teammates and club officials, and how they acted while in front of coaches and managers. Given their experiences within a professional environment as academy players, participants describe how it did not take long for them learn how to maintain a viable footballing identity in front of their professional peers. The comments of James, Paul and John demonstrate that this was a performance that participants had been portraying for a number of years already. In describing how he had come to learn the "right way" to act as a professional footballer, James describes that he can't put it down to a singular person but rather a collection of people within his particular social footballing environment, throughout his time as a player. Paul explains how once he was aware of the likelihood he would be offered a full time professional contract, it was important to act both on and off the pitch in a similar fashion to those who had already experienced success in terms of being signed. John describes how doing as other players have done before him was important in order to demonstrate to coaches that he was a committed player who had what it took and to show he was determined to contribute to first team football.

"I don't suppose I could really put it down to one person, but everything I've built up through the time I've been playing, it all just brings it together, the players you had as teammates once you got to the club as academy player, then seeing first team players come through as you were growing up who were all good pros, your coaches and the standards they set influences the way you are and how I've carried myself. My parents too had raised me to always give your best, so that influenced me…yeah…my dad always treated his work real professional like so he encouraged me to do the same. You just learned from others as you go, what to do and what not to do." (James)

"You copy players that are above you and do what they do because you want to be in their position. You want to get to where they are...and seeing what they do around the place influences how you do things. You have to learn how to be a footballer on and off the pitch. Obviously that isn't about heading to clubs and being out in town. Most of the lads I know aren't doing stuff like that…If you're going to make it acting the right way off the pitch is how you deal with people off the pitch…it's about lads in the changing room, coaches, manager all the stuff when you're in the club or representing the team. You have to be respectful to everyone in the club- but you have to have a certain bit about you too [self-confidence] or else people will pick up on it…every one is competing for their place and you never want people to start seeing you as soft or an easy target or something." (Paul)

"It's lots of things like turning up for training earlier, taking time to go in the gym or staying out after training to improve. Having the right attitude is massive, tuning in and showing that you're eager, that sort of thing is an influence. It shows coaches that you are there ready to train and more importantly they see you putting in this extra time you are telling them that – oh there is something about this lad- and maybe you get more time in the next match. Other players have been successful doing these things and I thought if the manager saw me doing those things they would see I want to be successful and I am serious about my football." (John)

The comments of James, Paul and John all highlight how participants acknowledge the importance of how they were perceived by social others within the cultural environments of their clubs. Their actions are

understood as dramaturgical performances. The social others within their football environment include coaches, teammates and managers and are understood as their audience.

The comments made by James illustrate how his footballing identity was constructed through his interaction with his audiences through the earlier stages of his career. Through the observation of others who have had their footballing identities dramatically realised within the club, James describes how he strived to replicate these realised performances and thus managed the construction of his own footballing identity. Such an understanding is also evident in the comments of Paul and John.

The sentiments offered by Paul offer an insight to how players are aware that the idea of giving the right performance is more complex than acting one way as opposed to another. The footballing identity of participants is not a static entity, but best understood as one that varies the performances offered depending on the expectations of their audiences. Highlighting the importance of respecting those who hold positions of power within the club, such as coaches and management, Paul's comments demonstrate the importance of performances depicting respectful attitudes towards these individuals both on and off the pitch. Paul alludes to how it is important to offer a performance that portrays oneself as being confident and assured of ones ability. If a player was to fail to perform this identity with the necessary conviction, Paul mentions how this may weaken his standing with other players as they all compete for places on the team and offers of new contracts. A failure to offer a credible portrayal of such a performance is understood by fellow players as a weakness they might be able to exploit in order to better position themselves within the team and their future employment at the club.

The sentiments of John like many athletes both within and outside of elite competition allude to the importance of training both individually and with a team. He also comments on the importance of having the correct attitude while training. Such an attitude is important for an athlete training

for competition as it enables the individual to optimise their mental approach towards conditions designed to physically and mentally push them in order to develop their abilities and prepare for competition. All participants were aware of this and it is important for this study to recognise participants' physical abilities and dedication to their training and attempts to further develop or enhance these abilities. However, with this point acknowledged, the importance John places upon not only doing the training but being seen to do the training, is very interesting and further supports the use of the dramaturgical metaphor. John describes how it is both important to perform physically (here referring to football training, and strength and conditioning) on the pitch and in the gym but also the manner in which such a performance is recognised by those within the cultural environment of football. John is very clear in his understanding that by being eager to train, showing up on time and doing extra individual training, he was demonstrating to those who made decisions regarding his footballing future that he had what it took to *make it*. The performance of his footballing identity was conveyed to management, coaches and teammates through his approach to training. John was fully aware that such a performance held its greatest potency when it was recognised by these social others.

From the comments of James, Paul and John their footballing identities are clearly understood as ones influenced by the presence of audiences and their performances to these footballing audiences. They encompass the daily *goings on* within the club environment and relate to how a player navigates through such an environment interacting with and performing to different individuals and groups as audiences. Regarding their past performances during their time in their respective footballing environments, what seemed to be primarily important to participants was that their performances would be dramatically realised by their audiences of footballing peers. In other words, having their footballing identities both recognised and legitimised by their teammates, coaches and managers. As a player grew in seniority and 'footballing' experience, it was then expected of him by his surrounding audiences within the club to now

know how to act. An audience would reward accepted social performances accordingly; this is seen in the comment from James:

> "I didn't play many (first team) games. But I trained hard, I think the way I conducted myself, I got a... a lot of respect off a lot of the first team players. I always thought I was a good pro, I knew what the story was like. I trained the right way, dug in when it was time to, we put some serious shifts in mind…I never took the banter to heart and was always able to give it back. Other lads were in similar position to me but then just bitched and moaned about not getting selected, then they would just say they were injured for a week or something like that…I just went about my football. The coaches liked that, I trained with the first team a lot, I mighten' (might have not) had the ability of say the likes of XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXX obviously, but the manager saw I worked and the first team players saw that too and I could take the banter so I got a lot of respect from them." (James)
>
> "How did that make you feel?" (interviewer)
>
> "It made me feel like I was going about stuff the right way. It might be something as small as say XXXXXXX signing a shirt for us for my nephew but there wasn't any bother about it or say them just saying hi to you walking down the hall. They didn't have to like, there was plenty of first team players who didn't give a shit about us reserve players...Those little things mean a lot to your football." (James)

James's audience compensates his performance by offering him their respect. He admits to having inferior footballing talent to those players at his club that played on the Premier League stage week in week out. His footballing identity shifts between performances in front of coaches and management of working hard in training to performances in front of players conveying his ability to "take" and "give back" banter. James's footballing identity is dramatically realised by his audience and deemed culturally appropriate when significant social others offer their own performances depicting their respect for the manner in which James conducts himself in the footballing environment.

Such was the nature of the majority of discussions with participants that close to the entire sample of participants seemingly acknowledged the importance of shared cultural values and norms within the footballing environment of their respective clubs. In order to be a footballer, it was necessary to portray oneself in a similar fashion as those who where currently and had been previously Premier League players. It is then just as important to ensure that the performances portrayed were seen and recognised by the correct audiences.

6.3 Justifying the use of Possible Selves

The comments of participants above clearly illustrate that players understand the importance of how they are required to present themselves in the everyday life of their place of employment. As explained within the introduction, how individuals see themselves in the future is seemingly just as influential upon their identities. The idea of working towards a goal is something that is inherent in sport (Larsen and Engell, 2013; Weinberg, 2010; Sullivan and Strode, 2010; Weinberg et al 1993). These goals can be long or short term and such is the nature of a goal-setting milieu that it creates an atmosphere in which it is common (perhaps unavoidable) for individuals to picture themselves in the near or far off future. Participants spoke of picturing themselves in the future throughout their lives, during and after their football careers. As described within the introduction, in order to avoid burdening participants with the theoretical concept of possible selves, the theory was addressed in relation to the hopes and fears they held. Providing evidence that warrants the use of possible selves to interpret and understand participants' identity management and construction, the hopes and fears held by participants during their time at Premier League clubs prior to their release will be discussed. The provision and discussion of such data will also further contribute to this chapter's attempt to provide a description of the cultural environment within which participants' footballing identities were constructed and managed.

The comments of Harry, Ian and Dave are considered as descriptions of some of the hoped for or positive possible selves that they held during their time at their respective clubs. Reflecting on their past experiences, these former positive future selves are representations of themselves in the (then) future that they wished to attain. Harry describes how during his time with his club he would often imagine himself playing with the first team, in Premier League fixtures. He very vividly describes how he pictured himself on the pitch. Such a vision is interpreted as being hoped for as Harry describes that this is what motivated him to keep training and working hard. Such a dedication to his professional craft would have only further reinforced his footballing identity. Ian describes how he had dreamed about following his father's footsteps into professional football. Such a dream was realised for Ian when he had the opportunity to sign with the very same Premier League side his father had, a feat he had hoped for as young child. James describes how he was constantly contemplating his future at the club. His hoped for possible self lay with his ambition to make it, and this is matched with a feared possible self of being released. He describes how such hoped for and feared future outcomes influenced him everyday. It drove the fashion in which he approached his training and the manner in which he would go about his day at the club (in the case of this extract from the data, this was with an air of confidence).

> "The whole time you are there as a player, you see the first team and you picture yourself there training with them and pushing for games. You have to have that idea in your head otherwise it will never become a reality…it's that type of thinking that keeps you pushing at training and motivated in the gym and stuff. I thought about that everyday I was a professional player. Being in that atmosphere of professional football can be a bit intimidating at times, but that was my kind of calming or like motivating thought. Just to be there, training and knowing that you would be out with the best players in the world on match day with thousands watching…I think (about myself) coming onto a ball in the middle of the park and just laying off to XXXXX breaking down the wing or something like that…." (Harry)

> "When I signed for my first club that was something you always dreamed about. It was a good moment…yes it felt brilliant, especially because my Dad had been my coach and at my games for so long. He had played at quite a good level for a while, so playing at the same club he did was something that was very special and a dream come true once I had signed. It was always something I had dreamed about and after going through the academy and then been offered your first real contract, well that was something I had been dreaming about since I'd say I was about 12." (Ian)

> "The dream was to make it. And then the fear was of being released. It motivated you every day at the club. What do I need to do? How do I need to play? Yes, it does motivate you, that type of thinking about all the success it can bring. Like there would be days when things were canny like (going well). Your football was tidy and you were doing well in training and it was fun. Those times you'd be (a)bout the place and feeling like you belonged (at the club) and being more confident because I could see myself with a real chance of getting in that first team squad." (Dave)

Here we see clear examples of how each participant held hopes for themselves in the future. These pictures of signing a new contract or playing for particular teams were representations they held of themselves in the future that they hoped to attain. Thus we can consider them as hoped for or positive possible selves. Markus and Nurius (1986) describe how when hoped for possible selves are matched with feared possible selves, such notions effect the construction of an individual's current identity. The fears or worries expressed by Andy, Ben and Dave describe events and situations that were common across participants during conversation regarding their times within the cultural environment of their clubs.

> "Its on your mind all the time when you are in there [the football club]. You hope, am I going to make it? And you worry, are they going to send me home? Like you said, being released can be hard. I was just going to keep my head down and train like a mad man. I'd say that fear of being let go was probably

why I worked so hard on my fitness and in the gym all the time…" (Harry)

"Yeah I didn't want to let my family down, they are so supportive and like drove us to all the training and matches when we was younger. They believe in whatever I do and I just wanted to do it for them. So like when you're tired at training, I'd just be telling myself- think about letting them down. That would get us right up for it most days. It sounds a bit bad when you say it out loud haha…but yeah… that is in the back of your mind. I had like this picture of me mam and like me kinda letting her down or disappointing her and me Dad…depends on how I was playing but it was definitely there in the back of my head." (Dave)

"You could see it in the club all the time…players are always trying to figure out where they are in terms of the pecking order, mangers plans, things like that. That's where so much of the banter comes from. It's jokes [meant and assumed as friendly humour] mind but there is a bit of seriousness to it that you need to know about it. It is passed off as just taking the piss and like if you're mates with lads then it's canny [fine] but players all know that there are players who are dicks. Someone either is trying to get in you, your head or put you down like so you don't play well in training, then they move ahead of you. It just added to it [the fear of being released] for me. I was in and out of the first team selection…I would have good days then, I would have days where my touch was heavy or I felt knackered. I was always worried about getting the chop 'cause of my consistency." (Ian)

Harry describes how prior to his release, he was constantly occupied by thoughts concerning whether or not he would be resigned or released. He describes how it was a fear of being released that influenced the way he approached his training. Dave describes a feared possible self that he held while still playing which was, like Harry, connected to the fear of being released. He describes a scenario in which following his release from the club, he experienced the shame of letting his parents down. Again sharing similarities with Harry, Dave explains that he often felt this motivate him. Ian speaks candidly about the cultural environment of professional football. Dave's sentiments portray an environment in which

the majority if not all players are constantly seeking to affirm their place in either the first 11, first team selection or their job security as a player within the club. Such a discourse stems from an overarching feared possible self of being released or not being considered good enough to be resigned. He describes how players seek to use banter as a means of degradation to influence other players to underperform, thus advancing their own position further up “the pecking order” and contributing to their future job security at the club. Dave comments describe one of his own former feared possible selves was, like many other players, based on the fear of being release. Dave describes how he found it difficult to secure a starting place in the first team throughout his time with the club because of a lack of consistency he showed in training sessions. Here we see a clear illustration of how ‘possible selves’ as described by Markus and Nurius (1986) are social and are constructed from the social realms and experiences of individuals.

Providing examples of possible selves participants held as players prior to their release has helped establish the legitimacy of employing the work of Markus and Nurius (1986) in order to better understand player identity management and construction during career transitions. The data provided subsequently help depict the cultural environment of professional football in which players construct their footballing identity. However, it is important to highlight that the possible selves held by participants during their career transition are considered through the position of Markus and Nurius (1986) as Current Possible Selves. The examples of the hopes and fears participants shared with this study while they were still playing with their Premier League clubs are those that they held in the past, and are considered past possible selves. However apart from the two advantages just mentioned of these past possible selves, Markus and Nurius (1986) describe how they lend themselves to an additional and very important function.

Markus and Nurius contend that the current possible selves belonging to individuals are influenced heavily by the representation of their own self in

the past. As possible selves are social in their nature this implies current positive and negative possible selves derive from the very hopes and fears for the future individuals held in the past.[8] Past possible selves influence current possible selves. This signifies the importance of the conversations regarding past possible selves, as they become a key element in understanding the construction of an individual's current identity when considering the influence of how they see themselves in the future during their career transition. Whether negative or positive, as Robinson and Davis (2001) describe, possible selves in the past act as behavioural blue prints. Whether either of these selves were ever realised or not, does not diminish or lessen the impression that the current possible selves of participants have been influenced and shaped by their past possible selves. Possible selves are never found or lost if not realised, but rather, much like how identity is proposed within this project, are in a state of flux and constantly evolving and reshaping depending on the cultural environments in which they exist.

6.4: Banter and the Cultural Environment of Professional Football

In an attempt to demonstrate the characteristics of the environment in which participants construct and manage their identities prior to and during their career transition, it is important to gain an understanding of the cultural context in which such identities are formed. Considering the cultural context and environment within the professional game for players proves to be a difficult task for academics. The above sentiments provided by participants help however as these comments also relate to participants' time spent as professional players prior to their release. The previous comments from participants relating to their past possible selves depict an environment in which the prevailing concerns of the players lie between a deeply emotional ambition to make it and a constant fear of being forgotten, undervalued or, worse, released. Other comments demonstrated how players tended to be acutely aware of the

[8] Such an appreciation of past, present and future possible selves is offered as answer to the *ahistorical* critique of Dramaturgy. Understanding the construction and management of the identities of participants in this fashion is to do so throughout their lives and time.

expectations of their audiences to give credible and socially acceptable footballing performances. Participants were all too aware of the presence of an audience judging not only their performances on the grounds of their physical and technical ability but on their actions as "good footballers" within the cultural environment of their respective clubs. Through conversations whereby participants referred to their past at clubs, participants continually highlighted the importance of banter as a cultural discourse within a footballing environment. Participants unanimously described how the giving and taking of banter was not only an accepted and expected performance. By understanding banter as an important signifier and legitimising part of what it meant to be a professional player for participants, this study offers an insight into the cultural environment of professional football.

Ed explains how he believed banter to be a key element of life as a professional footballer. He describes the different forms banter can take and what such discourses entail. Banter is understood in this study through the interpretation of data from participants, as it exists in the context of the professional football environments it refers to exchanges between players that seek to highlight reasons for a player to feel embarrassed or experience a form of cultural shame in front of peers. Ed alludes to the importance of being able "to take it", meaning a player having the ability to withstand banter when he is subjugated to it with a performance that is deemed socially acceptable. Ed also highlights the importance of "giving it back", meaning one's ability to offer similar performances directed at other individuals.

> "I do actually think it (banter) is an important part of being a footballer. You do see players sometimes, not almost get picked on, but if they've not got the banter and don't dish it out as much, they kind of seem to get sometimes a bit more of it than others. But I've always been up for it, I don't mind. I always took the banter, I could give it out too though which was important. Most of the time it is done for a laugh. It can be a joke at someone if they done something stupid in training or a match. We had a few lads who were keen into practical

> jokes- though I think management didn't like it too much. But most of the time it was just winding each other up. Trying to get a rise out of some one and get them angry or annoyed to the point were they'd blow their lid. But it is a big side to football now, I think. You see a lot of banter in the changing rooms and all sorts…with us it was pretty constant every day.
>
> And could that knock a player and their confidence? (Interviewer)
>
> Yes, I think it probably could. Depends on the individual you are, the personality that you have. Personally it wouldn't knock me because that's not the type of person I am. I have or had actually been around football my entire life so I know what the banter is about and how to handle it and how it works…but you could easily see a player getting stick all the time. Say their football was not going quite well and other things are on their mind. You see the confidence; it can knock them, yes. It hadn't happened to me now but I have seen it happen, it definitely happens. We had a lad, might have made a few small mistakes in training, and the lads just give him abuse for it like cause it's silly mistakes but then he lets it annoy him and he might try and have a go at one of the boys in the dressing room. Well then everyone just laughs at him, cause everyone knows that's all the lad winding him up was trying to do. But that then affects his football and it plays on his mind even more and he will take even more abuse for it. It's not abuse in like hurting him but just like jokes and stuff. But his confidence was definitely shot after that for a bit. (Ed)

Almost straight away Ed acknowledges the importance of banter within the cultural context of professional football. The significance of banter as a cultural discourse within this environment is evident from the sentiments of Ed when he describes how it happened on a regular basis, several times a day. He alludes to the importance of a performance in which players must "give it (banter) back" to their audience. Such a response from the recipient of banter is understood as a means of portraying to fellow professionals that the player accepts the social norms of their environment and is knowledgeable enough to offer what is accepted as the culturally correct response. Ed describes a former teammate who, instead of responding in the correct and expected manner to the banter

he received by giving it back, chose to vent his frustration and visibly get mad in front of all his teammates.

Ricky further reinforces notions that banter permeates the everyday activity within the cultural environment of professional football. His comments allude to banter being present in all clubs, but he concedes that the forms banter take can differ slightly from club to club and social standing regarding the seniority of players. According to the accounts of Ricky, players learn the correct way to negotiate and manage the use of banter during their time as academy players and as part of their first couple of years as fulltime professional players. In his comments regarding the actions of both taking banter from others and giving it back, Ricky also further supports this study's interpretation of banter as a culturally expected and accepted performance. Following being the subject of banter, the correct performance with which an individual should respond is to offer banter directed at those who first direct such "abuse" at them. Such a response comprehended as a performance is understood to be dramatically realised by teammates thus stopping or lessening the level of "abuse" to which the original individual is subject.

> "Lads who might have come to the club a bit later on, or like weren't in the academy, it'd take them time to get used to the new sorts of banter we had. I always thought it couldn't have been much different to what we would be used to do, but still (it) took them a bit of time. It's such a massive part of like every day, the abuse you get in a changing room is something else…haha. It's all fun, but you need to know how to take it, it's part of what this (being a professional player) is all about. Once you have made it out of your academy and played a season or two by then most lads know what they are about and can give and take it (banter). You might get a few lads who are quieter than others but they will still be able to handle it…Like I said, you have to be able to. Players will use banter to get in your head or mess with your football. With us (his Premier League club), we would all be competing for those last few spots on the first team that might be up for grabs and say you had a bad day in training it plays on your mind. Other players know it, they can pick up on it-cause they might be the

> same way. So they know you are a bit down or maybe thinking about your footy too much, which is never a good thing. They will pick up on it and come at you with small quick comments like, “aww mate well done out there haha you had a stormer”- so real sarcastic. Or like say kinda laugh at you “head up, you wont be as bad as that tomorrow”- just enough small things to have an effect on you.” (Ricky)

Similar to Ed, Ricky refers to banter using the word ‘abuse’, but is quick to frame banter not as something that should be considered as a form of cruelty or ill-treatment but rather as a form of harmless fun. As part of this investigation, this is interpreted as the generalised attitude players are expected to adopt and conform to regarding workplace joking relationships. Such an attitude considers banter as a legitimised and a dramatically realised performance within their cultural environment. In the comments of Ed and Ricky underlying sentiments are present that hold darker meanings than the attitude towards banter as being harmless pieces of fun among teammates. Ricky directly addresses how players would use banter in order to socially embarrass their teammates following poor footballing performances on the pitch by highlighting their poor play with sarcastic comments and remarks. This practice of banter would continue in an attempt to promote a player’s run of bad form and lessen their chances of selection and, thus, place the players giving the banter in a better position for selection (at least in perception if not reality).

Paul seems to take the notions of banter fuelled by ill feeling a step further. With great honesty Paul reflects personally on the times he gave out banter and admits it was motivated by something other than humour or light heartened fun at the expense of fellow teammates. Paul describes how he considers such motivation lay in the negative feelings footballers held towards each other as they constantly compete for selection.

