

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Understanding the Relational and Emotional
Dimensions of Transitions in Elite Sport: Professional
Footballers' Tales

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by

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Abstract

The issue of career transition in and out of sport has received increasing attention from researchers over the past three decades (e.g. Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Lavallee, 2005; Park, 2012; Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016). However, there continues to be a paucity of research exploring the impact of ‘others’ on athletes’, or indeed former athletes’ transitional experiences. Therefore, an aim of this study was to provide a relational, emotional and socio-cultural analysis of former professional footballers’ multiple transitional experiences and, in particular, to how interactions and relationships with significant ‘others’ impacted upon their transitions.

Data were collected through a series of in-depth, semi-structured, interviews with three participants alongside my own auto-ethnography. Throughout the study, the collection, analysis, and representation of data were features of an ongoing, reflexive, and iterative process (Tracy, 2013). Here, the analysis comprised of both emic and etic readings of the data which gave me the opportunity to explore emerging themes and issues in both future writings and in subsequent interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). In keeping with my interpretive stance, the findings were principally understood in relation to Bauman’s (2012) liquid modernity, Crossley’s (2011) relational sociology, May’s (2013) sense of belonging, and Burkitt’s (2014a; 2014b) discussions of emotions and social relations. The work of Turner and Stets (2005) and Cooley (1964[1902]) was also used to make sense of the emotions I experienced throughout my auto-ethnographic research.

My analysis revealed that the participants understood their transitions through their interactions and relationships with a variety of significant others who played important roles in both decision-making and sense-making processes. Here, each transitional experience

(both inside and outside of football) affected, and was affected by, the participants' location in various networks of interaction. This was also evidenced in my own transition(s) as I approached the end of my playing days in (semi-) professional football where my emotions were also inextricably linked to my multiple identities and therefore multiple networks of social relations.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1.0. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1. Prologue | 1 |
| 1.2. My Story | 1 |
| 1.3. Academic Background | 7 |
| 1.4. Aim of the Study | 13 |
| 2.0. Review of Literature | 15 |
| 2.1. Introduction | 15 |
| 2.2. Positivist/Post-Positivist Approaches to Career Transition Research | 15 |
| 2.3. Conceptual Models of Career Transition out of Sport | 21 |
| 2.4. Decision-Making Models in Career Transition Research | 31 |
| 2.5. Developments in Positivist/Post-Positivist Research | 33 |
| 2.6. A Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers | 39 |
| 2.7. Interpretive Approaches to Career Transition | 44 |
| 2.8. Post-structural Approaches to Career Transition | 51 |
| 2.9. Professional Football in the United Kingdom | 56 |
| 2.10. Summary | 58 |
| 3.0. Methodology | 60 |
| 3.1. Introduction | 60 |
| 3.2. The Interpretive Paradigm | 60 |
| 3.3. Methodological Approach One: Narrative Accounts | 66 |
| 3.4. The Participants | 70 |
| 3.4.1. Purposive Sampling | 70 |
| 3.4.2. Adam | 71 |
| 3.4.3. Jay | 72 |
| 3.4.4. Joe | 72 |
| 3.5. Qualitative Interviews: A Rationale | 73 |
| 3.6. Collecting Narrative Interview Data | 78 |
| 3.7. Methodological Approach Two: Auto-ethnographic Accounts | 83 |
| 3.7.1. Auto-ethnography | 83 |
| 3.7.2. Constructing my Auto-Ethnography | 85 |
| 3.8. Making Sense of the Data | 90 |
| 3.8.1. Iterative Analysis | 90 |
| 3.8.2. Theoretical Frameworks | 94 |
| 3.9. Judging the Study | 99 |
| 4.0. Findings and Discussion | 102 |
| 4.1. Introduction | 102 |
| 4.2. Summary of the Participants' Narratives | 102 |
| 4.3. Uncertainty, Unpredictability and Insecurity | 103 |
| 4.4. Turning Points in Participants Lives | 109 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|------------|
| 4.5. | Nomadic Lifestyles..... | 115 |
| 4.6. | The Team of Individuals..... | 120 |
| 4.7. | Disposable Relationships..... | 125 |
| 4.8. | Transition as a Relational Activity..... | 130 |
| 4.9. | What Does This Mean?..... | 143 |
| 5.0. | In the Midst of Transition..... | 147 |
| 5.1. | Introduction..... | 147 |
| 5.2. | The Last Chance of Wembley..... | 148 |
| 5.3. | The Assistant Manager’s Role..... | 151 |
| 5.4. | The Module Leader Role..... | 159 |
| 5.5. | The PhD Student..... | 165 |
| 5.6. | The Job Interview..... | 169 |
| 5.7. | Moving On..... | 175 |
| 6.0. | Discussion of Auto-ethnography..... | 181 |
| 6.1. | Introduction..... | 181 |
| 6.2. | Myself as ‘Multiple Selves’..... | 181 |
| 6.3. | Transition as an Embodied Experience..... | 189 |
| 6.4. | Transition as an Emotional Experience..... | 193 |
| 6.5. | Making Sense of my Transitions..... | 200 |
| 6.6. | Summary..... | 203 |
| 7.0. | Conclusion..... | 205 |
| 7.1. | Introduction..... | 205 |
| 7.2. | Summary of Key Findings..... | 205 |
| 7.3. | Suggestions for Future Research..... | 214 |
| 8.0. | References..... | 220 |
| Appendices | | |
| | Appendix A: Adam’s Story..... | 243 |
| | Appendix B: Jay’s Story..... | 300 |
| | Appendix C: Joe’s Story..... | 350 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|-------------|---|----|
| 2.1. | Conceptual model of adaptation to career transition..... | 23 |
| 2.2. | A Developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels..... | 35 |
| 2.3. | Cultural transition model..... | 42 |

1.0: Introduction

1.1. Prologue

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story (McAdams, 1993, p. 11).

1.2. My Story

How it all Started

What if my Dad wasn't a keen sportsman and instead enjoyed walking or gardening? Would I have had that same love for football? My Dad was and still is the main reason that I love football. Watching him play for Arctic Rangers on a Saturday afternoon and Norland on a Sunday morning was special. I would take my own pair of Adidas L2000 soccer boots, which were soft and comfortable like slippers, and kick around in the perfectly formed nets before their game kicked off. During the game, my brother, Dean, and I would make goals out of players' bags and would practise being Ian Rush or Mark Crossley (I strangely supported Nottingham Forest at this stage of my life). We loved the magic of replicating our idols. Momentarily, we would drift away to the hallowed turf of a crowded Wembley stadium and hear the magnificent roar of the on-watching thousands as the Mitre Delta nestled neatly into the bottom corner of the goal. As we returned to reality, the debate continued as to whether the post was the width of the scrunched, worn bag or the width of a Wembley post. The disagreements ended with a game of rock, paper, scissors that brought one of us joy and the other bitter disappointment. But as well as it giving us periods of enjoyment, of playing, of play-fighting, of fun, it engrained a love for football that continued to be a focal point of our lives.

12th May, 1997: Hessle Rangers Presentation Evening

Sitting beside my Mum, Dad and brother in the local working men's club, I received an introduction like no other. As recipient of the club's lifetime achievement award, I tried hard to contain my elated grin as the announcer extended his reasoning behind my award. The drumming of my chest and racing heartbeat proved easier for me to conceal but all eyes were on me. All smiles directed towards me. As my lengthy introduction continued, Mum's laugh boomed out as the club chairman focused on my new inability to drink alcohol on a Friday night. The gleam in her eye and rosy complexion suggested the laugh was also representative of her pride. I tried to talk to Dad and to my brother to mask the embarrassment of such a prolonged foreword. As I stood to receive my award, I felt taller, bigger, stronger. My lungs expanded to their fullest through deep, satisfied breaths. I was equally proud. The rapturous applause that followed was in honour of my achievement. I had done what many (if not most) of them dreamed of doing...what others in the room would have given anything to do. But they recognised my ability. They recognised my hard work and my dedication. They were pleased for me. They were delighted for me. They thought I deserved it. They'd been a big part of my life and had watched me develop...not only as a footballer but also as a person.

My Mum and Dad had brought me up as a well-mannered, respectful and thoughtful human being and they admired that in me. As I returned hand-shakes with the numerous others that confronted me on the way back to my seat, my achievement became real. My changing situation became real. The signing of my first contract was memorable. Sharing a changing room and training ground with senior pros would be inspirational for me. But to accept an award and be recognised amongst my closest family and friends for my first professional contract was priceless and meant the world to me. And upon my return home, my gummy eyelids and scratchy throat accompanied my slump into Dad's favourite armchair. My sadness was realisation that my Hessle Rangers career had finally come to an end. I was now Stampy the Scunthorpe United player. While my entrance into the world of professional football was filled with excitement, hopefulness and pride, it also made space

for uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity. My days of enjoying football for enjoyment's sake were no more.

July, 1997: Becoming a 'Pro'

As I entered the changing room for the first time, my heart raced and my stomach churned. They knew little about me yet they welcomed me. I was prepared for my first 'pre-season', as they called it. But as I eavesdropped on their conversations, my mouth turned dry and my fidgeting became more pronounced. They dreaded the running. They dreaded the exhaustion. They dreaded the long, hard days ahead. I questioned my fitness. I questioned my ability. I even questioned my decision to turn pro. The comment that I was built for marathon running brought a smile to my face. As the players joked and shared their collective belief that I would be 'busy' and lead from the front my body shivered and urged me to respond. 'God, you're joking aren't you...I'll be near the back' I replied, as the blood pumped viciously around my body. I knew I'd be near the back but they didn't. I translated their inquisition as a search for their own security. They didn't want any up-and-coming youngster showing the 'old guard' up. I knew there was little danger of that. I just wanted to be one of them. I didn't want to be anything flash or fancy. I just craved being a part of the group...being a part of the camaraderie and the shared banter. That was the most important thing to me. As I returned to the changing rooms, my hands tingled and my breathlessness increased. 'Jesus, Stampy, you weren't joking were you?' came the shout across the room...'you're gonna get on just great here pal'. I didn't care that I'd finished nearer last than first. I didn't care that the manager could now be questioning the extent of my commitment over the summer. That didn't matter to me. What mattered was that I was becoming one of them. They'd accepted me. And my sudden bout of giddiness that accompanied my visit to the communal showers signified my relief. And, as I later visited the local supermarket to buy the packets of pasta that the nutritionist had recommended, I sensed my achievement. I walked tall. My breaths were deep and meaningful. I was proud that I would be eating the food that my teammates would be. I was now one of them.

December, 2001: Leaving Scunthorpe United

There was something there...a blockade...an inner voice saying 'don't do it'...'you can't do it'...but why? I hated him...it was always my fault...I couldn't do anything right and yet, still, I was there...unashamedly...a Scunthorpe United player without a continuous run of more than six games to my name in four years...but I daren't leave...daren't contemplate life away from Scunthorpe United...what if the grass wasn't greener...what if there was no more grass...then what? To this day, former teammates ask me why the manager had a bee in his bonnet about me. I still don't know. I still question what I ever did wrong. I wish I'd been braver sooner. I wish I'd have left on my own accord.

It turned me into something I wasn't...I didn't usually scream at and berate my then girlfriend because she thought we should go home early...I didn't normally hide from Dad in fear of him quizzing me about football...I didn't slope off away from my mates on a Saturday night to go to casino...to be alone...that wasn't me. None of that was me. What happened to the real me? 'Lucky' to be a professional footballer...it played havoc with my home life. But was it because I hated the manager or because I didn't know what was around the corner? That angst bubbling away in the pit of my stomach...was that uncertainty? Was that just pure hatred? Or was that fear? Was that because I might have had to send my CV to Thompsons Plastics or Willerby Caravans and see if I could get a job with the boys? I still don't know.

June, 2002: My Big Move

My goals in the Nationwide Conference earned me my move up to League One. My stomach fluttered throughout the summer as my eagerness to impress enveloped me. The two year deal was agreed. The 50% wage increase was agreed. I was moving in with my uncle who lived nearby to ease the settling in process. I couldn't wait to get started. I attended the tribunal meeting between the two clubs that would determine the extent of the transfer fee. My new club were confident that the fee would be nominal and that they were doing great business. My old club secretly held high hopes that they would be rewarded for their

part in my development. I sat at the back of the room with Dad as the fee was revealed. The adrenaline spikes and rushing of my blood were indicative of my amazement. My mouth gaped open. Dad smiled. Dad's hand bounced on my knee in a display of pride. I'd been transferred for £50,000. My mouth dried up and my legs turned weak. My new club were distraught. The cries of NO! reverberated around the room for seconds. The banging of fists on the table likewise. My stomach emptied and my muscles twitched. My old manager greeted me with a broad grin. He was delighted for me. My new club officials appeared drained. They said it didn't matter. They said I'd repay that back in no time. I knew differently. I knew they were devastated. I knew they regretted the transfer. The warmth that continued to circulate my body was a sign of personal elation. My mates wouldn't believe that I was worth £50,000! Yet the shakiness of my limbs was also representative of my fear. I was now worth £50,000! I would now have to prove my worth to the officials, staff, teammates and supporters of my new club and that was never going to be an easy task.

May, 2008: Fatherhood

"For God's sake, Charlie...what is it now" I used to say.

Charlie could sense it...he was one month old. A constant air of disquiet and anxiety...everywhere. Watching television, it was there...eating dinner, it was there...visiting the parents', it was still there. Yet, it didn't speak...it couldn't speak. We didn't communicate the air. We tried to hide the air. But it was there. Charlie sensed the air...crying for what seemed like hours...yet lasted for minutes, maybe even seconds.

"For God's sake, Charlie...what is it now" I used to say.

I didn't tend to Charlie in the night...unless his nappy needed changing. I couldn't stop the hunger cry. That was the joy of being a woman (apparently)...the mother-baby bond. There wasn't much joy etched across my wife's visibly weary face. She looked washed out...drained of energy...exhausted...concerned.

The first weeks were supposed to be the hardest according to my wife's friends. No sleep...plenty of nappy changing...plenty of crying...feelings of helplessness. They were right. This was hard. Made even harder by the not knowing of what was to come...this wasn't how we'd envisaged parenthood. We'd planned it down to a tee...house all decorated...end of the footballing season...mid-contract...a year's maternity leave in the offing...meticulous. Meticulous, yet pointless. As the club entered liquidation, my contract became worthless. A precious, amazing time to be shared between parents and their first-born...turned, instead into distress and precariousness.

"For God's sake, Charlie...what is it now" I used to say.

May, 2012: Approaching the End of My Playing Days

When I considered life after football, I would hold my breath and gulp down breaths to stay quiet. I'd get worried about how life would change...how I would spend Saturday afternoons...more importantly, how I would pay the mortgage. Yet, the lightness in my chest and prominent aroma of the vanilla air freshener were signs of my excitement...excitement about where this path would take me. I didn't know if I wanted to stay in football, advance to postgraduate study, or gain the necessary voluntary hours deemed necessary for teacher training. My thoughts coalesced around my family and my need to provide. I needed to carry on playing but I also needed something else. Football wasn't enough. I needed something that would eventually replace football.

'Have you thought about postgraduate study?' my dissertation supervisor asked, inquisitively. 'I haven't given it much thought really', I replied, 'I know it sounds wrong but I can't afford to...I need to be earning money to pay the mortgage'. 'Well, every year the department receive a number of studentship PhD's that you might want to think about applying for' my supervisor continued, 'I think Adam gets about £1,000 a month to help him with his bills'. My eyes opened wide and my head tilted to the left as my heart skipped a beat. I was intrigued. I became hooked. What an opportunity, I thought. Dr Stamp already

had a certain ring to it. Studying for a PhD became my number one priority, my target, my goal.

The presentation and interview tasks proved challenging but rewarding as my application was successful. My ability to research from the midst of transition was a daunting proposition. Would I be sketching my troubled journey through the increasingly intense world of postgraduate study or would I be detailing the logic behind my refusal to retire from a game that has dominated my life? Would I be writing poems about being a Football League Assistant Manager? Or would my PhD be a means to an end in academia? As I commenced my writing I was as uncertain as I'd ever been.

1.3. Academic Background

The issue of career transition out of sport has received considerable interest amongst researchers over the past three decades (e.g. Allison & Meyer, 1988; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Lavalley, 2005; Park, 2012; Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016). Indeed, Park, Lavalley and Tod (2013) reported on findings from 126 studies in their systematic and wide ranging review of athletes' career transition out of sport. In an earlier literature review, McPherson (1980) had previously reported on 20 citations pertaining specifically to retired athletes. The extensive nature of Park et al.'s (2013) review offers evidence of a growth in transition-related research. This increased interest seems warranted given that the athletic process of retirement is a challenging period in the lives of elite athletes (Blinde & Strata, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Sparkes, 1998). The seriousness of these challenges has been illustrated through former athletes' descriptions of their suicidal thoughts in both previous research (e.g. Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Carless & Douglas, 2009) and in the National media. For example, on the 9th July, 2013, an hour long documentary was shown on BBC3 titled

'Football's Suicide Secret' and was presented by Chairman of the Professional Footballer's Association (PFA), Clarke Carlisle. Here, former high profile footballers, including Clarke Carlisle, shared their previous battles with depression and attempted suicide that illustrates the need for further research into this area. Here, former players related their personal struggles to the absence of customary financial rewards, the fame or social recognition and the 'buzz' of playing in front of thousands of expectant supporters.

Park et al.'s (2013) review has also evidenced a shift toward developing a greater understanding of athletes' transitions; where research appeared to be moving away from the consequences of athletes' career transitions out of sport and towards investigating predictors of the quality of the transitional process. For example, they noted that the value placed on athletic identity or voluntary control over the decision impacted upon the nature of the transition experience (Albion, 2007; Lally, 2007; Muscat, 2010). Despite this, within-career transitions have received less interest from sports career researchers with only a few studies investigating this area (e.g. Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Roderick, 2006a; 2012; Pummell, Harwood & Lavallee, 2008; Wylleman & Reints, 2010; Debois, Ledon, Argiolas & Rosnet, 2012). Viewing transitions from athletic, psychological, psycho-social and academic perspectives, Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004) emphasised the need to extend our knowledge of within-career transitions. Here, Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model focused on the normative transitions faced by athletes (i.e. initiation, developmental, mastery and discontinuation) as they progress through their careers. However, very little is known about how athletes navigate their way through non-normative transitions (Stambulova, 2000) throughout their careers, such as transferring between clubs, de-selection or injury (Roderick, 2006a; Gordon & Lavallee, 2011). Similarly, very little is known about how athletes negotiate multiple non-normative transitions, whether they occur within

or outside of their sporting lives. Indeed, to further understand how an athlete experiences their retirement, I would suggest that we first need to explore how they made sense of their previous transitional experiences.

In consideration of the non-normative transitions that faced professional footballers, Nesti et al. (2012) argued that the term 'critical moments' was a fairer reflection of the personal, professional or vocational challenges that had positive or negative effects on their sense of self. Examples of these could be being sold to another club, appointed team captain, dealing with a career-threatening injury, illness, or family and relationship difficulties (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012). Indeed, it has also been noted how athletes' adjustment to sport processes, such as playing style, team interaction, and the coach-athlete relationship may create difficulties in their lives outside of sport (e.g. Ronkainen, Harrison, Schuman & Ryba, 2014; Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016). Despite this recognition, there remains a paucity of research examining the interconnections between the sporting and non-sporting lives of elite athletes and how each impacts upon the other during transition.

Traditionally, career transition research has been underpinned by the positivist and post-positivist paradigm with psychological theorising at the forefront of the explanations provided (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). With a strong focus on the transition out of sport, scholars have focused on the transition out of collegiate (e.g. Fraser, Fogarty & Albion, 2010), club (e.g. Johns, Lindner & Wolko, 1990; Koukoris, 1991) and elite (e.g. Lavalley, Gordon & Grove, 1997; Lally, 2007; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) sporting environments, while developing and applying an array of theories and models to their findings. While early researchers utilised models of gerontology (e.g. McPherson, 1980; Lerch, 1984) and thanatology (e.g. Rosenberg, 1981; Lerch, 1984) as theoretical frameworks, later researchers (e.g. Swain, 1991; Kadlcik &

Flemr, 2008) have applied the human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981) and the athletic career termination model (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) to their studies. For example, Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model suggested that three main factors impact upon the quality of the transition out of sport; the causes of career transition, the developmental factors related to the adaptation process and the available coping strategies. Here, several studies (e.g. Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Marthinus, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007) have suggested that the voluntariness of the retirement decision is a crucial determinant of the quality of the transition. That said, other researchers (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Cecic Erpic, Wylleman & Zupancic, 2004) have argued that the decision to retire is far more complex than the model suggests and that factors inside (e.g. de-selection) and outside (e.g. family responsibilities) of sport may play a role. Others have also criticised psychological models for focusing heavily on the personality traits or characteristics of the individual at the expense of broader relational and socio-cultural factors (Jones, 2014).

In an attempt to redress the limitations of psychological transition research, there has recently been a call for a more social sociological understanding (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016). Scholars who located their work within the alternative post-structuralist (e.g. Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016) and interpretivist (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; 2012a) paradigms, have argued that any attempt to understand (transitional) experience or sense of self without attending to social processes which operate within sport culture would be futile. With a collective focus on transition through and out of professional football, this body of work has provided some useful initial insights into some of the socio-cultural and emotional challenges tied to transferring between clubs (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2012a) and exiting the sport (e.g. Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016). These collections of

work have shed light onto the socio-cultural context of professional football while briefly illustrating the various roles of 'others' in a person's transition. For example, Roderick (2006a) explained how players appear to accept their uncertain working conditions and seek to develop informal networks within the game when they feel vulnerable (i.e. out of the first team). These networks were seen as a valuable initial contact between players and potential new clubs. Alternatively, professional footballers related the relief they experienced during their retirements to their changing social networks and their escape from the 'close knit', 'bubble' environment (Jones & Denison, 2016). From their post-structural perspective, Jones and Denison (2016) described how players' relationships were shaped and stimulated by the unique cultural practices and institutionalised norms of professional football. That is, players saw their relationships with teammates and colleagues defined by unceasing competition and thus extending the omnipresence of discipline (Jones & Denison, 2016).

Although the work of Roderick (2006a; 2006b; 2012a; 2012b; 2014), Jones (2014) and Jones and Denison (2016) has certainly enhanced our social understanding of transition, their findings have illuminated further avenues for enquiry. While relationships and interactions were seen as key aspects of athletes' transitions, there remains a dearth of literature exploring the relational dimensions of transition in sport. In contrast, wider vocational research (e.g. Blustein, 2001; 2011; Gergen, 2009; Schultheiss, Watts, Sterland & O'Neill, 2011) has considered work-based experiences as both socially constructed and relational in nature. Conceptualizing work as a relational act signifies that every decision, experience and interaction is understood, influenced and shaped by relationships (Gergen, 2009; Blustein, 2011). Further, Blustein (2011, p. 1) suggested that 'work-based decisions, transitions, and experience are not simply the expression of individual agency, but are rooted in interactions

with a broad array of external influences'. While a number of contemporary scholars (e.g. Ronkainen et al., 2014; Ryba et al., 2016) have attempted to integrate such sociocultural and relational analyses into their transition research, their efforts remain limited to the transiting athlete, or their 'unified self'. That is, these scholars ignore the athletes' multiple identities (e.g. son, husband, father, teammate and friend) and, therefore, their multiple social networks. I would argue that to understand the relational dimensions of a person's transitional experiences, they cannot be separated from their multiple networks of interaction. As such, an aim of this study is to explore how a person's multiple identities (and therefore multiple social relations) impact upon their decision-making and sense-making processes through transition and how these change over time.

The work of Roderick (2006a; 2006b; 2012a) and Jones and Denison (2016) also touched upon the emotional nature of athletes' transitions where their findings were similar to much previous literature (e.g. Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007). Here, these emotional representations were arguably limited to cognitive thoughts; where athletes' shared their *feelings* of relief (Jones & Denison, 2016) that mirrored the *feelings* of anger or *feelings* of doubt of other studies (e.g. Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Park, 2012). On each occasion, the focus of these studies (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; Lally, 2007; Park, 2012; Jones & Denison, 2016) lied away from the embodiment of these feelings or how these affected/impacted upon their emotional understanding. While other scholars (e.g. Brewer et al., 1993; Sparkes, 1998; Sparkes & Smith, 2002) have alluded to the corporeal athletic identity, it would seem a disservice to limit the focus of emotions in the transition literature to cognitive analyses. Thus, a further focal point of this study was to gain both an embodied and a sociological understanding of emotions in

transitional experience. That is, shifting focus away from the cognitive capacities of the transiting athlete and towards their embodied feelings and their relationships with others. As such, the study could be considered an attempt to provide a relational, emotional and socio-cultural analysis of former professional footballers' transitional experiences throughout the course of their careers. It is hoped that the chronological mapping of athletes' careers will explore how the accumulation of transitions, labelled as complex, multidimensional and idiosyncratic by others (e.g. Baillie and Danish, 1992; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Stephan & Demulier, 2008), impact upon a person over time.

1.4. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to provide a relational, emotional and socio-cultural analysis of former professional footballers' transitional experiences. In particular, specific attention was given to how Adam, Jay and Joe (all pseudonyms) understood their interactions, in terms of their interconnections and relationships with significant 'others' (e.g. wife or girlfriend, children, manager, teammates, friends) and how their respective relationships impacted upon their transitional experiences. Alongside this, I also researched my own pending transition, where I approached the end of my playing days in semi-professional football from an auto-ethnographic perspective. Specifically, I was interested in the embodiment of my emotions and how these were affected by my interactions with significant others. The combination of these approaches (i.e. auto-ethnography and narrative biographical interviews) were utilised to explore the following research questions:

- A) To what extent do participants consider their decision-making processes to be affected by their relationships with significant 'others'?
- B) What emotions do participants experience during transitions? How do participants understand their emotional experiences in respect of significant 'others'? How have these experiences changed over time?
- C) How do participants evaluate the relative success of their transitions? To what extent are these evaluations impacted upon by their networks of relationships?
- D) To what extent do participants' understandings of previous transitions influence their understandings of present and future transitional decisions? How have these perceptions changed over time?

2.0: Review of Literature

2.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of sporting transition research. More specifically, the paradigmatic and methodological approaches of previous literature will be critically analysed alongside a discussion of the key findings. Firstly, a discussion of the transition literature underpinned by the positivist and post-positivist paradigms are presented. Here, I outline the underpinning assumptions of these philosophical positions, present key findings from this body of literature and highlight some of the limitations of this work. I then follow the same protocol to discuss a recent body of literature which proposed an alternative paradigm (i.e. a cultural praxis of athletes' careers) before reviewing research from the interpretive and post-structural paradigms. Finally, I provide a brief overview of football as a working profession in British society before concluding this section with a summary of the key points addressed in the review.

2.2 Positivist/Post-Positivist Approaches to Career Transition Research

As will be evidenced throughout this chapter, career transition research has been conducted from a range of paradigmatic positions, where scholars adopt various ways of thinking about and doing research (Mallett & Tinning, 2014). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 107), a paradigm is a “set of basic beliefs...and a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts”. Similarly, Markula and Silk (2011, p. 24) noted how paradigms “provide the orientations towards how researchers see the world (ontology), and

the various judgements about knowledge and how to gain it (epistemology)". Subsequently, a researcher's methodology will be underpinned by their response to questions of ontology and epistemology. In other words, studies are guided by "what the researcher thinks counts as knowledge, and who can deliver the most valuable slice of this knowledge" (Lincoln, 2010, p. 7).

Existing transition research has, by and large, embraced the methods and assumptions of the positivist and post-positivist paradigms (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Guided by the subject's traditional psychological discipline, theories, perspectives and designs have been underpinned by their associated ontological and epistemological assumptions. That is, positivist and post-positivist orientations to research focus on reductionism; where researchers attempt to understand the functioning of the whole (i.e. the transition) through an analysis of its individual parts (Brustad, 1997). Here, positivists adopt a realist ontology (i.e. there is a real world 'out there') (Mallett & Tinning, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). They also assume an objectivist epistemology (i.e. this world can, and arguably should be measured objectively) (Willig, 2013). As such, positivists typically collect quantitative data and subject it to statistical analysis (Sparkes, 1992). In essence, positivism posits that the social world is made up of hard and relatively fixed facts that can be observed, measured, and understood (Sparkes, 1992). This provides a mechanistic guide to understanding; where researchers view human behaviour as measurable, causally derived and therefore, predictable and controllable (Smith, 1989). Studies located within the positivist paradigm have primarily used quantitative surveys (e.g. Haerle, 1975), instruments, and questionnaires (e.g. Brewer et al., 1993; Alfermann et al., 2004) to explore transition. Using criteria such as validity and reliability to judge the quality of their research, scholarly work in the positivist domain seeks to disclose a

‘truthful’ account of ‘reality’ (Markula & Silk, 2011). That is, where quantitative and objective results (i.e. responses from questionnaires) are generalizable.

Post-positivist researchers share the ontological and epistemological belief systems of the positivist paradigm (Markula & Silk, 2011). That is, they also seek to disclose a ‘truthful’ account of ‘reality’. However, post-positivist researchers argue that quantitative methods alone restrict and exclude the meaning and purposes attached to human behaviour (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Despite their use of qualitative methods, such as observation and semi-structured interviews, post-positivist researchers still assume that “knowledge that counts as legitimate research must be collected objectively” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 31). In order to obtain unbiased results, the influence of the researcher continues to be minimised throughout the research process (Lather, 2006). For this reason, the findings of both positivist and post-positivist research into career transition will be presented together throughout the chapter, as both focus on reductionism. Evidence of this can be seen in the development of generalised models of transition (e.g. Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Fernandez et al., 2006; Park, 2012) that will be discussed in greater detail. However, before considering these models, attention must be given to early career transition research and how these initial studies paved the way for more sophisticated approaches for examining this topic.

The topic of transition out of sport was first approached by Mihovilovic (1968), who focused on the transition challenges of 44 Yugoslavian amateur footballers. Using a combination of unspecified questionnaires and interviews, Mihovilovic (1968) categorised various responses into groups of criteria. For example, when asked about the attitudes of others to players following their retirement, their responses were divided into three groups:

1 – a favourite at the time of the career, interesting for the public and the management, afterwards uninteresting, neglected, treated coldly, 2 – the public and friends had always a good attitude, the management always bad and cold, and 3 – the attitude of everybody during and after the sport career was always identical, friendly and correct. Mihovilovic (1968) also reported how more than half of the players had ended their career suddenly with some resorting to excessive alcohol consumption and intense smoking to combat the associated negative emotions. Similarly, his findings suggested that 95.4% of the players ended their careers involuntarily, where the decision to retire was arguably made for them by others (e.g. family or club). Later, Haerle (1975) reported comparable results in his study of 312 former professional baseball players whereby many players explained how excessive alcohol consumption was their way of dealing with emotional distress. Haerle's (1975) survey results showed how negative transitional experiences and negative emotions were linked to the fact that players found it difficult to contemplate life away from baseball, where 75% explained that they first considered their post-career life in their early or mid-thirties. These initial studies demonstrated an early interest in both positivist (e.g. Haerle, 1975) and post-positivist (e.g. Mihovilovic, 1968) approaches to career transition research.

Due to the lack of a theoretical framework surrounding these early studies (i.e. Mihovilovic, 1968; Haerle, 1975), researchers began to link the phenomenon of athletic career transition to wider theories of gerontology (i.e. the study of aging) and thanatology (i.e. the study of death and dying). For example, McPherson (1980) and Rosenberg (1981) suggested that certain theories associated with social gerontology (e.g. disengagement theory) could be applicable to the occupational and psychological challenges faced by retiring athletes. Through its suggestion that society and the aging individual withdraw from one

another to the mutual benefit and satisfaction of both, Disengagement theory (Cummings, Dean, Newell & McCaffrey, 1960) was seen as a valuable way to make sense of an athlete's exit from sport (McPherson, 1980; Rosenberg, 1981). Similarly, researchers (e.g. Lerch, 1984; Rosenberg, 1984) also suggested how theories derived from the science of thanatology (i.e. awareness of context and stages of dying models) could be applied to the sporting context to help map a person's social demise. Although linked mostly with participants that experienced forced retirement from their sports, researchers (e.g. Blinde & Strata, 1992; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999) used models of social death (Kalish, 1966), social awareness (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) and stages of death (Kubler-Ross, 1969) to suggest how these thanatological theories could also have implications for the career transition process.

Although both gerontological and thanatological theories enhanced the analysis of career transition research in sport, they faced criticism for being inadequate in their application to athletic retirement. For example, Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) questioned the utility of thanatological models, as they were developed with non-sport populations. Similarly, Crook and Robertson (1991) suggested alternative perspectives were needed to adequately account for the complex nature of career transition out of sport. For example, these scholars criticized thanatological models for stereotyping athlete reactions, and for portraying retirement in an overly negative light. Furthermore, it had been suggested that athletic career termination could be considered as a social rebirth, as opposed to a social death (Coakley, 1983). These recommendations led to the introduction of process-oriented transition models (e.g. Schlossberg, 1981; 1984) to further understand the phenomenon under study. More specifically, Schlossberg (1981) questioned how we could understand and help adults as they faced the inevitable but unpredictable transitions of life. Here, Schlossberg

(1981, p. 3) noted that “all we know for certain is that all adults experience change and that often these changes require a new network of relationships and a new way of seeing oneself”.

In reference to her model of human adaptation to transition, Schlossberg (1981, p. 5) defined transition 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’s (1981) model identified three interacting factors during the transition; the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (e.g. age, health status or previous experiences), the perception of the particular transition (e.g. role change, degree of stress) and the characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments (e.g. internal support systems or institutional support). While the model could account for any transitional experience over an individual’s lifespan, researchers (e.g. Swain, 1991; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993) again applied the model to their investigations into the transition out of sport. Using findings from 199 retired high-performance athletes who completed the 34-item Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ), Sinclair and Orlick (1993) reported the means and standard deviations from their likert-scale responses. The authors noted how athletes that adjusted smoothly had achieved their goals whereas athletes who endured difficult transitions tended to feel incompetent outside of sport. Here, each of the three interacting factors could be regarded as assets or liabilities depending on the athletes’ appraisal of their transition (Charner & Schlossberg, 1986). For example, an athlete may have found the transition easier if the decision to retire was made voluntarily with the support of their family, as opposed to an unexpected retirement through de-selection or injury (Crook & Robertson, 1991).

The application of various gerontological, thanatological and transition models were instrumental in developing and advancing subject knowledge throughout the early stages of sporting career transition research. However, each of these perspectives were limited, as they were unable to provide sport-specific variables or contexts and so lacked the operational detail deemed necessary to holistically examine the adjustment process out of sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). For example, little consideration was given to the cause of the athlete retirement, the personal factors related to their adaptation (i.e. self-identity or perceptions of control) or their available coping resources (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Researchers (e.g. Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Alfermann, 2000) also challenged Schlossberg's (1981) definition of transition. Here, it was suggested that adaptation to the post-career took approximately a year and how sporting retirement should therefore be regarded as a transitional process, as opposed to a singular event (Koukoris, 1991; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Moreover, Grove, Lavalley and Gordon (1997) suggested that early research tended to generalise findings across numerous athletes thereby categorising, instead of personalising the transitional process. Here, Baillie and Danish (1992) alluded to the misrepresentation of the multidimensional, complex and personalised nature of an athletes' career transition out of sport. Since the 1990's, and in light of these early findings, researchers (e.g. Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Gordon, 1995) have proposed conceptual models of career transition out of sport that have attempted to personalise the contextual and sporting element of the transition.

2.3. Conceptual Models of Career Transition out of Sport

Although Gordon (1995) and Sinclair and Orlick (1993) attempted to modify Schlossberg's (1981) 'human adaptation to transition' model to include sport-specific

variables, the most comprehensive conceptual model of adaptation to career transition out of sport was introduced by Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) and was later modified by Taylor, Ogilvie and Lavallee (2006). In their earlier research, Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) had noted how a person's response to career transition depended on four interacting factors; notably emotional, social, financial and occupational. In this regard, the overall quality of adjustment would be mediated by numerous interrelated variables, such as self-identity and perceptions of control (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), shown below in figure 2.1, examined what appeared to be the entire process of career transition. To this extent, an evaluation of the quality of adjustment to the transition was made along with recommendations for possible treatment interventions for stressful reactions. In agreement with Gordon (1995), Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) also suggested that research in the field of career transition out of sport should focus on the three main areas of their model; the causes of career transition, the developmental factors related to the adaptation process and the available coping strategies.

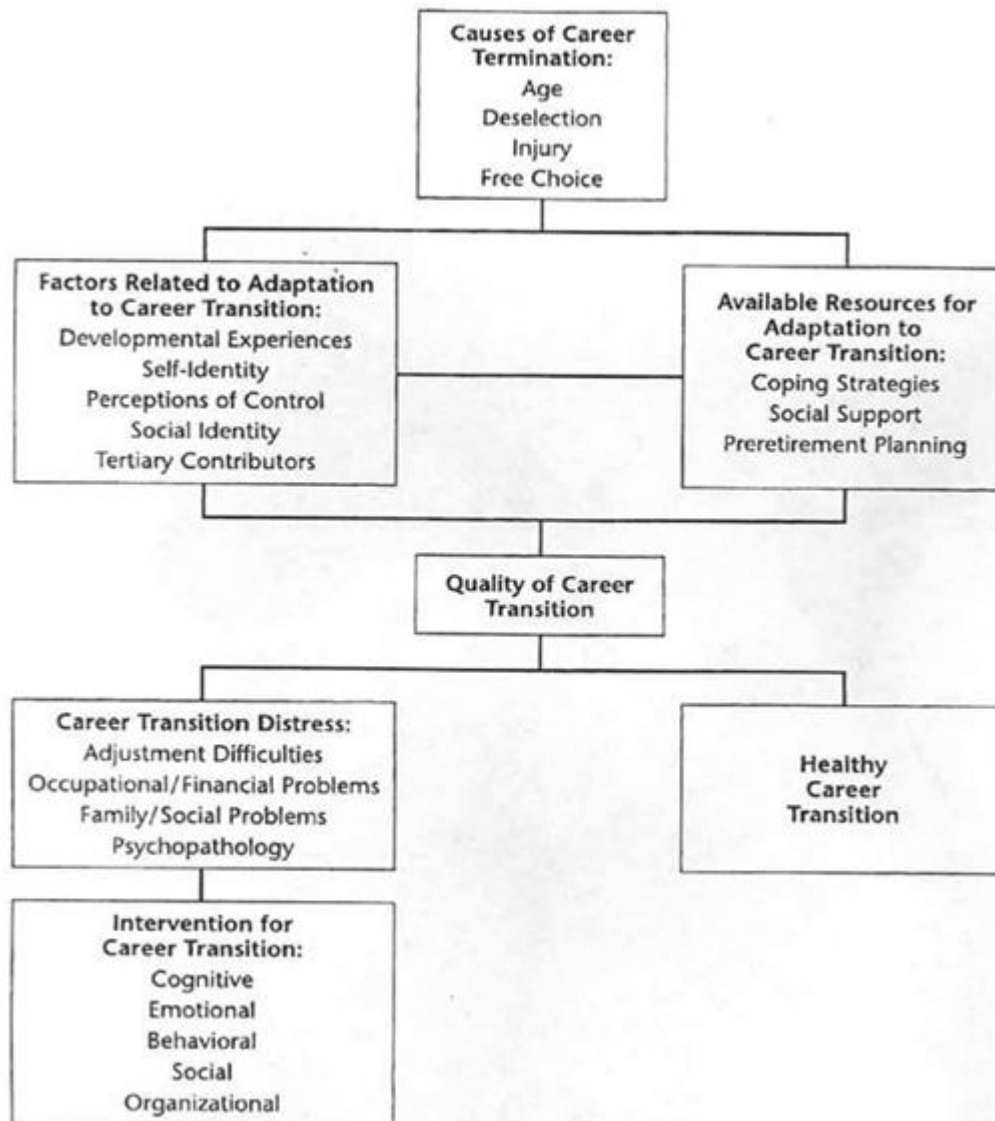


Figure 2.1. Conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

In line with Taylor and Ogilvie’s (1994) initial model, several studies (e.g. Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Schmid & Seiler, 2003) have demonstrated that the most common causal factors for career transition are career-ending injuries, chronological age, deselection and free choice. However, research (e.g. Koukoris, 1991; 1994; Stambulova, 1994) has also reported how there is rarely one factor that will explain why participants disengage from their respective sports. For example, in his sample of 113 Greek former athletes, Koukoris (1991) reported how findings from a 38-item questionnaire based on previous

literature explained that factors inside and outside of the sporting environment influenced athletes' disengagement, with financial constraint being a major factor. Here, athletes preferred to play recreational sport instead of club sport to eliminate the associated financial costs. Similarly, a combination of reasons was given for the disengagement of the 213 former elite-level, Russian athletes interviewed in Stambulova's (1994) study. Findings from open-ended questions suggested that athletes experienced a number of challenging transitions throughout their career, such as injury or being de-selected and that an athlete's entry into sport could also impact upon their respective exit (Stambulova, 1994).

The extent to which the voluntariness of the retirement decision affects the quality of transition has been the topic of much debate amongst previous literature (e.g. Marthinus, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). However, in relation to Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model, researchers (e.g. Cecic Erpic, Wylleman & Zupancic, 2004; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) have also argued that the decision to voluntarily disengage from sport can be much more complex than the model suggested. For example, amongst their sample of 85 former elite Slovenian athletes, Cecic Erpic et al. (2004) found that the participants' subjective evaluation of their athletic achievements played an important role in their decision to retire. In this sense, those athletes who had under-achieved struggled to accept that their career was over whereas those who were satisfied with their career success were more accepting. Four years earlier, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) had also found that, out of the seven former national and international female gymnasts interviewed in their study, three had told how the subjective evaluation of their athletic achievements was just one contributing factor towards their decision to retire. In a similar vein, Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) later claimed that ending an athletic career voluntarily does not necessarily ease the career transition process.

Here, we can begin to see early limitations of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model where the reasoning behind athletes' disengagement from sport is far more complex than a single decision.

In terms of the factors related to adaptation to career transition, Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model referred to five factors that linked the athlete to their perception of sport career termination. While developmental experiences, perceptions of control and tertiary contributors, such as health status or financial resources are considered within the model, researchers (e.g. Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000) have suggested that the two most fundamental of these issues are social identity and athletic identity. Although seen as interrelated entities, it has been suggested that athletes are capable of driving themselves into isolation, due to the hard work, dedication and perseverance required for continual improvement (Murphy, 2009). For example, Murphy (2009) noted how "the time spent learning, training, conditioning, and practising must be taken from other activities and social activities are often a casualty of the drive to succeed" (p. 203). In this regard, athletes often lose the social element of their identity outside of the sporting environment in favour of a strong athletic identity (Muscat, 2010).

It has also been suggested that a strong athletic identity could have positive consequences for participants in sport as it may assist athletes in their drive to be successful by developing narrow-focused goals, increasing motivation and subsequently building their confidence (Albion, 2007; Baillie & Danish, 1992). Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder (1993) defined athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" (p. 237). In this respect, individuals who strongly commit themselves to the athlete role may be less likely to explore other career, education, and lifestyle options (Baillie & Danish, 1992;

Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2005). As a result of this commitment, athletes who identified strongly with the athlete role experienced high degrees of adjustment difficulties during their transitions out of sport (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). For example, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) used findings from in-depth interviews with seven former National and International level female gymnasts to conceptualise retirement into the exit from sport, Nowhere Land and new beginnings; where Nowhere Land elicited feelings of disorientation, void and frustration. In light of these findings, numerous researchers (e.g. Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004; Muscat, 2010; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008) have expressed a need for some athletes to gradually re-socialize out of a strong athletic identity and into roles outside of the sporting domain to aid their transition process.

Coping strategies, social support and pre-retirement planning formulated the available resources for adaptation to career transition within Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model. In support of these suggestions, research has revealed how athletes found social support from significant others, in terms of both psychological and instrumental support, as a valuable source of comfort during their transition process (McKenna & Thomas, 2007; McKnight, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Furthermore, athletes revealed how support from their family and friends had eased the transition difficulties that they were faced with (McKnight, 2007; Schmid & Seiler, 2003; Young, Pearce, Kane & Pain, 2006). Alfermann et al. (2004) also described how having other interests or developing various life skills throughout their sporting careers could ease an athlete's transition out of sport. This pre-retirement planning has been considered as a significant influential factor that may determine the quality of the transition (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Stambulova, Stephan & Japhag, 2007). To this end, North and Lavalley (2004) described how athletes had both short

and long-term plans for their career transitions, suggesting that athletes may benefit from a combination of both realistic planning and suitable time-frames to ease their transition process.

The penultimate stage of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model focused on the positive or negative consequences of the career transition. To this extent, the disengagement from sport was not always a traumatic experience for athletes, with some athletes finding the adjustments relatively straightforward (Johns, Lindner & Wolko, 1990; Stier, 2007). However, the model highlighted various negative consequences athletes may be faced with, including adjustment difficulties, occupational or financial problems, family or social problems, psychopathology or substance abuse. In this regard, studies (e.g. McKenna & Thomas, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008) have revealed how athletes are susceptible to various negative consequences if they endure a traumatic disengagement. For example, Warriner and Lavalley (2008) referred to semi-structured interview findings with seven female, former international gymnasts to explain participants' identity confusion. Outside of gymnastics, these former athletes questioned their self-worth and experienced a general sense of uncertainty as to who they were (Warriner & Lavalley, 2008).

Finally, the conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) suggested various intervention strategies to assist athletes in their disengagement. Here, the model focused specifically on areas of cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social, and organisational support. In support of their modified model, Taylor, Ogilvie and Lavalley (2006) later highlighted the need for athletes to construct a balanced identity while focussing on the benefits of organisational support. Furthermore, Taylor et al. (2006) suggested using various therapeutic approaches, including cognitive restructuring (Garfield & Bergin, 1978), stress

management (Meichenbaum & Jeremko, 1983) and emotional expression (Yalom, 1980) to assist athletes in their transitions. However, amongst more recent research (e.g. Gilmore, 2008; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), there has been a call for strategies to also include proactive interventions (e.g. education workshops), as well as the reactive strategies (e.g. cognitive and emotional coping interventions) suggested by the model. For example, Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) suggested that proactive interventions, such as education, competence training and goal-setting for the post-career may help athletes adjust to life away from sport.

In general, the conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie (1994) enhanced athletic career transition research by providing exploratory variables that related to both the sporting and contextual elements of the adjustment process that had previously been ignored. Various studies, including Munroe, Albinson and Hall (1999) and Coakley (2006) have used Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model to explain and understand athlete disengagement from sport, alluding to the complex, contextual nature of their respective adjustments. The model (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) created a conceptual framework that called for researchers to examine a wide range of contextual variables that impact upon a person's transition process. To this end, researchers (e.g. Cecic Erpic et al., 2004; Mckenna & Thomas, 2007) were not only able to investigate the consequences of athletes' transitional experiences but were also able to focus on factors that affected the quality of experiences, in an attempt to improve or suggest improvements for the disengagement of future athletes. For example, Cecic Erpic et al. (2004) explained how the quality of transition may depend on a range of variables, including subjective evaluation of athletic achievements, educational status and the occurrence of negative non-athletic transitions that elicit a range of emotions.

At the outset of this review of literature, I noted how initial studies into transition (e.g. Haerle, 1975; Mihovilovic, 1968) shared athletes' negative emotional reactions to their post-athletic lives. More recently, these negative emotional experiences have been linked to an athlete's inability to control their retirement (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; McKenna & Thomas, 2007). In this respect, an enforced retirement, such as through de-selection or injury, led to participants experiencing high levels of negative emotions (e.g. Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Zaichkowsky et al., 2000). For example, McKenna and Thomas (2007) drew from their account-making approach to evidence the sense of betrayal experienced by the rugby union player in their study. Here, Garth Armstrong (pseudonym) saw his release as premature and unjust when considered against his previous achievements at the club and his perceptions of his ability. This sense of rejection elicited negative emotional reactions, including anger, fear and disappointment. In their systematic review, Park et al. (2013) found how 86 studies (e.g. Allison & Meyer, 1998; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007) reported negative psychological and emotional responses to retirement from their participants. For example, Lavallee and Robinson (2007) noted how the artistic gymnasts in their study experienced identity crisis and feelings of loss, fear, uncertainty and isolation following their retirement from a sport they had devoted so much time and energy towards. In a similar sense, Grove et al. (1997) revealed how those athletes with a stronger athletic identity experienced more negative emotions upon their disengagement.

Scholars have also demonstrated how their participants experienced positive emotions following retirement, through their exploration of other interests (e.g. Stier, 2007; Butt & Molnar, 2009) or their relief associated with a less competitive or pressurised lifestyle (e.g. Stier, 2007; Swain, 1991). Similarly, other researchers have identified the benefits associated

with expressing emotions during careers to aid athletes' emotional experiences during retirement (e.g. Grove et al., 1998; Taylor & Lavalley, 2010). In some cases, those who received information regarding their eventual retirement, such as education opportunities or financial assistance, experienced less difficulty or less negative emotions following their disengagement (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert & Wippert, 2008). Furthermore, the value of psychosocial (e.g. McKnight, 1996; Schmid & Seiler, 2003; Stephan et al., 2003) and esteem support (e.g. Lavalley et al., 1997) has also been found to reduce athletes' negative emotional experiences upon their exit from sport; something that these authors suggest may influence the retirement decision-making process.

While countless studies have depicted transition as an emotional experience (e.g. Stier, 2007; Butt & Molnar, 2009; Taylor & Lavalley, 2010), their analyses remain tied to a cognitive understanding. From a predominantly psychological perspective, researchers relate their analyses to cognitive thoughts without consideration to their definition or understanding of what an emotion actually is. In contrast, scholars within the field of sociology (e.g. Hochschild, 1983; Turner, 2001) have located emotions in the interplay between social environment, mind and body. Here, emotions are seen as embodied responses to environmental or social cues (for example, an event, an interaction or person), mediated by cognitive processes which provide meaning to those cues (Hochschild, 1983; Williams & Bendelow 1998; Barbalet, 2002). To date, transition research has given little consideration towards embodied experience or how our emotions may be socially constructed and in relation to our social networks. For example, while emotions have previously been found to affect the decision-making process (e.g. Lavalley et al., 1997; Schmid & Seiler, 2003), these decisions (and therefore also emotions) have been presented solely from the individual's perspective and

without giving thought to social influences (i.e. the thoughts and opinions of or interactions with significant others). That said, the decision to make the transition out of sport has been regarded as a complex process and has been the focus of further research which attempted to create their respective decision-making models (e.g. Fernandez, Stephan & Fouqereau, 2006; Park, 2012).

2.4. Decision-Making Models in Career Transition Research

The complexity of the decision to retire from sport has been highlighted amongst much previous research (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Cecic Erpic et al., 2004; Fernandez et al., 2006). Conducting a two-stage study with a total of 236 competitive French athletes, Fernandez et al. (2006) explored the reasoning behind their decisions to retire. Through the development of their Athletes Retirement Decision Inventory (ARDI), Fernandez et al. (2006) illuminated the multifaceted and complex nature of the retirement decision process. Here, they proposed four factors influencing the decision; notably, anti-pull, anti-push, pull and push. The anti-pull factors considered the overall risk and cost aspects relating to post-sport life whereas the pull factors considered the positive aspects of post-sport life. In this respect, athletes may base their decision to retire upon being able to earn more money outside of sport. Similarly, anti-push and push differed in their appraisal of the athletes' present life within sport. Fernandez et al. (2006) reported how athletes found their attachment to their sporting careers as the primary factor that kept them involved in sport. To this extent, the push factors that forced athletes to retire have regularly been found to cause athletes the most difficulty upon retirement (e.g. Crook & Robertson, 1991; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Alfermann et al., 2004). Despite being some distance from a meta-theoretical perspective

that had been moulded to fit the sporting context (i.e. Lerch, 1981; 1984; Rosenberg, 1981), it continued to underplay the complexity of the decision-making process (Park, 2012).

Park (2012) offered a more detailed analysis of the decision-making process with what he termed the moderate model of the stages of change. Park (2012) used findings from three focus group interviews, conducted with 12 current or former elite, Korean tennis players to develop his model. The model accounted for four stages of change during the athletes' decision-making process; pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation and action. The first step, pre-contemplation is where athletes occasionally think of their sport career end but do not take it seriously. In order to progress to the second stage, contemplation, athletes must begin to consider their sport career end more seriously, which may be affected by factors, such as loss of goals or post-sport career opportunities. At this stage, athletes will consider themselves to have low confidence for their post-sport career choices. During the third stage of change, preparation, athletes will gain confidence as they go through the decision-making process.

Park's (2012) model suggested that athletes have a tendency to continue playing if either their confidence for post-sport career choices remains low or the negatives associated with retirement continue to outweigh the positives. It is only when athletes gain higher confidence or change their beliefs whereby they consider the positives to override the negatives that the decision to retire is made and the fourth stage, action is achieved. Park's (2012) model, based on qualitative findings demonstrated the intricacy involved in the decision-making process and built upon the suggestion of previous models (e.g. Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Here, the free choice element of the causes of career termination and the decision to retire appeared considerably more complex than a simple, straight-forward

decision. However, Park's (2012) model also turns decision-making in transition into a step-by-step guide, generalising the process rather than personalising it. Similar to the conceptual model of adaptation to transition model (Taylor, Ogilvie & Lavalley, 1994; 2006) and the ARDI (Fernandez et al., 2006), these scholars have continued to generalise the decision-making process or the transitional experience to provide an all-encompassing model. Here, I would argue that if researchers are to explore the complex, multidimensional and highly personalised nature of transition (Baillie & Danish, 1992), then we need to move away from such explanatory or reductionist models and create real 'space' for difference. For example, I would suggest that the countless interactions and changing relationships that influence/affect a person's transitional experience are beyond the scope of any 'all-encompassing' model.

2.5. Developments in Positivist/Post-Positivist Research

Since Mihovilovic (1968) first approached the topic of career transitions out of sport, there has been widespread interest in the field from a positivist/post-positivist perspective (e.g. Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Cecic Erpic et al., 2004; Albion, 2007; Mckenna & Thomas, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Transition out of sport research now has the capacity to draw upon findings from athletes with a variety of demographics, such as country of origin (e.g. Stambulova et al., 2007), sports played (e.g. Koukoris, 1991; 1994), age of athletes (e.g. Leung, Carre & Fu, 2005), standard of participation (e.g. Missler, 1996) as well as including athletes involved in disability sports (e.g. Wheeler et al., 1999). However, a common theme that emerges from this array of empirical research is that career transition out of sport has the potential to cause severe physical, psychological and emotional disturbance (Park, 2012). Negative responses that have been reported in previous studies

include identity crisis, feelings of loss, fear of an uncertain future, isolation and frustration (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Yet, these findings have related solely to the transition out of sport and, therefore, a person's athletic transitions. While the majority of positivist/post-positivist transition research has tended to focus on the specific transition from in sport to out of sport (e.g. Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; McKenna & Thomas, 2007), Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler and Cote (2009) noted how there had been a recognisable shift towards an investigation of transitions throughout the whole career. This shift has not only focused on athletes sporting transitions but also career transitions in relation to developmental challenges and various transitions throughout an athlete's lifespan (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). In an attempt to provide a more holistic understanding of the multiple transitions that a person faces throughout their careers, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) introduced their developmental model of transition, incorporating athletic, psychological, psycho-social and academic or vocational transitions throughout the lifespan.

Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model focused on the normative transitions faced by athletes as they progress through their career. The authors noted how there are two types of transition, normative and non-normative, and drew from Schlossberg's (1984) definition of a normative transition as one that can be anticipated or predicted. The developmental model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) accounted for normative career transitions from the initiation through to the discontinuation stage and can be seen below in figure 2.2. Adding the discontinuation stage to Bloom's (1985) three stages of talent development (i.e. initiation, development and mastery) emphasised the changes in

competitive levels and were determined by organizational characteristics.

| Age | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 | 30 | 35 |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|--|----|----|
| Athletic Level | Initiation | Development | Mastery | Discontinuation | | |
| Psychological Level | Childhood | Adolescence | Adulthood | | | |
| Psychosocial Level | Parents Siblings Peers | Peers Coaches Parents | Partner Coach | Family (Coach) | | |
| Academic Vocational Level | Primary education | Secondary education | Higher education | Vocational training Professional occupation | | |

Note: A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation.

Figure 2.2. A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

From a psychological perspective, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) used conceptual frameworks within lifespan development research (i.e. Erikson, 1950; Piaget, 1971; Havighurst, 1973) to include three stages of development; notably childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Here, childhood indicated young athletes' readiness for structured competition whereas adolescence and adulthood were seen as a time where athletes are faced with various life skills developments, such as self-identity and social skills. Closely linked to the psychological level was the psychosocial level of development where athletes establish

social networks and interact with various others, whose roles change over time. The model showed that parents, siblings, peers, and coaches are the most influential others for young athletes, while in the latter stages of an athletic career (adulthood), partners, families, and coaches play more important roles in athletes' social networks. Finally, the academic or vocational stages of development were primary education, secondary education, higher education, and vocational training and professional occupation. Similar to the psychosocial level of development, Wylleman and Lavalée (2004) used a dotted line to signify the transitions as an approximation of their occurrence.

Wylleman and Lavalée's (2004) developmental model has been used as a conceptual framework for further research into both sporting and non-sporting transitions (e.g. Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008; Pummell, Lavalée & Harwood, 2008; Debois, Ledon & Wylleman, 2015). For example, Bruner et al. (2008) examined the transition into elite sport of eight rookie male ice-hockey players from the Ontario Hockey League (OHL). Here, the authors conducted two focus groups (each with four players) where the semi-structured interview guide was based around two layers of Wylleman and Lavalée's (2004) model; the athlete level of development and the athlete's social development relative to their athletic development. Staying true to their post-positivist belief systems, Bruner et al. (2008) noted how they utilised triangulation and trustworthiness to confirm the objectivity of the data. While trustworthiness was based upon credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, triangulation involved the use of multiple methods and sources to cross-check data and interpretations. Furthermore, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the researchers reported an inter-rater reliability of more than 85% between researchers that they conducted on 20% of the responses. The results of Bruner et al.'s (2008) study showed

that a number of themes emerged as being important factors during the transition into elite sport. The authors noted how these themes included both on-ice and off-ice factors and therefore offered valuable insight into two stages of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model; notably, the athlete level of development and the athlete's social development relative to their athletic development. Here, on-ice themes included readiness for competition, demonstrating competence, earning playing time, evaluation of performance and coaches' comments while off-ice themes included the role of teammates, billets, player trades, and personal development.

While some researchers (e.g. Bruner et al., 2008; Debois et al., 2015) suggested that the model provided a fruitful framework to understand young athletes' within-career transitions, other researchers (e.g. Debois, Ledon, Argiolas & Rosnet, 2012; Pummell et al., 2008) argued that the model provided insufficient information and placed athletes easily and definitively within a developmental stage. For example, Debois et al. (2012) illustrated the non-linear path to excellence of the fencer within their study. Here, the authors reported how Francine (pseudonym) experienced nine transitions that were both positively and negatively related to her sporting career (i.e. change of training structure or change in results), to education (i.e. beginning a course in Geography) and to her personal life (i.e. taking a break to have a baby). While Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) should be applauded for reaching out to more than athletic development and an athletic career, their work continues to reduce and categorise a person's experience to a limiting range. From a personal perspective, I entered higher education at 30 years of age and continue to play football into my mid to late thirties which contradict the model's suggestions. Furthermore, if I attempt to limit my psychosocial levels of development to two or three key people, that would be a disservice to the countless

others that have played various roles in my life to date. Indeed, the nuances of my personal experiences and those of Francine in Debois et al.'s (2012) study illustrate the need for further research into the non-normative transitions in both sporting and non-sporting life. By shedding further light into the idiosyncrasies of personal experience we may develop a greater understanding of why normative transitions may not be as predictable as Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model suggests.

Despite the dominance of positivist and post-positivist approaches to transition research, these perspectives are not without criticism. For example, it has been suggested that the human world is different from the natural or physical world and therefore should be studied differently (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). Here, researchers conducting their studies from within alternative paradigms (i.e. interpretivist/post-structuralist) reject the application of principles of the natural sciences to the study of social reality (Bryman, 2016). These scholars argue that social activity is more complex than the (post-) positivist view suggests (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Due to their roots in the natural and physical world, positivist and post-positivist approaches to research are critiqued on both ontological and epistemological levels. In opposition to the positivist view that there is a single identifiable reality or the post-positivist view that there is a single reality that we may not be able to fully understand, critics argue that, as human beings, "we put together our own personal reality" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Markula & Silk, 2011; Potrac et al., 2014) or that there are multiple realities. Similarly, it is arguably impossible to separate ourselves from what we already know (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As social researchers, we work within, not outside of broader historical, social and theoretical contexts which, subsequently, may impact upon the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Indeed, a group of scholars (e.g. Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Ryba et al., 2015;

2016; Ronkainen, Harrison, Shuman & Ryba, 2016) have recently attempted to view transition through a (socio-) cultural lens and from within an alternative paradigm that they labelled a cultural praxis of athletes' careers.

2.6. A Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers

In their recent work, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) noted that there had been limited attention given to cultural research on athletes' careers. They also reported how longitudinal studies in this area had all been conducted from within the positivist and post-positivist paradigms (e.g. Stephan et al., 2003; Lavalley, 2005). In an attempt to break away from this tendency, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) proposed a *cultural praxis of athletes' careers* as a paradigmatic approach to research in the field of transnational migration. In recognition of the abundance of theoretical frameworks linked to models from dominant discourses, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) endeavoured to create an evolution of cultural awareness in sport psychology. Specifically, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) offered six challenges for both researchers and practitioners that considered the whole career, the whole person and the whole environment: notably to provide a holistic perspective in career research and assistance, contextual/cultural situatedness, an idiosyncratic approach, transnationalism and trans-disciplinary research, multicultural and transnational consulting and career assistance programme's (CAP's) international networks, and participatory action research.

Firstly, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) suggested that to research the whole career, the whole person and the whole environment, researchers should consider the merging of two models; Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) developmental model and Henriksen's (2010)

ecological model. Secondly, they proposed a reflexive situatedness, where researchers remain cognisant of their project within their respective socio-cultural and historical contexts. Thirdly, their advocacy of an idiosyncratic approach was directed towards the diversity of both athletic populations and career patterns and trajectories; where they suggested career assistance should be tailored towards these differences. Fourthly, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) hoped to stimulate research into the experiences of athletes who travel extensively internationally and, as a result, find themselves adapting to new cultures. Fifthly, attention was given to the encouragement of international cooperation between CAP's and how these could be delivered as a collaborative service provision; where athletes should be able to access provision in both their 'home' and 'host' countries. Finally, Stambulova and Ryba's (2014) proposal of a *cultural praxis of athletes' careers* encouraged participatory action research which would facilitate close collaboration between researchers, practitioners and athletes/participants.

In order to implement their *cultural praxis of athletes' careers* paradigm, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) encouraged researcher and practitioner reflexivity through the positioning of their research. Suggesting that projects should be meaningfully positioned in a relevant socio-cultural and historically specific context, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) re-emphasized the importance of understanding socio-cultural difference and the effect this may have on career development and assistance. They also recommended situating projects within a scientific discipline or in the interdisciplinary space (i.e. integrating psychological, sociological and managerial approaches) that would match the research problem. Similarly, projects should be theoretically and methodologically positioned; where researchers make clear their

paradigmatic approaches and perspectives, ensuring that they are methodologically and culturally congruent (Stambulova & Ryba (2014).

In their most recent work, Ryba, Stambulova and Ronkainen (2016) proposed a temporal model of cultural transition that can be seen below in figure 2.3. Using life story interview data with 15 professional and semi-professional athletes, they situated their study within cultural developmental psychology. That is, Ryba et al. (2016, p. 428) believed that “psychological processes are the *emergent* outcome of the transactions between an individual’s ontogenetic history in a particular sociocultural framework, and characteristics of the immediate tasks confronting the individual”. From their findings, Ryba et al.’s (2016) model focused on three phases of transition; pre-transition, acute cultural adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. During the first stage, athletes physically and mentally prepare for their cultural transition through activation of their psychosocial mobility. In the second stage, athletes begin to adapt to their changing environment by fitting into the team or club culture and establishing normative belonging. Finally, following a long term stay or a permanent change, Ryba et al.’s model (2016) suggested that athletes reach the sociocultural adaptation stage where they establish equilibrium between self and society.