> “I’ll be honest and say I probably gave out some banter at times that might have had a bit of hard feelin’s attached to it. I think it is because I never really enjoyed it. Don’t get me wrong you can have a laugh and people did by making fun of you and each other. But I always felt like there was something a little

more to it under the surface. It was either a bit of jealousy or like maybe a lad didn't get on with you. There was just a bit of venom in some of the things and more the ways the things where said…and maybe when they had a go at you too. If you're down or had a bad day the last thing you want is someone trying to wind you up. You can't really speak to anyone about it and if you get mad, people just give you an even harder time. You just need to learn to take it and keep yourself right and move on. So yeah…then when I had the chance I would do the same to the lads that tried to wind us up. Like you always have to have your guard up for someone trying to stitch you up?"

How do you mean? (Interviewer)

"Just someone trying to make you lose face in front of coaches and that. Like say you have a bad performance but everyone is locked into training and focused you shouldn't go out that night especially if you have training (the next day). Most of the time when you are like that and really focused even after a game players will just take it chilled (relax) and not head out cause they want to be fresh for training but you will always have someone telling tails on lads who head out. Just so they can be like to the coaches "look at me and I'm not doing anything like that". Or the big one is say you are out in training and you and this lad are going for the same position. Well him and his mates might give you a shit ball say. Like they'll give the pass but they will fire at you and then you look like the monkey who can't control a ball. That happening once is okay but if that happens just a couple of times in training then coaches look at you as the lad with no first touch. So you got to, got to, be able to be ready to have a go if you know what they are up to and just give the same type of shit back. Nothing is going to happen like…its just up to yourself." (Paul)

Paul describes how, when dealing with banter, if it makes a player feel uncomfortable due to vast cultural acceptance within football of the discourse, there is little, if any, good to be gained from speaking to someone. Instead, within the cultural environment of football the general practice in order to "keep yourself right", is to learn how to let such "abuse" not affect you or heighten any frustration you may have, while at the same time being able to offer similar forms of accepted and expected

abuse as performances in front of fellow teammates. This overarching acceptance of banter and its less appealing characteristics is exemplified by the comments of Gary.

> "Listen about half the banter in and about football is just you or your mates giving abuse, it's harmless and a bit of fun. The other half though is the lads you're aren't really pally or close with…that other half is about trying to psych you out or make you look bad…At the end of the day you've got to learn the banter, basically. So, like, to get on not just on the pitch but in the changing room, on the bus, its important to be able to take it, because when it matters, in this game everyone is looking out for number one and if you are serious about your football you learn all these things you have to do survive." (Gary)

Gary describes how at certain times banter is seen as just fun between friends within teams. Interestingly however he still refers to this form of banter using the word, abuse. Gary continues to explain that banter when not between friends in good spirit is underpinned by the idea of players being isolated within their environment. As they strive for employment and job security banter becomes a tool by which individuals highlight the short comings of others as professional players. From the data provided it is clear that banter is then often used to reinforce an individuals short comings or mistakes in order to affect their mental state and in turn their play on the pitch. Such intentions are motivated by a desire to lessen competition for places at a respective club.

Seeking to adequately define hazing in sport, Crow and Macintosh (2009) draw from pervious studies of hazing (Holman, 2004; Hoover and Pollard, 1999; Marshall, 2002) and from their analysed data collected from focus groups conducted with student-athletes, coaches and athletic administers. Crow and Macintosh (2009) describe hazing as any potentially humiliating, degrading, abusive, or dangerous activity expected of a junior-ranking athlete by a more senior team-mate, which does not contribute to either athlete's positive development, but is required to be accepted as part of a team, regardless of the junior-ranking

athlete's willingness to participate. Crow and Macintosh (2009) continue and explain that this includes, but is not limited to, any activity, no matter how traditional or seemingly benign, that sets apart or alienates any team mate based on class, number of years on the team, or athletic ability.

Clearly there are elements of Crow and Macintosh's (2009) definition that share similarities to the type banter described by participants in this study, primarily surrounding activities intended as potentially humiliating, degrading, abusive that might alienate team mates. However, Crow and Macintosh's (2009) study is of Canadian university athletes, and deals with practices that might be considered as 'initiation' in the UK. While these are common in UK sport, participants of this study did not allude to them. Equally separating the explanation of Crow and Macintosh (2009) with this study, is their description of how hazing is directed exclusively toward junior team members by senior team members. Crow and Macintosh (2009) also highlight that these junior players must accept their hazing quietly without protest. From the data collected and provided above it is clear that banter was exchanged between teammates despite their position and length of time they spent with a club. Participants of this study contradicted the notions of Crow and Macintosh's (2009) focus group members who indicated that hazed athletes are best to just go quietly along with their initiation. Participants of this study describe that, while it was important not to resort to losing one's temper, in response to being subjected to banter one must be able to "give it back". Interestingly however one of Crow and Macintosh's (2009: 275) participants alludes to the idea of a joke when discussing hazing, as follows:

> "I think there is a line in the definition of what is considered hazing. Like a scavenger hunt, I would not consider that hazing, or telling your most embarrassing story or joke. A joke is a joke, but once it takes it across the line …to the point their self-esteem is hurt or they are physically hurt that is different."

It is clear that banter as experienced by footballers in this study has the potential to cause emotional distress. In fact it is often employed to

promote such distress in fellow players and teammates. This is often undertaken through use of “jokes”. Therefore, unlike the sentiments expressed by Crow and Macintosh’s (2009) participant, it would seem that in the case of banter in professional football in England, a joke is not merely a joke and can have much more malicious characteristics.

Speaking of banter in relation to racial micro aggressions in sport, Burdsey (2011) directs our attention to the use of humour as part of banter. One way in which individuals seek to avoid or mitigate accusations that their banter is underpinned with ill intentions is to claim that their comments were merely banter or “just a joke” (Billig, 2001; Matsuda et al, 1993; Picca and Feagin, 2007). It is commonly perceived that jokes are different to “serious” discourse and should be viewed through an alternative schema of interpretation (Pickering and Lockyer, 2009). The consequence of this is that humour at once permits, legitimates and forgives an insult. In their study of Dutch soccer, Müller et al (2007:341) discovered that “in many cases processes of racialization were simply not immediately recognised [by participants] as such because they occurred in the context of friendly and joking interactions.” Through claiming that a racist comment is “just a joke,” the teller, therefore, constructs her/himself not just as trying not to cause offense, but more importantly, as not really racist. Crucially, recipients can also buy into this dominant interpretative frame, not only by holding similar views about what constitutes “humorous” discourse and reinforcing binary racist/not racist models, but also through their desire not to be seen as unable to take a joke (Pickering and Lockyer, 2009). Unlike the claims made by Müller et al (2007) from the comments of participants in this study, players are acutely aware and quick to recognise the intention of banter directed towards them. However, similar in some fashion to the claims of Müller et al (2007) and Pickering and Lockyer (2009), by a player claiming his banter is meant as a joke or even by their partaking in the discourse of banter, individuals are communicating to their audiences that they indeed hold a viable and legitimate identity as a professional footballer.

Burdsey (2011) explains that athletes can be pressured into denying or downplaying of verbal discrimination which are articulated between team-mates and in a seemingly playful manner, dismissing incidents as merely "banter" or "jokes." Yet contrary to their perceived innocent, playful nature, jokes represent a significant means of subjugating individuals and groups in sport. The focus is shifted from the perpetrator to the recipient, who is subsequently encouraged, or even forced, to dismiss speech or acts that do not go beyond the "boundaries of acceptability." Yet these boundaries are not set by consensus. The experiences of participants in this study would seem to support this thread of Burdsey (2011). Participants descried how often banter would continually be directed at certain players in order to encourage that player to "blow their fuse". In order to maintain one's footballing identity, a player is expected to receive banter and take the meanings associated with it as a joke, even if such jokes relate to topics to which that individual might take offence or if the subject may cause the athlete distress or undermine their sense of who they are and how they want to be seen.

6.5 Conclusion

Through the provision of examples that highlight how participants' identities are influenced by a combination of both the presence and expectations of a social audience and the possible selves participants held of themselves for the future, this chapter has legitimised the use of both Dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959) and Possible Selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) in understanding and interpreting participants' identity management. Additionally, through analysis of such data and additional data relating to the issue of banter specifically, this chapter sought to portray the cultural environment in which participants constructed their footballing identities. An appreciation of such a cultural environment is necessary because it is from this setting that participants would later have

to transition following their release from their respective clubs.[9] Such discussion has led to both the contention and support of certain themes within existing knowledge discussed in the literature review.

Previously Crust et al (2010) described the environment of elite professional football academies as one that acted as a natural filter. Such academies had more participants at the younger end of the age range and fewer older individuals. Towards the end of each season, decisions are made whether to retain or release players with fewer players progressing to the older age groupings. As such, Crust et al (2010) explain that older participants tend to have experienced and withstood the challenges of the academy and have been deemed to possess the requisite qualities necessary to progress to fulltime professional status within football. The importance of time spent in academy systems to participants is clearly evident from the sentiments they expressed in the data provided within this chapter. Reflecting on their time within Premier League clubs participants general spoke fondly of their time in academies initially and, upon further reflection, provided more critical accounts. This study supports the notions of Crust et al (2010) but offers further extension to such findings.

Crust et al (2010) explain that players must demonstrate the requisite qualities deemed necessary to progress from an academy player to a full time professional. Through the examination of data surrounding issues of banter and the cultural environments within a club, this project offers an extension to such opinions. While the prerequisite of physical prowess and technical ability as describe by Crust et al (2010) exists, participants' descriptions and explanations of "taking" and "giving" banter allude further to social criteria necessary in order progress within professional football. It is clear from the sentiments of participants, players must not only successfully perform on the pitch and training ground but also within the

[9] Gaining such an understanding of the cultural environment within organisations like the professional football clubs participants played/worked for and how they influence participants offers answers to the previously highlighted *astructural* critiques of Dramaturgy

social and cultural context of their footballing environment and to the audiences found within these environments. Such a social awareness and understanding does not play a major role in the hypothesis of Crust et al (2010). Such a social astuteness, however, which in a sense can be viewed as an ability to navigate the use of banter within the social environment of a club, combined with the physical, technical and psychological traits described by Crust et al (2010) are essential in an academy footballer's eligibility to progress to senior academy and later full-time professional status. The fashion in which players have their footballing identities constructed and legitimatised, is a dynamic one with the banter employed as one of the additional means used to filter out players "not good enough" to make it through their ability to "give and take it".

Cushion and Jones (2006) describe how academy players are given little autonomy on a daily basis while being treated as members of an undifferentiated group. Subsequently this created an environment in which players usually move as a group, both during training and in their spare time (e.g., during meal times). Alongside a curtailment of individuality was a lack of privacy; changing, showering, and eating were communal experiences. Thus, Cushion and Jones (2006) explain that few opportunities exist in players' daily work routines for individuality or personal space from the collectively of the squad. The data provided within this chapter particularly the latter comments from Ricky paint a picture of players feeling more isolated in their footballing environment than the work of Cushion and Jones (2006) might suggest. Players were continually influenced by their cultural environment to look out for themselves. Participants were constantly aware of the competition against fellow teammates for squad selection and to attain good favour with other coaches and management.

The sentiments of Cushion and Jones (2006) that players move in groups throughout the social environments of their clubs echoes wider and more generalised conceptions of a *team first* mentality and a culture of

'togetherness' between teammates that traditionally is associated with professional team sports. The data collected from participants paints a very different picture. Such a portrayal offers a depiction of an occupation extremely individualistic in its nature. Roderick (2006) acknowledges that what is generally both an assumed and expected integral characteristic of a good professional attitude is the willingness of a player to sacrifice a personal achievement and glory for the good of the team. Roderick (2006) notes that such a characteristic is complex sociologically, as whilst players recognise that it is important that they be good team players they are centrally concerned with their own professional security. Roderick (2006) continues to explain that these individual versus club conflicts surface mostly when players are unable to play. For some players this will constrain them to engage on a degree of what Goffman terms 'impression management' (1959), as they are expected to behave in a manner that contributes, first and foremost, to the moral of the team. Magee (1998:129) quotes one his players as suggesting, with regard to professional longevity, that English football is characterised by a 'dog-eat-dog' mentally. Roderick (2006:42) supports such a notion explaining footballers above all are concerned with "looking after themselves" but must do so covertly as this attitude stands in stark contrast to "the rhetoric of being a good team player" (pp.44). This thesis has demonstrated how players are fully aware of and constantly concerned with the potential end to their careers. As professionals they hold possible selves constructed around images of their careers coming to an early end. With players possessing such an awareness and being permanently concerned about their own professional security, the findings of this investigation differ (again) from the work of Cushion and Jones (2006) and the generalised assumption that professional footballers embrace 'team first' attitude above their own interests for occupational security. From the comments of participants it is clear that professional football is an occupation marked by its individualistic nature.

The strategy of talking about the fears players held as means to discuss conceptions of possible selves leant itself well to the interview process.

Such a strategy helped uncover the notion that while still playing professionally, players faced the possibility of being released from the club and that such a picture of self-identity was always present in the minds of participants. Professional footballers are constantly living in an environment where their professional livelihood is constantly threatened and influenced by team selections. While their respective clubs compete against each other two and three times a week, individual players are all too aware that they are in competition with their own teammates everyday for selection to first or reserve teams. In discussion with participants, it is evident that while players will have friends at their club and take part in the culturally expected banter within groups, they still moved singularly within the footballing environment, constantly seeking professional security affirmed through regular selection. One may consider a 'me against the world' approach rather than an 'us against the world' approach, so readily associated with team sports. Such findings offer an alternative light on those of Cushion and Jones (2006) and their description of players existing as groups within the cultural environment of football.

Cushion and Jones (2006) noted how players also used being "busy" as a form of impression management. For the players, this meant secretly conserving effort during training. Their data, generated from focus group interviews, showed that any player who acted "too eager" or did "too much" was labelled as "busy" and hence had the potential to be marginalised by his peers. To maintain good relations with each other, players tried not to appear over-keen, thus engaging in a degree of "output restriction" (Collinson, 1992; Parker, 1996). Such action was also viewed as a means of collective resistance against the control of coaches, as it stopped players from volunteering and asking questions during coaching sessions. Paul describes the ploy of the "stitch up", where players deliberately place an individual in a position in which they were shown in a bad light while in front of coaching staff and management. This sometimes involved players "telling tails" to certain staff, knowing the information would get back to management if, for

example, prior to a bad performance a player had “been out late”. What occurred more often, was a common practice participants refer to as a form of on pitch ‘stitch up’. If a player was being too “busy” or was in direct competition for selection, they would ensure to make that individual look bad in training, e.g. continually passing the ball to the player with too much force with the intention of the receiver being unable to control the ball well. Such action was intended to show management that this certain individual lacked a “quality first touch”, thus was unfit for selection. Sentiments such as this support elements of the work of Cushion and Jones (2006) offering new extensions to be further explored and shed more light on the cultural context of a footballing environment.

This chapter has sought to provide data that justifies the employment of its theoretical underpinning, involving Goffman’s Dramaturgy (1959) and Markus and Nurius’s Possible Selves (1986). In doing so, the chapter begins to make clear one of the key assertions of this study; that individuals manage an identity that comes to the fore of their presentation of self depending upon the audience present and the particular possible selves held by the individual. In doing so and in the discussion of issues surrounding the notion of banter the chapter has also sought to depict the cultural environment of football from a professional player’s perspective. The notion of banter is one that I acknowledge was not investigated in-depth, but from the sentiments within the data presented here it is clear that future investigation into banter and its significance within the lives of professional athlete would be both meaningful and important within the discipline of the sociology of sport. Seeking to investigate the cultural context and environment within the Premier League still remains a difficult task due to issues of access. However, the comments from participants relating to their past possible selves depict an environment in which the prevailing concerns of the players lie between a deeply emotional ambition to make it and a constant fear of being forgotten, undervalued or, worse, released. Other comments demonstrated how players tended to be acutely aware of the expectations of their audiences to give credible and socially acceptable footballing performances.

Chapter 7

The Release: Understanding the event of being released from a Premier League Club

7.1 Introduction

The experiences participants shared in interview made it clear that players were aware of a pending career transition long before they received any verbal confirmation that they were going to be released. Through the interpretation of the performances of club officials and teammates, participants knew their fate as professional footballers well in advance of being released. Such an understanding initiated respective identity management and construction strategies for research participants. Therefore when discussing 'the event" of participants' release it is clear that the event begins, not when participants are officially told of their release from their club, but once players begin to interpret the performances of coaches, managers and teammates. The majority of participants displayed their own sense of agency as they explained how they decided to approach their managers to have these interpretations confirmed, instead of waiting until the end of the season to be given the official word on their release. Once again, they engaged in the management and construction of their own identities influenced by their audiences and their respective possible selves. Participants' performances were now judged as either the legitimate or illegitimate roles belonging to a released player, by their (soon to be former) coaches, teammates, as well as their friends and family members.

In the chapter that follows, participants' experiences will be examined and discussed through the consideration of how they knew that they were going to be released and how this news was rarely a shock or surprise to them. The chapter will then demonstrate how participants exercised their own agency in approaching club management to proactively find out if they were indeed going to be released. Following such illustration the chapter turns its attention to how once news of their release has been

made public, interactions between coaches and teammates change. The chapter offers a discussion about how audiences outside of participants' footballing environment influence and dramatically realise the performance and identities of the players following their release, and during the initiation of their career transition.

7.2 Knowing it's Coming:
Interpreting The Performance Of Teammates And Coaches

A common theme throughout the collected data is that the event of being released did not come as a sudden shock or surprise to participants. Instead, many participants shared similar sentiments, describing how they "had an idea", were "not surprised" or "already knew for certain" that they were going to be released and the club did not intend to "bring (them) back for next season". Players explained that long before any form of conversation was held regarding their professional future at their respective clubs they came to the realisation that they would not be returning the following season or have their contract renewed. Such a mindset was reached through understanding the interactions they had, or sometimes did not have, with club officials. Players described how, long before discussions were held regarding their release, the way they were treated by coaching staff and managers was key to comprehending the nature of their professional fate. It is important to point out that this is not to say that players were mistreated or suffered abuse by club officials. What is understood by the participants' comments is that the manner of their engagement in competitive games, team selection and training was one that did not warrant a player to consider themselves as an important element or piece of their team's success or future plans. Some participants explained how they predicted their fate through the way in which they understood how they were used in training, for example: "not having much involvement with team formations and schemes of play". Other participants explained how they understood their de-selection from a lack of inclusion in first and reserve teams as an indicator. Other participants described how the manner in which coaches, managers and eventually teammates spoke with and even joked with them was different

from other players. Below players describe how the actions of others led them to the realisation that they were going to be released, and that the event of being released did not come as a shock:

> "I knew it was coming just…just through the not playing of games, not playing frequently. You just get the impression off the coaches- you can kind of see it. If I'm not playing and other lads are playing in my position more frequently than I am, then you kind of…say to yourself, why would they give you a contract over him when he is playing football? And it'd work the same vice versa if I was given the contract. He wasn't playing but given it over me, you'd question it wouldn't you?" (James)

> "You know (that you are going to be released), I mean you just know…it like doesn't happen the way people think brov (brother). They think we just in here doing it all the time as hard as we can and just play and train hard. But it ain't like that. You see it like if yous is switched on, they start to treat you differently like. Training you are on the weak team or don't get on (during a match). I moved from playing, to the bench and then not getting selected or being told "Shane don't worry about travelling to the away game this weekend just stay and work on your fitness". They start telling you without saying anything brov. Then when it happens its easier for them cause you ain't upset or pissed when they say they isn't giving you another contract, cause you know it's coming…". (Shane)

> "To be honest, the team was struggling when I got my first contract for a year after coming out of the academy. When a team is like that then you know if you are a player joining or coming in then it goes either way. There are places up for grabs but then you can get the chop quickly enough. So people 'came in' in great shape, lots to prove like. I was the same…I wanted to be signed again. Then we got to a point in the season where the more experienced players seemed to know they had done enough to get paid (ensure their job security) they can take their foot off it for a little bit. We weren't in trouble of goin' down but we wasn't going to win anything. I never got the notion though from the coaches that I had made a big enough case for myself. I had come from being an academy player and XXXXX and XXXX (academy coaches) who had been great for me, always talking with me and stuff. Now I was with xxxxx (first team manager) and I just felt like

> we never got on. He wouldn't say much to me and it seemed as though experienced players where slowing down I was trying even harder but the game just was easier for them and I struggled. I had an idea what was thought of me when I got sent to the reserves- decent lad, tries hard but not (the right fit) for this team. I didn't get much time with that squad and then I was just in my own head thinking it was only a matter of time until they let me go". (Gary)

James' comments are the first to suggest that players are not taken by surprise when they are released. James explains that the reasons he expected he would be released. Shane makes an interesting remark that would seem to ring true throughout the rest of the experiences belonging to other participants, he says; "They start telling you without saying anything". Here Shane is alluding to a particular point; he felt he was being informed of the club's intention to release him at the end of the season through the interpretation of how he was being treated and used in training and not used on match day. For Shane playing on a weaker side in training, moving from the starting 11 to a substitute, to finally not getting selected and being told not to travel to away games, all indicated that he would be released at the end of the season. Similarly prior to his release and career transition, Gary explains how he found his transition away from the support he received from coaches as an academy player and success he experienced in being awarded a professional contract, a difficult one. Gary had to negotiate playing with more experienced players who understood the workings of professional football better than he did, while at the same time experiencing a manager that did not facilitate the same type of support to which he was accustomed. Gary explained that, combined with the demotion to the reserve team and knowledge of the opinions the manager held of him, he was not surprised to be released.

James, Shane and Gary had all experienced their career transition following spells with the first teams of their respective Premier League clubs. Their comments illustrate a trend in the experiences of the interviewees of this study. Prior to the data collection process and the study's engagement in the field, a presumption was held that participants

would describe their experience of being released as a sudden event and one that threatened an unexpected end to their careers, similar to the notions described in existing literature (e.g. Brown and Potrac, 2009; Lavellee and Wylleman, 2000; Mihovilovic, 1968). This presumption would be quickly quashed. Following their engagement with the vignettes and once the obstacles surrounding a discussion about their release (a discussion that it is important to note once again, was of a highly sensitive nature) had been maneuvered through, participants all shared a commonality in that they explained how they knew that they would be released before the event actually occurred (the 'event' refers to a meeting with team management and staff at which the player is given official confirmation that the club will not offer said player a professional contract for the following season). The comments of James, Shane and Gary, describe how they were aware of their forthcoming release by the way the in which social others engaged with them, particularly the management and coaches. It would seem that through the way in which club officials (particularly those that were concerned with team selection and competitive team performances in the league) interacted with the participants, acted as a pre-warning or overture in order to signify to a player that their services were no longer required or appreciated by the club. Similarly, Paul and John describe how the way others in the club acted towards them led them to believe that they did hold a strong position in being offered a new contract by the club:

> "I wasn't playing much at all, I mean I had a few niggles with my ankle and other small things but they happen to everyone. I just didn't get the chance I needed to really show what I could do. Before Christmas I had come on twice and scored. They were poacher's goals…maybe not the prettiest but I got a foot to both of them and goal scoring is what matters when you are a forward. But after Christmas I just wasn't in the manager's plans. I went to speak to him about it and see what the story was and he just played the (you are) 'too young' card. After that he didn't really speak to me much or even really at all. We didn't row or anything like that, he just seemed to not have much time for me. Before he would give me like pointers, cause he was a forward too, during training but that just

seemed to wear off. I wasn't surprised when I got sent out on loan because, like you said you see yourself maybe scoring again and getting on well…starting afresh like. It never really happened though. I played a few times for XXXXX in the Championship, but nothing really worth talking about came of it, tried a different spell with another team down in the League 1 but that was just a weird set up, so just went back to XXXX and saw out the end of year just training. Then when the season was done I knew what was coming." (Paul)

"The players knew it was coming too, and then one by one they starting asking you more openly how you are getting on and start being that bit friendlier and pally with you. I think cause now they know you are not a threat anymore. They know I won't be taking their place, they don't have to worry about you as much. Not saying that I didn't get on with everyone but that is the way it is, everyone is just playing for themselves ultimately and looking out for number one."

"How did they know that you didn't have a good chance of coming back?" (Interviewer)

"They knew the same way as me, I was down in the reserves anyway and our squad was full of quality like so you had lads there like xxxxxx and xxxxxx all top players I mean and they weren't too pushed or bothered about reserve football. But like I wasn't getting the same type of feedback anymore as the rest of the lads like. The coaches were all a bit hot headed so when you got told to do something or corrected you were hounded at. It had kind of passed that for me, coaches just give me encouragement and didn't really seem bothered if I fucked up or not. It was just – 'ah next time mate'. It was nice cause you could have a bit more banter with them but at the same time I figured out pretty quickly what it meant." (John)

In the experience conveyed by Paul, his dealings with the club's manager were explained as the gauge by which he judged his professional time at his club coming to an end. Paul describes how the pair did not have a falling out and perhaps the only thing they did not agree on was Paul's justification for more playing time. Earlier in the season the manager's connection with Paul was built on the fact that he too was a forward during his playing career. Considering the manager's social performance,

the provision of advice, pointers and feedback was a performance interpreted by Paul as a means to convey the manager's interest in him as a part of the plan for the team. Following their discussion at Christmas, the manager's performance did not cease to exist because his day-to-day engagement with Paul diminished. Rather this silence was understood as a performance indicating to Paul that he was no longer seen as the part in the team he once was. This meaning of the manager's performance was further reinforced for Paul when he was sent out on loan.

John explains that the situation regarding his future at the club started to become apparent to him, again similar to the previous participants, from the way his coaches spoke and engaged with him. Unlike Paul however who's manager stopped speaking to him, for John the manner in which his coaches spoke to him changed. Prior to considering that it was likely he would be released, John explained that his coaches would furiously shout and yell instructions at players during matches and training, a common characteristic in professional or elite team sports. John felt his "stock decline" as his coaches shouted less at him. He recalled how he was able to make jokes at and with coaches, and take part in and "swap banter" with them. Sharing in this type of interaction, the experiences of John and the performances of his coaches can be understood to convey the same type of message as Paul's manager, the intention to release the player. John describes that not only did he understand these performances as a means of indication that he would not be returning next season, so too did his fellow teammates. If John was not fully sure that he was going to be released, all doubts were answered when the actions of his coaches were reinforced by John's own teammates interpreting the performances belonging to the coaches as one that indicated the intention to release John. John, no longer existing as a threat to their own professional careers, found players' performances in front of him changed. It is clear then that the performance of social others can and do communicate particular messages within the realm of Premier League clubs, and whether a club intends to release a player or not is one such message.

Such an understanding of the experiences of John, Paul, Gary, Shane and James then implies the strength of the concept that performances can and do communicate that this type of particular message must be given serious consideration. It would seem then that players are all too aware of the social environment in which they work. The actions of those they are surrounded by, understood within this study as performances, do not go unnoticed. The manner in which participants' audiences interacted with them on a daily basis would appear to influence how their own identities are constructed and whether such identities are required to be re-constructed and managed in a new way. If we consider that while in a footballing environment, players manage an identity constructed around their prowess as a professional player and the cultural values within their respective club environments, then this identity requires reconstruction upon coming under threat via the event of release. However, experiences shared by participants suggest that the need to manage and reconstruct rather than maintain this footballing identity is understood before the official release occurs.

7.3 Taking the Initiative or Sick of Not Knowing? Exercising Agency

Professional football and the nature of the environments at the former clubs of participants are considered the structure that provided the parameters within which players could construct their own identities and manage their professional career. However, when discussing the event of their release participants seemed to exercise a strong element of agency during the initial stages of their own career transitions. Participants explained how they did not wait to be told at the end of season that they were going to be released. Instead they chose to speak directly with club officials and management. Following the interpretation of the performances of coaches and managers, the scarceness of his selection for competitive games and the fact that he had missed time with a sickness that meant he was unable to play for the a large part of his two year contract with the club, James describes how he approached management independently to discuss his future at the club.

> “Me, and I asked my dad to come along, like, and took the initiative to go in there early, because I knew I hadn't had a very good year and my two... well, two years in fact had kind of been restricted due to, like, because of my illness and stuff. So we went in early, just before Christmas, and just asked them, like, what would be the situation? Like, if they could tell us now because I want to, like, move on and I'll try and get... do things early before everyone else starts being told and then (later in the season, end of April/May) it's just a massive fight to almost get a club. So they told me before Christmas and it wasn't a shock to me. I was expecting it. Obviously it upset me but I soon... because I expected it, it didn't knock me how it possibly knocks other people. The club was brilliant support and has been a great help. They just said obviously at the time, if we were to tell you now, we wouldn't give you a contract. So there's still four or five months for you to prove it, but right now they said, we'll be honest, we wouldn't give you one.” (James)

James anticipating his release and keen to begin the search for a new club before the labour market became even further saturated at the end of the season, exercises agency in going to speak with management. In doing so he is already engaging in identity management. The intent to “do things early” suggests a want to find a contract with a new club. These actions demonstrate James’ engagement in identity management and construction. He invests energy in maintaining his footballing identity through the search for a place of employment where he can continue to play football professionally. The social audiences surrounding James consider this type of performance as an acceptable one. This is evident when James alludes to the role his father played, following the meeting with the club.

> “My Dad has been brilliant in me wanting to keep playing and he’s helping me out as much as he can. We’re both always on the phone at the moment trying to speak to clubs and sort out trials.” (James)

The support James’ father shows is one that might be expected in a father-son relationship and this study by no means wishes to discredit the

paternal empathy that this support displays. However at the same time, the support provided by his father is interpreted by James as a performance that condones his reaction as one that is socially acceptable and deemed legitimate to the news of his release. We also see the club officials acknowledging how James was doing things in what was considered the appropriate fashion when a player is released. This is evident from the support it gave its former player in searching for a new club. James consolidates this support when he describes how the club has “been a great help”. Again we see James’ audience deem his performance as a legitimate one and convey such legitimacy through their own performance of the provision of support. Similar to James, Ian knowing he would not be offered another year on his contract chose to speak with management rather than waiting to be given the news he was to be released.

> “I just knew my time was up, and it was about the October time, and XXXXXX and XXXXXXX (both coaches) had come up to the training with us, and they just said... well, they asked us how I was feeling, and I said. “Look, I need to know and have to know rather than just fannying around here”. And they’d spoken, and they agreed to release us…It was about the end of October, beginning November, when that happened and we sort of said “Look, there wasn’t going to be anything here for us”. My thinking was well now that I know I can get off and way on trial instead of hoping on a lost cause. So then I was able to set up a couple of trials. Try work something out and make sure I would be playing another while. It was a bit up front but they didn’t seem to be put off by it at all, they even said they’d make a few calls for us.” Ian

Ian’s experiences illustrates again for the reader examples of agency. Following a training session with two coaches Ian knew very well from his time at the club, he addressed the issue of his future with the team. Like other participants, Ian expressed in one of his interviews how he already knew he would not be offered a contract extension from the way he interpreted his lack of interaction with the club manager. As he expressed in his own words, Ian chose to confront the issue “head on”, instead of

expending energy in vain in order to earn a place or contract that was not going to be offered to him despite his best efforts. Ian's coaches validate his performance when they do not object to him so openly addressing the issue of a new contract. Following the correct interpretation of previous interactions with coaching staff, such a performance is further deemed as a legitimate reaction to his pending release, when the coaches tell Ian that they will "make a few calls" on his behalf to help him find a new club. Had they considered Ian's questions as an illegitimate or failed social performance, they might as easily have shrugged the conversation off and said nothing.

7.4 Banter and the Obliged Goodbye: Changing Social Interactions and Relations within Club Environment

Once given an official confirmation that they would not be signed for the following season, participants spoke about their final period of time at their clubs, depending on participants this was a number of days, weeks or months. Within these conversations participants reflected on the nature of their interactions with teammates. This study engages with these interactions understanding such performances as a form of a social 'goodbye'. The comments of John already describe how his interactions with teammates had changed, as players no longer saw him as a threat to their own professional status at the club. One more player they did not have to compete against in order to play. Other participants describe their own experiences. Once his release was confirmed and publically made known to club officials and his teammates, the experiences Harry shared in interview are understood in a manner that suggests his final period of time at the club did not contain a formal goodbye, fashioned to tailor his specific situation. Harry describes how his teammates did not engage in a conversation "properly" with him about the release, or the events that followed after this juncture in his employment biography. While everyone knew that Harry would be leaving the club, it seemed that outside of the official meeting at which he was informed he would not be resigned, the topic was never again fully addressed. This was especially true when

Harry spoke about his interactions with his soon-to-be former teammates regarding his release.

> “Not many people talk about like what’s going on (the event of player release).”
>
> At all? (Interviewer)
>
> “Well like I mean properly talk, for me anyways. The lads ask you: “How’s the search going? Keep the head up, you’ll find something for sure.” They don’t really want to talk about it. It’s nice that they are asking you how you’re getting on and their encouragement is always a bit of the boost. But now kind of looking back I think that was them kind of feeling like this is what they have to do, you know like, talk to me, but they didn’t really want to deal with the actual fact that I was being released. That’s fine though like I get it, for some they for sure might have thought they could be next (to be released) and for others who had never thought about being let go, for them to see me go I suppose that might have like woken a bit fear in them up- like you know? So if you’re the player when that happens to someone else you just have to keep the head down and make sure your take care of your own business.”
>
> You mentioned though that the lads didn’t properly talk to you about it, what did you mean by that? (interviewer)
>
> “Well like just that when they asked, you knew that they only really wanted to hear you say- “yeah it is going well”, or, “yeah mate keeping the search going”. But that’s okay, I know if hadn’t been let go and asked a lad who had been released I wouldn’t want to burden myself down like with everything that is going on with his release in case it some ways might effect my football. Does that answer you like? Those short questions and answers is just their way, I think, of how they wished me the best of luck. You don’t really open up in football, well at least I never really did to the squad or boss, it just isn’t what is done. It’s just football…and you have to leave you problems at the door and it was kinda the same once I was told I wasn’t coming back, you can’t tell everyone what’s happening, you just go on as if it’s just a normal day at the club.” (Harry)

One component of the culture within professional football is made clear when unpacking the experiences of Harry; an in-depth, open and public discussion of a players release is very uncommon among players. The fact that an individual has spent numerous years and without doubt countless hours preparing their physical fitness and footballing proficiency in order to succeed at the top level of professional football, only to be released by their employer is not considered a legitimate conversation. Harry reinforces such an understanding when he acknowledged that he himself would not wish to under-take an in-depth conversation with a player regarding their release. Players from a young age are encouraged to sacrifice and push themselves in order to achieve excellence in the hope of attaining a future possible self playing in the Premier League. Their release from a club can be considered a failure on the part of the individual, a particularly controversial failure if that same individual has done all that was asked of him by coaches and management. A conversation that is so packed with emotion, as one regarding the potential end to a player's career, is one that might involve an expression of vulnerability and sensitivity, characteristics traditionally not regarded as fitting to a football club or to one of its incumbents. This can be considered as the expectation of a hyper masculine environment, as Harry mentioned, "you don't really open up in football". Therefore a conversation about this failure between the player and his social audience within the club environment is considered illegitimate and is one that rarely occurs among teammates.

What is considered to be a legitimate performance and perhaps the alternative to engaging in the type of conversation just mentioned is a brief performance consisting of a few short questions. Harry notes that these questions regarding the search for a new club and fleeting comments of support, while meant well are offered because players feel obliged to do so. This small performance is the accepted and expected manner in which both to console and say goodbye to teammates. Harry also mentions how players feel they are somehow obliged to make such comments. This can be seen as an acknowledgement of the effort put

forth by their fellow player. However these comments command the correct responses from the released player. The answer must be short, upbeat, not depressing and not allude to the emotional trauma that the player might be experiencing. Players must offer the correct and socially approved performances as a response to their release and also engage with their teammates via performances that too are both considered socially correct and approved by their audience.

Further sentiments expressed by Ricky below would seem to reinforce the same understanding of Harry's experiences. Ricky like other participants described how he knew of the club's intention not to offer him a new contract after the current season. He and two other players in similar situations went to speak to the management team prior to receiving any official information regarding a new contract or the lack of one. Ricky could be considered a player who was building a strong case to be re-signed having played in the first team on a number of occasions at the start of the season, unfortunately he then experienced a "bad run of form for a couple months", as he describes "both in matches and in training". His remarks below illustrate how his teammates did not enquire into his situation with the club. This again is understood as players not being comfortable with a performance that acknowledges the failure of a player to maintain their status as professional within the club, even after amassing together countless hours of training.

> "Well I mean so I went to speak with them then and I had been told I wasn't going to be brought back. Everyone knew like…that's just how it is in a club. No one said anything to me or the other two lads (that were also released) until in the changing rooms one day, so that was a week or two after. I had said, "well, that's me and football now boys" and they were all like "Shite! What are you going to do now?". I said, "Well it's the butchers for me lads sure haven't I got the chop for it…hahah". (Chop referring here to being cut from the team/released by the club). After that they knew then and cause I had made a joke, that kind of told people that I wouldn't be coming back in a joking way, the lads understood that I was alright. But aside from a few jokes, cause I played a

> few reserve games while I was still at the club and I wasn't going to be around the next year, people didn't really say much else to me about it. When the season finished it was goodbyes as usual and the lads just- "ah we'll see yous around". That was it really apart from the odd bit of banter, I think it was just easier for the lads still pushing for that security to just ask how I was getting on now and again and then we would all go about the day at the club same as before, training and just doing what we were told." (Ricky)

Ricky's situation differs from Harry's in that as he explains once he received official news that he would not be returning to the club none of his fellow teammates acknowledged his new status and future away from the team. He explains that the majority of them would have known his position but, by not mentioning his release, we see what would have been an illegitimate performance on their part that Ricky's teammates chose to avoid. Again we see some manner of reverence for the hours of training and sacrifice Ricky has spent in order to try and achieve his possible self of forging a career in professional football. This study has talked at length about how a player's release is a sensitive topic and issue, this fact is best known by professional players themselves. Before offering the type of performance Harry received, Ricky's audience must first come to know if he is ready to consider such performances as legitimate. With Ricky, his 'banter' is interpreted as a performance that portrays to his audience, in this case his teammates who felt uneasy to mention his release, that he is comfortable with them acknowledging his situation. Ricky here has engaged in dramatic realisation in order to convey to his audience that he is ready to consider the types of comments players feel obliged to offer teammates not returning to a club the following year as legitimate and socially acceptable. Such discourse would seemingly contribute a notion of an empathically sensitive form of banter to existing literature (e.g. Hoover and Pollard, 1999; Holman, 2004; Crow and Macintosh, 2009).

Interestingly in addressing the nature of his goodbye with his teammates, Ricky explained how it was "goodbyes as usual" when he left his club. This is consistent with the experiences of the majority of participants.

Seemingly players refrained from *long goodbyes*. Participants parted ways with their former teammates very casually, as they would during the Christmas break or at the end of any season, when they go their separate ways during the summer break. Players staying on at a club must remain focused on securing their position within the club and their continued attainment of a professional career in Premier League football. Emotional goodbyes are performances that are not recognised by either the actor or their audience. We remember that players "do not open up in football" and such goodbyes are understood by both sides as only a form of distraction for those still at the club. Such principles and sense of detachment are consistent with previous cultural values expressed by participants when they described how one is expected to leave their worries and stresses of daily life at home: "leave football at football and home at home". Here "home" can be seen to refer to emotional camaraderie players may have felt between each other that will no longer be experienced from day to day; the difficulties an individual may be experiencing following their release; and the realisation that their feared possible self of not *making it* might be attained, such things should not be brought into conversation with fellow players as an individual leaves a club.

7.5 Family and Friends: Dramatically Realised Performances Outside of Football

While the structure of the family may have changed from participant to participant, whether that was from a traditional family model to a single parent household, the support received from their respective families and a high importance placed on family ties, is something that all participants held in common. Yet like other social groups surrounding participants, their families were still audiences to their displays and performances. Such performances conveyed identities and these had the potential to be either credited or discredited. We might recall as indicative, the earlier comments of James whose father was "on the phone everyday" trying to help his son find a new club and James describing these efforts as "great". Here we see an example of how his father's actions recognised

James' performances to proactively search for a new club. Thus, James' father (a former professional player) was undertaking his own performance to demonstrate to James he thought the efforts of his son to maintain and manage his footballing identity were worthwhile and valuable. James' performance to maintain his footballing identity by searching for a club is not only dramatically realised by club officials as a legitimate performance for a released player to portray (their provision of help in finding a new club is evidence of this dramatic realisation), it is also dramatically realised by his father's help in an effort to secure a new contract at a different club.

Similar to James we can consider the actions of Ian's mother as reinforcing her son's effort to maintain his identity as a footballer. Following his release after going to speak with club officials, despite being on trial, Ian was unable to find a new club before the end of season. Like so many released players, Ian continued to train daily at his local gym followed by his own routine of footballing drills in order to stay "in shape, sharp and match ready" as best he could. Such actions not only maintained his physical prowess but also acted as a performance. Such a performance portrays to his audience that he is still a footballer. Such an identity is also motivated and maintained by this performance in order to attain his desired possible self of making a "solid career out of football" and avoid the feared possible self of failing to attain such a career. Ian's mother uses a modest form of reverse psychology she knows will be successful in motivating her son to continue to train on days he admits to feeling lazy:

> "There are days when you just don't feel up to it, you are at it (training) all the time and if it's just you (training by yourself) then there are days when you're just not bothered. Me mum would come and I'd be lying on the sofa or still in bed, and all she has to say to us is; " Oh you're not up training today? Yeah- probably for the best…" That's it, she knows that's all she has to do to get us up and going. I am literally jumping out the door when she says that, but she knows that by saying that she motivates me to get back on the training…She is trying to

> make it out that I don't care about my football anymore, that I have lost the desire and even though she is just saying that she knows that all that needs to be said to get me just raging to get in and training. She knows I still see myself as a player and that's sometimes it's the type of supports she gives us…just getting us up and going, like a bit of mind games and reverse psychology…haha…she knows us too well" (Ian)

Ian's mother reinforces her son's attempts to maintain and manage his identity as a football player following his release by motivating him to continue to train. While continuing to train is important in order to maintain his abilities, Ian committing to and carrying out a training programme centered around football is also important in order to communicate to others that he is still a footballer. His mother's encouragement to continue his commitment to this regime dramatically realises Ian's performance as a driven quality footballer, albeit at that current moment in time a footballer in search of a professional contract. Additionally his mother's efforts contribute to the maintenance of Ian's footballing future possible selves.

Other participants explained how they sought to leave professional football following their release in order to pursue other career paths, these included attending university, returning to college and learning a trade. Some teammates of these participants regarded this as "giving up" on the dream of forging a career in professional football and discredited their performances and thus their alternative possible selves outside of football. Other audiences, such as their family members offered their own performance signifying their approval of participants' management of a new or in most cases, an already existing identity separate to their footballing identities.