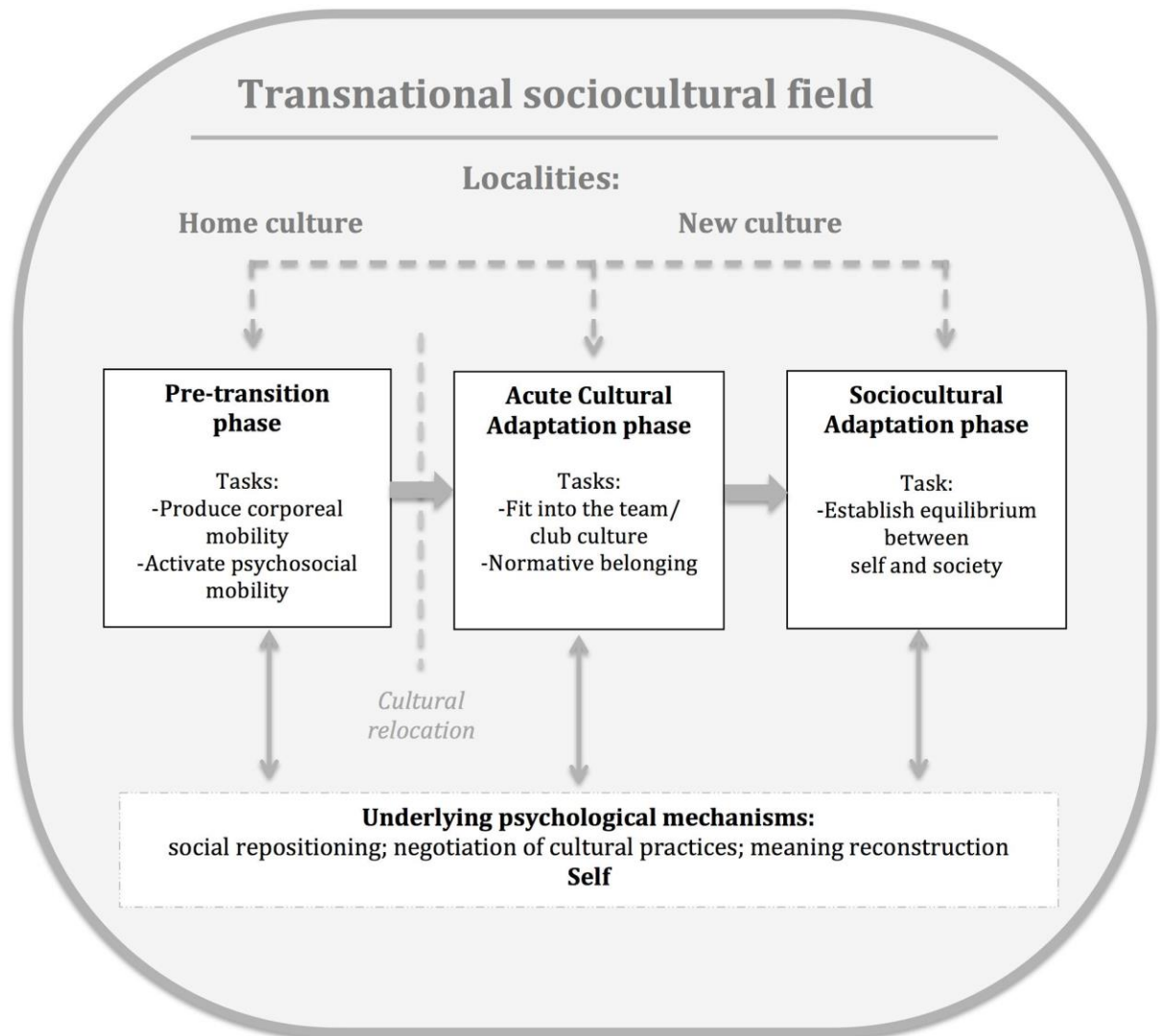


Figure 2.3. Cultural Transition Model (Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016)

Although situated within cultural development psychology, we can begin to see the inclusion of social processes and the relational construction of what Ryba et al. (2016) term career adapt-abilities within their work. Drawing from a growing body of vocational research (e.g. Blustein, Schultheiss & Flum, 2004; Gergen, 2009; Blustein, 2011; Schultheiss et al., 2011), Ryba et al. (2016) illustrated the socially constructed, relational nature of work-based experience. Here, scholars (e.g. Gergen, 2009; Blustein, 2011) noted how conceptualising

work as a relational act signifies that every decision, every experience and each interaction is understood, influenced and shaped by relationships. Indeed, the ways people experience life aspirations, career motivations and meaningful working life are all rooted in their various relationships (Blustein, 2000; Blustein et al., 2004). Moreover, Blustein (2011, p. 1) suggested that “work-based decisions, transitions, and experiences are not simply the expression of individual agency, but are rooted in interaction with a broad array of external influences”. Despite these suggestions, interactions and relationships continue to be disregarded or under-presented within career transition research.

While Ryba et al.’s (2016) model referred to three underlying mechanisms in the form of social repositioning, negotiation of cultural practices and meaning reconstruction, they were again seen as psychological entities. Despite Ryba and colleagues’ (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Ryba et al., 2015; 2016; Ronkainen et al., 2016;) suggestion that “athletes’ decision-making about the career and life course in general derives meaning in social interactions and take shape within a particular cultural and historical landscape” (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 430), they continued to resort back to psychological tendencies by viewing the transiting athlete as an ‘individual’. Similarly, Ryba et al. (2016, p. 432) argued that rather than merely unfolding, transitions are “dynamically and subjectively adjusted to by individuals to the multiplicity of cultural contacts in various localities”. Although their words and model evidenced a shift toward a more relational and sociological understanding of transition, the main aim of Ryba et al.’s (2016, p. 430) research was still to “identify the developmental tasks of cultural transition and basic psychological mechanisms underpinning the transition that assisted athletic career adaptability”. That is, the person experiences the transition from within. In this respect, their work follows the dominant trend of previous transition research (e.g. Baillie

& Danish, 1992; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007) by focusing on individual characteristics. Furthering this point, several scholars (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; Carless & Douglas, 2009; Jones, 2014) have recently called for more social understandings of transition.

2.7. Interpretive Approaches to Career Transition

In a similar manner to positivist and post-positivist orientations to research, interpretivists also believe in a particular system for thinking about and doing research (Smith & Sparkes, 2014). That is, their research is underpinned by contrasting ontological and epistemological assumptions. The interpretive paradigm adopts an “internalist-idealist/relativist ontology (i.e. there is no reality independent of perception), a subjectivist epistemology (i.e. knowledge is subjective and socially constructed), and an idiographic methodology (i.e. the focus is on the individual case)” (Potrac, Jones & Nelson, 2014, p. 32). Intent on unearthing how individuals make sense of their social worlds, interpretivists also acknowledge that this interpretation may be influenced by a range of social, cultural or political factors (Howell, 2013; Potrac et al., 2014). Typically, the interpretive research tradition uses qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, to understand the subjective experiences of both individuals and groups (Mallet & Tinning, 2014). These methods enable interpretivist researchers to focus on potentially hidden meanings, such as ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ rather than ‘how many’ and ‘when’ (Gratton & Jones, 2010). However, as interpretivists believe that knowledge is socially constructed, they acknowledge the subjectivity of the research process, including their active role in the collection, analysis, interpretation and representation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Cresswell, 2013).

From their interpretive perspective, Carless and Douglas (2009) and Douglas and Carless (2009) argued that any attempt to understand experience or sense of self without attending to social processes which operate within a sporting culture would be futile. Subsequently, both of their studies focused on in-depth life history interviews with two women golfers in an attempt to make sense of their participants' life experiences. In both of their studies (i.e. Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009), the researchers conducted a content analysis and a narrative analysis of structure and form. Using Smith and Sparkes' (2006) terms, the authors assumed the role of story analysts to link participants' stories to theory. Carless and Douglas (2009) presented the analysis of Christiana and Kandy's (pseudonyms) stories in three sections that were narrative construction of self, negotiating narrative alignment and consequences of narratives. Similarly, Douglas and Carless (2009) presented an analysis of Berni and Debbie's (pseudonyms) narratives in three different sections that were living the performance narrative, narrative wreckage and asylum. Guided by the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretive paradigm, Carless and Douglas (2009, p. 55) noted how their aim was to "illuminate rather than finalise the complex ways in which narrative, identity, and psychological well-being interact in the context of professional sport".

From their six-year longitudinal study, Carless and Douglas (2009, p. 64) suggested that "narrative and identity work can be understood as a necessary and ongoing life project". Furthermore, they touched upon the various identities of their participants and how their exit from the sport was related to these multiple identities. In this respect, the golfer who orchestrated their life around their multiple identities (i.e. mother, wife, golfer) endured a more successful transition than the golfer who appeared tied to a golfer identity. While these studies have provided a valuable initial insight into life inside and outside of athletes' sporting

worlds, little consideration was given to how participants managed their multiple (and arguably competing) identities and how these changed over time. Furthermore, while Kandy shared stories which involved her husband and her daughter, the true extent of participants' social networks, and the part they played in their respective decision-making or sense-making processes were not at the core of this study.

Elsewhere, Douglas (2009) has provided a detailed analysis of her life experiences from a relational perspective. Having previously been a professional golfer, Douglas (2009) utilised an auto-ethnographic approach to share several short stories; where she understood her identities through her interactions and relationships with others, both inside and outside of her sport. Despite linking her stories to narrative theory (e.g. MacLeod, 1997), Douglas (2009, p. 188) also paved the way for a more socio-cultural exploration of identity (through transition) in her suggestion that "it is through affiliations and attachments that a sense of self is constructed, maintained and developed". Although Douglas' (2009) relational identity certainly points towards a more sociological understanding of her narratives, this work was not grounded in social theory. However, and despite not being a transitional study per se, Douglas' (2009, p. 176) use of auto-ethnography proved a valuable way to "illuminate processes of identity construction and negotiation". While auto-ethnography continues to be utilised within various sports science and sports coaching contexts (e.g. Jones, 2006; 2009; Purdy, Potrac and Jones, 2008; Purdy and Jones, 2011), the method has yet to be used within career transition research. Here, I would argue that the strengths of the auto-ethnographic approach identified by sporting scholars (e.g. Sparkes, 2002; Jones, 2006; Purdy et al., 2008), where readers are presented with a novel window into the life of the author in ways that link personal experience to wider socio-cultural systems suggest that this may provide a valuable

way to research transitional experience. To this extent, exploring how an athlete navigates the emotional and relational challenges associated with transition out of sport from their auto-ethnographic perspective (and therefore from prospective and in the midst positions) would complement transition research, arguably enhancing our understanding.

Another body of research that explored transition from an interpretive perspective is the work conducted by Roderick (2006a; 2006b; 2012a; 2012b; 2014). More specifically, Roderick (2006b, p. 250) utilised elements of narrative analysis (Silverman, 2001) and an interpretive interactionist approach (Denzin, 1989) “to explore the relationship between broader social structures and subjective experiences”. In keeping with the interpretive paradigm, Roderick (2006a) acknowledged that there were innumerable ways in which he affected the research process. For example, Roderick (2006a) suggested that his position as a former professional footballer would affect his perceptions and knowledge of the culture of professional football which, in turn, could affect his response to participants’ testimonies. In his thorough sociological examination of professional football as a ‘Labour of Love’, Roderick (2006a) conducted semi-structured interviews with 47 male professional footballers; 37 of which were still playing. In conjunction with the thoughts and opinions of 12 club doctors, ten physiotherapists and three agents, Roderick (2006a) gave the most detailed analysis of professional football to date. The data drawn from these ‘depth’ interviews were focused around their thoughts on daily activities within their clubs, where players were encouraged to talk about turning points in the careers. These data were later disseminated to focus on specific facets of a professional footballing career; uncertainty (Roderick, 2006b), intra-national labour mobility (Roderick, 2012a), the effect of transferring on family life (Roderick, 2012b) and dis-identifying with the athlete role (Roderick, 2014). A further aim of Roderick

(2006a) was to understand whether, and how, a player's social network might be transformed during these transitional episodes.

Through his suggestion that the end of each season involves the release of 600-700 players from their parent clubs, Roderick (2006a) exposed the professional footballing nexus as an environment permeated with uncertainty. His findings showed that this uncertainty was an integral aspect of players' lives, where they chased a place in the starting team to enhance their feelings of being wanted and to improve their opportunity for longer-term security. That said, players also shared their experiences of injury, managerial succession and loss of form which appeared to impact upon their career trajectories. Here, Roderick (2006a, p. 173) suggested that older players live in a climate of fear; "fear that someone younger, cheaper, fitter and who is perceived to be hungrier for success, may replace them". In an attempt to protect themselves from exiting the game, Roderick (2006a) noted how players develop informal friendship networks within the game to enhance their future opportunities through links to potential managers. However, while Roderick's (2006a) study focused on the daily activities of players in the game, he also speculated that retirement could provide relief from the intense physical demands of the profession and such uncertain working conditions. Using the work of Goffman (1959), Hochschild (1983) and, to a lesser extent, Bourdieu (1984), Roderick (2006a) explained how players engaged in strategic actions, such as suppressing negative emotions, in order to present the 'good attitude' deemed a necessary facet of a footballer identity.

In his 2006b paper, Roderick stated the following: "Exploring the uncertainty experienced by professional footballers sheds light on the ongoing dynamics of the interdependent work-place relationships, which are a striking feature of their working lives"

(p. 258). Describing professional football as a career 'in-built with insecurity' Roderick (2006b) continued to place emphasis on the nature of social networks borne out of these existent uncertainties without scrutinising these relationships further. For example, Roderick (2006b, p. 258) made the following comment: "Access to and movement within professional football clubs is strongly influenced by relatively complex social relationships developed within the industry". Here, Roderick referred to interview data that suggested players developed informal friendship networks, possibly in an attempt to widen their web of contacts. Similarly, Roderick (2006b, p. 258) claimed that relationships formed throughout playing careers were the basis of important networks for players while suggesting that as well as having positive connotations, "...inactive players may develop a sense of alienness towards [fellow] first team colleagues".

Roderick (2012b) later drew from media evidence and anecdotal data from conversations with players and players' wives to expand his research into job relocation. Here, Roderick (2012b, p. 328) stated that: "Partners find it difficult to leave friends and family, they often experience feelings of isolation, they are burdened with the logistics of relocating, and they struggle to settle in unfamiliar settings". Roderick (2012b, p. 395) further noted how "...very little empirical knowledge exists...[about] how they (players and partners) come to resolve job relocation choices". While Roderick's (2006a; 2006b; 2012a; 2012b) work has certainly provided some useful insights into the relational dimensions of transition, to date there has been little consideration of a person's multiple social networks through transition. In this respect, further investigation into the multiple identities (i.e. footballer, son, husband, father, friend), and therefore multiple social networks of athletes may aid our understanding of the possible interconnections between transitions at home and transitions at work.

Furthermore, it might help to make sense of how these multiple transitions affect a person (and their social networks) over time.

Roderick (2012b) also explained how he was unprepared for the emotive manner in which players linked their club transfers and geographical relocations to career contingencies, such as injury, loss of form or managerial succession. While each of these can be regarded as non-normative transitions (Schlossberg, 1984), and have been described by others as critical moments (e.g. Nesti & Littlewood, 2011; Nesti, Littlewood, O'Halloran, Eubank & Richardson, 2012), the emotions that players shared were never analysed. Consistent with most, if not all transition research, the definition of an emotion was also never presented. As the majority of transitional research continues to be conducted from a psychological perspective, analyses of emotions (when presented) invariably remain tied to a person's cognitive understanding. To return to a point made earlier in the review, exploring the embodiment of emotions through transition may enhance our understanding of athletes' sense-making processes. Similarly, to date there has been little consideration given to emotions as social experiences in the transition literature. Here, I would argue that if researchers approach transition from a sociological perspective (as Roderick does), then these emotions could also be subjected to a social analysis. Indeed, scholars in the wider sports coaching domain (e.g. Potrac, Nelson & O'Gorman, 2015, p. 11) have located emotion "at the interface between self and social structure...[acknowledging] the multitude of overlapping emotions that are inevitably experienced in the social milieu". Indeed, this also suggests that emotions themselves may be relational and therefore paves the way for a relational analysis of emotions in transition. That is, how do athletes understand their (embodied) emotions in relation to others?

The studies reviewed in this section (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; 2012a; 2012b; 2014; Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009) have been located within the interpretive paradigm and have shown how these researchers utilise various methodological approaches and theoretical analyses to conduct their research. Seeing knowledge as socially constructed, they accepted the active role the researcher plays in the collection, analysis, interpretation and representation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Cresswell, 2013). While the interpretive paradigm appears to lend itself well to the social exploration of transitional experience, it has been criticised elsewhere for focussing too narrowly on subjective experience (Markula & Silk, 2011). Despite the fact that interpretivists can and do acknowledge social structures, some critics still argue that the paradigm suggests that individuals are free to lead the life of his or her choosing (Markula & Silk, 2011). Similarly, Plummer (2005, p. 364) explains how the interpretive paradigm claims to assume a universal 'human being': "a common humanity that blinds us to wider differences and positions in the world". Others have also criticised interpretivism for failing to give recognition toward how structure and discourse influence the social world and the actions of social actors (Giddens, 1984). Although a key asset of interpretivism lies in its belief that individuals define their own meanings within respective cultural, social, and political settings, it seems that some scholars also take issue with this view of the social world and nature of knowledge.

2.8. Post-structural Approaches to Career Transition

Despite not being a prominent approach within career transition research, studies conducted within the post-structural paradigm (e.g. Hickey and Kelley, 2008; Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016) are also underpinned by specific ontological and epistemological

assumptions. In a similar manner to interpretivist researchers, post-structuralists view truth, reality and knowledge to be fragmented, multiple, multi-faceted, and situated (Tracy, 2013). In opposition to the (post-) positivist view that a singular reality or truth can be 'discovered' objectively, post-structural researchers acknowledge their role in the research process and recognise that "research is inevitably influenced by the social, and thus always contextual and subjective" (Avner, Jones & Denison, 2014, p. 43). To this extent, they typically employ observations, interviews, or textual analyses as research methods (Avner et al., 2014). However, in contrast to interpretivists who subscribe to the view that there is no reality independent of perception, post-structural researchers believe in multiple realities and that these realities alongside knowledge and truth are produced through 'discourses' rather than found (Avner et al., 2014). Markula and Silk (2011) noted how these discourses correspond to dominant ways of understanding social fields, such as elite sport, and the dominant social practices within that social field. Furthering this notion, post-structural researchers believe that our understanding of the social world is framed by our unavoidable link to power relations; where individual agency remains tied to broader structures (Avner et al., 2014).

From their post-structural perspective, Hickey and Kelley (2008) drew from the findings of a research project funded by the Australian Football League (AFL) in 2004 to examine the transitioning professional footballer identity. More specifically, Hickey and Kelley (2008) explored two main issues that were the emergence and evolution of a 'professional identity' and secondly, how this identity is not natural but, instead, developed through a range of 'professional development' activities. These issues were considered in relation to early stage players (i.e. 0 to four years in the game), mid-career players (i.e. involved for between 4 and 8 years) and late stage players (i.e. over 8 years in the game). In other words,

Hickey and Kelley (2008) were interested in what it meant to be a professional AFL player at various stages of their career and how this identity was best developed or managed. Drawing from interviews with management and regulation officials, club coaches and football development staff and players themselves, Hickey and Kelley (2008, p. 483) noted how understanding what it meant to be a professional footballer was “a product of the negotiations between different individuals and groups about why players should adopt this identity, and the forms of work necessary to produce this identity”.

Drawing from the later work of Foucault (1991; 2000) on governmentality and care of the self, Hickey and Kelley (2008) argued that elite performers are so focused on establishing and prolonging their elite careers that, other aspects of their identity are seen as less important, or something that must comply with industry expectations. For example, despite the AFL’s and the Australian Football League’s Players Association (AFL-PA) annual contribution of 1.5 million dollars towards various education and training activities and grants to support player development and welfare, some players saw these opportunities as a potential distraction away from their performances and respective place in the team. While lack of time and access were recurring issues in participants’ testimonies, their limited focus and commitment proved their biggest problem; where all footballers put football first and education second. Here, Hickey and Kelley (2008, p. 479) suggested that “the industry (AFL) generates a series of expectations about appropriate behaviours and dispositions that serve to identify a player as a professional”. In this respect, and in line with post-structural understandings of discourses and power relations, players continually felt obliged to dedicate their lives, first and foremost, to their professional identity in order to prolong their careers in the game (Hickey & Kelley, 2008).

Elsewhere, Jones (2014) and Jones and Denison (2016) have provided a thorough social analysis of the transition out of professional football from their post-structural perspective. Here, Jones (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews for his PhD thesis with 25 British retired professional footballers. Consistent with the post-structural paradigm, Jones (2014) explained how the interview guide was specifically devised around the work of French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault (1991) in order to expose the disciplinary power inherent in the elite sporting world. In this respect, Jones and Denison (2016) described how they used Foucault's (1991, p. 5) disciplinary framework to "frame retirement as the removal of an individual from an overtly disciplinary context". Thus, these studies (e.g. Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016) gave consideration to the practices and relationships that players are exposed to during the careers and the implications these may have upon their retirement.

The findings from this body of work (e.g. Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016) noted how players became docile, conforming bodies throughout their entire careers; whereby "a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1991, p. 136). Whilst acknowledging that the experiences and interactions of players in his study were framed by human relationships, Jones (2014) suggested that relationships themselves were shaped and stimulated by the unique cultural practices and institutionalised norms of professional football. In this respect, Jones (2014) and Jones and Denison (2016) considered the culturally prescribed sporting experiences and relationships that professional football allowed their participants and therefore contrasted other scholars' reference to player resistance or dis-identification (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Roderick, 2014). Indeed, Roderick (2014) explained how players in his study began to externalise their professional footballer identities while cynically distancing themselves internally from the kind of person they were

expected to be. In further contrast to Jones (2014) and Jones and Denison's (2016) suggestions, a host of scholars (e.g. Nesti, 2010; Roderick, 2012; 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2008) have also argued that research focusing solely on the moulding of an individual's athletic identity also avoids the complexity of human life.

Jones and Denison (2016) also explained how players' found it difficult to switch off from their relationships with teammates during their careers; where they viewed their retirements as an escape from the 'close-knit' 'bubble' environment. However, Jones and Denison's (2016) analysis left minimal space for personal (read relational) difference (i.e. the impact of being a father, a husband, a son, a friend) or gave little consideration to how these relationships change during multiple transitions and over time. Similarly, players build relationships with other players, managers, coaches, physiotherapists, scouts, agents and club officials and each of these may impact upon or influence an athlete's transitional experiences. While Jones and Denison (2016) noted how former players' shared their sense of relief linked to building new relationships outside of football, I would again argue that we are left speculating to the management of their multiple identities (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009). Furthermore, how are these multiple identities affected by a person's (multiple) transitional experiences over time? In a similar sense, while indicating that a changing social network (i.e. footballer to non-footballer) elicited 'feelings of relief' or 'sensations of relief' we are again left without reference to their embodiment. While these studies (e.g. Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2014) have certainly provided some useful insights into some of the socio-cultural and emotional challenges of exiting professional football, to date there has been little consideration of how a person's (embodied) emotions may be tied to their changing social network during transition.

While the work of Hickey and Kelley (2008), Jones (2014) and Jones and Denison (2016) has undoubtedly added value to the transition literature, there are also several critiques of the poststructuralist approach to research. For example, post-structuralism has regularly been accused of determinism, which implies that “individuals are so constrained by power relations that they have no ability to make any of their own meanings” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 52). Thus, through viewing power as embedded in discourses, post-structuralism has been criticised for having no theory of agency. In this respect, post-structuralism rejects the idea that individuals can make their own choices and instead posits that ‘the individual’s self is understood as a ‘form’ continually constructed by discourses’ (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 52). Indeed, this appears to contradict more interpretive suggestions that our personal reality is self-created (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1985; 1994). Thus, while the post-structuralist approach to research highlights the presence of power and discipline within social life, this paradigm has also been found to present a number of issues.

2.9. Professional Football in the United Kingdom

Throughout this chapter I have provided a review of the methodological and paradigmatic approaches of previous transition literature without making any further contextual link to the specific focus of this study; professional football. Therefore, attention will now turn to the historical and cultural role of football as an industry. Indeed, Jones (2014) noted that any discussion involving football in the United Kingdom should acknowledge the importance of the relationship between football and British society; whereby “it would be unwise to ignore the wider influence of football’s cultural place in the UK” (p. 25). Due to its sheer popularity and historical resonance, football provides a means of representation for not

only British nationality, but also masculinity, community and class (Hargreaves, 1986). In this respect, Jones (2014) alluded to the symbiotic relationship football holds with various classes in British society but, and a point also referred to by other researchers (e.g. Hargreaves, 1986; Carter, 2006) how this is principally held with the working class. As Woolridge (2002) eloquently suggested, the professional footballer in Britain can often be regarded as a 'working class hero'.

Becoming a professional footballer in the UK is 'Every Boy's Dream' (Mcgillivray et al., 2005; Green, 2009). In support of this notion, Baker (1988) noted how working class players view football as an opportunity to achieve in their lives what they may struggle to gain elsewhere, such as social recognition and financial rewards. Throughout their professional careers, players experience the thrill of playing "in a public arena before intensely partisan crowds and frequently on television...[where] The sheer excitement and intensity can lift players out of the everyday world into a kind of high octane, intoxicating existence" (Gearing, 1999, p. 47). It is this excitement, social recognition and associated fame that the players in Gearing's (1999) study found difficult to replace in their post-sporting lives. In a similar sense, Gilbourne (2002) also made reference to the 'street cred' that accompanied his status as a professional footballer and how this metaphorically elevated him above his peers from an occupational perspective but subsequently left a void upon his retirement. As these findings begin to highlight (e.g. Gearing, 1999; Gilbourne, 2002), being a professional footballer is not necessarily the gateway to eternal happiness.

It would also be folly to suggest that actually *being* a professional footballer, or working in a professional football environment is as rewarding as many perceive it to be. Indeed, Parker (1996) and Monk (2000) have highlighted the challenges associated with

making professional status in the British game; where approximately 75% of young British trainees are released just before 'making the grade'; and where "guided from an early age toward sporting careers that, although offering the hope of transcending their objective conditions, invariably deceives them with optimism" (McGillivray, 2005, p. 120). Challenges also extend into the professional game where players must display a 'good attitude' (Roderick, 2006a; Cushion & Jones, 2006) and a visible desire to succeed (Gilbourne, 2002). Here, Cushion and Jones (2006) noted the paramount importance of this 'good attitude' and how it appears to override any subjective evaluation of a player's technical capabilities. Regarding coaches as the 'gatekeepers' to their future in professional football, players in this study explained how they accepted and internalized the expectations of the staff and viewed the displaying of a good attitude as the first step to a successful career (Cushion & Jones, 2006). These findings demonstrate how traditional disciplinary practices continue to operate in professional football and add substance to Cassidy, Jones and Potrac's (2004) suggestion that any coaching context is often pervaded by existing rituals, norms and traditions. Furthermore, it lends support to Roderick's (2006a) claims that professional football could be regarded as a 'labour of love'.

2.10. Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive review of existing transition research. Here, while also providing a brief overview of football as a working profession in the UK, I have presented some of the key findings from the literature underpinned by the positivist and post-positivist paradigms, the proposed new paradigm of cultural praxis of athletes' careers, and the interpretivist, and post-structuralist paradigms. While considering

the strengths and limitations of this work, I hope to have demonstrated the need for a greater relational and emotional understanding of transitional experience. Further exploration into the impact of a person's social networks on their decision-making and sense-making processes and how these changed over time and in relation to multiple transitions would arguably present a more detailed and contextual understanding of transition as a relational experience. Similarly, attempting to understand how people make sense of their *embodied* feelings would help to explain the mechanisms behind their emotional experiences. As such, the ensuing studies can be considered an attempt to explore some of the relational, emotional and social complexities of transition.

3.0: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Within this chapter I describe and explain the reasoning behind the methodology I utilised to complete this thesis. Initially, I justify the alignment of my studies within an interpretive paradigm, where particular ontological and epistemological assumptions informed my use of qualitative research methodologies in the form of narrative accounts and auto-ethnography. I then provide a detailed description of both methodological approaches, focusing specifically on data collection and analytical procedures before considering the criteria which I wish the quality of my work to be judged against.

3.2 The Interpretive Paradigm

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, paradigms play an important role in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, 2010). They help to explain how researchers think about and make sense of the complexities of the world (Patton, 2002). Transition research in and out of elite sport is often underpinned by the positivist (e.g. Brewer et al., 1993), post-positivist (e.g. Lavallee, 2005; Park et al., 2013), interpretivist (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; 2012a) or post-structuralist (e.g. Hickey & Kelley, 2008; Jones and Denison, 2016) paradigm. When I considered the contrasting ontological, epistemological and methodological belief systems of these paradigms, I found that my assumptions were in keeping with the interpretive paradigm. I believed that the optimum way to understand the naturally subjective meanings that individuals attach to transitional experience and the various roles played by 'others' would be through an interpretive approach (Coe, 2012). Here,

I adopted an internalist-idealist/relativist ontology (i.e. there is no reality independent of perception), a subjectivist epistemology (i.e. knowledge is subjective and socially constructed), and an idiographic methodology (i.e. the focus is on the individual case) (Markula & Silk, 2011; Coe, 2012). Thus, I would argue that my research questions have ultimately defined both the approach and methods I have used (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, the end product could be considered co-constructed research into transition that involved both myself and my participants (Howell, 2013).

From an ontological perspective, I reject the view that the social world consists of “hard, tangible and relatively immutable facts that can be observed, measured and known for what they are” (Sparkes, 1992, p. 20). Rather, in keeping with the interpretive paradigm, I argue that *reality* is what an individual perceives it to be (Cresswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Similarly, I believe that mental constructions form the multiple, subjective realities of our existence (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and that these are constructed within certain social, cultural and political settings (Markula & Silk, 2011; Potrac et al., 2014). I also regard individual meaning-making as a flexible entity, as people may “revisit and re-interpret their own and others’ behaviours in a variety of different, sometimes contradictory, ways” (Potrac et al., 2014, p. 33). To this extent, my research aim could be regarded as “interpreting the interpretations of others” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 12) with a specific focus on gaining a shared understanding of their transitional experiences in, through and out of professional football.

From an epistemological perspective, I reject the positivist assumption that the social world is an external reality that can be studied objectively (Sparkes, 2001). Rather, my belief that knowledge is socially constructed informed my use of subjective interaction in the

research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Here, I recognised that to investigate transition from my interpretive perspective, precise and unbiased results were both impossible and unnecessary and, as such see no reason to deny my active engagement in the process of knowledge creation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). Thus, I accept that as an interpretive researcher, I have played a central role in the collection, analysis, interpretation and representation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Cresswell, 2013). Here, I embraced two key features of interpretivism; verstehen and hermeneutics. Firstly, verstehen describes “the first person perspective that participants have on their personal experience as well as on their society, culture and history” (Tracy, 2013, p. 65). Thus, while interpretivists believe that it is impossible to see the world purely from the participants’ eyes, I endeavoured to strive toward an empathic understanding of their transitional experiences (Schwandt, 2003; Tracy, 2013). Secondly, my interpretive belief system rejects the idea of a tangible material reality that can be discovered and measured and instead views human activity as a ‘text’ that can be read, interpreted, deconstructed and analysed (Tracy, 2013). In keeping with the hermeneutic tradition then, I acknowledge that to understand any text, I must simultaneously consider its cultural and historical context while recognising how prior understandings and prejudices may have shaped the interpretation process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Tracy, 2013). Indeed, the final thesis has been influenced by the relationships I held with my participants, my analytic capacities and my understanding of, and subscription to, certain guiding theories (Markula & Silk, 2011; Potrac et al., 2014).

In order to explore and understand how individual’s made sense of their transitional experiences, I adopted an idiographic methodology (Sparkes, 2001; Mallet & Tinning, 2014). Here, I focused on obtaining rich, detailed data from a small number of participants instead

of a breadth of data to formulate generalizations (Mukherji & Albon, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). I was interested in how individuals interpreted their experiences in relation to their unique circumstances (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). To this extent, I prioritised the production of ‘thick description’, where I focused on detailed, rich accounts of what participants heard, saw and felt as well as ‘thick interpretation’, where, together, we analysed what these experiences and interpretations *meant* for participants (Howell, 2013; Potrac et al., 2014). As will be discussed below, I spent an extended period of time with three participants, where specific interview techniques (i.e. semi-structured) formed the basis of my narrative inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Furthermore, I researched my own transition out of playing (semi-) professional football from an auto-ethnographic perspective with the aim of capturing transitional experience ‘in situ’. It was hoped that a combination of retrospective and quasi-introspective accounts of transition would “make the world [of professional football] visible”, where, as a qualitative researcher I had the capacity to “turn the world [of professional football] into a series of representations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Indeed, Wall (2006, p. 3) has previously argued that “the freedom of a researcher to speak as a player in a research project and to mingle his or her experience with the experience of those studied is precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge further along”.

My decision to adopt an interpretivist approach was driven by my personal transitions in professional football and the level of disconnect between those experiences and my interpretations of much published transition research. As I approached the end of my twenty year playing career in both professional and semi-professional football, I struggled to envisage my transition being as linear or as predictable as previous models (e.g. Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Park et al., 2013) suggested. My memories of transferring

between clubs involved an array of intense feelings and emotional experiences; ranging from the embodied weightlessness of joy and delirium having being bought for £50,000 to the prolonged loss of appetite that accompanied the despair of Halifax Town's liquidation. Similarly, I do not believe that these experiences were constructed, in the post-structural sense, through discourses. Rather, I recognise that these are the personal (arguably relational) meanings that I, as an embodied human being have attached to these experiences. I also believe that, despite commonalities, there are no definitive transition experiences for elite athletes (Overman, 2009; Jones, 2014). Thus, I see no reason to search for *the* reality of transition. I therefore regard the use of a subjective epistemology and qualitative research methods enhancing my attempt to explore some of the emotional, relational and social complexities of transition. That said, I recognise that the use of an interpretive approach to my undergraduate research and my network of academic relationships have also impacted upon my thinking.

Although the interpretive perspective may be problematic for those concerned with finding positivist or post-positivist 'truths' (e.g. Stephan et al., 2003a; Lavalley, 2005), I see the approach as a necessary step toward reality grounded, sociological research in this subject area. I see the interpretive paradigm capable of attaining valuable insights into personal experience beyond the scope of other research paradigms (Mallet & Tinning, 2014). Indeed, Nelson et al. (2013, p. 472) have previously argued that "the interpretive paradigm lends itself to the exploration and interpretation of the frequently emotional, complex, and negotiated nature of coaches' and athletes' lifeworlds". Thus, an interpretivist approach enabled me to interpret and understand the social realities of former professional footballers and their transitional experiences, including the dilemmas and complexities that they faced. Similarly,

by using my own prospective transition for research purposes, I hoped to capture some of the nuanced, idiosyncrasies that illuminate some of the more uncertain and unpredictable facets of transition. However, I see my contribution as simply that; a contribution. In this respect, I am not advocating the interpretive approach as the only way to research transition in, through and out of sport. Instead, I see my research complimenting the advancement of previous literature in the hope of providing a more contextualised and detailed understanding of transitional experience.

While my work is located in the interpretivist paradigm, I also adopt a particular understanding of the agency-structure debate. Here, I am drawn to the work of Crossley (2011), Donati (2010) and Powell and Depelteau (2013) and their relational beliefs. Their workings in relational sociology have attempted to overcome the dualisms between individual and society and agency and structure that have previously dominated the sociological landscape (Crossley, 2011). Rather than viewing the individual and society as separate entities and that exist in different planes of reality (i.e. agency and structure), a relational understanding of social life posits that the two, despite being clearly identifiable, are inextricably interlinked (Crossley, 2011). In other words, these scholars conceptualise “both individuals and the larger formations in which they participate (like collectives, institutions, social systems) as belonging to the same social order of reality, a relational order” (Powell & Depelteau, 2013, p. 3). In opposition to post-structuralist beliefs that we are formed through discourses and therefore do not exist as a humanist self, relational sociology suggests that social structures, systems and discourses are the products of relations that exist between interdependent social actors (Donati, 2010; Crossley, 2011; Powell & Depelteau, 2013). Thus, while I believe that we indeed interpret and affect our own worlds, I do not believe that we

are entirely free to do so. Instead, I believe that our individual agency is always located in and through social relations (Donati, 2010; Crossley, 2011; Powell & Depelteau, 2013).

3.3. Methodological Approach One: Narrative Accounts

While I have explained the reasoning behind my employment of a subjective epistemology and qualitative methods, recognition should be given to how these have evolved in the social sciences. Here, qualitative research has endured successive waves of epistemological theorising (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Firstly, the traditional period (1900-1950) was associated with the positivist paradigm and objective approaches to scientific studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described the following period, the modernist or golden age (1950-1970), as a time when a variety of interpretive, qualitative perspectives, such as hermeneutics and structuralism were employed to construct more post-positivist arguments. During the phase of blurred genres (1970-1986) that followed, the researcher borrowed from many different disciplines and became a bricoleur; where their “choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context” (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992, p. 2). This enabled researchers to combine multiple methods and approaches and led to the *crisis of representation* phase (1986-1990). Here, while adopting various methodological approaches, qualitative researchers began to question the previously uncontested role of research writing (Denzin, 1997). More specifically, Denzin (1994) argued for a change to the forced scientific separation between researchers and their participants or between the research experience and the resulting interpretations. Recognising their privileged authorial position, qualitative researchers questioned their reproduction of more positivist writing practices but struggled

with how to locate themselves and their participants in reflexive texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Following the crisis of representation and during what Denzin and Lincoln (2003) termed the postmodern moment (1990-1995), interpretive researchers began to rupture the objectivism tied to constructs of validity and reliability in their production of more reflexive writings. In what was widely considered the narrative turn, calls came for more experimental approaches to writing that were conceived of as less as a method and more of an art (Richardson, 1994). This enabled researchers to create qualitative texts that were vital; that gripped readers and invited them to engage in the subject matter (Richardson, 1994). To this extent, scholars evidenced a concern for storytelling and for composing ethnographies in new ways (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Here, narratives were regarded as a valuable way for researchers to represent their 'findings' (Sparkes, 2002). In support of narrative research, scholars argued that "People understand themselves as selves through the stories they tell and the stories they feel part of" (Smith, 2007, p. 391).

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2009), narrative research focuses on the stories people tell about their lived experiences. While suggesting that there is no singular definition of narrative research, Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 46) contend that it is commonly assumed that "our lives are storied and that the self is narratively constructed" and that narratives "provide a structure for our very sense of selfhood and identity". Simply put, narrative research can be considered the interpretation of stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Moreover, Smith and Sparkes (2009, p. 3) derived the following characteristics or principles of narrative inquiry:

- (1) Meaning is basic to being human and being human entails actively construing meaning.

- (2) Meaning is created through narrative, and is a storied effort and achievement.
- (3) We are relational beings, and narratives and meanings are achieved within relationships.
- (4) Narratives are both personal and social.
- (5) Selves and identities are constituted through narratives, and people do and perform storied selves and narrative identities relationally.
- (6) Being human is to live in and through time, and narrative is a primary way of organising our experience of temporality.
- (7) The body is a storyteller, and narratives are embodied.

In line with the characteristics put forward by Smith and Sparkes (2009), Woike (2008, p. 434) suggested that narrative inquiry enables researchers to analyse “complex, subjective experiences, as well as intentions, patterns of reasoning, and attempts to find meaning in personal experiences”. Here, I was seeking the *insider’s* viewpoint on the life they lived (Clandinin, 2007). In agreement with Josselson and Lieblich (1995) then, I contend that the ultimate aim of my narrative inquiry was to interpret the lived (i.e. storied) experience of others and particularly in relation to their transitional experiences. Further, I was not only concerned with *what* was being told but also *how* it was being told (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Thus, equal focus was placed on both the things and events being described as well as how it was conveyed, why it was being conveyed and what was felt and experienced (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In opposition to psychological qualitative research into transition that resemble “a “facilitating” interviewer who asks questions, and a vessel-like “respondent” who gives answers”, I regarded my narrative inquiry as “two active participants who jointly construct narrative and meaning” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23).

In terms of the benefits of narrative inquiry, Smith (2010), and Smith and Sparkes (2009; 2012) have argued that it has the capacity to reveal the temporal, emotional and

contextual quality of relationships and lives; honour the inherent complexities of a lifeworld; instigate both social and personal change; illuminate the subjective worlds of both groups and individuals; focus on the embodiment of experience; and acknowledge an individual's uniqueness, both with agency and within broader social and cultural constraints. Similarly, Clandinin (2007) noted how the narrative provides a powerful way to understand the complex process of 'making sense' of a person's story. Indeed, Smith and Sparkes (2009, p. 2) suggested that a narrative addresses this complexity, whereby it "routinely contains a *point* and *characters* along with a *plot* connecting *events* that unfold *sequentially over time* and in *space* to provide an overarching *explanation* or *consequence*" (emphases in original). However, this approach is not without its limitations. For example, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) claimed that individuals are free to choose or select what stories they share when articulating their inner lives.

Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 46) also suggested that "stories are also staged, and performed for particular effects and purposes that can include the claiming of specific narrative identities" which may impact upon the researcher's interpretations. Here, Denzin (2014, p. 33) warned us that individual lives consist of multiple narratives, where, in essence, "we are who we are through our performative acts...nothing more, nothing less". It must be noted however that my aim was never to query or to question the participants' stories, as I had no way of assessing whether events recounted had actually occurred (Josselson, 2013). Rather, I placed meaning-making and interpretation at the centre of my narrative inquiry with the capacity to explore individuals' subjective reality while gaining a greater understanding of how they interpreted and made sense of their transitional experiences. In keeping with

Josselson's (2013) explanation of narrative research, I assumed that the stories participants' shared had emotional and psychological meaning for them.

3.4 The Participants

3.4.1 Purposive Sampling

Study one utilised a purposive sampling process (Tracy, 2013). In short, this involved the selection of participants that would facilitate a detailed understanding of some of the social complexities of transition in and out of professional football. To gain an "in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (Patton, 2002, p. 230), specific focus was placed on the quality and not quantity of data; considered by Sparkes (2000) as a major strength of socio-cultural research in sport. That said, I would also argue that I gained quantity of data albeit from a small number of cases. The fact that I had been a professional footballer meant that I had access to many potential participants within the game. In this respect, I used *network sampling* (Patton, 2015) and selected participants with relevant transitional experience that would permit me to answer my research questions. I approached five players in total; three former teammates who were no longer playing and two former players who had experienced problematic retirements that were captured in the media. The three former teammates were people I had not spoken to for over a year. The fact that these former teammates were relatively local from a logistical perspective enhanced the likelihood of completing the study given their necessity to engage in a number of interviews.

Having informed them of the nature of the study and how they could participate, all five participants verbally agreed to take part. In order to secure their participation, I informed

them of their anonymity throughout the process and their right to withdraw at any point. However, one participant proved extremely difficult to contact and following six failed attempts, was omitted from the study prior to giving informed consent. Similarly, while another participant gave informed consent and took part in an initial interview, he was later omitted from the study following a lengthy period without contact. The three remaining participants were all former teammates of mine. Here, it was hoped that with a strong rapport already in place participants would immediately feel relaxed and comfortable in my presence; encouraging them to talk freely and openly (Rapley, 2002; Merriam, 2009). That said, I was equally aware of my need to maintain sufficient distance to enable me to “ask real questions and to explore, not to share, assumptions” (Seidman, 2013, p. 102). The study also received Institutional Research Ethics board approval.

3.4.2 Adam

Adam is a 40-year old former professional footballer who played in all four divisions of the Football League. While Adam gained experience of foreign culture at [Club i] and [Club iv], the majority of his career was spent in the English Football League. In all, Adam transferred between clubs on ten occasions. Adam now describes himself as a company director and his working life is coalesced around two self-employed businesses. Having been through ill-tempered divorce proceedings, Adam has no contact with his two sons from the marriage and currently lives with his fiancée, [Nicola].

3.4.3 Jay

Jay is a 31-year old former professional footballer who started his career as a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) scholar in League One and, following a total of eight transfers, finished playing semi-professionally in the Conference North. Throughout our time as teammates, Jay struggled with injury and appeared to spend more time in the treatment room than on the pitch. His career ended somewhat voluntarily, and despite the influence of a recurring knee injury, Jay's attractive career prospects away from football made his decision to retire from the game a relatively simple one. Now a successful businessman and a company director, Jay had recently married and was expecting his first child at the time of the final interview.

3.4.4 Joe

Joe is a 39 year-old, former professional footballer who spent the majority of his career playing in League One, despite also playing in the Championship. Throughout his career, Joe transferred between clubs on seven occasions. Towards the end of his playing days, Joe made the move into part-time football and it was here that I first met him, as we spent a season together at the same club. Although Joe was similar to most of my former teammates whereby our contact outside of the game would be minimal, I'd heard from another former teammate of ours that he'd had a number of occupations since retiring two seasons previous. As a married father of three daughters, Joe currently stacks shelves at the local supermarket and agreed to share his wealth of transitional experience both in and out of professional football.

3.5. Qualitative Interviews: A Rationale

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, p. 5), a qualitative interview is a “conversation that has a structure and a purpose”. This conversation can be regarded as a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Josselson, 2013; Randall & Phoenix, 2009). Subsequently, this relationship allows us to enter into the interviewee’s perspective about a given subject (Patton, 2015; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This approach becomes necessary when researchers attempt to explore unobservable aspects of life, such as feelings or how people interpret their lifeworld (Brinkmann, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, qualitative interviews are more than a relationship between the questioning researcher and the responsive interviewee (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Rather, Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 83) have depicted the qualitative interview as:

...a craft and social activity where two or more persons actively engage in embodied talk, jointly constructing knowledge about themselves and the social world as they interact with each other over time, through a range of senses, and in a certain context.

By their interactive nature, qualitative interviews enable researchers and their participants to interpret and make sense of opinions, emotions and feelings that are arguably outside the scope of other methods (Purdy, 2014). Extending this notion, other researchers (e.g. Josselson, 2013) have described the qualitative interview as a *dance*, where the interviewer follows the motion of the participant and tries to ask as few questions as possible in the shaping of the interaction. However, an interviewee’s response should not be considered as their “‘true’, absolutely reliable understanding” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 82). Instead, and to reiterate a point made earlier, it was their interpretations that became the focus of my interpretation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, I accepted that differentiating

between trustworthy and untrustworthy interpretations was an impossible task (Sparkes & Smith, 2009; 2014; Smith, Sparkes & Caddick, 2014).

Despite similarities between various forms of qualitative interviews, there are key differences according to the nature of the study, requirements of the methodology and the research questions (Purdy, 2014; Patton, 2015). While terms such as open-ended, in-depth, informal and conversational are often used to characterise the method of data collection, Markula and Silk (2011) noted how there are three main types of interview; structured, semi-structured and unstructured. In a structured interview, “questions and the order in which they are asked are determined ahead of time” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 109). Unable to change the order or focus of the interview schedule, researchers using this approach identify with “highly standardised and purposefully inflexible” methods of data collection (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 84). Thus, questions follow the exact sequence for each participant without the addition of any further questions (Tracy, 2013). Tracy (2013) described how structured interviews are valuable for studies with large sample sizes and where researchers wish to minimise the variation in participants’ responses. From an alternative perspective, this approach limits the role of the researcher and is restricted by its inability to probe or use follow-up questions (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, Mason (2002) explained how the rigidity of this approach lacks flexibility and sensitivity to context. As such, their responses must be accepted as sufficient or truthful, regardless of whether contradicting nonverbal expressions, such as hesitations, suggest otherwise (Tracy, 2013).

In contrast to the structured interview, the unstructured interview enables the researcher to cover a broad range of topics in a spontaneous and free-flowing manner (Tracy, 2013; Purdy, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In this form, the interviewer takes on the role of

active participant (Rapley, 2002; Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti & McKinney, 2012), where listening and reflecting become as important as questioning (Tracy, 2013). With an ability to follow-up and explore interviewee responses, the emphasis of the unstructured interview transfers to “the natural flow of the interaction and the knowledge and experience of the researcher and participant” (Purdy, 2014, p. 162). A major strength of the unstructured interview then lies in its capacity to unearth unanticipated and exciting data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) while tailoring the pattern of the interview to the relevance of the individual (Merriam, 2009; Brinkmann, 2013). Similarly, the lack of structure invites participants to reflect upon their stories and the meanings they attach to events, behaviours or emotions in complex ways (Tracy, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). However, the unstructured interview is not without its limitations. In this form, interviews may produce high levels of irrelevant data that could present further challenges when analysing and comparing cases (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, inexperienced researchers may find it difficult to develop, adapt and generate the questions deemed appropriate to the topic under study and the central purpose of the investigation (Merriam, 2009).

The final form of qualitative interview used by researchers is the semi-structured interview (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Here, researchers use a pre-planned interview guide but have the capacity to expand upon or alter the course of interaction should they wish to pursue any emergent topics (Merriam, 1998; 2009). In this respect, the researcher is able to react and respond to the uniqueness of the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Despite the relatively tight structure of the interview, participants are afforded the opportunity to share their respective thoughts, opinions and feelings about a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Further, Sparkes and Smith (2014)

have argued that the inherent flexibility of semi-structured interviews enables participants to reveal extended meanings of their experiences that are beyond the scope of the structured interview, thus, giving participants greater control. Although this form of interview is the most common within sports coaching research (Purdy, 2014), it is not without potential weaknesses. For example, the relatively tight structure has the potential to reduce or restrict the complexity of participants' lives (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Similarly, while placing high value in the development of a strong rapport, Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggested that participants may withhold information should a barrier develop between the interviewer and interviewee. Finally, due to probing and expansion of the interview guide, Sparkes and Smith (2014) explained how analysing semi-structured interview data may be more difficult than that obtained from a structured interview.

Having carefully considered the strengths and weaknesses of the aforementioned techniques, I considered the semi-structured interview as the most suitable for the purposes of the study. Driven by my epistemological stance, where I believe that knowledge is socially constructed, I envisaged my researcher's role as more than an objective participant (Mallet & Tinning, 2014). Rather, I saw each interview as an "active meaning-making venture" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 157) where our interaction and relationship would determine the success of the data collection phase (Josselson, 2013). In this respect, I endeavoured to create an interview situation where I would be regarded as a catalyst for and recipient of stories instead of a probing questioner (Josselson, 2013). Although my research questions ultimately led to the asking of certain questions, I hoped to elicit richer narratives and deeper meanings by *following* rather than *leading* participants in the detailing of their experiences (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2011; Josselson, 2013). Contrary to the unstructured format however, I approached each interview with varying amounts of questions to direct the course of the conversation.

While I was open to the emergence of new topics, I was equally aware of the potential for interviews to produce high volumes of irrelevant data. With these sentiments in mind, approaching each interview with a number of meaningful questions gave me elements of focus representative of the structured interview combined with the flexibility of the unstructured interview (Markula & Silk, 2011; Brinkmann, 2013). However, here I would argue that describing my interviews as semi-structured fails to represent the variance between them. As will be discussed later in the chapter, using an iterative process of data collection and analysis enabled me to return to participants' responses where necessary to obtain further, arguably more detailed understandings of specific instances. Therefore, while each interview was indeed semi-structured, the contrast of structure between interviews was considerable and was not set to a pre-designed schedule. For example, interviews often became more structured as I attempted to make sense of the participants' transitions using social theory. Here, the greater structure of the interview was tied to theory focused questions, such as 'what was your main 'goal' when you made that decision'? Thus, while I would suggest that my interviews were semi-structured, I would argue that they occupied varying positions on a continuum between 'relatively-structured' and 'relatively-unstructured' semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2013).

3.6. Collecting Narrative Interview Data

In total, I conducted 24 interviews; seven with Jay, eight with Joe and nine with Adam. Each interview ranged between 60 and 120 minutes (mean length of 93 minutes) and was dependent upon a number of factors, including the time that each participant had available, the progress made during each interview (in terms of making our way through each transition) and my ability to obtain and pursue greater understandings of their transitional experiences. For example, Jay preferred to take a 'double lunch break', as he termed it and participate in a two-hour interview. Contrastingly, Adam's hectic schedule meant that the majority of his interviews were held at short notice and whenever he could fit me in. As the researcher, I appreciated them giving up their time and subsequently 'fitted in' around suitable times proposed by each of them. Similarly, the location of each interview was determined by its convenience to the participants (Tracy, 2013). Here, while I remained conscious of some of the practical issues associated with collecting audible data (i.e. background noise) I was equally aware of my need to find a suitable place where participants would feel relaxed and comfortable in sharing their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Tracy, 2013). By giving participants the choice of where to conduct each of the interviews, I hoped to maximise their comfort and also their responses (Purdy, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Correspondingly, Jay and Joe chose their favoured coffee shop while Adam preferred to be interviewed in his office at work. I returned to the same location for each of their respective interviews until I felt that data saturation occurred (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Merriam, 2009). That is, where I believed that no new data was emerging and participants repeatedly covered experiences that had already been discussed (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Due to the previous relationships I held with each of my participants, I endeavoured to make each interview as 'normal' and as conversational as I possibly could to alleviate any potential barriers that may develop between my role as friend or former teammate and my role as researcher. By somewhat disassociating myself from my researcher role, I hoped that our interactions would follow a similar, relaxed pattern, where I saw my participants as more than just people who I wanted to tap into for my own purposes (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Josselson, 2013). This was something that I strove to make clear during our first interview for both ethical and moral reasons. Although I was keen to ascertain and disclose the personal meanings participants' associated with transitional experience, I only explored to levels that participants were comfortable. Thus, my primary obligation was always to my participants and not to my project (Denzin, 1989). While I continued to use a range of probing techniques that will be discussed below, I conducted myself as a thoughtful, caring researcher and only pursued lines of investigation that seemed appropriate in relation to the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed. Here, I combined listening in an attentive and thoughtful manner with mutual disclosure (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). To this extent, I felt a reciprocal desire to share some of my transitional experiences given the intimacy of the details that participants were willing to share (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Similarly, I hoped that continuing our positive relationship along these lines would help to elicit rich and meaningful data (Josselson, 2013; Purdy, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

During the first interview with each participant, I informed them of my intentions to protect their identities while ensuring that their data remained confidential. Firstly, I explained that the interviews would be recorded on my personal Dictaphone that only I would have access to (King & Horrocks, 2010). Recording the interviews gave me an opportunity to

review and re-listen to the interview while transcribing the dialogue verbatim (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). That is, transcription of “the actual words spoken by [my] informants, however repetitive, slangy or ungrammatical” (Riley, 1990, p. 25). Similarly, in an attempt to get closer to the data, I transcribed every hesitation, pause, laugh, ‘um’ and ‘ah’ as well as comments such as ‘you know’ and ‘like’ (King & Horrocks, 2010). These transcriptions were then saved onto a personal password protected laptop (Purdy, 2014).

Following further recommendations by King and Horrocks (2010), I explained that while having continuous access to their transcripts should they request it the use of pseudonyms (i.e. an alternative name) would ensure the participants and their respective clubs anonymity throughout the process. Further, I explained that should participants require sensitive information or specific experiences to be excluded, or if they preferred to discuss something ‘off the record’, then this was also fine (Amis, 2005). While none of my participants asked me to omit any experiences from their narrative, there were occasions where they preferred to discuss experiences outside the scope of this study ‘off the record’, to which I duly obliged. Here, I reiterated that my role was not to judge them but solely to gain a greater understanding of their transitional experiences (Purdy, 2014).

While I employed semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, these were guided by a combination of generative (Tracy, 2013) and directive (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2013) questions. Generative questions are non-directive, non-threatening queries that aim to develop rather than dictate the course of the interview (Tracy, 2013). These included tour questions (e.g. what did transferring between clubs mean to you?), timeline questions (e.g. what events led to your departure from the club?), behaviour and action questions (e.g. how did you react?) and motive questions (e.g. how did you feel?)

(Tracy, 2013). With a strong focus on the ways in which participants understood their actions and their motives in relation to others, I was interested in how they came to this understanding. Here, Katz (2001, p. 445) explained that 'how' questions "turn the discussion toward 'the long story' that traces how networks of social relations and detailed processes of social interaction worked to shape the respondents' present status".

Following the generative questions, and once my rapport with the participants' had further developed I asked a number of directive questions. Directive questions structure and direct interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Here, I utilised a number of close-ended questions (e.g. did the manager make the decision to release you from your contract?) to ensure that I had understood what the participants had previously shared. Similarly, I used member reflection questions in the later interviews to see whether their narratives reflected their understandings and the meanings they attached to their experiences. For example, I asked the participants' whether they would have changed any aspect of the narratives that I present and whether they were happy with the end result; in other words, did the narratives accurately reflect their experiences? Each participant was indeed happy with the representation and was equally pleased they had been given the opportunity to reflect upon their professional footballing careers in a way that they had previously failed to do.

As mentioned above, I utilised a number of probing techniques throughout the interviewing process. This was an attempt to gain additional information from my participants by going deeper into their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and was done in a number of ways. Firstly, I used non-verbal communications to encourage participants to expand upon their responses. For example, I regarded a short period of silence as a chance for participants to reflect on their descriptions and potentially provide a more detailed

explanation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Similarly, I used my eyes to encourage elaboration. In this respect, Fielding and Thomas (2001, p. 128) suggest how “an expectant glance can function as a probe as much as a direct request like ‘please tell me about that’”. I also used probing questions to extract further information from participants that could loosely be categorised as detail-oriented, elaboration or clarification probes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While I used detail-oriented probes to ask questions about who was involved or when events occurred, I used elaboration probes to expand responses further, such as requesting an example of a particular experience or questioning why something had happened (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Contrastingly, I utilised clarification probes when I failed to translate meanings. For example, by informing participants that I was unsure what they meant, my request for them to explain their answers a little more was directed toward a greater understanding of their responses (Merriam, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

In keeping with narrative analysis, I was faced with two ways to represent my interview data. Although similarities exist, researchers adopt either a storyteller or a story analyst approach (Smith & Sparkes, 2009) to their narrative research. From the storyteller’s perspective, the analysis is the story itself (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 2004). In this respect, storytellers refrain from adding another layer of analysis or theory, arguing that stories are both analytical and theoretical in their own right (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). In other words, when people share their stories, they employ analytical techniques to make sense of their worlds (Ellis, 2004). In contrast, the story analyst carries out a further analysis of the story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Here, the researcher steps back from the story and employs analytical procedures to scrutinise, explain, and think about its specific features while developing theoretical abstractions (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). I saw this approach providing me with the

greater potential to make sense of the participants' narratives in relation to their networks of social interaction. However, I do not claim to have captured or produced 'the truth' or 'the reality' of transition in a (post) positivist or (neo) realist sense. Rather, in keeping with the interpretive paradigm, I offer an alternative interpretation of transitional experience from a sociological perspective that will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

3.7. Methodological Approach Two: Auto-Ethnographic Accounts

3.7.1. Auto-Ethnography

Another approach that stemmed from the narrative turn in the social sciences was the application of auto-ethnography (Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 2004). Auto-ethnographic research developed as a qualitative methodology in the late 1990's, where the storied writing of an individual's experiences was seen as a novel window into the inner life of the person (Sparkes, 2002; Denzin, 2014). In short, auto-ethnography has been defined as a research approach which "draws on the researcher's own personal lived experience, specifically in relation to the culture (and subcultures) of which s/he is a member" (Allen-Collinson, 2012, p. 193). In contrast to ethnographic research where the researcher becomes an insider within the research setting, auto-ethnographers are themselves the focus of investigation (Duncan, 2004). Thus, auto-ethnography lets you use yourself to get to culture (Pelias, 2003). Similarly, Sparkes and Smith (2014) noted how auto-ethnographic researchers relate their personal experiences and stories to wider cultural concerns through a variety of personalised, revealing writing styles; something they described as a 'narrative of self'. That said, Gearity (2014) reminded us that there is no one way to do auto-ethnography. Indeed, it has been widely

acknowledged that auto-ethnographies differ significantly in tone, structure and intent depending on the researcher's emphasis on auto- (self), -ethno- (culture), and -graphy (the research process) (e.g. Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Gearity, 2014).

It has been argued that the writing of personal stories makes 'witnessing' possible, enabling participants and readers to better testify on behalf of an event or experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Gearity (2014) explained how an auto-ethnographic approach allows the researcher to obtain thicker, richer accounts of personal experience by virtue of being closer to it as it unfolds. Further, Adams and Holman-Jones (2011, p. 110) suggested that within auto-ethnography, identity and experience become "uncertain, fluid, open to interpretation and able to be revised". To this extent, a further strength of auto-ethnography lies in its capacity to remain open-ended, ambiguous, inconclusive, and therefore subject to multiple interpretations (Denzin, 2014). Indeed, Goodson, Biesta, Tedder and Adair (2010) described how such open forms of narrative are more representative of *ongoing learning*, such as the evolving construction of a life story. It is possible for the author to revisit and relearn (Biesta et al., 2011), leaving space for change in the perception of self and others (Toner et al., 2012). Another strength of auto-ethnography stems from its ability to encourage critical and reflective thinking in others (Ellis, 2004; Holman-Jones, 2005; Markula & Denison, 2005; Gearity, 2014). When done well, auto-ethnography becomes "personal and scholarly, both evocative and analytical, and it is both descriptive and theoretical" (Burnier, 2006, p. 414).

While auto-ethnographic approaches to research have been well received within their respective paradigms (i.e. interpretive, poststructuralist), that is not to say they are not without limitations or indeed criticisms. Auto-ethnography has been criticized for being self-

indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, and individualised through its use of self as a source of data (Atkinson, 1997; Sparkes, 2000; Delamont, 2009). Similarly, authors have criticized evocative personal writing for its lack of analysis, use of theory or methodological rigor (e.g. Duncan, 2004). In this respect, auto-ethnography has been disparaged for being too artful (Ellis et al., 2011); or for lacking any significant theoretical interpretation (Denzin, 2014). Other researchers (e.g. Riessman, 2008; Frank, 2010) have critiqued the methodological approach; arguing that auto-ethnography does not follow a set method or linear series of steps that will lead to unequivocal results or interpretations. However, it was this apparent critique that drew me towards this approach. Ellis's (2004, p. 120) analogy of auto-ethnography mirrored my pending transition out of playing semi-professional football; where I felt like I was entering "into the woods without a compass". Thus, at the beginning of the study and indeed the inception of my writing was a transparent "awareness that what I attended to and how I attended to it were choices I made on an emergent, moment to moment, basis, as I interacted with my world and the world impacted me" (Ellis, 2011, p. 170). In other words, the method seemed a fitting match for my unpredictable exploration into the world of research as both researcher and participant. Furthermore, it enabled me to tell *my* story *my* way (Forber-Pratt, 2015).

3.7.2. Constructing my Auto-Ethnography

As I approached the end of my playing days as a (semi-) professional footballer my transition was both unscripted and unplanned which brought with it a wealth of uncertainty. These uncertainties and unpredictabilities became the focal point of my research. Beforehand, I never knew who would be involved, where it would lead, why it would lead in

this direction or how successful each stage of my transition would be. Yet, I saw these providing the essential ingredients explaining the 'hanging up of my boots'. In order to capture these experiences 'in situ' I filled in a personal diary on a regular basis. At times, the diary would be left untouched for several days, as I never wanted to write for writing's sake. Rather, the notes that I kept were reflective of my changing physical feelings, thoughts and emotions (Ellis, 1999). These notes were a strategy to preserve interactions, ideas or inner dialogues that accompanied me through my daily life and that encompassed a wide range of physical and mental experiences. I recorded where I was, who I was with, why I was there, what I felt, and why I felt that way. This also gave me a linear and temporal chronicling of events (Muncey, 2010). In short, the purpose of my diary was to capture my lived experiences as they occurred and to counter or eliminate some of the limitations of memory decay (Muncey, 2010). In total, I collected 302 diary entries over the three-year research period. Each diary entry acted as a momentary act of sense-making that would form the basis of my re-interpretation in story form (Ellis, 1999; Pelias, 2015). I saw this as a crucial phase in the process where I felt a necessity to capture the experience as holistically as I possibly could. In agreement with Brown, Gilbourne and Claydon (2009, p. 493), my reflections and writing were 'forensic' in nature, as "moments and memories were placed under the microscope...as never before".

Although intent on capturing transitional experience 'in situ', the writing process offered me both a distance from my lived experiences and a space for reflective hindsight where I saw things that I was unable to see clearly when they occurred (Ellis et al., 2011). In line with the five phases (i.e. cognitive, scribbling, serious, polishing and relishing) reported by Muncey (2010), a variety of writing dominated my auto-ethnographic research. In this way,

my diary could be considered as both the cognitive and the scribbling phases, where my thoughts (and arguably experiences) translated into note form and where they transformed into ideas and plans for future representation and interpretation. Secondly, and during the serious phase, I utilised an array of writing styles to present several vignettes that will be discussed in greater detail below, where I regularly interchanged between the past and the present, to document *my story my way* (Forber-Pratt, 2015). Throughout the writing process, my supervisors acted as critical friends who provided me with honest feedback and suggestions for improvements or alterations. Their feedback informed the redrafting or the polishing phase. However, taking Bruni's (2002) advice into consideration, I saw my supervisors as more than just the providers of feedback but also as an appropriate support mechanism for my role as a potentially vulnerable researcher. Here, I felt able to share and question my experiences with my supervisors in return for both an honest and caring response. While I feel that my supervisors have also played a key role in the relishing phase of my writing, where their comments that my final stories were 'fascinating' and 'rich' raised the hairs on my skin, I hope to continue the relishing phase beyond my degree through the publication of my work.

While auto-ethnographies have been presented in various forms, such as short stories, memoirs, textual fragmentation, poems and poetic monologues (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gilbourne, 2011), authors of sport-based auto-ethnographies have also used literary techniques, such as characterisation (i.e. bringing characters to life through detailed description) (Stone, 2009) and flashbacks (i.e. returning to specific moments in time) (Jones, 2009; Gilbourne, 2010; 2011) to help share their stories in engaging and informative ways. From a representational perspective, I present a 'layered account' (Ronai, 1992) of my

transition, where I reflexively explore my multiplicity of experiences, voices and emotions. Here, I move back and forth through time, writing from a variety of perspectives and roles, including husband, father, PhD student, teammate, assistant manager, lecturer, interviewee and auto-ethnographer. The *layering* of my experience across time and across roles is a purposeful attempt to go beyond my experiences by providing insight into the impact of wider social and cultural concerns (Ellis, 2004; Jago, 2011; Dillon, 2012).