> "Dad came from very little and he made it good by putting himself through education so it's always been a big part of our family. We are supported to do whatever we want as long as we remember education. I'd got the chance to play football with a great club and obviously took it and obviously it didn't work...or you wouldn't be with me haha. But seriously the

> whole time I was at the club Dad would pick me up from after training and drive me to college where I did classes in the evening with like adults and stuff. I wanted to have my A levels to just have to the option of some day going to uni. But I think that gave me something more…to my family I wasn't just a footballer. It was important to me but I was also the little brother or son studying in the evening and trying to make a go of football at the same…It just seemed natural then when things didn't work out to apply for uni and everyone in the family was like "well obviously" haha." (Dave)

> "Yeah I had a plan after the end, like I could see myself doing this (working in a trade). Like I was upset and all, and things didn't work on trial and I just wasn't enjoying my football any more. My uncles worked as a bricky and a joiner. During the summers I always worked with them on site, just pick up a bit of money here and there. I never thought much of it, just a bit of extra money to head on holiday. I started to play less and was working with them and I really enjoyed the joinery side of it, like working with the wood and all. I always made sure I worked hard for them, they're me uncles like so (they would) go through you like (if you didn't do a good job). They never treated us any different cause I was signed to here or there. When it was over I went and they took me on no questions asked. They didn't look and say oh here's such and such down on his luck, they just saw me as their hard working nephew and said yeah no bother." (Ed)

Dave and Ed's experiences following their release provide an example of career transitions away from football and their subsequent identity management. Compared to Ian and James whose performances following their release sought to maintain their identity associated with being an elite athlete at a Premier League club, Ed and Dave engaged with elements of their self not bound by their footballing identities. It is clear that Dave's sole self is not his footballing identity. He explains how outside of his club his family did not consider him as just a footballer. Contrary to existing ideas of exclusive athletic identities and identity foreclosures (e.g. Ogilvie and Taylor, 1993. Mitchell et al, 2014; Brown and Potrac, 2009; Marcia et al 1993; Petitpas, 1978), Dave like all participants holds multiple identities outside of being a professional

player. This seems to make his transition away from being a footballer an easier one as his performance of a driven student with a possible self of attending university is one that has long been established and dramatically realised by his family. Most Premier League clubs offer some form of education on site or in conjunction with a nearby college, however these often have no connection to subjects outside of sport. Dave's father collecting and driving his son in order to help him attend A-level courses displays his support for Dave's 'student' identity and ambition to attain the identity of university graduate. Ed explains how his uncles never considered him as "their nephew the footballer". Ed had worked on site with his uncles for years so his identity as perhaps *their nephew the labourer* was one that had long been established and legitimised. Ed was comfortable in the social environment and expresses how he began to really enjoy joinery work. He was confident with this identity because it had been a performance that an established audience had recognised and approved for an extended period of time. Ed describes how he made the decision to work full time and to learn a trade with his uncles. Ed explains that his uncles did not recognise his identity as a released footballer or former pro "down on his luck", rather they acknowledge him as their nephew who wanted to learn a specific craft and enter the construction industry.

Interestingly in considering audiences other than the family, participants spoke of friends they had known from childhood. In describing the interactions with friends outside of a footballing environment, participants spoke of feeling much more relaxed in their company compared to their friends who were teammates. Gary describes how he enjoys his identity away from his club with his friends, the only acknowledgment of his footballing self occurs when his friends make fun of him. It would again seem to reinforce the notion that "you leave football at football" and further supporting the alternative to a 24/7 footballing identity (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Crust et al, 2010). This project therefore offers as more representative perspective. Participants explained how they had friends at the club who were fellow teammates and friends from home. Such

groups never appeared to mix. This is clearly illustrated when Gary makes the comments;

> "My mates back home are great lads, the banter is just chilled. There is no worry about trying to…trying to play ahead of anyone or that. I never mention what is going on at the club and they never really ask much about it. When we are out they love playing that card with girls but like its more them just having the banter and making fun of me." Gary

When asked how he found coming home and seeing his friends following his release, Ricky explained that little time was given to the fact he was experiencing a career transition. It appears that a form of separation does truly exist between the club environment and the time spent with friends from home. This may partly be due to the fact that Ricky played his football in a different part of the country than where his home was, so a distance geographically speaking existed. However while Ricky demonstrated a fluid self, moving from his footballing identity to his identity at home, it would appear that his friends at home were disconnected from what was going on in his footballing life.

> "They were obviously a bit disappointed for me but they just said: "I'm sure you will find a new club" and that was it, now and again they would ask you "are you okay?", but like that was it. We all then would just hang out as normal….I suppose they were used to me not chatting much about football or the club so it was just normal to not really pay much attention to it."
>
> Why do you think that is, because I would have thought something like that would be really interesting- to know what's going on at a big club? (Interviewer)
>
> "It's not that they don't care it is probably when I am home I am just Ricky and I play for…well used to play for XXXXXX. But like when I was home I wasn't walking around with my kit on, I played at XXXXXX so it's not like my football was close by. So like I said before, the 'football me' was different to 'me at home'".

Ricky acknowledges how his performances changed depending on his audience. It is also clear that he chooses and seems to enjoy the separation from his life within and outside of football. This notion has already been mentioned within previous chapters to be common with all participants. There is not only a physical distance between Ricky's football and home but a separation in his footballing and home identities. The two are kept apart, mentioned only in banter or as jokes among friends. Such a distance may explain why Ricky describes how following an initial display of empathy from his friends they continue to "hang out as normal", not mentioning or discussing his current career transition. Ricky has always handled his footballing matters outside of the social environment he shares with his home friends, so perhaps they feel why should his release change the friendship group's status quo in regard to how it treats his footballing career. Ricky does not feel like he has to justify or defend the fact his footballing identity is under threat because his performances belonging to his footballing role have never been a concern of his friends at home as a social audience.

Shane expressed how his friends did not seem to care too much that he was no longer a player with XXXXXXX. He describes aside from his family and girlfriend who were upset for him after he was released, he never felt obliged to justify himself as a released player or former professional to his friends. His sentiments regard the fact that perhaps his friends didn't take his professional career as seriously as others might due to the fact he hadn't made many appearances with the first team, was only on a one year contract and was not earning a similar salary compared to other more established, well-known players.

> "I think it was because I wasn't on big money yet. I mean me and the Mrs. had plans if I had stayed on- not like that we don't now but I mean you know? Big house, new car…all that bruv (brother). But like with me mates, dey is fam (they are like family). I was still the same as I was in school. I am still young so it's not like too much has changed since then. They left school and are like doing nothin', like bit of bar work and one of

> them is working tescos…but like no careers or anything like that…It's not that dey (they) are jealous. I used to play football but now I am not at the minute, but dey (they) are not doing anything special. So I like never said to myself "Oh I need to act like the shit or big time". I was just me…the way I's always been."

Shane did not feel the need to offer his audience outside of football a performance that apologises or defends how they might interpret his career transition and perceive it as a failure. He cites that he was not earning the type of large salary associated with the Premier League or had secured a contract longer than one year, so therefore his friends may have perceived him still on the cusp of *making it*. The current employment status of his friends does not seem to affect their identities or how they act in front of each other and this seems to be the same for Shane as well when in their company. His identity in front of his friends was not constructed or managed on the basis of him as a footballer. Therefore, while a different scenario, Shane is much like Ricky in his performances in front of his friends, who are not concerned with having a footballing identity dramatically realised.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to unpack and discuss the event of participants' release to the reader, for some this transition occurred over a much shorter period of time compared to others. It demonstrates that career transition and accompanying identity management do not begin when players are given official conformation that their contract will not be renewed for the next season. Instead players employ their understanding of the social landscape that is their club environment. Unlike the sentiments within existing literature (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Lavellee and Wylleman, 2000; Mihovilovic, 1968) that described how players within their studies met the end of their sporting careers with surprise and shock, participants describe how they knew they were going to be released long before the event took place. Such knowledge of their fate was gained through their interpretation of how they were used in training,

their de-selection from first and reserve teams, and how interactions with their coaches, managers and teammates had changed. Such happenings are presented to the reader as performances belonging to participants' audiences.

The chapter also demonstrates how participants attempted to take their professional fates into their own hands. Upon understanding the type of performance just mentioned, players did not wait idly by but rather approached management in order to address the issue of their future at the club rather than wait until the end of the season. Surprisingly management had little problem with participants exercising such agency. Seemingly this was the case as long as the player responded to the event of being released in a fashion that was either expected or accepted. Whether that was to go out on trial in the hope of finding a new club or to leave football for education or an apprenticeship to a trade, management was content with the situation as these performances are considered legitimate responses within the football environment.

The manner in which the interactions within the club changed following a players release seemed to occur not as one might think. Some participants spoke of teammates now no longer considering them as a threat to their professional careers. One overwhelming notion consistent throughout the data was a reverence held towards the work and sacrifice players put forth in order to attain a professional career. This work and sacrifice seemed to demand more respect when it potentially could be considered by soon to be former teammates as a failure. This meant that players rarely, if ever, "opened up" about how they truly may have been experiencing their career transition. This reverence made for the discussion of the released players' perceived failure to be considered as illegitimate, if the players did not first publicly demonstrate their acceptance of the release. Instead social protocol demanded performances from both participants and fellow teammates that ensured a *thin reality* was created and maintained. Such a thin reality allowed both parties to comfortably navigate through their interaction, without the

players still signed by the club becoming distracted by the experiences of released players. Ultimately these interactions where teammates offered a brief inquiry into the search for a new club before resuming the status quo of daily performances within the club environment are understood as the good bye to the participants. There are few individualised or personalised goodbyes and when players do part ways for the last time participants describe it being done in the same manner as parting for a summer holiday.

By the manner in which the experiences of participants are unpacked, the reader should be careful in their consideration of the type of role played by participants' audiences, especially those outside of football. It has already been highlighted the importance participants placed on their families and that all participants received tremendous support from their own respective family groups. The reader may begin to consider that the manner of support received by John and Dave would be more helpful with regard to a career transition than the type of support offered by the families of Ian and James. John and Dave's families may appear to facilitate the move away from professional sport better than those of Ian and James, whose parents continued to motivate them to strive to persevere and earn a new contract with a different club. Such examples of support shown by families should not be considered as unhelpful to participants achieving both a smooth transition away from football and successfully managing a transformation in the type of strategies which they use to construct and produce their identities. Rather the differing types of support are intended to demonstrate to the reader how participants motivated by the presence of an audience and by their possible selves, whether that was trying to continue to play professionally, attending university or learning a trade, offered performances portraying an identity experiencing a career transition. Some participants attempted to maintain their footballing identity while appropriately playing the role of a player searching for a new club, while others now shifted their focus to other identities they held outside football. The support participants received from their families should be interpreted

by the reader as the dramatic realisation offered by their different respective audiences outside of football and not the actions of parents trying to live vicariously through their children.

This chapter has attempted to illustrate two central points that have appeared as common themes across the experiences of all participants. The first, players were aware of their positioning within the club and had it clear in their mind that they would be released. The second, participants held more than a singular identity routed in football. Whether they chose to try and maintain their footballing identity or shift their focus to one of their alternative identities depended on how their performances were dramatically realised, by audiences within and outside of football. With discussion concerning the identity management of participants during their career transitions highlighted, the ensuing chapter deals with such discussions in more depth through extending the rationalisation of the efforts of participants to; maintain a reconstructed footballing identity; their engagement with non-footballing identities; and the influence of non-supportive audiences; and thus addressing the research question central to this study.

Chapter 8

Talking Strategy: Understanding the Identity Management and Construction Strategies of Participants as part of their Career Transition

8. 1 Introduction

Having introduced evidence illustrating how footballers have more than a singular identity rooted in football and how such identities are recognised and deemed legitimate by their audiences, in this chapter I intend to promote such a notion in greater detail. Thus, I seek here to address the research question central to the study and explain how the identities of participants can be better understood through the theoretical perspective implemented through the mergence of the dramaturgical metaphor and notions of possible selves. In this chapter I will provide an understanding of identity as conveyed by participants. Previous chapters have established the premise that the notions of the dramaturgical metaphor and possible selves have a bearing on the identity construction and management of players who have experienced life as Premiership footballers, and also a career transition away from such a life. This chapter will demonstrate the practicality of the two theories co-existing, and how such a combination provides a working hypothesis of identities in flux following a career transition from Premier League football, through the discussion of issues regarding the efforts of participants to: (i) maintain a reconstructed footballing identity; (ii) their engagement with non-footballing identities; and (iii) the influence of non-supportive audiences. Such a notion of identities in flux thus humbly offers a credible alternative to existing literature (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Holt and Dunn, 2004; Holt and Mitchell, 2006; Marcia et al, 1993; McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006 Mitchell et al, 2014, Pain and Harwood, 2008; Petitpas, 1978) within sport centred scholarship that considers athletes in terms of single and an exclusive identities, regarding an end to a sporting career as identity foreclosure.

8.2 Reconstructing and Maintaining Footballing Identity

8.2.1 Legitimised Performances

Conversations relating to participants' own identity management strategies generally stemmed from their opinions of the reactions of protagonists within the vignettes to the event of their release. From this starting point these types of conversations would begin to shift toward participants' own experiences, with them recollecting their initial attempts and early efforts to maintain their footballing identity. Such an identity often had to be renegotiated and reconstructed. Harry's sentiments, for example, illustrate his efforts to keep playing football professionally. On learning he would not be returning to the club the following season, he describes how, with the support of his club, he organised to play out on loan in the League Football. Such a drop in playing standards might be considered significant from the lofty heights of the Premier League, but it is one that seems all too familiar with former Premier League players who experience an early transition out of one of the world's most competitive leagues.

> "It's a strange feeling, cause like I said you know its coming but then I kind of just was really worried of what would happen next…it's hard I mean. At the time I was still set on working to stay in a decent level of football. You still want to show you've got what it takes. So I was dead keen to get out on loan. We set a few things up with one or two clubs. You need to be careful when you drop down.
>
> What do you mean? Why? (Interviewer)
>
> Well because some of the lads might see you as…with a target- on your back like. There are lads though who have went through similar things to what I was going through. I mean like (players) who had been released after time with a bigger club say…and now were making a living in league football. They always knew the story. I saw them and they seemed to be doing okay. This happens to a lot of players (being released from a Premier League club) and they find a club and keep playing professionally. I saw the rest of the season out with XXXXXX (Football League club name) on

> loan. XXXXXXX (former player at Harry's previous Premier League club) was playing there and I knew him from XXXXXX (Premier League club name), he was a few years older than me and he was doing alright, earning competitive money as a pro. So I aimed to get to where he was or something like that. I was still a footballer and that mattered to me. So many people just give up, but going out on loan let me keep training and playing. I didn't want people to think; "oh he just, just gave up" or that I "was never good enough from the start". I wanted to show people that I had put in the hard work and had what it took. At the time my thinking was- all it takes is one scout or someone, you know, who knows someone and a few good matches and I could show people that I have enough talent to at least be up with a championship side or one of the lower Premier League teams…"

Harry's comments illustrate how he sought to maintain his footballing identity as part of his career transition. Such maintenance is understood by this study as a process by which his identity is managed through an understanding of his performances to particular audiences and how such performances were motivated by the particular possible selves he held for himself in the future. Such an interpretation is underpinned by Harry's comments when he describes how he encountered a former player from his Premier League club now playing for the Football League team with whom he was 'on loan'. Harry describes how the player was "doing alright" and earning (what would be considered in football realms as) decent money. Harry was aware that a lot of players get released from "bigger" Premier League clubs. His comments depict how as he attempted to secure a professional contract with a club, he found encouragement in seeing, first hand, a player who had been released or had failed to be resigned by a Premier league or Championship club, still carving out a career in professional football. Harry explains how he "aimed to be" like this player, clearly illustrating the possible self he held during his career transition of still having a professional career despite not being with his original club. This possible self is further expanded into a future hoped for possible self that sees Harry once again returning to the upper tiers of professional football. Harry recounts how he felt that such a

return could have depended on something as small as a person with an affiliation to such a club being present at some of his matches. If Harry then proceeded to play well in these matches a call up or trial might only be a phone call away.

As explained in past chapters Markus and Nurius (1986) describe how hoped for possible selves have the ability to influence the identities of individuals when they are matched with feared possible selves. Harry's alludes to a feared possible self that revolved around a concern with the negative opinions other people may have of him. During his career transition Harry held a possible self of not playing professional football. This no doubt is a feared possible self, however what appears to truly match with Harry's positive possible self of remaining in professional football is a self that is not playing professionally and subject to the negative opinions held by others of his technical ability and footballing value. Harry sought to continue his professional career, with the hopes of being seen by a scout or club official from a higher division as means of avoiding a self that was removed from football. Removed from football, Harry feared his differing social audiences would judge his effort to make it as worthless; that he didn't want it enough or, was "never good enough" from the beginning of his career to play football professionally.

Paring Harry's possible self of continuing his footballing career with a possible self in which his efforts as a professional player are criticised by others, influences Harry's management of his previous footballing identity. As part of this career transition, this identity formed during the time he spent within the cultural environment of his previous Premier League club has come under threat. With the potential of not having a club to play for, Harry's identity as a professional player lacked the constancy it may have once possessed. However upon seeing former Premier League players earn their living within League Football, Harry was able to picture himself in a similar position in the future. Thus Harry is able to continue to embody a footballing identity. His footballing identity during this period of time is legitimised also by his social environment and

footballing circumstances (i.e. interacting in the setting of a football club on a daily basis and still playing professional football as a player on loan). When Harry describes how, “You need to be careful when you drop down…because some of the lads might see you as…with a target- on your back”, we also see how his former identity could not successfully exist within his new social environment and had to be renegotiated.

Harry had to reconstruct his footballing identity in order for it to be accepted and legitimised by his new audiences. Ian’s sentiments can be understood in a similar fashion. Below is part of his description of what it was like going on trial at different clubs in league football following his release from a Premier League team. Apart from displaying his obvious skill and footballing intellect through his assertion of effort and intensity on the training pitch and in matches, Ian is attempting to convey to others around him that he is still a footballer through the performance of his renegotiated footballing identity. When asked, Ian was able to reflect and recognise that he had pictured himself in the future throughout his sporting career. He conveyed that he was often motivated by a sense of wanting to avoid “that picture of me not amounting to something” and an ambition to “make it” as a footballer. The effort and attitude with which he approached his time on trial with clubs conveyed to such new audiences his desire and future ambitions. He also mentions how he quickly realised that such an approach stood in his favour, as it seemed to be the approach managers wanted in league football from younger players coming from Premier League sides.

> “You have to be hungry and really show you’re keen, they have to see you still want to be a footballer…lots of lads just give up and don’t put it in…the effort like when they move down because like you can get away with it- training isn’t as tough…. well it is sometimes but it isn’t all the time. Like when I was at XXXXXXXXX training would be tough all the time but when you are in league football especially, you might have a week of tough training but then there will be a couple of days the next week where it’s not so bad. Compared to what you are used to I mean. Anyway, so you go on trial to here and that

> and you have a sign over your head already because you have come from a big club, so if you don't put the effort in then it's just lads going on saying, "oh big time Charlie over here thinks he's this and that". The managers want to hear that you want to be back up again (in the Premier League) because they know then you are motivated to really push yourself and work hard. So I just made sure they knew what I was about. I would show in training that I meant business, then in the meeting or whatever after made sure I played the part, you know. One; told them what they wanted to hear but it was fine because that's what I wanted too. Two; did the whole grit teeth thing…you know really sell it to them that I am the type of player who wanted to make it back up and just try and show how bad you wanted it."

In employing the framework of dramaturgy (Goffman,1959) to help understand participants' identity management and construction, it is important to acknowledge that, like so many individuals, they try to make the invisible visible in order to dramatize their performances. There is little value to players sharing similar experiences to those of Harry or Ian, in doing or being something if no one recognises it. They are required to spend energy not only on action but also on making that action apparent. Therefore Harry and Ian are required to expend energy not only on the actions deemed appropriate by their audience of new teammates and managers while on loan, but also making their action apparent to those very same people. This can be identified as Goffman's dramatic realisation (1959), and it rests on impression management. For example, the player swearing after his shot goes wide of the goal; a released player training even harder once they have been let go from a club; a player while on loan eagerly agreeing with the footballing directions of their new manager, are all different exemplifications of dramatic realisation. This is not to claim that those performances of Harry and Ian in front of new audiences influenced by their possible selves are fraudulent in any meaning of the word. It is paramount to explain, that this study is not suggesting that, motivated to avoid a feared possible self or driven to attain a desired one, players are not consciously manipulating or attempting to fraud those around them. Instead the reader is asked to

consider the performances of an identity are an inevitable process and indeed what participants do is done for the benefit of the social groups of which they are a part.

8.2.2 Illegitimate Performances

Another example of a participant's initial reaction to their career transition and their early efforts to maintain a now reconstructed football identity is found in some of the experiences shared by Paul. Paul's effort to manage his identity and his accompanying performance however were 'disallowed' by some of his audience. Three months until the end of the season he was told that he would not have his contract renewed at the end of the year. Paul chose to stay on at the club and continued to train with the squad. This is often permitted by many clubs and is widely practiced within football. The club has another body at its disposal to have in drills and training, an individual who knows the systems and is familiar to the environment (a case perhaps of better the devil you know). The player has the opportunity to continue training at a high level in order to stay sharp, with the hope that management will loan him out to play for another club. A hallmark of traditional (Fordist) employment relations that has held sway for much of the twentieth century was a bargain between the workers and employers in which workers traded loyalty and hard work for job security (Grint, 2005). In professional football the labour market has always been uncertain and likened to working-class industrial and manual occupations, players work hard and dutifully because of a pressing need to demonstrate a dedication to an appropriate work ethic. Sentiments expressed by Paul suggest that even when players have been or know they are going to be released, there continues to be a critical need for players to enact displays of professionalism.

> "…you choose to stay on, you can't just do whatever you want you have to stay focused and locked in. It's a lot harder though because coaches are now much more relaxed with you…they have a laugh and more banter with you. It used to piss me off though at times because then they would just get into you massively if like they were in a bad mood and you weren't

> being like 100% switched on…yeah you were still expected to act like before and just be a pro even though sometimes they would loosen the reigns a bit and you can tell they don't care that much about your football anymore…"

Thus working, without protest and with dedication, in training and in reserve team games- retains relevance because of the potential for negative references in the medium to long term. Similar to the findings of Roderick (2006) in this highly contingent and masculinised occupation, many believe that by reacting to the perceived indignity of rejection with renewed display of hard work, players confirm in their minds and in those of their contemporaries that they are worthy of the status of professional footballer (Roderick, 2006). Many participants acknowledge that you must accept your place in this instance, players are treated at times as a "training mule…you just have to fill in wherever you're told and in the drills you're told, some days you just have to stand around cause the training isn't geared towards you specifically". Paul explained how he "came to blows" with one of the coaching staff because he would tackle players too aggressively.

> "You are still told to play tough and with intensity, and you almost have more intensity than the others cause you don't know where you're going to end up - so you are really goin' hard in trainin' tryin' to stay sharp- right. Now like puttin' a challenge in is a huge part of my football, the coaches knew that. That was one of the things they liked about me. But then they wanted you to stop being you. Like just play and train the way they want you to. All they wanted was for me to just keep your head down and not be who you have always been- just what they think a good (professional) player is. I couldn't take it any more and just lost it with him and we had a massive row and falling out." (Paul)

In this instance, Paul's attempts to maintain his footballing identity fail to be dramatically realised. Despite acknowledging he understood the process by which his footballing identity would have to be reconstructed and the type of performances that accompanied this form of identity, Paul fails to offer a performance deemed appropriate to his new position and

identity in the club. His own coaches refuse to dramatically realise his hard challenging performances and thus his efforts to negotiate his new football identity are not legitimised by his audience. The sentiments of Paul, Ian and Harry all illustrate examples of participants' understandable early efforts to maintain a footballing identity during the initial stages of their career transitions. Such efforts are consist with those of other participants. Variations appear when one examines the length of time individual participants devoted to attempting to maintain such identities.

This project from its beginnings has been critical of the notion of an exclusive athletic identity that an athlete embodies (e.g. Grove et al, 2004; Lavellee et al, 1997; Mitchell et al, 2014). In contrast, this study has offered the position of a self composed of multiple identities constantly in a state of flux. As discussion with participants progressed from their initial attempts to manage, construct and reconstruct their identities as part of the career transition process, the prominence and importance of other identities away from football and separate from their own footballing identities became very clear.

8.3 Other Non-Footballing Identities

Contesting pre-existing literature describing a primarily exclusive athletic identity within elite sport (e.g. Grove et al, 2004; Lavellee et al, 1997; Mitchell et al, 2014) throughout the study this project has attempted to portray the perception that the self as it pertains to participants, is more accurately understood as a combination of multiple identities. Such a self and its identities are in a constant state of flux with different identities coming to the fore dependent on the varying audiences, possible selves and social contexts. To employ the language of Goffman (1959), participants have spoken about playing the role of a footballer as it is expected within the cultural context of a football club and how when the participants are not in the presence of a footballing audience they embody whichever identity is considered most appropriate, as deemed by their audience and their environment. Such performances could belong to the role of a son, brother, husband, a student or of someone who enjoys

‘a quiet pint’ of beer with their mates. While such identities may not have been as prevalent in the past while participants were still secure with their professional contracts (in terms of the how they influenced performances offered), as part of the career transitions such identities seem to bear a greater influence upon participants’ presentation of self. Central to this position is the theme that individuals such as this study’s participants, even while playing for their clubs were more than just ‘footballers’ solely. Harry, John, Gary or any of the participants did not cease to exist simply because their footballing/athletic identity became threatened or was no longer considered legitimate. The notion that they adhered to an entirely exclusive athletic identity seems a narrow perspective and one that is not consistent with this study’s findings. As part of data included below, extracts from the interview process demonstrate participants’ identities they held outside of football and how such identities came to the fore as part of their career transition.

James’ comments depict how he felt when he was still playing for his Premier League club. He describes how he felt much of his time was taken up by the different elements of what it meant to be a footballer, such as, training and travel etc. James interestingly mentions how such efforts “take away from other things”. Such other things can be considered the identities James maintained alongside his footballing identity, like the identity of a engineer enthusiast or a long time pool playing friend.

> “We have spoke about it before not bringing your footy home. Who I was outside of football is just now who I am. I am not sure that makes sense but…say when I was with XXXXXXX so much of time was taken up by the whole thing…training, travel to training, physio’s the lot… (it) just eats away at the amount of time you give other things. I always had other things though. It was important to have other things, just for your own sanity. Like not many of my teammates knew I am big into construction and engineering…bridges and that. But all my mates and family back home know. I get a bit of hard time for it haha. Anyway me and the boys can just hang out play a bit of

> pool and never really chat football. If we do it might be about results at the weekend but not ever what was goin' on with me…It's not that they didn't care I just never brought it up and they were happy then to leave it. It was kind of the same with my family. Everyone will ask hows you are getting on and would support us, but then that was it. Then I was just an uncle or brother in law."

The identities maintained by James outside of football both past and present, are welcomed by his social audiences. Performances conveying identities positioned around a keen engineering enthusiasm, family member, and friend are considered legitimate and dramatically realised by James' audiences. Like many of the study's other participants, while his football was of significant value to him, James kept his football identity separate to his identities outside of football. He describes how family would ask briefly about his football when they met but excluding sentiments of support this was the extent to which the conversation would go regarding the topic. Instead James interacted as, James the uncle or James brother-in-law. Similarly, in his comments regarding performances offered to friends outside of football, James is not quizzed on life within the professional game; he was neither regarded as James "the footballer" nor following his release and career transition was he regarded as James the failed footballer. He assumes his longstanding identity as a friend while offering performances both expected and approved by such an audience.

The comments from Dave are similar to those expressed by James. Previously Dave shared his ambitions to study at university describing the support he received from his family to study at night courses for his A-levels. In his comments it is evident Dave has experienced a career transition perhaps smoother than most. He describes how upon leaving professional football he found he had more time to devote to the pre existing performances of identities he maintained outside of football and was also able to explore and construct new identities.

> “Leaving football I had more time to do other things. Uni has been great like, I play still for our Sunday pub team but now I am just happier more of the time haha…funny that.”
>
> What other things do you mean? (interviewer)
>
> “Well like just spending more time with my family…things I would have missed before because of training or matches or even just travelling and that. Now I get to go to all the family things or mates are having kids and I am around for all that. The Mrs got us a road bike so I enjoy getting out on that. I am heading out a few times a week with the triathlon club. It’s more balanced now, football is fun and not as serious… though you should see me play on a Sunday I can still lose the plot…but then we just go have a pint haha. But I have more time to just enjoy other parts of life that before took a bit of back seat for better or worse because of my football.” (Dave)

While he has now retreated from his ambitions to play football professionally in the Premier League, Dave has still reconstructed his own footballing identity through his enjoyment and involvement in his “Sunday pub team”. His footballing identity has not ceased to exist because of his career transition. It has simply been reformed to best suit the social context, expectations of his current audience and the lack of a possible self having a long career in the Premier League. Dave previously explained, and in his above comments alludes to, the alternative identities he held while still playing football with his former club of studying to gain entry into university. Removed from football Dave explained he now felt he had more time to engage with identities that in the past the demands of his profession did not enable. Having attained his possible self of studying at university, Dave constructed and developed his identity as a third level student. He describes how he now has more time to enjoy going to more family occasions and spending time with friends, revealing more time spent engaged with this respective identity. Encouraged by his girlfriend and her gift of a road bike, Dave even offers evidence of a new identity he now maintains while training with his local triathlon club. As part of his experiences throughout his career transition, Dave openly acknowledges that since his withdrawal from professional football he has

had more opportunity to engage with the his pre-existing and now newly formed identities, that in the past took a “back seat”.

Commenting on the significance of identities outside of the cultural environment of football and the importance of the manner in which individuals re-engage, manage and construct such identities as part of their career transition, perhaps one of the most powerful comments from all participants comes from James. Discussing the event of his release, James openly admitted that even though he knew it was coming the official release from the club was an event he found both socially difficult (within the environment of his club) and emotionally tough. The interview then progressed to James experiences of coming home, with the interviewer wrongly (and embarrassingly) expecting James to comment on the shame or unease with which he found his interactions with friends and family.

> With being released, moving out of big time football, was it difficult to be around your friends and family? (interviewer)
>
> “Haha..No mate!”
>
> Oh sorry… is it alright to ask why not? (interviewer)
>
> “I have been around the lads and my family my whole life. I don’t mean to be short but like I have known my family longer and some of my good mates longer than I was with XXXXX (name’s club).”

James short answer demonstrates clearly his highly developed identities outside of football. Such identities may not have been portrayed as often in the past as they are now. The obvious confidence of James’ performances when faced with such an audience and his readiness to comfortably offer such performances following his release speaks of a highly developed identity outside of and away from football. So strong are these identities that following his release, James has the ability to turn to such identities that have been refined over a period of time much longer than he played with his Premier League club. Such comments only

further strengthen the assertion that participants were more than footballers during their time as professional players and it would appear the more developed, supported and recognised these identities were, the greater the chances participants stood of experiencing smoother career transitions. John is one such participant who has appeared to have successfully negotiated his career transition and the accompanying identity management processes.

Speaking of his transition following his release John comments help further this project's understanding of the process of his identity management and construction. John played for a Premier League club not based in his hometown or city. Like so many players when he was afforded the necessary time he would travel home to spend time off work with friends outside of his footballing environment and family. In the abstract presented from one of the interviews with John, he describes prior to his career transition how his relationships with his mother and long time friends were not altered by the fact that he played football professionally. John then continues to explain how he found support from his family and friends while negotiating his career transition.

> "My friends never treated me any different when I was at home. I was still their mate. Same with my mum, I may have been a player at XXXXXXX but she was like, "my house, my son, my rules" haha. So I was never under any pressure to try and be this big footballer or anything. So going through all this I don't think I have had to change the way I acted around my mum and my mates, family and stuff. I am figuring out how things will go now like when I've finished my training but I am the same with them as I have always been. Yeah…so when I thought I would like to give this apprenticeship a try, they all were dead supportive. I'm a ways into it now and beginning to see the opportunities that will be waiting for me at the end of it. It's been tough but those people like, friends and family they just keep you real. It helps now that I'm in the college for the 2 days like I said and then out working in the industry. It's there and it's tangible. But I have never felt like I had to be anything different with them like in terms of football and looking back that definitely helped."

John makes it clear that there was no distinction between how he was treated when visiting home, especially by his mother and also his friends simply because he played with a Premier League club. His comments illustrate how he did not have to offer such an audience the social performance expected of a professional footballer. John embodied his identity of a young adult son obeying his mother (her house, her rules). When spending time with friends he had at home, who were outside of his footballing environment, John portrayed the performances they expected. Such performances were not those of a footballer. It is clear that John's self has many identities that differ depending on his social environment and the audiences within those differing contexts. Having such identities away from football would seem to ease his career transition and identity management process. John comments describe how he did not have to change how he interacted with his mother, family and friends. His identities as a son or as friend did not have to be renegotiated due to his career transition and, if either of these did, it was not to the same extent as his professional identity as footballer had to be.

John understandably acknowledges that his career transition has been difficult. Following his release John moved to back to his home town/city and thus, we can assume, engaged with his once non-footballing identities more often than he would have previously done while training and playing with his club. A shift towards engaging with these non-footballing orientated identities is further reinforced by his social surroundings. John now living at home has the ability to offer his audiences, whether they consisted of his mother or friends, performances that suit his current social environment and context. John's identities of a son and friend and the performances that accompany such identities are additionally legitimised by the very fact that his current circumstances of having moved back and living in his home city, are surroundings that make his performances all the more real and easier to dramatize. Previously while playing with his former club, John rarely visited home and was forced to offer such performances through phone calls or text

messages. John's own future within his trade brings with it certain possible selves that influence current identities. John sees himself in the future as a professional tradesman. While only briefly mentioning his trade in this abstract from an interview, he interestingly uses the word "tangible". It is noticeable to friends and family that he is studying and learning his trade through their ability to physically witness him within this context. The fact that he is in college and work experience throughout the week and that this is physically visible and known to audiences acts to further legitimise John's identity as a trainee influenced by a future self as a tradesman. Thus his audience dramatically realise such an identity through offering their support.

However not all periods of time or elements of career transitions proved smooth and easy for every participant to negotiate. This understandably proved to be most true when participants received little support from those around them and when the performances and identities they offered failed to be dramatically realised by such audiences.

8.4 Non-Supportive Audiences

Sections from interviews with Ricky and Ed further support the notion that participants' processes of identity management and construction following their career transition are heavily influenced by the responses of their social audiences. Such responses can either dramatically realise the performances and identities of participants or not. When their audiences legitimise such identities, participants talk of the support they received from friends and family and express a greater sense of ease in regard to how they experienced their career transition. The sentiments of Ricky and Ed shed some light on how they experienced periods of their career transition. It is evident from these comments both individuals have not experienced the same extent of wide support as other participants and thus struggled at times to have their post-professional football identities recognised and dramatically realised.

Following his release Ricky spoke of his motivation to go to university. Ricky's background was from a predominantly working class setting. He described how other individuals from his family had gone to university, now held graduate careers and bettered their own social position; "they got out…football was going to do that for me but now I think it's the university route". This positive possible self was matched by a feared self Ricky held of remaining in his local area and working in similar jobs as his friends. As part of his career transition and with this motivation to study at university, Ricky developed an identity focused around his ambition. He described how he did his utmost to attend open days, email university staff and research access routes. It was these performances, ambitions and the identity to which they belong that Ricky found little support for from his friends.

> "Not having the support of others was tough. I mean the lads I am friends with obviously want what's best for me and wish me well but they are used to me not being around what with trainings and that. I think they think "ah well, he was footballer he will be looked after he's always been alright". I don't know- you are expected to go into coaching or maybe be a scout…something like that when you are done playing. But look- say I wanted to be a ballet dance teacher, not saying I do but like just say. Well like people aren't expecting something like that. When you're a younger pro and when you are not playing for a club everyone around here expects you to be down the bookies. Then eventually you end up working in the pub or do the sort of things they all do. Trying to be something different isn't really thought very much (of)…well at least not round here, and like because I'm not there yet they just think I'm chatting through my hole (lying or talking about something and not following through)."

Speaking of his ambition and how his friends met such an ambition, the comments of Ricky shed light on how the identities of participants through the performances they offer are subject to the judgment of their audiences. As previously described, such judgment dramatically realises the management of these new or existing identities. Ricky's identity as an individual aspiring to study at university is not supported by his friends.

The performances accompany this identity clash with Ricky's social context. Apart from those in his family, people in Ricky's community tended not to go to university and seemed sceptical of those who do. Ricky seems all to aware of the fact that in order to receive the support of his friends and to have an identity dramatically realised, he must forgo his ambition to go to university and satisfy his audience's expectation to "work in a pub" and spend his free time "down the bookies".

During his career transition Ricky received such lack of encouragement from his friends regarding his ambitions that he compared their attitude of contempt to a scenario in which he want to become this predominantly working-class community's first male ballet instructor. Such was the lack of support Ricky received for his performances portraying an eagerness to leave the area and study at university; he uses the example of ballet in a traditional working class environment to illustrate the attitude of his community and wider social audience. Ed also experienced great support from his family but recounted how, when he first returned home, he found some friends lacked understanding of his reasons for not continuing to play professionally with a club in a much lower league, where he could undoubtedly warrant being signed. Ed may not have been as certain on the precise details of his ambitions or may have chosen not to disclose them as part of the interview process. He does however allude to lessons learned in a sporting context regarding goal setting. Ed describes how, while his long term goals within Premier League football may no longer be attainable, he still has established goals he wishes to achieve outside of football.

> "Coming from that sports background I have been used to setting my own goals and working to achieve them, I would say that and my family influence me the most. I want to achieve the goals I have set myself. That might not have worked out in football but when I look I think I can say I have done more than most of a lot of other people- especially where I am from. I have mates who I know for a fact think that this is it for me now, that things were as good as they are going to ever get for me and now I am just like everyone else. I think it's jealousy

> honestly, they don't get why I would want to walk away from football and why I wont just play for anyone cause for them I guess they think it's a great life. It's hard not to have them behind you and really care but it was my decision to stop playing. I can still achieve the goals I have now, they're (his goals) just away from football, like getting a good job and making a living."

Ed's "goals" of having a good career and "make a living" may not originate from clearly defined possible selves or the new identities of Ricky, but this makes them of no less importance to him and his career transition. He is also no less astute to the lack of support he received from his friends. Acting as another social audience aside from his family, and unlike those of Ricky's who failed to recognise an identity due to its position within a cultural context, Ed described how his friends failed to acknowledges his ambition to achieve his goals of success away from football. Their refusal to dramatically realise his identity, of an individual eager to be successful away from football appears to stem from this particular audiences' opinion that by playing for a Premier League team Ed had experienced the pinnacle of what he would have achieved in life. Additionally Ed explains how such friends cannot comprehend why he does not to want to try and play professionally as along as he can. From his comments it is clear Ed's failure to have his identity legitimised by a social audience outside of his family is hard for him and makes the process of his career transition and subsequent identity management a difficult one.

Consistent with the experiences of other participants, it is evident that Gary was aware of his fate and that the initiation of his career transitions began prior to him being officially released. Gary acknowledges the support he received from his immediate family in making the decision to step away from football, despite the affectionate pleas of his grandfather. In his efforts to negotiate the process of his identity management it is clear Gary was influenced by the performances of his friends from outside

of football, and how this impacted and continues to impact on his aspiration for the future.

> "Oh mate I had made the decision that come the end of season that if I wasn't offered a new contract by someone or if XXXXXX (former club) didn't up the offer they made me, that was it-done. I spoke with my family and they were really supportive. I think my granddad was disappointed saying, "Oh, why don't you give it another go". He loves football but even he understands. To be honest I didn't really know what to do next. My mates all outside of football, well they had all finished with college and were getting jobs and such. That put us off a bit actually, cause you don't want them taking the piss and they gave us a good bit of banter and shit saying I was "stupid and one of these oldies at college" and such. So I started doing a bit of coaching, to be honest just cause you see a lot of lads go down that road or like staying involved with the game somehow like that…I am not sure where it is taking me. If anyone is honest with you then they will tell you they have no idea how likely the chances of making decent money at this is with a proper team."

The dilemma faced by Gary is clear. Understanding that he was going to be released he was adamant in his decision to stop playing football professionally but is unclear "what to do next". He mentions the support he received from his family, however it is his interactions with his close non-footballing friends that offer an insight into the influence of a non-supportive audience. Within his comments one can see Gary held a possible self that involved him returning to college, however his friends did not support this subsequent student or returning to school identity. This new identity was met with slurs and teasing. This particular audience of close friends offered a performance that conveyed to Gary, through the use banter, that this new identity would not be dramatically realised. Influenced by such an audience's performance and a feared possible self involving himself continuing to be the recipient of such passive-aggressive banter, Gary turned to football coaching. The shortcoming of having a lack of support for new identities is evident. Gary does not hide his own awareness of the uncertainty surrounding football coaching as a

profession. He acknowledges that he made such a decision because it somehow fell in line with the status quo with many former players choosing “to go down that road”. Rather than choosing to construct such an identity through a desire to passionately pursue ambitions as a professional coach, Gary offers his audience what he regards as the most commonly expected and accepted performance. He does this despite acknowledging that it might not be the soundest decision to make with regard to career prospects and financial security.

8.4.2 An Identity not supported by its Current Social Context

So far in this chapter the extracts taken from interviews with participants loosely lend themselves to form a timeline, starting with participants describing identities and performances that attempt to maintain a footballing identity at the initial stages of their career transitions. As the chapter progresses, so too do the sentiments of participants as they begin to start to talk about identity management strategies away from and outside of football. Breaking this pattern are the experiences of Shane. Similar to Ricky, Ed and Gary, his comments deal with the issue of non-supportive audiences outside of football following his return home. However like the efforts of Harry, Ian and Paul, Shane is striving to maintain his footballing identity even though he is no longer playing or training with a professional team.

Expanding on his opinions of the protagonists within the vignettes and reflecting on his own career transitions, Shane’s sentiments provide an opportunity to consider less supportive experiences. Speaking of his release, Shane, like so many of the participants, acknowledged he “knew it was coming” but felt quite strongly that he was good enough to be offered a new contract citing that the manager and coaches had “favourites” and he was simply not one of them. Following his time with the club Shane moved home. While there he continued to train, often by himself, in order to maintain his athletic competency and footballing ability. Shane’s efforts to sustain such qualities clearly indicate his efforts to conserve his footballing identity as part of his career transition. The

extract from this particular interview with Shane deals with how he encountered different audiences now he had moved home to a cultural environment outside of a footballing context.

> Was it hard moving back home, did you find people had a different opinion of you now because you weren't with XXXXXXX (Shane's club)? (Interviewer)
>
> "Yeah I get ya. I would say people don't really get behind you (support his efforts to keep playing professionally). Like recently I was at a party and some people be saying shit about us. They just are hating. They don't know me. I know I have what it takes. I have got my fam, my close friends. They just treated us as fam- even before I was Shane at XXXXXXX (Shane's Club) and support what I am trying to do. But when people be talking shit man it gets us crazy (mad)…But they see me not playing right now or I'm in the gym at home and they can give chat like, "you're aint (aren't) a real player anymore cause if you were you wouldn't be in here". I know I just gotta not let it effect me and my plans…I use it as motivation. I just store it up and use it as fuel…"

Shane's efforts to maintain his footballing identity amongst a wider social audience are evident in his efforts to continue training. Motivated by the possible self of signing for a new club and returning to the professional game, he continues to exercise and train on his own. Even though his identity as a footballer has been threatened, such training can be considered as a strategy by which he can reinforce this now vulnerable identity. Within the comments Shane shared as part of the interview we can see, much like other participants in this study, he received support from his close friends. Shane talked of not being judged a failure by these friends following his release. Such a social group acting as an audience may not expect the same footballing performances as those within the cultural context of Shane's former club, but they do dramatically realise and thus legitimise Shane's footballing identity through offering their support towards his efforts to keep training and maintaining his footballing skill. Shane describes an incident in which he was at a party and interacting with his wider social audience at home. Such an audience

seems to view and regard Shane in a different fashion compared to his close friends, who Shane regards as family. This wider social audience fails to recognise Shane's efforts to maintain his football and fitness while not employed or playing for a club as legitimate. Their lack of support is conveyed through slurs about Shane or, as he himself described, "hating". Their failure to dramatise Shane's footballing identity stems from a view that his current social/cultural context away from a professional environment does not support the performances he is offering in an effort to convey his footballing identity.