I would contend that the vignettes I present enabled me to return to “a moment-in-interpretive time; a frozen moment within an on-going process of reflection” (Toner et al., 2012, p. 74); a place where I “ask the readers to relive the experience through the writer’s or performer’s eyes” (Denzin, 2000, p. 905). My ability to switch between my thoughts, my feelings and my spoken words allowed me to disclose the social complexities of my transition or to describe “what it must have felt like to live through what happened” (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, p. 80). Here, I attempt to “elicit emotional identification and understanding” (Denzin, 1989, p. 124); embodying my experiences rather than just psychologising them (Muncey, 2010). By adding a further interpretive voice to my writing, I hoped to “extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” (Bochner, 2000, p. 270). This was a purposeful attempt to move away from the realist tale which has previously been considered as theory laden and author evacuated text (Brown, Gilbourne & Claydon, 2009). However, my theoretical interpretations locate my auto-ethnography in both the analytic and artistic camps (Richardson, 2000; Burnier, 2006). While answering the call for stories with a gripping my-story, I have also, to some extent, used my ‘self’ as a means to a theoretical end (Richardson, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Gearity, 2014). In this respect, I share my story with the specific purpose of theoretically understanding my experiences (Jones, 2009; Denison, 2016).

Despite using my 'self' as a means to a theoretical end, I would contest that my use of theory was purely to explore the why's and how's of my narrative and of my experiences (Denison, 2016). Thus, while social theory was utilised throughout my writing and to make sense of my transitional experiences, I never used theory to tailor extracts from original events, as has been suggested by some scholars (e.g. Frank, 2001). Neither did I see the inclusion of theory adding a perceived legitimacy to the tale (Silverman, 1998). Instead, I agreed with Denison (2016, p. 9) that, "if we want our narratives to do justice to our training as qualitative social scientists we need to bring social theory into our accounts in more obvious ways...to blend rich description with thick analysis". Relatedly, I see my narrative (as well as those of Adam, Jay and Joe) as a social story which may stimulate "the enhancement of our social sensibilities, and our deeper knowledge of the complexities of others" (Gilbourne, Jones & Jordan, 2014, p. 85). In agreement with Gilbourne et al. (2014, p. 89), understanding my ever-changing position through the nuances and subtleties of everyday life served "to highlight the futility of attempts at divorcing ourselves from our inevitable social interconnectedness and dependence". As such, and in response to Denison's (2016) call, I have provided a more obvious presence of social theory to make sense of my narrative but also to make sense of the social interconnectedness that Gilbourne et al. (2014) discuss. Here, with a focus on *telling* (theoretically) rather than *showing* my story (Jones, 2009), I have attempted to do much more than be evocative (Denison, 2016).

Continuing the relational theme, Morse (2002, p. 1159) suggested that the ethical considerations of auto-ethnography are complex as "the narrative is rarely entirely one's own". Through my multi-faceted role as researcher, informant and author, I remained conscious that my story was not made in a vacuum and, as such, 'others' were always visible

or invisible participants in my story (Morse, 2002). From this perspective, Tolich (2010, p. 1605) recommended that writers become sensitized and focused in their responsibility to minimise harm by asking the question “Who would be offended by what is written”? Medford (2006) similarly advised that auto-ethnographers should not publish anything that they would not show to the other persons mentioned in the text. To this end, and while I have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of characters within my stories, the writing that follows has been presented under the presumption that those mentioned in the text will read it (see Ellis, 1995).

3.8. Making Sense of the Data

3.8.1. Iterative Analysis

Data collection and data analysis are mutually recursive and dynamic processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers are thus encouraged to view data analysis as a recursive and iterative exercise (Taylor, 2014). Contrary to many book chapters devoted to the analysis process, analysis has also been regarded as a continuous part of the research process itself and not as a distinct and separate entity (e.g. Sparkes, 2002; Taylor, 2014). In this respect, Taylor (2014) argued that the analysis only makes sense if we consider what our data means on a perpetual basis. From a similar perspective, Sparkes (2002) and Markula and Silk (2011) rejected data analysis as something conducted in between the data collection and writing up phase of a research project. Rather, these authors argued that researcher’s continually order their thoughts, make judgements and reach conclusions throughout the research process. Indeed, data analysis proved to be a cyclical exercise throughout this study

and, in conjunction with data collection, should be regarded as an integral part of the “knowledge-making experience” (Taylor, 2014, p. 184). Furthermore, in agreement with Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 115), I regarded the data analysis phase of my research as an:

...interpretive process of meaning-making that begins at the outset of the investigation. It involves transcription, data management, immersion in collected data, a concern with what is in the data or how it is constructed, an examination of any possible interrelationships, and a reflexive awareness of the processes of writing and representation.

One of the main functions of the data analysis section of a research project is to make the link between data and theory (Nelson et al., 2014). Depending on their ontological and epistemological assumptions, researchers use theory in either an inductive or deductive manner (Bryman, 2012). Here, Bryman (2012) explained how researchers committed to a quantitative investigation may use a statistical analysis to deductively verify (or reject) a specific theory; a strategy labelled as ‘deductive testing’ by others (e.g. Nelson et al., 2014). Contrastingly, Bryman (2012) contended that when utilising an inductive approach, theory becomes the outcome of the research, whereby themes or categories are borne out of the analysed data and subsequently linked to theory (Merriam, 1998; Cresswell, 2013). In its purest form, inductive analysis of qualitative data leads to the construction of a new theory specific to the subject in question; otherwise known as grounded theory (Nelson et al., 2014). However, both Bryman (2012) and Nelson et al. (2014, p. 77) contested that both deductive and inductive approaches are not “as clear-cut as they are sometimes presented” and the terms should instead be regarded as tendencies. In a similar manner, Kawulich (2009) argued that rather than being the product of qualitative investigations, theory should be an integral aspect of each phase of the research process (i.e. the problem, the participants, the research questions, the data collection and analysis, and the representation). When utilised in this way,

theory can be regarded as a 'theoretical lens' to both critique and/or challenge existing thinking; a strategy synonymous with poststructuralist/postmodern research (Nelson et al., 2014). From an alternative perspective, Nelson et al. (2014) suggested that theory can be used as an analytical framework whereby theories are utilised as sense-making tools. In light of these suggestions, I would argue that I used theory as both a 'theoretical lens' and as an analytical framework to interpret my findings. However, for reasons that will be discussed below, this was done iteratively, as opposed to either deductively or inductively.

By adopting an iterative approach to my data collection and analysis, I was able to move back and forth between data and theory in order to raise further questions or gain an enhanced understanding (Taylor, 2014). Similarly, I was conscious that an inductive analysis would prove insufficient or present an understanding of transitional experience that failed to resonate with myself and my participants. Here, I was concerned that without an ongoing analysis my data would become "unfocused, repetitious and overwhelming" (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). In light of these reservations, and in keeping with Tracy's (2013) definition, an iterative approach enabled me to gain an emic or emerging reading of the data while also using existing explanations and theories to make sense of my data from an etic perspective. This gave me the opportunity to explore emerging themes and issues in both my future writings and in subsequent interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). In other words, this reflexive process allowed me to visit and revisit my own experiences and those of my participants while connecting the data to emerging themes and insights; progressively refining my (arguably our) focus and understanding (Tracy, 2013). While synonymously engaging in reflective discussions with my supervisors, immersing myself in the data was therefore a continuous process throughout this study (Tracy, 2013).

In keeping with Tracy's (2013) illustration of iterative data analysis, I continued to engage in two main cycles of analysis that ran simultaneously. Firstly, each interview transcript was read through, line by line, and then 'coded' to identify any emerging themes. Here, the use of highlighter pens enabled me to develop categories that were both meaningful and that would help me answer my research questions (Merriam, 2009; Taylor, 2014). For example, while each transition arguably centred round a 'critical incident' or 'epiphany' (Denzin, 1989; 2014), the key words and phrases that were initially 'coded' developed into categories, such as the people involved in the transition and their respective roles. In turn, these categories became the focus of subsequent interviews, where additional questions and probing elicited a greater insight into participants' transitional experiences.

Alongside my emic analysis of emergent themes and categories, I engaged in a critical examination of those that had been previously identified. This etic analysis of each interview transcript was guided by my reading of existing social theory and also allowed me to raise further questions for subsequent interviews. However, it should be noted that while social theory dominated my undergraduate degree, I entered the research process without any pre-conceived theoretical frameworks for this study. That said, my use of 'analytical memos' enabled me to draw tentative links between the meaningful segments of data I had previously categorised and the theory I began to engage (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, I also began 'writing up' my data during the data collection stage in order to identify and attend to any gaps in my findings while formulating my ideas and contemplating their meaning (Groom et al., 2014). As such, writing became a further form of analysis (Richardson, 1990). In agreement with Groom et al. (2014), this enabled me to critically assess the appropriateness, depth and richness of my findings in relation to my

research questions. In keeping with a more holistic narrative analysis, I purposefully kept participant stories in tact rather than analyzing and presenting categories across the stories (Beale, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead, I made abstractions across the narratives in the discussion chapter. I believed that representing my data chronologically provided a greater insight into participants' biographical trajectories while equally helping to answer my research questions. It should also be noted that while the stories I present have been interpreted by myself and my participants and made sense of using social theory of my choice, they are equally open to further interpretation by the reader (Taylor, 2014; Huggan, Nelson & Potrac, 2015).

3.8.2. Theoretical Frameworks

Jay's, Joe's, Adam's and my own transitional experiences were principally understood in relation to the work of Bauman (1998-2013), Crossley (2010; 2011; 2013), May (2011a; 2011b; 2013) and Burkitt (2014a; 2014b). In line with a more interpretivist line of thinking, Bauman proposed 'defamiliarization' and 'sociological hermeneutics' in his unique and substantial social commentary of contemporary living against a neoliberal backdrop. With very little to say on issues of methodology or paradigmatic stances, Bauman regarded reality as too large, complex and various to be captured by empirical research but recognised that "there is nothing to be gained from imposing rigid theoretical frameworks or interpretations on patterns of behaviour where none exist (Blackshaw, 2005, p. 16). Instead, Bauman uses a number of metaphors to 'defamiliarize the familiar' and encourage an alternative understanding and experiencing of the world (Jacobsen & Poder, 2012).

Bauman's sociological hermeneutics demands that "whenever we pursue the meaning of human thoughts or actions we ought to look into socially shaped conditions of people whose thoughts or actions we intend to understand/explain" (Jacobsen & Tester, 2007, p. 324). Under the umbrella metaphor of 'liquid modernity', Bauman (2012, p. xvi) compared life in a liquid modern world to "walking in a minefield: everyone knows an explosion might happen at any moment and in any place, but no one knows when the moment will come and where the place will be". Surrounded by uncertainty, unpredictability, and insecurity, Bauman (2012) explained how individuals are both in and on the market; a location determined by their commoditization. In light of such conditions, Bauman (2005) described how individuals are left to piece their lives together as a series of short-term projects or episodes. Placing a premium on competitive attitudes, Bauman (1998, p. 18) suggested that in liquid times and with a strong focus on self-interest, people increasingly find themselves living "separately side by side" with others.

While the work of Bauman provided a theoretical lens to interpret the participants' and my own transitional experiences in relation to wider cultural contexts, the work of Crossley (2010; 2011; 2013) was used to make sense of their social worlds more locally. Constructing his case for relational sociology, Crossley (2011) argued that sociological research should focus on evolving and dynamic networks of interaction and relations instead of the individual or the collective. Here, Crossley's thesis closely aligns with interactionist beliefs surrounding the nature of social life (Potrac, Nelson & O'Gorman, 2015). With the majority of his work focused on social networks and network analysis in the United Kingdom, Crossley (2010) argued that analysing networks provides symbolic interactionists with the ability to explore important contemporary debates on 'complexity'. With relationships at the

forefront of his research, Crossley (2011) suggested that, too often, social researchers return to the atomistic individual. As Potrac et al. (2015, p. 3) suggest, Crossley's discussions about networks "offer symbolic interactionist-inspired researchers new ways of theorising about 'social structure', as well as thinking about the micro-macro divide". Thus, Crossley's (2010; 2011; 2013) work could be seen as an attempt to disclose further social complexities of a person's lifeworld; one that accounted for the multitude of competing roles and identities that were mutually interdependent on relationships.

A further analytic framework used to make sense of our transitional experiences was provided by May (2011a; 2011b; 2013) and more specifically her linking of a person to society. While May (2011b) located her work broadly within a social constructionist tradition (exploring how a particular way of defining something came about and why it continues to be so), this approach shares its anti-realist and relativist stance with interpretivism (Hammersley, 1992). Similarly, social constructionism and interpretivism share common philosophical roots and focus on the process by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified (Schwandt, 2003; Andrews, 2012). In this respect, May's (2011a; 2011b; 2013) work was seen as a valuable sense-making tool to understand the world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live in it (Andrews, 2012). Here, May (2013) presented an understanding of the ways in which people go about connecting (and disconnecting) to other people, places and communities. Similar to the work of Crossley (2010; 2011; 2013), a key theoretical starting point for May (2013) is her viewing of the self as relational. That is, May (2013, p. 4) also argued that the self "emerges in relationships with and in relation to other people". It is this attachment and these connections that shifted May's (2013) focus away from the autonomous individual and toward a sense of *belonging*. Complimenting the analysis

provided by the work of Bauman and Crossley, May's (2013) work was also considered a valuable framework to make sense of participants' plethora of relocations and transitional experiences.

The penultimate sense-making framework to interpret my own transitional experiences was Burkitt's (2014a; 2014b) writings on *Social Selves* and his follow-up book titled *Emotions and Social Relations*. Burkitt's (2014a) work was an attempt to answer the basic social question of 'who am I?' In a similar manner to both Crossley (2010; 2011; 2013) and May (2011a; 2011b; 2013), Burkitt (2014a) developed an understanding of self-identity as formed in social relations and social activity. Here, Burkitt (2014a) draws a link to the work of Bauman in his suggestion that the very process of becoming a self with its own identity has changed. In a consumerist world, individuals are *seduced* instead of *coerced* into usefully embodied citizens. Burkitt (2014a) suggested that Bauman's work has insightfully pointed up some of the important social changes that have occurred in the past 30 years; where considerable technological improvements leave individuals connected and disconnected by the click of a button.

Going beyond analyses of emotions as individual and therefore cognitive experiences, Burkitt (1999; 2014b) also investigated emotions as a complex and dynamic phenomenon, drawing a link between the whole self, body and mind, and a person's relation to others. That is, Burkitt (1999) saw the embodied aspect of an emotion as an essential ingredient. Burkitt's (1999; 2014b, p. 94) perspective was "to understand thought, feeling and emotion as based on bodily interactions with the world and other people". In line with a more interpretivist way of thinking then, Burkitt (2014b, p. 116) argued that "the body is also essential in making (rather than simply experiencing) meaning", as human beings never enter situations with

“ready-made feelings and muscular experiences”. Indeed, Burkitt’s (2014b) social analysis illuminated some of the relational complexities of both self-identity and emotional experience; something which helped make sense of my own transitional experiences throughout this study.

Finally, I used the work of Turner and Stets (2005; 2006) and Charles Horton Cooley (1964[1902]) to make sense of specific emotional experiences from a sociological perspective. Here, from a symbolic interactionist viewpoint, my emotional experiences were linked to my reading of the words, facial expressions and behaviours of others and how these affected my response. Drawing on Turner and Stets’ (2005; 2006) work, I explained how my emotional reactions depended on the verification or non-confirmation of my self-conception. Here, Turner and Stets (2005; 2006) noted how the verification of self results in positive emotions, such as happiness and pride while the non-confirmation of self results in negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety. While using Turner and Stets’ (2005) work to make sense of my anger, I used Charles Horton Cooley’ (1964[1902]) concept of the *looking-glass self* to make theoretical sense of my shame and pride. Referring to three perceptions (our appearance in the eyes of others, the judgements or evaluations made by others, and our own feelings about ourselves given others’ evaluations), Cooley (1964[1902]) explained how pride and shame are the result of meeting/not meeting or exceeding the expectations of others. The work of Cooley (1964[1902]) and Turner and Stets (2005; 2006) provided a useful lens to present an alternative, sociological analysis of emotions to the athletic career transition literature.

3.9. Judging the Study

The standard criteria for judging quantitative research was deemed inappropriate for qualitative inquiry by early researchers, Lincoln and Guba (1985). Initially, Lincoln and Guba (1985) substituted the quantitative criteria of validity, reliability and generalizability with an umbrella term 'trustworthiness', which included credibility, transferability and dependability. Here, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that adherence to a number of techniques, such as prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation and member checking would necessitate a study's trustworthiness; where the research could be subsequently regarded as "good quality scholarly work" (p. 43). Despite being the 'gold standard' of judging the quality of qualitative research in sports science, their approach has been heavily critiqued by other scholars (e.g. Sparkes, 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2009; 2014; Smith, Sparkes & Caddick, 2014). Most notably, Sparkes and colleagues contested that Lincoln and Guba's (1985) parallel perspective is philosophically contradictory. They refuted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) apparent compatibility of ontological relativism (i.e. a world of multiple, constructed, and mind-dependent realities) and epistemological foundationalism (i.e. reality can be found objectively). Instead, Sparkes and colleagues argued that researchers must either commit to finding an objective reality or to accept that differentiating between trustworthy and untrustworthy interpretations remains an impossible task (Sparkes & Smith, 2009; 2014; Smith et al., 2014).

While Lincoln and Guba's (1985) parallel framework continues to be utilised by a large proportion of qualitative researchers when designing and evaluating their studies, other scholars (e.g. Sparkes, 1998; 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) have developed their own evaluative stance. In a call to judge the 'goodness' of qualitative inquiry with more relativist

criteria, Sparkes and colleagues encouraged a 'letting go' perspective; effectively abandoning traditional views of validity and trustworthiness. However, Sparkes (2002) and Sparkes and Smith (2009) emphasised that this does not mean that all knowledge claims are equal to other knowledge claims or that 'anything goes'. Rather, criteria should be regarded as characterising traits and emergent in nature, as opposed to any fixed, absolute or preordained standard (Sparkes, 1993; Smith et al., 2014). Here, Smith and Deemer (2000) noted how the list of characteristic traits can therefore be modified to suit the specific context and purpose of a given study; enabling constant reinterpretation of changing times and conditions. Thus, while researchers (e.g. Sparkes, 2002; Smith and Sparkes, 2009; Tracy, 2010; Smith et al., 2014) have drawn up potential lists of how to judge a study's 'goodness', they are not set in stone or to be applied to all qualitative research. In other words, these traits may describe how a study *might* be judged instead of how it *must* be judged (Smith et al., 2014). Indeed, while I invite readers to evaluate this study in relation to the questions that I provide below, I accept that these are not the only criteria that can be used for passing judgement and subsequently hope that the thesis impacts upon readers in many different ways.

In keeping with Denzin's (2010) suggestions, I would like my work to be critiqued within its paradigm; where I ask the reader to honour specific interpretive criteria drawn from Sparkes and colleagues' (i.e. Sparkes, 1998; 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2009) 'letting go' position. Indeed, if I was seeking evaluation based on validity, reliability and generalizability, I would have opted for a more suitable methodology (Allen-Collinson, 2012). Instead, I draw from lists provided by Richardson (2000), Tracy (2010; 2013), Smith et al. (2014) and Barone and Eisner (2012) to offer the following considerations. Firstly, I would like the reader to assess whether

this was a worthy topic and whether it was relevant, interesting, or significant? Second, does this study make a substantive contribution to social life by generating “a sense of insight and deepened understanding” of transitional experience both within professional football and society more widely (Tracy, 1995, p. 209). In other words, does the study exude evocation and illumination by defamiliarising transition and presenting the process in an alternative way? Third, does this investigation succeed aesthetically; opening up the text in satisfying and complex ways that invite an interpretive response from you, the reader? Or, does the study provide resonance by using the narratives of Joe, Jay, Adam and myself to help you make sense of your own transitional experiences? Fourth, does the study provide verisimilitude, or, similarly, is this study “a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the ‘real’” (Richardson, 2000, p. 937)? That is, does it provide an embodied sense of lived experience? Fifth, is this thesis rich in rigor? Does it utilise ‘sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, sample(s), context(s), and data collection and analysis processes’ (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 197)? Finally, does this study impact upon you as the reader to inspire further research questions about social life?

4.0: Findings and Discussion

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to theoretically analyse players' transitional experiences. Firstly, I provide a brief overview of the participants' narratives that can be found in appendices A, B and C. The remainder of the chapter will then discuss key features of the players' transitions, where I will use the work of Bauman (1998-2013), Crossley (2010; 2011; 2013) and May (2013) to make sense of their experiences. More specifically, I use the work of Bauman (1998-2013) to analyse the participants' understandings of their workplace contexts. I utilise a number of Bauman's metaphors to interpret various aspects of the participants' lives and how this understanding led them to think about transitions in particular ways. I then make sense of how the participants' generated and operationalized this understanding and how this was inextricably linked to their various networks of social relations. Here, I turn to Crossley's (2010; 2011; 2013) relational sociology and May's (2013) sense of belonging to make theoretical sense of the parts played by 'others' in the participants' transitions. I conclude the chapter with a summary of what impact this could have on the sporting transition literature.

4.2. Summary of the Participants' Narratives

While I discuss key features of the participants' transitions in this section, a more complete representation of their experiences can be found in appendices A, B and C where I provide a narrative for each of the players in this study; Adam, Jay and Joe. Here, it was hoped that presenting a more complete version of their stories, and by detailing these events

chronologically, would illuminate the impact of multiple transitions over time. Although each participant's transitional experiences were somewhat unique in nature, there were many similarities that will be analysed throughout this chapter. Firstly, each participant experienced numerous sporting and non-sporting transitions that affected their lives and to varying extents. The precarious descriptions offered by the players of their working environment preceded their necessity to navigate through their careers with often covert self-interest. Paradoxically, the participants craved feeling part of a team and an important one at that. During each transition, the participants' decision-making and sense-making processes revolved around their ever-changing social networks; where countless 'others' played various roles. While family members may have significantly affected the participants' decisions, friends, teammates, managers and supporters enabled participants to make sense of, and determine the success of their transitions based on a number of factors, including financial, social and personal aspects. Indeed, Adam's, Jay's and Joe's narratives (see appendices A, B and C) highlight some of the idiosyncrasies of transitional experience but also some of the similarities that will now be the focus of analysis.

4.3. Uncertainty, Unpredictability and Insecurity

Perhaps the most striking theme of the interviews was how the participants experienced numerous and contrasting career and life transitions and were unable to fully anticipate or control these transitional episodes. While these occurred before, during, outside of, and after their respective careers, Adam, Jay and Joe made extended reference to the unstable environment of professional football. The ubiquitous uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity that participants referred to mirrored the previous depictions of professional

football made by other researchers (e.g., Roderick, 2006a; 2012a; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). In this respect, all three participants learned quickly about “the uncertainty of the marketplace, the limited tenure of average contracts...and the constant threat of workplace injury and ageing” (Roderick, 2006a, p. 334). At various times in the participants’ careers their contracts ended prematurely as they either agreed a settlement figure, were sold on, or in Adam and Joe’s case when they requested to leave; Adam when he left [Club viii] and Joe when he left [Club H]. Adam’s statement that “nothing’s ever certain in football and you’re always wondering what’s around the corner” epitomised participants’ understanding of their workplace environments. Despite the relative security of two or three year deals, participants were seemingly conscious of the unwritten ‘subject to change’ policy where clubs seemed able to manipulate contracts to their desired needs.

Contracts appeared to act as a short-term fix to participants’ financial obligations or often as insurance policies. Upon signing new contracts, participants recognised the minimal likelihood of seeing out their contract and regularly confessed that this was their ‘worst case scenario’. This was perhaps most explicit when Adam and Joe secured their respective three year contracts; contracts that, as a predominant feature of professional football were never fulfilled but which had given them the longer-term financial respite they craved. Participants rarely considered extending their stay at clubs beyond the length of their contracts and, at times, the length of the contract merely served as a reference point for the severance packages that became a regular feature of the latter stages of both Adam’s and Joe’s careers. Equally, at times, the length of the contract played a crucial role in the players’ desired mobility. For example, Adam’s contract at [Club viii] left him ‘stuck’ at the club and prevented him from making the move to the so-called ‘bigger club’. Similarly, Joe seemed destined for a

big move away from [Club B] but his remaining years' contract and respective elevated transfer fee appeared to wade off potential suitors. Ultimately, participants seemed conscious of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a long-term contract meant financial stability but on the other hand it meant potential immobility had another, perhaps, a better option come along.

The participants' understanding of their workplace environments and respective careers could be interpreted using the work of Bauman (2003; 2005; 2007; 2012; 2013) and more specifically his social commentaries on present day living. While Bauman presents a macro generalization of contemporary life, I endeavour to explain how elements of his work can be transferred to the micro level to arguably advance previous social interpretations of personal experience. That said, and while I focus specifically on the experiences of my participants, I believe that Bauman's work could also be used to make theoretical sense of professional football more widely. For example, the clubs that Jay, Adam and Joe represented faced similar uncertainties, such as a regular turnover of players or facing the financial challenges tied to prospective promotions and relegations.

Under the umbrella of 'liquid modernity', Bauman (2012, p. viii) describes contemporary life as fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability, whereby:

'liquid modernity', is the growing conviction that change is the *only* permanence, and uncertainty the *only* certainty...under conditions of 'liquidity' everything could happen yet nothing can be done with confidence and certainty.

Throughout his work, Bauman makes reference to the switch from a more 'solid' and stable environment to the metaphorical 'liquid' surroundings of present day. Here, Bauman (2005) notes how the formerly 'heavy', fixed locations of capital, in the form of large businesses and

corporations encouraged longevity in the form of 'careers' and 'progress'. Against a neoliberal backdrop of deregulation, privatization and where 'the market' rules, advances in technology have elevated 'light', portable entities that "include no more than a briefcase, a cellular telephone and a portable computer" (Bauman, 2012, p. 58) to the forefront of the business world. Bauman's use of the term 'liquid' draws a clear distinction between the past and the present whereby, as he suggests, "liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape" (Bauman, 2012, p. 2). Here, Bauman notes how employers and employees alike remain conscious of the potential frailties of their own positions in relation to the effects of globalization and, in a world obsessed with consumption and instant gratification, should be prepared to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret in pursuit of more favourable opportunities. In light of this change, Bauman notes how we must remain adaptable and flexible; where the concepts of 'career' and 'progress' are being readily replaced by short-term projects and episodes (Bauman, 2005). Indeed, these conditions have been recognised in wider occupational literature (e.g. Quinlan, 1998; Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001) and have been termed 'contingency work' and 'precarious employment'. This precariousness has seen a decline in permanent, full-time employment and has seen a growth in shift-work, self-employment, part-time jobs, and casual employment, including agencies leasing workers (Alberti, 2014).

I would argue that Adam, Jay and Joe could each regard their professional football experiences as several short-term projects or episodes, as opposed to the 'career' that they regularly referred to; an argument substantiated by the 35 clubs they collectively represented. While each could refer to times of 'progress' where they moved up through the professional leagues or enhanced their earnings, these transitions were far from future-proof.

Rather, these 'progressions' were temporary promotions that depended on future performances; a point supported by the participants' testimonies. In this respect, upon signing a three-year contract with Championship club, [Club G], Joe admitted that "it didn't mean I were gonna be a Championship player for the rest o' mi' career". Similarly, upon signing his three-year deal for [Club vi], Adam acknowledged that the rest of his career would not be spent in Holland and that much of his life could indeed be ephemeral in nature. The liquidity of their experiences was perhaps most explicit through each of the participants' suggestions and acceptance that in football, "anything can happen" and therefore, as players, they seemed unable to plan or even estimate where their future was heading. Instead, players appeared to take each move one tentative step at a time and piece together their fragmented 'careers' as they went along.

While Bauman draws from events such as National conflicts and natural disasters to underpin much of his reference to uncertainty and unpredictability, his reference to the financial crash of 2008 could help to provide some of the context in which the players operated. Here, the financial issues experienced by football clubs in light of the crash, especially in lower leagues, are arguably an example of this macro trend. In this respect, the privileged few clubs in the Premier League were able to flex their financial muscles and further improve their clubs. On the contrary, lower league clubs, and the less financially stable clubs were left operating on tight budgets and short-term contracts. This left a surfeit of players that were willing to work in this environment, creating a climate pervaded by uncertainty and competition. I would also argue that the participants' awareness of the impact of injury, de-selection or managerial change created a similar climate of uncertainty at the micro level. Furthermore, these uncertainties and anxieties left participants feeling vulnerable in their

workplace environments. Similar to Roderick's (2006b, p. 246) findings, the participant's recognised the fluidity of their place within the team and appeared to live by the maxim, "you are only as good as your last game". A run of several first-team appearances seemingly lowered players' anxieties whereas a run of several games on the substitutes' bench seemingly heightened their insecurities.

Despite striving for a regular place in the starting team, the participants' often found themselves wanting to be transferred when in a good run of form; where a change was seen as a 'must' or almost as a necessary process whilst staying would leave them feeling vulnerable. For example, while Adam seemed desperate to 'cash in' on his rich vein of form at both [Club v] and [Club viii], he viewed transferring as the only option and one that he couldn't afford to miss out on. Here, the work of Bauman (2012) can be utilised to make sense of the participants' quest to continually better their position. Furthering his discussion on the concepts of 'career' and 'progress', Bauman (2012, p. 134) noted how "progress is no longer a temporary measure, an interim matter, leading eventually (and soon) to a state of perfection...but [instead] a perpetual and perhaps never-ending challenge and necessity, the very meaning of 'staying alive and well'". Bauman (2012, p. ix) further suggested that, in the liquid modern era, to be modern means "an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired". Here, the participants' desperation to transfer to a 'bigger' or 'better' club whenever they were given the opportunity emphasised their desire to strive for continuous improvement.

Bauman's (2012) discussion of 'liquid modernity' helps to illuminate the participants' understanding of their workplace contexts (and lifeworlds) by making sense of the inherent precariousness. This social analysis introduces a significant underpinning to the elite sport

environment and subsequently goes some way to substantiating the majority of the participants/athletes decision-making processes. Indeed, by introducing the notion of liquid modernity to the transition literature, thought-processes and decision-making strategies can be understood in a more detailed manner. For example, instead of decisions being limited to one of four options (i.e. pull, anti-pull, push, anti-push) (Fernandez et al., 2006) or broken down into four stages (i.e. pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation and action) (Park, 2012), they can be understood in relation to the athletes ever-changing position in a liquid modern world. Here, while uncertainty and vulnerability have been discussed elsewhere in the career transition literature (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; 2012a; Nesti et al., 2012), my findings have shown how these facets pervaded the participants' daily lives. Thus, I have advanced existing understanding by showing how sporting careers can also be affected by transitions outside of sport; transitions that are equally tied to a similar climate of uncertainty. Furthermore, my use of sociological theorisation offers an alternative way to make sense of these working/living conditions. Indeed, these findings have shown how sporting and non-sporting lives are equally shrouded in uncertainty, where either has the potential to alter the trajectory of a career or indeed life course.

4.4. Turning Points in Participants Lives

Having explained their workplace environments as uncertain, unpredictable and insecure, Adam, Jay and Joe proceeded to give numerous examples of turning points in their careers that were often related to circumstances beyond their control and that mirrored the critical moments, such as injury, de-selection, or being sold to another club, outlined by Nesti et al. (2012). While injuries and managerial change dominated participants' examples of

unpredictable events, these also included clubs entering administration, the collapse of a television broadcasting company and unexpected telephone calls from agents to name a few. Similarly, countless unpredictable events occurred outside of the professional football environment that had similar repercussions on participants' lives. Here, alongside instances of miscarriage, separation and divorce, each of the participants shared with me instances where family members had lost their lives that affected both their careers and their personal lives. In this respect, careers and personal lives were not distinct but intertwined and impacted upon each other. For example, Jay recalled the game following the death of his uncle and great uncle where his "head was all over the place and [he] was thinking about anything apart from the game". Jay later described how the deaths had played a further role in the unexpected approach from [Club 3]; one where his decision seemed tied to his family and where he agreed a move in order to 'be there' for his aunty. Jay's examples demonstrated the interlinking of careers and personal lives and suggested that the uncertainty and unpredictability that participants spoke about in professional football were also present in their personal lives.

Following each turning point or unpredictable event, participants re-evaluated what was important to them and reacted accordingly. Relatedly, they regularly offered examples of 'what might have been' in relation to transfers that never materialised or the different decisions they may have made; for instance, had their family members not fallen ill or passed away. Indeed, Joe would almost certainly have remained in professional football for longer had his Mum's health not deteriorated suddenly. Jay's decision to sign for [Club 3] would also have been different had his uncle and great uncle not recently passed away. Throughout each unpredictable event, participants were able to relate their emotional experiences back to the

precise or specific moment in time [the turning point] where their lives and careers were synonymously affected. Referring back to Schlossberg's (1981, p. 5) definition of transition, I would argue that each unpredictable event indeed initiated or triggered a transition, as they resulted in a "change in assumptions about [the participants] and [their] world and thus require[d] a corresponding change in [their] behaviour and relationships". Arguably, the participants in this study were constantly monitoring various transitions in their lives and offer empirical evidence of the often underplayed social complexities of the non-normative transitions that Stambulova et al. (2009) briefly discussed.

Here, the work of Bauman (2013) can again be utilised to make sense of the many turning points that proliferated the participants' lives. Having already used the work of Bauman and his metaphor of liquid modernity to interpret my findings, I believe that his discussion of time will further inform the omnipresence of transition and help make sense of the turning points in participants' lives. Underpinning Bauman's notion of 'liquid modernity' is what he defines as "*a renegotiation of the meaning of time*" (Bauman, 2013, p. 143). Referring to terms, such as 'nowist culture' or 'hurried culture' to depict liquid modern living, Bauman (2013) explains how time is regarded as *pointillist* in the liquid modern era; an era obsessed with speed and immediacy (Tomlinson, 2007). In contrast to modern or pre-modern histories where time was perceived as either cyclical or linear, Bauman (2013, p. 143) suggests that, similar to a pointillist painting, time has been "broken up into a multitude of separate morsels, each morsel reduced to a point ever more closely approximating its geometrical idealization of non-dimensionality". Expanding on this non-dimensionality, Bauman (2013, p. 143) explains how points "have no length, width or depth: they exist...*before* space and time; in a point, space and time dimensions are yet to be born or erupt". Bauman's (2013)

suggestion that points have infinite potential to expand supports his repetition of contemporary life as fraught with uncertainty and unpredictably. Moreover, Bauman (2012, p. xvi) compares life in a liquid modern world to “walking in a minefield: everyone knows an explosion might happen at any moment and in any place, but no one knows when the moment will come and where the place will be”. To this end, Bauman (2013, p. 143) describes a map of pointillist life as “a graveyard of imaginary or unfulfilled possibilities” and arguably gives reasoning to participants earlier claims that [in football] “anything can happen”.

The charting of Adam’s, Jay’s and Joe’s lives would undoubtedly resemble the graveyard of imaginary or unfulfilled possibilities that Bauman (2013) spoke about and could be traced back to the commencing of their professional football experiences if not earlier. Each of the participants’ narratives would have taken an alternative path had Adam’s family not moved from [Margate] when he was ten years old, had [Club 1] not increased their intake beyond the usual eight YTS’s to include Jay or had the youth team manager not been promoted to the [Club A] first team, opening up the opportunity for Joe to fulfil his dream of signing his first contract. Similarly, Adam could have easily signed for [Club ii] instead of [Club iii] or [Club vi] instead of [Club vii] that would have altered the course of his life story. Using Bauman’s concept of pointillist time as an analytic tool, Adam’s potential transfers could therefore be regarded as ‘points’ in Adam’s life; with “infinite potential to expand” (Bauman, 2013, p. 143). In this respect, while each choice of club [point] expanded into a clear option, and subsequently played a role in Adam’s life story, the ‘points’ of [Club iii] and [Club vii] expanded into more significant roles [read points] and arguably became lines; albeit dot-to-dot lines. To this extent, Adam’s [Club iii] and [Club vii] careers were far from linear progressions and involved a number of positive and negative experiences that could

potentially be evidenced by the changing direction of the dots. While Adam's examples may offer tentative support of Bauman's pointillist time, they fail to encapsulate the nature of points that explode into participants' lives unexpectedly and have the potential to determine their career trajectories.

Breaking down time into a "multitude of separate morsels" (Bauman, 2013, p. 143) discloses the uncertainty and unpredictability within professional football (and indeed life). Dissecting each participants' club 'projects' into a match-by-match analysis and thereby viewing each football match in pointillist terms further exposes the ubiquitous uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity that participants spoke of. Joe even commented on the fluctuating effects of matches on his life, where a goal would be rewarded with a takeaway but a defeat or a poor performance would lead to him sulking and preparing as well as possible for the following match. My discussions with Joe also revealed a life changed by more serious turning points and 'explosions'. Joe described his transfer to [Club E] as *the* turning point in his career but then continued to share his wife's miscarriage, his stellar season of 29 league goals, becoming a father for the first time, his nasty knee injury that scuppered his big money transfer, the relief of his comeback goal, his failed medical exam with [Club F], his transfer to the "massive" [Club G], fathering twin girls, and the keeper's unbelievable save on his [Club G] debut, and all within a two-year spell. With the inclusion of the [Club D] chairman going to prison for fraud, his Mum's death and four managerial sackings, Joe's experiences in professional football were littered with turning points and 'explosions' that all impacted upon his life.

Alternatively, I believe the participants' experiences of unexpected events can also be better understood using the work of Giddens (1991) and his discussion of fateful moments.

Giddens (1991) utilised concepts of ontological security and existential anxiety as polar opposites in his theory of human existence. Defining ontological security broadly as the security of being, Giddens (1991) described how fateful moments provide a risk to individuals' ontological security, simultaneously heightening their existential anxiety. Giddens (1991, p. 113) defined fateful moments as "times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence". Furthering his reference to fate, Giddens (1991, p. 112) acknowledged the potentially disruptive nature of these life events in his recognition that "fateful moments are highly consequential for a person's destiny". Indeed, the illness and subsequent death of Joe's Mum immediately stands out as an example of a fateful moment that left Joe at the crossroads between full-time and part-time football. In turn, his destiny was arguably driven by his Mum's illness. His desire to spend as much time with his Mum as he possibly could ultimately led him into part-time football. Equally, when [Club 1] were unexpectedly placed into administration, the element of surprise raised his existential anxiety. Prior to [Club 1's] administration, Jay's ontological security was predicated on his interactions and relationships with people who he trusted and people he respected and felt comfortable around. Similarly, when any managerial change occurred, participants instantly questioned their ontological security.

While Giddens' (1991) fateful moments can also be used to shed light on the unexpected nature of transition, I believe that the introduction of pointillist time (Bauman, 2013) to the transition literature will show athletic careers and indeed athletic lives in a whole new light; one where athletes tentatively transit point by point faced by both unpredictability and vulnerability. Instead of mapping or projecting athletic careers against the normative progressions from amateur to elite or from novice to expert in a few simple stages (e.g.

Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), I would argue that pointillist careers would be a more fitting representation of actual, *lived* careers. Indeed, non-normative transitions (Schlossberg, 1984), such as being injured, managers being sacked or transferring between clubs dominated the experiences of the participants in this study and were found to have a profound effect on the eventual direction of their career trajectories. This would also provide a more sophisticated interpretation of how multiple transitions impact upon/affect an athlete over time and lend support to previous suggestions that the path to excellence is rarely (if ever) a linear path (e.g. Debois et al., 2012). In this respect, viewing careers in pointillist terms would illuminate the fluctuations between positive and negative aspects of an athlete's career without limiting them to, for example, the *mastery* stage of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model. More importantly, I believe it would showcase transition for what it really is; an omnipresent feature of our existence. Indeed, as my findings have demonstrated, the participants' experienced multiple transitions both inside and outside of their professional careers that were unexpected, unpredictable and that altered the course of their lives.

7.5. Nomadic Lifestyles

The precarious nature of the professional footballing environment meant that participants often found themselves surplus to requirements or in-pursuit of more favourable working conditions. Each of the participants shared similar views on some of these conditions (e.g. needing to play in the first team and earning a suitable living) but differed on others (e.g. the importance of a positive coach-athlete relationship or being close to home). Equally, the importance of each changed throughout the course of their careers and in relation to their personal circumstances. Here, financially rewarding contracts took precedent during the later

stages of the participants' careers and were arguably tied to increasing responsibilities. In an effort to seek secure employment or better working conditions where possible, the participants regularly had to move between clubs, and sometimes location of residency. However, at times, these transfers were within commutable distance of participants' family homes and therefore didn't result in a geographical move per se. Indeed, Joe's career decisions appeared guided by his eagerness to remain within close proximity of his family. In this respect, Joe admitted that potentially commutable transfers were far more appealing than non-commutable transfers and that his proximity to family and friends was instrumental in his thought processes whenever a move was on the horizon. Contrastingly, Adam's comment that he had to "go where the money was" typified both Adam's and Jay's approach to their careers. Continuing into their post-footballing lives, Adam and Joe have similarly changed jobs on several occasions without having to move geographically. In contrast to Adam and Jay who have moved house on numerous occasions in search of more favourable working conditions, Joe has arguably been fortunate enough to remain close to the place where he grew up and surround himself with the family and friends that have played important roles in his life.

The participants' made sense of their job relocation in terms of the part they played in the move. Furthermore, they were appreciably aware of the part played not only by themselves in their transfers, but also by their parent clubs; where the participants differentiated between a) moving on and b) being moved on. In this respect, being "kicked out of the club" or being told that they "weren't good enough" was a completely different experience to "being wanted" or earning "a big move". The extent of the voluntariness of the respective transition also affected the participants' evaluation of its relative success. For

example, Adam and Jay shared with me a number of situations where they experienced negative transitions and were left option-less and felt unwanted. That said, both Jay and Adam (and Joe) also experienced situations where they transferred having chased more lucrative contracts or contracts at clubs they considered better options; Jay when he craved the same move as [Jack] and subsequently signed for [Club 4] and Adam when he endured his prolific season at [Club v] and later signed for [Club vi]. However, Joe's transition into semi-professional football showed how transfers between clubs were not purely about football. This also suggests that the participants were able, to varying extents, to affect the course of their careers. The above examples demonstrate that the participants experienced contrasting transitions at different points in their respective careers and transferred under varying circumstances.

The mobility of participants throughout their professional footballing careers and beyond can be interpreted using Zygmunt Bauman's human metaphors of the 'tourist' and the 'vagabond'. Describing the degree to which individuals are on the move in liquid modernity, Bauman (1998) utilised examples of immigrants, refugees and the underclass to represent the 'flawed consumers' or the 'vagabonds' of globalization. According to Bauman (1998), individuals are, to varying extents, either tourists or vagabonds. In this respect, Bauman (1998, p. 92) noted how the "tourists move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly *attractive*, [whereas] the vagabonds move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*". In their appraisal of Bauman's metaphors, Jacobsen and Marshman (2008) described vagabonds as involuntary tourists while also differentiating between the 'haves' [the tourists] and the 'have-nots' [the vagabonds].

Larsen and Jacobsen (2009) suggested that tourists exert greater influence over why, when, where and how they move, as opposed to the vagabonds who move out of need rather than out of want. In his suggestion that we are all, to varying extents on the move in liquid modern times, Bauman (1997, p. 93) noted that “we are all plotted on a continuum stretched between the poles of the “perfect tourist” and the “vagabond beyond remedy””; a location that remains fluid according to an individual’s changing circumstances. While Bauman’s metaphors of the tourist and the vagabond may suggest a binary thinking, in terms of the polarisation of the ‘mobility rich’ and the ‘mobility poor’ (Larsen & Jacobsen, 2009), I believe that the concepts enable further social complexities of transition to be realised; whereby people have a varying influence on their (multiple) transitional decisions. I would argue that each of the participants’ mobility can be better understood in relation to Bauman’s (1998) tourist and vagabond metaphors and how, at the micro level of analysis, they placed much of their transitional success [and failure] down to the extent of their influence on career moves. Here, I would argue that while each of the participants in my study experienced being both a tourist and a vagabond, there was considerable variation in each of their experiences. That said, I would suggest that the participants were mostly edging toward the ‘perfect tourist’, instead of the ‘vagabond beyond remedy’ on Bauman’s continuum.

Using Joe’s career as an example, he was seemingly affected by a number of difficult decisions of which team to sign for, highlighting the progression through his career as mainly a tourist. However, having had his YTS retracted from [Club A], Joe’s experiences of vagabondage, where he was ruthlessly omitted from [Club A’s] quota of scholars and subsequently enrolled on a mechanic’s course, arguably led to his future as a tourist in professional football. In this respect, Joe was adamant that he didn’t want to experience the

disappointment that accompanied his failure of being “kicked out o’ the club [Club A]” and subsequently changed his mind set to “I am gonna make it”. Joe’s eventual exit from [Club A] could also evidence his shift along Bauman’s continuum; whereby he deliberated over the offers from [Club A], [Club B] and [Club C] before eventually ‘moving on’ voluntarily to [Club B]. Furthermore, Jay’s [Club 4] experiences alone could be plotted on a number of positions along the tourist-vagabond continuum and again contests that, in keeping with Bauman’s notion of liquidity, individual positions in the social world remain, arguably, in a constant state of flux.

Although previous literature has focused on the voluntariness of athletes’ decisions to transit out of sport (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Marthinus, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007), few studies (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; Debois et al., 2012) have explored the voluntariness of within-career transitional decisions. While answering the call from Gordon and Lavallee (2012) to investigate transitions created by inter-club trades, I have offered an alternative way to make sense of in-career transitions that, at present, remain dis-serviced by their non-normative label (e.g. Schlossberg, 1984). Although transferring between clubs would indeed constitute a non-normative transition, my findings suggested that these occur under a variety of circumstances, often voluntarily for players, where the success of each is equally evaluated in multiple ways; such as financially, socially and personally. Using Bauman’s (1997) continuum between the “perfect tourist” and the “vagabond beyond remedy” illustrated the disequilibrium attached to these transfers and the potential for both positive and negative consequences. Bauman’s (1998) concepts, and more specifically the positioning of participants on the tourist-vagabond continuum, discloses further social complexities of transition and evidences the participants’ shifting influence throughout their biographies.

4.6. The Team of Individuals

Alongside the precarious nature of their employment, a desire to gain more favourable working conditions meant that participants often considered themselves to be in competition with their co-workers. Despite their involvement in multiple team environments where they shared changing rooms with countless teammates, each of the participants prioritised their own needs ahead of those of the team. Players recognised the competitiveness associated with earning places in the first team which could ultimately dictate the course of their club 'projects' and subsequently adopted a selfish approach to their work. Here, I would suggest that participants' actions were guided by their desires to both survive and thrive. Essentially, the participants were only concerned about their own welfare and craved an extended tenure in the professional football environment. Joe's confession that his teammates were equally his competition epitomised the participants' outlooks towards the players with whom they shared their workplace environments. On a similar level of analysis, participants showed little loyalty to the clubs they represented. At the end of each contract, participants evaluated their options at face value and were seemingly attracted by multiple factors, such as a position in the starting team, financial incentives or improved length of contract. In this regard, participants refused to extend their stay at a club based on previous successes or because of their love for the club. Rather, during each transitional decision (including those that failed to result in a transition per se), participants were merely interested in what they stood to gain from signing an extended contract and perhaps more importantly, where the offer stood in comparison to others.

The participants continued to be selfish in their post-footballing lives and demonstrated this in a number of ways. Jay became "hooked" by the potential perks of his

new role as a recruitment consultant and chased the commission that would elevate him to the summit of the employee leader board. Here, Jay told how his goal was to see his name at the top of the business leader board so that everybody in the company could see how well he was doing. From a different perspective, Adam's newfound goal was to "live [his] life and to enjoy [his] life". Speaking after the death of one of his old teammates and following an unsavoury divorce, Adam's new outlook focused on enjoying life away from work as much as maximising his working potential. Having lost the majority of his life savings in divorce proceedings, Adam's "me first" attitude appeared tied to consumption and making the most of his life from both financial and enjoyment perspectives. Similarly, Joe's post-footballing experiences also demonstrated how the participants focused on their own welfare on a daily basis and not always for maximum gains. Guided by his will to attend the "local boozier" with all of the "kids and Dad's" on the last day of the school term, Joe's unexpected offering to do the "shitty job" and stack the freezers was infused with a selfish undertone and arguably earned him his attendance. Conscious of a similar, dog-eat-dog scenario at Sainsbury's, Joe's tendency to do more than was expected was a strategic ploy to enhance his reputation; standing him in good stead for future "favours", such as having New Year's Eve off work that he mentioned. Thus, Joe continued to manoeuvre according to the costs and benefits of his actions.

I believe that Bauman's expansive social commentary and more specifically, his metaphor of the "hunter" provides a particularly insightful interpretive lens when analysing participants' thought processes and decision-making. Bauman (2007, p. 14) noted how the shift towards the aforementioned liquid surroundings was an individualizing force; one where a neoliberal agenda seemingly encourages individual survival in the style of "everyone for

himself, and the devil take the hindmost". Here, Bauman (2007) utilised metaphors of the gamekeeper (i.e. to defend and preserve the 'natural' order), the gardener (i.e. constant care and attention of wanted/unwanted plants) and the hunter (i.e. not worried about the overall balance of things) to describe the world's changing priorities. In keeping with the musings of a liquid modern world, Bauman (2007, p. 100) explained how "we are all hunters now...and called or compelled to act as hunters do, on penalty of eviction from hunting, if not...of relegation to the ranks of the game". Being hunters, we compete against other hunters, where "the sole task hunters pursue is another 'kill', big enough to fill their game-bags to capacity" (Bauman, 2007, p. 100). In this respect, Bauman (2003, p. 88) suggested that an individual's fear of losing out on the 'prize' accentuates individualization; with "survival being the ultimate proof of fitness". Indeed, Adam, Jay and Joe all viewed their workplace environments as "dog-eat-dog" contexts that conceivably led to self-absorption.

While it could be argued that Adam, Jay and Joe's desire to remain a professional footballer was itself their main 'prize', and indeed the focus of their 'survival', I would argue that, as 'hunters', their main 'hunts' were contracts. Similarly, I would argue that contracts were, in essence, two-pronged 'hunts' that consisted of a) securing the contract and b) making first team appearances while under contract. Making first team appearances meant that the participants were in a greater position than their non-playing teammates and therefore stood a better chance of earning new contracts or, better still, a move to a 'bigger' club. The success of these appearances and contracts, or rather these 'hunts' would invariably depend on whether they could hold down a regular place in their respective first teams. In this respect, the participants' differentiated between surviving and thriving; where their position in the team (and arguably length and value of contract) determined the extent of

their success. Indeed, participants regarded being under contract but not playing as a failure or as their “worst case scenario”.

While using Bauman’s (2007) metaphor of the hunter to make sense of participants’ goals, I would argue that their ‘hunts’ were not constant but instead, ever-changing. In this respect, ‘hunts’ covered various aspects of participants’ lives; ranging from the more obvious goals of financial security and in-contract stability to the less obvious goals of spending more time at home with dependants. On each occasion, the participant’s individual ‘hunt’ drove their thought-processes and affected their respective decision-making. In turn, participants evaluated the relative success of their transitions in relation to a number of competing factors [read ‘hunts’]. I would argue that the participants were constantly judging the success of their transitions and that their judgements were made in relation to a number of ever-changing hunts, as Adam’s transfer to [Club vi] demonstrated.

Adam’s transition to [Club vi] perhaps best signifies the vacillation of participants’ priorities [read ‘hunts’] and therefore offers an example of how my findings can be interpreted using Bauman’s hunter metaphor. With a burning desire to survive in professional football providing the backdrop to Adam’s career, his move to [Club vi] was driven purely by finances and his wish to “cash in” on his good season at [Club v] by investing in his family’s future. The quadrupling of Adam’s previous salary on a three-year contract seemed ideal given the specificity of his ‘hunt’. The seamless birth of his first son provided Adam with yet further transitional success [his transition into fatherhood also emphasising the crossover and interlinking of transitions]. However, following a prolonged period in the background of [Club vi], the financial reward of the transition and the joy of fatherhood became insufficient. Thus, Adam’s desire to play first team football came to the fore and altered the course of his ‘hunt’.

Furthermore, his wife's desperation to return to England accentuated the failure of the transfer and similarly affected Adam's thought-processes (a point that will be examined in greater detail later in the chapter). Despite successfully investing in his family's future, Adam re-evaluated the various implications of his transition and subsequently orchestrated his move back to England where their collective goals of first team football and happiness, as well as investing in their family's future could be realised. Adam's example brings to life the ever-changing complexities of participants' 'hunts' and how they may intertwine depending on an individual's multiple roles and responsibilities; where the participants' thought-processes and decision-making processes revolve around the varying extents of their multiple 'prizes'.

In light of these findings, I would argue that there has been little consideration given to the variety of goals (read 'hunts') by much previous transition literature (e.g. McKenna & Thomas; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Instead, these studies followed the lead of transition models (e.g. Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) by simply labelling the 'quality' of the transition as positive or negative. As my findings suggest, rarely are transitions entirely positive or entirely negative, but, rather, evaluated in multiple ways and in relation to various aspects of athletes' lives. Thus, the participants' in this study evaluated the relative success or failure of their transitions in sport, or indeed out of sport, in relation to the multiple strands of their identity. Although this will be discussed further below, it is worth noting here that my findings have added to the valuable initial insights provided by the work of Carless and Douglas (2009) and Douglas and Carless (2009). Here, these scholars noted how the transition out of golf was a smoother process for the golfer who orchestrated their life around the multiple strands of their identity compared to the golfer who appeared tied to their performance identity. Indeed, my findings have explained how the participants in this study continued to evaluate

the relative success (or failure) of their transitions in relation to a number of factors, both inside and outside of sport. Indeed, none of the participants struggled to make their transition into working life which could again be related to the work of Carless and Douglas (2009) and Douglas and Carless (2009) and the fact that Adam, Jay and Joe chased a variety of sporting and non-sporting goals ('hunts') during their careers. Introducing the concept of 'hunting' to the transition literature would help illuminate athletes' competing and shifting priorities during their careers while explaining how transitions can be an accumulation of both positive and negative outcomes.

4.7. Disposable Relationships

Another striking feature of the interviews I held with the participants was the number of significant others that played roles in their lives and in their transitional experiences. Teammates, managers, friends, girlfriends, and members of participants' families all played varying roles and to varying extents in players' biographies. The number of 'others' who were omitted from the participants' narratives (see appendices A, B and C) were also considerable, as Adam, Jay and Joe shared several anecdotes that were outside the scope of this study. The participants' nomadic lifestyles meant that many of their professional and personal relationships were fleeting encounters. As they exited a club, they maintained contact with a varying number of teammates from that club before seemingly making space for the next raft of teammates with whom they would now share a dressing room with. This seemed a never-ending process despite the odd occasion when the participants continued their contact further and developed their relationship into a friendship. However, the participants were honest in their appraisal of their relationships with the majority of their teammates;

suggesting they were instead “colleagues” and subsequently “served a purpose”. Indeed, the participants admitted that their contact was infused with self-requisites and whether with their teammates, respective managers, agents, potential teammates or family and friends, was ultimately driven by their own needs. Subsequently, once a transfer had materialised and the participant had moved clubs, contact was maintained with certain significant ‘others’ while contact fizzled with others.

Maintaining contact with ‘others’ in their personal lives seemed difficult for the participants throughout their transitions or relocations. However, the participants didn’t need to move to lose contact or eradicate others from their lives. In one of our early discussions, Adam shared with me the abrupt ending of his relationship with [Emma] which highlighted the disposability of others. Similarly, as the participants’ priorities [read hunts] changed, so did the extent of their relationships. For example, Joe’s friendship with the three brothers he mentioned has been strong throughout his life but appeared to have been manipulated to suit his needs following the arrival of his three daughters. In his post-sporting life, and now with three adolescent daughters, Joe continued to spend the majority of his free time with his girls and only met up with his friends on the odd occasion. In many ways then, the participants’ post-sporting relationships have followed a similar pattern to their in-career ones. Although Adam joined a networking group, he saw these as people who were “serving a purpose...to help his business grow”. Here, Adam adapted his behaviours when with the group in order to maintain his contacts and in recognition of the “world” he was now in. Adam explained how he would have “slaughtered” the “bloke” who shared his “rubbish” joke had he been in a changing room but didn’t want to sever connections with people who could ultimately enhance his business. Similarly, the relationships Jay held with his work colleagues

evidenced the business-oriented nature of his interactions. Having sacked a number of employees, Jay evidenced both his ruthless approach to his work and his tendency to dispose of people he considered “useless”. In this respect, Jay shared the positive relationships he held with colleagues who “produced” for him every month but showed no remorse when informing individuals of their sacking.

The high turnover and changing relationships in participants’ lives can be interpreted using the work of Anthony Giddens (1992) and his description of the ‘pure relationship’. In his detailed social analysis of human existence, Giddens (1992, p. 137) suggested the pure relationship is “not, as marriage once was, a ‘natural condition’ whose durability can be taken for granted short of extreme circumstances”. Rather, exemplifying his presentation of human togetherness, Giddens (1992, p. 137) explained how the pure relationship “can be terminated, more or less at will, by either partner at any particular point”. Similarly, Giddens (1992, p. 58) noted that being ‘pure’, relationships are based around “what can derived by each person” and continue only when “it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it”. Bauman (2003) used ‘pure relationships’ (Giddens, 1992) as the bedrock of human bonds and relationships in his liquid modern setting, suggesting that, as with most [liquid] things in life, they are indeed ‘pure’; or in Bauman’s (2003, p. 90) own words, “frail, fissiparous, unlikely to last longer than the convenience they bring, and so always ‘until further notice’”. I believe that work of both Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992) can be utilised as a sense-making tool to further understand participants’ fragmented interactions and relationships. For example, Jay’s colleagues could be regarded as the ‘commodities’ that Bauman (2007) spoke about in his suggestion that relationships are themselves objects of consumption and are therefore easily disposed. In this respect,

“bindings and bonds make human relations ‘impure’ – as they would do to any act of consumption that assumes instant satisfaction and similarly instant obsolescence of the consumed object” (Bauman, 2003, p. 47).

I believe Joe’s exit from [Club E], and more specifically the termination of his relationships with his [Club E] teammates can be better understood using Giddens’ (1992) pure relationships. The fact that he “didn’t even say goodbye to the lads at [Club E] and it didn’t bother [him]” disclosed Joe’s true feelings about his teammates; they were merely helping him to succeed while he was at the club. Thus, Giddens’ (1992) discussion of pure relationships could be used to make sense of Joe’s fizzled contact; whereby Joe could no longer derive anything from his old [Club E] teammates. From an alternative perspective, Joe no longer brought the satisfactions of scoring goals to his former [Club E] teammates and they similarly terminated their relationship[s] with him. On a similar level, Jay’s return to [Club 4] could also be understood in terms of Giddens’ (1992) pure relationships. Having struck up close bonds with housemates [Owen] and [Henry] during his loan spell at [Club 5], Jay later revealed that he hadn’t spoken to either of them “for ages”. Jay’s confession that they didn’t “need each other” anymore demonstrated the derivation of their relationships. Arguably then, Jay’s relationships with [Owen] and [Henry] can be understood through Bauman’s (2003) analogy of ‘pure’, whereby they failed to last longer than the convenience they brought. Equally, it could be argued that Jay’s loan move to [Club 5] only materialised because he was no longer providing what the manager of [Club 4] wanted and so had his relationship terminated. Indeed, Jay’s loan move stemmed from his regular “blankings” from the [Club 4] manager and his desire to feel wanted again.

Giddens' (1992) pure relationships can not only be utilised to make sense of the participants' relationships with their teammates but of all their interactions. For example, their relationships with agents symbolized the necessity of contact. As soon as a transfer was mentioned, both the participants and their agents increased their contact to force the move through. However, once the move was finalised, their respective contact faded. In this sense, both had acquired what they needed from the relationship and their contact waned. Adam's analysis of the relationship he held with his agent, [Alan] while at [Club v] arguably evidences his understanding of the purity of their relationship. Off the back of Adam's successful season at [Club v], [Alan] seemed as desperate as Adam to force through a move and "cash in" on his success. With Adam also destined to "cash in" on the move, he shared his willingness to "talk to him [Alan] all day" while similarly accepting the financial reasoning behind [Alan's] sudden influx of calls. As Adam eloquently suggested, "[he] wasn't his mate or anything", although judging by Adam's confessions, his interactions with his "mates" continued along similar lines. In this way, Adam described his friendships as "on his terms" and how he is able to conduct his interactions according to his needs, whereby they don't need to be texting each other every day to maintain their strong friendship. Furthermore, Adam shared his ability to "lock [him]self away for three months" if he so wished.

By exploring the participants' various interactions and relationships with others, I believe that I have provided an alternative social analysis of transitional experience. In this respect, the participants in this study only interacted with, and held a relationship with people who could bring them satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). In many ways, these findings lend support to the work of Roderick (2006a; 2006b) and his suggestion that players develop informal networks within the sport when foreseeing a move away from their respective clubs. Indeed,

the participants in this study continued to interact with teammates, former teammates, agents, and other members of club staff (i.e. physios, chairmen and directors) throughout transfer processes. Similarly, my findings mirror those of Jones and Denison (2016) who described how former players severed contact with others in the 'football bubble' once they retired. However, as my analysis has shown, the disposability of others was a constant process throughout the participants' careers; where people inside and outside of their careers were readily disposed. Thus, players didn't need to retire to end relationships that the disciplinary environment of professional football allowed (Jones & Denison, 2016). Instead, the participants' continued their interactions with others who brought them satisfaction (Giddens, 1992); whether inside or outside of their professional footballing careers. This further discloses the relational nature of transitional experience and how, at any given time, a person belongs to multiple networks of social interaction that depends upon the multiple strands of their identity.

4.8. Transition as a Relational Activity

I believe the work of Zygmunt Bauman adds an unprecedented sociological perspective to previous transition literature by providing a metaphorical and easy to digest backdrop of our social world. This body of work has helped to illuminate the participants' understanding of their work (and life) context. While this might appear to paint a somewhat individualised account of the participants' transitional experiences, the participants continued to reveal how their transitional decisions and experiences, as well as how they subsequently went on to judge the success of their transitions, were very much influenced by the actions, desires, intentions, and interpretations of significant others in their various networks of social

relations. Despite using Giddens' (1992) pure relationships to interpret many of the participants' interactions, I presented these relationships in isolation to emphasise the disposability of a number of their social relations. In this section, I aim to widen the focus of my interpretation to the participants' networks of interaction in an attempt to make sense of their multiple and often competing identities. In this respect, alongside their occupation as a professional footballer, the participants were similarly a partner, son, brother, father, friend, or business colleague. Thus, what follows is in response to Crossley's (2013, p. 125) suggestion that:

The behaviour of the individual can only be rendered intelligible and explained, methodologically, if we remain alert to his or her location within a network of relations and interactions.

To reiterate a point made in the previous section, the participants' decision-making and sense-making were far from individualised processes but invariably involved 'others'. Even when the participants made decisions for the betterment or the longevity of their own careers, the decisions were often made with their family's security in mind or for financial reasons that alleviated some of the pressures of their family lives. Essentially, the participants were consistently aware of 'others' that played a role in their decisions; whether they were 'others' whose well-being they considered, 'others' they would potentially leave behind, 'others' that they would begin a relationship with or 'others' whose opinions they valued. Thus, the participants made decisions in respect of the multiple strands of their social networks and more specifically, in respect of the interlinking of several 'others'. That is, a footballing decision extended beyond their football career and impacted upon, and was affected by their social spheres more widely. Similarly, the participants also evaluated the success of their (potential) transitions against the change in level of participation (standard of

players), the management style of the managers involved or the opinions of friends and other members of the professional footballing nexus; suggesting that others continued to be important figures throughout their transitional experiences.

When making transitional decisions the participants interacted with a varying range of others, including family members, agents, teammates, friends and managers. These were far from repeated interactions but rather dependent on the participants' ever-evolving social network. To varying degrees, the participants made decisions when single, in a relationship, married, divorced, as a parent or in Joe's case, as carer. To this extent, the participants' contact with friends (both inside and outside of football) depended on their personal lives and the effect that their marital/parental status had on their social lives. As such, the participants' family lives, social lives and football careers often had a correlative effect on each other, where increasing interaction with one connection necessitated decreasing interaction with another. Similarly, the participants' identities maintained much of their strength through the relationships and rapport they developed with new teammates and managers, media journalists and club supporters (as well as wives, girlfriends, parents and friends) during their transitions. In this sense, positive interactions with others ultimately gave the participants the self-belief and the self-confidence that they desired and were seen as crucial determinants of transitional decisions and successes. Equally, negative interactions with others led the participants to question the success of their transitions and often lowered their self-esteem.

The significance of the participants' networks of relations and interaction on their transitional experiences can be interpreted in light of Crossley's (2010; 2011; 2013) relational sociology. Through his thought-provoking analysis of the social world, Crossley (2011, p. 2)

argued that rather than being individual agents, we are always “agents-in-relation”. That is, instead of being self-contained or self-sufficient atoms, we are social beings. Similarly, Crossley (2006, p. 40) posited that people exist “within networks of relationships within which they are, to varying degrees, dependent on other people”. Furthermore, Crossley (2011, p. 15) implied that individuals exist in “historically specific circumstances...in ‘positions’ within networks of relations to other human beings, with the various identities, interests, interdependencies and practical engagements that such positions entail”. In contrast to much of Bauman’s (1998) reference to individualization, Crossley (2011, p. 15) suggested that “individuals, or rather actors, are formed and continually re-formed in and through interaction”. Placing social relationships at the forefront of his conceptual drive, Crossley (2011) defined a social relationship as “the lived trajectory of iterated bouts of interaction between actors” (p. 35) or as “lived histories of interaction with tacitly projected probabilities of future interaction” (p. 60). Here, Crossley (2011, p.180) noted how these social relations “enable and constrain action” in such a way that “roles and identities are not ‘about’ the individual but rather about their relations to others”. It was only through Joe’s (tentative) interactions with his new teammates and during his challenging first training session at [Club G] that he questioned his changing identity and in relation to others. Through his (often lack of) interactions with journalists and supporters and without being one of the first names on the team sheet, Joe located himself in a peripheral position of the [Club G] social network which evidently had a negative effect on his sense of self.