With the football season well under way, Shane's current social position (again referring to his physical position in time and space) is at home and not with his former club. It can be legitimately assumed that his wider social audience at home has the ability to deduce that such a development implies that Shane has been released by his club. Still motivated by the possible self of returning to play professional football, Shane continues to train at his local gym and strives to maintain his footballing identity while experiencing his career transition. While his close friends support Shane's efforts, a wider social audience deems such a scenario illegitimate. Shane's social context does not support the performance he offers portraying a footballing identity. In the eyes of this audience, if Shane's identity as a professional footballer, motivated by his relevant possible self, were legitimate he would not be working out in the local gym and training at home. The audience conveyed their discontentment with Shane's footballing identity through slurs and what Shane described as "hating" and "talking shit". It is evident that the failure of this audience to dramatise an identity, that is clearly valuable to Shane is a source of some anguish for him and understandably so. He describes how he tries to not let such attitudes affect him, but from his sentiments it is evident this is not the case: "it gets us crazy (mad)".

As previously mentioned, in order for a positive possible self to have an impact on one's identity it must be paired with a feared possible self. Additionally, as previously described possible selves are social,

influenced by their social surroundings and environment. The performance of this wider social audience conveys to Shane that they feel he is no longer a professional footballer, nor is he good enough to be one. Such a performance is dramatized by Shane's own recognition of it; he uses it to "fuel" his motivation, highlighting and aiding in the construction of his own feared possible self of not making it back to football.

This interaction between paired positive and negative possible selves; Shane's own performances; the performances of his different audiences; and the dramatic realisation of all these performances, illustrates the working interdependence of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor and Markus and Nurius (1986) possible selves in the understanding of identity construction and management. Shane's positive possible self of returning to professional football is formed through a combination of his past experiences of playing for a Premier League club, his hopes for the future and his performances portraying an identity associated and influenced by such a possible self being dramatically realised and legitimised by his close friends. His feared possible self of failing to make it as a professional footballer is formed through a combination of his past experiences of being released from a Premier League club, his fears of the future, and Shane dramatically realising the performances of his wider social audience that convey their failure to recognise and legitimise his attempts to maintain his footballing identity. Through such perspectives' symbiotic association with each other, Shane undertakes the process of developing and managing his footballing identity as part of his career transition.

8.5 Performances and Possible Selves in Everyday Life

Considering identity construction and management in relation to careers specifically within sport, Wheeler et al (1999) explain that elite athletes often develop a sense of personal competence and establish their own self-identities through the sport in which they engage. This can be said for many of the football participants within this study. Their participation in

one of the world's elite professional leagues credits them as being part of a very select few. Holding such a station for any length of time is something all players were proud of. Such pride made it evident that their competence in regard to football established a strong part of their identity. However many participants expressed how other things equally held a great importance to them. This is evident from their descriptions of identities outside and away from football.

Career transition influences individuals such as the participants in this study to reinvest time and energy into the management and construction of their identities. As they reconnect with family and friends, return to school and attempt occupational careers, some individuals experience adjustment issues. This however should not come as a surprise as many participants had been involved with Premier League clubs in the form of academies and development programmes from as early as 8 years of age. Such feelings are understandable given that these players have not been fortunate enough to have long careers in professional sport. The sentiments of Coakley (2007) express the notion that if sport has expanded a person's identity, experiences, relationships and resources, then their transition will likely be a smooth one. Messner (1992) and Murphy et al (1996) highlight that difficulties are most likely to occur when a person has never had the desire or chance to live outside the culture of elite sport. Messner's (1992:120) findings suggest that those heavily involved in sport since childhood encountered serious adjustment problems as they try to make their transition out of sport. One quite poignant response expressed by a participant within his study reflected as follows:

> "You find yourself scrambled. You don't know which way to go. Your light has been turned out…Of course you miss the financial deal, but you miss the camaraderie of the other ballplayers. You miss that- to be an elite, to be one of a kind…the game itself…the beating and all that… you really miss. You miss the camaraderie of the fellas. There's an empty

> feeling…the one thing that has been a major part of your life is gone…you don't know how people are going to react to you,"

Coakley (2007) suggests that people are not simply socialised into sport and more importantly, neither are they simply socialised out of sport. Though not directly addressing the type of transition from sport that is being discussed in this project, what can be taken from this is an appreciation that such a transition is associated with social relationships, the cultural environment in which they occur, and expectations that the individual engages with. While still supporting the assertion that identity issues are part of the social and cultural contexts in which people make decisions about sport in their lives (Dacyshyn 1999; Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Swain, 1999; Kadlcik and Flemr, 2008; Lavellee and Robinson, 2007), this would seemingly act as an excellent position to conclude this chapter, through offering a new perspective to such existing literature.

Considering the notions of performance, the influence of an audience and supported by the sentiments included in pervious chapters illustrating the helpfulness of employing such thinking, one is drawn to the work of Park, quoted by Goffman; "In a sense, and in so far as the mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons" (Park, 1950:250, cited in Goffman, 1959:30). Goffman here is arguing for something much richer and more profound than the idea that individuals play roles, what is been expressed is that the performances of individuals are far from masking what is actually in their back stage or who they truly are (as is commonly assumed). To be a person, then is to perform being a person. It is important at this point to outline performance as part of the study is being employed within the limits of dramaturgical understanding accompanied by the additions of the notion of possible selves. That is, performances and the roles played are influenced by the combination of the many possibilities an individual sees

in their future, whether desired or not; the presence of an audience; how such an audience engages with the on-going performance; and how such a performance is realised.

Professional footballers experiencing a career transition away from the Premier League, the social others surrounding them, family, friends and coaches, all as social beings, are accustomed to distinguishing between true and false performances. However, if this study is to truly employ the type of conceptualization of self-identity that it proposes and considering the direction of Goffman, then it is forced to cast its gaze further. The distinction rather should between performances that are convincing and those that are unconvincing. Those performances that work and those that do not. It should be noted here, that this study is not suggesting that, motivated to avoid a feared possible self or driven to attain a desired one, players are consciously manipulating or attempting to fraud those around them. Instead consider the assumption that the performances of an identity are an inevitable process.

The self-identity, its construction and management, with regard to the participants of this study can be understood as a social product in three senses. First, it is a product of the performances that these individuals put on in social situations, for example their reactions when it is first confirmed that they are going to be released, the manner in which they present themselves when around family and friends and how they take part in activities in new clubs or at their original club in the hope of impressing coaches who may use their 'footballing contacts' to help find them a new club. One should not consider that behind these performances there is some form of quintessential core 'inside' the players waiting to be given expression in social situations similar to those just mentioned. Rather, the sense of self arises as a result of publicly validated performance. Secondly, even though participants perform an active role in fashioning these self-indicating performances, they are generally constrained to images of themselves that can be socially supported in the context of a given status hierarchy. Thus, the self is a

social product in the sense that it depends upon validation awarded and withheld in accordance with the norms of a their social audience. The construction and management of the self-identities of participants are understood with addition of a third and final sense. Such notions of who they are and how they present themselves are influenced by the 'tandeming' motivational effect of a feared possible self, matched with a hoped for possible self. Backed by the evidence found in the collected and analysed data this study can assert that following their release, if participants can still fathom themselves to be a football player they have the ability to engage with their social audience as one. In order though for such a future self to have a behavioural impact, as mentioned before it must paired equally with a future self that is feared. This feared self may not be a player unable to play for a club, it may be the individual unable to earn a decent income or being judged a failure by social others. Such possible selves though must always be rooted in social experiences. The performances of participants influenced by these possible selves and supported by their social context strengthen their chances to have their identities dramatically realised by their differing audiences.

8.6 Conclusion

With all but a few participants experiencing their career transition at the same time as they took part in the research, the majority of the study's unique sample were in the middle of their transitions away from professional Premier League football. Their self and identity are not static things but the outcome of the configuring of personal events, which include not only what has been but also 'anticipations of what will be' (Polkinghorne, 1988: 150). As creative and dynamic processes, the self and identity contain a temporal dimension, that is to say, they comprise not only images of the current selves but also images that are placed in the future as possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1987) and possible identities (Osyerman and James, 2011). As Goffman (1959: 245) indicates: "The self, then as a performed character, is not an organic thing, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the

characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.”

Chapter 9

There Is More To Life Than Football: 'Cooling Out' The Mark Through Legitimising Possible Selves

9.1 Introduction

In the discussion of career transitions from Premier League teams it is important to acknowledge the role that the Education and Welfare Officers (EWO) play at each club. As part of this study the opportunity arose to speak with three such officers from different clubs, Alfred, Simon and Billy. Since the time of data collection, this role has now been divided into two positions by some but not all of the clubs included in this study. Within such clubs these two positions now exist as Club Welfare Officer and Club Education Officer. The study will examine the data collected from these individuals considering them as EWOs and acknowledges that the responsibilities of each of these individuals changed from club to club. Broadly speaking, the primary concern of such officers was the provision of adequate education to scholarship players within the Premier League academies and to ensure the safeguarding of all players' welfare at their respective clubs. Due to time restriction caused by the training schedules of senior players, and the pressure to provide educational courses for young players, EWOs spent the majority of their official contact time with young aspiring academy players. It should be noted that within this chapter the data collected from EWOs did not relate to any particular participant of this study, instead they spoke of different players who have sought their help during their time as EWOs. Therefore this chapter deliberately distinguishes between the word, *player*, when interpreting the comments of the EWO and the implications their actions have on players in general and not those who have taken part in this study. *Participant*, is used when referring to individuals who agreed to take part in this project.

Outside of this educational contact time, EWOs explained how players often approached them on an individual basis. EWOs described how these sorts of encounter seemed to occur following a player's release or

as a player began to understand their diminishing chances of a sustained future as a professional player. For some officers such provision of care was part of what their positions and job description entailed, for others such interactions while always undertaken were not officially developed within their written contracts (this was generally the case for players who are released by the club but return in time seeking informal help). Goffman's first published work regarding adaptations to failure and the metaphor of *Cooling out the Mark* (1952) is employed here to understand this unique element of this investigation's data through the use of such a metaphor. I propose and develop the notion that players are "cooled out" as part of their career transitions by EWOs encouraging players to engage with possible selves outside of a football environment. The development of such possible selves and the legitimization of pre-existing possible selves add to the empowerment of individuals to manage and construct identities following their transition from a club or the professional game entirely. Such an interpretation as the one proposed will also engage with literature from employability studies surrounding the topic of Outplacement. While still discussed and applied across a range of employability studies (e.g., Gerards et al, 2014; Hallqvist and Hyden, 2013; Leenders et al, 2014), outplacement (with relevance to this study) was comprehensively discussed in the mid 1980's and early 1990's. During this period of time it too successfully engaged with Goffman's Cooling Out metaphor. In order to support the proposition that players are often cooled out through the legitimization of their possible selves this chapter will illustrate, (i) the importance of the role EWOs can play in the identity management of individuals as they progress through their career transition; (ii) how such support can be understood using Goffman's cooling out metaphor; and (iii) explore how such an understanding can engage with literature of a similar kind within employability studies.

9.2 Education and Welfare Officers

EWOs spoke of how players who had an understanding their of fate while still at a club and players who had been released by the club in the past would approach them seeking assistance in their transitions away from

the club or often out of professional football. For example, Alfred (an experienced Educational Welfare Officer at a Premier League Club) holds the opinion that he regarded as very realistic in relation to the potential players have of warranting selection into the club's first team. Alfred described how tough competition for such a place is, how skilled players must be and the help of timely "bits of luck that all players need". He also describes the different types of situations players are in when they approach him regarding their career transitions. Upon realising during the season and prior to receiving official confirmation that they would be released at the end of the year, players would come to speak with him. Alfred also discussed how other players return after trials or spells of play away at other clubs and seriously consider the possibility of leaving football. He describes his initial feelings towards players who have been released in the following comments:

> "I have been in and around football now since I was maybe 9, I got signed and went through being released and having to find my way...The issue is when these (players) come in here the education is mandatory as part of the scholarship. The majority don't really want to be listening to you or spending their off day in here (the classroom) with us. But you also get the lads who have come through the system. But they soon begin to understand the game and that's not the one out there (on the pitch). So we get lads (seeking support following/pending their release) looking to head on out (of professional football) from here but we also get lads coming back to us looking for a bit of help too."
>
> Former Players? (Interviewer)
>
> Yes.
>
> How old would they be? (Interviewer)
>
> "Oh really they are still young men…some though can be in the their thirties and some can be a bit older and should have left the game sooner, if you ask me. They are lads who would have come through the club in the earlier days. You know? They didn't quite last here with us, but they get signed with a

different club for a bit. You know often they go down a league or two and they either realise this isn't for them or they have got the chance to stay at a high level and realise that they are not good enough or didn't get that bit of luck all players need. They come looking for information about the classes we did and what qualifications and certs they had…BTECS, coaching certs. You ask them how they are getting on and help them out…get into a college or give them a reference for a job. You get a lot of that…players coming back looking for a bit of support. And even though they aren't with the club anymore I will always try to help the lad."

Alfred here describes in general terms how players initially come to him during their career transition. If we consider how Alfred describes the manner in which players seek him out following or leading up to their release, the importance of EWOs as a useful resource or form of support seems to become clearer to players once their career transition begins and as the need to manage and reconstruct their identities becomes apparent. Alfred remarks that players both past and present of the club seek support during their transitions and this is echoed by the sentiments of other EWOs:

"They begin to see themselves not earning enough in the long term to keep at it…some just don't enjoy the game anymore, well I think that's true with most players. They have their days where they love the game and you see that in their play and trainin' but there are days when we all hate this fucking game too. Some players just have more of those days and it eats at them, they come to you saying they would just be happy out." (Billy)

"The smart ones will be thinking of what happens if this doesn't work I need a back up plan and we try to do that when they are here. You always get the lads coming back thinking about stepping away rather than heading down to league football, not knocking that mind there are some quality players there but some of them… have just had enough. They come and I…we do our best for them." (Simon)

Billy and Simon reinforce Alfred's comments. The fact that players who have been released from clubs where they spent their academy careers

are willing to return following their subsequent release from their current clubs illustrates the importance of the role played by EWOs in facilitating players' identity management during their career transition. As players begin to consider university and college courses or entering the mainstream labour market, possible selves outside of football begin to play a more prominent part in the management of players' identities. Individuals recognise and seek out their current and former EWOs for help and support during their transitions.

9.3 Released Players as *Marks* needing to be *Cooled*

Assigning the role of mark to players who are experiencing career transitions is appropriately justified from the outset by the initial comments of the *Cooling Out* metaphor. Goffman in this case describes a *mark* who requires cooling out as a person who no longer sustains one of his social roles and is about to be removed from it. The case then is easily made for individuals undertaking the management of transformed identities as their role as a Premier League player is coming to an end. Billy's comments below explain how with the realisation of their pending release it becomes more difficult for players to maintain their footballing identity while still at their respective clubs awaiting official confirmation that they will not be resigned.

> "Lads (from the first or reserves teams) don't come to me saying oh I want to keep going with their education. They're working hard to earn their pay, what they do off the pitch and all that I may not agree with but they were all academy players once and I always keep that in mind- you know? Over the years I have had lads come to me when things aren't looking too good and they are thinking about getting out earlier. Most of the time I had them as academy players and they may have moved on, few really stay at the club…they get picked up by other teams. So they give me a call- "Billy I am thinking about trying something else", and they remember a talk we had from a college or uni or else they are looking for a bit of advice with CV's that aren't about football. Even those that are thinking about coaching…they ah…come to you every now and again. I think that says a lot about the job I've done and we do. These

> men are still young really they have moved on to other clubs from here but it's this phone here that they are calling or putting their heads into the office."

Billy describes, similarly to Alfred, how players who come to him are not just players being released from his own club but players who were former players of the club. These individuals would have experienced Billy as their EWO during the early stages of their career. The comment he included from players "I am thinking of trying something else" is evidence that players hold possible selves for their future employability outside of the role they are no longer able to maintain as a professional player. Billy explains that he often supplies guidance and advice in relation to résumé writing or exploring the opportunity to attend higher level education.

Goffman contends that persons protect themselves with all kinds of rationalizations when they have a buried image of themselves, which the facts of their status do not support. Within the cooling out metaphor examples of what a person may tell themselves in an attempt to construct such protection include; that they have not been given a fair chance; that they are not really interested in becoming something else; that the time for showing his mettle has not yet come; that the usual means of realising their desires personally or morally are distasteful, or require too much dull effort. For players this maybe a scenario where they feel perhaps the coaching staff did not like them, or they were not given enough chances to play in order to show management how good they were. By means of such defences, a person saves themselves from committing a cardinal social sin- the sin of defining ones self in terms of a status while lacking the qualifications which an incumbent of that status is supposed to possess. In initial conversations with participants this proved to be the case, with players giving many reasons for why they had been unsuccessful in their pursuit of a long lasting career in top-level football. These defenses took form as examples of participants describing a scenario where they felt perhaps the coaching staff did not like them or;

they were not given enough chances to play in order to show management how good they were and what they could do. The most common and apparent form of this defensive rationale however was that many participants explained how they did not consider a player as not having *made it* until they reached a stage in their career where they played regularly in Premier League fixtures for their club. We are reminded of such sentiments by the comments of Ian[10] (who is first introduced in this thesis describing how he had always dreamed of signing his first contract),

> "Really I don't think anyone has made it until they are up there training week in week out with the first team of the club, not just training but playing and they're on the telly making a proper contract…then you are a footballer". (Ian)

While these forms of defence were still maintained in some cases as the relationships developed during the vignette and interviewing process and as players moved through their own transition, some participants seemed to be more honest with themselves and in interview regarding their release, acknowledging the true difficulty of securing a contract in such a saturated market. Participants (bravely) reflected upon the own skill set and considered that perhaps it may not have been high enough to warrant a new contract.

Participants all possessed possible selves of *making it* and at some time or another they could all justifiably consider such a possible future for themselves as a not too far reaching expectation. Goffman (1952) explains the disappointment of such reasonable expectations creates the need for consolation. A person may be involuntarily deprived of his position or involvement and made in return something that is considered a lesser thing to be. Participants' initial reactions to the realisation that they were going to be released often reflected this. It is mainly on these

[10]Ian is first introduced in this thesis in Chapter 6 describing how he had always dreamed of signing his first contract)

occasions that the need arises for him to be cooled out. Goffman (1952: 454) explains:

> "A person maybe involuntary deprived of a role under circumstance, which reflect unfavorably on his capacity for it. The lost role may be one that he had already acquired or one that he had openly committed himself to preparing for. In either case the loss is more than a matter of ceasing to act in a given capacity: it is the ultimate proof of an incapacity to play the role and in many cases it is even more than this. The moment of failure often catches a person acting as one who feels that he is an appropriate sort of person for the role in question. Assumption becomes presumption, and failure becomes fraud. The loss of substance is thereby added loss of face. Of the many themes that can occur in the natural history of an involvement, this seems to be the most melancholy, here it will be quite essential and quite difficult to cool the mark out."

Applying the thinking of Goffman participants will have come to define their possible career lines in terms of a sequence of legitimate expectations and to base their self-conceptions on the assumption that in due course they will be what the institution allows persons to become. Players from their entry and first signing with a club will train when they are expected to train, in the method they are instructed to and act in a fashion that is deemed socially acceptable by their coaches and teammates. By abiding by the physical and social rules of their club, players should expect to rise through the ranks and compete for a place in the starting eleven. Often this may not be the case, and when such aspirations are not realised, players may need to be cooled out. Alfred explains how in the early stages of their careers players will hold a conception of a linear progression through the ranks of their clubs. Warnings and precautions flagged in these initial stages of their careers are not always "taken seriously" by the players or deemed to apply to them, as Alfred describes:

> "They are good lads I mean don't get me wrong, but when you explain to them that they are not all going to make it and have this big long career, they think you aren't speaking about them.

> You are speaking to the lad sitting beside him. I think that pretty soon they realise what it is like as a pro after a year or two. Still though in my experience these younger players then know-"okay I might not be a star top player" but they think "okay but I'm going to have a career in this league or at worst at the championship level." Then you see the lights slowly start to come on. The lad will see just how tough it is to carve yourself out a place or spot. You see them begin to realise, "Hang on maybe I'm not cutting it". It's not knocking the lad, it's just…it's that tough. We have an idea of who is coming back and who isn't and I think most of the players do too after a while, so I get these lads coming to me saying, "What are my options then?""

We can see then that the players Alfred is talking about hold appropriate possible selves that they will indeed secure a contract and long career as a footballer. When the occasion arises that they realise this future self may seem unlikely to come to fruition, it is then that they turn to Alfred and are required to be cooled out.

9.4 Cooling Out the Mark/Legitimizing Player's Possible Selves

In line with the propositions laid out so far within this study Goffman (1952) explains that sometimes however, a member of an organization may fulfil some of the requirements for a particular status, especially the requirements concerning technical proficiency and seniority, but not other requirements, especially the less codified ones having to do with the proper handling of social relationships at work. The responsibility must fall to someone to break the bad news to the victim; someone must tell him that he has been fired, or that he has failed his examinations or that he has been by-passed for promotion. After the blow-off, someone has to cool out the mark, the necessity of disappointing the expectations that a person has taken for granted may be infrequent in some organizations, but in others it occurs all the time. From the data collected from EWOs in this study, the cooling out phase can just as easily occur later than the original release of a player. As part to this study *organisation* as implied by Goffman (1952) is humbly developed further. This investigation's analysis does hold *organisation* to refer exclusively to the Premier

League team and clubs players play for, within the interpretation of study it also refers to the profession of football.