Returning to Jay’s [Club 4] career, we are also able to break this down into stages and make sense of it using Crossley’s (2011) theorising. Firstly, Jay shared with me his surprise when informed of [Jack’s] transfer to [Club 4] and how [Jack’s] agent had played a pivotal role.

I would suggest that it was only through his iterated bouts of interaction with [Jack] that Jay extended his social network to include [Jack's] agent and used this social relation to pave the way for his own transfer, thus 'enabling action'. Once in contact with the [Club 4] manager (and to some extent [Jack]), Jay made sense of his changing identity in relation to his manager's complimentary comments and pending teammates that were part of the "massive club" that he spoke about. In this respect, Jay's changing identity was not 'about' him but rather 'about' his changing relations with others. By making the step up from [Club 3] that "sounded like a pub team" to the "massive club" of [Club 4], Jay's sense of self heightened, but again, only in light of his changing relations ([Eva's] happiness also having a significant impact). Similarly, Jay's identity as a [Club 4] player was repeatedly formed and re-formed through his (lack of) interaction with his manager. Arguably, Jay's increased interactions with [Sam] and [Will], which led to frequent nights out, also had an adverse effect on his professionalism (read professional footballer identity). Equally, I would argue that Jay's limited or strained bouts of interaction (social relationship) with his manager went some way to preventing him from making first team appearances and thus 'constrained action'. Finally, Jay's lived history of interaction with his manager informed his projection of limited future interaction and underpinned his desperation to leave [Club 4].

Crossley's (2011) work also helps to make sense of the participants' multiple social networks and how these interconnect during transition. Prior to his transfer to [Club 4], Jay shared with me the positive conversations he had held with the manager and how these had influenced his decision to sign. Having been encouraged by the manager's genuine desire to make Jay his first signing and with the positive relationships that he struck up with his [Club 4] teammates, Jay felt wanted and was happy with the majority of his life at that point in time;

his relationship with [Eva] continued to progress, his new teammates welcomed him with open arms, he was living with people who he got on great with and he was venturing 'home' at any given opportunity to spend precious time with his family. However, within a few months, Jay had separated from [Eva], grew frustrated with his apparent "blankings" from the manager and headed out of the club on loan having failed to make the first team appearances that he craved. As Jay's example illustrates, other people's choices also influenced and had a significant impact upon both the participants' transitional experiences and their sense of self-worth. On a similar level, Joe understood much of his transitional and indeed career success in relation to the relationships that he held with managers, teammates, supporters, members of the local press and the exposure that his performances warranted. Transitional success was therefore judged on more than footballing performances alone but also the extent to which the participants' relationships with 'others' in various social networks made them feel wanted.

Despite regularly transferring to clubs that had chased their signatures, feeling wanted was not an a priori condition for the participants as they made their transitions and invariably developed (although not always) over a period of time. Reflecting the transitional experiences of Joe and Jay, Adam admitted to feeling "daunted" and "out of his comfort zone" during any transition because of the changing dynamic of his social relationships and interactions. However, Adam acknowledged that before long he would find himself "bedded in" as people "accepted that [he] was now a part of their [social] worlds and tried to make him feel welcome". Adam only felt like a member of any team that he represented once his interactions with his teammates had reached the stage where he considered himself "bedded in". Thus, while Adam's identity was not 'about' him but 'about' his relations to his teammates

and was formed and re-formed through these interactions (Crossley, 2011), this also stemmed from Adam's previous "bedding-in" experiences and his interpretations of being made to feel welcome. Similarly, while Adam's 'position' within his club social network evolved over time (arguably transforming from a peripheral to a central club figure through his increased interactions), Adam again understood his position in relation to his previous 'positions' at former clubs. To this extent, much of Adam's sense of self stemmed from his own interpretations of being a "fringe player" at [Club iii]; something he understood in relation to the close bond he struck up with [Kev] and [Mark] who were themselves in similar fringe 'positions' during the embryonic stages of his professional footballing career.

The desire to feel wanted extended beyond the participants footballing careers and into their private and post-sporting lives. In this respect, they evidenced a desire to be desired (Crossley, 2002) by others in their various social networks. Drawing on the work of Kojève (1969) among others (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1962) Crossley (2002, p. 88) suggests that "though things matter to us on account of their use value, they equal matter because they are symbols of the desire of the other...we desire desire". In other words, we want others to want us. Using Jay's transitional episodes as an example, he felt wanted and gained a sense of self-worth through relationships with his previous girlfriend, wife, family members (i.e. mum, dad, brothers, aunty), friends, housemates and business colleagues. Feeling wanted and arguably appreciated was therefore a pervasive feature of the participants' lives. That said, the participants also needed to *want* to continue on their respective life paths. In this regard, each of the participants either ended a relationship or left a club because they *wanted* something else or because they had grown tired of their situation. Here, I would argue that Adam, Jay and Joe each made their transition out of professional football voluntarily and

because they did not need or want to play football any more. Each had alternative opportunities that they *wanted* to pursue and thus, a professional football contract was no longer the attractive prospect that it had been throughout their lives. In short, wanting and feeling wanted played similar roles in the participants' understanding of their transitional decisions and success.

In conjunction with Crossley's (2011) relational sociology, the work of May (2011; 2013), and more specifically her concept of 'belonging' can also be used to make sense of the participants' transitional episodes. Drawing from the work of Simmel (1950) and Elias (2001), May (2011; 2013) presented a relational view of 'the self' and 'society' that saw both as interdependent and permeable, each affected by the other (Burkitt, 2004). Broadly speaking, May (2013, p. 3) defined belonging as "the process of creating a sense of identification with, or connection to, cultures, people, places and material objects" where "significant changes in our surroundings are reflected in a fluctuation in our sense of belonging". In other words, a sense of belonging can be seen as "a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings" and emerges when we go about our everyday lives "without giving much consideration to how we do it" (May, 2011, p. 368). Here, I would argue that May's (2013) work could be used as a sense-making framework to interpret previous similar findings. In this respect, previous research that has noted how teammates formed a safety net of belonging (e.g. Ryba et al., 2012; Schinke et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2016) would arguably be better understood using May's (2013) sociological interpretations. Indeed, May's (2013) work adds credence to Roderick's (2006a) suggestion that transformations of identity are always the outcome of interaction with others.

While a change in participants' surroundings lied at the heart of their transitional experiences, it is here that we can see how the participants' transfers can be interpreted using May's (2011; 2013) concept of belonging and how moving from club to club led to a fluctuation in their sense of belonging. In this respect, the work of May (2013) draws many similarities to Crossley's (2002) suggestion that we desire to be desired. For instance, Adam took time to create his connection to his new teammates and usually felt "out of place" for a couple of weeks before "bedding in"; his transfer to [Club ix] transcending his feelings of unease. Indeed, following the mystery of his missing wallet during the early stages of his [Club ix] career, Adam struggled to "bed in" to his new environment and later revealed his discontent with the attitudes of some of the senior players, which questioned whether he ever completely "bedded in" at the club. Sharing banter and feeling part of, or 'belonging', to the group played a pivotal role in determining the success of the participants' transitions and was something that Adam failed to achieve at [Club ix]. From an alternative perspective, May's (2013) sense of belonging can be used to interpret the participants' transitions out of professional football. As participants approached the end of their careers, their sense of identification with the professional football environment alleviated, where, for example, Adam sat on the substitutes bench and was not bothered that he was not playing or whether his team won or lost.

May (2013) also proposed the term 'belonging' in opposition to 'identity'; where instead of beginning with the autonomous individual, the focus switched to the connection of individuals to one another. In this respect, May (2013) used the work of Calhoun (1999, p. 225) to differentiate between the positing of identity as a "singular, integral subject", and the "multiple solidarities and hybrid identities" that a sense of belonging enables. Here, we may

return to the participants' professional footballer 'identity' and examine how they made sense of this. To their friends and family, Adam, Jay and Joe were professional footballers for whichever club they represented. However, the participants frequently interpreted their professional footballer identities through their relationships to their teammates and the social networks within their club environments. To this extent, while Joe was a [Club G] player, he never felt like he 'belonged' to the [Club G] social network and subsequently omits them from his life narrative. Similarly, despite being a [Club iii] player, Adam made sense of his professional footballer 'belonging' in relation to the players who themselves 'belonged' to the group of 'fringe players' at the club. In other words, the participants needed to feel accepted by others. Whenever the participants viewed themselves as peripheral figures, they felt as though they did not belong to the club's main social network but instead to an alternative (fringe) network.

A similar theme that ran throughout each of the participants' interviews was that Adam, Jay and Joe made sense of their ever-changing positions in social networks in relation to their previous transitional experiences. Alternatively, the participants' identities were constantly evolving and borne out of their accumulation of life experiences. Whereas Bauman (2004, p. 81) placed identity as an object of consumption and suggested that "individual biographies are all too often stories of discarded identities", the participants understood their current identities through the storying of their lives (accumulation of identities) and made sense of this in relation to their past. Arguably then, identities were not completely discarded but rather utilised as sense-making tools or reflexive mechanisms against which the participants developed a potential shift in self-understanding. For example, only through the positive start to his career at the prestigious [Club 1] did Jay understand the lower standards

and his identity as a Conference player at [Club 3]. Similarly, Adam's experiences at the Premier League champions, [Club ii] substantiated his claims that it was a "big deal" for the players that he later shared a changing room with at [Club iv], where he was seen as, and felt like, a marquee signing.

Having transitioned out of professional football, the participants continued to make sense of their positions within varying social and business networks in relation to their former professional footballer identities. For example, Adam understood part of his professional footballer identity as a "bit of a joker"; as somebody who enjoys 'banter' and making fun of others which was a customary part of his daily football routine. However, when in a business meeting environment and surrounded by important contacts that could potentially evolve his business, Adam felt unable to deliver similar comments. Only through his experiences as a former professional footballer was Adam able to understand his new businessman identity and alter his approach (read identity) accordingly. Indeed, much of Adam's joviality persists in his interactions with friends and former teammates that he remains in contact with to date (myself included). In a similar manner, Jay understood his ultra-competitive business nature in relation to his former professional footballer identity. Here, Jay likened his desire to top the company commission leader board to his desire to win three points on a Saturday or to show the club manager how dedicated and successful he could be while he was a professional footballer. That aside, Jay's ultra-competitiveness did not extend into his relationship with [Charlotte] or his family. Rather, Jay's identity arguably changed from businessman to husband, to son or to brother on a daily basis.

Adam's and Jay's changing interactions can be understood in light of Crossley's (2011, p. 163) suggestion that "our identity at any point in time depends upon who we are

interacting with and, no less importantly, which social world we are orienting to in our interaction". The manner in which the participants' made sense of their identities in relation to their previous experiences can similarly be interpreted using Crossley's (2011) relationship between 'the I' and 'the me'. Expanding upon the work of Mead (1967), Crossley (2011, p. 93) noted how "'the me' is a historical reconstruction of itself that the I forms in moments of self-reflection". To this extent, the participants arguably gained an updated version of 'me' throughout the twelve-month period of interviewing, as their changing roles and stories verified. Crossley (2011, p. 93) argued that 'the I' "comes to know itself by means of reconstruction, that is, by a reflection backwards upon what it has done, said, thought etc.". In this respect, Crossley (2011, p. 94) suggested that it is through these stories that "Actors build a sense of 'me' through a historical reconstruction of scenes, dramas or sequences of events in which they have been involved...[where] The me is a character in a story told by the I". From contrasting positions, we can see how Jay explained his new role as recruitment consultant was "a perfect fit for [him]" in light of his competitive approach to his professional footballing career and how, in a business environment, Adam felt unable to share the footballing banter that *he* would have done previously. On both occasions, the participants have reflected on their previous experiences and gained a new understanding of their changing identities.

I believe the collective work of Crossley (2011), Bauman (2012) and May (2013) can be used to offer an enhanced sociological analysis of transitional experience. In this respect, positioning participants within their multiple social networks before locating them in 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2012) enables a more comprehensive understanding of their decision-making and sense-making processes. For example, the participants could still be regarded as

'hunters' but as people who understand their hunts and the success of their hunts in relation to the hunts of others; whether their families, teammates or others. To this extent, 'hunting' was not the insular act that Bauman's individualization thesis suggested but alternatively, a relational act. Similarly, as tourists, the participants arguably 'toured' with their respective families and social networks while interpreting their ever-changing positions as tourists or vagabonds in relation to the mobility of various others. Indeed, the participants in this study did not see professional footballers as a collection of isolated individuals. Rather, their interactions and relationships with fellow professionals (and managers, coaches, physiotherapists and people outside of football) illuminated the interdependencies that contributed to their lives as professional footballers.

Despite the obvious differences between Bauman's work and the work of both Crossley and May, there are also similarities whereby both agree that a person's identity/sense of belonging is a never-ending and ever-evolving process. In this regard, Bauman's (2012) sense of 'becoming' draws many parallels to May's (2013) sense of 'belonging' through its constant state of flux. However, where Bauman (2012) would contest that it is the individual that is in a constant state of flux, May (2013) (and Crossley) would counter this argument with their suggestion that it is the individual's sense of belonging and therefore their network of relations and interactions that are in a constant state of flux. In this respect, the visions that the participants held of their futures only made sense once they had located themselves in their network of relations; with Adam's imminent second marriage and Jay's venture into fatherhood providing further evidence of the participants' ever-changing 'sense of belonging'.

4.9. What Does This Mean?

As my findings have shown, transition occurs in a world characterised by uncertainty, vulnerability, individualisation and performance. In light of these conditions, the participants pieced together what appeared 'patch work' careers that were developed with little more than a short term view on their ever-changing positions in the professional football context and in their post-sport working lives. While these may correspond to similar findings in the transition literature (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; Nesti et al., 2012), the work of Bauman (1998-2013) has helped to make sense of the participants' understandings of their workplace contexts and the disposability of others. Here, the metaphors of 'liquid modernity', 'pointillist time', 'tourists and vagabonds', 'hunters', and 'pure relationships' have helped to explain how the participants came to think about their transitions in particular ways. This sociological theorisation has highlighted how the participants' decision-making and sense-making processes were inextricably linked to others while also being tied to wider societal concerns.

Having understood their decision-making and sense-making processes in relation to others, the participants in this study have offered alternative explanations to both psychological (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Stambulova, 2000; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Park, 2012) and post-structuralist (e.g. Hickey & Kelley, 2008; Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016) understandings of transition. Instead of focusing on their cognitive abilities, or personality characteristics in psychological terms (e.g. Baillie & Danish, 1992; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavalley, 2005), the participants interpreted their transitional experiences through their multiple networks of social relations. Similarly, rather than understanding their transitions through the inherent discipline and the dominant discourse of professional football in post-structuralist terms (e.g. Jones, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016), they made sense

of their positions in relation to their various interactions and relationships with others, both inside and outside of the game. In opposition to post-structuralist beliefs that we are formed through discourses and therefore do not exist as a humanist self (i.e. have agency), my findings suggested that the participants indeed had varying amounts of agency in their actions, interactions and their transitional experiences. In keeping with a relational understanding of social life then, these findings lend support to suggestions that social structures, systems and discourses are the products of relations that exist between interdependent social actors (Donati, 2010; Crossley, 2011; Powell & Depelteau, 2013). That is, “both individuals and the larger formations in which they participate (like collectives, institutions, social systems)...belonging to the same social order of reality, a relational order” (Powell & Depelteau, 2013, p. 3). However, while my findings show that the participants interpreted and affected their own worlds they were not entirely free to do so. Instead, and as evidenced in their multiple transitions, the participants’ agency was always located, and to varying extents, in and through their social relations (Donati, 2010; Crossley, 2011; Powell & Depelteau, 2013).

These findings and subsequent analyses highlight the contradictions that existed between the participants’ intentions, hopes and desires during transition. Firstly, the participants were intent on consolidating their place in the team (or respective businesses) which would enhance their opportunities for future employment, whether at their respective clubs or elsewhere. In this respect, their actions and interactions appeared guided by self-interests and often disregarded the thoughts and feelings of others. Paradoxically, the participants evidenced a desire to be desired and a need to feel a sense of belonging to their respective environments. In other words, they thought about themselves and their own

positions in relation to others and wanted to feel part of their social networks. These inconsistencies provide an alternative social analysis of transition. While the participants endeavoured to strive for personal success in their careers, this was generated, understood and evaluated in relation to the multiple strands of their identities and multiple social networks. Indeed, it is my belief that much previous transition literature focuses on the transiting individual without locating them first in their networks of relations and interactions that Crossley (2013) rightly propounds.

Although I contend that the work of Crossley (2011), Bauman (2012) and May (2013) enables us to make sense of transition as a relational experience, I believe my analysis has, thus far, failed to capture the emotional impact of transition. However, my reasoning here is not related to the unsuitability of social theories or concepts. Rather, these limitations are linked to my belief that there was, arguably, a 'ceiling' to my narrative data; a point which I make for two reasons. Firstly, participants gave what I considered a 'safe' and calculated version of their emotional experiences. While they shared emotive stories, I sensed that they were unwilling or unable to expand beyond the limits of their re-constructions. In this respect, as a researcher I had a duty to remain within what I considered moral and ethical boundaries and accepted that they were sharing their 'full' stories. Secondly, the findings and discussion that I have presented (along with the participants' narratives in appendices A, B and C) are my understanding of the participants' experiences. While I endeavoured to maximise my ability to empathise with the participants, I was physically unable to live through and share their emotional experiences. In this sense, I would argue that the data was restricted by the participants' memory recall abilities and secondly through my ability to relay *their* stories. With these limitations in my mind, the following chapter aims to address these concerns

through the presentation of my own auto-ethnographic account of transition. What follows is a 'warts-and-all' version of how I approached the end of my days as a [semi] professional footballer. Here, it is hoped that my emotive stories in-situ capture the level of emotional complexity that I felt unable to achieve second-hand. I then proceed to make theoretical sense of my emotional experiences and hope that together, my analyses present a thorough sociological interpretation of transition as both an emotive and a relational experience.

5.0: In the Midst of Transition

5.1. Introduction

The aim of the following chapter is to present transition from an alternative perspective to the retrospective accounts that dominate much previous transition literature. What follows are the idiosyncrasies of my own transition, as I approached the end of my playing days in semi-professional football. These have been captured ‘in-action’ and in the midst of some challenging personal experiences. This approach enabled me to question my embodied and emotional experiences and make sense of them in a wider context and in relation to a number of significant others. By bringing to life more mundane aspects of my everyday life, I endeavour to explain why I consider transition to be an ever-present process and as human beings, transition affects our lives on a yearly, weekly, hourly or even minute-by-minute basis. Chronologically, I present a detailed and considered narrative of actual events and emotional experiences that I encountered approaching the end of my playing days in [semi-] professional football while at Gainsborough Trinity FC, accompanied by the sense-making strategies that I employed. For conciseness, certain experiences have been chosen for inclusion over others. Thus, the data and experiences that follow are a purposeful attempt to accurately reflect the emotional aspect of my transition(s).

Gainsborough Trinity were a small, well-run, financially stable club. The chairman was a multi-millionaire and basically bankrolled the club’s financial outgoings, enabling him to pay more in wages than the average Conference North club. I’d be lying if I said that played no part in my signing for the club. It played a monumental part. But equally important was the fact that there was no re-location involved for my family. Rachel and I had done more than our fair share of travelling up and down the country during my professional career and were

settled in familiar surroundings, within close proximity to our parents' [read babysitters]. Armed with a first class degree with honours in sports coaching and performance and with sons Charlie and Jack now a big part of family life, I was awarded a studentship PhD at the University and embarked upon my transition into postgraduate student/researcher. Financially, Rachel worked two and a half days as a banking advisor at Halifax bank and together with the funding for my PhD and the wages from football, we lived what I would describe as a comfortable lifestyle; neither wealthy nor poor. It is from this point that I narrate my transition out of [semi-] professional football from a number of viewpoints; whereby my array of writing styles and regular interchange between the past and the present is an attempt to accentuate some of the personal challenges I faced. To this end, the focus of the chapter is to uncover further social complexities of transition and the respective roles played by significant 'others' in my own transitional experiences.

5.2. The Last Chance of Wembley

As little old Gainsborough Trinity reached the semi-finals of the FA Trophy for a place at the newly constructed Wembley Stadium I sensed a pinnacle to my career...an opportunity to return to the scene of my greatest achievement and my fondest memory. Wrexham from the league above stood in between me and my dreams...where I relived the chance that hit the crossbar for Scunthorpe United back in 1999, only this time it nestled in the top corner of the perfectly formed nets to the ecstasy of the watching fans and I'd become the hero. The reconstruction elicits the warm rushes of blood that darted throughout my muscles that day. Only this time I was the hero to the 40 family and friends from Hull who I'd arranged a coach transfer to and from the game. It was all mapped out in my head. We were one match away

from a fitting climax to my career...the old Wembley aged 20 and the new Wembley aged 34. What a script to bring my career towards its end, I thought...only I'd read the wrong script as we lost the tie 4-3 on aggregate. The missed opportunity accentuated my realization that I was approaching the end. I would never get a better chance to play at Wembley and I knew it. I wanted to be pleased with what we'd achieved. I wanted to say well done to the lads for doing so well. I wanted to say we would get promoted instead but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I buried my head under my shirt and cried; immediately recognising the significance of my tears in relation to the young players that littered the dressing room:

*I stare aimlessly at the pale blue wall of the home dressing room...body numb, exhausted, lifeless, and slumped against the cold, hard wall...my heart has been ripped out of my sunken, defeated chest. The tears continue their tap-like drip down my flushed cheeks as players catch unintended eye-contact...eye-contact where they awkwardly turn away, as if I've caught them doing what they shouldn't be doing...I'm only crying boys, get over it! Why isn't anyone else crying? Why isn't anyone else burying their head? Did this mean more to me than you lot. Maybe you'll get another chance. Maybe you'll actually get there. Some of you might be playing in 15 or 20 years' time. I won't. This was it....my last f***ing chance. I'd love to know what you're all thinking. 'He knows it was his last chance' probably....and you're right. It was. I couldn't even tell you what gaffer is saying. Probably how well we did....how brave we were....how unlucky we were and how much credit we deserve. Means nothing. I'll still wake up tomorrow and wonder what might have been...as I achingly amble downstairs and question whether I've actually torn my thighs, hamstrings and calves or whether, as usual, it's just my body's newfound way of recovering.*

On my return home, I was greeted with a chorus of chants by Rachel, Charlie and Jack...'Daddy, cha cha cha...Daddy, cha cha cha' they sang. The tears that were this time forcefully trying to push their way through my awkward smile were both sadness and happiness. In that one moment, my family were everything...the love and cuddles that I

needed sent a warm wave of much needed care flushing up and over my shoulders and all the way through to my fingertips that tingled in response. I appreciated their efforts. They didn't care if I played until I was 50 or retired tomorrow...it wasn't important. While instantly reminded of the magnitude of my despair, the big smiles plastered across Charlie and Jack's faces were magical. They had listened to the game on the radio and had been chanting all afternoon. Bless them! Hearing details of their afternoon chants re-ignited my sadness as I blurrily pictured them both, head to toe in blue and white and chanting from the grand backdrop of Wembley stadium but it just wasn't meant to be. Later the same evening, Rachel and I shared a laugh during a conversation over tea that appeared to drain away any final disappointments of my Wembley dream and highlighted the importance of having the support of an amazing family; where, at the end of the conversation, I placed my arm around Rachel's shoulders and understood the loud banging of my heart as our devotion for each other:

Rachel: *Did anyone cry in the changing room?*

Darryn: *Me (holding up my hand).*

Rachel: *What? (sniggering) You? So you didn't cry at our wedding; you didn't cry when Charlie was born; you didn't cry when Jack was born but you cried over a football game. At least we know where we stand.*

Darryn: *The occasion just got to me. That'll be the last chance I ever get to play at Wembley.*

Rachel: *You never know.*

Darryn: *I do. Chances like that don't come along every day, especially at this stage of my career.*

Rachel: *Well, you know what they say, 'Que Sera Sera'.*

Darryn: *Now you are just taking the piss out of me.*

Rachel: *What do you mean? Why is that taking the piss?*

Darryn: *That is what all football fans chant at games when they are going to Wembley...Que Sera Sera, whatever will be will be, we're going to Wembley.*

Rachel: *(laughing so much she nearly falls off her chair) I promise I never knew.*

Having my amazing family around me helped to put everything into perspective. It was a game of football. Nobody had died, nobody was terminally ill...I had lost a game of football. But while sitting in that changing room, I saw the end of my career and questioned how long I had left in the game which was emotionally draining and compounded my misery. Physically, I'd become accustomed to the after-effects of playing as a veteran and it wasn't a nice place...where I wearily amble downstairs to limit the aches and pains. But in the back of my mind, I needed football. I didn't need football for the enjoyment or for the pleasure that I got from playing or from winning anymore; they were a bonus. I needed football for my family and because football helped pay family bills. Football was a financial necessity.

5.3. The Assistant Manager's Role

At the end of the aforementioned season, and with the chairman of the club announcing his intention to withdraw his financial support of the club, Gainsborough Trinity entered a period of financial uncertainty and subsequently began cost-cutting measures. In light of the expected financial constraints, the assistant manager left the club instead of 'hanging around' to see what cuts the club would enforce on his already limited wages. As I write, I further appreciate the chain of events that occurred before I was offered the role of player/assistant manager of Gainsborough Trinity FC. Firstly, the chairman suffered a brain aneurysm mid-way through the previous season which instantly placed his role into serious doubt. Behind the scenes, his frictious relationship with the owners of the stadium had negated his plans to expand and improve the club's facilities; perhaps questioning his role further. As a result, the chairman explained how he had taken the club as far as he possibly could (mostly because of his failed plans) and would leave the club debt-free. Secondly, the

previous assistant manager left the club before considering any contract offer; something that from my past experiences in [semi-] professional football rarely happens (a drink-driving ban possibly having a crucial role in his thought processes). Finally, Housh (the manager) had chosen me. A player combining his playing duties with the role of assistant manager was an obvious cost-cutting measure, but for him to choose me was somewhat less obvious.

Housh and I go way back. Way back to 1996 to be precise where we first became teammates at Scunthorpe United FC. Housh made his own Wembley appearance two minutes earlier than me in 1999, as we were both substitutes and together we played the final 15 minutes of the play-off final. Housh was the main reason why the opportunity to become assistant manager was such an exciting prospect. I didn't know whether football management really appealed to me. How would I when I haven't sampled it and when I envisaged it as this time-consuming and all-encompassing role? Yet there was something inside me that instantly ignited the moment I considered it...something that switched on when I visualised standing on the touchline barking out some tactical ploy to exploit opponents' weaknesses...weaknesses that only I had spotted. This feeling was electric; it mimicked the adrenaline rush of playing while sitting comfortably on my sofa. A burst of energy from out of nowhere impelled me to give Jack a fireman's lift; a move that encouraged Charlie to join in our joviality and share in our camaraderie as my excitement took control of my body and encouraged me to tickle them both frantically. And yet the decision was still not a formality as my feelings of excitement were swiftly replaced by a deep, weighted sigh that assisted my return to the sofa and where the quiver in my stomach accompanied the array of questions that surrounded my potential dual-role. Becoming assistant manager wasn't the simple decision I expected:

What if I don't play as much as I'd like because I'm assistant manager?

What if I think I should be playing but Housh doesn't?

What if Housh thinks I should be playing but I don't?

What if I want to criticise other players but haven't played well myself?

What if I don't like it?

What if we start the season poorly and Housh is sacked?

What if the players act differently around me because I am now staff?

What if I can't join in the banter for the fear of being judged by the players?

What if the players don't respect my input?

What if I can't control the players in a coaching session?

What if players start whispering about me amongst themselves?

What if the fans turn on the management team?

What if the fans love what I do?

What if I love it?

What if we win the league?

What if Housh gets a move to a bigger club?

What if this is the first stepping stone of my future involvement in football?

What if Rachel doesn't want me to stay in football?

What if.....?

Accepting this role would indeed not be as straight forward as I envisaged. North Ferriby, who plied their trade in the same league as Gainsborough and who were a three-minute car journey from home, had also offered me a year's contract on £50 a week more than Trinity. I was now in the shoes of Housh, of both sets of players, of the supporters and of Rachel as I contemplated what was best. As my fingers began tapping together in an

unusual, yet orderly fashion, further questions manifested themselves from a different angle. What would I think if the new assistant manager didn't live up to my expectations? What would I say? How would I conduct myself around him? I was reading too much into this. I was over-thinking everything. Rachel was happy for me to combine the two roles despite being tempted by North Ferriby's prime location. In truth, nothing was going to change from her perspective and so why wouldn't she be happy? I would be out of the house for the same amount of time and for the same money and that's all that concerned Rachel. As long as we could afford to go abroad the following summer then Rachel would be happy. During contract talks, Housh informed the players that he had offered me the assistant's role and their response was pleasing. Gathered together pitch-side, one-by-one players held their talks with Housh and were left to mull their offers over the coming weeks but wasted little time in sharing their thoughts about my offer. While players aired their comments I turned away and burst into laughter as my knees weakened. Their jokes were both amusing and satisfying. My sixteen-year career helped to translate their banter; banter that was nothing short of collective support:

Player 1: What is that all about by the way...assistant manager! He is having a laugh isn't he?

Me: Cheers mate, I hadn't told anyone.

Player 1: I don't care, that is ridiculous.

Player 2: What, are you serious? I knew the club was in trouble but wow! That just shows how desperate they are.

Player 1: Well it's made my mind up for me anyway, I am definitely leaving now.

Player 3: You can't be assistant manager...you are too old!

Player 4: I suppose it doesn't go on how fit or how fast you are so you were always going to have a chance.

Me: Thanks boys, it's good to have your backing! I haven't accepted it yet anyway so just go careful because I could be running the bollocks off you.

My relationship with the players was strong and played a significant role in my decision. "Seriously though, Daz...I think you'll be great" said player one, when no longer performing in front of the rest of the group. It was a simple comment, possibly a comment that he hadn't given any thought to and felt pressured to say but it prompted a comfortable warmth to wash over my face. My modest reply acknowledged my lack of experience, and how management is a completely different challenge to being a player but underneath my modest exterior I appreciated his comments and agreed with him. I would be a great assistant manager and it gave me great satisfaction to know I had the support of my teammates and was something that made my acceptance of the role a significantly easier decision.

Two-nil down at half-time of my first league game as assistant manager, I re-evaluated my position; where the difference between my identity as a player and my identity as an assistant manager came to the fore. Housh was suspended for the first two league games of the season and being served with a touchline ban, was unable to enter the changing rooms on match day. The half-time team-talk was down to me. We'd been outplayed. We'd been out-battled. We were second best in every department. On the long, lonely walk back to the changing rooms, I contemplated the enormity of my challenge. Here were teammates...teammates who I shared a dressing room with and shared banter with...but teammates who had underperformed...teammates who had shown very little in their first half performance and who had not reached their expected standards. The long, lonely walk emphasised the task I had on my hands and uncovered the challenges of having changed my identity. I felt unable to stress my true feelings for fear of ruining our relationship:

*Sh*t! Sh*t! Sh*t! How am I going to pick the lads up after that? It was f**king awful! It's the worst we've played. As my ears pound profusely, my teeth inexplicably clench and grind together. I can't hammer them...or can I? Should I? Should I let them know what I really think? I can't. I'm a player. I'm one of them. What would they think if I started abusing them the first time things have gone wrong? I know what I'd think...arse-hole! They're an honest bunch...great lads that just haven't performed. But I can't be too nice either...I'd look weak. I can't be weak. I can't show any signs of weakness. What would Housh do? F**king hell, I know what Housh would do...he'd go off on one...big style. He wouldn't care what anyone else thought or what the lads were feeling, he'd just tell them how it was...he certainly wouldn't mince his words! Think! Think! Think! My heart beats like never before as I frantically rub the back of my neck with my sweaty palm. My shoulders twitch in conjunction with my nervously twitching arm while the repetitive clearing of my throat does little for my dry mouth. I sense the importance of the situation and how this moment could pave the way for a new set of relationships in my life...relationships changing from MY teammates to MY players. I don't want that...not now...maybe not ever. I know...I can be honest without being abusive. Something like, 'lads, that isn't good enough is it? That's nowhere near what we expect from you...what you should expect from yourselves anyway. Luckily, you have got another 45 minutes to put things right'. That's it, I can put a positive slant on it...get yourselves out of it...show a bit of pride and all that bollocks. I take a final, deep and calming breath before slowly closing the changing room door in an attempt to buy yet more time and walk calmly through the watchful eyes of the players...avoiding eye-contact, I then stand at the end of the room and prepare for my moment...*

Unbeknown to me, Housh had broken league rules and had managed to secretly hide in the toilet of the changing rooms for the final five minutes of the half, in preparation for his outburst. As I closed my eyes and shook my head during Housh's over-zealous b****cking, my breathing shortened through my now overly-dry mouth as I gradually came to terms with both my disbelief and my relief. This unexpected delay paved the way for my hastily prepared yet considered positive spin on events and maintained the positive relationship that I held

with my teammates. As far as I was concerned, they were still my teammates and not my players and to me, that was essential.

The frustrations of a poor start to the season finally took their toll during the fourth game of the season and another game where I was again a named substitute. It was the most difficult day I experienced as assistant manager in my first season. It was painful to watch. You can talk about formations, styles of play, philosophies, whatever you like but if players underperform it means nothing. There was no organisation, no talking, no bravery, no quality, nothing. We had gone there with a game-plan to be as solid as we could possibly be. Effectively we were playing with one forward and ten defensively minded players with keeping a clean sheet being the order of the day. Be hard to beat. Be horrible to play against. Be big. Be strong. Be whatever you need to be. We conceded after nine minutes. We seemed unable to string more than three passes together which was in stark contrast to the mesmerising passing displays that dominated our training sessions. Standing on the side lines proved an exasperating experience and one that provoked a sudden urge to get back out on the pitch. I'd sensibly monitored my own involvement in the opening games, attempting to strike a balance between my roles but this game proved one game too far. We needed me. We needed me more as a player and as a target to hit than as somebody barking out instructions. As a fifty-fifth minute substitute, I did little to help our cause and merely compounded our misery. From the moment I walked from the bench to the pitch, I no longer felt able to mask my frustrations under a professional façade, where my clouded vision and twitchiness told me everything I needed to know; I was livid.

*F***ING HELL LINESMAN, JUST LET ME GET ON THE PITCH...STOP BEING SO BLOODY BUSY, LOOK, NO JEWELLERY, UNDER SHORTS ARE YELLOW, STUDS ARE FINE...THERE YOU GO. IS THAT ALRIGHT?*

*Busy pr*ck. My heart rate continues its steady increment to the point that I can now hear the loud,*

*fast beat. RIGHT, COME ON BOYS PULL YER F***ING FINGERS OUT! What is he doing? He's having one. JAMIE, COME ON MATE, FOR F***'S SAKE...YES, WAZZA, CROSS IT, CROSS IT...what the f*** was that? He's having a nightmare as well. Have we got nobody who can cross a f***ing ball? Right, here we go, HIT ME JOE, HIT ME (the whistle blows for offside). NO WAY! NO WAY! ARE YOU TAKING THE P**S LINESMAN, HOW CAN I BE OFFSIDE THERE, I'M IN FRONT OF HIM (the referee shows me a yellow card for dissent). ARE YOU F***ING SURE? HOW IS THAT A BOOKING? I HAVEN'T EVEN SWORN AT HIM. I need to be careful here or I'm going to get sent off. I'm going to get sent off, I know I am...I can feel it, I'm fuming...f***ing fuming. Calm down! Breathe! REF, WHAT THE F***ING HELL WAS THAT? HOW CAN YOU GIVE A CORNER THERE? STICK A F***ING BLACK AND RED SHIRT ON. F***ing typical! Not even a corner and they get their second f***ing goal. WELL DONE REF! OBVIOUSLY WHAT YOU WANTED (the referee gives me a final warning). ANY CHANCE OF US STEPPING UP THEN BOYS, OR WHAT? NOT GOOD ENOUGH, NOT F***ING GOOD ENOUGH! Here we go again, another misplaced pass, another slip, another f***ing free kick. COME ON YOU! F***ING LIVEN UP! Come on then, here we go, YES, JOE, IN HERE, STICK IT IN HERE. Straight to the f***ing keeper that's going...but where's he going, he's not blocking me that easily...if he tries that, he'll get one...pr*ck. My heart beats like never before and my teeth grind together intensely. GET UP YOU D*** HEAD. I NEVER F***ING TOUCHED YOU! YOU'D KNOW ABOUT IT IF I DID (the referee shows me my second yellow card and subsequent red card). THAT'LL BE RIGHT. YOU'VE WANTED TO DO THAT SINCE I CAME ON THE F***ING PITCH! I NEVER TOUCHED HIM. JOKE, REFEREE...ABSOLUTE JOKE!*

I had so much pent-up aggression inside me for the ten or fifteen minutes that I managed to remain on the pitch for, I have never felt anything like it. My blood was boiling...inside me was simmering lava. I was so angry...so incensed. Everything was annoying me, everything was irritating me...absolutely everything. I felt as though I wasn't doing my job properly...as though I should be getting more out of the players than I was...as though they weren't performing for *me*. Why were so many players who'd been magnificent for us last season now underperforming? It sure felt like I made a difference to the club but for the

wrong reasons. That wasn't what I wanted. Was this my baptism of fire? Combining the two roles was a far trickier proposition than I'd imagined and one that got harder before it got easier. My record stood at played six and lost six as I made my way into the realms of football management. An immediate success it certainly wasn't.

5.4. The Module Leader Role

Towards the end of my second year as a PhD student at the University of Hull, I was offered the role of module leader in performance analysis for second and third year undergraduate students across two semesters. While the offer was wholly unexpected and a somewhat daunting proposition it put my whole PhD into perspective. Furthermore, the offer appeared to question the significance of my life as a postgraduate student...and not just a postgraduate student but a funded postgraduate student. In this sense, postgraduate study was something that never appealed to me until I was informed of the funding opportunities and the studentships available at the University of Hull. Like a red rag to a bull, I was instantly attracted. The motivation for my PhD was simple; I would earn a wage for a further three years. In this respect, I could intercalate from my PhD and earn similar money lecturing, essentially extending the period of funding. Despite my own excitement, Rachel needed convincing. Growing frustrated by my ever-presence around the house, Rachel simply saw the opportunity as "yet more time without a proper job" and our interaction became strained...where I daren't bring the topic up for fear of an altercation. Conversations with my supervisors directed me toward one option. "It's a great opportunity that you can't really turn down", said Dave. "Plus, it will buy you a bit of time to write your narratives", added Lee. Lee was the outgoing lecturer and whose role needed filling, albeit temporarily. In my mind, Lee

admired my progress and had given me a glowing recommendation. Their advice didn't stop there. "This might sound strange", they said, "but keep your PhD as your priority...yes, it will be good experience but getting your PhD is far more important". At the time, I almost brushed this idea to one side. However, Dave and Lee were right and my PhD really was more important; I just needed to work it out for myself:

*...everybody looks disinterested, bored, tired, basically as if nobody wants to be here. I don't really want to be here but I'm trying to hide that fact behind my regular infiltration of humour...without much success, I might add. I've never seen a group of people look so p***ed off. And here I am trying to inform them that by making reference to the grounded theory approach of Groom et al. they will be demonstrating their understanding of the complexities of video-based feedback in performance analysis. They couldn't care less.*

Just out of interest, this is the journal article I have been banging on about for the past four weeks that will be a key part of your assignment. Be honest with me, has anyone read it yet?

Not a single hand. Not one. 35, final year degree students and not one single hand mirrored the raise of my astonished eyebrows. I'd been warned how poor they were as a group of students but come on! I couldn't have made it any simpler. It's not the fact they daren't put their hands up either because the majority of them looked up at the slide and shook their heads...in slow motion because they couldn't be bothered to move their head from side to side. As my skin begins to tingle, my slow shake of the head is one of disbelief. The biting of my lip coincides with the clenching of my stomach. I feel let down.

Right. Listen up. I'm not going to keep repeating myself time and again about this paper. This paper will link the part A of your assignment to your part B. When you take the time out to read it, I hope you will see why I'm trying to drill this point across and it will make so much sense.

They're just not getting it. I wish I could take a photograph of their disillusioned faces...of the ones that aren't mid-yawn. It's priceless. Two girls have just exchanged telling glances...one of those where the eyes bulge and the head turns to one side, almost in disgust. I envisage an imaginary

speech bubble that captures her thoughts: 'I haven't got any time to read with everything else that's going on'. Needless to say that the 'everything else' wouldn't be university orientated. They're wasting my time.

The role that I was temporarily filling was eventually advertised nationwide as a lecturer or senior lecturer position. As far as I was concerned, there was little point applying as the competition would be ridiculously strong. Lee had even glossed over my limited chances with a throw-away comment that it was just a little soon for me; but I agreed. I agreed that even if I miraculously landed the role, the combination of lecturing, administrative responsibilities and completing my thesis would be too much to expect of myself. I needed to be near to submission; at a point where I was editing and formatting instead of drafting and re-drafting. But my thought-processes became disorientated during a meeting with the programme leader at the University. "Are you applying for the performance analysis vacancy" he asked. As he uttered those words, I wriggled in my seat and purposely played down my chances; fishing for any inkling to his thoughts. "I hadn't thought about it", I replied as the sweet smell of the vanilla air freshener suddenly became prominent. "I didn't think I was close enough to completing my PhD or would stand a chance against the fierce competition" I continued. "Well, you're the one leading the module at the moment and your research fits with the interests of the department...you've nothing to lose" was his response. His advice was rewarding. His advice was significant. He thought I could do it. While the meeting was to discuss learning outcomes for the following semester's student handbook, I exited his room gently biting my lip and with a flutter inside my stomach. My feelings were unexpected optimism.

My application also questioned my identity when I shared my job application with a good friend of mine, Chris who lives a stone's throw from my house. I grew up with Chris and

spent countless hours playing football together for local clubs or frequenting nights out but now each have our own family priorities that limit our contact. I hadn't seen Chris for months, despite living so close. Having been to University himself, Chris was impressed with my recent module leader experience and immediately brought a humbled smile to my face. His comments that I'd done "fantastically well" and that I "deserved to stake [my] claim for the job" initiated a tingling warmth in my legs while unearthing something that had now vacated my life. Yet seeing Chris also caused my stomach to knot and eradicated my cravings for one of the Wispa chocolate bars I'd earlier purchased. I'd not seen Chris or my other 'mates' for months and months, despite the strength of our relationships. I'd become a social outcast. While boosting my ego on one level, our interaction had raised a number of significant questions to the extent that I felt ready to quit football and regain my identity as a mate. My friends meant a great deal to me but had been abandoned out of my life; something that seeing Chris had brought to life:

My body feels cold and distinctly lacking of any significant energy. I'm a social misfit. When they're watching Hull City, I'm playing for Gainsborough. When they're playing five-a-side football together, I'm out training. When they seldom venture out on a Saturday night or play cards on a Friday night, I rule myself out...football being the all-encompassing obstacle. This lecturer's job could be a Godsend. Instead of going to football to earn money, I could be going to football with my mates, and for a laugh. Instead of imprisoning myself on a Friday night in preparation for Saturday's game, I could join the lads for an enjoyable game of cards. Instead of eating chicken and pasta every Friday evening for tea, we could have fish and chips. Quitting football has got more going for it than re-igniting friendships. No more twelve hour days spent on away fixtures to the distant lands of the mighty Gloucester City or Lowestoft Town. No more rollercoasters of emotion matching the significance of an undeserved yet priceless victory or a hard to swallow defeat. If they lose their five-a-side matches they take the piss out of the worst player in the bar afterwards...that sounds more like it. I've missed it. I've been having banter with everyone else

instead of with the people whose company I'd choose. It's not the same with teammates or with the gaffer or with supporters. My mates mean more than any of those. Those are momentary. Those are fleeting. A distant stare accompanies my reminiscing over the friendships I held with Jason at Stevenage or Wayne at Chester. I genuinely feel sad that we're no longer in contact. But those relationships are part and parcel of football...you move clubs, you change teammates...you move clubs you perform for a new set of supporters. It's an ever-changing cycle in football and you harden yourself to it. But my footballer identity has superseded everything...the sooner that is discarded, the sooner I will be Stampy the mate again.

Financially, football continued to be a necessity while ultimately restricting time spent with friends. In truth, our family lives would undoubtedly complicate our contact more than my football but in that moment and following that conversation my career lost its appeal. The turbulence in my stomach signified my sorrow and my regret. I was happy to walk away. I was happy to commence the next chapter of my life as a lecturer and discard my footballer identity. The lecturer identity was alluring. Stamp et al. had a captivating ring to it and one whose shelf life would be greater than the couple of seasons left as the veteran striker. Much like the professional footballer had done to me as a young, unworldly footballer the lecturer post became the fascination. The lecturer post became the necessity. The lecturer post caused me to check and re-check my emails countless times a day in search of the coveted call for interview; a search that ended on my morning walk downstairs to make the routine family drinks. As I stumbled my way down the stairs, the anticipation, the excitement, hope, and belief were dissipated in the click of a button and the swipe of a screen. The volcano that had been bubbling away in the pit of my stomach for days on end was fuelled with anger and desperate disappointment:

I'm glad I'm gonna be sub today...I'm knackered. Poor Jack, he must be exhausted. That cough has kept him awake for most of the night. (I look at my mobile phone that has been charging through

*the night). That's strange...two emails to my University email account during the early hours of a Saturday morning...bizarre. My heart races. I wipe away the beads of sweat on my forehead with my increasingly clammy hands. The sweat has now transferred to my mobile phone screen that has gained a film of condensation, making it difficult to read. I wipe it away with my dressing gown, as my body temperature soars. I recognise how important this moment could be. I open my dressing gown to release some of the simmering air inside. My chest now dripping with sweat. "Dear Mr Stamp Thank you for your application for the position of lectu...". Sh*t! This is it...the outcome of my application...sent at 1:02 this morning. They can send it when they like if it's positive, I don't care. Come on, come on, come on! Please, please, please. "We regret to have to inform you...". NO! YOU'RE JOKING! F***ING HELL! My heart and stomach sink in tandem. Why send me an email at one o'clock in the f***ing morning to say I haven't got an interview? Are they sure? "What's the matter" Rachel shouts, cognisant of my alarmingly raised voice. 'I haven't got an interview...they emailed me at one o'clock this morning to let me know. I'm fuming darling! My ten yard walk to the kettle resembles the final stages of a pre-season run at the army camp...legs ready to buckle, arms like lead weights and head mentally ruined...I'm a beaten man.*

The rejection left me emotionally drained. I was incensed with the timing of the email. I was angry that I'd been advised to apply and hadn't made the shortlist. I was scornful that nobody else would possess my elite background. I was frustrated that I'd dedicated so much time and effort to an application that was now a complete waste. I was annoyed that I'd still have to teach a bunch of uninterested students who couldn't care less about their studies. The whole process had left me completely drained. "Don't worry", Rachel said, "everything happens for a reason" as she continued to hide her own disappointment behind a façade of optimism and show of support. It did nothing for my depression.

Unknowingly, fellow PhD student, Ben had also applied for the position. Ben's rejection softened the blow of mine as I made sense of my position in relation to Ben. His early morning text seemingly lightened my mood, as I put my rejection into context. Here was

another Hull University graduate who was approaching his PhD submission date and who already had two module leader experiences under his belt. His CV must have also read pretty bloody well...for somebody yet to gain his doctorate anyway. Ben also informed me that Laura (a former PhD student at the University) had been given an interview for the vacancy. With no publications to her name at present, and following a game of text tennis, Ben and I decided that until we get the Dr in front of our names, instead of the Mr, then we were destined for rejection.

5.5. The PhD Student

Despite continually meeting deadlines for draft work, the initial feedback I received fluctuated, as I struggled to grasp the reasoning behind the failings of my writing. “It’s good” said Dave, “but I’m not sure if it’s auto-ethnography”. There was always a ‘but’. A compliment followed by what they really thought; in my mind, an attempt to butter me up before they let loose with their criticisms. I repeatedly left meetings clenching my jaw and with a dull headache to boot; my frustration simple to translate. I began to dread the ‘it’s good’ comment and craved true compliments, such as fantastic or brilliant. They never came. My work became interesting but...or a decent attempt but. I couldn’t escape the ‘buts’. I questioned my academic ability as my deep-weighted sighs revolved around self-doubt. While the relationships I held with my supervisors undoubtedly affected my emotional experiences and my approach to my studies, the effects of spending hour after hour locked away in the spare bedroom to focus on the intricacies of my thesis spilled over into family life. My relationship with Rachel proved taxing on a regular basis. As far as I was concerned, I was working. As far as I was concerned, I was earning. As far as Rachel was concerned, I was merely delaying the

inevitable...she coveted the moment where I would relinquish my student identity and assume the role of employee. Similar to the effects of the early feedback I received from my supervisors, Rachel's suggestion again raised my own insecurities:

"You're suffocating me...you're just constantly under my feet. I just want you to have a normal, Monday to Friday, nine to five job and be around on the nights and the weekends when I need you...I know what we need from shops, I can do the bloody dishwasher, just leave me alone".

Maybe I do need a job...maybe Rachel's right.

I'm only trying to help. Sat alone in my study upstairs...Jack kicking off downstairs because he can't have another packet of 'sweeties'...it's impossible to block out through the paper-thin walls as the pain in the back of my throat intensifies. Yet the guilt comes and goes...I'll go hang the washing out and save Rachel a job or maybe I could cook tea tonight...but, if I was out at work and I wasn't around like Rachel wants then I wouldn't be able to do anything anyway. And then what would happen with the boys on a Monday or Tuesday morning when Rachel has left for work? It's great when I'm needed and around to help out doing those things. I've got one more year of study left...or more importantly, one more year of funding, so something's got to give...it would be crazy to give up now.

That gives me a year to get something in place...a year...sounds a long time, a year...so where does the stomach churning and chest tingling sprout from when I think about the year ahead? Maybe because if it's anything like my previous five years at Hull University it will fly by. And in that year my PhD needs to be finished...or as near as damn it...everything that's been swirling around my brain for the past two years needs to be down on paper...to PhD standard...my flag in the sand for an original contribution to the literature. Does that cause the stomach churning and chest tingling? It's coming to crunch time and maybe I'm not up to it. The feedback's showing little sign of improvement...literature review seemed fine...narratives were 'interesting' or 'heading in the right direction'...but how long will the feedback continue? They've all got their own transitions to deal with...will anybody else be as thorough or as thought-provoking? Or is this solely about me? Is

there going to be a ceiling to my work...am I on the cusp without being able to cross that line?

There must be something in what I've just written...or I'd have deleted it.

I'm finding it so hard to appease the situation. 'In a year's time, you'll miss me being at home', I joke, 'who will you have to annoy you then'? Never gets a smile though...just another telling glance...then silence.

Being a PhD student could be a monadic experience. Interviewing was fine. What's not to like about grabbing a cup of coffee or a bite to eat with former teammates and asking a few questions about their life stories? Together we'd make sense of the unpredictable world of professional football while sharing stories about memorable teammates or less than amorous managers. Similarly, meetings with my supervisors was a change from the norm and a chance to re-visit the coffee shops and talk football yet again; discuss the direction of my thesis and reiterate the study's novelty. But writing was a lonely existence...one consisting of myself and my laptop. And the more I read researcher's swift reference to 'nowhere land', the more I needed to know. Nowhere land continued to be a desolate place and repeatedly re-appeared in my daily life:

I stare around the unoccupied room, neatly arranged tables and chairs directed perfectly towards the three blank whiteboards and the hidden projector screen. The room oozes conformity...forty-five chairs (yes, I've counted) geared towards intent listening, towards learning, towards education. But do I actually want to educate or does it matter what I do?

The clock is ticking...in nine months' time the funding for my PhD ends. One way or another, I will no longer be a full-time PhD student. I simply cannot afford to be. And the minute I consider not being able to afford things, my breathing accelerates and my stomach begins to churn as I return to nowhere land. Nowhere land is a dark place; an unpleasant place. Nowhere land is shrouded in anxiety, in uncertainty, in doubt. Nowhere land is a place where my legs turn weak and my body temperature drops. Nowhere land is full of worry...full of worry because I'm not the only one who

resides there. Little does he know it but Charlie is in nowhere land. Jack is in nowhere land. How much longer can we visit Clark's for two pairs of ridiculously over-priced school shoes? 'But they're really comfortable and great for their feet' Rachel says. And those are the little things. Ibiza is booked, it's paid for...in five weeks' time, we fly out for what will hopefully be another amazing family holiday. But will that be possible next year? Rachel impatiently looks forward to holidays as the highlight of her year but Rachel is also in nowhere land...only she is as aware of the situation as I am. Rachel regularly shares her anxieties of the future...where her breathing and heartbeat race in tandem as she contemplates the significance of our dwindling savings. In truth, Rachel is probably more afraid of nowhere land than I am and who can blame her? For the best part of our sixteen years together, my life has been dictated by short-termism. A year's contract here, a year's contract there, the chance of a two-year deal if the manager doesn't get sacked. The uncertainty seemed constant and longer-term security continues to seem a distant prospect. The tremors in my body suggest that this is down to me...my family's future rests with me...what will they think if I can't land that all-important first job. I would be a failure.

The room hasn't changed. The chairs maintain their focus on the whiteboards as the ticking of the nearby clock becomes ever-more prominent. The constant tapping of my fingers on the keyboard conceal the dull ache that sweeps across my forehead, as I contemplate what lies ahead...a dull ache that mirrors the dull ache of last Friday or last Wednesday, where, without joy I relentlessly searched jobs.ac.uk because lecturing seems the obvious next step. This transition is arduous...this transition is mentally perverse. I need an end for my means. I need something to write for. Craig's sorted with Hull City. Ben's sorted with New Bucks University. And their prospective jobs have augmented their writing. It's given them a goal...both an aim and a reward. My motivation rests with Dr Stamp...but Dr Stamp walking aimlessly and without a compass into the labyrinth of the unknown.

Jobs.ac.uk and fejobs.com took a significant hold in my daily life as I searched in vain for the ideal job opportunity. The excitement of a sports coaching lectureship was consistently shattered by its proximity to the South coast of England or the Welsh border. The more I

considered what it was I was actually searching for the more I saw the ludicrousness of my hopes...a University within an hour's commute that would be interested in somebody who was in all probability a year away from submitting his PhD and who had no research profile or experience of external funding. But I continued to search for my guiding light...the guiding light that I so desperately needed. The University of Lincoln was perfect. Their lectureship in performance analysis was something I had previously taught at levels five and six...and with the essential person specification referring to a PhD, or close to completion, my hopes were as high as their decline was low. The elusive interview continued to frustrate. I simply wasn't good enough. I just didn't have enough experience on my CV to compete in the fiercely contested academic arena.

5.6. The Job Interview

Following two failed job applications, I was finally invited for my dream interview at a University within an Hour's commute. As I arrived for my interview, I was greeted by a lecturer in the department who accompanied the candidates throughout the scheduling of the event. He seemed a nice bloke, quite a bit older than myself but chatty enough and seemed to be trying to put my mind at ease. But then he dropped a bombshell...a bombshell that I couldn't, or didn't feel able to respond to in any other way. "Unfortunately, there are no students on campus", he said "and so it's going to be ten members of the department in the teaching activity instead, if that's ok"? "You're joking"! I replied (luckily leaving out the expletive that would have emphasised my true feelings). My head lifted itself towards the ceiling in a display of what must have appeared a half-disgusted and half-'that's my chances ruined' response as my head shook slowly from side to side. "My whole session is planned around getting

prospective opinions from the students about their future transitions out of University”, I said while sensing my own disappointment in the clenching of my stomach and the laboured, deflated tone of my voice. “Well don’t worry”, he responded, “the staff know to play the part of students for the day”. “It’s ok, don’t worry”, I said, “I’m sure I’ll come up with something...that’s what teaching is all about isn’t it, being able to think on your feet”. Despite my comments, I was livid!

As I walk into the interview room, I’m greeted by the four members of the panel who looked decidedly different to their picture profiles that I scanned through on the University website...maybe it’s the shirt and tie that’s thrown me but their awkward smiles resemble a look that says ‘welcome...you better be ready’ as opposed to the kind and friendly smiles on their profiles. I’m instantly aware of my need to impress. Following a brief introduction by the chair of the panel, the members of the panel introduce themselves one by one and initiate my first insecurity that sends a shiver of panic waving through my upper torso...*do I smile back, do I acknowledge them, do I respond to each one individually, do I say nothing, what do I do?* I opt for the smile and little nod of the head in their general direction that, in my mind said nice to meet you while hopefully concealing my desperation to remember their names just in case I needed to refer to them personally later on in the interview. Following a couple of easier questions, my anxieties returned during a further seemingly innocuous question; one where I was asked to give an example of when I’d dealt with conflict or conflicting demands and one that flashed up a sudden desperation for a drink of water. My mind inexplicably emptied of anything spontaneous to say...I was completely blank. “That’s a good question”, I replied...“I’ll just have a minute to think about that one”. “Of course you can” came the response. My guess would be that I took approximately ten seconds to come up

with my answer...ten seconds that felt as though I'd had enough time to return home and pick up the tie that I oh-so nearly forgot:

Conflict...what does she mean by conflict...a fight...an argument...people tearing each other's hair out...right, quickly...conflict, conflict, conflict...it doesn't give you an answer if you just keep saying the bloody word conflict. I later remembered the perfect example of conflict in the previous semester's teaching between four students that turned into personal and public castigations of each other but the example had somehow deserted my dishevelled brain. My body temperature drops as I speedily twist my wedding ring. But she said or conflicting demands...is that a better option? Move on...demands. Who demands things from me? Who expects me to do things for them? Or, more to the point, what do they want to hear? Not football... 'put the ball away' as my teammates would say. Something teaching orientated...something PhD orientated...but what? I'd love to tell them about the weekend I've just had what with the holiday, football, Charlie's tournament that I had to turn down to bang out their thesis that they wanted me to in a day...yes, a day! The presentation and the activities that you've asked me to do, I've put together in a day! Part of me is thinking this is a great idea but the other part, the more sensible, pragmatic part is saying my chances would be lost in a milli-second. My breathing changes from a medium paced jog into a three-quarter pace sprint as I look around the room for a moment of inspiration. How long have I been thinking for? I can't take much longer or they'll question my preparation (how dare they?)...that's it, make something up...it's your only option.

I think I've had many situations where I've had conflicting demands and I'd say the ones related to my PhD and my lecturing duties would be the best example (*gives me a little more time to make something up*). Before I went away on holiday (*I can't get it out of my mind*), I had to write my final narrative (*it was my second of three but final makes it sound closer to completion*) for my PhD supervisors to look over while I was away (*I set myself the target but it sounded better if it was from those two*)...I knew that I'd been writing roughly 1,000 words a day (*some days 2,500 but less means more concise and considered*) and with just over two weeks before I left I still had lots of work to do for the feedback sheets, MEQ and critical reflection form and module board for the

performance analysis module that I'd taught (*drop that in just in case they've forgotten that I've been a module leader*). I had to strike a balance between the two quite heavy demands while still ensuring that I fulfilled my duties as husband and father of two boys (*I didn't plan to include my family at all today but it's sent a warm wave of pride shivering through my body and it sounds mature...it sounds brilliant...she even smiles as I mention Charlie and Jack*). In fact, the more I think about your question Sally (s**t! *it was Sally wasn't it?*) the more I realise how much I'm dealing with conflicting demands...the demands of being a husband, a father, a student, a module leader, an assistant manager...I'd like to think that I'm always meeting conflicting demands head on and have developed an efficient ability to prioritise (*Jesus Christ, where did that come from?*).

The ten seconds spent worrying and panicking about what I actually was going to say just rolled off the tongue in what must have appeared a well-thought out and considered response...if only they knew...maybe they did. On leaving the interview room, one of the panel members jokingly commented that Bauman had got his whole individualisation thesis wrong...*that's strange*, I thought...*I've said I'm going to use his concepts but I've also said that I'm going to critique his work*. After a couple of seconds to re-program my frazzled mind I suggested that Bauman was right...a semi-contradiction to what I believe and a reply that didn't allow me to tell the whole story, but a response that was abruptly interrupted by the chair of the panel, "Come on John, you can't speak to the candidates like this", she says. "I'll email you later", says John. As the two conversed, my breath appeared lodged in my chest. *That's bizarre...he'll email me later on? That must be a positive sign...he must have thought that I'd been better than the earlier candidates. I thought I'd done as well as I could have done but you never know*. I take a last sip of water, pick up my Ping rucksack and stroll confidently out of the interview room...shoulders rolled back, stomach sucked in as each footstep feels lighter and lighter...thanks Sally, thanks Dawn, thanks Daniel, thanks John...see you

soon. In my mind, I will be seeing them soon as Jim's comments have engrained a picture in my mind of my departure...four nods of approval, four, 'he's good' comments, four 'I like him's'.

I also evaluated my experiences in relation to the members of staff who were playing the role of students for the teaching activities and questioned the extent of their roles. Were they there to judge or were they merely there as a body for the day? I struggled to decipher their roles but hoped it was the latter. As I perused the room for inspiration to how I could arrange the focus group or where I could stand for my presentation, I detected an air of boredom...an atmosphere that did little to disguise the staff's extended morning of tortuous presentations. 'Oh sh*t', I thought...I hardly had anything to raise their energy levels. The twitching in my right upper arm coincided with the constant rolling in my stomach, as my nervousness became all too apparent. As I introduced my presentation and explained how I was going to conduct my teaching activity I became instantly aware of their body language and began evaluating my own performance against their mannerisms:

...the guy at the back of the room nods an approval at my breaking down of the module into four, three week blocks of theory, practice and analysis. The funny shape of his lips suggests it's a different approach and he seems impressed. My chest protrudes another inch as I catch his apparent approval. My voice raises an extra decibel with the increased confidence. But down to my left hand side, there's a middle-aged woman who can't wait to get out of here...her strange eye-rolling could be a careful consideration of my ideas but as I imagine it, it's a blatant disregard for something that does little for her tedium. She's seen hundreds of presentations and mine is nothing she hasn't seen many times before. The lady next to her is tired...she musters the odd burst of energy that enables her to smile a tired smile...one that is broken down into slow motion and because her lips are now working, they cause her eyes to partly close to balance off the exertion of what little energy she has left. While playing the role of a student in the focus group, one notes his

*interest in becoming a lion-tamer to the hilarity of the rest of the group...cheers mate, I need you don't I? The stiffness in my neck confirms my annoyance. I wanted a relaxed atmosphere but don't take the p**s. The rest of the group recognise their roles in proceedings and make sporadic attempts to engage in the session...it's difficult to judge their perceptions as they maintain a stone-faced façade throughout. One thing is for sure, I've been dealt a rough hand with the timing of the teaching activity and being last, I'm constantly questioning the part they're playing...will their opinions count? Does it matter what they all think? Should I be trying to impress them all or is the one at the back of the room the only one who matters, the one with the laptop and who is catching eye-contact with me throughout, the one who regularly tilts his head on a slight angle that I can neither detect as approval or discontent...is he the most important member of this session or should I be attempting to impress the people that seem unimpressible?*

I was informed that I would find the result of my interview later the same day which was both exciting but draining. It dominated the rest of the day. 6pm became 7:15pm...and then 8:30pm...then 8:45 pm...the surplus saliva gathering in my mouth emphasised my heightening nerves...it simply had to be soon! As the time approached 9pm, I didn't want the phone to ring...maybe they'd been held up and hadn't been able to make their decision...maybe they'd decide tomorrow. And even if the phone did ring, it could only be negative news as their preferred candidate would have accepted their offer. The hours spent hopefully zooming in on the shiny, rectangular, hand-held device had been too much, as my eyes felt like the lady's I'd picked up on in the earlier teaching activity, slowly being pulled wider in an effort to close. At 9:17 my mobile phone rang and the unknown number flashing on the screen immediately increased my heart-rate; where my destiny was revealed:

...my almighty sigh and slow drop of my head to one side act as a deflated acceptance of what is to come...the muscles in my body sinking lower into the settee, void of any hope. They haven't got caught up at work and they've made their decision...the chances of the call being a positive one at this time of night is negligible and I know it. Picking up the pace of my walk into the conservatory

(where I seem to pick up a better reception to my mobile), my heart rate reaches previously unencountered territory...the rate and sound resembling a child playing football. I eventually answer the call while forcefully opening the cold, plastic, white door handle, a door that will ultimately house my rejection...my failure. "It's not the news you'll be hoping for I'm afraid, Darryn", says Dawn, as my body attempts to exhale its mountain of disappointment out of my now lifeless limbs..."but the standard of applicants was extremely high so don't be too disappointed". "If you want detailed feedback on your interview then give me a call on Thursday" says Dawn. Rachel wanders into the dining room seeking the news...a simple shake of the head and closing of my eyes is suffice...her floored expectations mirrored my own. "I didn't want you driving all that way every day anyway" Rachel later commented...bravely concealing her dismay that I envisaged had caused her mind to laboriously re-consider the financial plight of next April. My hand combs down my face, squeezing every last ounce of disappointment from the receptacles of my tired skin, continuing to flush my sadness back down my throat and into my chest with a similar sweeping movement...my head looks up to the dimly lit ceiling and is accompanied by a monumental sigh...a sigh that speaks volumes for my desperate disappointment.

5.7. Moving On

The interview at [AE] University was the first of many. Each time I received the invite to interview, my heart would race and my hopes were raised, where I viewed my entrance into academia as a necessary financial step. Making matters worse was an unexpected turn of events from a footballing perspective. As my PhD funding finished, so did my chances of earning a further assistant manager's contract at Gainsborough Trinity. Ten games before the climax of the season, and with the club situated a respectable twelfth in the league, Housh was sacked. As he informed me of his news, my stomach clenched, my eyes widened and my mouth slackened. I continued to rub my eyebrows as he shared the conversation he'd had

with the chairman. I was in complete shock. Being under contract as a player rather than an assistant manager would make it difficult for the club to also relieve me of my duties. Part of me began to consider the chances of me being placed in caretaker charge and finishing the season as manager. Yet, every time I considered this as an option, I sensed a thickness in the back of my throat that coincided with what Housh would think. I didn't want the job. If we hadn't been good enough under us both, why would things change under me?

Becoming caretaker manager was not even an option. My only option was to assist the club captain who took over the reins and would manage the team for the final ten league games of the season. In effect, I saw myself as assistant captain for the remainder of the campaign. The lightheadedness that accompanied each journey across to the club signified my disbelief. If I didn't need the money, I would have told the chairman where to stick his offer. I was gutted. So were the lads. They were dejected with the decision and felt as though they'd let us both down. Most of them had signed for Gainsborough to play for Housh and the look on their unexpected faces when he relayed the news conveyed their disbelief. As their eyes bulged and their mouths gaped open, the reality of the situation unfolded. While Housh exited the changing room with tears in his eyes, the mood was sombre. Following the captain's rallying call for the lads to 'do it for Housh now', I was left unconvinced that this would lift their spirits. During his first training session, I questioned my decision to stay on board and considered my worth to the club:

What am I actually doing here? I'm not in the starting 11...I've not got a bib on...I've not spoken a single word...nobody would notice if I wasn't here. As I wrap my arms around the back of my body and sheepishly make my way off the pitch to get out of everybody's way, my legs feel weak and my eyes and cheeks hot. I'm humiliated. My humiliation forces me to avoid eye contact with the lads. In my mind, they're also wondering what my new role will be. Clearly, not a big one judging

by my apparent omission from the session! This is terribly awkward. I've spoken to him [the captain/caretaker manager] briefly over the phone but that was it. The two times he has asked my opinion, the tingling sensation that accompanies my response suggests that my thoughts are unimportant and it's more in search of support of his decision than a joint one. I'm not sure whether I can do this. The humiliation...the awkwardness...the treading on egg shells...if it wasn't for the money, I'd be out of here in a flash.

Despite a poor run of form towards the end of the season, the chairman stuck by his decision and appointed the captain on a permanent basis. As expected, he informed me of his intention to bring in his own assistant manager and wasted little time in doing so. I respected the manner in which he told me and wished him well in the future and began to contemplate life without being involved in football. My thoughts coalesced around alternating ventures to watch Hull City every other week with Charlie and Jack and having family days out in between. Not having to condition myself in preparation for my 20th pre-season made it an enjoyable and relaxing summer. As my boots were thrown into the dustbin, my giddiness and release of tension exposed my relief. Despite conversing with Housh throughout the summer about potential vacancies and opportunities to return to football management, I was secretly pleased that this could be it. I was as relaxed as I had ever been and was looking forward to a break from the uncertainties, the anxieties, the tensions and the pressures of the [semi-] professional footballing world.

What made this decision easier was that financially, we were fine. Rachel was two months away from taking voluntary redundancy and, due to the death of Rachel's Grandma and Grandad from separate sides of the family we had inherited a sizeable sum of money. Without this, our situation would have been considerably different. Yet, here we both were, potentially without a job between us in the coming months and as relaxed as we'd ever been.

We worked out that if neither of us managed to find employment we had enough savings to live comfortably, including paying the necessary bills, for nearly two years. We would regularly discuss how we saw both Rachel's Grandma and Grandad looking over us and ensuring that we were ok. This gave us a bit of breathing space and a bit of financial security that we had never had and we loved it. That didn't mean that we were both planning to do nothing and live off the entire savings, but it eradicated all of the financial pressures that we had tied to me finding employment. In essence, I could now afford to complete my PhD and publish a journal article or two that would enhance my application for a lecturer's post. While this sounded like a fantastic opportunity to boost my longer-term prospects, they were short-lived. Within the space of three weeks, I found myself re-joining Housh as assistant manager at North Ferriby Football Club while also being appointed as programme leader for the Higher Education sports degrees at North Lindsey College. North Ferriby had been promoted into the National Premier League and so were now not only in the league above our last club, Gainsborough Trinity but a club that would travel the length and breadth of the country to fulfil fixtures. From the midst of transition, I had reneged on my belief that semi-professional football was too big a commitment and that a year to finish my PhD and publish my first journal article was the ideal path to take. Instead, I saw both of my appointments as brilliant opportunities that were too good to turn down. However, my thoughts and feelings were not as positive as I'd envisaged them being having been rejected from numerous interviews.

The call was strangely underwhelming. The repetitive sound of apologetic interviewers was engrained on my mind and I saw no reason for things to change. I'd done nothing else. Nothing had changed. My PhD was yet to be completed which meant that there were no publications either. I hadn't gained any more teaching experience and there was a

part of me (a very big part) that was thrilled by the opportunity to give management in the Conference National a bloody good go. Yes, the money wasn't great and yes, the chances were that North Ferriby faced a notoriously difficult task of staying in the league. But, as I considered the finer details of the challenge ahead, including the bigger grounds, the better standard of players and having my name on the back of my shirt again, the repetitive bursts of adrenaline rush signified what an exciting opportunity this was! The phone call should have been equally exciting. It should have been both elating and relieving. Instead, the conversation was shrouded by indifference:

That's fantastic! I reply. Yet, my body appears emotionless. As my mind wanders to the work still to be done on the PhD, there is a profound lowering and loosening of my shoulders. "You sound surprised", he comments. Indeed, I am. But my surprise isn't fuelled with delight or with amazement. It's merely fuelled by a distinct lack of energy that signifies my realisation. Shit! Am I taking on too much? My flat tone suggests I just might be. I would have been relieved if I hadn't been appointed. I would have turned my attention to the research assistant post at the University of Hull that would have fitted perfectly with my football commitments. And so I just can't get excited. I just can't be happy. As my breathing becomes slow and even, I give Rachel a thumbs-up sign as she peers expectantly through the conservatory door window. As one hand moves straight towards her mouth, the other presses against her chest. Her wide smile brings a smile to my own face and sends a tingling sensation over my chest. This isn't just about me and how difficult it might be to juggle whatever duties and responsibilities I am charged with. This is about my family and about our future. Are we finally heading towards a future of financial stability? Rachel's reaction suggests we are. I just wish I was as happy.

I continued to feel laboured and as if everything was in slow motion for the following few days. One minute, I was happy and couldn't wait to text people and let them know my news and the next I was anxiously considering how I would lead multiple modules that were

outside of my comfort zone. What would the students think if I was unable to answer their questions about the Krebs Cycle or the dietary requirements of a marathon runner? I still couldn't get excited. For days, I had a pronounced ache in the back of my throat that made swallowing difficult. The thought of combining my PhD, my assistant manager's role at North Ferriby and my programme leader role at North Lindsey College was a daunting proposition. I needed to press on with my thesis and push for as late a start date as I could. But a later start date meant less time to recruit the necessary student target and prepare the 100's of lectures that I would be delivering from September onwards.

I hoped this was just another phase.

6.0: Discussion of Auto-Ethnography

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to make theoretical sense of my own transitional experiences. Here, I focus not only on the relational but also the embodied and the emotional dimensions of my transitions in the hope of extending the analysis beyond the discussion of my participants' narratives. In this respect, what follows is a concerted attempt to provide a more detailed response to research question B at the start of the thesis. Where the participants felt unable to articulate their feelings, I have attempted to make theoretical sense of both my embodied feelings and my emotional experiences. Firstly, I use the work of Crossley (2011), May (2011; 2013) and Burkitt (2014a) to present a relational understanding of how I approached the end of my playing career in (semi) professional football; a transition that was difficult to separate from a number of personal transitions that involved various strands of my identity and an array of significant 'others'. Secondly, I use further work by Burkitt (1999; 2014b) and others (e.g. Cooley, 1964; Turner, 2000; 2001; Turner & Stets, 2005; 2006) to offer a social interpretation of my embodied, emotional experiences and how they were inextricably linked to dialogic relations with others. Finally, using the work of Bauman (2012) and Burkitt (2014a; 2014b) I draw similarities between my experiences and those of my participants to make a connection to wider societal patterns.

6.2. Myself as 'Multiple Selves'

As I approached the end of my playing career in (semi) professional football, perhaps the most striking feature of my transition was that it impacted upon numerous aspects of my

life and was one transition among many. Not only was I Darryn the (semi) professional footballer, I was also Darryn the husband, Darryn the father, Darryn the friend and Darryn the PhD student before also becoming Darryn the lecturer and Darryn the potential employee. While each identity involved various networks of interaction, they were far from separate entities. As evidenced in my writings, there was substantial cross-over between the different roles I played; for example, between husband and PhD student or footballer and assistant manager. Similarly, there were examples of competing identities, such as between friend and footballer or PhD student and lecturer where performing one role or responsibility severely impacted on my ability to fulfil others. Although I continued to be Darryn, with the copious strands to my identity, these identities only played out within relevant social encounters. For example, I never returned home from university and attempted to teach Rachel, Jack and Charlie. Similarly, I never went to football training prepared to be interviewed. Rather, I understood my identity in relation to the people with whom I shared the social environment and interacted with them accordingly.

Not only did I understand my identity in relation to the people with whom I shared the social environment but I also measured my status or the success of my transitions against these relationships and interactions. This was done in two ways. Firstly, I interpreted my interactions against previous interactions (or relationship) that I held with the respective 'other' or 'others'. Secondly, I estimated the potential outcome of the interaction and evaluated this against my intentions or hopes. For example, as I made the long walk back to the changing room during half time of my first game as assistant manager I considered my dual identities of Darryn the teammate and Darryn the assistant manager. Here, I was faced with the onerous challenge of verbally criticising my teammates. With the strength of our

previous relationship driving my thought processes, I was reluctant to jeopardize the pattern of our future interactions. I valued my relationship with the players higher than anything else and was prepared to put a positive spin on an unacceptable performance. As far as I was concerned, these relationships would be a crucial source of my future success or failure as assistant manager and subsequently communicated with the players on a similar level to I did as a teammate.

Similar to the theoretical analyses of participants' transitions, I believe that my own experiences can also be interpreted using Crossley's (2011, p. 15) relational sociology whereby I was always an "agent-in-relation" and continued to find myself being "formed and continually re-formed in and through interaction". In this way, my identity was being re-shaped, during transitions, by my changing 'positions' within various networks of interaction; "with the various identities, interests, interdependencies and practical engagements that such positions entail" (Crossley, 2011, p. 15). For example, my teammates shaped my footballer and assistant manager identities while students and supervisors shaped my lecturer and PhD student identities. Similarly, I could again draw on the work of May (2013) and interpret my experiences in relation to my sense of 'belonging'. May (2013, p. 3) defined belonging as "the process of creating a sense of identification with, or connection to, cultures, people, places and material objects" where "significant changes in our surroundings are reflected in a fluctuation in our sense of belonging". As a player, I felt a sense of belonging with my teammates whereby I felt 'at ease' and gave little thought to what I was doing or how I was doing it (May, 2011). However, as I became player/assistant manager, I craved the same sense of belonging and attempted to limit the changes in my surroundings by maintaining similar relationships with the players. Relatedly, I would argue that having

unexpectedly seen my friend [Chris], I questioned my sense of belonging, whereby our conversation suggested that football was dominating my life and, as a result, I had become a social outcast. In agreement with Miller (2003) and May (2013) then, I too believe that belonging is something we have to keep achieving through an active process as the world and people in it, including ourselves, continue to undergo change.

While Crossley's (2011) and May's (2013) work can indeed be utilised to make sense of my experiences, I believe that the work of Burkitt (2014a), and more specifically his work on the formation of 'social selves', will present a greater understanding of my experiences here. Possessing many similarities to the work of Crossley (2011) and May (2013), Burkitt (2014a, p. 16) believes that social relations are "the very essence of what it is to be a self: an individual with an identity amongst others". Opposing traditional psychological views of personality that see traits and capacities as biologically given, Burkitt (2014a) placed interaction and dialogue as essential components of an individual's identity. That is, Burkitt (2014a, p. 188) noted that it is through these interrelationships: "we come to identify our self through the image of some of the selves around us, with some of what they represent, while setting our self against the images of others". To this extent, Burkitt (2014a, p. 165) suggested that rather than *having* an identity: "in fleeting, ever-changing social configurations, identity is something that is continually *made* on the spot, *in situ*". In essence, Burkitt (2014a) argued that our various identities, our 'social selves', only become valid within specific networks of relations and the ensuing interaction with others who afford us the identity. Furthermore, Burkitt (2014a, p. 165) argued that "we only *appear* to others as unified and whole identities, when just under the surface of appearance we are a fragmented and diverse assemblage of voices, demands, intentions and possibilities".

Using Burkitt's (2014a) work to interpret my experiences, it could be suggested that the various aspects of my identity were both formed and in-formed through my relations with others. My hopes of being a respected teammate and considerate assistant manager played out in my interactions with fellow players. Through continuous evaluation and re-evaluation, the success of my player/assistant manager identity depended on the relationships that I held with members of the team and how I managed and interpreted their perceptions of me. In this respect, my identity was being formed within a specific network of my social relations (Burkitt, 2014a). Similarly, I questioned my ability to be both a considerate husband and dedicated PhD student through my strained interactions with Rachel. Albeit for a temporary period of time, our opinions differed on how I could combine both roles, whereby Rachel saw my offers to help around the house as being "constantly under [her] feet". Equally, my opinion of a dedicated PhD student developed into 'job avoider' in Rachel's eyes where I again questioned both my progress and my identity in relation to my interactions within the specific network of family life.

While I evaluated the status of my identity and success of transitions against the relationships and interactions that I held with others, this proved challenging with people I had just met. With very little information to relate back to, I repeatedly picked up on their body language or on any comments that they made during our interaction and made a subsequent evaluation. For example, I soon questioned my intent to turn below average students into above average students due to their negative body language and lack of communication during one of my early lectures. Despite maintaining my professional teaching approach, I valued my progression to Dr Stamp higher than being the likeable lecturer that I initially envisaged and altered my time management accordingly. Similarly,

during my interview and presentations at [AE University], I searched for nods of approval or body language that suggested I was doing a good job and could indeed be a valuable addition to their institution. The interview panel member's closing comments proved how I garnered my success or failure through the comments and body language of others I barely knew.

Despite my recognition of others' body language and respective comments, I continued to evaluate my own actions throughout my interactions. During my interview and presentation at [AE University], not only was I conscious of the panel members' or the focus group's body language or comments, but also of my own performance and how I envisaged this being delivered. Contemplating my response to the interview question about conflict, I became increasingly aware of the length of time I took to respond and how this could have been portrayed negatively; as a lack of preparation. Similarly, as I missed out on what I regarded as my last chance of Wembley, my self-dialogue orchestrated around my own thoughts and feelings as well as how I looked to my teammates and their respective thoughts. In that one moment, I recognised the changing dynamic of our interactions; where my unprecedented emotional reaction caused my teammates to avoid eye contact with me in what I viewed as a display of embarrassment. Not only was my identity as Darryn the semi-professional footballer arguably changing, but it was changing according to the perceptions I held of my social relations. In my mind, both the players and I realised that I was approaching the end of my career and subsequently of my identity as Darryn the semi-professional footballer.

Here, we might usefully draw on further work by Burkitt (2014a) and the formation and re-formation of ethical social selves. Drawing from the work of Mead (1967) and Bakhtin (1981) in particular, Burkitt (2014a) noted how, as humans, we are conscious of three points

of view. Firstly, Burkitt (2014a) suggested that individuals are constantly aware of other people and therefore that they may be judged; labelling this perspective as 'others-for-me'. In light of our recognition of others, Burkitt (2014a, p. 74) described how we subsequently exist "first and foremost as an 'I-for-others', which is the awareness of the possible images others have of me". Finally, from this point of view we derive an 'I-for-myself', or "the awareness I have of myself, my thoughts and feelings, and the dialogue I hold with myself" (Burkitt, 2014a, p. 74). Burkitt (2014a, p. 74) further suggested how: "At any one moment of interaction there are complex, multi-directional currents in the dialogic [and non-dialogic] relations between these positions". Indeed, the interplay of these three perspectives has been evidenced throughout my transitional experiences where it could be argued that the perceptions of others were, at times, of greater importance to me than the images I held of myself. In this respect, I recognised that adding a permanent lecturer strand to my identity rested on the thoughts and opinions of others. Similarly, becoming Dr Stamp would involve me producing the calibre of work deemed 'flag in the sand' material to both supervisors and examiners.

As the above section demonstrates, the role of others was paramount in the evaluation of my transitional success. Whether it was their voiced opinions or my interpretations of their opinions which impacted upon my evaluative stance, I became fascinated by the approval of others. To this extent, having my identities confirmed and heightened by others proved an essential source of confidence and self-belief. Here, we may return to the work of Burkitt (2014a, p. 82) and his suggestions that the "words and actions of others in-form us not only in a cognitive sense, in the way we *think* about ourselves, they in-form our very bodily dispositions in the world". Similarly, Burkitt (2014a) explained how

our relationships with others provide a mirror through which we create a relatively stable image of ourselves that we and others can dialogue with. In this respect, and to make sense of how I perceived various others' body language, Burkitt (2014a, p. 193) described how we "'read' others in embodied interaction, using this as a means of judging our responses to them and their possible responses to us". This further substantiates Burkitt's (2014a) claim that we are multiple, 'social' selves and shows how each form and re-form in a variety of practices and interactions with others.

I believe the above analyses present an alternative understanding of transitional experience. Indeed, writing from an auto-ethnographic perspective gave me a privileged researcher viewpoint, where my experiences suggest that transition is not as individualised as much as previous literature suggests (e.g. Muscat, 2010, Park, 2012). Generally speaking, researchers would present a psychological analysis of athletes' transition out of sport with the aim of developing and improving cognitive strategies to aid future athletes as they embark on their lives post-sport (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Stambulova, 2000; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Park, 2012). In light of this narrow scope of interpretation, I have widened the lens of focus and examined transition not only from a sociocultural perspective but also from a relational one. My findings have shown how I only understood my multiple identities through my interactions and relationships with others and provide an alternative understanding to the predominantly psychological interpretations (e.g. Lavalley, 2005; Lally, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Here, I would argue that the various roles of numerous 'others' in athletes' transitional experiences have escaped the attention of previous sociological career transition literature (e.g. Jones & Denison, 2016). As the previous chapter demonstrated, transitions were not solely about my footballer self but incorporated various strands of my identity

according to my locations within several networks of interaction (Crossley, 2011). Furthermore, the transitioning of my multiple identities continued to elicit a range of physical sensations and feelings. Indeed, during my interview at [AE University] my potential employee self was placed under scrutiny, where the body language and words of others evoked a range of feelings. It is these embodied experiences that I turn to in the following section, where I believe that my feelings were also inextricably linked to my dialogical relations with others (Burkitt, 1999; 2014b).

6.3. Transition as an Embodied Experience

Another of the most prominent features of my transition was the wide range of feelings that I experienced and how they seemed to be in a constant state of flux. Rarely were they prolonged sensations, as one feeling appeared to follow another. Similarly, while a changing heartbeat was easier to detect, the grinding of teeth or tingling of limbs were of equal significance to my embodied feelings despite their reduced temporal pattern. Rarely was there a single feeling. A changing heart-rate often complimented a changing breathing pattern or a changing bodily temperature and these were often complimented or swiftly replaced by other bodily sensations. For example, as I contemplated my switch to a player/assistant manager role at Gainsborough Trinity, the adrenaline rush of my frantically racing heart was swiftly replaced by a deeply weighted sigh and quiver in my stomach as I returned to my sofa.

My feelings seemingly hinged on my social relations and relevant interactions with others. Similar to the way my identity formed and re-formed through interaction, my feelings

orchestrated around my perceptions of given social encounters. The thoughts, words and actions of others continued to be the trigger of, or reasoning behind, my embodied feelings. To this extent, my feelings were linked to family members, friends, teammates, lecturers, supervisors, students, referees, linesmen and opponents and were both positive and negative, depending on the situation. In this way, they were also based on my past history with respective others and my anticipation of our future interactions. Although the extent and nature of my feelings were not predictable, the manner in which they manifested themselves was, as they developed through my interpretations of social relations and interactions. For example, as my transition into football management continued to fail, the unacceptable performances of the players combined with the actions of the referee and linesman elicited the intense feelings of a rapidly pounding heart, a rigidly tense upper torso and the rush of what felt like boiling blood racing around my body. Similarly, as I returned home having failed to secure a place in the FA Trophy final, the cuddles I received from Rachel, Charlie and Jack sent a warm flush of much needed care over my shoulders and to my fingertips.

Here, my feelings can be interpreted using the work of Burkitt (1999, p. 1) and his contention that “it would be impossible to contemplate being a person without one’s body”. In his book entitled *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity*, Burkitt (1999, p. 7) focused on the sensate and corporeal components of our existence to suggest that “thought is an embodied, social activity”. Furthermore, Burkitt (1999, p. 76) argued that the sense of being a person is inseparable from bodily practices within social relations whereby “the sense of self we develop is primarily based on the feel we have of our body and the way it connects us to the world”. Indeed, the array of physical sensations or feelings that I

experienced during my transition(s) was inextricably linked to my sense of self. For example, my rapidly pounding heart and rigidly tense upper torso were the connections that I made to my world and that I understood as signs that I was failing as an assistant manager. Similarly, the warm flush over my shoulders to my fingertips were a sign that despite my failure to reach Wembley, my family would continue their support.

Describing feelings as the embodiment of interactions and social relations, Burkitt (1999, p. 110) also noted that “all human feelings are characterised by *pattern* rather than quantity”. Thus, Burkitt (1999) explained how embodied feelings are also linked to patterns of relationship; between their multiple selves and between self and other and self and the environment. That is, embodied feelings are an essential part of our relationships with others. Indeed, it has been suggested elsewhere that “if it [the body] is not included within an embodied approach, the body becomes a mere mechanistic vehicle that is inhabited by us, rather than being us” (Theodosius, 2012, p. 63). The feelings that dominated my vignettes in the previous chapter were indeed embodied, where the contrasting senses of heaviness or weightlessness or between hot and cold were formed through my patterns of relationships to other people. For example, as I arrived for my interview at [AE University], my stomach clenched and my jaw began to ache as I was informed of the lack of students for my teaching activity and I contemplated changing tact for the staff I now considered to be analysing my every move. These were in stark contrast to the rolling back of my seemingly broadened shoulders and sucking in of my fluttering stomach that accompanied each light step of positivity exiting the interview room. On both occasions, my feelings were created through my interactions with others and the changing dynamic of my perceived relationships with them and our shared environment.

In light of my findings, I believe that the majority of previous researchers (e.g. Lally, 2007; Muscat, 2010; Park, 2012) have yet to focus specifically on transition as both an embodied and a relational phenomenon. For example, many studies (e.g. Allison & Meyer, 1998; Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007) have reported negative psychological responses to retirement, such as identity crisis or feelings of loss or fear. Here, researchers related these responses back to athletes' understanding of their (changing) athletic identity and how these were experienced from within. However, without sharing what this actually 'felt' like, they were regularly labelled as 'feelings of anger' or 'feelings of relief'. It is here that I believe only the cognitive part of the feeling has been presented. Similar to the players studied by Roderick (2006a), the three participants in my study also struggled to recall what retrospective feelings actually 'felt' like. Upon reflection, and given the additional opportunity to explore my own 'feelings', I believe that accepting the participants' responses was both morally and ethically correct, rather than probe beyond a level I felt comfortable with as a researcher. As my narrative testified, the embodiment of my feelings was integral to the situation itself. Furthermore, I was unable to reduce these feelings to a mere inner-body experience but instead, interpreted them through my [arguably changing] relations and interaction with others and my subsequent position in a wider sociocultural context. In this respect, I would argue that my analysis has extended on the work of Jones (2014) and Jones and Denison (2016) by focusing on the embodiment of these feelings. That is, I have provided a corporeal dimension to the wide array of feelings that I experienced during my multiple transitions and made sense of these in relation to my interactions with others.

6.4. Transition as an Emotional Experience

Throughout my transition(s), I experienced a number of emotions that were both negative (e.g. anger, fear, guilt, disappointment, frustration and sadness) and positive (e.g. happiness, joy, excitement, pride and love). Here, I understood my emotions through the embodiment of my feelings in given social encounters. That is, only through physical sensations and embodied feelings in interaction did I interpret my emotions. In this respect, these emotions were not limited to cognitive processes as has been suggested by much previous transition research (e.g. Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Rather, they were arguably cognitive translations of my embodied feelings and my social relationships with others. Therefore, I didn't just think I was angry or happy. Instead, my anger or my happiness was borne out of my embodied feelings that were tied to interactions with others.

I believe that here we can use further work by Burkitt (1999; 2014b) to make sense of my embodied feelings as emotional experiences. Burkitt (1999) explained how many studies of the emotions fail to clarify what they consider to be an emotion or how it will be investigated. In response to these limitations, Burkitt (2014b, p. 23) suggested that for an emotional experience to occur there has to be "both a bodily response to a particular situation fused with a mindful realisation of that experience as expressed in language, word meanings and metaphors". Echoing the sentiments of Johnson (2007), Burkitt (2014b, p. 62) also believed that meaningful experiences must be *felt* before they can be understood, whereby "there has to be a bodily feeling in the utterance of words for us to understand the emotion a person is experiencing". In other words, the physical component of an emotion is crucial to our experience of it (Burkitt, 1997). However, the strength of a feeling does not determine

emotional from non-emotional experiences. Rather, “it is social meaning and context that distinguish what we feel as an emotion or some other type of experience” (Burkitt, 2014b, p. 8). Here, Burkitt’s (1999) relational view distinguished between emotional feelings such as love, hate, fear and anxiety and non-emotional feelings, such as hunger and pain. That said, Burkitt (2014b, p. 167) also noted how this is not always a straightforward translation, as emotions become “complex, ambivalent, unpredictable, and ultimately as difficult to govern as the social relations they both emerge from and feed back into”. The work of Burkitt (1999; 2014b) could therefore be used as a sense-making tool to illustrate how each of my emotional experiences could be considered a translation of my physical sensations and embodied feelings that were inextricably linked to my interactions with others and my changing social relations.

Here, we can use the work of Burkitt (2014b) to make theoretical sense of my emotional experiences and how they were not limited to cognitive processes alone. This can be evidenced through my experiences of anger. During the sixth game of my transition into player/assistant manager at Gainsborough Trinity FC, my embodied feelings were ‘felt’ in relation to a number of others. In this way, my rapidly beating heart, tense upper torso and grinding teeth was in relation to the under-performing players, the ‘busy’ linesman and a poor referee who I considered to be negatively affecting the success of my role. Thus, I only understood my anger through my embodied feelings and my interpretation of negative social relationships. However, as my narrative demonstrated, these emotional experiences were not always straightforward to translate and often involved more than one emotion, such as excitement and anxiety. For example, as I contemplated my switch to a player/assistant manager role at Gainsborough Trinity FC I translated my frantically racing heart as excitement

and the quiver in my stomach as anxiety. The array of 'what if' questions further demonstrated how the anticipation of future interactions with others also guided my emotional experiences. Although I was excited by the prospect of being a success, I was also equally anxious that I may fail and the negative effect that this could have on my relationships with others. Again, instead of thinking I was excited or anxious I interpreted my excitement and anxiety through my embodied feelings and potential relationships with others.

My analysis shows that even when I was alone my thoughts and feelings coalesced around my social relations with others. In another example, as I sat in the empty lecture theatre and ventured once more into 'Nowhere Land' my imagination turned to Rachel, Charlie and Jack before comparing my position to Craig's or to Ben's. My restless legs and dropping body temperature were linked to my potential inability to provide for my family and illuminated my fear and, in some respects, my guilt. Similarly, my tapping fingers and dull headache were borne out of the comparison between my labyrinth of the unknown and Craig's role at Hull City or Ben's role at New Bucks University which accentuated my fear. Here, my emotional experiences were as much related to approaching the end of my PhD funding as they were to 'others'. I understood my position through my interactions with Paul, Lee and Ben and our collective understanding of the competitive nature of the job market where I had already been rejected from three applications. Despite my ability to navigate through the precarious professional football environment, I was entering the uncharted territory of academia where my unfamiliarity was not only exposed but interpreted through my understanding of uncertain working climates on a more macro scale. My fear was therefore realised through my familial relationship with Rachel, Charlie and Jack and our collective situation which remained tied to an uncertain employment market.

Again, we are able to interpret my experiences through the work of Burkitt (2014b) and his aesthetic understanding of emotion. Challenging the psychological view of emotions as fundamentally cognitive experiences, Burkitt (2014b, p. 156) contended that emotions are linked to “our habitual, embodied responses to others and to certain situations, which in turn is tied to our relational past and the practices we engage in with others”. In this regard, “it is not the situation itself that governs what we feel, but our own relationship to that situation and the people in it” (Burkitt, 2014b, p. 135). Similarly, Burkitt (2014b, p. 153) further suggested that “each person will have their own relation to the social situations they face based on their own biographical trajectories”. Here, we are able to translate my present position in relation to my previous career and my changing familial dependencies. Firstly, my biographical trajectory ascertained the professional football environment as fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability but as something that I was able to navigate through relatively safely. However, during that stage of my life, money dictated the majority of my decisions. Although money continues to play a significant role in my decision-making processes, my family’s preference for a fixed residency continued to be the more dominant factor. Secondly, not only did I understand the academic arena as an ultra-competitive marketplace but also as one that my family’s wellbeing would depend on. While Paul, Lee and Ben seemed happy to journey up and down the country to advance their careers, it was arguably my limited radius of opportunity and therefore the unrealistic nature of my search that proved the main source of my worries and concerns.

I also believe we can also make theoretical sense of my emotional experiences here by drawing from wider sociological theories of emotions (e.g. Cooley, 1964[1902]; Turner, 2000; 2001; Turner & Stets, 2005; 2006). More specifically, Turner and colleagues have

identified five general theoretical approaches (i.e. dramaturgical, symbolic interactionist, interaction ritual, power and status, and exchange theories) to understanding the sociological dynamics of human emotions. These scholars argued that emotions are one of the driving forces of human behaviour, interaction and social organization and that, subsequently, we rely on emotions to guide decisions, form social bonds, and build complex sociocultural structures (Turner & Stets, 2005). I believe that my emotional experiences are better understood using the symbolic interactionist approach and the synonymous view that emotions arise from states of disequilibrium in relation to others and to the environment (Turner & Stets, 2005). In this respect, when an individual's expectations and experiences are congruent, positive emotions such as happiness, satisfaction and joy result (Turner, 2000). Alternatively, any discontinuity, incongruence or deflection between expectations and experiences results in negative emotions, such as fear, anger and disappointment (Turner & Stets, 2005). Indeed, it has been suggested that symbolic interactionist theories go beyond other theoretical approaches by examining specific emotions (Turner & Stets, 2005). Furthermore, analysing emotions from a symbolic interactionist perspective is in keeping with my use of relational theorising; where emotions themselves were experienced in relation to my interactions with others.

I believe the work of Turner and Stets (2005; 2006) can be used to interpret my specific emotional reactions. These scholars suggested that, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, individuals "role-take, assess the dispositions and likely course of action of others, and evaluate self from the point of view of others" (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 100). Thus, my emotions depended on how I interpreted the actions and interactions of others and whether I envisaged my self-conception being verified or non-verified (Turner & Stets, 2005).

For example, my sixth game as assistant manager brought into question the success of my role and resulted in anger. My anger could therefore be interpreted through my perceptions of a decreasing status or non-verification of self and the fact that I attributed the decrease to the underperforming players and the inept officials. Elsewhere, it has also been suggested that one of the most prominent reasons for anger involves the threatening of a person's self-concept, public image, or identity and that common elicitors of anger include injustice, betrayal, unfairness and the incompetent actions of another (Cupach & Canary, 1995; Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004). That said, Ellsworth and Scherer (2003, p. 575) stated that "rather than a single emotion of anger, there can be many varieties of 'almost anger' and many nuances of the anger experiences". Indeed, when I learned of the lack of students for the teaching activity at [AE] University, I would consider my thoughts and embodied feelings of that moment in time as representative of 'almost anger'. Therefore, while anger was a discernible emotion throughout my transitions, there were undoubtedly variations in the extent and the intensity of my experiences of anger.

While Turner and Stets' (2005; 2006) work can be used to make sense of my experiences of anger and indeed many of my emotional reactions, I believe the work of Charles Horton Cooley (1964[1902]), and more specifically his concept of the *looking-glass self* can be used to interpret my experiences of both shame and pride or happiness. Cooley (1964[1902]) suggested that when people see themselves in the looking glass they are aware of three perceptions; their appearance in the eyes of others, the judgements or evaluations made by others, and their own feelings about themselves given others' evaluations. Here, Cooley (1964[1902]) placed particular emphasis on the two emotions, pride and shame; where each was related to meeting/not meeting the expectations of others and the impact

this had on our feelings. Indeed, the shame that I experienced in 'Nowhere Land' was my interpretations of my family's financial position and my apparent inability to provide. As I considered the cost of over-priced shoes and family holidays, I realised the seriousness of our collective position. In this respect, I was failing to live up to my own interpretations of cultural expectations that a husband and father is the main financial provider for the family. However, not only was I conscious of the fact that I was letting down my family but also of what other people may think if I was continuously unable to provide. Here, Turner and Stets (2005) have also noted how, when experiencing shame, a person views self unworthy from within as well as from the perspectives of others.

While my focus thus far has been on the negative emotions of anger and shame, the pride or happiness that I experienced can also be interpreted using the work of Cooley (1964[1902]). In this respect, Cooley (1964[1902]) suggested that meeting or exceeding the expectations of others results in the positive feelings of pride. Using Cooley's (1964[1902]) work as an analytical tool, we can make sense of my transition into football management; where the responses of my teammates played a pivotal role in my emotional experiences. Having translated their banter as collective support for my pending role, the weakening of my knees and synonymous bursts of laughter signified both my happiness and my pride. In my mind, they had already accepted me which had elevated my status; thus, exceeding my expectations. However, pride or happiness was not always the emotional experience related to an increased status. Instead, upon landing my assistant manager's role at North Ferriby and my first job in academia, my thoughts and feelings were as much tied to the daunting proposition of juggling multiple identities as they were to my increased status. Here, my emotional experience was one of indifference and contradicted the happiness that I expected.

Furthermore, despite experiencing a number of similar emotions throughout my transitions, they were each dependent upon the specificity of the situational context. That said, my analysis shows how pride, shame and anger continued to be an embodied, relational experience and provides an alternative understanding of emotions to the predominantly cognitive interpretations of much previous transition literature (e.g. Allison & Meyer, 1998; Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). As the analyses have shown, my emotional experiences depended on my interactions with others, my interaction with my environment, and my interpretations of these relationships; arguably paving the way for alternative sociological understandings of emotions in transition.

6.5. Making Sense of my Transitions

Although the narratives of my participants and I varied in both their approach and their analysis, there are many similarities that can be drawn from our experiences and it is here where I believe that I can also make sense of my transition(s) using the work of Bauman (2007; 2012; 2013) by locating myself in 'liquid times'. While I have argued previously that the professional football environment could be interpreted as an accentuation of Bauman's (2012) 'liquid modernity', my narrative, combined with participants' personal transitions demonstrates how uncertainty and unpredictability is a ubiquitous facet of contemporary living more generally. In this regard, I seemed unable to structure my life or plan further than the immediate future, where my year's contract at Gainsborough Trinity and year's funding at Hull University were the sole extent of my security. In a similar manner, we could return to Bauman's (2007) metaphor of the 'hunter' to make sense of my changing circumstances, or 'hunts'. During my professional footballing career, money was regularly the main focus of my

'hunt', as Rachel and I enjoyed living a comfortable lifestyle wherever it was on offer. Despite being influenced by the prospect of playing first team football, similar to the participants in the previous study, the financial implications of any potential transfer ultimately dictated the direction of my career. However, while finances continue to play a significant part in my present 'hunt', I would suggest that the attractive location of job opportunities would now be *the* critical determinant of my decision. Indeed, a financially appealing opportunity outside of suitable commuting distance and which would potentially disrupt the happiness I associate with a stable family life would be disregarded from the 'hunt'.

My transition could also be interpreted using Bauman's (1998) metaphors of the tourist and the vagabond. Much like the respective careers of my participants', each of my transfers and transitions could be positioned on the continuum between the perfect tourist and the vagabond beyond remedy. Having secured employment within my ideal radius of opportunity, and now in a financially rewarding position, I would consider myself comfortably placed in the tourist end of the continuum. This was also evidenced in my decision to remain at Gainsborough Trinity and turn down the earlier opportunity to sign for North Ferriby or the Southern-based lecturer positions. Here, I would argue that my ability to decline certain options afforded me an element of 'tourist' status. Although somewhat speculatively, I would also argue that my reluctance to experience any severe form of vagabondage would have eventually dictated my entrance into academia, had the North Lindsey College opportunity not materialised. In this respect, I recognise that a change in 'hunt' may have overridden any preferred ideals. Similarly, while my pending roles at North Lindsey College and North Ferriby United has fulfilled a number of my 'hunts' that is not to say that my hunting will now cease. Rather, my hunting will continue and will be in relation to my multiple identities.

In many ways, my transition out of semi-professional football resembles participants' experiences of managerial change or dealings with unexpected events and could therefore also be interpreted through Bauman's (2013) notion of pointillist time. On a number of occasions, I was affected by something unexpected or that I was unable to predict and have subsequently approached my transition tentatively and on a daily basis. At times, my life seemed determined by the outcome of a telephone call or the details of an email that could dictate the course of my future academic career. Similar to my participants' narratives, I continued to react to circumstances beyond my control and accepted that this was just a 'part of life'. However, just because these circumstances were out of my control did not mean that there was always a negative outcome. For example, the chairman of Gainsborough Trinity's ill health precipitated my entrance into football management. Similarly, only through Lee's relocation did my lecturing experience at Hull University arise. Viewing my transition in pointillist terms showcases the uncertainty and unpredictability that I was faced with. Indeed, becoming a player at North Ferriby United or [AE University] could be considered 'points' in my life that failed to expand, much like [Club ii] or [Club vi] in the mapping of Adam's life. Similarly, becoming player/assistant manager at both Gainsborough Trinity and North Ferriby United and a lecturer at Hull University could be understood as 'points' that developed into respective dot-to-dot lines, much like the expansion of the [Club iii] and [Club vii] points in Adam's biography.

Finally, and again in line with Bauman's (2012) notion of liquid modernity, many of my interactions and relationships can be interpreted using Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationships', based upon the necessity of our contact and often fleeting existence. Throughout my period of writing, my relationships with a significant number of 'others' varied depending upon how

I valued their role. While family members, teammates and PhD supervisors were salient 'others' on several occasions, 'others' such as potential employers and students were disregarded as hastily as they were introduced into my life. In this respect, pure relationships were an integral aspect of my transition, whereby I continued to interact with those who brought satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). Similarly, I too was disregarded by 'others' who deemed our relationship unnecessary. Following my negative feedback from [AE University], there was no further contact, as we both understood that the satisfaction we both envisaged being possible was not achieved. Thus, my interactions and relationships with others depended not only upon where I located them in my networks of connections, but also where they located me in their networks of connections.

6.6. Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have made sense of my transitional experiences in relation to the multiple strands of my identity and the impact that these various networks of interaction had on my feelings and emotions. Drawing principally from the work of Burkitt (1999; 2014a; 2014b), and also the work of Crossley (2011) and May (2013), I argued that my identity, feelings and emotions were borne out of dialogic relations with others. Here, I argued that the embodied and relational element of my analysis contradicted the findings of much previous research that regards emotions as fundamentally cognitive experiences. I then continued to position myself in a wider sociocultural context and having drawn similarities from my participants' experiences, used the work of Bauman (1998; 2007; 2012; 2013) to locate myself within 'liquid times'. I would argue that to understand my transition in greater detail, from both sociocultural and relational perspectives, my experiences cannot be

divorced from my networks of relations or from my position within an uncertain and unpredictable environment. To this end, I would argue that transitions are as much about a person's networks of interdependency and their location within 'liquid times' as they are about the person themselves.

7.0: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to end the thesis with a summary of the key research findings. Specifically, I share what I consider to be the major empirical and theoretical contributions of this work to our understanding of transition in sport. Following this, I then provide suggestions for future transition research with a particular focus on multiple identities (Stets & Stryker, 2011; Burkitt, 2014a). Here, I also consider various forms of representation, a narrative approach to the within-career transitions of coaches and various stakeholders, and exploration into transitions in a range of sports from a sociological perspective.

7.2. Summary of Key Findings

This thesis sought to present some initial findings into the relational, emotional and socio-cultural challenges of transition in professional and semi-professional football. Specifically, this study has focused on how Adam, Jay and Joe navigated their way into, through and out of their professional football careers while exploring the variety of roles played by significant others in their transitional episodes. As my findings have shown, significant others played roles in the participants' decision-making and sense-making processes, as well as their embodied and emotional experiences. In this respect, the success of the participants' transitions was largely evaluated against their ever-changing networks of relationships and the impact these were understood to have on their sense of self. Similarly,

each of the participants recognised the relational dimension of future transitions and placed specific value on the thoughts and opinions of others during these transitional episodes.

The participants' in this study made regular reference to the unstable environment of professional football. The ubiquitous uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity that participants referred to mirrored the previous depictions of professional football made by other researchers (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2012a; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). However, the work of Bauman (2003; 2005; 2007; 2012) extended previous analyses by providing an insightful sociological analysis of the participants' working climate. In this respect, I explained how viewing careers within what Bauman terms 'liquid times' disclosed the reasoning behind the players' vulnerability. By doing so, I questioned the value of psychological decision-making models (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2006; Park, 2012). Instead of decisions being limited to one of four options (i.e. pull, anti-pull, push, anti-push) (Fernandez et al., 2006) or broken down into four stages (i.e. pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation and action) (Park, 2012), I argued they could be understood in relation to the athletes ever-changing position in a liquid modern world. Here, while uncertainty and vulnerability have been discussed elsewhere in the transition literature (e.g. Roderick, 2006a; 2006b; 2012a; Nesti et al., 2012), my findings arguably advance existing understandings of transition by bringing to light the similar uncertainty in contemporary life away from sport. Indeed, these findings have shown how sporting and non-sporting lives are equally shrouded in uncertainty, where either has the potential to alter the trajectory of a career or indeed a life course.

In light of their uncertain workplace environments, the participants' shared numerous examples of turning points in their lives that were perceived to be beyond their control. Here, I argued that the participants' career trajectories (both in and out of football) were best

understood in relation to Bauman's (2013) notion of pointillist time; progressing, as they did, on a dot-by-dot basis and regularly affected by non-normative transitions (Schlossberg, 1984). That is, careers were far from linear progressions and involved a number of positive and negative experiences that could be evidenced by the changing direction of the 'dots'. The significance of non-normative transitions in the participants' career trajectories then led me to question models that represent normative progressions from amateur to elite or from novice to mastery (e.g. Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Contrastingly, my findings added credence to previous suggestions that careers are affected, in both positive and negative ways, by critical moments (Nesti et al., 2012) and that the path to excellence is rarely (if ever) a linear path (Debois et al., 2012). To this end, I argued that transition could be considered an omnipresent feature of our existence, as opposed to the reductionist stage-like process that much, if not all previous literature suggests (e.g. Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Stambulova, 2000; 2009; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

The participants often found themselves having to move job, and sometimes location of residency, in an attempt to seek secure employment, or more favourable working conditions. Each of the participants rejected and agreed to job relocations based on their home lives, where their respective relationships with significant others played a pivotal role in their decision-making processes. Bauman's (1998) metaphors of 'the tourist' and 'the vagabond' were provided to make sense of the participants' ever-changing mobility. Specifically, the participants' narratives demonstrated how their level of control was not constant but rather dependent on their ever-changing situation and was better interpreted through their movement along Bauman's (1998) continuum between the 'perfect tourist' and the 'vagabond beyond remedy'. Although previous literature has focused largely on the

voluntariness of athletes' decisions to transit out of sport (e.g. Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Marthinus, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007), these findings have added useful insights to the voluntariness of within-career transitional decisions. While answering the call from Gordon and Lavalley (2012) to investigate transitions created by inter-club trades, I have offered an alternative way to make sense of in-career transitions that, at present, remain dis-served by their non-normative label (e.g. Schlossberg, 1984). Although transferring between clubs would indeed constitute a non-normative transition, my findings suggested that these occur under a variety of circumstances, often voluntarily for players, where the success of each is equally evaluated in multiple ways. Similarly, as my findings have shown, non-sporting transitions also have the potential to bring similar disequilibrium to athletes' careers and indeed lives.

The precarious nature of their employment and their susceptibility to job relocation meant that the participants often considered themselves to be in competition with their co-workers. Here, Bauman's (2007) metaphor of the hunter was used to make sense of the participants' selfish approach to their working lives, where they employed a number of strategic actions to both survive and thrive. The participants in this study were constantly evaluating the success of their transitional episodes in relation to a number of ever-changing 'hunts' and lends support to previous suggestions that the transition out of sport is smoother for athletes who orchestrate their lives around their multiple identities (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009). Such findings have led me to question the positive/negative dichotomy of much previous research (e.g. Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Piffaretti et al., 2003; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Arguably then, this investigation has provided a unique insight into how transitional decisions and their relative success depended on more

than a changing professional footballer identity. Indeed, the working and non-working identities of the participants in this study were both interconnected and seemingly in a constant state of flux; where the success of a transition from a workplace perspective did not necessitate a successful transition from a non-workplace perspective or vice versa.

Given the high volume of transitions that the participants experienced, there was a high turnover of 'others' involved in their lives; and where the majority of their relationships were fleeting encounters. Here, the work of Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992) was utilised to make sense of the participants' ever-changing social network; where relationships with others were considered 'commodities' or objects of consumption (Bauman, 2007). In this respect, the participants recognised that their relationships formed and were maintained according to their necessity and would terminate should either party fail to derive satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). While previous research has begun to acknowledge the relationality of transitional experience (e.g. Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Ryba et al., 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016), my findings have also demonstrated the transient nature of human relationships and the reasoning behind such evanescence. Indeed, these findings have shown how the players did not need to retire to end relationships that the disciplinary environment of professional football allowed (Jones & Denison, 2016). Furthermore, I have provided some useful insights into the consequences of the participants' multiple transferring processes and presented a more adequate understanding of the interconnections between the home, work and family lives of players. Specifically, I have illustrated how decisions were affected by, and made according to the participants' identities as, for example, a son, single man, partner, husband, father, friend, and in Joe's case, as carer.

Adam, Jay and Joe made regular reference to the various roles of others, both inside and outside of football. Here, I used the work of Crossley (2010; 2011) and May (2013) to explain how the participants' decision-making and sense-making processes were never asocial but rather dependent on a number of interactions and relationships with a multitude of others. By exploring the participants' interactions at the micro level these findings highlighted how players interacted with others in family networks, friend networks and team networks and, as such, involved multiple strands of their identities. Crossley's (2011) relational sociology was used to make sense of the participants' positions within these multiple networks of interaction. More specifically, Crossley's (2011) work suggested that the roles and identities of the participants were not *about* them, but about their relationships with others and their ever-changing positions in various networks of relationships.

'Bedding in' and feeling wanted or part of the group was an essential aspect of successful transitions for the participants and supports suggestions that teammates form a safety net of belonging (e.g. Ryba et al., 2012; Schinke et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2016). Here, the work of May (2013) and, more specifically her concept of 'belonging' was used to understand how the participants in this study established a sense of ease or connection with 'others' or with their environment during transitions. Such findings questioned the value of much previous research (e.g. Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007) which focused exclusively on the transiting athlete while adding credence to a growing body of research that considers transition as a relational process (e.g. Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Ryba et al., 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016). However, my findings have advanced existing understanding by viewing the transiting athlete as somebody with multiple identities (i.e. multiple selves) as opposed to a unified self. Similarly, my use of sociological theorising has

provided an alternative sense-making framework to the psychological dominance of much previous research (e.g. Lavalley, 2005; Stambulova, 2009; Park, 2012).

Despite the multiple insights provided by the participants', the detailing of my own transitional experiences auto-ethnographically enabled me to add a further layer of analysis to the study. Here, as I approached the end of my own playing days in semi-professional football, I understood my multiple identities in relation to numerous 'others'. Using the work of Burkitt (2014a), I presented a relational analysis of identity that continued to question the utility of previous work (e.g. Muscat, 2009; Park, 2012) that has depicted transition as an individualised process. Indeed, this analysis has provided an alternative sociological understanding of identity to the predominant psychological origins of transition research (e.g. Lavalley, 2005; Lally, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Furthermore, my findings have illuminated the interconnections that exist between a person's multiple identities (and therefore multiple social networks). In this respect, the various roles of numerous 'others' in athletes' transitional experiences has not yet been a primary focus for researchers in this field of enquiry (e.g. Jones & Denison, 2016). Indeed, my findings have provided some initial relational insights into transition; where I only understood my experiences (and my multiple identities) in relation to others, in relation to my environment and in relation to my previous transitional experiences.

While the emotional challenges of the participants' transitions were suggested throughout their respective interviews, it was only through my own auto-ethnographic narrative that an embodied, emotional account of transition was presented. In this respect, the participants' recollections of emotional experiences mirrored the findings of previous research (e.g. Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007; McKenna &

Thomas, 2007), where, I suggested they instead shared cognitive thoughts. Principally drawing from the work of Burkitt (1999; 2014b), I explained how, contrary to the recollections of the participants, my emotions were the social and relational interpretations of my embodied feelings. I contended that while transition literature should be applauded for exploring the emotional challenges of transitional experience, the tendency to omit the corporeal element of feelings meant they were conveyed in a disembodied manner. While scholars have often alluded to the corporeal athletic identity (e.g. Brewer et al., 1993; Sparkes, 1998; Sparkes & Smith, 2002), rarely have embodied emotions been shared by the researcher. Thus, I argued that researchers (e.g. Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Park, 2012) have invariably presented thoughts of doubt and thoughts of anger, as opposed to the feelings that they claimed. In this respect, it was only through physical sensations and my embodied feelings that I understood or made sense of my emotions (Burkitt, 2014b). Furthermore, these emotions were not merely psychological or cognitive experiences, but rather embodied and an irreducible part of my social relations with others or with my environment and, as such, relational experiences (Burkitt, 2014b).

Finally, I used the work of Turner and Stets (2005; 2006) and Charles Horton Cooley (1964[1902]) to make sense of specific emotional experiences. Drawing on Turner and Stets' (2005; 2006) work, I explained how my emotional reactions were tied to the verification or non-confirmation of my self-conception. Here, I used Turner and Stets' (2005) work to make sense of my anger and explained how this resulted from having my assistant manager identity questioned. Similarly, I used Charles Horton Cooley' (1964[1902]) concept of the *looking-glass self* to make theoretical sense of my shame and pride. Referring to three perceptions (our appearance in the eyes of others, the judgements or evaluations made by others, and our

own feelings about ourselves given others' evaluations), I used Cooley's (1964[1902]) work to explain how my pride and shame were the result of meeting/not meeting or exceeding the expectations of others. I suggested that the work of Cooley (1964[1902]) and Turner and Stets (2005; 2006) provided a useful lens to enable me to present an alternative, sociological analysis of emotions to the transition literature.

Finally, and while it was never my intention to generalise my findings, I find myself in agreement with those sport scholars (e.g. Jones, 2006; 2009) who have suggested that it is possible to generalise (to some extent) from interpretive, or single case investigations. In this respect, I am drawn to what Stake (1995, p. 85) termed *naturalistic* generalisations which are "conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves". Here, I have arguably opened a space for this kind of generalisation by providing readers with 'rich, thick descriptions of the case under study so that the readers themselves can reflect upon it and make connection (that is, naturalistic generalisations) to their own situations' (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 184). Indeed, I hope that my representation and analysis of my own experiences alongside those of Adam, Jay and Joe will allow readers to begin to develop an understanding of feelings and emotions from our perspectives and, in doing so, enable those from both sporting and non-sporting backgrounds to relate the presented material to their own transitional experiences.

At this point, I would advocate the sharing of professional footballers' career stories, such as Adam's, Jay's and Joe's as narrative resources (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; 2009b). Making such resources available to young professionals and the professional football coaching community might help to develop a greater understanding of some of the

emotional, relational and socio-cultural challenges that players face in transition. In drawing upon the work of Smith and Sparkes (2009a; 2009b), I believe that these narrative resources could encourage people (i.e. coaches and players) to live in different and more socially sensitive ways. Indeed, if coaches (and players) were to remain aware of the multiple challenges facing outgoing and incoming players, then their interactions could be tailored to enhance a person's sense of belonging (May, 2013). In turn, this may positively affect a person's performances, or, at least, reduce the pressure tied to a changing network of relationships within liquid times.

7.3. Suggestions for Future Research

I believe the findings of this thesis open up a new vista of enquiry into transition as both a relational and emotional experience. Specifically, this work has illustrated how transition affects or is affected by the various identities of professional sportspeople and how transitional success may be tied to more than a sporting identity. To date, only the work of Carless and Douglas (2009) and Roderick (2006a; 2012a) have given any real attention to the interconnections between the various identities of professional sportspeople in transition. While this thesis has extended upon their work by exploring the participants' interactions within various networks of relations (i.e. family, club, teammates, friends), further exploration of a person's multiple identities (i.e. multiple selves) through transition would enhance our understanding of transition as the relational experience that it is. To this extent, I would argue that the effect that my transition had on a number of my multiple selves (e.g. husband, father, teammate, friend, student, lecturer and potential employee) has contradicted much transition research that depicted the transiting person as a unified self (e.g. Ryba et al., 2016;

Ronkainen et al., 2016). That is, approaching the end of my playing days as a semi-professional footballer was one strand of my multiple identities and, as my findings show, one transition among many. That said, I do not see my research pre-empting a conclusion to transition research. Rather, I see my study as a valuable addition to the literature base that opens further avenues of research into this subject area.

While I have provided a sociological interpretation of transition, I acknowledge that the theoretical analysis has stemmed from my previous and continual engagement with social theory and, as such, is one interpretation among many. Although the work of Bauman (2003; 2005; 2007; 2011; 2012; 2013) was utilised to make sense of the precarious environment of professional football, the work of Beck (1999) could be used to make sense of what he termed the 'risk society' of contemporary living. Through his reference to economic convergence, political fluctuation and national insecurity, Beck (1999) illuminates the uncertainty and flux that has been a pervasive feature of Western culture in the latter half of the 20th Century. In light of these conditions, Beck (1999) explains how people engage in 'risk avoidance' strategies in relation to present and potential future dangers. Similarly, despite my support of Burkitt's (2014a) work on identity and multiple selves, I would urge researchers to consider the work of other scholars (e.g. Burke & Stets, 2009; Serpe & Stryker, 2011; Stryker, 2004) to make sense of a person's multiple identities. Here, scholars could explore how a person's multiple identities are verified or non-verified through their transitions and in relation to their interactions with others (Burke & Stets, 2009).

One of the frameworks that could be utilised to analyse athletes' identities through transition is Stryker's (2004) identity theory. Here, Stryker's (2004) conceptualisation of multiple identities into a *salience hierarchy* could be used to interpret how some identities

are more likely to be invoked than others during transitions. Similarly, McCall and Simmons' (1978) identity theory could be utilised to make sense of identities as improvised, variable and negotiated. In contrast to Stryker's (2004) *salience hierarchy*, McCall and Simmons' (1978) organization of their *prominence hierarchy* could help to interpret a person's ideal self, or what is desired or important to them and how this plays out through transition. Indeed, interpreting findings through an array of sociological frameworks will help enhance our collective understanding of transition as the relational, emotional and socio-cultural experience that it is.

In light of my auto-ethnographic findings, I would also encourage researchers to explore the embodiment of emotions in their future transition studies (Burkitt, 1999; 2014b). While transition has previously been depicted as an emotional experience (e.g. Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007; McKenna & Thomas, 2007), the embodied nature of these emotions has received little focused attention. While researching transition from a retrospective viewpoint (e.g. Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008; Jones, 2014) may impact upon the emotional recall ability of the participant, I would encourage researchers to follow other scholars (e.g. Lally, 2007; Carless and Douglas, 2009) by monitoring athletes through their transitional experiences. Here, the ability to research a person's embodied feelings 'in situ' would provide a more detailed understanding of transition as an emotional experience with the potential to hone in on the 'midst' of transition and the respective 'feelings'. These feelings and emotions could also be analysed and interpreted in various ways. While I have used the work of Burkitt (2014b) and Turner and Stets (2005) to make sense of my emotional experiences, I would encourage researchers to consider other theories on the sociology of emotions. For example, the work of Blau (1964)

could be used to make sense of emotions as part of a social exchange. Here, emotions could be understood in relation to a person's interpretations of the 'reciprocity' and 'justice' of the resources exchanged.

While writing from an auto-ethnographic perspective enabled me to view my transition prospectively that is not to say that I now think everybody should research transition in this way. Rather, I see auto-ethnography as providing merely another method to research transition. Equally, while I used several vignettes to provide the readers with an opportunity to share an embodied sense of my experiences, I recognise that there are many ways that I could have done this. In this sense, I would encourage researchers to experiment with various modes of representation, such as poetry, film, ethnodrama, photography, and confessional tales, among others (Groom et al., 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). However, these representations should not be used solely for their uniqueness (Groom et al., 2014). Importantly, I would urge researchers to consider their ontological and epistemological beliefs before engaging with such forms of representations. Once satisfied with the nature of the data, the purpose of the study and the envisioned audience, I suggest that these representations may disclose and convey further rich and valuable insights into transition.

While each of the narratives in the appendices are from the perspective of the players, I believe that exploration into the transitional experiences of managers/coaches and other stakeholders working in professional football (e.g. physiotherapists, performance analysts and kitmen) would further our understanding of transition in professional football more locally and sport more widely. In this respect, managers both affect and are affected by their relationships with their respective players; where their own managerial careers could rest on the success of their playing staff. Investigating how they make sense of their own transitional

experiences and how they develop or harbour a sense of belonging (May, 2013) could help explain how managers themselves navigate their way through the precarious world of professional football. Attention could then also be given to their non-sporting identities and networks of relations outside of their employment and how each impact upon their careers. However, exploring how coaches manage their identities, and therefore networks of interaction inside the game (i.e. players, physiotherapists, scouts, agents, chairmen, family and friends) could shed further light on the highly pressurised environment of professional football. This could then pave the way for exploration into how coaches/managers' emotions are linked to their interactions and relationships with key contextual stakeholders. Furthermore, explaining why they signed or released members of their playing staff would arguably open a space for a polyvocal account of transition. That is, a transition that affected and was affected by both a player and a coach would provide a fruitful analysis of the interdependencies and interactions involved.

Finally, while the aim of this thesis has been to explore the relational and emotional dimensions of transition in, through and out of professional football, I believe this approach could be utilised with various different sports. In this respect, while previous transition literature has focused on a variety of sports, including tennis (e.g. Stier, 2007), golf (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009), rugby (e.g. McKenna & Thomas, 2007), gymnastics (e.g. Lavalley & Robinson, 2007) and fencing (Debois et al., 2012), these studies have been conducted from psychological perspectives. That is, the researchers interpret athletes' transitions in relation to their cognitive abilities. Here, I would encourage scholars to explore the transitions of athletes (and other stakeholders) in various sports from a more social perspective. Indeed, as my findings have shown, transition can be understood in

relation to others, in relation to the environment and in relation to previous transitional experiences. While my study has provided some useful initial insights, further exploration into transition in sport as a social phenomenon would extend existing understanding in the subject area.

8.0: References

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Appendices

Appendix A: Adam's Story

A1: Moving House

I would argue that much of Adam's footballing transitions, if not life transitions can be better understood following an appreciation of his school years and, in particular his family's relocation. At the age of ten, and despite not knowing the reason why, Adam and his family (Mum, Dad and Sister) made the 320-mile move from [name of town] to [name of town]. Although some 30 years on, and with many of my childhood memories etched in the back of my mind, I expected Adam to recall the friends he used to play about with in the park or early memories of people he went to school with and was sad to leave when the family moved. Instead, Adam's memories were distinctly lacking:

I can't remember to be honest...there will have been a few lads who I knocked about with and played football with but I've no idea who they were...I can't remember being too sad leaving them anyway.

While the previous extract may seem rather vague and arbitrary in nature, it set the tone for what followed in the narrative of Adam's career and indeed life. A year after making the move to [name of town], Adam was faced with a further transition; from primary school to secondary school. Here, Adam described how he sourced a new circle of friends, as his primary school classmates made the move to a different secondary school. At ten years old, Adam appeared to develop an early understanding of interaction and relationships and learned very early on that, in life, people come and go. In an honest summation of his early school years, Adam has a new understanding of the part they played in the rest of his life:

I learnt very early on that in life you meet lots of new and different people...but I'd also lost touch with and forgotten about a lot of people and I suppose that became my norm and became the theme of my life.

The previous extract highlights the instrumental role played by Adam's pre-footballing transitions in the rest of his life. From a relational perspective, Adam placed much of the disposable nature of his early relationships down to the era in which they were friends. In this respect, Adam reflects on how things may have been different in today's climate:

...it was different back then because there were no mobile phones, no Internet and so it was harder to stay in touch...you literally had a landline call and that was it...so, it's so much easier to stay in contact now with all of the IT that's bandied about and I probably would have stayed in contact with my friends from school if we'd had those facilities...it would have been hard not to.

While the enhanced world of IT may have indeed increased Adam's network of friends, it would have done little to alter his perception of his roots. As I argued earlier, I believe much of Adam's footballing and life transitions can be made sense of through his school years and Adam's own self-perception of where he calls *home*. To help make sense of Adam's narrative that is to follow, I believe the following excerpt acts as an important underpinning to the majority of his decisions:

People want to know and ask me where I'm from...I just laugh it off and say I'm a bit of a gipsy to be honest...and I make a bit of a joke about it but I kind of am...I wouldn't class anywhere as home because I've never been anywhere long enough to say that and because I moved about so much when I was young.

With Adam openly doubting his roots and where he calls home, it is clear to see how and why he has adopted a 'have boots, will travel' philosophy throughout his footballing career and even into his working life; something that will be evidenced in the transitions that follow.

A2: The National Football School

Adam's early love of football became apparent in our very first interview. When asked about the biggest influence on his career, and on his early career in particular, Adam's response was swift: 'my Dad, end of! He didn't play at all, he just loved it...he didn't force me, he didn't push me, but he obviously wanted me to enjoy it'. While Adam's Dad clearly had a big influence on his love of football, his friends from his newly joined secondary school shared his passion for the game and together, they 'spent the majority of [their] free time together kicking around in the park'. Playing together for their school team and local football club side, Adam was soon recognised for his distinct footballing ability and chosen to represent the local town and regional school representative sides. A number of outstanding performances for the local town and regional school representative sides led to his County manager forwarding him for a trial with both the National Football School (NFS) and the English Schools Football Association (ESFA). Whereas Adam acknowledged that he 'was one of the best in [his] area', his National trials were to prove a different proposition, as Adam recognised the step-up in standard and began to compare himself with his fellow trialists:

...when you go to these trials and there are forty kids there that are all decent, you are like...how good am I compared to these? It was a great standard but subconsciously, I felt like I was as good as most of them, if not better...without being big-headed, I believed in myself.

Having spent the majority of his childhood fanaticising about football, Adam was offered a place at the NFS at the age of 14 following a number of successive trials. While Adam regarded his decision to attend the NFS as a 'relatively easy one to make', he based this decision on a number of relationships. Firstly, Adam had become close friends with another

local player who had also been offered a place at the school which had a notable impact on his decision. Here, Adam described how 'knowing [Jon] was going to be there as well gave [him] a sense of comfort...[where] at least [he] had someone that [he] knew really well'. Secondly, after numerous conversations with his Mum and Dad, Adam recognised the potential outcome of his time spent at the NFS and together they shared the belief that following their stint at the school, 'players [that attended the NFS] virtually had the pick of which club they wanted to sign for'.

Adam explained how the majority of his teammates at the NFS had already signed Youth Training Scheme (YTS) contracts with Premier League clubs before their arrival. Here, Adam revealed that because the other players had already signed contracts with different clubs, the group were 'close-knit' and competition between each other was minimal. In this regard, Adam revealed that he never used to judge himself against his NFS teammates or attempt to better their achievements. Rather, Adam saw himself as 'one of the group...[and] felt part of a group of players that had been recognised as having fantastic potential'. If anything, Adam saw the advantage of his position whereby he was not restricted to where he was going next and could have his pick from potential suitors.