For the players experiencing a career transition, cooling out represents a process of adjustment to a situation arising from having defined themselves in the past that now their social facts have come to contradict. The comments first made by Ricky come to mind: “I am a professional footballer, who at the end of the day isn’t getting paid and who isn’t with a big club or any club worth talking about”. Players must therefore be supplied with a new framework in which to see and judge himself. Goffman describes how a process of redefining the self along defensible lines must be instigated. Since the mark himself is frequently in too weakened a condition to do this, the cooler (in this case the EWO but this could be any significant social other), must initially do it for them. For example, Billy initially begins by describing some of the help he provides to released players which are interpreted viewing him as the cooler legitimizing the possible selves of players and thus helping them to redefine themselves along defensible lines. These defendable social identities include: those of an individual seeking employment through the successful application of his résumé, or an individual potentially studying for a university degree. However Billy also describes a powerful example of the type of weakened individual Goffman talks about, one who is unable to confront their now illegitimate and failed social role:

> “Listen it could be as little as reading a CV…making a call to a university seeing what’s available, pointing them to the PFA support. It can be a bit more though sometimes you have players who are dealing with issues with alcohol and drugs, they remember you being there trying to help when their we released and now they need a bit more help. Sometimes that is just calling up a player and making sure they are okay. Take XXXXXX, (a former player from the club) everyone knows he has his demons, but well I have always stayed in touch nothing massive but just make sure he is alright now and again. So I heard he hadn’t been seen in the usual spots for a bit, so I drop him a text and he gives us a call- How you doing

> XXXXXXX? “I have been on a three day bender with two birds”. There is no way I’m able to go and get him but I put a call to his Mum and he is picked up the next day. That’s not the first time something like that has happened but it’s probably the worst of the bunch, you know? He is a great lad and I’ll give him all the help I can, even if it’s from that way of a distance but that’s what keeps you motivated to help the lads that technically aren’t our players anymore, you don’t want something similar happening to them- ya get me? But its strange though, XXXXXX was probably the best…well one of the best players we had through here, who took the hand at the likes of XXXXXXX and XXXXXXX, and in the end he may be having the worst time of it.”

Billy, yet again, describes how he helps players who come to him looking for help once they begin to think about their transition out of football. He describes how both current players at the club and former players approach him. He provides information on further and higher education courses, while also helping with CV writing as best he can. Billy also acknowledges the role the PFA can play in helping some players as they try to step away from football. Billy’s sentiments also share his experience with a former player who has experienced an unhealthy transition away from professional football. Here we can understand this sense of an individual struggling with the need to proactively manage and reconstruct his identity as his social circumstances no longer support his performance. Rather, as proposed by Goffman, it is up to family, friends and other individuals, such as Billy, to initiate and help with this identity management.

One way in which this is achieved by EWOs is through the encouragement of players to develop new possible selves outside of football and in some cases the actual provision of these possible selves. In the case of players who already have such possible selves, support such as this will only further legitimise the development of these future selves that players will have already began to use as part of their initial identity management and construction. Such support is given through conversations about these possible selves, outlining the different future

possibilities for players and through listening to players' vision of themselves as part of their career transition. Such a method of 'cooling out' can be understood as the dramatic realization of players' possible selves outside of football by an EWO.

The position taken to view the cooling out of players as the dramatic realization of their possible selves aligns itself well to Goffman's (1959) original metaphor. The symmetry between the two can be found in Goffman's (1952) offering of solutions to the *problem of cooling the mark out*. Such solutions consist of offering the individual a status that differs from the one they have lost or failed to gain, but one which provides at least something or a somebody for him/her to become. Usually the alternative presented to the mark is a compromise of some kind, providing him with some of the trappings of his lost status as well as with some of its spirit (Goffman, 1952). The metaphor provides its readers with the example of how a lover may be asked to become a friend. In the cases of participants within this study they can be offered possible selves by an EWO that in some way relate to their unique experience as a professional athlete. In the case of James, following his career transition, he explained how through the support from his family and guidance from his club's EWO he secured both a university offer from a top UK institution to study Sport Science, along with a Sport scholarship from the university to play collegiate football. James engaged with a possible self outside of the footballing environment of his former club. This possible self was one that clearly held a strong sporting association and with his scholarship to play football, the possible self and the role it played in James's identity management held some of the trappings of his former identity, as proposed by Goffman. As contended earlier his previous identity has not died a social death, rather it has helped in the formation and construction of a new identity, a process that took some of its first steps during his engagement with a possible self as a university student legitimised in part by his EWO. Alfred describes how some of the help he offers players who come to him not only relates to possible selves outside of football, but also to possible selves surrounding an image or desire of

players to continue to play football. Contesting the inadequacy of previous literatures surrounding sporting career transitions and the presumption of an exclusive identity and its foreclosure (e.g. Lavellee and Wylleman, 2000. Mitchell et al, 2014; Brown and Potrac, 2009), again we see a cooling out process that contains some similarities to players' past identity.

> "They still want to be a footballer for a lot of them. That sometimes will last a few trials with different teams until the summer; it can go on for a year or two and they move down through the divisions; and for some it won't ever leave them…I am still looking at myself and seeing a footballer haha. They take inspiration from stories of lads getting let go and in factories or on Sunday league teams and working their way up again. For a lot of them I think most people if they're honest thinks it's a bit of a fantasy. But who's to say that they wont? I think at the very least they should give it a go, so along with the other stuff (such as interview preparation, help with cv writing, advice on further and higher education) we put together a dvd of the player, their highlights that we have recorded from matches, video of them doing drills and fitness tests I then will make 50 copies and we send a copy with a cover letter, contact details and football résumé to different clubs."

Alfred comments illustrate how through the support and help he provides players with, he legitimatises possible selves that can be outside the footballing world but can also contain similar characteristics to individuals' former identities as players and this, therefore, is the point of cooling out the mark. A player may once have constructed his identity around the image of a professional football player. Following the initiations of their career transition and through the support of EWOs like Alfred, the individual may hold multiple possible selves, e.g. going to university; learning a trade; or being a football player succeeding in their search for a new club. While this identity of a player without a club is not the same as the previous image held by the individual, it is still a possible self, linked to a former self. This new possible self is one that has been legitimatised

by a significant social other and will play a role in how a player will construct and manage their identity.

Of course some participants strongly identified with the vignette themed by the restitution narrative. Participants spoke of how they too had ambitions to play again at a high level, fulfilling the restitution prophesy of: *Yesterday I was a footballer. Today I am not. Tomorrow I will be one again*. Goffman (1952) explained how another related way of handling the mark is to offer him another chance to qualify for the role at which he has failed. After his fall from grace, a player is allowed to retrace his steps and try again. Goffman notes that third and fourth chances are seldom given to marks, and second chances are often given but seldom taken. Failure at a role removes a person from the company of those who have succeeded, but it does not bring him back "in spirit anyway" (Goffman, 1952:460), to the society of those who have not tried or are in the process of trying. The person who has failed in a role is a constant source of embarrassment, for none of the standard patterns of treatment are quite applicable to him. Instead of taking a second chance, he usually goes away to another place where his past does not bring confusion to his present. The collected data for this study would tend to disagree with Goffman's point that the marks are offered another chance to qualify for the role at which they failed. EWOs were in no position to offer a second chance at the club to players, obviously this ruling was a responsibility of management. Such an opportunity is only offered in the smallest number of cases; for example, it may occur if a player has left the club following their release, played well in a lower division, and his former club seeks to resign him. Goffman's point that individuals do not want to accept a second chance is one that may not so easily apply to participants in this study. Both Paul and Gary express how they would have grasped the opportunity of a second chance if offered another contract with their respective clubs.

> "I would love to stay on here." (Paul)

> "I wanted to stay at the club, I knew the deal and I acted professionally…but I would have given anything to stay on at a club like XXXXXX." (Gary)

Both Paul and Gary's comments are points that would seem to diverge from Goffman's metaphor of adaptions to failure. Both have failed to secure a new contract or be resigned by their respective clubs. Such is their understanding of just how regularly this occurrence happens, that they do not seem to be influenced by a sense of embarrassment that would arise if they were able to reclaim their position as paid players within their clubs.

However, the second element of this point relating to seeking a new role in a place and space where his past may not bring confusion to his current role relates best to desires of players to seek a new contract at a different club. The role of EWOs, and indeed other coaches in the club in cooling out the mark in this case is one of the most prominently shared experiences of all participants in this study. Here part of the process of cooling out participants involved being told by EWOs and coaches that they would *give a call* to the coaches and management they knew around the league in order to help them find an alternative club. Former players, James and Shane are examples of this:

> "Management were great really after I was that bit initially upset…They told me I had improved as a player during my time at the club and that there just wasn't a spot for me in their plans heading forward. But they said they would make a few calls around for me and let other teams know the type of player I was." (James)

> "They say they will make this call and do this and that- "oh I know such and such down at XXXXXX or over in XXXXX" but they are just saying that so you don't get too upset, they said it other players in the past so I knew nothing was coming of it. Like I said, it's done to clam you down." (Shane)

Both James and Shane (though the latter is sceptical of such a process) illustrate again the appropriateness of the cooling out metaphor as they

explain how they would seek to manage and also maintain their identities as Premier League footballers at different clubs.

While not directly related to EWO legitimizing or fostering players engagement with their other possible selves outside of football, in his final solution to the *problem of cooling out the mark,* Goffman (1952) explains that there is the possibility that the mark may, in a manner of speaking, go into business for himself. He can try to gather about him the persons and facilities required to establish a status similar to the one he has lost, albeit in relation to a different set of persons. This way of refusing to be cooled is often rehearsed in a fantasy of the "I'll show them" kind, but sometimes it is actually realised in practice. It is perhaps in the region of the fantasy of proving others wrong that Goffman suggests a defeated self makes its last stand. This rings very true for players like Shane. Shane describes how he received confirmation that he would not be offered a new contract half way through the season. He chose to leave the club without seeking the council of its EWO and was driven to show his former club, teammates and coaches that he was capable of competing at the highest level. Harry also discussed his belief that his former coaches would do nothing to help him find a new club and such offers of help were viewed as empty promises. Harry was one such participant that held this attitude through the majority of the data collection process.

> "I am going to prove them wrong, show them that I'm good enough. They are going to see they made a mistake, ya get me bruv (brother)? I have been on my own since I got here. I look after myself, I got this like and I will get further again on my own without any of them promises to call up "old mates"."

Harry's comments relate both to Goffman's suggestions that individuals are offered fragments of their past identity. Harry still wants to be a footballer but he wants to "go into business for himself" (Goffman, 1952:458). Harry showed great determination, (and sometimes hostility) in wanting to prove to others he could not only play football at the top

level in the UK, but that he could also get there on his own and did not need the help of his former club.

9.5 'Cooling Out' the Mark with Possible Selves

Interpreting the comments made by Alfred, Billy and Simon, the role played by EWOs in players' career transitions and subsequent identity management share similarities to a body of literature within employability studies dealing with Outplacement (OP) and its practitioners. While still a current theme of academic discussion (e.g. Gerards et al, 2014; Hallqvist and Hyden, 2013; Leenders et al, 2014), this topic has been comprehensively analyzed during a period of time from mid 1980s to early 1990s. Definitions and understandings of OP from such a time period examine how outplacement practitioners are employed by large firms to assist terminated employees in their transition and re-employment and closely parallel Goffman's *cooling out* metaphor. By means of conclusion, certain assertions made within the above chapter that both share points of comparison and contention within this body of literature will be discussed.

Advocates of outplacement are seemingly justified in their contention that employees are traumatised upon being notified of termination. Such practitioners are especially concerned with defusing the hostilities that surface with dismissal. During the "crisis management period" (Gibson, 1991:4) individuals accordingly begin confronting the reality of job loss. In addition to generating ill-feelings about ex-employers and concerns over finances, termination commonly damages self-concepts, particularly for those whose role in a firm is central to their identity. Unemployment also entails an abrupt break from regimented activity, and the loss of such structure may exacerbate negative affect, "anger, depression and destructive thinking…tend to come to the boil if people have nothing but time on their hands" (Filipczak, 1992:48). The similarities to the event being discussed within this study are clearly visible, examples include multiple participants who discussed how they felt emotionally saddened upon their realization that they were going to be released by their club;

players such as Shane and Harry had clearly developed ill feelings towards their former coaches and clubs; and all participants engaged in identity management following damage to a self concept that was heavily influenced by their role as a Premier League player. Just as EWOs help players through career transitions, outplacement practitioners begin serving immediately as an important support resource. Outplacing practitioners in the role of "helping hand", lead fired or laid off employees "through the harrowing and frightening emotional stages" (Kingsley, 1984:98).

Miller and Robinson (1994) describe how dismissal from employment denotes rejection and rejection generally produces anger. From an OP perspective, Miller and Robinson continue and describe how in order to successfully cool out a mark following their dismissal, situational redefinition should also facilitate redefinitions of the self and the identities belonging to the individual, serving in turn to enhance distance from former employers. The potential for retaliation is diminished to the extent that individuals define themselves less as "terminated employees" and more as "unemployed workers", again we see comparisons to the *a player without a club* identity. Rejection also deals a blow to self-esteem, even if job loss is not internalised, and this may compromise one's ability to secure another job. OP strategists (Brammer and Humberger, 1984; Furler, 1980) therefore suggest that identity restoration is an important precondition to job search efforts. Granholm (1991: 223) suggests that "Counseling is needed for individuals to rebuild the feelings of personal competence and the motivation that are essential for coping with and solving survival and employment problems". In short, the outplacers must convince clients that termination does not equate with failure. One method of this reconstitution of identity (Miller and Robinson, 1994), which shares similarities with this study, appears in OP literature as the *Redefinition of the Situation.*

Outplacers are said to be highly concerned with redefining dismissals so they are defensible for both ex-employees and ex-employers. Essentially

borrowing from Goffman (1952: 452), “instruction in the philosophy of taking loss”, redefinition aims to bring clients to accept the fact of termination and the idea that they gain nothing through retaliation. Within the realm of Premier League football the notion of redefinition from OP literature is also helpful to consider, as it has shown to be important in helping individuals cope through their career transition. Redefinition is also regarded as important in helping them cope with dismissal in an individuals’ own minds (unresolved issues deflected attention from reemployment), and for generating more positive attitudes with which to later impress job contacts. Outplacers are said to encourage clients to adopt the view that losing a job is not a personal tragedy, nor is it even a negative event. Reflecting on the actions of Billy, Simon and Alfred who shared their experiences with this study, through enlightening players to the number of potential possible selves that are available to them, and by legitimizing players’ pre-existing possible selves, EWO are similar to those OP practitioners who promote the adoption of a view that losing a job is not an entirely negative event to individuals. Guinn (1988: 48-49) suggested, “the outplacement counselor’s role is to try to minimize (a negative attitude) by focusing on the termination as actually *a solution*. The termination allows affected employees to move to a new challenge and career satisfaction rather than the frustration of a bad job fit”. Thus, as explained by Robinson and Miller (1994), outplacers commonly attempt to transform a dismissal’s definition from an ending to a beginning. Similarly one could view the support and guidance provided by EWO as one that suggests while the time at a Premier League club may be coming to an end, this also marks the beginning of a time at university, college or even (for the a small number) at a new club.

Within OP literature the notion of the Bystanders, as described by Brockner (1992), Simon (1988), and Miller and Robinson (1994), was one that did not align as neatly to the findings of this study as those of the Reconstitution of Identity and Redefinition of Identity. Although Goffman viewed the mark as only the object to which the cooling out efforts need to be directed, OP advocates stress that others should be likewise

addressed, particularly in situations of large layoffs or reductions in forces. “Workplace Survivors” are held to be the most threatening to employers, especially if they have identified closely with the dismissed (e.g. Brockner, 1992; Simon: 1988, Weinstein and Liebman:1991). Those remaining on the job “watch the way management treats a terminated employee and they take this as a signal of how they will be treated” (Guinn, 1988:49). Professional footballers are not long into their careers until they appreciate the saturated labour market in which they try to earn their living (Roderick, 2006). Miller and Robinson describe how those who remain at a place of employment may experience any of several reactions, ranging from “survivor’s guilt” to anxiety about their own jobs and diminished trust in employers. Accordingly, productivity may be damaged as survivor’s become reluctant to extend effort and take risks for their firms. Advocates of outplacement and the cooling process it employs in the past have therefore agreed, “if you…are to help employers function effectively after downsizing, you must first re-establish employees feelings of security and their belief that they can still count on the organization for fairness and justice” (Brockner, 1992:15). One could argue the fact that for players who have not been released by football clubs, the offer of a new contract and the very fact these individuals are still playing for the club should re-establish their feelings of job security. However, as described previously, while players may be driven to make it and hold multiple possible selves containing images of reaching their goals, much of the data collected as part of this study would seem to suggest that players are still all too aware of their vulnerability as earning professionals. The positive possible selves of *making it* are constantly paired with the negative possible selves of not. This study is not so naïve as to suggest that from speaking to a sample of participants experiencing a career transition from professional football that it can establish with certainty that the reassurance remaining employees receive as described in OP literature is experienced by players in Premier League clubs who are not released at the end of their contracts. However from the unique perspective this project has gained from its collected data and working in and around the footballing environment it has examined, it is in a position

to make a well-informed assertion that such a process does not occur. The reaction and interaction of players remaining at clubs with those who are experiencing a career transition reaches as far as the performances described in the previous chapter. Players offer commiserations as a means of acknowledging the efforts of the released individual as a player trying to earn his place, but are quick not to be *dragged down* to a psychological place that might affect their own performance on the pitch and at the training grounds.

The process of cooling out a mark is a difficult one, both for the operator in the case the EWO who cools the mark out and for the players being released as the mark being cooled. Goffman (1952) explains that because of this, safeguards or preventative strategies often exist in order to aid or sometimes negate the process. It is important then to consider previous themes expressed within this study as flexible notions that can be viewed as what Goffman (1952) described as preventative strategies, and not strategies for cure. Cooling out is an institutionally organised feature of all employing football clubs but yet it operates informally via enmeshed interactions only some of which are an official kind. The conceptualization of players understanding their fate through an interpretation of the performances of others within their footballing environment is one whose characteristics enable it to also be considered as one such preventative strategy. Players understand their fate and know they are going to be released. Their release from their club does not come as a shock to them and (as previously explained) they begin to consider how they will construct and manage their new identities away from the club before they receive official confirmation that they will not be offered a new contract. This involves an engagement with possible selves that are further legitimised by social others, such as club EWOs. Such a process means that they when they receive their official release it comes as less of an emotional blow. This in turns means players can be cooled out by EWOs in a fashion that is helpful to players and their future, rather than being cooled out in order to ensure the player will not *cause a scene*

or *make any trouble* as they leave the club as suggested in OP literature (Brockner, 1992; Miller and Robinson,1994).

9.6 Conclusion

Identity work essentially entails “redefining the self along defensible lines” (Goffman, 1952:223) and can be coextensive with certain redefinitions of situations as described in the aforementioned OP literature. The comments of Billy, Alfred and Simon and the help and support they provided players experiencing a career transition is similar, if not identical, to some of the OP literature discussed. Both OP practitioners’ and EWOs’ strategies for cooling out their respective marks consist of providing ample material on individuals’ strengths, achievements, and life goals with which to later impress prospective employers, it also has utility for career planning- particularly in cases where competency is an issue. Such information encourages individuals to reflect on their entire record, reminding them they are still skilled and competent. Within this context identity work also facilitates situational redefinition, as termination within OP literature can be reframed as only a temporary rather than a career-ending event or as this project has framed such events as a career transition. Through the promotion and dramatic realisation of possible selves outside of a footballing environment EWOs play an important role in cooling out such individuals. Compared to existing employability literature this process is not carried out for the benefit of the club but rather in order to help their former players and in turn assist them in their identity management and (re)construction during their career transition.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

According to Drawer and Fuller (2002), the provision of socioeconomic services at professional football clubs for retiring players are inadequate, however, they do claim the Professional Footballers' Association provides significantly more help and advice to retired players on medical, financial, career, and educational matters than any other organisation. Despite this, Drawer and Fuller (2002) recommend that the soccer industry should develop a long-term strategy for managing the needs of players who are forced to retire. It is hoped that this study has shed some light on what the experience of being released is like for the hundreds of players who experience it every season. Outside of an academic environment the findings within this thesis offer an insight which has relevance for many stakeholders within the English football industry such as individual clubs that are concerned with the holistic care of players, the Professional Footballers' Association, League Football Education, the Premier League and the Football Association. The experiences participants shared in interview can engage willing clubs and governing bodies to construct support strategies for players experiencing the type of career transition that was at the heart of this study. This project sought to investigate the identity management strategies of professional footballers as part of their career transitions from the English Premier League. In doing so the project offers meaningful contributions to the sociology of sport, to employability/career studies, to theoretical discussions of workplace identity and debate regarding qualitative research methods.

Providing a final note on the research methods employed by this study, Mitchell et al (2014) end their quantitative cross sectional investigation of the athletic identity of elite footballers with a call for more qualitative orientated research that seeks to understand the environment that appears to shape the social identity of this especially unique and hard-to-reach population. This investigation offers its own answer to the call for a

shift in methodological approaches when conducting research into sporting career transitions. Acknowledging the sensitivity of the research topic, qualitative vignettes were successfully employed as the research method. Three vignettes were developed, each one the owner of a particular theme or narrative. These themes reflect the work of Arthur Frank (1995) in The Wounded Storyteller, and take the work of Smith and Sparkes (2004) and their vignettes used in dealing with sporting spinal cord injuries as their focus and point of departure. The three assigned narratives within the vignettes acted as a platform to present specific material that was hoped might provide points of conversation from which to approach this sensitive topic. In light of this, a singular vignette was devoted to a Restitution Narrative, a Quest Narrative, and finally a Chaos Narrative. A large amount of time and effort was devoted to the planning, construction and delivery of these vignettes as outlined in Chapter 5. While the method is not employed in a fashion exactly similar to the work of Smith and Sparkes (2004), I believe deeply that the quality, depth and genuineness of the data collected would not have been achieved was it not for the use of these vignettes. It is hoped that such a process can be offered to future students as means of approaching data collection (particularly but not exclusively to sensitive research topics), and is proposed as an addition to the strategies in which vignettes have been employed in the past.

This study has also sought to reconceptualise the notion of Possible Selves. In the past the model has been primarily employed as a theoretical tool within psychological investigations (Haman et al. 2010; Robinson and Davis 2001; Hoyle and Sherrill, 2006). This is understandable given that the origins of Possible Selves lie with Markus and Nurius, both of whom are situated within psychological scholarship. However, influenced by the call of Sparkes (2000) for enquiry into the potential value in considering Possible Selves within sociological perspectives, this investigation sought to reconsider Possible Selves through a sociological lens. In their original work, Markus and Nurius (1986:954) describe how possible selves are individualised or

personalised, but they are equally very clear that possible selves are "distinctly social". Markus and Nurius (1986) continue to explain that possible selves are direct results of previous social comparisons in which the individual's own behaviours, characteristics, ambitions and fears have been contrasted and compared to those of others around them. They even go as far as providing an example sentence, "What others are now I could become" (p. 954).

Findings presented as part of this investigation place possible selves more thoroughly in the realm of the social. This investigation not only supports observations made by Osyerman, Ager and Grant (1995) but extends them further by explaining how the socially constructed possible selves of participants rely heavily on the backing of important others in their social environment as providers of important messages about which characteristics of particular identities are valued and important in differing social environments. The findings within this thesis contribute and extend the comments of Oakes and Turner (1990) through the examination of how others in participants' social environments provide information about how to be. Returning to data presented within discussion chapters for examples participants spoke of picturing themselves in the future throughout their lives during and after their footballing careers. For example, two players expressed the following sentiments:

> "Dad came from very little and he made it good by putting himself through education so it's always been part of, been a big part of our family…I wanted to have my A levels to just have the option of some day going to uni…Dad would pick me up after training and drive to college where I did classes in the evening with like adults and stuff…I wasn't just a footballer…I was brother or son studying." (Dave)

> "You copy players that are above you and you do what they do because you want to be in their position. You want to get where they are and seeing what they do about the place

> influences how you do things…You have the goal or dream I suppose to make it and you learn that from those lads ahead of you. You have to learn how to be a footballer." (Paul)

Influenced by the others around him within his footballing environment Paul builds his possible self of *making it* in the Premier League, echoing the aforementioned sentiment of Markus and Nurius (1986:954) "What others are now I could become". The extract from an interview with Dave, illustrate how within his family life, education is very important especially given the example Dave's father provides. From Dave's comments we can clearly see how the culture within his life outside of professional football and the values within that environment influenced the construction of his possible self in which he is studying at university. Such knowledge influenced the fashion in which participants' constructed and managed their differing possible selves. These *others* provide models for emulation and feedback about the kind of self one might become. It is here, when employed as sociological perspective we see the compatibility and co-operative characteristics Possible Selves share with Dramaturgy's emphasis on *audience*, *dramaturgical idealisation* and *realisation*. Discussion chapters have sought to provide readers with clear examples of the usefulness of not only employing possible selves within sociological investigations but also reconsidering the theory as a sociological perspective. Such a goal has been achieved by the development of a working partnership with Goffman's (1956) Dramaturgical Metaphor.

One of the contributing reasons for the mutualism this theoretical partnership has produced relies on the consideration of possible selves belonging to participants as social constructed. The comments of participants have illustrated how they were free to create any variety of positive and negative possible selves, whether they were in regard to football, education or potential career options. Yet the collection of possible selves participants held at any one time derived from the categories, experiences and discourses they witnessed or were exposed to within their own social and cultural environments. The investigation has

demonstrated how participants held possible selves informed by the actions and experiences of others around them, be that fellow professional players who were both successful and unsuccessful in their attempts to carve a 'long' career with a Premier League club or from the experiences of significant social others outside of a professional footballing environment. Understanding the comments of participants using this perspective has allowed this thesis to reinforce its repositioning of possible selves within the sociological scholarship, and added to sociological knowledge about career transitions out of sport.

This thesis has placed great conceptual importance on the social origins of possible selves belonging to its participants. The reasoning behind such a position is rooted in the sociological nature of the investigation and the firm belief in the significance of understanding how socially constructed possible selves influenced the identity-formation of participants. Conceptualising the notion of possible selves so firmly as sociological perspective is undertaken in much greater depth and with more conviction than previous research that has utilised the work of Markus and Nurius.

This study was positioned within literature that considered a football player's exit from the English Premier League as a career transition (Swain, 1991; Drahota and Eitzen, 1998; Taylor, 1972), and has sought to unpack the experiences of its participants during such a process. Brown and Potrac (2009) previously described how players as part of their investigation where stunned and shocked when faced with the news from coaches that they would be released. Contrary to these previous findings the data within this study indicates how players developed an understanding that they were going to be released long before they received official confirmation from their clubs and prior to the actual event taking place. Such comprehension of their professional fate was gained through the interpretation of their daily interactions within the footballing environment; how they were used in training, their de-selection from first and reserve teams; and how exchanges with their coaches, managers

and teammates had subtly changed. Such discourses are presented to the reader in this study as performances belonging to the footballing audiences of players.

Speaking about the manner in which the interactions within the club changed, some interviewees spoke of how teammates no longer saw them as a threat to their own professional careers. While in front of their footballing audiences and interacting with teammates, players rarely (if ever) “opened up” about how they were truly experiencing their career transition. Instead the accepted social etiquette demanded performances from both participants and fellow teammates that created a *thin reality*. Such a thin reality allowed both parties to navigate through the strategic interaction without the players still signed by the club becoming distracted by the experiences of released players. Ultimately, as part of these exchanges teammates offered a brief performance of consolation, inquiring into the search for a new club before resuming the status quo of daily performances within the club environment.

This study has demonstrated that career transitions and the subsequent management of identity do not begin when an official meeting is held with a player at the end of the season and he is told that his contract will not be renewed for the following year. Instead players rely upon their acute understanding of the social landscapes within their respective footballing environments. From the experiences interviewees shared it was evident how they attempted to take their professional futures into their own hands. Upon understanding the performances of their footballing audiences, many players approached management in order to address the issue of their future at their club, rather than wait until the end of the season. From the perspective of players, management held no objection or dislike towards such a strategy. This proved to be the case only as long as players responded in either an expected or accepted fashion to the event of being released. Whether that was to go ‘on trial’ in the hope of finding a new club or to leave football for education or an apprenticeship, the football club’s management was content with the

unfolding situation as these performances appear to be considered legitimate responses within the workplace culture of professional football.

This thesis has provided evidence that illustrates how, when players experience social environments where their audiences legitimised their performances, generally these were periods of uncertain time when individuals' career transitions proved to be smoother. These performances often were those of players motivated by a desire to attain positive future possible selves. The data presented and its subsequent analysis opens a window into the lives of participants. Through such a window the reader can see examples of participants striving to return to play professional football in the Premier League, and the identity associated with such ambition being supported by family and friends. Thus a renegotiated footballing identity is 'dramatically realised' and hence the individual player does not experience a career transition that is too severe. Other examples included participants offering identities and performances associated with studying at universities and learning trades. Even so difficulty arises when performances portrayed by participants are not dramatically realised by their audiences or supported in the context of their cultural surroundings. Examples of these types of scenarios dealt with possible selves similar to those just mentioned, for example, a return to football or returning to school. However, in these instances audiences did not legitimise the identities and subsequent performances.

This investigation also had the fortunate opportunity to consider the role played by Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). This investigation has found that the informality of the after care provided by EWOs is a vital support structure for players. Bringing to light the experiences of the EWOs who have contributed to this study offers meaningful insights to their peers and their wider profession. The sentiments shared by these individuals offers an expert understanding of just one of the forms of support that players experiencing a career transition find helpful. This project contends that such an understanding should be considered when

relevant stake holders such the PFA, the LFE, the Premier League, its clubs and their respective EWO's attempt to build upon their existing strategies of support for players undergoing their career transitions from professional football e.g. post-football career development and career exit pathways. Specifically, the project deals with when EWOs legitimatised identities linked to the positives possible selves of players and this contributes to smoother career transitions. Analysis of the conversations had with these EWOs centred of their ability to foster a smoother career transition for players through offering performances that legitimatised players' possible selves and identities. Examining the role played by EWOs, the issues of career transition was considered in relation to additional literature from employability research surrounding the issue of Outplacement (Brammer and Humberger, 1984; Furler, 1980; Gerards et al, 2014; Hallqvist and Hyden, 2013; Leenders et al, 2014) and Goffman's (1952) notion of "Cooling Out the Mark". Reflecting on the actions of participating EWO's through encouraging and enlightening players' engagement with a number of potential possible selves that are available to them, and by legitimizing players pre-existing possible selves during their career transitions, EWO are similar to Outplacement practitioners who promote the adoption of a view that losing a job is not an entirely negative event for individuals. A perspective of the career transition of this kind allows affected employees to move on to a new challenge and career satisfaction, rather than dwell on the frustration of their redundancy (Guinn, 1988). Thus, as explained by Robinson and Miller (1994), outplacers commonly attempt to transform definition of dismissal from an ending to a beginning. Similarly, in this study it is contended that EWO's do provide a similar type of support and guidance to players. Speaking about how they interacted with players during their career transitions, the EWOs described how they suggested to players while their time at a Premier League club may be coming to an end for a player, this also marks the beginning of a time at university, college or even (for a small number of players) at a new club.

Identity work essentially entails “redefining the self along defensible lines” (Goffman, 1952:223) and can co-exist with certain redefinitions of situations as described in the aforementioned Outplacement literature. This study demonstrates that both Outplacement practitioners’ and EWOs’ strategies for cooling out their respective marks consist of providing ample material on individuals’ strengths, achievements, and life goals with which to later impress prospective employers, it also has utility for career planning- particularly in cases where competency is an issue. This type information encourages individuals to reflect on their entire record, reminding them they are still skilled and competent. Through the promotion and dramatic realisation of possible selves outside of a footballing environment, EWOs play an important role in cooling out players experiencing career transitions. Compared to existing employability literature this process is not carried out for the benefit of the club but, rather, in order to help their former players as employees and in turn assist them in their identity management and reconstruction.

The recent reflections of former Ireland international, Roy Keane, considered by many fans as a Manchester United legend on a BBC Match of the Day interview seem to almost fit too perfectly with the sentiments consistent within this thesis. A fact perhaps that speaks to the success of the project’s efforts to seek experiences beyond the generalised responses and ambiguous rhetoric players provide to those outside of the tightly closed footballing environment. Keane (2014) states the following:

> “In different parts of your life, whether you are at home with your family, or when you are going to work, or you are playing at 3 o’clock on a Saturday, it’s an act. You are not going to act like that when you go home or when I am in the dressing room having a go at a lad or they are having a go at me. I think we are all actors in a sense.”

Similar to all the participants interviewed as part of this investigation, Keane alludes to the notions of multiple identities both within and outside

of football. Keane even goes as far as to employ almost identical language as the participants involved in this investigation. Indeed in his sentiment that "We are all actors", he uses a 'turn of phrase' that may as well have been plucked from Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Metaphor. The central theme in this investigation has proven to be the assertion of the existence of multiple identities[11] belonging to footballers as apposed to the thematic positioning of past research within sport scholarship offering the conception of an all-but exclusively athletic identity (North and Lavellee, 2004; Baillie and Danish, 1992; Messner, 1992, Grove et al, 1997). This project has provided clear and illustrative examples of the multiple identities belonging to footballers. Interestingly, the sentiments of interviewees demonstrate that instead of identities in competition with each other for their respective portrayals, the exchange and variations of identities are influenced by the interaction between participants and their audiences and the visions participants hold of themselves in the future. The core of this study's central theme and the theoretical understanding of identity is underpinned by the working combination of Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgy and Marcus and Nurius's Possible Selves (1986).

In order to place this study's contribution to and position within existing literature, it is first helpful to consider the way in which Mitchell et al (2014) describe how to excel in elite-level professional sport. They argue that athletes typically form a strong bond with their chosen specific sport. Wiechman and Williams (1997) explain how family, friends, coaches, teachers and, in some cases, differing media, often support the goal of advancement in that sport and, consequently, players begin to form what has been termed an athletic identity. This has been defined as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" (Brewer et al, 1993:237). The resultant effects of this perspective are that athletes may experience psychological, social and behavioural disturbance when de-selected (Coen and Ogles, 1993; Higgins, 1987; Horton and Mack, 2000;

[11] While not a new notion within wider sociology existing research dealing with sporting transitions (as reviewed in Chapter 3) has traditionally addressed the notion of an exclusive/ singular athletic identity

Showers, 1992; Sparkes, 1998, 2000) and lack post-career planning (Blann, 1985; Marcia, 1966; Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer, 1996). Mitchell et al (2014:1295) explain that historically, the mantra of 'live, breathe and eat" football is strongly advocated within youth development environments and is further supported by family and friends. It has been noted that those who are encouraged to place too strong an emphasis on their athletic identity become somewhat one-dimensional, and in that sense may come to view themselves soley as a sports person at the expense of other social roles (Wiechman and Williams, 1997). It is these deep cultural markers that past research perceived to evoke notions of an exclusive athletic identity and an equally all-consuming commitment to attaining professional status (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Holt and Dunn, 2004; Holt and Mitchell, 2006; Pain and Harwood, 2008; Parker, 2000). Similar notions have been termed "identity foreclosure" (Marcia et al, 1993; Petitpas, 1978). According to Marcia (1966), foreclosure occurs when individuals prematurely make a commitment to an occupation or ideology or, in the case of this study, a career in professional football. Mitchell et al (2014) claim this is especially pertinent as those players who fail to make a professional career are at risk of psychological effects and experience difficulties if their careers are prematurely terminated. This observation is consistent with previous work on athletic identity (e.g. Grove et al, 2004; Lavellee et al, 1997).

Wheeler et al (1999) explain that elite athletes often develop a sense of personal competence and establish their own self-identities through the sport in which they engage. This was very true for the participants of this study as their employment and experiences within Premier League football clubs credited and forcefully re-confirmed their footballing competence; such footballing proficiency and experience understandably established a strong part of their identity. In contrast to the findings in past literature, however, as part of this study many interviewees expressed how other things in their lives equally held great importance to them. This clearly is evident from their descriptions of their sense of self outside and away from football. Thus, the event of their release from their

respective Premier League clubs is not considered in terms of an identity foreclosure. Participants described how they valued their experiences in football and often recounted how such experiences *help make them who they are.* Career transition allowed participants more to time and energy to manage, engage and also reconstruct (if necessary) their previous and newly evolved identities.

For some this involved re-negotiating their footballing identities, for others they now spent more time with audiences outside of their footballing environments and offering appropriate performances. As they portrayed their non-footballing identities on a more regular basis, such as those involving ambitions to return to school and to begin new careers, some individuals experienced periods of adjustment that proved difficult. This was especially the case when their identities were not legitimised through the dramatic realisation of their performances to audiences associated with such identities. Compared with past research (Mitchell et al, 2014; Grove et al, 2004; Lavellee et al, 1997) this explanation offers fresh reasoning for why some athletes may experience harder career transitions than others.

The sentiments of Coakley (2007) express the notion that if sport has expanded a person's identity, experiences, relationships and resources, then their transition will likely be a smooth one. Messner (1992) suggests that those heavily involved in sport since childhood encountered serious adjustment problems as they try to make their transition out of sport. Coakley (2007) describes how athletes are not simply socialized out of sport. While still supporting the assertion of past research, that identity issues are part of the social and cultural contexts in which people make decisions about sport in their lives (Dacyshyn 1999; Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Swain, 1999; Kadlcik and Flemr, 2008; Lavellee and Robinson, 2007), this would seemingly act as an excellent position to reaffirm this project's understanding of the identity management strategies following the career transitions of players and its contribution as a new perspective to existing literature.

In this conclusion, therefore, I am not suggesting that players are consciously manipulating or attempting to fraud those around them. Instead I am asking readers to consider the approach that the performances of an identity are an inevitable process. Inspired by Goffman (1959) the project is arguing for something richer than the idea that participants played roles as if actors on different stages. What is being expressed is that the performances of individuals are far from masking what is actually in their back stage or who participants truly are. To be a footballer, son, friend or spouse, is to perform being such a person. That is, performances and the roles played are influenced by the combination of the many possibilities an individual sees in their future, whether desired or not; the presence of an audience; how such an audience engages with the on-going performance; and how such a performance is realised. With all but a few participants experiencing their career transition at the same time as they took part in the research, the majority of interviewees were in the middle of their transitions away from professional Premier League football. Thus, I am arguing that their self and identity are not static things, but the outcome of the (re)configuring of personal events, which include not only what has been but also 'anticipations of what will be' (Polkinghorne, 1988:150).

I am reminded here of an anecdote from the data collection process. In my final meeting with interviewee, James, having established a good rapport with him, we spent an entire morning in discussion about his future hopes outside of football and his acceptance of his career transition. James had always spoken very openly about his experiences both within and outside of a footballing environment. Throughout vignette interviewing with James, his engagement with his non-footballing identities and their subsequent performances was clearly visible. While he admitted his initial sadness in the realisation that he would most likely never again play in the Premier League, as part of our final interview his enthusiasm and excitement for the possibilities of his future was as evident as it ever had been in our encounters. Our meeting came to an

end and we left the calmness of the café and headed out into a busy street of a major city. We walked together headed in the same direction and James spoke of how he found the process of being involved in my research. Suddenly a voice called out from across the street, “O’Connor! James O’Connor!” A short, slim, middle-aged man walked toward us. He wore a large down coat with an ageing badge of James’s former club on its left breast. The local man explained how he was a lifetime fan of the club and expressed his opinion that he thought James was a “solid young pro” and his time with a prestigious club like XXXXXXXX would stand him in good stead, “getting picked up soon by another club”. I quietly stood in the background. James politely thanked the gentleman and talked briefly with him about the current state of the club and other happenings within football. It struck me how, only a couple minutes prior, James and I were in deep conversation about his life with his family, his aspirations and hopes for the future and even so here I witnessed James in an entirely different light, engaging with the footballing identity once so prominent in his life. The man shook James’ hand and then went about his day. Once he had crossed the street I laughed and asked James if this sort of thing happened to him regularly, he replied; “You get it every now and again-people around here love the club and some die-hards just know everything that goes on. I haven’t played in ages but those types (of fans) just know you as a footballer. The way things are in a town like this…they’ll give you a bit of chat and the best way to go is just be friendly and give them a bit back”. In that chance encounter I witnessed first hand, James’ performance shift from lending itself to his non-footballing identity, to reengaging with a footballing self influenced by a change in his audience.

As creative and dynamic processes, the self and identities of James and all interviewees contain a temporal dimension. They comprise not only images of the current selves but also images that are placed in the future as possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1987) and possible identities (Osyerman and James, 2011). As Goffman (1959: 245) indicates: “The self, then as a performed character, is not an organic thing, whose

fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited." The identity management and construction with regard to the participants of this study as part of their career transitions from the Premier League are asserted as a social product different from the past research by two central conclusions.

Firstly; identity management and construction strategies are products of the performances that individuals put on in social situations; for example the reactions of young players when they gain an understanding that they are going to be released, the manner in which they present themselves when around family and friends, and how they take part in activities at new clubs or at their original club in the hope of impressing coaches who may use their 'footballing contacts' to help find them a new club. One should not consider that behind these performances there is some form of quintessential core 'inside' the players waiting to be given expression in social situations similar to those just mentioned. Rather, as explained within the discussion chapters, the sense of self arises as a result of publicly validated and legitimised performances. Even though participants perform an active role in fashioning these self-indicating performances, they are generally constrained to images of themselves that can be socially supported in the context of a given status hierarchy. The self is a social product in the sense that it depends upon validation awarded and withheld in accordance with the norms of their social audience.

Secondly: notions of who they are and how they present themselves are influenced by the motivational effect of a *feared possible self* matched with a *hoped for possible self*. Backed by the sentiments of its participants, this study can conclude that following their release, if players can still fathom themselves to be a football player, they have the ability to engage with their social audience as one. In order though for such a future self to have a behavioural impact, as mentioned before it must be paired equally with a future self that is feared. My data indicated that this

feared self was not confined to a vision of a player unable to play in the Premier League. Alternatively it may be of an individual unable to earn a decent income or being judged a failure by social others. Such possible selves though must always be rooted in social experiences. The performances of participants influenced by these possible selves and supported by their social context strengthen their chances to have their identities dramatically realised by their differing audiences.

This project asserts that the identities of participants are constructed around the performances they offered to their audiences. Social audiences held expectations of these performances. If a performance met such expectations it was dramatically realised and thus deemed appropriate and legitimised. Interviewees described how, while present in the cultural environment of professional football, they acted in a manner consistent with what it meant to be a *footballer*. Frequently participants made reference to, *leaving football at football*. When away from their football settings, participants described how their audiences might have at different times acknowledged their professional position within the Premier League, however these audiences often did not expect a footballing-centred performance. Instead according to the expectations of their differing non-footballing audiences, the performances participants offered were those of sons, uncles, nephews and spouses. Participants also described the fashion in which they pictured themselves in the future. These images of possible selves were conceived through their interpretation of their past experiences and the experiences of the others they observed in similar cultural environments, such as senior players and teammates at their former clubs, as well as friends and family members outside of football. In the formation of possible selves of this kind the influence of significant others around participants demonstrates the social characteristics of Markus and Nurius (1986) original concept. It is this position within 'the social' that lends perspective so well to a working relationship with Dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959). Consistent with the original work of Marcus and Nurius (1986), it appeared that for such visions of a future self to impact the current identities of participants they

had to be matched or paired with an equal-counter part. For example, a feared possible self of being released and never again returning to Premier League football must co-exist with a hoped for possible self of resigning with a Premier League club and *making it*. Not only during participants' career transitions but also throughout their professional careers, their comments paint the picture of individuals acutely aware of their social surroundings, with each different cultural environment pertaining to its own identity. The result of such an understanding of identity is an acknowledgment that there was far more to these former footballers than their ability to kick a ball.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Restitution Vignette

Appendix 2: Quest Vignette

Appendix 3: Chaos Vignette

Appendix 4: Semi-Structured Interview Plan

Appendix 5: Consent form

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Appendix 2: Quest Vignette

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Appendix 5: Consent Form

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