Evaluating the relative success of his transition into the NFS, Adam was resolute in the way that the move had impacted upon his later career. Here, Adam noted how he gained a number of personal qualities that increased his chances of making it as a professional footballer further down the line:

It [attending the NFS] improved me as a person...the discipline, both mentally and physically got my mind into what it took to be a footballer...the coaches [at the NFS] told us how many talented

footballers fall by the wayside because they lacked the focus and the dedication...so I made sure I was disciplined...without that, I might not have been a footballer.

Adam's confession that he 'might not have been a footballer' without the discipline was interesting given his obvious ability. While Adam evaluated the success of his first transition mainly on the impact it had on his future career, he also looks back at this transition with regret in relation to his network of friends. Although Adam had previously described the disposable nature of relationships throughout his life, I sensed that Adam remained tinged with sadness with the eventual outcome of his transition to the NFS and, more specifically the fizzling out of his friendships back in [Blackpool]. In short, Adam told how his intended frequent returns home and contact with his friends failed to materialise and when asked whether he regretted losing contact with his friends back home at this point in his life, Adam revealed the following:

Yeah, definitely, I've missed out...not missed out because I have done everything I wanted to do but it's not like I can ring someone up...I mean I've got [Jon] but, it's not like I can ring someone who I was at school with twenty years ago...that's gone...I'm fine with it but it's still something that I have missed out on.

Reflecting on the decision that he made so early in his life, Adam now has a new understanding of his experience at the NFS through present relationships. Adam makes sense of the collateral implications of this experience in relation to his fiancée. Adam's regret of losing contact with his school friends has been accentuated by his fiancée's lifestyle:

I look at my missus now who was born and bred in [name of town]...she bumps into people in town who she was at school with 20 years ago, she still goes out with people who she has been friends with since her school days...I'd love it if I was part of a group of friends who had grown up together

and could look back and see how that togetherness had carried us through the ups and downs in each other's lives...it's that sense of belonging to a group I suppose.

In accordance with the narrative of his life, when Adam left the NFS he only kept in contact with one of his former teammates, [Jon]. Having both been scouted while playing for the ESFA, [Club i] offered Adam (and [Jon]) the opportunity to play in abroad where, despite offers from a number of top English clubs, together, they both signed four year contracts. Here, the strength of their friendship played a significant role in their joint signing of four-year contracts [two year YTS and two-year professional] at [Club i]. While he reeled off a number of top English clubs that he could have signed for, Adam saw the move abroad as a fascinating opportunity; but one that was made more appealing by [Jon's] similar offer:

I could have signed for any team in England basically but for some reason, playing abroad struck a chord with me...I didn't know much about the club [Club i] to be honest but the chance to play football there just sounded amazing...and because [Jon] was going as well, we knew we could help each other through it which was probably the biggest part of my decision.

A3: The Move Abroad

Taken at face value, Adam's decision to move abroad may seem an extremely brave one given the fantastic opportunities that he had with the top clubs in England; something that had motivated him to attend the NFS in the first place. However, Adam seemingly gained enormous self-confidence through the moves he'd made even earlier in his life, enhancing his self-esteem. Here, Adam's previous experiences of relocating 320 miles away, moving schools and then moving yet again to attend the NFS had highlighted an adeptness to deal with change. In short, Adam had developed a

proficient ability to forge relationships with previously unknown counterparts; something that would prove a useful tool for future transitions:

I learned very early on that the first week or so of anything new is daunting...you know, you're of your comfort zone because everything is new and you don't know anyone...but if you keep your head down, you know, speak when you're spoken to...eventually, you get to know everyone and you gradually get yourself bedded in.

The previous extract also helps to make sense of Adam's transitions and transitional decisions. Here, Adam highlighted the 'daunting' and 'out of your comfort zone' nature of transitions, yet found very early on that he had the necessary interaction skills. In this regard, Adam recognised that these feelings would be short-lived and before long, he would find himself 'bedded in', and subsequently felt confident when making future moves. While Adam oozed self-confidence in support of his decision, it didn't appear to impact upon the success of his move to [Club i]. Here, Adam shared with me the 'challenging' and 'difficult' nature of his transition. Although he learned a lot from the previous transitional experiences in his life, Adam only had negative memories of his time spent abroad:

I was too young...there were only two English players there, me and [Jon]...I didn't settle at all...it was too intense. Actually, it was the intensity that did me...they did lessons at seven in the morning, then train, then lessons, then lunch, then sleep for two hours locked in your room, then lessons, then train, it was constant...it did me!

Adam appeared to evaluate the failure of this transition on his inability to deal with the demanding daily routine. However, mentioning that 'there were only two English players there' suggested that he found the communication aspect of the transition difficult. When asked whether there had been reduced interaction between himself and his teammates and whether this had been a problem for Adam, he gained

a new understanding of his interaction at [Club i] when he said the following: 'at the time I didn't really pick up on a reduced interaction but looking back, there must have been...maybe the communication was a bigger problem than I thought'. Adam reflected upon his thoughts at that moment in time and shared the potentially serious implications of his failure to adapt; confirming that it was the intensity rather than the interaction that had instigated his desire to leave:

I questioned whether I wanted to be a footballer because we signed a three or four-year deal and we had to run away...we had to say 'look, we don't want to stay'. I was questioning whether to give it [football] up because I just didn't want to be there. I was seventeen and I needed to just breathe. I might not have done [quit] but I definitely questioned it.

Interestingly, Adam still reflects on his move to [Club i] as the right decision and commented on how glad he was that he gave it a go. Adam commented that 'it was the right decision [signing for Club i] because my gut feeling...those feelings of excitement...were too strong to ignore'. To this extent, Adam implied that he could have been interviewed for this study while contemplating 'what might have been' and how '[he] would have regretted not going'.

Following their honest confessions, both Adam and [Jon] informed the manager of their desire to return to England after spending one season with the club. While the manager attempted to persuade both to stay with a financial incentive, Adam and [Jon] maintained their desperation to return home. Eventually, the manager reluctantly agreed to sell both players and arranged a trial with two clubs who had showed an earlier interest in their services. Here, Adam explained how [Jon's] dad had acted as the go-between where he 'dealt with the financial side of things and acted like an agent'.

Subsequently, Adam and [Jon] went on trial to [Club ii] and [Club iii] back in England where they faced another important decision.

A4: The Move to the Premier League

Adam's move back to England was clearly driven by his unhappiness abroad and his displeasure at such demanding schedules. This was further evidenced in his eventual decision of which club to sign for. While Adam (and [Jon]) both preferred the 'feel' of the trial at [Club ii] and the respective club environment, [Club ii] refused to match [Club i's] collective valuation of £120,000. Ultimately, Adam (and [Jon]) had a choice. They could return back to [Club i] and wait to see if (their preferred option) [Club ii] could eventually come to some agreement regarding the transfer fee, or they could sign immediately for [Club iii] who had agreed on the fee. Following little contemplation on what seemed an important decision, Adam (and [Jon]) opted to sign for [Club iii] and make an immediate return to England. Adam's decision appeared to be made with an element of desperation; evidenced when he said the following: 'I just wanted to come back to England and have an English life, that's what I wanted to do...in the end, I didn't care where it was, I just needed to come back'.

Although Adam failed to sign for his preferred choice of [Club ii] which had a friendly 'feel' around the club, his transfer to [Club iii] could hardly be regarded as unfortunate, as they were the reigning Premier League champions. The fact that they were the current champions of England appeared to affect Adam's approach and he immediately seemed to write off his chances of playing for the first team or being a key player at the club so early in

his career. Here, Adam felt inferior and was left comparing his own arrival with the arrival of more established senior professionals:

*I basically went there at seventeen thinking right, they have just bought [name of player], they had just bought all of these top, top players so I didn't have a chance but I will do my best...so, basically f**k it, I'll just give it a good go.*

Again, Adam adopted a 'nothing to lose' approach, as he continued to judge himself against his new teammates. In this regard, I was curious about the £120,000 price tag that accompanied Adam to the club and the respective pressure that may have created. Interestingly, the only pressure that Adam felt was the pressure that he placed on himself to succeed. Adam was not only left comparing his valuation against the valuation of other new arrivals, but also his ability and his position in the squad:

They [Club iii] paid 120 grand for two of us but they paid two million for [name of player] that year, 400 grand for [name of player]...120 grand was a drop in the ocean in comparison and so as far as I was concerned, we were way down the pecking order...some of the skills I'd see in training were unbelievable...there was no way that I would be as good as [name of player] or [name of player] but it didn't matter.

Not only did Adam feel inferior to his new teammates but he was in awe of them. To this extent, Adam shared the memories he holds of walking into the dressing room on his first day at [Club iii]:

...the first time I am in that dressing room, gulp! It was ridiculous...I was shaking, literally shaking...these were top, top, top players, stars everywhere you looked...it was kind of surreal and I had to pinch myself that it was happening.

Although Adam appeared to place his teammates in a different league from a status perspective, he managed to force his way into the first team squad and play a number of

games in the Premier League, heightening the success of his transition. In his own words, '[he] was playing for the Premier League champions so how could it not be a success'? From a relational perspective, Adam was also 'bedding in' with the 'top class players' that he spoke about, confirming the success of his transition. However, Adam struck up a closer bond with two of the younger players in particular; [Jon] and [Luke]. Due to the fact that all three were hovering on the fringes of the first team, their friendship continued to grow and while the three of them began their [Club iii] lives together in club digs, Adam and [Luke] later bought an apartment together, such was the strength of their friendship. Against the theme of his life, [Jon] and [Luke] are two friends that Adam has kept in contact with throughout his life and are people who he continues to classify as 'really good mates' because of their continued ability to 'get on so well'.

Adam's initial success at [Club iii] seemed to have a negative impact upon his attitude to football. Having scored two goals in the FA Youth Cup final, Adam appeared to take his position for granted as a Premier League player. Looking back over his time at [Club iii], Adam was brutally honest in why he perceived his success came to a halt:

I didn't apply myself properly...I thought I'd made it and done all of the hard work, walking around as if I owned the place...I got a bit big time, got a bit above my station...I was only driving around in a little Citroen so I wasn't splashing the cash or anything but I was a bit chirpy and I'd be moaning if anything didn't go my way...yet, nobody ever said anything to me about it.

Adam also told of his 'all-day drinking sessions' with fellow teammates ([Jon] and [Luke] in particular) whenever they didn't have a reserve game in the week but made sense of his exploits in relation to his fellow teammates:

...[name of player] was a first team regular and was out with us all the time...so it was like, if he can do it then why can't I? Girls were practically throwing themselves at us every time we went out so we carried on going out. And the other lads [teammates] just laughed and thought we were young and living our lives.

While Adam evaluated the impact of his lifestyle on the decline of his [Club iii] career, he was in no doubt as to the eventual reason for his departure. Initially, Adam became disillusioned with his 'bit-part' role at the club and equally frustrated with his time spent in the reserves:

I'm asking myself where I am in the pecking order?...you know, when you're not even on the bench and the team isn't even scoring...I always thought I got on great with the manager and the players and everyone but because I wasn't getting the slightest chance, I just knew that the manager didn't fancy me and I became discouraged...I just wanted to play [first team football].

In light of his frustrations in the previous extract, it could be argued that Adam's relationship with his manager at [Club iii] had a significant impact on his decision to turn down the offer of an improved contract at the club, further confirming his dismay. With a strong belief in his ability to make a healthy career for himself elsewhere, Adam expected clubs to fight for his signature but was left disappointed. Adam looks back at this point in his life with a different understanding and questioned the success of his decision:

I turned down an improved contract which, looking back I probably shouldn't have done...if I'd had an agent things might have been different but I genuinely thought that the phone wouldn't stop ringing all summer and I'd have the pick of where I could go...I even bought myself an answer machine for my home phone, that's how confident I was...but the phone didn't ring once.

Despite turning down the offer of an improved contract, Adam returned to pre-season training at [Club iii] and waited for a move to materialise, as [Club iii] were entitled to a

transfer fee had Adam moved on. Here, Adam described the moment his [Club iii] career capitulated, as during a routine training session his feelings of embarrassment became too much to handle and instead of leaving the club on his own accord, the decision was made for him:

They [the management] picked the two teams and he's handed me a bib and said, 'you be the linesman'...in front of all of the first team...I was so embarrassed, I could feel myself blushing. While the game's going on I put my bib on the floor and walked over onto the other pitch and started firing the ball into the net...I could hear the assistant manager shouting over constantly but I just blanked him. Looking back as I'm telling this story I can't believe what I did, Jesus Christ, this is [Club iii]. Anyway, after the game the manager's called me in and told me that I had a free transfer...he just wanted me out of the club...I was devastated...I was like, shit! What have I done!

Adam spent the following two weeks at his Mum and Dad's house in [name of town] where, contemplating the seriousness of his banishment, he began 'panicking about what he was going to do'. However, the fact that he was now available on a free transfer interested three clubs in the lower leagues; all of whom were given permission by [Club iii] to conduct transfer talks. Adam revealed how this interest had materialised in light of his decision to fax every football league club informing them of his immediate availability where he 'didn't want to be on the scrapheap and became proactive'. He subsequently had the option of signing for three clubs; two that were willing to pay higher wages but who were in League One and [Club iv] who were in the Championship.

A5: The Move to the Championship

Adam eventually signed for Championship club, [Club iv] on a two-year deal where his thought processes were driven 'purely by [his] desire to play at the highest possible level'. From a relational perspective, Adam maintained contact with best friends at [Club iii], [Jon]

and [Luke] and moved over to [Name of town] with new girlfriend, [Emma]. Now 21 and having grown close to [Emma] during the latter stages of his [Club iii] career, Adam talked cogently about how she calmed his regular nights out and how they enjoyed each other's company: 'she [Emma] was good fun to be around and at that stage of my life, living together was the obvious next move and she was also excited by it'. Adam soon garnered a new circle of friends at [Club iv], as many of the players had also relocated to the area, such was its distance from neighbouring cities. However, this materialised quicker than Adam had expected, as his new teammates appeared fascinated by his previous career, immediately enhancing his self-worth:

It was a bit of a big deal for the [Club iv] lads when I signed because obviously I'd been at [Club iii] who had won the Premier League a couple of seasons ago...and they all loved the fact that I'd been at such a big club...they were all asking me questions about the club, about the players, about the fans...and that felt great...I suppose I was proud that I'd played for them [Club iii].

In a light-hearted manner, Adam told how he was given the nickname 'big-time' by his teammates, because of the fact he had played for the Premier League champions. While he was unaffected by his adopted nickname, Adam understood how the name had materialised, recalling the specific moment he hadn't helped his own cause:

...because I'd come from [Club iii] in the Premier League I just assumed that everybody got given boots or that everybody was sponsored...one of the lads put a new pair of Adidas boots on and I asked him if Adidas had sent him them...he turned around and looked at me in disgust...he said, 'yeah, good one big time'...but I was genuinely naïve and thought that everyone got free boots.

From that moment on, Adam appreciated the change in his surroundings and recognised that he maybe had to lower his expectations in terms of luxuries. In this respect, and although [Club iv] made a blistering start to his first season at the club, Adam was fully aware that

training would no longer be up to the standards that he'd been used to and that the players were never going to replicate the stars that littered the [Club iv] changing room:

It wasn't an issue for me that there weren't stars everywhere I looked, that wasn't a problem at all...I knew I had to lower my expectations a little bit and I suppose if I'm being honest with myself, I looked around at a changing room of good Championship players and maybe thought that I'd found my level...I felt a bit more comfortable and confident, I suppose.

The fact that Adam felt more comfortable in his new surroundings perhaps highlights the emphasis he placed on his sense of self when evaluating the success of his transition. Again, Adam understood his sense of self in relation to others; this time against his change in teammates. While Adam had clearly taken a step downwards from a footballing perspective, he appeared to regard this as a positive move, and enjoyed being regarded as one of the best players at the club; something he never experienced at [Club iii]. In this respect, Adam shared examples, such as 'players just being interested and asking questions [him] about what it was like being a [Club iii] player or what [name of player] was like as a person' which gave him an enormous sense of pride.

Although Adam's [Club iv] career started brightly from a footballing and self-confidence perspective, the success of the transition deteriorated following a terrible run of results midway through his first full season at the club. While Adam had been an ever-present during the early stages of the season and when the club were playing well, he gradually found himself in and out of the side but understood his omission in relation to the manager's admission that the team needed to be bigger and stronger, both mentally and physically; something Adam's diminutive figure contradicted. Adam clearly placed much of the success of the transition down to being involved with the first team and feeling part of the group;

something that was to change when the manager was sacked and that Adam made sense of in relation to a number of others:

He [the manager] never said anything to me, took me straight out of the team and before long I was in the stands...and that's demoralising...but also, you spend a lot of time with other players who aren't involved and you all have a negative outlook on the club and on your futures...you know, I'm questioning where my career was going because nothing's ever certain in football and you're always wondering what's around the corner...I was playing reserve games with 17 and 18 year olds and just felt like a spare part.

For the purpose of this study, I have tried to highlight the relational impact of transitions between clubs and between changes in working life (i.e. from job to job). What the previous extract highlights, however is that Adam experienced a transition in his own sense of self while still at [Club iv]; when the manager was sacked. In short, Adam's narrative (along with Jay's and Joe's) suggests that transitions do not only occur when players move from club to club or when people move from job to job; they also occur within clubs or within jobs. Furthermore, they also appear to occur unexpectedly. From a relational perspective, Adam gained a new understanding of his status at [Club iv] when the manager who had signed him was sacked and replaced. In this respect, Adam was very quick to gauge where he stood with his new manager by his limited game time. Adam didn't need to move clubs to experience this shift in self-understanding, as it happened in the same environment, just with different personnel. However, and from an alternative perspective, it could also be argued that the sacking of the manager actually triggered Adam's next transition. Although some months prior to his eventual departure from [Club iv], Adam was beginning to accept that another move could have been on the horizon, as his significant lack of game time continued to show no sign of improving his minimal relationship with his new manager. Here, Adam

explained why he felt their relationship struggled and how, eventually, he began to resent the manager:

Six weeks before the end of the season, he [the Club iv manager] rang me and told me that [Club v] had offered 50 grand to sign me...he said that he was going to release me in the summer anyway and that they would pay my contract up in full now if I signed for [Club v] and that he thought I should go...

The conversation with his manager infuriated Adam, but while he was angry with the way the manager had dealt with the situation he was equally pleased that other clubs had made their interests known. In this respect, Adam reflected upon his ill-tempered departure from [Club iii] and was adamant that he didn't want to find himself in a similar situation:

I thought I was better than League Two but I kept thinking about what I'd been through at [Club iii] and what it felt like for nobody to show an interest in me...all of the doubts and worrying what might happen...as much as I didn't want to drop down to League Two, it was an option and someone actually wanted me....I think that's what I ultimately wanted...to feel wanted.

Adam's first contact with the [Club v] manager, who was the same manager that had been sacked from [Club iv] made Adam feel special. To this extent, Adam explained how the [Club v] manager had described him as 'the best striker in the league...[and] somebody who everybody [at Club v] would look up to', which raised his self-confidence and ultimately encouraged Adam to sign for the club.

A6: The Drop Down to League Two

Despite the somewhat awkward end to Adam's previous relationship with his new manager, in light of his eventual sacking, any awkwardness diminished the minute the two were re-connected. Here, Adam explained how his decision to eventually sign for [Club v] was

based primarily on his prospective relationship with the [Club v] manager, as well as what the financial implications of his move meant to him personally:

...he [the Club v manager] was putting his balls on the line to sign me because he was giving me the most that any player had ever been given at [Club v]...he said I'd be on more than he was earning but that didn't matter because he wanted me that much...he couldn't have gone any further out of his way to sign me and in the end I was delighted to sign for him again.

Adam's decision was clearly affected by the persuasive influence of the [Club v] manager who, despite managing a club who were participating at least a league below where Adam felt he could play, had convinced him of how vital a role he could play in their rise up the leagues. Also at the heart of Adam's decision, and for the first time in his career, was his ability to stay where he was living. Having built a close network of friends outside of football (with [Nick] and [Steve] in particular), Adam was pleased that he could continue his lifestyle of playing golf and going out for drinks whenever fitted in around his football. However, Adam was less thoughtful about his relationship with [Emma], who had become unhappy with his increasing nights out and who wanted to spend more time with him than he was willing to give her. Here, when asked how and why his relationship with [Emma] fizzled out, Adam exposed a selfish streak that had ultimately informed his decision:

I was ruthless and just ended it [his relationship with Emma]...we spent a bit of time together and it was nice and all that but I was selfish I suppose and would rather have gone out with my mates than see her...but I was 21 at the time so I'm glad I was ruthless.

As the previous quote suggests, Adam has two evaluations of the fizzling out of his relationship with [Emma], one from the moment in time and another looking back retrospectively. Again, Adam appeared to judge the success of his transition against his present life whereby the fact that he is now 40, divorced and living with his fiancée

accentuates the freedom with which he made his decisions and ultimately lived his life. Similarly, Adam had a new understanding on the success of his transition to [Club v] from a retrospective viewpoint. Here, Adam described the worries he associated with making the step-down to League Two but how he now reflects upon the transition with great pleasure:

I really didn't want to move to [Club v] because in just over a year, I'd have dropped from the Premier League down to League Two and that was a real worry but do you know what...that was the best decision I made in my career...I look back at that move and by taking a step backwards, I kind of found myself really and I got my career back on track.

Expanding upon the 'step backwards' that Adam had undoubtedly taken, he was quick to emphasise the impact that this had on his self-esteem. Although playing for a team who were one, maybe two leagues below where Adam envisaged himself playing, he was now desperate to show everybody how good he was. True to the narrative of Adam's life, his first meeting with new teammates was surrounded by nerves and anxiety, as this time he was introduced on the coach on the way to the game; something he remembered vividly:

*I had six hours on a bus to [name of club] when I didn't know anybody...I could see everyone whispering when they sat down, you know, 'who the f**ks that' kind of thing and it was just a strange way to meet your new teammates...the nerves come back, you wonder whether you've made the right decision and what they're all going to be like but I'd been through it before and it was just part of it [the transition].*

Adam explained how he settled into his new [Club v] surroundings quicker than he had done at his previous clubs due to his debut goal. Although Adam had described the worries of not knowing anybody before the game, and wondering whether he really was going to stand out at this level, these were relinquished the moment the team celebrated his goal in the tenth minute of his debut:

Everyone was ecstatic and just bombarded me...the feeling was just immense...it was partly relief of justifying the price-tag, partly delight that my teammates had seen what I could do, I was partly focused on the fact that I now knew I could get a hat-full if I put my mind to it and part of the feeling was just 'get in'!

Having signed a two-and-a-half-year contract, Adam spent the final six weeks of the season in scintillating form, scoring freely as [Club v] finished the season strongly. However, and having labelled the transition as 'the best decision of [his career]', it would be folly to suggest that it was plain sailing for Adam and in the middle of his two-and-a-half-year contract, Adam shared a transition that ultimately altered the course of his future career. Having finished the final weeks of the season at [Club v] strongly, Adam described his first full season at the club as a 'complete shocker'. To set the scene of his mid-employment transition, Adam met his future wife halfway through his first full season at [Club v] and before long, moved [Anna] into his property. Exemplifying the hasty nature of their blossoming relationship, [Anna] fell pregnant towards the end of the season which appeared to act as a wake-up call to Adam and questioned the direction of his career. In Adam's mind, the only reason that he would be a [Club v] player the following season was because he was still in contract:

I genuinely believe that if I'd have been out of contract at the end of that season, I'd have been released and probably not found another club, I'd been that bad. The manager even got me in his office and said, look, I know you've been off the boil but I'm sticking with you and I know you'll get back in the goals before long...but I feared that it could be my last season if things didn't improve.

To some extent, Adam's realization was affected by his relationship with [Anna], their imminent birth and his ability to provide. With the added responsibilities of fatherhood

looming, Adam was forced to re-appraise his lifestyle and evaluate where his future career was heading compared to where he wanted it to go. In turn, Adam re-focused on the discipline and dedication that had earned him his first ever contract and appeared to reap the rewards. The fact that Adam changed his approach to football by quitting drinking and by focusing more on his football generally and on getting fit emphasises the transitive nature of his being. Here, it seemed as though the added responsibility of becoming a father played a significant role in Adam's outlook.

Having endured a prolific campaign in the final year of his two-and-a-half-year contract and following [Club v's] promotion to League One, Adam was inundated with contract offers from a number of clubs in League One and League Two and from [Club vi] in a foreign Premier League. Here, Adam explained how he struck up a close relationship with his agent, [Alan] who was informing him of any potential interest and what the move would mean financially. Adam started his relationship with [Alan] halfway through the previous season through their mutual friend, [Ross] who, being a player at [Club v] had informed Adam of [Alan's] interest and recommended his services. Although their relationship seemed quiet in the first couple of months, Adam revealed how their contact escalated to the point where they spoke on a daily basis. However, Adam was also cognisant of the reasoning behind their increasing contact:

He [Alan] was an agent at the end of the day and agents are only after one thing, aren't they? He was going to be cashing in on my good season as well and so I knew why he seemed to be on the phone all of the time...I wasn't his mate or anything but as long as he got me a decent move and a decent contract, I would have talked to him all day.

The previous comment highlights how Adam would have done whatever was necessary, and used whoever possible to succeed. The fact that [Alan] wasn't Adam's 'mate' emphasised the role he played in his life. He was merely a broker in Adam's ensuing transition and had no further attachment to Adam or his family. Contrastingly, Adam's decision-making processes were majorly affected by his family's future and the financial implications of any move. In this respect, Adam was frank in his desire to 'cash in' on his good season while he could and make the most of his upturn in fortunes:

I wanted to earn as much money as I could and I literally couldn't turn down the offer from [Club vi]...it had quadrupled my wages that I'd been on at [Club v] and it was a three-year deal...it wasn't something that I was desperate to do, to play abroad or to play in a foreign league again...it was more the fact that I had to do it for the money and for our future as a family.

Adam's apparent obsession with money was further evidenced in his retrospective appraisal of the decision he was faced with. To this extent, Adam confessed that '...if [Club vi] had offered £1500 a week like [Club vii] had done then [he'd] have definitely signed for [Club vi]'. As has been a running theme throughout Adam's narrative, the fact that he was leaving behind his friends caused him little concern. Here, his focus of earning as much money as he could became the most important aspect of the move. In this respect, it was [Anna] who was more concerned with leaving behind her family and friends, as this was the first time she had made such a move. However, Adam explained how their joint decision was based around what was best for their family and their futures:

It was a difficult decision for her [Anna] because she was leaving people for the first time...we had countless difficult discussions about moving and about leaving family and friends but in the end, our family and our futures came first.

A7: The Foreign Premier League

Within the first month of his move to [Club vi], Adam's girlfriend, [Anna] gave birth to his son the day before his first training session. Adam shared his sense of pride and feelings of joy at his arrival: 'When [Oliver] was born, I was over the moon...to have brought this tiny person into the world was an amazing feeling...I was extremely proud'. When Adam reported back for his first day of pre-season training, his pride became a distant memory. Here, Adam revealed how his very first session at the club set the scene for the rest of his [Club vi] career, as his arrival at the club did little to impress his new employers:

*We got weighed on the first day and I was about three or four pounds above what I should have been and they [Club vi staff] didn't like it...they gave me this diet that I had to go on, they gave me workouts I had to do before training, you know, 300 sit-ups every day, stuff like that...I think they lost respect for me from that very first day and their minds were made up and that really p**sed me off...I'd say it was a failure from an hour of me arriving at the club.*

Adam was clearly making sense of his position in respect of his new employers and their apparent disgust at his weight increase. In this respect, Adam was able to evaluate the relative success of the transition after an hour, and again in relation to his new employers' actions. Adam reflected over his time at [Club vi] with discontent. Despite adhering to the fitness programmes he'd been handed and subsequently improving his physicality, Adam's attempts to alter the perceptions of his manager were in vein. Here, Adam shared his frustrations regarding the success of the transition, again pinpointing his arrival as the protagonist of his downfall:

*I was p**sed off that they'd made their mind up straight away because I lost the weight and got a six-pack within six weeks but it was too late...I felt as if everyone agreed that I wasn't fit enough or*

good enough...you know, where everyone groans if I give the ball away in training as if to say I'm not at their level...and that was hard to get my head around. I felt worthless.

While Adam acknowledged that he didn't need a circle of friends away from football, I was keen to ascertain the role played by his teammates in his transition to [Club vi] and how they affected the success of his transition. Here, it was clear to see why Adam felt like 'an outcast', as he described and strangely accepted the minor part they played in his transition:

They all spoke good English and to begin with they were all fine with me...but over time they spoke less English and it was as though they couldn't be bothered to speak English anymore...but I get that...if I spoke French then I'd speak French for a couple of weeks and then get bored and expect them to speak our language, that's how it works.

Adam continued to judge the success of his transition in relation to whether he was involved in the first team squad. Although from a financial perspective the transition was clearly a success, from a footballing perspective the transition was an epic failure. Here, Adam shared his thoughts during this testing time where his priorities appeared to alter slightly and his desire to play first team football increased in importance: '...my overriding desire was to play football and even though it was the money that I'd chased when I went over there [to Club vi], I was still itching to get playing in the [name of country] Premier Division'. Although Adam and his family's future was benefitting from the move, Adam and [Anna] also became more concerned with their lonely existence in the present and began to re-consider their position, re-evaluating what was important to them. Six months into a three-year contract, Adam questioned the focus of his [Club vi] career and shared his thought processes at this challenging time:

I was training on a Sunday morning with the under-21's and it was just awful...I didn't feel as though I could spend another two-and-a-half years of my life doing it but I would have done purely

for the money...I began to feel low all of the time but my ex-missus hated it more than me, spending all day, every day with just the little one...she was tearing her hair out.

For the first (and only) time in Adam's career, his motive to find a new club was driven by somebody else; his ex-wife. Adam admitted that it was [Anna's] unhappiness that had ultimately impelled his decision:

Even though she [Anna] wasn't saying that we had to get home as soon as possible, she was the main reason that we came home when we did and if she had been happier then we'd have stayed for longer...I wasn't happy but I'd have stayed through it for the money.

With his family's happiness and his desire to play first team football now underpinning his thought processes, Adam's agent arranged a trial game at [Club vii] back in England. In a similar manner to the desperation that surrounded his decision to escape from [Club i], Adam shared his comparable thoughts at this time:

I wanted to play first team football and [Anna] was desperate to move back to England, it really was as simple as that...we would have moved anywhere in England...it didn't matter if we were up north or down south, we would have gone wherever I thought that I'd be playing every week.

Again, while [Anna's] situation had a severe effect on Adam's decision-making, it was still his career that dictated proceedings. In suggesting that they would have gone 'wherever [he] thought that [he]'d be playing every week', the decision to move ultimately rested on Adam, and his quest to survive in professional football. Here, Adam revealed how his previous experiences at [Club v], and his concerns of exiting the profession he loved at that time had affected his whole approach to his working life:

From that moment at [Club v] where I thought I could have gone [out of professional football] my goal has been to survive...if I'm playing [first team football] then I'll survive and my life will look

after itself...I went to [Club vi] for the money but I still had a burning desire to survive...signing a three-year deal just meant I could survive for longer.

In the previous extract, Adam highlighted the value he placed on survival, yet having signed a three-year deal I questioned whether survival was the main source of his drive and ambition. However, it appeared that beneath the surface of Adam's goal to survive, there was an underlying meaning to his goals and aspirations:

I wanted to be a professional footballer because I felt valued by managers, players, staff, supporters, whoever it was, I felt valued. The money and paying the mortgage and everything else came with me being able to survive in professional football...but yeah, I suppose I also wanted to be valued.

While Adam could have survived for three more years at [Club vi] and made the financial gains that he'd set out to achieve, his desire to feel valued dictated his actions. Here, following a trial game at [Club vii] back in England, Adam signed a six-month loan deal with the club; a move that seemingly benefitted all parties:

[Club vii] were getting a player they wanted, [Club vi] were getting rid of a player they didn't want, my wages would stay the same, [Anna] was getting her side of the bargain in returning to England...it was in the middle of the country so she could easily get back to her family if she needed to, but more importantly, the manager had told me I could be a massive player for them [Club vii] which was a great feeling and a fantastic opportunity to get my career back on track.

A8: The Move Back to England

Having flown in and out of the country for his trial match, Adam's new teammates soon made him feel welcome in his new surroundings; something that had evaded his short spell at [Club vi]. With banter being exchanged in relation to his 'jet-set lifestyle', Adam

revealed how the immediate success of his move back to England stemmed from team camaraderie and being around teammates who he could now have a laugh and a joke with. Adam described how his teammates would jokingly ask if he had flown into training every morning, highlighting the great team spirit that Adam spoke fondly of. Although the social side of Adam's transfer was an immediate success, his overall aim of playing first team football in order to survive in professional football was soon in doubt, as he found himself on the substitutes bench for first team games. Referring to the critical and strict, authoritarian manner of his [Club vii] manager, Adam began to re-evaluate the success of his transition:

*The lads were great, the club was great, the fans were great, my ex-missus was happy but I couldn't stand the manager, he was a d**k. He was like a dictator and the reason the lads were a great bunch was because they hated him and the banter was mostly covert protests against him...I started to worry that I'd made the wrong decision and questioned what I was going to do.*

Adam made both the positive and negative evaluations of his transitional success to [Club vii] in relation to others; notably his teammates and manager. Similarly, Adam felt 'at ease' and 'comfortable' when around his teammates in the changing rooms but 'on edge' and 'apprehensive' around his manager. In a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of his position at the club, Adam's [Club vii] career was brought to an abrupt end in a frank and open discussion with the manager that occurred somewhat unexpectedly:

Yes, I wasn't playing and yes, I hadn't been given a fair chance to impress but I wasn't expecting what happened...he [the manager] basically pulled me into his office and told me that it hadn't worked out and because I wasn't playing and because they were paying most of my wages, the chairman had told him that I had to leave...my jaw dropped...I couldn't believe it.

During the conversation with the manager, Adam was informed that [Club viii] in League Two had shown an interest and had agreed to take over the remainder of his loan deal. Although Adam was clearly shocked by his manager's confessions, he made no reference to the vulnerability that I expected. Instead, Adam revealed how his previous career experiences had acted more as a support mechanism than as a source of fear:

I'd hardened myself to not being wanted...as stupid as that sounds, I had...I'd already had it three times in my career where clubs didn't want me or the manager wanted rid of me so I'd just got used to it.

With his quest to survive in professional football driving his ambition, Adam's goal of playing first team football remained at the heart of his decision-making processes. Here, and in a similar manner to his previous transfers, Adam re-evaluated what was important to him (i.e., playing first team football/surviving) and which option gave him the best opportunity of achieving his goal. Essentially, Adam was entitled to stay at [Club vii] and sit out the remainder of his six-month loan spell and similarly return to [Club v] at the conclusion of the six months. However, the main reason that Adam returned to England was not only to play first team football, but also for [Anna's] happiness. In this respect, Adam's decision orchestrated around both his and his family's future:

Deep down, I did feel like nobody wanted me and like I was getting pushed from pillar to post which was horrible...but I just wanted to play football and by going to [Club viii], that's what I was going to do...I was hoping that it would lead to something more permanent that would benefit me and my family.

With [Club viii] located in close proximity to [Club vii], Adam and [Anna] would remain in their rented accommodation which also had a positive influence on his decision. However,

it was the initial conversation with his potential new manager that had the most considerable impact on Adam's eventual decision; a conversation that ultimately gave him the self-belief and wanted feeling that he'd been craving. Furthermore, situated just outside the League Two play-off positions, and with a fantastic chance of earning promotion to League One, Adam regarded his option as a straightforward one to make:

He [the Club viii manager] told me that he wanted to build his team around me whichever league they [Club viii] were in the following season and that he wanted to create as many chances for me as they could because he knew I'd score goals...and that gave me such confidence to know that he had such belief in me...I couldn't wait to get started.

A9: On Loan While on Loan

Adam signed on loan for [Club viii] on the morning of a game and therefore only met his new teammates in the team hotel beforehand. Again, Adam referred back to his previous experiences when he made sense of the circumstances surrounding his arrival:

...[when I signed for Club viii] it was the same as every other time that I moved clubs...I didn't know anybody so there were butterflies in my stomach about what the lads were going to be like and how good the team was going to be but deep down I knew that I would only be out of my comfort zone for the first week or so and then I would start to feel comfortable again.

In the final stages of that season, Adam noted how, unusually, four out of the final ten league games of the season required the team to stay overnight in different locations, such was the journey time to opponent's grounds. Adam reflected on this with positive sentiments, as it gave him further opportunity to bond with his new teammates. Although the team would travel on the day before League games, Adam and a number of his teammates also stayed in

a hotel the preceding night, enhancing their team spirit. Here, Adam described how their routine appeared to have a significant effect on the team's performances, and similarly heightened the success of his own transition:

...we'd [Adam and his teammates] have a few beers on the Thursday night before travelling down on the Friday which we shouldn't have done but we'd win 1-0 on the Saturday and I'd get the winner, so it became a bit of a routine for us...it made it easier for me to get to know everyone and because of that I was desperate to join on a permanent deal because I was happy.

Evaluating his transition in a wider context, Adam's footballing performances and respective achievements had a significant impact on his life outside of football. In this respect, Adam referred to the positivity that surrounded his performances towards the end of that season and how, as a result, his decision to sign for [Club viii] on a permanent basis proved an easy one to make:

I'd literally gone in and ripped it up and I'd made the difference between play-offs and automatic promotion really...I felt appreciated and that has such an effect on your life because I was probably a happier person to be around.

When I asked Adam what he meant by feeling appreciated, he was unable to pinpoint one thing in particular. Referring to [Club viii] supporters who were desperate to get his autograph or the manager breaking the club's transfer record to bring him in permanently, Adam appeared to enjoy the recognition that he received during his seemingly rich vein of form. To this extent, while Adam evaluated the success of his transition against his footballing performances and respective promotion to League One, the social implications of his on-the-field success translated to his personal sense of self off it. Here, Adam also judged the success of his transition against the opinions and actions of various others:

I loved being asked for my autograph because it showed I was doing well...I loved being praised by the manager in front of the squad because it meant that I was doing well...I loved seeing my name making the headlines on the back of the local newspaper because it meant I was doing well...and as much as I knew I was doing well, it meant a lot to know that the manager, the players, the supporters and whoever else thought that I was doing well.

Despite Adam signing a two-year contract with [Club viii], his family's long-term plans remained the same, whereby they were admittedly happy to 'go with the flow'. To this extent, and having previously rented a property local to [Club vii], Adam and his family bought a house closer to [Club viii]. Mindful of his previous experiences, Adam made reference to the nomadic nature of his career and the uncertainty that it harboured:

I was a footballer and so I would have moved wherever I was going to be playing football...I could have been there for six months or six years but the worst thing was knowing that if I wanted to survive as a professional footballer, it might not have been me making the decision to move.

During one of the interviews, Adam revealed a ruthless streak that had accompanied him through his previous marriage and his footballing career in relation to relocation. Here, despite considering the thoughts and feelings of his ex-wife throughout any transitional decisions, Adam was persistent in what would ultimately drive his decisions:

I'd listen to what she [Adam's ex-wife] had to say and what she thought we should do...I'd maybe even see what my Mum and Dad thought or a few of my friends in football. But ultimately, if I wanted to sign for a club, I'd sign for the club...I would have left my missus rather than not signed for a club that she didn't want me to sign for.

Although Adam's confession seemed excessively selfish, he related everything back to the goal of his career; to survive as a professional footballer. However selfish the previous extract may appear, Adam was consistent in his thinking from his apparent epiphany at [Club v].

Furthermore, Adam was equally cognisant of the various aspects of his life that could be ephemeral in nature if he was to survive:

I could have changed managers and teammates every season, I could have moved house every two years, maybe having to find new mates outside of football every time I moved...these were all things that I knew might happen and that I was comfortable with. But I knew that if I was still a professional footballer, all of these things would look after themselves.

Here, I would argue that Adam's approach and attitude to his footballing career served him well. With his desire to play professional football underpinning every decision that he made, Adam accepted that transition was going to be (possibly had to be) a big part of his life. This became further evident when Adam's impressive run of form continued and [Club viii] rejected the approaches of two clubs that wanted to sign him. Seemingly preoccupied with a potential move to a 'bigger club', Adam revealed his discontent with having to stay at [Club viii]:

*I was p***ed off with them [Club viii]...as far as I was concerned, by turning down approaches they'd held me back from moving onto bigger and better things again. I could have gone to a bigger club and signed a longer contract on more money...but instead, I was stuck there.*

Adam's use of the term 'stuck' again emphasised the transitive nature of his being. Only weeks earlier, Adam was admittedly 'a happier person to be around' and grateful for the praise he was receiving during his rich vein of form. However, when made aware of the interest of the two clubs in question by his manager, Adam's inability to move came to the fore. Despite his discontent, Adam maintained his professional approach to his football and while concealing his true feelings, hoped that the clubs' interest would remain:

I could have asked for a transfer and kicked up a fuss but I suppose there was a lot of respect there because [Club viii] had been so good with me and got my career back on track...I didn't want to

jeopardise my relationship with them. I just kept my thoughts to myself and hoped that something would happen further down the line.

A10: The Panic

Following a successful first full season at [Club viii], Adam entered the final year of his contract somewhat apprehensively. With the mantra 'to survive' still driving his ambition and despite continuing to play well for the club, Adam became anxious that, in essence he had twelve months guaranteed wages remaining. Adam's anxieties increased following conversations with his good friends, [Kev] and [Mark]. In short, the collapse of the Football League's transmission deal with ITV Digital had major repercussions on the majority of football clubs and their respective summer transfer budgets; something that concerned Adam:

I'd spoken to [Jon] and [Luke] and they told me about different players who had been on decent money...I was worried because out of the blue the collapse of ITV Digital meant that nobody had any money, clubs were going into administration and it seemed like a nightmare situation for everyone involved.

Shrouded in uncertainty and already concerned about his future at [Club viii], Adam's position grew ever more precarious when his manager was sacked following a disappointing start to the season. Having played every league game as a striker up until the manager was sacked, Adam was asked to play a different role by the newly appointed manager. Here, Adam shared his consternation during one of our interviews; something he felt unable to do during his conversation with his new manager for a number of reasons:

...basically, I just said of course I could [play in a different position]...I couldn't tell him what I really thought because I needed my place in the team...but I had six months left on my contract and I just thought it was his way of telling me that he didn't want me there.

Adam made sense of his situation in relation to a number of others. Firstly, as mentioned above, Adam was concerned that he'd find himself in a similar position to the players he'd spoken about with [Jon] and [Luke]. Secondly, and comparing his status to his teammates as the club's record signing, Adam recognised the vulnerability of his position as the club's top earner, given the financial uncertainty surrounding football. Finally, Adam understood his position through the actions of his new manager who had not only played him in a different team role but had then pursued to bring in a new player in the position that Adam had been asked to fill. With the fear of exiting professional football or struggling to survive financially affecting his thought processes, Adam became proactive and acted upon his fears by again sending a fax detailing his availability to all lower league clubs:

I had to look after myself and my family because I couldn't risk putting us in a situation where financially, we would have struggled to maintain our lifestyle...we weren't lavish or anything but if I'd have had to drop from £2500 a week to £400 a week, things would have had to change and I really didn't want that to happen.

In light of Adam's fax circulation, [Club ix] showed an immediate interest in his availability and were keen to strike an early deal with [Club viii]. For a small transfer fee, Adam immediately agreed to sign on a further two-year contract. Although participating in a league below [Club viii], Adam was excited by the prospect of playing for such a 'massive club', as he termed them; a massive club that had recently moved into a brand new, 25,000 all-seater stadium. Adam reflected on the success of his decision to sign for [Club ix] in an interesting way. Seven games into his managerial reign at Adam's previous club [Club viii], the manager

was sacked by the newly appointed owners of the club. Subsequently, and contrary to the financial uncertainty surrounding lower level football, [Club viii] made a flurry of new signings while establishing a reputation as one of the more financially secure clubs in the Football League. Here, Adam acknowledged the insecurity that surrounded his decision but was equally magnanimous in his appraisal of what might have been:

If I could have predicted that [Club viii] would spend loads of money in that summer like they did do and I might have got a new contract on more money then I'd have taken a chance, obviously...but they could still have got rid of me and I could have ended up playing in the Conference...looking back, it was the right decision based on the information that I had.

In signing for [Club ix], the move gave Adam and [Anna] the opportunity to move back to [name of town] where [Anna's] family and friends were based. While this had positive connotations for [Anna], Adam's paternal responsibilities meant that he saw very little of the friends that he regularly socialised with during his early playing days; something that caused Adam little concern:

I got back in touch the lads that I spent a bit of time with when I played for [Club iii] and [Club iv] but time had moved on...I was 28, I had a three-year old and a one year old so my life was now training, kids and sleep...I wasn't particularly bothered about anything else to be honest.

Again highlighting the disposable nature of his friendships, Adam noted how he got 'back in touch with', as opposed to 'in touch with' his former friends. Similarly, he wasn't 'overly bothered' about spending time with them anyway, as his two sons were now his priorities. Furthermore, Adam's changed identity from bachelor to husband and father had clearly affected his interactions with his friends and dictated their occurrence.

When evaluating the success of his transition from [Club viii] to [Club ix] and for the first time in his career, Adam explained how the reservations he held about his new teammates played an integral role in his appraisal. Adam soon questioned the integrity of the players that he would now share a changing room with, as during his first day's training he was one of two new signings that had money stolen from their wallets:

I've gone to get changed and my wallet was empty...there was a couple of the lads still getting showered so I'm looking around hoping that I can see them giggling about hiding it or that it was a wind up...there was about £130 in it so I was just hoping that it was just a joke that they did to new signings. I've asked the other lads if they'd had anything nicked out of their pockets and [Alan Fettis] had been done as well. We both thought it was some kind of initiation thing for new players but it wasn't.

Adam found himself in an awkward situation and began regretting his move to [Club ix]. Referring back to the numerous 'happy' changing rooms that he'd been a big part of and where he'd exchanged banter with countless other professional footballers, Adam was left feeling deflated. Similarly, Adam explained how he felt unable to 'start pointing the finger and accusing people on [his] second day'. Instead, Adam revealed how his grievances were somewhat dampened by an extremely apologetic chairman who reimbursed both Adam and the other new signing with their financial losses. However, this did little to alter Adam's perceptions of his new teammates, as their first impressions had made a lasting one:

I left my wallet in my car every day after that [the day Adam's wallet was stolen]...I couldn't trust them from then on and even now, looking back, there were a lot of idiots in that changing room and I didn't enjoy it.

Adam evaluated much of the failure of his transition to [Club ix] against the relationship that he held with his teammates. Although Adam developed a good relationship

with the three players he shared a car with to training, he found himself judging players' characters in a way that highlighted a number of negative qualities:

*...the captain ran the changing room and he had a few lads that just followed and accepted everything that he did, it was strange...I just kept my distance and was my own man. I realised that they were just my work colleagues...I thought they were a bunch of w****ers.*

From a social perspective, Adam clearly regarded the move to [Club ix] as a downright failure. Adam also regarded the move as a failure from a footballing point of view, as he sustained an early injury that altered the course of his [Club ix] career. Having started the first six league games since his transfer, Adam broke his foot in an on-field collision and spent the remainder of his season rehabilitating. Before Adam made a full return from injury in the following pre-season, [Club ix] had signed two strikers to fill the void left by Adam's injury. Adam was resolute in his appraisal of why his [Club ix] career ended in failure:

If I hadn't have got injured, they wouldn't have needed to sign [name of player] or [name of player] and I would have kept my place in the team...but injuries are part of football and they can play a massive role in where your career goes...that injury definitely altered the course of my [Club xii] career though.

Upon his return from injury, Adam found himself as third choice striker behind the two new signings. In a re-evaluation of his position at [Club ix], Adam acknowledged that he was merely a 'bit part player' at the club with sincerity while accepting that the impressive run of form of the two first choice strikers was having a significant effect on his own personal success (or lack of). Here, Adam compared his position to that of former teammates that 'had been a bit part player when [he] was in a rich vein of form' at previous clubs. Despite not being completely happy as a 'bit part player', Adam's position as 'first reserve' meant that he continued to feel valued by the manager.

A11: The Agent's Influence

While being the 'bit part player' at [Club ix] that he spoke openly about, Adam unexpectedly received a phone call from a random agent. Working as a negotiator for a number of Football League clubs, the agent had approached [Club ix] and enquired about Adam's availability while working for a League Two club. Here, Adam was informed by the agent that the [Club ix] manager would be willing to let him leave the club if the circumstances were right. Startled by the agent's confession, Adam was left to query the role of the manager in proceedings:

I started to look back at how he'd [the manager] been treating me recently and spent the next week just waiting to be pulled [spoken to] by him...it wasn't a very nice position to be in and I was gutted because, deep down I knew I was going to be on the move again.

Disappointed in the manner that his availability had come about, Adam revealed that he 'lost a lot of respect' for his manager from that moment on. Sure enough, Adam was soon informed by the manager that [Club x] had enquired about taking him either on loan or on a permanent transfer and that the club were willing to let him go. Although Adam now questioned how much he was valued by [Club ix], his initial concerns turned to the lowly league position of [Club x] and their potential relegation out of the Football League:

My goal was always to survive in the Football League because I knew I had the ability to play at that level...[Club x] were bottom of League Two, looking like they might be relegated and so, even if I signed a three year deal on the great deal that they were offering me, there was still a very good possibility that I would end up a Conference player and I didn't want that.

When pressed on what it would mean to become a Conference player, Adam said the following: 'once you dropped into the Conference, there was no way back...the Conference was pretty much for players who were not good enough to play in the Football League'. Subsequently, and with his goal of Football League survival dominating his agenda, Adam turned down the move to [Club x] when it first materialised. However, with a year remaining on his [Club ix] contract and while continuing to play the 'bit part player' that he became accustomed to playing, [Club x] re-ignited their interest in signing Adam and having now escaped relegation, looked an exciting prospect. Here, Adam explained how his decision wasn't as straightforward as it might have been and how his ex-wife slowed down proceedings:

After two weeks of constant arguing about it, I gave her an ultimatum basically and said that I was the one earning the money and providing for us as a family and so I had to go where the money was...I said if she didn't like it then I was going anyway.

Again, Adam's overall goal to survive in the Football League came to the fore and despite the decision being affected to a lesser extent by his ex-wife's vocal disapproval, Adam signed for [Club x]. Here, Adam made sense of his position in relation to his current and potential future teammates. Similarly, having previously played under the assistant manager at [Club x] while at [Club viii], Adam was keen to re-ignite their relationship. In this respect, Adam's decision was ultimately made with regards to a number of relationships with significant others:

I knew a few lads at [Club x] who I'd played with before who I got on really well with...I also quite liked [the assistant manager] who was always sound with me. My other option was to stay at [Club ix] around people who I didn't really like, not play for another year and find myself scratting around for a club in the Conference the following season.

[Anna] eventually made the decision to follow Adam to [Club x] and set up home yet again in unfamiliar surroundings. Having been a recurring theme throughout his life, the significance of such a move was insignificant for Adam in comparison with [Anna] who was leaving behind her family and friends once more. When asked about the emotional consequences of the move in relation to his relationship with [Anna], Adam explained how the whole family (children included) eventually loved the move to [Club x], although, initially Adam and [Anna's] relationship was strained:

The first couple of weeks were frosty to say the least...we weren't speaking much and I wondered whether [Anna] would stick it out. But then, the more we went out with other couples and the more we did as a family, the happier everyone was...we all loved it down there [Club x].

Evaluating the success of his transition to [Club x], Adam was unequivocal in his summation of the social success of the transition. Being around people that he respected and enjoyed spending time with played an integral part in Adam's success story of his time spent at [Club x]. However, Adam also reflected back over this period and gained a new understanding:

From a social point of view, the move to [Club x] was by far and away the best move we made...there'd be times where there'd be ten players and their partners out having a drink together and that was brilliant. But then I keep in touch with one player from my time at [Club x] which again shows that they were just people in my life at that time.

From a footballing perspective, Adam reflected on a time of frustration as he 'couldn't put [his] finger on what it was, but it just didn't work out for [him] at [Club x]'. Having been a 'marquee signing' and with high expectation to propel [Club x] up the League, Adam's performances failed to deliver the qualities that had served him well throughout his career and regarded the transition as another footballing failure. It was here that Adam and I made

sense of his [Club x] career, with regards to the impact his life away from football was having on his career. In this respect, there was a far more serious issue than poor football performances lingering in the background of Adam's life. During one of the later interviews, Adam revealed how his Dad had battled against depression for ten years and described their relationship in the following way: 'it wasn't a distant relationship that we had [Adam and his Dad] but we weren't very close...it was somewhere in the middle'. These suggestions were divergent to the earlier interviews where Adam had inferred that his Dad was the major factor in his successful career. , Adam then revealed how his Mum and Dad had also split up while he was at [Club x], as his Mum refused to move back to where his Dad was raised as a child, [name of town]. In terms of how his Dad's depression had affected his own life, Adam made the following comment:

I didn't see much of it [his Dad's depression] because I wasn't around him, so I'd just hear bits from my Mum and from him a little bit I suppose. But when he split up with my Mum, that was the trigger to things getting worse for him [Adam's Dad] and I really started to worry.

Adam revealed how his sporadic telephone calls with his Dad were now based around his Dad's paranoia and how his Dad was contemplating taking his own life, such was the impact of the split from Adam's Mum. Here, Adam revealed his own feelings of helplessness whereby '[he] kept saying that everything would be ok...[but how] [he] didn't know what support to get him or what [he] could do to help him'. Using the specific date as a point of reference, Adam told how his Dad acted upon his dreadful thoughts and attempted to take his own life:

On the 20th of December he [Adam's Dad] took an overdose...but as soon as he'd done it he rang 999 because he was petrified of dying...he'd been back to [name of town] to get back with my Mum but Mum wasn't having any of it...but I don't blame Mum for anything that happened.

Later that evening, Adam shared a telephone call with his Dad who convinced him of his regret for what had happened and how sorry he was for being so thoughtless. Adam's Dad also convinced the doctors of his regret and gratitude as he was released from hospital a couple of days later. Having spoken with his Dad on Christmas day and despite his Dad's apparent change of heart, Adam remained concerned for his Dad's well-being but following a chat with the club doctor at [Club x] agreed that it sounded like a cry for help and that he probably wouldn't do anything more. However, following [Club x's] home league fixture on Boxing Day, Adam's fears were confirmed, as that evening local police arrived at his home to deliver the tragic news he'd been dreading:

That evening [Boxing Day] the police came knocking on my door about seven o'clock and told me the news...as soon as the car pulled up I just knew what had happened...I just knew. As gutted and as heartbroken as I was, he wanted to die and he died. Now, he was sick and he was ill and he wasn't thinking logically but he got what he wanted and that's helped me deal with it a little bit...he had some demons in his head and he got rid of them.

Adam was informed by the police that his Dad had hung himself. The fact that his Dad had taken his own life was something that Adam kept concealed. Despite telling a couple of his good mates everything that had happened from the depression to the eventual tragedy, Adam informed everybody else, [Club x] included that his Dad had died from a heart attack; a decision that he made for his own best interests:

...if I'm being honest, I didn't want anybody thinking any less of me...people knew who I was, people knew me, people respected me, people in football and out of football and I didn't want what had happened to my Dad to overshadow anything...and so I lied because it was easier.

Adam revealed how he questioned the extent to which depression was hereditary and whether, like his Dad, Adam's own life was mapped out in a similarly tragic way. Adam also

noted how it is only now, in the present that he truly feels at ease with his own situation as, with current fiancée, [Sarah's] constant support his understanding of depression has grown considerably. To this extent, Adam explained how he: 'now know[s] that it's [depression] not hereditary and that you can program your mind to do whatever you want it to do'. However, to combat the unpleasant thoughts that he experienced at that point in time, Adam played in the league fixture two days after his Dad's death in his quest to feel 'normal' again:

It [his Dad's death] was just something that I tried to sweep under the carpet in an awful way...I just didn't want to think about what had happened and my way of dealing with it was to try and carry on as normal and try and forget what had happened.

Adam clearly preferred to accept the responsibility for his inept performances, but eventually agreed that the tragedy must have had an impact, if not consciously then subconsciously. With two years remaining on his contract at [Club x], Adam found himself being used as a regular substitute and again, despite his relative security began to question his long-term future at [Club x].

A12: Leaving [Club x]

While Adam was frustrated at not playing first team football at [Club x], he explained how his contentment away from the club had a major impact on his overall happiness. Although [Club x] had informed him of their desire to 'get [him] off the wage bill' due to his lucrative deal, Adam's contractual security meant that essentially, the decision to leave the club would be his own rather than the club's. In this regard, Adam highlighted how his decision to move would be based on more than playing first team football. In a different scenario to [Club xi], Adam wanted to stay where he was happy and understood his happiness

in relation to the relationships he held with his teammates and their respective social lives. Here, Adam described the important role played by past, present and potential future teammates in any of his decision-making processes:

*I'll speak to the few lads that I know and keep in contact with to see if they know anybody who has played for that manager before and find out what he's like, how long they train for, do they run their b****cks off, do they get days off and all things like that. And then I'll weigh up my options based on what I've been able to find out from the people whose opinions I value.*

Adam was keen to stress the value he placed on other people's opinions. While Adam would consistently make his own decisions, they were never made entirely by *just* him. Here, Adam recognised the broader role played by others in his decision-making processes:

I would say that I don't make any decisions whatsoever solely by myself. I always talk to people whose opinions I value and get a different take on things...there's so much comparison that you do with every decision that you make and the majority of it will be down to how you compare your position to others.

While Adam's role at [Club x] continued to revolve around sporadic substitute appearances, he increasingly began to question his long-term survival. Adam's constant evaluation and re-evaluation of his position, not only at [Club x] but within professional football more generally began to look ever more precarious. Having spent the majority of the season as a substitute and with just over a year now remaining on his contract, Adam's vulnerability came to the fore. Here, Adam also questioned his physicality and shared some of his negative thoughts during this time:

I thought my legs had gone...I felt old and leggy, as though I couldn't get around the pitch like I used to and that was a weird feeling that obviously left me feeling vulnerable...I genuinely couldn't see myself playing for much longer in League Two.

With doubts about the longevity of his career circulating his mind, Adam was given the opportunity to sign on loan for League Two club, [Club xii] by a manager that had attempted to sign him on a number of occasions. The chance to play first team football, while maintaining elements of his happy social life proved a fruitful option for Adam; and one that he took. However, with the camaraderie of [Club x] fresh in his mind, Adam's first day on loan at [Club xii] was a different proposition, as Adam gleaned a negative impression of his new teammates:

*I walked in and said morning to everyone as you do and no f****r said hello to me...nobody had brought me any kit, nobody had made any effort to acknowledge me even being there, I thought it was a wind-up...without being big-headed, everyone knew me in the lower leagues and so when everyone grunted at me rather than saying anything or acknowledging me, it p*ssed me off.*

Following a successful goal-scoring spell in his month's loan, and having propelled [Club xii] towards the League Two play-offs, Adam was offered a two-year contract by the club. The decision whether to move house yet again was not made lightly. With the potential disruption to his children's school life also affecting his thought-processes, Adam evaluated the consequences of yet another move and appeared to return to his primary goal; survival:

I was panicking a little bit whether they'd [Adam's children] settle in their new school and whether it was the right thing to do after they'd seemed to make some good friends [while at Club x]...me and [Anna] spoke at length about the pro's and the con's but selfishly, I needed to make the decision that was right for myself and for my career in order to look after my family and eventually, [Anna] agreed.

In signing for [Club xii], Adam was grateful that he would continue as a professional footballer for a further two seasons. Adam was also cognisant of the positive role played by his [Club x] teammates during his spell at the club and, although to a lesser extent the part

played by their partners. While he recalled both the sadness and the collective intention to 'stay good friends' at the point of his departure from the club, Adam was realistic and forthright in the reasoning behind their failure to stay in contact. In this regard, Adam placed his departure from [Club x] into a wider context and evaluated the transitive nature of his friendships:

They're [friends] basically the network of people that I interact with while I'm at that place. If I move, then I build a new network of people who I interact with...that's just a never-ending process.

While Adam appeared candid in the disposable nature of friendships throughout his career, he was equally frank in his assessment of the relationships he held with managers. Here, and having never known if he would be play for them for weeks, for months, or for years, Adam 'found it hard to get too attached [to managers] in case things didn't work out or in case [he] wasn't with them for long'. Adam's relationship with the [Club xii] manager was no different. Having scored the goals that had catapulted [Club xii] into the League Two play-offs, Adam's despair of missing out on promotion was overshadowed by his disappointment surrounding the managers' departure, who left for a club in League One. In this respect, Adam now questioned his own security but made sense of his own disappointment in relation to his manager's success and the uncertain and short-term characteristics of professional football:

...I was questioning what would happen to me and how secure my position was now that he was leaving...but there is such a short window of opportunity in professional football that you've got to strike while the iron's hot...I was gutted [the manager] was leaving but to be fair, he deserved his move and I was pleased for him...anybody else would have done the same.

Adam's disappointment was fleeting, as the old assistant manager was promoted to first team manager, adding an element of continuity to his [Club xii] career. Furthermore, Adam recalled the conversation he first held with the newly appointed assistant manager that accentuated his enthusiasm:

I remember him [the newly appointed assistant manager] saying, 'look, I know you're 32 so I don't want you running here, there and everywhere, let the younger lads do all of that...just keep between the 18-yard lines and do your stuff in the box'...and that gave me such confidence and self-belief to know that they both rated me and they were looking after me.

Here, Adam evaluated the success of his transition in relation to a number of significant others. In this respect, Adam regarded the transfer to [Club xii] a success for footballing reasons when he said the following:

[Club xii] was a massive success from a footballing point of view...there was no comparison to being at [Club x] where I thought my legs had gone and I was past it...we were winning games whether we were playing well or not, I was scoring goals whether I played well or not, everything just seemed to fit into place...I was loving it and felt part of a good team.

Away from football, and for only the second time in his career, Adam had also built relationships with people that were outside of the professional football nexus. Having played poker at a local venue with [Lee], one of his [Club xii] teammates, Adam noted how he soon became involved with a group of regular poker players which led to other social activities:

...we [Adam and Lee] used to go and play poker together but through playing poker I built a network of friends that I used to socialise with, whether it was playing poker, having the odd drink or game of golf and that was good to have...don't get me wrong, it's not like I was out every night or anything like that but it was still nice to socialise with non-footballers for a change.

The above extract helps to explain why Adam regarded his transition to [Club xii] as a success. Not only was Adam happy with his footballing performances but he had also built up a network of friends that extended his social interactions. Given these observations, the relative success of his transition arguably gave him the platform to begin the next stage of his working life and enter the world of business.

A13: The Move into Business

Adam's [Club xii] career continued to progress smoothly throughout his two-year contract with the club. During this time, and despite feeling like 'an important member of the team', Adam became increasingly aware that his career was approaching the end. In this respect, Adam's thoughts turned to life after football and more specifically to what he could spend the next 30 years or so doing. Here, Adam expressed his desire to be his own boss and sourced the advice of his chairman at [Club xii] who was himself a successful businessman:

I spoke to the chairman at [Club xii] because he was a successful businessman and he gave some good advice about setting up my own business...I didn't know if I was being realistic or not but I wanted to be in control of my own working life ...he said if I was going to do it then just be brave and do it because I could talk about it forever and be forever wondering what if?

The chairman at [Club xii] wasn't the only person that Adam approached about his ideas, as Adam also spoke to a number of people, including ex-teammates and people involved in community coaching, as his first idea revolved around a football coaching company. After receiving positive feedback from a number of sources, Adam set up his own coaching academy within close proximity to [Club xii]. While dedicating three evenings a week to the

start-up of the business, Adam was amazed by the initial interest shown by the public, placing much of the attraction down to the fact he was well known around the area:

Because I was still playing, people in the town knew who I was and obviously knew that I played for [Club xii] so the interest was unbelievable...on the first day I started I had people queuing out of the door and I had to turn people away because it was so popular...I was over the moon.

Adam's transition into business was a categorical success. While interest in his coaching academy continued to grow, Adam also maintained his excellent run of form on the pitch and ended the season as [Club xii's] top goal scorer. However, having reached the end of his contract with another highly successful season under his belt, Adam's expectations of an extension to his contract were not as straightforward as he envisaged. Here, Adam recalled the moment he was called into a meeting with the chairman and chief executive of [Club xii] alongside the head of [Club xii's] Football in the Community programme; a meeting that left him stunned:

*The Football in the Community at [Club xii] weren't happy that I was doing so well [with my business] and were accusing me of taking money out of the football club because kids were coming to me and not them...they said that I needed to be sacked because I was already getting my wages from the club and that I was taking the p**s out of the club and stealing their business...I was gobsmacked.*

Despite escaping the sacking that the Football in the Community had suggested, Adam was offered a contract on the same money but on the proviso that he didn't continue to grow his business and that he informed the club of every detail of his business so that it didn't expand any further. Adam shared his dismay during this time and reflected on what had initially encouraged him to enter the world of business: 'I felt let down by the whole thing...not only that but it was actually the chairman [of Club xii] who had influenced my decision to set

it up [his business]'. Disappointed and dispirited by his contract offer, Adam refused to accept the terms and conditions and acknowledged the wider context of his dispute. Following two seasons of consistent performances that had seen him claim the top goal-scorer award, Adam recognised the outcry that would surround any potential departure:

I was in a very good position because the team were doing well, I was scoring goals and I knew there would be uproar if I left because the fans would have gone mad...and there was no way that I was going to give up my business for nothing. They maybe thought that because I was 33 I'd struggle for another year's contract somewhere but I thought they were trying to bully me.

Following his disappointing meeting with the club hierarchy, Adam again circulated his CV to clubs within commutable distance to where he lived to gauge his position. Adam noted how he 'just wanted to test the water and see if there was anybody else who might be interested...[he]was nearly 34 but [he]had nothing to lose'. Adam subsequently received a phone call from [Club xiii] in League Two and was offered a year's contract on more money. Here, Adam's decision was affected by a number of relationships. While his relationship with members of [Club xii] seemed to be in decline, Adam would be re-connected with former teammates of his at [Club xiii], with whom he shared positive relationships previously and who therefore played a role in his decision-making:

I knew a couple of the lads there [Club xiii] from other clubs and I knew that I would be travelling in with them because they lived not far from me...and that might not play a massively important role in your decision but it's nice to know that you've got a couple of people who you already know who will ease the bedding in process.

Adam informed the [Club xii] manager of his intent to sign for [Club xiii] and was met with a grovelling response. In what appeared to be an act of desperation, Adam was offered a role on the coaching staff for the following season but remained unmoved. Comparing the

success of his business against the potential success of a coaching role, Adam was unfazed by the manager's offer and proceeded to sign for [Club xiii]:

...being offered a coaching role didn't do anything for me...my business was flying, I was still going to be playing League Two football and I was going somewhere where I felt wanted...it was a no-brainer [the decision].

A14: The Transition out of Professional Football

Adam's transfer to [Club xiii] was his final move in professional football. Approaching 35 years of age, Adam's passion for the game diminished throughout that season. While playing the role of first reserve for the majority of the season, and while again feeling like a 'spare part', Adam questioned the role of football in his life. In this respect, Adam and his sister had set up an energy company aimed at lowering the price of energy for businesses which took on a salient role in his life. Adam's sister's previous experience in the energy industry proved a vital source of knowledge for Adam, as his excitement of setting up yet another business was not the random choice that it first appeared. Here, Adam noted how '[his] sister's knowledge of the [energy] industry was crucial and it was only because of her involvement that [he] got involved'. With his sister's business acumen driving the company forward, Adam revealed the moment he realised that his business was his priority, as during another routine appearance on the substitute's bench, Adam gave serious contemplation to his future:

I was 90% certain they [Club xiii] weren't going to offer me a new contract...I hadn't set the world alight, I was on fairly decent money and I was coming up to 35 years old...I sat there [on the subs bench] and I just thought to myself that I wouldn't be that bothered, and I'd actually be quite happy

for this to be my last season and for my career to be over. For the first time, I wasn't overly bothered about not playing and I couldn't care less if we won or lost. I was more bothered about how well the energy company was doing.

Adam and his sister's business energy company began to play *the* major role in Adam's working life, as his identity as professional footballer became of secondary importance. Similarly, less than three years since its formation, Adam sold his coaching academy, but only due to the escalating success of his energy company. The feelings that Adam shared regarding his coaching academy suggested the business had merely acted as a stop-gap:

...because me and my sister had set up the energy business company, I was able to sell my coaching academy business...if I'm being honest, I stopped enjoying coaching kids, that was the be all and end all...I wasn't enjoying it anymore and I no longer needed to do it because I had the energy business that was doing so well.

Despite the fact that Adam and his sister continued to drive the success of their business forward, his feelings surrounding his transition were not entirely positive. While his transition out of professional football was arguably a downright success, there were still elements of Adam's life that he struggled to adjust to. To this extent, Adam shared some of the challenges he faced during his new working life:

*I'd be sat behind my desk asking myself what I was doing...I used to just stop work for a few minutes and think that my job [as a businessman] was s**t. I used to feel important as a footballer because people would stop me in the street and ask me about the game on the weekend or want my autograph...nobody gave a s**t about me while I was sat in my office and that was tough to get my head around.*

Adam is able to reflect upon two polar opposites of his working life from a relational perspective. Chasing greater business for his energy company was and continues to be a

lonely existence which involves sitting behind a desk while being rebuffed by the majority of businesses that he contacts. Contrastingly, being part of a professional football club gave Adam a sense of importance, as his daily life involved countless interactions with a number of various stakeholders. Adam continues to understand much of his working life in relation to others and implied that he learned a lot while being a professional footballer:

I've learnt what a great life it is as a professional footballer. People look at you, even as lower league players, and give you enormous respect for what you do...but it's only when you come out of it [professional football] that you see the difference and you have to work harder to get people's respect or you have to do something to earn people's respect.

Throughout the interviews with Adam, we both became aware of the enormous number of people that have played various roles in his life to date. Some, Adam described as 'ships in the night' while others, he described as 'very good mates', yet they all affected his life in some way. Whether they have been teammates, girlfriends, managers, supporters or just friends, each and every name that Adam mentioned has a place in his own narrative of his life. In this respect, [Anna], [Oliver] and [Jacob] are three names that played a significant part in Adam's life but who are no longer involved. At the time of our first interview, Adam had recently finalised a divorce settlement with [Anna] and had no contact with [Oliver] or [Jacob]. Adam preferred to say as little about [Anna] as he possibly could which I respected. Clearly incensed by the financial implications of their divorce, Adam was 'absolutely gutted' with the decision and declared that he would now 'watch everything that [he earned] to make sure she [Anna] doesn't get another penny'. At the time of our final interview and some 14 months on, Adam still had no contact with [Oliver] and [Jacob] and had strong words for his two sons:

...I haven't spoken to either of them [Oliver or Jacob] for ages and to be honest, it doesn't bother me. Their Mum [Anna] has influenced their actions but they're old enough to make their own decisions...they're 16 and 14 now but the last time I saw them they got their money from me for Christmas and then they just cut me out...I kept ringing them, texting them, trying anything to meet up but they sent me back abusive texts. Listen, it hurts, of course it does but I've bent over backwards for those two and they've treated me like shit...there's only so much abuse I can take.

Adam later claimed that he had no intention of re-igniting his desire to spend time with [Oliver] and [Jacob]; something which, as a father of two myself I found hard to understand but further accentuated the idiosyncrasies of individual experience and the potentially monumental role played by significant 'others'.

Adam's most recent role as a businessman has seen him change his interactions on a daily basis. Adam made regular reference to monitoring what he says in order to maintain healthy relationships with business colleagues. In this respect, Adam feels unable to approach his interactions in the jovial manner that he once did in many a footballing environment. Using a recent business meeting as a prime example, Adam explained how he felt unable to distribute the banter that he was once renowned for, as this could have led to undesirable consequences with prospective networks:

*A bloke in a meeting last week said he reckoned he could get businesses cheaper waste suppliers for bins...he stood up and said that half of the bins being used now are rubbish and then said bum, bum! I was desperate to stand up and batter him for it in front of everyone but instead I just laughed aloud to make him feel better...he deserved to get slaughtered for it but I couldn't because I'd have lost a connection and other people in the room might have thought I was a bit of a d**k and I wouldn't have been able to network with those people further down the line...that's just the world that I'm in at the moment.*

Adam regards his business associates or indeed potential business partners as a valuable network of connections. In this regard, Adam told how he joined a local networking group in order to 'help grow [his] businesses and advertise what [he's] doing...and to build contacts with people who might have other useful contacts'. Here, Adam shared his one-dimensional evaluation of his networking group:

I go there once a week but I don't class any of them as friends because they're just serving a purpose...to grow my business. In fact, they organised a bowling event last week but I couldn't think of anything worse to be honest and so I didn't bother because they're not the kind of people that I socialise with...but hopefully they will help my business grow.

Adam has evaluated his friendships in a similar manner during both his footballing career and now into his working life. In his lifeworld, Adam is happy with a small network of connections and doesn't feel the need to expand beyond his close friends. In short, Adam's network of connections enables him to live the life that he so wishes:

I don't need a big network of people...I've got everything I need in my life...as long as I've got a couple of mates who I can go out for a drink with or a game of golf with, as long as I've got a missus who I get on really well with, as long as I've got people who I can speak to on a business level to do what I need to do then I'm happy...I only need a small network of people to be happy...I don't need to have fifty mates ringing me or texting to see how things are every day.

Furthermore, Adam also suggested that he felt in control of his friendships and that they suited his needs. Here, Adam continues to conduct his friendships on his own terms:

...if I want to lock myself away for a month or something then I will...I won't but I know that I haven't got to be ringing somebody every day or texting all of the time to stay mates with them...it's all on my terms and I can get in touch with people whenever I need to.

Being happy is something that Adam strives for moving forward. Having dedicated his life to both his professional football career and now business ventures, Adam displayed a cognisance of the dominant role played by his working life and acknowledged the importance of striking a balance between work and enjoyment in the future:

...what's it [life] all about? My goal now is to live my life and to enjoy my life...and that doesn't mean not working hard, because I did work hard and I still do work hard...but I need to enjoy it as well, there is no point working hard and earning well if you can't enjoy the benefits of that.

Adam appeared to learn a lot about his own happiness when reflecting on his previous marriage and his then long-term vision. Having spent the majority of his career saving and planning for his family's future, Adam's plans were effectively destroyed the moment he entered divorce proceedings, changing his whole outlook on life. While he never regarded himself as 'flash' or somebody who felt the need to display his wealth, Adam conveyed his financial approach to life in an intriguing way. Using a recent purchase as an explicit example, Adam identified how his thought-processes have changed following his divorce:

Before the divorce I saved and saved and then lost the lot! If I want something now, I'll go and get it...I'm not flash or anything but like I wanted a new TV and so I went and spent £700 on a new TV...before [the divorce] I would have spent £500 on a TV and put £200 away...I'd have had to justify to myself spending that much on a TV but now, I don't care...I want to live for the now and have enough money so that I can do nice things and go to nice places.

Although Adam displayed an air of disregard for his long-term future in his previous comment, he also spoke of a need to prepare for later life, just 'not as stringently as [he] used to'. Again, Adam made sense of his position in relation to others. Sadly, on this occasion Adam made sense of his approach to life in relation to a former teammate of his that had passed away suddenly:

*...s**t happens...[name of player] who was a good mate of mine at [Club xii]...he just died at 29 and I think like, he was 29 and I was a good mate of his, and I am now 39...you know, how much planning was he doing and then 'bang', he's gone...so it makes me think of things differently...not just that but there are so many instances where you get that little reminder that life's too short.*

Throughout the narrative of Adam's life, he has made sense of his position in relation to a number of 'others'. Adam also sees 'others' playing an important role when looking ahead to the rest of his life and more specifically to any future transitions that he is faced with. In this regard, Adam suggested that 'others' invariably play a significant role in any transition-related decision-making processes; something that he will continue to embrace:

I will approach any future transition in exactly the same way that I always have done...I'll assess what's important to me...I'll compare where I'm at at that moment in time with where I could potentially be...that could even be down to who I'll be with...I'll find out as much information as I possibly can about wherever the opportunity is, seek the opinions of people whose opinions I value and only then will I make a decision based on everything that I've seen and heard.

Appendix B: Jay's Story

B1: Learning his Trade

Recalling his early desire to 'be like [his] Dad', Jay followed in his father's footsteps and developed a love of football and, more specifically, the local professional football team. Having spent the majority of their childhoods kicking a ball around wherever they possibly could, Jay and one of his 'best mates', [Ben] earned places at the academies of neighbouring professional clubs that continued throughout their school years. However, Jay's boyhood dream was to earn his first step on the professional footballing ladder; a Youth Training Scholar (YTS) contract. In order to fulfil his dream, Joe's progression through the academy and into the Youth Team would depend on the thoughts and opinions of his coaches. With their decision finally made, and having already given out the usual eight YTS contracts, Jay received a phone call that changed the course of his fledgling career:

I got a phone call from my youth team manager one night saying they had decided to give out a ninth YTS contract and they had decided to give it to me...I cried, I was so happy...for the next two years I was going to play football for a living...I wasn't going to be earning massive money but that didn't matter.

Jay revealed how ecstatic he was upon signing his YTS contract, as he recalled 'a beaming smile that stayed with [him] for days'. Although, initially he would not have much to do with the first team squad, Jay had been given the opportunity to live the majority of schoolboy's dreams and play for a professional football team.

Upon signing his YTS contract, Jay was faced with the first major decision in his life; whether to live at home with his Mum and Dad throughout his YTS contract or move into club 'digs' with the rest of the players? Here, Jay's decision was affected by a number of

relationships. While his Mum and Dad were happy for Jay to do either, it was the opinions of his fellow youth team members that mostly struck a chord with Jay. Conversing with three YTS players in particular, Jay began to agree with [Russell], [Dean] and [Matthew's] sentiments that if they were going to commit their lives to playing football, being around people who were chasing the same dream as them would reduce the risk of any distractions and maintain their necessary dedication. While both options had positives and negatives, Jay was also impelled by his fear of 'missing out' on the whole group experience and becoming separated from the rest of the team. Looking back over his decision, Jay noted how his move into club 'digs' had served him well, despite the strict disciplinarian regime of his manager:

...you had to be in for quarter to ten and lights out for ten, every night...if you left a light on you were on pot duty for a week or if you left a door open...it was almost like being in an army camp really...you had to make your bed every morning, you had to be down for breakfast every single morning for eight o'clock...it was really regimented...but it gave us all a good grounding and made us appreciate what we had further down the line.

Jay also revealed how the YTS players quickly became accustomed to the hierarchical nature of the professional football environment and how, as first year scholars, they were collectively subjected to a number of 'initiations' that, in Jay's words, had 'brought them closer together':

Getting chucked in ice baths, getting stripped naked...boot room blackout was the one...where you used to go in the boot room and the lights used to go out and you'd get polish all over your face, brushes thrown at you...it was bad looking back but we all went through it together.

While Jay was building new friendships with his new teammates, the time spent with his 'best mates' dwindled throughout the season. Most notably, Jay became very close to three of the thirteen players who he shared the 'digs' with, [Russell], [Dean] and [Matthew],

as Jay told how they 'did everything together...[and] were probably four of the best in the group [first year YTS's]'. Although [Ben] had also signed YTS forms for the neighbouring professional football club, he continued to live at home with his Mum and Dad in order to maintain his blossoming relationship with his girlfriend. Jay appeared to judge much of the success of his first transition against the respective success of [Ben]. Jay explained how, in retrospect the decision that they had both made at the embryonic stages of their career had played a pivotal role in their respective success. Having opted for the easy decision of maintaining his home comforts, Jay told how [Ben] may have felt excluded to some extent, possibly not being able to 'fully experience the life of a YTS...the banter in the digs, the feeling part of a group all of the time'. Jay also explained how he and [Ben] appeared to distance themselves from each other, as a result of their new found club rivalry. Not only were Jay and [Ben] seeing less and less of each other away from football but when they saw each other in a footballing environment, they ignored each other. In what seemed a mutual decision, Jay and [Ben] froze each other out of their lives, as the following extract demonstrated:

Every day we had to walk over the bridge to training and had to walk past them [Ben's team]...so there we are, my best mate who I had grown up with at school who is with his ten [name of club] boys and I am with my ten [Club 1] boys and we used to just walk past each other and not even talk to each other... it was the weirdest thing, we just used to walk past each other and not even speak...probably half out of shyness because we were both YTS's but also, we were now rivals...you know, we wanted to be better than them with everything.

Jay appeared to understand much of his first transitional experience in football in relation to [Ben]. Although delighted at becoming a YTS player and despite their tendency to win the rival encounters whenever they played, part of Jay was also jealous of [Ben] and

jealous of the things that he had. By his own admission, Jay felt financially inferior to [Ben] and wanted the extra wages and the accompanying niceties:

...because they [Ben's team] were on the young professional scheme they were straight on to £200 first year and £250 second year whereas we were £42.50 first year and £47.50 second year...they were all in their nice kit, their trendy gear, all driving round in their Vauxhall Tigras which were the car of the time and our kit was terrible...1980's bumblebee tracksuits ...we were envious of them.

Having somewhat scraped his way through his YTS days financially, Jay was desperate to earn a professional contract for both footballing and financial reasons and dedicated the majority of his spare time preparing for upcoming matches; something that he was soon rewarded for. Looking back over his transitional experience into football, Jay made specific reference to the bravery of his decision to move away from his home comforts which is something that Jay may need when making future transitional decisions. Now a successful businessman, but also husband and father, Jay's ability to make future brave transitional decisions will now be affected by his changing identity and his family's needs. Speaking about the potential to set up offices around the world for his now booming business, Jay commented on a strong urge to consider any opportunities that may arise, but was equally pragmatic about the restricted nature of his future bravery:

...any decision in the future will be driven by my family...I could progress to managing director or set up my own business but that could jeopardise the time I spend with my family or risk our long-term future. Do I want to set up offices in [Dubai] or would that mean that I would see very little of my family?...I'd love to go to [Dubai] but these are all going to be very challenging decisions to make...but I've shown in the past that I'm not afraid to make brave decisions...but now my bravery will be dictated by the risk of the decision to my family's well-being.

Jay's current understanding of the brave nature of his transition into professional football has led him to re-appraise the extent to which he will be able to replicate such bravery in the future. As a result of changing priorities and the respective importance of his family's well-being, replicating the bravery of his early career decisions in any future transitional decisions may indeed be extremely difficult for Jay.

B2: Turning 'Pro'

Jay described his decision to sign his first professional contract as a 'no-brainer' and inferred that it was 'more of a formality than a decision'. After a spate of consistent performances in the youth team and reserves, Jay was the first YTS to be offered a professional contract at [Club 1] and now became the one who other players were jealous of. Having travelled with the first team on a number of occasions, Jay was labelled as being 'busy' by members of his YTS teammates and regularly told to 'get out of the manager's arse' in apparent bouts of jealousy. As he began to spend more time with the first team and less with the scholars, Jay noted how his interaction with the YTS's became strained. While [Russell], [Dean] and [Matthew] were delighted that he'd been offered a professional contract, the majority of the team failed to acknowledge his achievements and appeared to distance themselves from him which Jay saw as a display of jealousy. Although Jay seemed unaffected by his teammates' apparent change in attitude towards him, he was affected by the 'banter' he received from the first teamers who he now shared a dressing room with; but in a positive way. Recalling a conversation held with his youth team manager at the time, Jay explained how the first team 'banter' enhanced his self-efficacy:

I would have done anything they said or taken whatever piss-taking they threw my way. I just loved being around them...these were guys that I looked up to because of what they'd done in the game and I couldn't believe I was actually training with them...I was star struck, if you like...I remember my youth team manager saying to me very early on...he said they must think something of you if they take the piss out of you all of the time...he said if they didn't like me or rate me then they just wouldn't talk to me.

Despite his increased self-confidence, Jay was constantly aware of how he was being perceived by the first team and appeared to understand much of his identity in respect of his interactions with them. Cognisant of the first team squad's aversion to 'big time Charlie's', Jay told how this affected his actions on a daily basis:

...subconsciously, I'd always be wary of what I was saying or doing and making sure that I wasn't coming across that way ['big time'] because I knew that if I did I'd get some really harsh words thrown my way...looking back, I don't think I could ever totally be myself...you probably never are yourself 100% because you are either wanting to impress your teammates or not piss them off all of the time...I suppose I just wanted to be somebody who they'd all think was a decent lad and that's what I tried to be.

Although Jay had fulfilled his boyhood dream of being a professional footballer, there were parts of his early career that panned out differently to how he had envisaged. Again, somewhat chasing the approval of his teammates, Jay relinquished his dream and vision of driving a sporty BMW for the more reserved Ford Fiesta. While I sensed an obvious desire from Jay to purchase his dream car at that point in his life, ultimately, yet another decision was made with his teammates at the forefront of his mind:

...I didn't save up and get one [a BMW] out of respect to the lads...I wanted to keep them on my side...I remember one of them saying 'fair play Jay...you've not gone down the 'big time' route that

most young lads would nowadays' and that meant a lot to me...I felt proud that I hadn't, even though I would have loved to roll up outside my mate's house in one.

The above extract demonstrated the difference in Jay's status when he was with his [Club 1] teammates and when he was with his 'mates'. In the changing rooms, and amongst players that had played hundreds of League games, including Premier League games, Jay appeared somewhat pressurised to play the role of the young professional, or the 'average Joe' as he termed it. However, and having seen 'big time' players castigated by the senior players at the club, Jay was equally desperate not to follow in their footsteps and would rather hide away in the background. Yet, away from the [Club 1] environment, Jay was seen as a 'local hero', or as somebody who was living everybody's boyhood dream of being a professional footballer. Jay told how the increased attention made him feel important and gave him a heightened self-confidence, especially around his friends. While out with his [Club 1] teammates, his thoughts of being a 'very small fish in a big pond' were insignificant, as he was now one of the players that local revellers would be staring at and whispering about when they walked by. Although Jay shared his excitement of being out with the other big name players at such a young age, it was clear where he felt most comfortable:

I used to love going out in my local town, either with my mates or with the [Club 1] team...but I much preferred going out with my mates because I knew I could always be myself and wasn't always trying to impress anybody or tread on egg shells to make sure that I didn't get on the wrong side of anybody.

Despite his revelations that he could 'never totally be [him]self' and that he was always trying to impress his teammates, Jay was also grateful for the part his teammates played in his early career decisions. Looking back, Jay noted how their guidance was a constant source of advice:

...having such an experienced dressing room had a massive impact on how I lived my life and the decisions I made...before I bought my apartment I had a chat with [name of player] who had half a million pound in his pension fund and who'd paid his mortgage off by the time he was 28, and he just told me that cars were a luxury whereas properties were investments...their advice was invaluable really and they respected the decisions I made.

While Jay saw his [Club 1] teammates as a constant source of advice, his Mum and Dad were also omnipresent throughout any decisions he made. Averse to renting property, Jay's Dad ensured that Jay's thoughts were geared towards buying his first property and even helped him with his deposit. In this regard, Jay's decision to buy his apartment was also heavily influenced by his Dad, who saw renting as 'dead money' and his desire for Jay to use his apartment as an investment.

Having now cemented his place in the first team, Jay spoke of the relatively smooth transition he'd made into professional football and how his teammates were a vital part of his personal success for the aforementioned reasons. Whether it was being eased in with banter or being advised how to look after his finances, Jay clearly respected the positive outlook of the senior professionals at the club and utilised their help and advice whenever possible. Reflecting on how helpful the senior players at [Club 1] had been with him, Jay recognised how much they had eased his bedding in process. In this regard, Jay's current understanding of his transition into the first team environment at [Club 1] has a big influence on his future transitional decisions, if not his daily life:

I like to be surrounded by positive people and at [Club 1] the senior pro's were really positive with me which was a massive help...they were always there for me. When I'm interviewing candidates now, I instantly try and get a vibe of their outlook on life and how positive they are...if they are

keen to do well and enthusiastic about the post then that's half the battle...and then I can maybe help them through their transition into the job like the senior pro's [at Club 1] did with me.

B3: Leaving [Club 1]

Jay laid the blame of his [Club 1] departure on something entirely out of his own hands; bad luck. Having received an unexpected call by an agent, Jay shared his Dad's opinion that those who had an agent were 'going to make it big' and therefore agreed that he could look after Jay's contracts. Despite being offered a new two-year deal by the club and in light of his recent appearances for Wales Under-21's, with the advice and guidance of his newly-appointed agent Jay began to chase a more lucrative deal. Unfortunately for Jay, during this time of negotiation the club were placed into administration and unable to sign any players on new contracts. As a result, the deal was agreed on the proviso of the club exiting administration, although Jay revealed how this agreement was 'not worth the paper it was written on'. Having been taken over by a consortium of fans, [Club 1] sacked the manager and Jay's position at the club grew ever more precarious due to his recent spate of injuries:

In such a short space of time, my [Club 1] career had nosedived...I'd gone from being on the fringe of signing a new and much improved two-year deal for a manager and club that I loved to being offered a reduced six-month contract and all because the club had gone into administration and the manager was sacked...but football is like that, everything is so unpredictable and uncertain...but I now had an offer from an unknown manager and club that I now resented...I just couldn't bring myself to sign it.

Jay began to evaluate his place in the team and his future prospects at the club against the words of the new manager. Here, Jay described how he felt the new manager's welcome speech had been directed his way, almost as a personal vendetta. By informing the players

that it didn't matter how long they'd been at the club or what they'd done in the past and that from now on everybody was starting from scratch, Jay felt that everything that he had worked so hard to achieve at the club and the positive relationships that he had built up over a sustained period of time were all in vain. While also rehabilitating from his latest knee injury at the time of the new manager's arrival, Jay was left to anxiously consider his future at the club with echoes of the new manager's ruthless approach ringing around his head. By his own admission, the decision to return from injury was majorly affected by his relationship with the new manager whereby he returned 'nowhere near fit', but 'because [he] didn't want him [the new manager] questioning [his] commitment'.

Reflecting back over his career and the reasons behind his departure from [Club 1] in particular, Jay made reference to the biggest mistake of his career. At the time of the contract offer, Jay's thoughts were orchestrated around the thoughts and opinions of a number of other people; from the kit man and senior players at [Club 1] to his friends in his local town. While Jay was relatively satisfied with the offer, it seemed as though everybody else thought he was worth more and questioned his ability to stand up for himself:

...the kitman said the club were taking the piss with their [Club 1's] offer...[name of senior player] said that I deserved more and could get more out of them [Club 1]...my agent was saying that I needed to get a better deal and my mates were saying that I needed to grow some bollocks and ask for more because there were players earning three or four times that...I began to agree with everyone that I was worth more and maybe I did need to stand up for myself.

With the benefit of hindsight, Jay reflected on his decision to chase a more lucrative offer and had no doubt that it was the one thing that he'd have changed in his career and subsequently reflected on what the consequences may have been:

When I was offered the two-year contract from [Club 1] in League One, I'd have signed the bloody thing instead of chasing an extra fifty quid a week...and then I might have spent the rest of my career in League One or at least in the Football League...that is the standout mistake in my football career...I would have probably had a better football career if I'd have signed that contract.

However, I got the sense that Jay had also learned a great deal about the persuasive influence of others during this transition and from that point onwards, became more assertive as a person when making transitional decisions. Looking ahead to future transitional decisions, Jay appears to have developed an increased self-confidence that he intends to make the most of:

I still consult the important people in my life like my wife, my Dad or my Mum but I think over time, I've become much more decisive as a person and I don't know if that's a confidence thing but now, I'm far more self-assured and I'll happily back my decision to be the right one instead of looking for support from everybody.

Following Jay's first game back from his latest injury at [Club 1], his decision to leave the club was ultimately made by the manager who called him into his office and informed him of his intention to cancel his now month-to-month contract the following month. This was a time that Jay remembered vividly:

My world came crumbling down...it was all I'd ever known and all that I'd ever wanted to do...to have that taken away was devastating. I'd never been told that I wasn't good enough or that I wasn't wanted before...not only that but I felt 'at home' at [Club 1]...you know, I enjoyed my routine morning conversation with the secretary or the regular banter with the groundsman...I got into my car, drove around the corner and cried my eyes out...I was heartbroken.

Although Jay continued to train with [Club 1], and before his agent 'went missing for a month', Jay took part in a trial game at a League Two club on the advice of his agent. Having also been alerted to the interest of a club struggling at the bottom of League Two by his

manager, Jay felt the game was a great chance to 'find something better'. Reflecting on this moment, Jay was quick to stress the naivety of his thought process, and his decision to 'turn [his] nose up at the offer' proved a costly one, as the club's interest dwindled following his trial game. Jay's concerns of finding himself in a poor team, or indeed overriding fear of being 'left on the scrapheap' and 'without a club' had also suppressed his fitness concerns. That single trial game appeared to dampen the interest of a number of potential suitors, as Jay's injury, which had admittedly left him feeling 'way off the pace' played an instrumental role in his ineffective performance. Similarly, Jay continued to explain the negative impact of being surrounded by players he didn't know:

...for the first time in my career, I was lost on the football pitch...I was used to knowing everybody's name, their strengths and weaknesses and generally feeling comfortable around everybody and here I was, running around in the middle of the pitch and not knowing a single person on either team...and I knew people were here to watch me...I must have looked like a lost little boy.

The trial game at the League Two club was the first of many for Jay. When asked to describe his feelings during this challenging time in his life, Jay reiterated the importance he placed on having a sense of belonging. As the following extract reveals, Jay understood his identity in relation to his fellow triallists and his previous experiences:

Walking into changing room after changing room where you don't know anybody was horrendous...the looks you get, the doubts that enter your mind...you're just sitting there in silence as everybody eyes up the competition...you feel so lonely.

Jay clearly felt more comfortable in familiar surroundings and around people he knew and respected. However, away from football Jay was facing up to far more serious relationship concerns, as he was still coming to terms with his Mum and Dad's split, following his Dad's extra-marital affair. Being the oldest of three brothers, Jay felt partly responsible for

their welfare and did everything he could to help guide both his Mum and brothers through their ordeal. While Jay 'hated [his] Dad for what he'd done', he explained how his Mum and Dad's split had a greater effect on his younger brother, who was sitting his GCSE's at the time. While he noted how he would always give his younger brother advice whenever he felt necessary, Jay regarded this as a pivotal time in his life and therefore made a concerted effort to convince him to continue his studies. Jay looks back at that period of his and his brothers' lives with pride at their collective ability to deal with the situation. As Jay explained, it could have easily provided his brothers with an opportunity to 'go off the rails' but instead they stuck together and helped each other and their Mum through an extremely challenging time. Looking forward, Jay noted how the closeness of his relationship with all of his family members will be a vital source of comfort for him during any challenging life events or difficult transitions in the future.

Despite now maintaining healthy relationships with both his Mum and his Dad, Jay later revealed how the fallout from their divorce will have a lasting effect on all of his family. For example, Jay explained how he was constantly 'on-edge' about how his Mum would react when preparing and making decisions about his own wedding. While both of his parents played an equally important part on his special day, Jay referred to the 'awkward atmosphere' that would now dominate any future family events.

B4: Moving on

Following a two-month period of trials at several League Two and Conference Premier clubs Jay played two league games for a team in the Conference North after being contacted

by their manager. Disillusioned and disappointed with the lack of offers from Football League clubs, Jay's desire to 'get back out on the pitch' was as strong as his resistance to 'eat into [his dwindling] savings'. Jay reflected on the bravery and respective success of his decision to drop to such a low level of football, as his outstanding performances earned him an offer from [Club 2] for the rest of the season. However, Jay was presented with a dilemma. Having trained with [Club 2] and spoken at length about signing the contract the following day, Jay was contacted by the manager of a League One club and offered a week's trial. Here, Jay based his decision to sign for [Club 2] on his own previous experiences rather than the help and advice of anybody else. Despite the attractive lure of a potential return to League One, Jay's previous trialling experiences had a significant impact on his thought processes:

...if I'd have had the chance [to go on trial] in the first week of being released from [Club 1], then I'd have taken a chance and gone on trial at the League One club...but knowing what I knew, you know, the unpredictability and uncertainty of professional football and feeling like you're begging to be offered a deal, I had to take the concrete offer and make sure that I had some money coming in again...I was over the moon to be honest and couldn't wait to get started.

Following a number of outstanding early performances that had earned him the 'player of the month' award, Jay soon settled into his new surroundings and instantly warmed to his new teammates. While the move was a 'step-down' from a footballing point of view and his subsequent [Club 2] career was littered with injuries which caused much distress and concern, Jay looks back over this period in his life with great satisfaction and judged the success of his transition from a social perspective. In his own words, Jay described how:

In terms of my life and what I learned from that particular move, it was extremely successful...for me to move away from home and stand on my own two feet gave me my own independence which was really liberating...it was as though I'd moved away from this comfortable bubble-like

environment where I'd known everybody since I was nine years old and lived so close to my Mum and Dad and into the big wide world.

In the early stages of his [Club 2] career, Jay used his favourable relationship with the club's commercial manager to his advantage, and his contracted hotel expenses were soon changed to monthly rent for a nearby apartment, giving him the freedom he'd desired. Disillusioned with the two-hour drive back and forth to his Mum's, which appeared to be having an adverse effect on his fitness, Jay spent more time than ever away from home but maintained his positive relationships with his family and friends. Although less frequently, Jay ensured that he returned home whenever possible for nights out with his friends or simply to spend time with his family. Jay's home visits gave him an enormous sense of fulfilment, as his Mum and Dad would share their pride in his ability to take ownership of his life decisions. Here, Jay used the opinions and words of others to evaluate the success of his transition to [Club 2]. For example, Jay explained how a loving cuddle from his Mum or comment from his Dad: 'you know...I'm proud of what you're doing, son', would give him extra belief and self-confidence upon his return, as Jay regarded this as their way of telling him that he was succeeding. Similarly, whenever Jay had been awarded the 'star man' in the newspaper that they'd read, his friends would text or ring him to share their delight. Jay described how these texts or calls were a reminder that people back home were still paying attention to his career and still recognising the apparent success of his move which he found rewarding.

Looking back over his transition to [Club 2], Jay spoke fondly of his social improvements and how [Geoff], the [Club 2] manager had played a pivotal role in 'bringing [him] out of [his] shell'. Having to regularly stand up in front of the whole team and talk about the previous game gave Jay an enormous boost from a confidence point of view. Although daunted by the

experience initially, Jay reflects upon his [Club 2] transition and notes how it stands him in good stead for the future:

At first I hated standing up in front of the team [Club 2]...but the more I did it, the less daunting it was and the more confident I became. Now, I wouldn't bat an eye lid at speaking in front of a group or going for an interview or starting a new job...I'd like to think I've developed as a person from that move and [Geoff] has played a big part in that.

B5: Moving on Again

Jay's two-year spell at [Club 2] came to an end for a number of reasons. Firstly, Jay was dejected by the club's decision to cancel the rent for his apartment and place a number of the first team squad in a 'club house'. While it made financial sense from the club's perspective, it did little for Jay's self-esteem, as he questioned his value to the club:

I'd been staying in my own flat when things were going good...but then when I'd been injured for a while and I was coming to the end of my contract, I was somewhat forced into living in a shitty little bedroom in a house with a handful of other players...I definitely felt like the club were trying to tell me something, 100%.

This negativity escalated when the manager's rumoured attempts to sign another player in his position filtered through the changing room and Jay began to contemplate life away from [Club 2]. However, during what was already a challenging time for Jay, he received some sad news that put his problems into perspective. Within the space of a week, Jay lost his close uncle and great uncle who had both been integral parts of their close-knit family. Jay recalled how he used to visit them both in [name of city] three or four times a year and would

spend two memorable weeks there during each summer. Their respective deaths had severe implications for Jay's next performance:

I remember we had [name of club] in the FA Trophy and I can remember just floating around the pitch thinking to myself, 'what is happening here'? My head was all over the place and I was thinking about anything apart from the game...it was like an outer-body experience where I just couldn't focus on the game...I was feeling sorry for myself.

Jay further explained how: 'going to the funerals and meeting up with everybody kind of highlighted the fact that football is important to [him] but not as important as [his] family'. The death of his uncle and great uncle clearly affected Jay's approach to his football and in a big way., Jay told of his intention to share any future personal challenges with family members, friends or colleagues in order to more openly seek the solace he'd craved and that 'talking about things rather than bottling everything up may help [him] in the future'.

Following his terrible news, Jay was contacted by a former teammate of his who was now manager of [Club 3] in the Conference Premier, and who were based within commuting distance of his relatives in South Wales. Jay's relationship with his auntie and cousin had a major impact on his decision and was something that he found appealing on two accounts:

There was definitely part of me, and a big part that liked the sound of being there for them after their loss, if you like. Not only that, but because I'd agreed to take a bit of a cut financially to go there [Club 3], not having to pay a hefty mortgage or rent was a massive financial help for me.

Not only was the opportunity to 'be there' for his relatives a major attraction for Jay, but he also felt wanted again. During the later stages of his [Club 2] career, Jay made regular reference to feeling unwanted and unappreciated. Due to his injuries and regular omission from the starting eleven, Jay recalled how when he wasn't playing, there was a 'kind of

numbness...where [he] wasn't bothered if they won or lost because [he] never felt part of it anyway'. The phone call from the [Club 3] manager instantly re-ignited Jay's feelings of being wanted, something Jay remembered vividly. Having trained with the 'bombed squad' again, as he termed it (the players who were not involved in the starting eleven), Jay recalled how his planned afternoon of feeling sorry for himself in his bedroom didn't last long:

I was so pissed off...I'd had my flat taken away from me, my place in the team taken away from me and all of my enthusiasm had just drained away...I just laid on my bed, lifeless...thinking how everything was going wrong or where I'd end up next...but just as I nodded off, he [Club 3 manager] rang and changed everything...to hear somebody tell you how much they want you and how important they think you could be is such a great feeling...it was though my body had been all scrunched up and feeling sorry for itself but that phone call opened it out again.

It wasn't long before Jay acted upon his desire to feel wanted again and secured his transfer to [Club 3]. While his decision-making process was clearly affected by his deteriorating relationship with the [Club 2] manager and his urge to 'be there' for his relatives, Jay also began to judge the success of his transition against his new surroundings and his new teammates. Despite having the comfort of knowing the manager from his playing days and being able to stay with his nearby relatives, Jay very quickly questioned whether he'd made the right decision and more worryingly, whether he could actually put up with it. Jay shared his thoughts during this difficult transition and appeared to evaluate the relative success of his transition on materialistic things:

...they [Club 3] were still playing at their old ground so the training facilities were horrible and I found it quite difficult...I'd think back to the facilities at [Club1] or [Club 2] and ask myself what had gone wrong or why I was now playing at a place like this...everything was a lot less professional...you know, lads were rushing into training late and turning up in any kind of shit training kit they wanted...the standard of everything was generally a little poorer...the facilities,

the quality of players, the lads didn't have a pot to piss in and so the cars were like rust buckets, there were no designer clothes...I got the impression that everyone was skint.

Although Jay immediately questioned the success of his decision based upon the apparent drop in standard of everything from players to facilities and valuables, he also understood his transition through people's reactions to his addition to the squad. While he had added an element of quality from a footballing perspective, Jay was now also somebody who his new teammates looked up to from a financial point of view. As Jay reeled off a number of quotes from his new teammates, such as 'of course he'll pay his fine, he'll just sell one of houses', I sensed that Jay enjoyed being regarded as the wealthy one and can see how this increased his self-esteem. Comparing his status in the changing rooms at [Club 3] to his spells at [Club 1] and [Club 2], Jay appeared to enjoy his new status when he made the following point:

I quite liked the fact that I was now the one that everyone kind of looked up to and wanted to have the things that I had...you know, the property rented out, the decent car, the nice clothes...everyone thought I was being paid a fortune and to them it probably was but, even though I saw everything as a big step down, they made me feel good about myself.

Having staved off relegation for the remainder of the season, Jay eagerly awaited the rest of his [Club 3] career while developing a number of positive relationships with his teammates, and began to regard the move as much more of a success. However, four games into the new season, and coinciding with his spell on the side lines through injury, Jay's manager was sacked following a dreadful start to the season. Jay's feelings of déjà vu heightened his sense of anxiety as the new manager instantly made his feelings known. Upon his arrival, the new manager, [Ian] informed Jay that he saw him as a third choice central

midfielder, due to his preference for more technically gifted players and that Jay would have to alter his perception of him as a player:

The manager [at Club 3] getting sacked threw everything up in the air...but [Ian] came in and was sound with me...he just said that he liked the other two central midfielders more because they were the type of players he preferred...you know, comfortable on the ball, skilful, good range of passing...he just said that he saw me more as a workhorse and wanted me to concentrate more on developing my technical attributes...it wasn't a particularly nice thing to hear but I didn't want to ruin our relationship so early on so I just agreed with him to save any hassle.

While Jay agreed with [Ian's] thoughts to some extent, he set about changing [Ian's] perceptions of him as a player. Being regarded as the third choice midfielder at [Club 3] was something that Jay had never envisaged and appeared to 'hit home' with where his career was heading. With his exit from [Club 1] at the forefront of his mind, Jay regarded his new manager's words as a personal challenge and developed an apparent hunger to succeed. More specifically, Jay's intention to 'prove him wrong' appeared to drive his performances to the next level and acted as a much needed wake-up call. Here, Jay began to contemplate life away from [Club 3] and saw it as a process of realization whereby he could find himself without a club:

If I wasn't careful, I was going to find myself being released from [Club 3]...released from [Club 3]!...that's when it hit home that I needed to pull my finger out...maybe I had been in a comfort zone again and hadn't been pushing myself like I should have been doing.

While Jay spoke honestly about his lack of 'pushing [him]self', I couldn't help but relate his 'comfort zone' to his new relationship. Having been to former YTS teammate, [Matthew's] wedding the previous summer, Jay had fallen in love with an American girl that became a big part of his life. Despite their obvious love for each other, they had to spend their lives

thousands of miles apart, as [Eva] continued to work in Miami. Before long, [Eva] accepted a new International role to increase her visits to England but this also failed to materialise. As time progressed, and their relationship maintained its solidity, [Eva] agreed to quit her job and move over to England to be with Jay. When [Eva] eventually came over to England, Jay was living with one of his teammates in a house that he'd recently bought with his apartment equity. As their relationship progressed, and as [Eva's] search for a job continued unsuccessfully, Jay couldn't hide his increasing frustrations, which he openly shared:

*...she [Eva] came over with the intention of getting a job but just sat at home on Facebook and Myspace all day or watching the Kardashians all day and it used to really piss me off...she wasn't paying anything towards any of the bills or anything and I know I was only paying half of the rent but it bugged me that her parents were multi-millionaires and she wasn't making any contribution...her Dad's a millionaire, her step-Dad's a multi-millionaire and this rich kid is sat in my place for f*ck all...and we were still in a decent enough relationship but it just started to grate on me.*

While Jay expressed his frustrations with [Eva's] failed attempts to source employment, he was equally praiseworthy for the impact she had in his life. Following their instant attraction to each other, their relationship continued to grow, to the point where [Eva] had a major input into Jay's life decisions, such as encouraging Jay to become a student. Having also met [Eva's] family early in their relationship, Jay also talked cogently about his increased self-confidence:

I definitely became more confident when I was with [Eva]...she loved me for who I was and even when we went over to meet all of her family, they all loved me as well...they loved my personality, they loved my enthusiasm and that gave me such confidence.

Jay was clearly happy during this period in his life. During this time, Jay was also called into the manager's office and was made club captain, much to his delight. Jay recalled how he was 'privileged to have been given such an important role at the club...[and how it was] something that gave [him] enormous pride'. However, while he was happy with being club captain for [Club 3] and being one of the better players in the team, he was also realistic in his future aspirations, as the following comment suggested:

...the dream was never going to happen...you know, I was never going to be playing in the Premier League or anything and if I was lucky I might have played in a league or two above but the money wouldn't have been an astronomical rise or anything so I started to think about life after football.

Here, Jay revealed the major impact that [Eva] had in his life and how she had played a pivotal role in his thought processes by extending his previously short-term vision of the future. Not only was [Eva] having a significant influence in Jay's decisions, but her family also affected Jay's introspection:

In America, it's almost unheard of to not have a degree and so I felt as though I was being frowned upon by her family...they wouldn't say anything nasty or anything but their take on life definitely played a part in my decisions...I didn't feel any less of a person for not having a degree but I definitely bought into their way of thinking and the benefits of having one...you know, the better job options and the higher potential earnings...seeing how successful they'd been gave me inspiration I suppose.

With [Eva's] family ethos driving his decision, Jay enrolled at the University of [name of city] to do a part-time business management degree and would now dedicate the hours that he previously spent 'lounging around in an afternoon' to studying. Jay's new student identity had also questioned the value of his now sporadic visits back home. When asked about the maintenance of his childhood friendships, Jay was appreciative of the changing circumstances

and explained how each of them had continued on their separate paths in life which affected his decision whether to return home for the weekend:

...whereas I used to go home and go out with my two good mates, one of them was now married, the other one hardly went out anymore so going home to sit in a living room with my mate and his missus was less appealing than going home and going for a night out with my mates...it was a shame that we saw very little of each other anymore...but that's life...time moves on.

Looking back on the fizzling out of his long-term friendships, Jay appeared unaffected by their demise in an apparent re-evaluation of their friendships. Over time, they had turned from 'best mates' into 'old best mates' merely through their divergent life paths. Jay's acceptance that 'time moves on' was further evidenced through the most current update of his schoolboy friendships. Although Jay had re-ignited their friendship to some extent later on in his career, when he moved on loan to [Club 6], their relationship never returned to its former solidity. While [Robbie] attended his wedding day somewhat reluctantly, and despite being a 'rubbish usher' as Jay coined it, Jay informed me that he had made an early exit after the wedding speeches, in an apparent protest of his children being uninvited. Having not been invited to his stag do by Jay's brothers, Jay also told how [Jamie] refused his wedding invitation, leaving him a derogatory voicemail in the process. Having interviewed Jay seven months after his wedding day and with no further contact with [Ben] or [Jamie] since that day, Jay appeared to mock their respective status' when he made the following comment:

Without sounding stuck up or anything, the people that live in [name of town] will always live in [name of town] and that maybe shows that I've moved on a little bit from that...I was never going to live the whole of my life there whereas those two will probably be in the same job and still be there for the rest of their lives.

When asked what it would have meant for him to remain in [name of town] for the rest of his own life, Jay found it difficult to share his thoughts but I sensed a feeling of underachievement or a lack of ambition; as though, without wanting to degrade the people of [name of town], he felt superior to them in some shape or form. I sensed that Jay was all too aware that his family still lived in [name of town] and didn't want to do them a disservice throughout the interviews. However, Jay was less secretive about his feelings of [Club 3] and what it was that led to his eventual departure from the club.

B6: Moving on up

During his two year stay at [Club 3], Jay had become 'best mates' with two of his teammates. Also during this time, Jay had purchased a house near to the [Club 3] training ground as another investment. While he rented a room out to [Dan], [Jack] lived with his wife, but within close proximity. Jay told how, following an 'average' season at [Club 3], [Jack] clinched a transfer to a 'massive club' in the same league, and how he was astounded at how the move had materialised. Here, Jay appeared to make sense of his own position in relation to [Jack's] and emphasised his envy when he evaluated [Jack's] qualities:

[Jack] had done alright but he wasn't outstanding or anything...you know, he was a full-back so he did what every full-back in the league did...a steady seven out of ten every game without pulling up any trees.

When informed of the integral role played by [Jack's] agent in the transfer, Jay quickly arranged for the agent to look after his own career and set his heart on a similar move. Jack's move had clearly impacted upon Jay's aspirations, and he began to re-evaluate his own position, as he poignantly described:

I loved playing for [the manager] but [Club 3] were always going to be [Club 3]...you know, they sound like a pub team, the players were never going to suddenly turn into promotion contenders and I suppose I wanted to get back to something bigger and better as well.

Not only was Jay envious of [Jack's] move, but [Eva] also became envious of his synonymous lifestyle. While visiting [Jack] and his wife on several occasions, [Eva] admired the cosmopolitan feel to the area where [Jack] and his wife lived and was awestruck by the beauty of the neighbouring marina:

We'd [Jay and Eva] been during the summer when the sun was out and all the yachts looked amazing in the marina...[Eva] fell in love with the place...she kept going on about how much she'd love to live there and how happy we could be.

With the season's end fast approaching, Jay was offered a new contract by [Club 3] but they were unable to stretch to the two-year contract that Jay coveted for 'a bit of financial stability'. During this time, Jay confessed to an inner hope of something more lucrative materialising, through the help and hard work of his agent. Secretly, Jay was hoping that his agent could maintain his links with the club [Jack] had recently signed for and convince the club of Jay's similar ability. With two contract offers on the table; one from [Club 3] and another financially attractive, two-year offer from a team in the same league, Jay and [Eva] travelled to America for their holiday and thrashed out their decision. Here, Jay's decision was affected by more than just [Eva]. Jay recalled how [Eva's] family again played a part in their decision-making, with her Dad providing a financial breakdown of both offers while providing an inquisition into the positives and negatives of each:

He [Eva's Dad] kept saying that financially we were better off with the offer from the other team but kept asking how stable the club was and how likely were we to get paid on time all of the time?

Not only that but he [Eva's Dad] kept reminding me how comfortable I was at [Club 3] and how well I got on with all of the players...that wasn't guaranteed if I moved on and he really helped me weigh everything up.

As their financial doubts and security concerns continued, Jay and [Eva] were delivered the opportunity they'd secretly hoped for. After failing to achieve promotion to the Football League through the play-off final, [Club 4] made Jay a contract offer as, unbeknown to him, he became their first choice transfer target. Jay commented on his longer than usual decision-making process, but was quick to recognise his reward:

...looking back, I could have easily signed again for [Club 3] or jumped straight in and signed for [name of club] but I suppose because I was with [Eva] and we were making this decision together, we wanted to make the right decision and so took our time with it which paid off.

While they had prolonged their decision between the two previous contract offers, and with [Club 4] now in the frame, Jay's decision became easier on a number of fronts, as he explained:

...they were a massive club in the Conference that had just missed out on promotion, one of my best mates was already at the club, it was a two-year deal and my girlfriend loved the idea of living in that part of the country...I couldn't have been happier.

During their three-week spell making their decision, [Eva's] family had convinced her to do an MBA in [name of city], as a way of compromise. Jay and [Eva] agreed that this would enable them both to continue their respective careers while, despite being difficult, it would also ensure they saw enough of each other, as [Eva] could fly back to England most weekends. As [Eva's] weekly flights soon became fortnightly and then monthly, Jay was honest in his appraisal of the situation and explained how 'she [Eva] probably didn't realise how much she was going to enjoy it there [name of city]'; something that the following extract highlighted:

I remember surprising her while she was still in [name of city]...we had a weekend off at football and I thought I'd fly out and surprise her but it just didn't go well...she was almost like 'ah right, what are you doing here'...in my head I thought she'd be over the moon to see me and really appreciate the effort I'd gone to and she just didn't...she'd made plans and it just ended up being an awkward weekend so the writing was on the wall at that point...I was gutted really because I really thought we'd stay together.

Jay and [Eva] eventually agreed to calm their relationship and see where they stood once [Eva] finished her degree but as Jay explained, 'as always happens in that situation [they] moved on and got on with [their] lives'. Looking back at that moment, Jay spoke of the sadness that the split had caused, and how he spent the following days reminiscing over their time spent together. However, Jay was equally pleased with the direction his life has taken from that point onwards and commented how he may have never met his wife or be in the happy place he is now if he hadn't gone through the difficult split. The positivity that Jay referred to earlier in his narrative is clearly something that will follow him through the future:

There will be tough times ahead for me, there's no doubting that...but I will always try and remain optimistic...when I look back at everything I've done and everything that I've already been through, it's made me a stronger person than I was...and that's something I'll try and continue in the knowledge that it's making me stronger and I'll come out the other side [of the challenge].

B7: Going on Loan

In the short-term, and following his split from [Eva], Jay moved in with two of his teammates, [Sam] and [Will] who were sharing a rented house together and who had offered him their spare bedroom. Interestingly, Jay also reflected on a change in approach to his

studies now that [Eva] was no longer in his life. While Jay considered transferring his degree course to a local University, Jay, in his own words, took the easy option:

...if I'd have still been with [Eva] then she would have made sure that I carried on with my studies but instead, I suppose it was easy for me to procrastinate and look for the easy option and not do it...I knew I should have been doing it but I suppose without [Eva's] pushing, and with the backdrop of a two-year contract, I could put it off as much as I wanted and I did.

Although still focused on making his mark at [Club 4], Jay's first team opportunities were limited and eight months into his two-year contract, Jay was loaned out to [Club 5] for a month, to get some much needed game time. Although it was the [Club 4] manager who had initially approached Jay, he was excited by his offer and his urge to get back to competitive football again ultimately drove his decision. Jay also told how feeling wanted again and the security of a further year's contract played an important role in his decision to go out on loan:

I knew that I had another year left at [Club 4] so it was a no-brainer...he [the Club 4 manager] wasn't going to play me at [Club 4] so I had nothing to lose...and the fact that the [Club 5] manager had rang me and told me that I was exactly what he needed made me feel wanted again...worst case scenario, I'd have gone back [to Club 4] and sat on the last year of my deal.

Although Jay placed [Club 5] in a similar bracket to [Club 3] in terms of facilities and quality of players, he reflected on his time there with nothing but contentment and regarded the transition as a complete success. Jay revealed that the time spent on loan at [Club 5] was his happiest while a [Club 4] player, and at the heart of his evaluation was the bond that he struck up with his new teammates:

I went with another one of the [Club 4] lads who was just recovering from cancer and we stayed in a club house with two of the [Club 5] players...we had a whale of a time and got on brilliantly...we'd take it in turns to cook, we'd go out drinking together quite a bit so the four of us struck up a really

good relationship....every morning, training was a laugh and the lads were just down to earth...I loved it there.

Due to his superb run of form and continued positive relationship with his [Club 5] teammates, Jay extended his loan for another month which suited all parties. Here, he maintained his excellent form throughout this period, pre-empting his manager to recall him back to [Club 4] to aid them in their quest for promotion. While Jay talked cogently about the disappointment of leaving behind his [Club 5] teammates, and most notably [Owen] and [Henry] who he had lived with for the two months, he was more excited by the prospects of playing a pivotal role in leading [Club 4] to promotion: 'I loved my time there [Club 5] and met some great people but I'd gone there to get some games and return to [Club 4] and that's essentially what I'd done...the friendships were a bonus'.

The fact that Jay labelled the friendships a bonus was further evidenced in a later interview when Jay informed me that their contact had waned and he hadn't spoken to [Owen] or [Henry] 'for ages'. Although Jay noted that he would 'still go for a coffee with [Owen] if he was in [name of City]', his contact with [Henry] dwindled as soon as he returned to [Club 4]. This was another example of Jay's fleeting relationships with friends or teammates that seemed to cause him no concern when they later diminished, as he expressed succinctly: 'at the time, you build up a really good bond with each other but once you move on you've both got too much going on in your life [to keep in contact]...I suppose you don't need each other anymore'. The previous comment suggests that Jay valued his [Club 5] housemates' and teammates' friendships while he needed them. In short, and possibly while Jay was feeling vulnerable at the decline of his [Club 4] career, [Owen] and [Henry] and the rest of his [Club 5] teammates provided Jay with the 'pick-me-up' that he needed. However, when Jay

returned to [Club 4], the positive relationships he'd already built with [Sam] and [Will], along with the rest of his [Club 4] teammates replaced those he'd built at [Club 5]. While Jay recognised the disposable nature of the relationships gained from [Club 5], he was equally thankful for the short role they'd played in his life and looked back at their time together memorably: 'I'd have nothing but positives to say about [Club 5]...yeah, they weren't the greatest team in the world but their team spirit and togetherness was fantastic'.

B8: The Quest for Promotion

Having been recalled to [Club 4] for the final month of the season, Jay set his sights on adding a promotion to the Football League to his CV. Although the manager had ultimately made the decision to recall Jay back from [Club 5], Jay informed me that the fans had made public their disapproval at him being loaned out at such a crucial time in the season which he also envisioned playing a part in his return. Referring to articles in the newspaper or radio phone-ins, Jay's self-confidence was at an all-time high upon his [Club 4] return:

I was absolutely buzzing...I couldn't wait to get started and see all of the [Club 4] boys again...I'd loved it at [Club 5] but I knew that I was now going to be playing with better players again and knew that we had a right chance for promotion...I was itching to go.

While Jay's first game back was as an unused substitute, his first start culminated in two yellow cards and the resultant sending off. When asked for his own reaction to his sending off, Jay made sense of his identity through the overzealous reactions of his manager:

*...after the game, [the manager] battered me in the changing rooms in front of all of the lads... 'you're a f*cking disgrace, I'm fining you two weeks wages'...when really, it was two bookings which can happen in any game...yeah, I was disappointed but it happens...they were innocuous challenges...but it was as though he'd got what he wanted and had the perfect excuse to leave me out again...all of my eagerness and enthusiasm drained away.*

Jay's negative thoughts surrounding the manager's approach to him were confounded when he was later suspended from the club following an outburst in training. Having been 'rolled' [a clever turn which foils the opposing defender] by a forward in a small-sided training game, the manager halted proceedings and publicly berated Jay for his apparent inept defending. Instead of accepting the manager's 'bollocking' which he usually did, Jay stood his ground:

I'd had enough of being the scapegoat and so I said my bit back to him and he didn't like it one bit...in front of everyone, I just said that he'd let so much go during the session but chose the slightest little thing to highlight something that I'd done wrong...as though it was personal rather than professional...he sent me off the training pitch but instead of just standing on the side of the five-a-side pitch like a naughty little school kid, I walked straight into the gym that was near the changing room...I was fuming.

Now served with a suspension from the club, Jay was made to stay away from one of the biggest days in the club's history, as they challenged the play-off final for a place in the Football League at Wembley. Not alone, Jay watched the game round at another of his teammates' house who was also serving a club suspension. In an honest summation of his thoughts during the play-off final, Jay revealed the following:

...it was a little bit bitter sweet because although they got promoted, we wasn't part of it and that hurt... but in a purely selfish way, there wasn't any part of me that wanted them to get beat...basically, I had another year's contract at what was going to be a League Two club and my

wages were going to go up quite a bit...so, although I wasn't pleased for the manager, I was pleased for everybody else at the club and, most importantly for myself and my situation.

Having recently moved back in with two of his [Club 4] teammates, [Sam] and [Will], Jay became embroiled in a number of interactional dilemmas. Firstly, Jay was disgruntled by the way that he was still being treated by the [Club 4] manager and told how their relationship began to dwindle even further the following season. In his own words, Jay claimed that it was more the actions of the manager, rather than the words that riled him:

I'd train better and harder than everybody else and I was still not playing...he was one of those managers that would come into the changing rooms and have banter with all of the lads individually, you know, taking the piss out of clothes or hairstyles or whatever, but then he'd just totally blank me...and that did bother me because I knew that he liked the lads who he was having banter with and so I just felt like he didn't like me.

Secondly, and as Jay began to sample more of the manager's 'blankings', he became ever more disillusioned with his [Club 4] opportunities and decided to experience more of the night life that [Sam] and [Will] had become accustomed to. Initially concerned by how his performances in training could be affected by nights out, Jay rebuffed his housemates' early invitations but later saw this as a way to release his selection frustrations. While [Sam] and [Will] accepted Jay's decision to refuse their early invitations from a professional perspective, they continued to encourage his presence on nights out and were equally delighted from a friendship perspective when he began to spend more time out with them. Jay spoke fondly of their closeness and how his friendship played out with [Sam] and [Will]. Off the back of his recent split with [Eva], Jay spoke of how [Sam] and [Will] proved to be the perfect foil to his relationship heartache, and how he 'didn't have much chance to fret over [Eva]...[he] was

enjoying [him]self too much to care...they [Sam and Will] were just what I needed at that time’.

While Jay judged his transition back to [Club 4] as a failure from a footballing point of view, due to his limited game time, overall, he considered the move a success from a career and a financial perspective. Reflecting back over his move back to [Club 4], Jay noted how the promotion had a positive impact on two levels:

I was now earning more money which was great and my next loan move was back to [Club 2] who were a big team in the Conference, as opposed to [Club 5] who were struggling near the bottom...no disrespect to [Club 5] but they were never going to be challenging for promotion or anything like that because the players weren't good enough.

B9: Back Out on Loan

Jay's time at [Club 4] failed to gather momentum the following season, as the manager continued to give him extremely limited game time. In a light-hearted manner, Jay joked how, during his two-year contract at [Club 4], he 'never set foot on the home ground in a competitive fixture', which we both found staggering. While Jay claimed that this was not something he was conscious of at the time, Jay placed the failure of his [Club 4] career down to his relationship with the [Club 4] manager, who was clearly having a negative impact on his career. I asked Jay about the role of his agent at this testing time in his career, presuming that he had been attempting to drum up some interest in the background. However, and on the contrary, Jay informed me of the breakdown of their relationship and how, more importantly, he was unaffected:

I hadn't spoken to my agent for ages...he obviously had bigger fish to fry and didn't think he could do much for me because otherwise he'd have made more of an effort...but that didn't bother me...he'd got me my move to [Club 4] so as far as I was concerned, he'd served his purpose...it didn't matter that I never spoke to him again.

Similar to [Owen] and [Henry] in his transition away from [Club 5], Jay was unconcerned by the lack of future contact with his agent. As he ruthlessly conveyed, 'he'd served his purpose' and therefore Jay made no attempt to make further contact with him. Without the help of an agent, Jay was given the opportunity to re-ignite his relationship with the [Club 2] manager as they made an approach to take Jay on a month's loan. Having been released by [Club 2] a couple of seasons previous, Jay appeared perplexed by the offer, but was grateful all the same:

It was a weird one really because obviously he'd [Club 2 manager] released me and let me go for nothing...but when he got back in touch and told me that he knew what I was all about and that I was exactly what they were looking for at that point, it gave me self-belief again...it made me feel wanted...and I'd loved it at [Club 2]...I still knew most of the lads and [Geoff] even spoke about the possibility of a contract for the following season so everything seemed perfect.

While Jay 'knew most of the lads', there were three players there who were new additions to the previous squad who he 'got on with like a house on fire' and who Jay dedicated much of his transitional success to. Having been out together on several occasions with their mutual friends back home, Jay moved in with one of the players, [Fozzy], for the duration of his loan. When asked to evaluate the relative success of his transition back to [Club 2] on loan, and despite his impressive performances, Jay preferred to focus on the social implications of the move and how that would play out in the future:

I met [Jonah] and [Paul] there for the first time and we got on like a house on fire...and I've kept in touch with them and still see them whenever I can now and will continue to in the future... so it was definitely a success going back to [Club 2]...I was just sad that it couldn't have been for longer.

Jay's confession that it couldn't have been for longer was a result of the breakdown in communication between the [Club 4] and [Club 2] managers. Jay's decision to return was ultimately made for him by the [Club 4] manager, as [Club 2] refused to match the unfair wage demands he'd made for Jay's impending loan extension. Although the two managers could not agree on the financial aspect of the loan extension, Jay remained confident that eventually, the loan would go through, which made his [Club 2] departure so difficult:

I was gutted when I left...I remember leaving [Fozzy] and one of the other lads who was living there at the time at midnight to get back to [Club 4]...because everybody presumed something would be worked out for me to stay it was really hard for me...saying goodbye was tough...I suppose it highlighted how happy I'd been.

Already incensed by his manager's decision to cancel his pending loan extension, Jay's anger multiplied when he made his nine o'clock arrival at the [Club 4] ground. Greeted by the youth team manager, Jay was informed that the first team had already left for the overnight stay necessary for the weekend's game and, therefore Jay would be running with two other professionals in the car park; something he remembered vividly:

*I was livid...it wasn't his [the youth team manager's] fault but I just went on the rampage... 'this is a f*cking joke, why didn't he [the manager] tell me what was happening, what a pr*ck'... it was a disgrace...I've never felt so mad in my life...I remember chuntering away to myself while we were running...in the end we convinced the youth team manager that it was embarrassing what we was having to do and he cut it short.*

This was the first of many sessions that Jay would spend with the youth team manager, as his desire to exit [Club 4] turned into desperation.

B10: The Loan Move Back Home

Jay's decision to move on loan to [Club 6] was affected by a number of his relationships with significant others. Firstly, Jay was desperate to get away from the [Club 4] manager, as their relationship hit rock bottom. Now training regularly with the youth team and only sporadically seeing his first team teammates, Jay told how they would question why he was being treated in this manner, fuelling his anger. While Jay was in constant contact with the [Club 2] manager, desperately trying to come to some arrangement for a further loan or subsequent transfer, he was contacted by the [Club 6] manager and offered another loan move which appealed on two fronts:

I just wanted to get away from him [the Club 4 manager]...he was actually getting to me and I couldn't stand him...I was getting so frustrated, I just wanted to punch him. Then, when [Club 6] came calling the first thing I thought of was my Mum and how great it would be to go back home...I even thought that I could spend a bit more time with [Ben] and [Jamie].

As has been mentioned earlier in Jay's narrative, Jay began to see more of [Ben] and [Jamie], despite their relationship never reaching the closeness that it had previously. While Jay's relationship with his friends had not reached previous levels, his relationship with his Mum did:

I love my Mum to bits...she's always been there for me whenever I've needed her...she's always let me go back home whenever I've needed to and treats me like I'm still living there...at that point

[having just signed on loan for Club 6], it was great to see her all of the time again and get some home comforts.

While his Mum had clearly given Jay some much needed love and care, Jay also experienced a huge sense of relief at his escape from the [Club 4] manager. However, looking back at his transition to [Club 6], Jay wished he'd been more patient and waited for something to materialise with [Club 2]. Jay's current understanding of this transition has had a big influence on his present understandings of future transitional decisions. Looking ahead to future transitional decisions, Jay made reference to his desire to 'try and try and try to do what [he] really want[s] rather than accept something that [he's] not really happy with'. Although he had exited [Club 4] as he'd been so desperate to do, Jay wished he'd have held out for what he really wanted:

I wish I hadn't jumped in so quickly...because of the location and because I could go and live back at my Mum's for a bit, I near enough said yes straight away...I should have held out for [Club 2] but because the managers' relationship had broken down so much, I couldn't see it happening...in hindsight, I should have pushed for that move [to Club 2] more because deep down, that's what I really wanted...I loved the lads, I was getting on great with the manager again and I was enjoying my football.

As Jay touched upon in the previous extract, he placed the majority of his successful time at [Club 2] down to his relationships and his football. This had been a recurring theme throughout Jay's narrative and had clearly impacted upon the negativity surrounding his loan move to [Club 6]. Most notably, Jay informed me that, for the first time in his career, he had felt a little intimidated by his new environment:

I felt as though there were a few little clicks and even though I'd see them [the players] and have a good chat with them now, there were a lot of very opinionated players who'd all played loads of

games in the Football League...so if they weren't playing, they'd all be whispering between each other and probably saying negative things about the lads that were playing...and I didn't like that.

For the first time in his career, the relationship that Jay had held with his teammates had not lived up to his expectations and subsequently had a negative effect on the success of his transition. With the success of his football achievements driving his evaluation of the transition's wider success, Jay shared another negative experience with me that had omitted his earlier career; verbal abuse from his own supporters:

...the fans were shocking...because they were used to being in League Two or in the Football League, their expectations were so unrealistic...they expected us to be beating everyone four and five nil but it was never going to happen...and because I had the link to [Club 1] who were local rivals, I probably ended up getting more than my fair share of stick...it didn't bother me too much but I was definitely aware of it...you know, I'd be a bit scared to make a mistake and if I made a mistake then I knew what was coming...I just had to bite my tongue.

B11: Signing for [Club 7]

Upon his release from [Club 4], Jay contacted his best mate from [Club 2], [Fozzy] to see if he could drum up any interest through the wide array of managers that he knew or that he'd played for previously. Without the help of an agent, Jay commented on the important role that [Fozzy] had played in his next move: 'he [Fozzy] did wonders for me to be fair...to have two offers on the table from different clubs was a relief really because I don't know what else I'd have done'. While Jay's relationship with [Fozzy] had initiated the potential moves, his relationship with former teammates and players that he knew had a major impact on his

eventual decision. With offers from [Club 7] and [Club 8] on the table, Jay's decision was made with other players' experiences at the heart of his thought processes:

I knew a couple of the lads at [Club 8] and knew what they were earning so when he [the Club 8 manager] offered me what he did, I knew that he was taking the piss. I'd also heard some unbelievable stories from players who'd played under him...where they'd started training at seven o'clock in the morning because they'd lost or how he'd just crucify anybody that made mistakes in games...that definitely affected my thinking when I was making my decision and I didn't like the sound of the way he ran the club.

Here, it seemed that Jay made his decision off the back of something that he didn't want to experience at [Club 8], as opposed to something that he did want to experience at [Club 7]. However, Jay was equally pleased with his new [Club 7] surroundings, and most notably with the relationship he built up with the manager. Comparing his new relationship with that of his [Club 4] manager, Jay had no doubt as to the success of his transition, as his happiness testified:

*He [Club 7 manager] was a breath of fresh air...to be having banter with the manager and playing every game again felt great...I was happy and had a smile back on my face again...it made me reflect on my time at [Club 4] and realise what a pr*ck he'd [Club 4 manager] been.*

The positive relationships that Jay built with his [Club 7] manager and teammates played an integral role in his deeming the transition a success, and were a vital source of comfort through the challenging times that ensued for Jay. After suffering a knee injury in one of his early League games for [Club 7], Jay later went on to have three operations in an attempt to return to full fitness. At the beginning of this challenging time in his career, Jay was able to call on the love and care of another source, as he began his long-term relationship with girlfriend, and future wife, [Amy]. Speaking of his indebted gratitude and [Amy's] unbelievable

patience, Jay joked how [Amy] had: 'seen the sh*t end of [his] career...[because he] was a bit of a nightmare to be around during [his] operations but thankfully she put up with [him]'. Having paid for all three of his knee operations, Jay was also eternally grateful to [Club 7] and considered the contrasting consequences had he signed for [Club 8]:

...to say that they [Club 7] were having their own problems financially, they were fantastic...I couldn't thank the club enough...If I'd have had my knee troubles after opting to sign for [Club 8] instead of [Club 7], and judging by the stories that I've heard, I'd have been banished from the club...and what a different situation that would have been for me...without a club...no money coming in...knee still injured...that would have been horrendous.

Following his second knee operation, Jay was informed by the surgeon that he would have to consider retiring from football. Looking back on his conversation with the surgeon, Jay described how the thought of not being able to play football ever again proved more difficult than when he definitively stopped playing:

I was absolutely devastated and I remember ringing my Mum but I couldn't talk because I was crying my eyes out...the surgeon said that if I wanted any quality of life further down the line then I'd have to stop playing...I was gutted...and it's almost like I got rid of all of my despair and disappointment there and then which made it easier for when I actually did stop playing.

While Jay was advised by the surgeon to retire from football following his second knee operation, he pursued a second opinion in the hope of continuing his career. With the help of one of his teammates, whose brother played for the reigning Premier League champions at the time, Jay visited the knee specialist that their club used and following a successful operation, returned to playing. However, Jay soon realised his performances were 'below scratch' and found it difficult to come to terms with his inferior performances:

As much as I maybe wasn't up to the standards that I had been at previously [prior to the knee operations], I was still doing a job and wasn't letting the team down or anything...I was just frustrated with how I felt and maybe recognised at that point that I was never going to be the player that I was...that was hard to accept. It was more about not feeling supple and feeling heavy all of the time...my game was all about being mobile and buzzing around the pitch but I'd lost that...I didn't feel sharp at all and like I was plodding through training sessions and games.

In an apparent re-evaluation of his ability, which had caused him to seriously consider his post-footballing opportunities, Jay's thoughts led to a state of confusion:

I was more confused than anything...confused about what I was going to do when football came to an end...I knew I wanted to do something in business but I didn't know what...there was something about the competitive side of business that attracted me towards it but it was never anything concrete.

While Jay gave serious thought to life after football, he continued to play for [Club 7] until the manager was sacked following a poor run of results. Recognising the pivotal role that the manager had played in keeping Jay at the club throughout his sustained spell of injury, Jay knew that the 'writing was on the wall' and that in all likelihood, he would be one of the first to leave the club in the next round of cost-cutting measures. At this point, Jay started to 'put some feelers out' with his previous teammates and people who he knew in football to see if anybody might be interested in him. Jay scrolled through the collection of players in his phone book to provide him with an entrance into somewhere if, as he expected he was to be released. Sure enough, when the youth team manager was appointed as caretaker manager, Jay was called into his office and informed of the club's decision to release him from his month-to-month contract. Reflecting on the moment he was informed of his release, Jay maintained his belief that 'the club had done everything they could to support [him] through

[his] lengthy period of injury and [he] left the club on good terms and with no bitterness towards them whatsoever'.

B12: Turning 'Semi-Pro'

As has been a running theme throughout his career, and as mentioned in the previous section, Jay called on the help of previous teammates and informed them of his desire to find another club. Keen to make his transition into part-time football in order to pursue opportunities away from football, Jay recalled how one player in particular, [Johnno] played a key role in his next move and by putting him into contact with his own manager they became teammates again at [Club 9]. Jay relayed the main focus of the conversation with the [Club 9] manager and explained how: 'he [the Club 9 manager] didn't seem to know much about [him] so he must have gone away and done some research and was obviously happy with what he found'. Here, it appeared that Jay was given an opportunity solely off the back of his previous career and to some extent had been made to sell himself to the [Club 9] manager. While Jay had verbally agreed a deal with [Club 9] until the end of the season, he told of his frustration and disappointment when the manager changed the contract offer at the last minute:

*...he'd [the Club 9 manager] said that he'd sign me until the end of the season but then when I went to sign the contract he said it was going to be a month-to-month contract...knowing what football is like, I knew that inevitably there'd be a little knee injury around the corner so I felt very vulnerable...I didn't know how long I'd stay fit and so I was sh*tting myself.*

Looking back over his decision to sign the month-to-month contract, Jay recognised the risky nature of his agreement but was also pragmatic about his limited capacity to do anything

else. With the constant anxiety of another injury playing on his mind, Jay recalled the precise moment he questioned the success of his move to [Club 9]:

I had an epiphany a week into [Club 9]...it seemed like a crisis at the time because I was asking myself what I was doing with my life...I'm living with my girlfriend's Mum and Dad, earning £350 a week playing part-time for [Club 9] and I didn't know where my life was going...I was lost.

As he mentioned, Jay wasn't only questioning the success of his move to [Club 9] but also his future prospects and where his future lay. With [Amy] keen to help Jay source employment, Jay's football was of secondary importance, as he applied for a number of full-time jobs. Jay noted how [Amy's] help was invaluable during this time: '[Amy] helped me prepare my CV and she helped me prepare for interview questions because obviously I'd never had to do anything like that before and I didn't have a clue [what to do]'. However, Jay experienced a number of setbacks in his quest for his first job outside of football. Describing his thinking as 'very naïve', Jay explained how he initially expected to be given opportunities solely for being 'a footballer with more than half a brain' but was instead left 'demoralised'.

Following a successful interview, Jay eventually began working for a recruitment agency. Excited by the prospect of combining his part-time football career with a job that had potential longevity, Jay's outlook on life improved and he no longer felt lost. When asked how he'd found the transition into working life, Jay was quick to focus on the work ethic that he'd needed to draw from to sustain his professional career:

I had to work my nuts off to get to where I got to in football...I know I haven't had this big illustrious career but I've had to work harder than most to have the career that I had because I wasn't the most technically gifted of players...I was always turning up to training earlier than everyone else and leaving later than everyone else to try and make sure that I was the fittest I could be...so, really it wasn't much of a culture shock for me to have to work hard.

Interestingly, Jay retrospectively made sense of his experiences in relation to others, as he compared his own transition into working life with the transition of what he termed, 'the average footballer'. By drawing from the attributes that had assisted him through his footballing career, Jay regarded his transition into working life a downright success, as he became infatuated by the competitiveness. In an honest summation of his new role, Jay confessed that he 'didn't realise how much he'd enjoy it' and continued:

I walked into the job not knowing an awful lot about the role and what it would entail but as soon as I smelt the commission and heard the potential perks of the job, I was hooked...and I was excited by how competitive the environment was and it was the kind of thing that I really love...leader boards, rewards to go on Champions League dinners, posters on the wall advertising trips to Las Vegas for the top billers...I thought it was all too good to be true...I loved it from day one and it was a perfect fit for me.

While Jay was fascinated by the potential perks of the job and the sheer competitiveness of being up against thirty other employees, he began to regard the football as an impediment to his potentially greater success, and viewed time spent at football as 'time spent away from [his] office'. Jay recalled the moment his 'time spent away from [his] office' became too much and ultimately, brought to an end his [Club 9] career:

*I had got the train after work to go training...it was the worst weather ever, wet, windy, I was p*ssed off, in my suit and when I got there no-one was there... I was like, what's happening here? Then [the manager], [the physio] and another lad who was injured turned up... so basically all of the first team had been told that there was no training apart from me...I was raging...I just let rip at [the manager] and I just said he was f*cking out of order.*

While Jay appeared to have been accidentally left out of the group text to inform him of the cancellation of training, he remained furious and began to question how much he needed football and how much he was actually enjoying it. During this period of contemplation, Jay received a phone call from the manager of [Club 10] in the same league. Earlier in Jay's career, and just before he signed for [Club 7], the manager of [Club 10] had unsuccessfully tried to sign Jay but this played a major part in Jay's pending decision. Aware of the manager's previous interest in him, alongside the appealing proximity to his office, Jay opted to cancel his contract with [Club 9] and sign for [Club 10]. Again, this decision was based on his relationship with others, as Jay's conversation with the [Club 10 manager] made him question his relationship with the [Club 9] manager:

...he [Club 10 manager] just said how long he'd been interested in me and how much he thought I could offer the club [Club 10]...I wasn't having to sell myself again...here was a manager who couldn't say enough positive things about me and who was desperate to sign me whereas [the Club 9 manager] didn't even include me on group texts and who was leaving me out of the team left, right and centre...I couldn't wait to get out.

Having now signed for [Club 10], Jay was made club captain in his first game which gave him enormous confidence and self-belief. Jay revealed that, much like his initial conversation with the manager, he'd been made aware of his potential worth to the club and how instrumental he could be in the club's future success. Jay also revealed how his new teammates were fantastic with him from the outset, such as 'going out of their way to find out more about [him]'. With most of the players seemingly impressed by his business acumen, Jay explained how he received great pleasure from sharing his new identity with anybody:

In a strange way I felt great telling people that I was working in recruitment...I had something else to my name other than Jay the professional footballer...yes, I'd been a student for a while but now I could tell everyone that I was actually starting the next chapter in my life...that felt good.

Reflecting over his time as a semi-professional footballer, Jay was realistic in the overall success of his transition. While Jay questioned the success of the transition from a footballing perspective, mainly due to the uncertainty surrounding his injuries and short-term contracts he was adamant that it had been a success from a work perspective. Jay noted how the move into part-time football had 'bought [him] a bit of time where [he] could fathom out what it was [he] was actually going to do'. Furthermore, for the first six months of his working life Jay had continued to give football a chance and having been such an integral part of his life, finished playing when he felt he had nothing left to offer and his injuries became too much. Having suffered a hamstring injury and a groin injury towards the end of the season at [Club 10], Jay was given the opportunity to return to pre-season training the following season and earn a new contract by the manager. However, following a light-hearted five-a-side game with locals on holiday, Jay recalled the moment he realised his footballing career had come to an end:

...my knee just ballooned, it was massive... I was in agony on the third day of my holiday and I just said to [Amy] that it's not worth it, I am just going to ring him [the Club 10 manager] and tell him ...she completely agreed and said she hated to see me in such pain...so we decided there and then on holiday that there was just no point...that was it!

True to his word, Jay contacted the manager of [Club 10] and informed him of his decision to retire from the game. Fully appreciative of his reasoning, Jay left [Club 10] with his manager's blessing and embarked on a full-time career in recruitment.

B13: The Businessman Looking Forward

While Jay combined his transition into business with the latter stages of his semi-professional football career, it wasn't until he dedicated all of his working time to his new employers that he began to reap the full extent of the rewards. Evaluating the success of his transition into working full-time in recruitment, Jay claimed that it was 'no coincidence that when [he] left [Club 10] [he] had [his] biggest month'. Here, Jay was left with little time to consider the withdrawal of football from his life, as he maintained the thrill and buzz of competition in a masculine environment, just in a different context:

...all I'd done was taken the exercise and matches out of it and replaced the three points with commission...I was still getting the buzz from seeing myself on a leader board, just like I would see the club in whatever league I was playing in...and I was still in a room full of lads and so the banter would still be flying about even though it was a bit more of a serious environment.

The thrill of competition was clearly something that drove Jay's passion for business. Although Jay is driven by the financial aspect of being successful in business, more importantly, Jay revealed an inner drive that stems from a desire to be regarded as successful by others:

I love being in competition with other people and trying to beat them...it's the buzz of winning or topping a leader board that drives me...I love seeing my name at the top of the league because then I know that I'm doing the best in the business...I want everyone to keep seeing my name at the top...it's more the satisfaction of everybody seeing me doing well than the financial rewards now but they come hand in hand.

Interestingly, Jay retrospectively compared his former role as a professional footballer with that of a businessman. Comparing the financial status of both roles, during one of the early interviews, Jay noted how 'everyone sees professional football as a wealthy

job but [he's] earned more in the last year in recruitment than [he] ever did playing football'.

However, Jay also recognises the controlling nature of his new occupation and looks forward to the future with trepidation:

I struggle to switch off from everything so that's something that I'm a bit worried about...my phone is always going off or I'm always receiving emails that will remind me that I've forgotten to do something during the day...because we deal with multi-national companies, the time differences means I could receive emails or messages at all hours...I'm definitely going to have to switch off more, 100%...but that will be tough.

When I asked Jay about the impact that the full-on nature of his new job has had on his relationship with [Amy], he made reference to how, initially they had both found it tough, as they were seeing very little of each other. Jay told how [Amy] became 'frustrated and lonely at returning home from her own long days at work to an empty house'. Yet, Jay referred to a mutual acceptance of Jay's workload, as his drive and ambition appeared grounded in family concerns:

[Amy] knows that she's my number one priority but she also knows that I need to be successful because that's just the way I am and that I'm ambitious...and [Amy] loves that I'm ambitious...and she knows that I'm doing it to earn as much commission as I can so we can live in a nice house or have a nice holiday next year or get all of the baby stuff that we need...at the end of the day, I'm trying to earn as much money as I can so that [Amy] doesn't have to go back to work after the baby.

Another transition that Jay has made in his working life is into management which he appears to have adjusted to with ease. Now also a company director, Jay shared with me a couple of occasions where he has had to sack previous employees, which he handled ruthlessly. Firstly, Jay informed me of a situation where one of his employees had left him

what sounded like an abusive, albeit light-hearted voicemail while drunk. While Jay expected his employee to receive a 'slap on the wrist' as the company were looking to increase their head count, Jay was told that he simply had to sack him. Here, and knowing how thoughtful Jay was from our playing days together, I expected him to make reference to how hard it had been and how sorry he felt for his employee. However, Jay exposed a ruthless streak that left me shocked with his changed persona and left me feeling sorry for the person involved:

...he was just apologising, saying he had let me down and everything...he was really apologetic, he was in tears to be fair but it's just one of them things isn't it? You've got to do it...be ruthless...he'd just rented an apartment across the road from the offices and some of the other lads saw him carrying a brand new TV up the stairs the other day...but that's not my problem, he shouldn't have done what he did.

Right up to the most recent part of Jay's life story, he is making decisions based on his relationships with significant others. To clarify this point further, Jay highlighted some of the attributes that he looks for in potential employees, referring to [Tim] as a standout example:

[Tim] is probably the kind of lad we need...he's not the cleverest lad in the world but he's not from a rich family or anything, he hasn't got a lot and so needs to do well and needs to earn money...he works his bollocks off...he needs this job, do you know what I mean?

Although Jay evidenced an obvious passion to succeed and overt desire to be the best manager he can be, he has had to re-evaluate what constitutes success. Making clear his admiration of Jay's drive and ambition, the CEO of Jay's business explained how people will approach their working life differently, something that Jay is going to have to accept:

I still have to appreciate the people who don't necessarily over-achieve and he's [the CEO] totally right because if someone can do their target for me every period or something similar then their invaluable without being world-beaters...they might be super-competitive but if they are happy to

come in and do their bit and hit their target then I've got to almost appreciate them as much as the person that smashes it.

The positive relationship that Jay builds with his employees is something that he strives hard to maintain. Recognising the positive impact that his manager had in his early career, Jay spoke of the enthusiasm that permeates his daily work. Comparing his apparent success in business with that of other employees, Jay placed the majority of his success on something he values most; his ability to build relationships:

...some of the graduates that come in at 21 or 22 are better educated than me and better with technology and computers and everything but I think where I make up a bit of ground is that I can talk to people at a better level and build a relationship with someone rather than just placing with them and being happy with that...I'll maybe have a bit of a laugh with them and build a relationship where they think, 'oh, we'll go back to this guy, we like him and he's done a good job'.

However, Jay was also realistic about the ever-changing nature of relationships and how inter-connections and networks depend on the priorities of the person involved. Emphasising the point further, Jay made one final claim to his own changing priorities and how this has changed over his life span:

...as everybody grows up and goes their own separate ways, it's harder to spend as much time with some people that you love because you each have your own little families developing and so your priorities change. Going forward, [Amy] and the little one and however many more children we have are going to be the priority and as much as I love my Mum and my Dad, they know that my family will be my priority....me and my brothers are all still very close but whereas they used to be my closest family with my Mum and my Dad, [Amy] and the baby are now...until the baby is old enough to have their own family...that's just life.

Appendix C: Joe's Story

C1: The Early Rejection

Joe's early love of football was, for the most part, encouraged by his Dad. Although his Dad had never played, I got the impression that he may have been living his own dream through Joe's life. Whereas Joe never mentioned much about his Dad's history, the stories that he shared suggested that his dad took on the role of coach or mentor early in his life:

From three or four years old I can remember going on park wi' mi' Dad and 'im kicking the ball 100 yards up in the air and telling me to trap it...he did shout at me if I mis-controlled it and so he was quite 'ard on me...from about six or seven, he'd be making sure that I was trying mi' best with everything...you know, it wasn't just a p**s about.

Interestingly, Joe questioned whether he would have had the dedication to make it as a professional footballer without his Dad's input. Joe was equally cognisant of the important role played by a set of three brothers in his life who emerged as his best friends; not only in his childhood but throughout his career and beyond. In short, Joe admired the way each of the brothers would not only respect his career ambitions but similarly do everything they could to ensure Joe succeeded. An example of their pivotal role in Joe's life could be traced back to his childhood concerns around growing up on a 'rough council estate' as he termed it, where he recognised the apparent protection his friendships had brought him:

...they [the three brothers] were the main family on the estate and everyone wanted to be wi' 'em 'cos you didn't mess wi' the [family name's]...and because I was best mates wi' 'em all, I knew that I'd be ok...you know, nobody'd mess wi' me either...it kind o' give me peace o' mind that I could play football wi' everyone and not 'ave any d**k heads trying to break mi' legs.

During his early adolescent years, Joe confessed to 'growing a bit too quick and so [he] was a gangly kid really'. From the age of 13 to 14, Joe also suffered with Osgood-Schlatter syndrome, which meant that his knees were regularly painful. Having talked cogently about his doubts of earning a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) contract anywhere, Joe's delight of being offered his dream YTS contract was soon crushed a short time afterwards when it was later withdrawn by [Club A]. Here, Joe's school of excellence manager's decision to offer Joe a YTS contract was over-ridden by the club's youth team manager who opted to sign another player instead. Joe recalled how he concealed his feelings from the youth team manager in order to 'save face...[and] to make 'im think that I wasn't bothered 'cos I'd easily get somet else' but how the heart-breaking news had later initiated a flood of tears in the company of his Dad:

I just got into the car with mi' Dad and burst into tears...I felt like nobody wanted me, as if I were being kicked out o' the club [Club A]...I was in pieces. I don't honestly know what I would 'ave done if mi' Dad 'adn't been wi' me...would I 'ave gone for a beer and thought 'f**k it'? I don't know...probably thought 'f**k em' and gone and got a job. But instead, and 'cos o' mi' Dad it was 'f**k 'em, we'll show 'em' kind o' thing. And from that moment on really mi' mind set changed to I am gonna make it.

As the previous quote suggests, the initial setback in Joe's quest for a career in professional football proved to be a defining moment, if not *the* defining moment in his career path, something which his Dad played a pivotal role in. Correspondingly, Joe recalled how his Dad's initial response to his setback encouraged him to visit the gym: 'mi' Dad said I weren't strong enough so I was doing weights, sprints, everything to make me better 'cos at that point [being released] I was like Bambi on ice'. Joe's admission that he was like 'Bambi on ice' coupled with his Dad's immediate suggestion of visiting the gym revealed exactly what Joe, or indeed Joe's Dad thought he needed to do to make the grade. Having signed up to a

mechanic's course, 'cos [he] 'ad to do somet', Joe spent the following months improving his physical attributes, predicated on visits to the gym. This approach paid dividends for Joe, as the 'gangly teenager' cum 'Bambi on ice' had, by his own admission been transformed: 'I'd grown up, I'd put a bit o' beef on and so I was a proper number nine...I'd turned into a proper striker kind o' thing'.

While Joe used to watch football all of the time with the three brothers he'd grown close to and would reel off the names of every player or every ground at that stage of his life, I couldn't help but wonder whether Joe's Dad had almost forced him into this career path. His strictness towards football in his childhood was clearly evident, his tendency to write to different clubs for a trial following a setback was mentioned, and his immediate suggestion of going to the gym upon his release from [Club A] could all suggest that this was Joe's Dad's decision and not Joe's. However, my idea was to prove fruitless when Joe reflected on his Dad's approach:

...mi' Dad always pushed me but probably 'cos he knew I were good enough...he always used to say 'look, if you don't wanna do it then don't do it', so it wasn't as though he was making me do somet I didn't wanna do...deep down, I was desperate to be a footballer.

In retrospect, Joe's dad played a major role in giving him the belief and self-confidence that he needed to make the step up to the next level, something that Joe was grateful for. Having somebody who believed in his ability and regularly 'pushed' him to improve as a player gave Joe a taster of what was to follow in his future 18-year tenure as a professional footballer. Following a fruitful period of scoring goals for a local Sunday League team, Joe completed the remaining months of his apprenticeship at [Club A] in what Joe described as a 'twist of fate'. The youth team manager who had previously released Joe from the club was

promoted to first team coach mid-way through the season. The incoming youth team coach who had watched Joe play on several occasions was a keen admirer of his ability and instantly offered him the YTS contract he'd coveted:

I couldn't believe it...I'd worked so 'ard to get there [being offered a YTS] and thankfully the 'ard work paid off...I felt great and was overjoyed...but it was only 'cos the youth team manager 'ad gone up to the first team that it 'appened...it was just fate I suppose.

As Joe made his transition into professional football, he had three notable networks of relationships. Firstly, Joe held close relationships with his Mum, Dad and sister who he continued to live at home with. Secondly, Joe's friendship with the three brothers he spoke fondly about played another key role in his life and the role where Joe felt he could maintain his 'down to earth' profile. Finally, Joe regarded his [Club A] teammates and the respective staff involved in and around the club as his third network of connections and the network where ultimately '[he] knew [he] 'ad to impress to keep earning a living'. In this respect, Joe recognised his varying roles and responsibilities in this important stage of his life and acknowledged that his interactions with 'others' varied, depending on who the 'others' were. Furthermore, Joe accepted that these different networks of relationships varied throughout his life but enabled him to display different personas according to his network of interactions:

...it's been great to 'ave the three brothers around to take the p**s out o' me all o' the time and bring me back down to earth...you know, I can let mi' 'air down when I'm wi' 'em kind o' thing...but then I loved 'aving a professional attitude and working mi' b*****ks off to impress the manager wherever I was at...it just depended which environment I was in I suppose.

The previous extract demonstrates Joe's cognisance of his changing identity. As well as being Joe the son and Joe the brother, Joe recognised the importance of having an identity that wasn't football-driven. Being able to 'let [his] 'air down' has given Joe the pressure

release that he has clearly needed throughout his life. In his post-football life and with a family of his own, Joe now has a husband and a father strand to his identity; a seemingly forever-changing identity that has guided much of Joe's decisions and actions and that will be examined in further detail during each of his transitional experiences.

C2: The Young Professional

As Joe made the transition into professional football he now felt 'honoured' and experienced the joy of being part of a Premier League football club, albeit as a member of their youth team. Despite his late entrance into the [Club A] youth team, Joe made reference to the encouraging feelings that surrounded his affiliation. Having spent the previous season playing with the majority of the current youth team for the [Club A] school of excellence, Joe felt relaxed in their company and instantly felt welcomed by the rest of the team:

The team [Club A youth team] were great with me...they made me feel welcome straight away and I felt like nothing 'ad changed...I was one o' them again and I was so 'appy [to sign] that I couldn't stop smiling for days.

Joe instantly felt part of a team that worked together not only on the football pitch but also off it. Sharing with me a number of team chores that the youth team would routinely undertake Joe took pride in his role whatever it entailed. However, Joe's display of hard work appeared underpinned by more selfish connotations, as he alluded to here:

We'd spend more time cleaning the stands than playing football and I'd always be the one who'd be doing more than everybody else or doing other lads' jobs, mainly 'cos I wanted to get away earlier and you couldn't leave until everything was done...but I also wanted the manager to see that I was willing to work 'arder than anyone else 'cos in mi' mind I wanted it [to be a professional

footballer] more than anyone else...the lads would laugh at me and let me do it but to me that said more about them than it did about me.

Although Joe seemed intent on furthering his football career and rejected many invitations to venture out with either his friends or his teammates, his decisions were not entirely his own. Joe candidly explained how his Dad would have 'gone ballistic' if he'd ever gone out drinking which guided his thought processes. Joe seemed reluctant to go against his Dad's wishes and respected his Dad's advice to maintain a professional attitude. Aware of his stop-start entrance into [Club A], Joe and his Dad agreed that he was, in essence, six months behind his fellow YTS teammates from a development perspective and needed to make up the ground in any way he could. Here, Joe conveyed a sincere appreciation of his Dad's role in his fledgling career, as his performances for the youth team and subsequently the reserve team continued to excel. In short, Joe regarded his development and rapid improvements as a direct result of his dedication and focus; something that set him apart from his teammates and something that his Dad had played a pivotal role in:

I wouldn't say they [Club A teammates] weren't professional 'cos they were...but it gave me a buzz to know that I wanted it more than them and that I was willing to make sacrifices they weren't...and that comes back to mi' Dad's strictness I suppose but I were glad he was [strict].

The success of Joe's transition into professional football continued to escalate and he was offered his first professional contract towards the end of his YTS contract and following his emergence as a consistent performer for both the under-21's and the reserve team at [Club A]. While Joe shared his overwhelming happiness at signing his first professional contract, he was equally despondent with the consequences of his transition. Here, Joe made sense of his transition in relation to a number of others and regarded his promotion as a non-event:

...when I signed mi' [first professional] contract I was ecstatic...I was seriously over the moon. But then nothing changed. I was still in the under-21 changing room, I was still training wi' the under-21's and I still felt like a youth-teamer 'cos all that had changed was that mi' money had gone up...and money wasn't important at that stage of mi' life, I just wanted to play first team football.

Joe's [Club A] career was predominantly spent with the under 21's or in the reserve team which, in turn had a negative impact on his self-belief. Here, Joe made sense of his position in relation to the players that occupied that first team changing room. While [Club A] had a plethora of striking options, Joe never saw himself worthy of competing with such quality players and began to question his own ability. In his own words: '...the year they [Club A] got in the Premier League I just thought to mi'sen 'ow am I ever gonna play ahead of 'im, 'im or 'im' kind o' thing...I was never gonna do that'. However, Joe was given an unexpected opportunity to travel with the first team when one of the regular strikers fell ill. Despite not even making the substitutes' bench, Joe reflected on this opportunity as both his big chance and the moment his fate at the club was sealed:

He [the manager] was big on superstition and even though I was only 17th man for [the champions] away, we got beat 7-1 and I never went again...I genuinely believe that one game killed me...nobody said 'owt but things like that stick wi' me 'cos it was as though I never got another chance 'cos o' that result...as if it was somet to do wi' being a bad luck charm or somet.

Joe also reflected upon this moment as the emergence of a crucial realisation process. In his mind, he was never going to get a better opportunity to be involved with the [Club A] first team. Despite scoring freely in under-21 and reserve team fixtures, Joe became disillusioned with his distinct lack of first team opportunities and questioned the value of his further year's contract offer at [Club A]. Ultimately, Joe's burning desire to play first team

football came to the fore and was something which became the catalyst for his exit from the club:

I just wanted to play first team football...believe me it wasn't easy to walk away from a Premier League club...it could 'ave been one o' the biggest mistakes o' mi' life but I was brave enough to make it and don't regret it one bit...I wasn't 'appy pretending I was a professional footballer anymore, 'cos that's what it felt like...I wasn't getting the buzz that I imagined all the players getting playing in front of thousands o' fans.

Now aged 22, and with his desire to play first team football driving his thought processes, Joe turned down [Club A's] contract offer and set his sights on becoming the first team regular that he spoke eloquently about. In this respect, Joe had again made sense of his position in relation to the first team players at [Club A] and expressed his desire to feel like 'a proper [read first team] footballer'.

C3: Becoming a First Team Regular

When Joe informed the manager at [Club A] of his desire to source first team football elsewhere, he was surprisingly commended and told of two clubs that had expressed an interest in his services towards the end of the previous season. Rather than attempt to delay his potential exit from the club, the manager accepted that Joe was probably sixth or seventh choice striker at [Club A] and deserved a chance to be the number one striker somewhere else. The two clubs that Joe's manager had previously spoken about made contact with him as soon as his availability was mentioned and left Joe with an interesting dilemma. [Club B] were a team in League Two and who were just within commuting distance but who were offering far less wages than [Club C], who

were in the Football Conference and located outside of commutable distance. Joe's decision was severely affected by his relationship with 'others'. More specifically, Joe sourced the advice of his old youth team manager who was not only an avid admirer of Joe's ability but someone who had an extensive knowledge of lower league football and who would have his best interests at heart. Joe recalled the exact words his old youth team manager gave him which seemingly had a resounding impact on his decision: '...he [Joe's old youth team manager] said 'do not drop into non-league football 'cos you'll never get back up...and that stuck with me'. With his Dad seconding his old youth team manager's wise words, Joe subsequently signed for [Club B] where the manager had also made a lasting impression during negotiations:

...the money [Club C] were offering was so tempting as a 20-year old...but the [Club B] manager was fantastic wi' me...he reeled off all o' these games that he'd been to see me play in and 'ow well I'd done and I just felt wanted straight away...he made me feel like I'd be the main man at the club and that was what I needed...money was just a bonus.

Having made his decision to remain a Football League player, Joe grew excited at the prospect of playing first team football; something that had eluded his early career. However, these feelings of excitement were cast aside as Joe made his first commute to his new club. Describing the events of his first training session, Joe reflected on his daunting experience:

I'd got mi'sen a little Renault Clio, drove to the end o' the road where the stadium was and went straight to the phone box to ring mi' Dad. He wasn't in so I spoke to mi' Mum and I just said 'Mum, I'm scared'. I'd been in the same dressing room for the past three years, somewhere where I felt comfortable 'cos I knew everyone and 'ere I was, about to walk into a changing room where I knew nobody. I was petrified. I walked into the changing room as nervous as anything...mi' stomach was doing cartwheels...a few lads said 'alright' but that was all I got'.

For a few minutes, and while the rest of the players were changing into theirs, Joe sat in silence waiting for his training kit to arrive. During this short time, which seemed like an eternity for Joe, he contemplated whether he'd done the right thing, as feelings of angst and nervousness led him to consider how easy things could have been if he'd stayed at [Club A]. However, Joe described how this period of self-doubt and suspicion was cut short by a humorous comment that instantly relieved his tension:

I took mi' top off and 'ung it on a peg and I just remember [Ian Jones], who was like the senior pro...he said 'f**k me, 'ave you just come out o' prison'...I've got a few tattoo's and I'm no male model so when he shouted that out it was great 'cos it broke the ice...all o' the other lads were laughing and I just laughed along wi' 'em...to say I was relieved is an understatement...and that was it from then on...I was one o' them.

Joe had been taken out of his comfort zone in more ways than one. As well as having to relinquish the comfort of knowing everybody in the dressing room, Joe was also having to sacrifice his home comforts, as he spent the first couple of weeks staying over in a local hotel to ease the bedding in process and reduce his lengthy commute. Here, Joe experienced home sickness while also becoming excited by his new challenge:

I found that first couple o' weeks [at Club B] really tough...it was 'ard. It's strange 'cos you're kind of 'ome sick and you feel sad and down 'cos you can't stop thinking about your 'ome comforts and your family...but then you're excited by the prospect o' being the best player at your new club and wondering where this move's gonna take you.

When asked to evaluate the success of his transition to [Club B], Joe had nothing but positives to say about his move. While at [Club B], Joe quickly developed into one of, if not *the* top strikers in the division. Despite being at the bottom of the league, Joe had still managed to top the scoring charts and attracted the attention of a number of higher ranked

clubs. As well as attracting attention on the pitch, Joe began attracting female attention off it while on nights out with both his [Club B] teammates and the three brothers who continued to play a major role in his life. Here, Joe explained how he now saw nights out as an opportunity to take his mind off football and take a break from his intense focus and dedication:

...I was living like a monk and it would 'ave killed me...I needed an escape button [from football] every now and again or I'd 'ave quit. But then when I'd 'ad mi' night out I'd be back watching everything I ate or everything I did...but it was great to be able to go out wi' friends from school and keep in contact wi' 'em 'cos I didn't wanna be in some football bubble.

Joe's admission that he didn't want to be in 'some football bubble' was further evidenced in the relationships he'd built at [Club A]. Although Joe had spent the previous three years in the same changing rooms and among similar faces, he was forthright in his evaluation of their diminishing relationship during his time at [Club B]:

...they were just teammates [at Club A]. As much as I'd been wi' 'em every day, they weren't mi' mates...I 'ad no reason to keep in contact wi' any of 'em anymore 'cos there was another set o' 20 players that I now spent every day with...I suppose it was a bit strange at first but I was 'appier spending time wi' mi' real mates anyway.

Joe's transition from [Club A] to [Club B] was also a success from a social perspective, as he was able to maintain his childhood links and continue his 'down to earth' lifestyle among people he respected. Joe's positive relationship with the [Club B] manager was another reason Joe regarded the transition a success. Here, Joe explained how the manager would constantly give him praise and advice while recognising his ability to play at a higher level. The extent of their positive relationship was evidenced further into Joe's [Club B] career. Having played in the Premier League himself as a player, Joe respected the manager's words

of advice and wanted to repay the faith he'd shown in him when teams began showing an interest in Joe's performances:

...'cos I'd done well and scored loads o' goals, teams started showing an interest in me and wanted to sign me...but [name of manager] kept saying that I was better banging the goals in there [Club B] and that mi' move would come...he was desperate to keep me and 'cos he'd given me mi' first real chance in pro' football I suppose I wanted to pay 'im back.

As the previous extract highlights, Joe's decision to remain at [Club B] was severely influenced by his relationship with the [Club B] manager. However, following a poor run of results that left [Club B] embroiled in a relegation battle at the foot of League Two, the manager was eventually sacked and a caretaker manager put in place. It was here that the full extent of their positive relationship emerged as Joe's thoughts immediately switched to a move away from the club. The manager's sacking had completely changed his outlook for the following season:

...as soon as the manager was sacked I wanted to leave [Club B]. I didn't feel as though I had any loyalties or any debts to anyone at the club. I stayed through some tough financial times at [Club B], basically 'cos o' the manager and 'cos o' what he did for me and what he thought o' me but also 'cos I lived at home wi' mi' Mum and Dad and didn't 'ave a mortgage or 'owt.

Despite being offered an improved contract at [Club B], Joe continued to let his contract run down until the end of the season before making a decision on his future. Having been contacted by an agent who informed him of a number of interested clubs and who seemed genuinely attentive to his well-being, Joe signed a contract with [Jim] in the hope of generating more attractive options. Joe reflected on his decision to sign with [Jim] as a resounding success but also acknowledged the part played by luck in running down his contract and escaping the unpredictable trappings of professional football:

...signing wi' [Jim] worked well 'cos he 'elped me sort mi' money out and plan for the future like he said he would...but when I think I ran mi' contract down when I was on fire at [Club B] I do think o' what might 'ave been...I could 'ave broken mi' leg or 'owt and 'ad to prove mi' fitness before getting another deal anywhere...but luckily I stayed fit.

Having 'luckily' stayed fit until the end of the season, Joe weighed up his options before opting for a move away from [Club B]. With two full seasons now under his belt, Joe could leave [Club B] with his status as an established professional driving his agent's negotiations with a number of interested clubs. With a number of potential options in place, and now aged 24, Joe eventually signed for [Club D] in League Two.

C4: The Established Professional

Joe's decision to sign for [Club D] in League Two was affected and seemingly made more attractive by their proximity to his Mum and Dad's home. In this respect, all that would change in Joe's life was the football club that he represented; enabling him to continue many aspects of his lifestyle and more specifically his close bond with family and friends:

...mi' decision [to sign for Club D] was an easy one...it was miles closer to 'ome than [Club B], I could still live at 'ome wi' mi' Mum and Dad, I could still see as much o' mi' mates as I wanted and I was gonna be getting paid four times as much...it was a no brainer.

Joe found the transition from [Club B] to [Club D] far easier and less stressful than his earlier move from [Club A] to [Club B] and put this down to his now renowned ability to score goals. Similarly, having become a fans' favourite at [Club B], Joe's sense of pride enhanced both his self-belief and self-worth. Despite his teammates receiving regular abuse from their

own fans due to their lowly league position at [Club B], Joe had received regular praise and adoration from fans on team nights out which increased his self-confidence:

It was alright for me at [Club B] 'cos I was doing well but other lads were getting slated in the street by fans [on team nights out]. They'd [other players] be getting verbally abused but they'd [fans] be coming up and 'ugging me. It was mad 'cos I felt sorry for the lads but I'd be lying if I said I didn't like the attention...I felt a million dollars and like I'd become a proper footballer.

In light of Joe's previous remarks, he was no longer walking into a daunting changing room as a former Premier League youth team or reserve team player. Instead, he had a Football League career under his belt as well as the support and respect of countless fans that now offered another challenge. Whereas his new teammates would be aware of and probably respect his previous goal scoring exploits, Joe now felt pressurised to maintain his reputation and appeared to relish the challenge by showing a strong personal desire to affect the perceptions of his teammates regardless:

I've always been somebody who wants to impress his teammates anyway...when I signed for [Club D] after I'd banged goals in for fun at [Club B], yeah, I walked in with an air o' confidence but I wanted to show the lads at [Club D] 'ow good I was...I suppose I wanted 'em to see me as someone who was too good for that level, even if it was just by working mi' b*****ks off to score as many as I could in training.

Intrigued by the image Joe was trying to convey, I was interested in his motives. While Joe again found himself in unfamiliar surroundings in the early stages of his [Club D] career, he had developed an early understanding of the role played by his teammates in his career. In this respect, Joe recognised that as well as being teammates, they were also his competition. Speaking openly about the reasoning behind the image he attempted to convey, Joe uncovered a ruthless approach to his career; an approach centred on his own well-being:

At the end o' the day, it's all about yourself and people can say what they want but deep down everybody knows it...managers know it and players know it...it's dog-eat-dog and if by somebody doing well that means you're not gonna be playing or not gonna be the main man then you don't want it to 'appen. I don't know one person who would be 'appy for somebody else to do well at a club rather than them.

Furthermore, Joe had little hesitation in responding to the conflict of interest between personal and team success. Despite suffering relegation while at [Club B], Joe expressed satisfaction with how the season had panned out due to his personal goal scoring achievements. Here, I asked Joe whether personal success was indeed more important than team success; a question that prompted a swift response and one that shed further light on Joe's self-centred approach to his career:

...we [Joe's team] could lose any game 7-1, but if I'd scored the one then I'd be going 'ome 'appy...I'd rather finish bottom o' the league but score 20 goals than win the league with 4 [goals]...without a doubt...I was always desperate to keep mi' name on the scorer's charts that come on Sky Sports News every ten minutes 'cos it would bring a smile to mi' face and I loved it. And it wasn't just 'cos I felt good about mi'sen...it was 'cos I knew that everybody else could see me as well. I could imagine fans and managers saying, you know, 'I see Joe Wilson's scored again'...and that gave me a massive buzz and it meant that I'd be alright.

While Joe continued his excellent vein of form into his [Club D] career, he reflected on other successful aspects of his transition, such as moving into his first house with new girlfriend, [Sally]. Having spent increasing amounts of time in each other's company throughout the early stages of his [Club D] career, together they purchased a house local to both of their parents and received some rather unexpected news within weeks of moving in:

...we [Joe and Sally] bought our first 'ouse together and almost immediately, [Sally] fell pregnant...it wasn't planned and it was a massive shock to us both but we were 'appy together

and that was all that mattered...but from that moment on, I realised what responsibilities I had and became even more focused on mi' football and mi' career.

However, the transition was not entirely successful, as Joe also disclosed an unspoken rift between himself and the [Club D] manager. As [Club D] continued to struggle from both performance and financial perspectives, the manager bore the brunt of the fans' frustrations which seemingly affected Joe's relationship with him. Although nothing was ever said in person, Joe alluded to a strained relationship between the pair and one that was seemingly affected by each other's popularity:

I was getting a lot o' positive press coverage even though we were doing c**p...he [the manager] didn't like it one bit and everyone knew it...the lads would joke that me and [Smithy] would be managers soon 'cos the fans were always chanting mine or [Smithy's] name and giving 'im [the manager] a lot o' stick. He'd always be nice to mi' face but I always felt as though he'd be saying stuff about me behind mi' back or that he'd want me out o' the club...especially when we were losing.

As Joe's performances continued to excel, he made reference to 'feeling like Ronaldo must feel every time he walks onto the pitch'. In this respect, Joe explained how he 'felt untouchable' whereby his confidence in his own ability had elevated him, both mentally and physically above any defenders that League One could throw at him. In his own mind, '[he] was probably too good for that level [League One]'. With [Club D] desperate to offload some of their prized assets to balance the books, Joe became an obvious option and one that could make the club a significant amount of money. Despite being perturbed by the manager's approach, Joe was given the opportunity to speak to [Club E] in the Championship who had seen their offer accepted and who seemed an attractive proposition to Joe on many levels. Now aged 26, Joe's decision was affected by a number of others; others who he would be

leaving behind, others that he would be given the chance to test himself against and others in the form of his girlfriend [Sally] and the new born they were expecting:

He [the manager] just said [Club E] 'ad come in for me and he thought I should go...that p***ed me off 'cos he could 'ave said it in a nicer way...but I wanted to test myself at the next level 'cos I thought I were good enough to play against better players...it was a 2-and-'alf year deal on a bit more money which gave me and [Sally] a bit more security wi' little 'un on the way...plus, I'd get a decent pay-up from [Club D] and we wouldn't 'ave to move...it was a great move really.

Interested in the role played by [Sally] in the ensuing move to [Club E], I asked Joe how important her thoughts and feelings were during this or indeed any transfer. Describing the process of his move to [Club E] which he regarded as synonymous of each of his transfers to different clubs, Joe appeared to be left to his own devices when making football-orientated decisions but suggested that the location of each of the respective clubs reduced the likelihood of any conflict:

I'd talk to [Sally] about mi' options but nothing in-depth or 'owt like that...if I wanted to sign for someone, I'd sign for 'em, it was as simple as that...but then the deals 'ave always been on good money and I've always wanted to stay close to 'ome anyway 'cos I like being near mi' family...I wasn't asking 'er to move down South and away from 'er family for an extra 'undred quid.

I would suggest that Joe always had [Sally's] and later, his family's best interests at heart during any football-orientated decision that he made. However, I would also argue that decisions were based primarily on the progression of his career and the chance to earn as much money as he could; something that would advertently take care of his familial responsibilities. While this will become further evident in his later transfers, Joe's decision to move to [Club E] was also influenced by his relationship with previous teammates. Although Joe had no contact with the players he spoke about since

leaving them behind at [Club B], Joe was encouraged by the prospect of re-connecting with them at [Club E]. To this extent, Joe revealed the impact of knowing players that he would potentially share a changing room with during his decision-making process:

...‘cos I knew that [Paul] and [John] from [Club B] were at [Club E], I could see mi’sen being ‘appy and relaxed in their company again...and as much as it wasn’t the be all and end all, it definitely gave me peace o’ mind to know that I’d ‘ave a couple o’ lads who I could get on wi’ and obviously they’d already seen ‘ow good I’d been.

With a number of relationships and interactions affecting his thought processes, Joe signed for [Club E] in the Championship and set about making his mark in the second flight of English football. Joe later described his move to [Club E] as ‘the turning point in [his] career’ and the transfer that confirmed his potential as a top striker.

C5: The Championship Player

Joe placed much of the early success of his move to [Club E] down to the sheer timing of it. In this respect, Joe revealed his aversion of pre-season training and his distinct lack of motivation throughout this time. Luckily for Joe, his transfer to [Club E] happened midway through the season and gave Joe an immediate chance to impress. Here, Joe reflected on the importance of signing two day before a game and how the timing had affected his motivation:

It was miles better playing straight away ‘cos there’s nowt worse than signing in pre-season and ‘aving eight weeks of expectation ‘anging over your ‘ead ...plus, it ‘ad to be a league game for me to get up for it...it ‘ad to be a game where I’d see mi’ name in the paper or I’d be able to add the goal to mi’ total...it ‘ad to be worth something to me.

Joe soon settled into his new surroundings and following a couple of goals in a string of impressive performances, enjoyed competing against better quality players. By his own

admission, Joe had previously 'doubted whether the move would be a step too far for [him]' but had dampened any suspicions very early into the transition as the goals continued to flow. However, following an excellent start to his [Club E] career, Joe and [Sally] received the sad news that they had suffered a miscarriage in the latter stages of their pregnancy. Here, Joe admitted the event had affected his wife far more than himself:

For two or three months she [Sally] was devastated...it really 'it 'er 'ard. It was really difficult for 'er and I know it might sound a bit 'arsh but it wasn't that difficult for me...I'm one o' those people who can shrug it off and move on...not in a heartless way 'cos it was upsetting but I was more upset for mi' missus. For me, the baby wasn't born and ok, I know we were planning for everything but it 'appens to a lot o' people.

Joe appeared to use the challenging experience of the miscarriage to his advantage as, while looking back at this transition and subsequent period of his career, Joe alluded to a definite shift in his professional attitude. While supporting [Sally] through her emotional distress, Joe explained how some of his methods of support also enhanced his own professionalism. For example, Joe described how [Sally] enjoyed regular visits to the gym and so Joe would accompany her on a nightly basis; something which he also reaped the benefits of:

I tried to do everything that I could to help [Sally] through it [the miscarriage]...but I also used it to mi' advantage as well 'cos [Sally] loved the gym and so we'd go to the gym together every night...I became a bit obsessed wi' keeping in shape and being as professional as I could be I suppose 'cos I knew I'd soon 'ave a family to support and I wanted to keep earning the money I was earning.

[Sally's] miscarriage was one of a number of challenging transitions that occurred in the middle of Joe's contract. While moving between clubs presented Joe with obvious personal transitions, dealing with the miscarriage had equally affected his

thought processes. With their first daughter, [Emily] being born a year later, Joe's changing identity as a father initiated immense feelings of pride and accentuated his desire to be as professional as he could. Similarly, Joe stated how injuries were also tough transitional periods of his career, due to the unknown quantity of what lied ahead. In this regard, Joe distinguished a distinct difference in his identity as a fit and an injured player. Using his time at [Club E] as a prime example, Joe reflected on his time spent in rehabilitation following a nasty knee injury. Having scored 29 goals in his first full season in League One with [Club E] and following a number of enquiries from Championship clubs, Joe was to spend the majority of the following season on the sidelines; something that severely affected his identity:

...it's weird when you're injured 'cos someone else is doing your job and playing your role...I was just Joe the injured lad for nine months and I 'ated it...I'd still 'ave banter wi' the lads and stuff but I didn't feel part o' the team. The manager was always sound wi' me as well but it's as though he speaks to you less when you're injured...but I suppose being injured also makes you insecure 'cos in the back o' your mind is a nagging doubt that you'll never be the same again...I needed to be out training and playing to properly feel part of everything...I just felt unimportant I suppose.

Further supporting his conflict between being fit and being injured, Joe recalled the moment his identity seemed to return on his first game back from injury. Describing the pressure of his comeback game, where he felt a need to prove his fitness to an expectant crowd of club officials, supporters and scouts, Joe succinctly detailed the goal that left him shrouded in relief. Here, I would argue that the moment Joe scored was a transition in itself; a transition from Joe 'the injured lad' back to Joe the renowned striker:

...if there's one moment in mi' career that I could relive it would be that goal [his comeback goal at Club E]...it's a hot day and for the first 15 minutes, I didn't get a kick...[name of player] runs

down the line and crosses the ball into the box...diving 'eader...I just shut mi' eyes and 'eard the roar...you can't reconstruct it can you but that goal and the mixture o' relief and buzz o' scoring was out o' this world...I'd put so much pressure on mi'self to score in the game 'cos I knew there'd be loads o' people watching...scouts, supporters, club officials. The doubts about being a yard short or off the pace just went in that split second...I was back.

The fact that Joe mentioned that [Club E] officials would be watching his comeback game with interest was perplexing. Having been an outstanding performer for the club for the previous 18 months, I was intrigued by Joe's inclinations of a judgemental board of directors and was keen to learn more. Joe explained how prior to his knee injury and with a number of Championship clubs interested in paying between 500 and 750 thousand pounds for his services, the club offered him an improved and extended contract that was later withdrawn when he sustained his injury. In Joe's mind, he had to prove to the officials at [Club E] that he was worthy of their previous offer. However, despite scoring seven goals in his first twelve games, [Club E] offered Joe the same contract that he was on previously which led to him feeling unwanted:

I was gutted to be 'onest [to be offered the same deal]...before mi' injury they [Club E] were desperate to keep me and pushed the boat out...but after mi' injury it was as though they thought less o' me and wouldn't 'ave been bothered if I'd left...they didn't need to say 'owt to me, their offer said it all...and that 'urt me and I wanted out.

With under a year left to run on his contract, Joe received a phone call from a former teammate of his at [Club A] and whose agent had expressed an interest in representing Joe. Joe's contract with previous agent, [Jim] had ended a month earlier and having not contacted him throughout his time of rehabilitation, Joe had put an end to their working relationship:

...it was n'owt malicious or 'owt like that but he'd not shown any interest in me while I was injured and that told me everything I needed to know...he was only interested in the money and so I just called 'im to say that were it and I weren't signing with 'im again...I thanked 'im for what he'd done but as far as I was concerned there wasn't much more to be said.

Encouraged by the prospective agents' proposal, Joe made no secret of his desire to sign a contract with him straight away. The first thing mentioned to Joe was the interest of a club in League One who wanted to sign Joe on a three-year contract and who would foot the bill of the agent fees involved. A three year contract was something that immediately appealed to Joe given that he was 28 and [Sally] was now expecting twins some 20 months after [Emily's] arrival. With ever-increasing responsibilities driving his thought processes, Joe agreed to meet with [Club F] and discuss the terms the agent had mentioned. However, despite agreeing terms on the three year contract the agent had spoken about, Joe's transfer was cast into doubt when he failed the club medical because of his recent knee injury.

Unconcerned by the collapse of Joe's transfer to [Club F], Joe's new agent arranged for Joe to hold talks with [Club G] who were willing to meet [Club E's] valuation and who were similarly willing to offer Joe a three-year contract. Describing [Club G] as a 'massive' club, Joe was excited by his potential move and the stability and security it would bring to his familial responsibilities. However, Joe also recognised the importance of future performances and subsequently, the potential frailty of his contract: 'it was a three-year deal but you know what football's like, anything can happen...moving to [Club G] didn't mean I were gonna be a Championship player for the rest o' mi' career'. From a relational perspective, Joe was also leaving behind players who had played a role in escalating him to one of the top strikers in the Football League and who he had exchanged banter with on a daily basis. When asked to share his thoughts when leaving his former teammates behind, Joe had an uncaring view of

their relationships; but a view that Joe regarded as representative of professional football in general:

I didn't even say goodbye to the lads at [Club E] and it didn't bother me. I failed the medical at [Club F] on the Friday and didn't go into the club again 'cos I signed for [Club G] on the Monday. Apart from playing against some of 'em in games, I 'aven't seen or spoke to any of 'em since that last Thursday in training but that's football. If I kept in touch with every player who I'd ever played wi' I'd never get 'owt done...it'd be impossible.

As he alluded to in the above extract, Joe signed his three year contract with [Club G] and having recently moved into a bigger house to cater for his increasing family, set about making his name in the Championship once more. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below the move proved far from a resounding success for a number of reasons.

C6: The Three Year Deal

As mentioned previously, Joe's decision to sign for [Club G] was affected by his relationships with a number of significant others. Similarly, 'others' played a role in both the relative success and the impact Joe's transfer had on his identity. More specifically, Joe was faced with a number of personal challenges that he admittedly struggled to manage. For instance, Joe recalled his first running session at [Club G] and found himself in a whole new predicament during their first fitness session:

I was busting mi' balls and was still 20 yards behind the last man...there was only one other player who was on mi' Richter-Scale and everyone else was just ridiculous...and I just thought, f***ing hell, this is a massive step up... at the end o' that training session I began to question whether I was actually up to that level and doubted whether I was good enough to be at a club like [Club G].

Joe explained how he sensed an initial air of tentativeness from his new teammates in the changing room and reflected on this during our conversations. Having played against the manager of [Club G] on numerous occasions, Joe looked back over a previous touchline spat that saw the pair exchange heated words and dragged apart. Reflecting not only on the manner of his transfer but also the apparent withdrawn approach of his new [Club G] teammates, Joe estimated that he'd maybe been signed as 'a nutcase for when times were 'ard and when games got physical'. Admitting that he enjoyed the physical side to the game but not in an overzealous way, Joe suspected that the manager and perhaps the players had got their perceptions of him all wrong which affected his early interactions at [Club G]:

It's 'ard to explain but in the early stages [at Club G] there was definitely a wariness o' me in the changing rooms...whether it was just a quietness I picked up on I don't know but I definitely felt as though the other players were a bit wary o' me...as if I were a bit of a loose cannon.

Behind the scenes, Joe was preparing for the arrival of the twins to complement his 18-month old daughter, [Emily]. Having signed for [Club G] on a Monday, Joe's debut the following Saturday was curtailed as he accompanied [Sally] to the birth of their twin daughters, [Lauren] and [Grace]. Despite being overjoyed by their arrival, Joe grew increasingly impatient and frustrated by his now prolonged chance to impress at [Club G]. In his own words, 'as delighted as I was wi' the twins [birth], it affected mi' debut [at Club G] and it felt like I 'ad to wait forever'. While the timing of Joe's debut was clearly affected by things out of his control, he also placed part of the evaluation of his debut and subsequent [Club G] career down to the role of the opposition goal keeper in that one game. Reliving his substitute appearance during the final twenty minutes of the game, Joe's entrance onto the biggest stage of his career nearly got off to the perfect start but instead left Joe contemplating what might have been:

...I 'ad 'eader which I caught as sweet as I could 'ave done and their keeper made an unbelievable save...I think if that'd 'ave gone in, it would've given me that extra confidence and things might 'ave been so different at [Club G]...I look back and think that chance could 'ave been the start of a great career there whereas the keeper pulls an amazing save out of 'is arse and things didn't end up working out.

Joe's confession that things didn't end up working out stemmed from his lack of first team appearances and the impact this had on his identity. Having been the main striker at his previous three clubs, Joe found himself used sparingly, as other strikers assumed the role at [Club G]. While Joe appreciated the plethora of striking options the manager had at his disposal, it did little to alleviate his feelings of rejection. In this respect, it wasn't only the manager who affected Joe's self-worth by not selecting him but also [Club G] fans who failed to display the interest and affection that had accompanied him through his previous successes:

...there were loads o' big name players [at Club G] and so no one wanted mi' autograph and nobody really knew who I was...and that was so 'ard for me to get mi' 'ead around and it did affect me 'cos I'd come from [Club E] where everybody knew me and everybody knew that I was the main man kind o' thing and then at [Club G] I felt like a nobody...that was hard for me...I felt like an outsider really.

Joe's suggestion that he felt like a 'nobody' or an 'outsider' stemmed from his wider recognition. Although Joe's interactions with his teammates were no different to his interactions with former teammates at more successful clubs once he had bedded in, his lack of first team playing opportunities had a knock-on effect with his overall self-worth. Moreover, Joe's name was no longer on the top goal scorer charts on Sky Sports News every ten minutes and no newspaper journalists were interviewing him after games during this

period. In essence, Joe had lost a big part of his footballer identity and a part that now persuades Joe to exclude [Club G] from his playing career if it ever crops up in conversation:

If anyone ever asks me about mi' career and about where I've played, I never mention [Club G] 'cos I never felt as if I was a [Club G] player...I never felt as if I was part o' the furniture or someone who could say, yer, I played for 'em.

Given these observations, it could be argued that Joe's [Club G] career was a downright failure. On the surface of these experiences, Joe obviously suffered numerous setbacks, or indeed a halt in proceedings in his quest for more personal success during his career. However, upon signing for [Club G], Joe's personal success appeared to take a change of direction, in terms of his aims and aspirations. Whereas Joe had previously been almost transfixed on scoring as many goals as he could and playing at the highest level possible, his personal success would now be self-evaluated a little differently, with financial responsibilities at the forefront of his drive. Although Joe had undoubtedly maintained a desire to be successful from a footballing perspective, lying underneath the ruthless exterior of his professional image was his ulterior motive; money:

I just remember thinking when I signed for [Club G], right, this contract's gonna see me 'til I'm 32...from that point o' signing mi' deal at [Club G], it became about money. I had mi' three kids to think about and I still 'ad a big mortgage around mi' neck so mi' sole aim was to sort that out and so I wasn't bothered about getting a new car or owt 'cos all I wanted was to get mi' mortgage down.

Although Joe revealed that his priorities had changed from the point he signed his three-year contract, I would question whether this change in thinking had been instigated by the unsuccessful period he endured, and therefore happened a short time afterwards. Would Joe's outlook have changed if the keeper hadn't 'pulled a save out

of 'is arse' and Joe had instead scored on his home debut in front of thousands of celebrating fans? Moreover, maybe this negative period in Joe's career had acted as a wake-up call, possibly questioning the extent of his future earnings in the game. However, the fact that Joe 'wasn't bothered about getting a new car or owt' was nothing new. When asked whether it mattered what people thought about him and whether he felt a need to impress anybody through his possessions, Joe offered an excellent example of his reserved approach to life:

That's just not me [impressing people]...it never interested me. I mean I bowled up to [Club G] in mi' missus' ten-year old Volkswagen Golf and the lads used to take the piss, you know, 'ere he is in 'is big fun bus!' There was food all over it, a right mess inside but I've got three kids so it's no good 'aving a nice car for me...I didn't care what anybody else thought.

Throughout his career, if not whole life, Joe has never been concerned about what people think about him on a materialistic level. During one of the interviews, Joe described how he 'never acted like a footballer...[he] just loved the football and not the other sh*t that comes with it, the living up to it and the showing everyone that you've got this and you've got that kind o' thing...that never interested [him]'. Joe clearly had a mental picture of what constituted 'act[ing] like a footballer' and did not want to fall into that category, as he alluded to here: 'I'm not bothered about 'aving all o' these flash cars and designer clothes that are worth a small fortune...I don't wanna look a mess but I'd rather wear a tracksuit and feel comfortable'. Having spent the best part of ten seasons earning on average, 'between £2000 and £2500 [per week, basic wage]', Joe was clearly in a position to live the lifestyle that he spoke about had he wanted to. Instead, Joe was happier spending his money on what he described as 'more important things', such as his mortgage or holidays and days away with his kids.

Joe's lack of first team opportunities were the major factor behind his next decision; a decision where he asked the manager if he could leave [Club G] on loan. Following a three week spell in the stands where he was omitted from the first team squad, Joe's thought processes were different to how I expected. Sharing with me the time he spent in the stands, Joe referred to positivity instead of the frustrations that I'd envisaged:

...I was happy [being in the stands] 'cos I knew I wasn't going anywhere at the club...it was too serious for me, it was all too intense and I knew in mi' own mind that it wasn't what I wanted and d'ya know what, when I looked around the squad, the majority o' the players were better than me...I just wanted an easier life and if I'm being 'onest, one where I was the main man again.

While Joe never informed the manager at [Club G] of his desire for an easier life, he did approach him to go out on loan and get some much needed first team action. As I was interested in the manager's reaction to Joe's request, Joe recalled how the manager 'thought it were a good idea [to go out on loan]...he [the manager] didn't say he regretted signing [him] or anything but thought the games would do [him] good'. With his manager's approval, Joe signed a months' loan at [Club H]; a club that showed an immediate interest in his availability and a move that would see him spend the following 18-months officially as a [Club G] player but out on loan at [Club H] and later [Club I].

C7: The Loan Player

Joe's decision to move away from [Club G] on loan was affected by his relationships with a number of significant others. Firstly, away from football Joe's Mum was ill and suffering with an early-onset of Alzheimer's disease. Here, along with his Dad and sister, Joe was keen to spend as much time with his Mum as he could or at least use training as a mechanism to

free his mind of his inherent sadness. However, the intensity and duration of his daily routine at [Club G] was something that merely accentuated his despondency:

...not only was I getting nowhere near the first team but I wasn't enjoying the seriousness and intensity of everything [at Club G]...I was cut up about mi' Mum being ill but training wasn't giving me the escape that I needed...I wanted to train with a smile on mi' face and forget about everything for a bit but instead I was worrying about making a mistake or getting bollocked.

Secondly, Joe made the loan decision in relation to the ability of his [Club G] teammates. By his own admission, Joe recognised that 'the majority o' players were better than [him]' and preferred his earlier status as the 'main man'. His months' loan to [Club H] enabled him to return to League One; a league that he'd earlier revealed that '[he] was too good for'. As expected, Joe immediately found himself as the main man at [Club H] and scored six goals in his seven games at the club. From a social perspective, Joe was keen to stress the emotional impact of his loan spell at [Club H]; a loan spell made more successful by his regular contact with the manager at [Club G] who appeared delighted with his excellent run of form:

...after every game [for Club H], [the manager of Club G] would text me or ring me and say well done! You know, keep it up kind o' thing and it was weird 'cos I felt a million dollars after that...as soon as I saw that text or 'eard 'is praise I was absolutely buzzing...so 'appy.

As the above extract demonstrates, Joe evaluated the success of his loan move to [Club H] not only by his own goal to game ratio or by the standard of his own performances but also by other people's appreciation of his achievements. While the [Club H] manager would also enhance Joe's self-esteem with regular praise, it was Joe's recognition on a wider scale that mostly affected his evaluation of the transition. More specifically, seeing his name in the newspapers and his goals on the television gave Joe part of his former identity back. Using a

radio phone-in as a prime example, Joe described the moment that depicted his loan move as a complete success:

I'd always 'ave the local radio on on the way 'ome [from games] and the [Club G] fans would be ringing in asking why I was out on loan scoring all o' these goals when they were struggling...and looking back it's strange 'cos I never really wanted to make that step up at that time but it gave me great pride and pleasure to know that he [the Club G manager] was giving me all o' this praise and that the fans recognised what I could do, even if I 'adn't done owt for 'em...I felt wanted.

Having been recalled by [Club G] following his excellent run of form at [Club H], Joe was informed by the manager that he would start the next league game and set his sights on making his mark in a first team he'd previously deemed 'better than ['im]'. Joe's return game for [Club G] could itself be regarded as a transition; a transition that saw Joe's enhanced confidence and elevated self-belief cast aside and replaced by the burden of pressure. Reliving the hours leading up to kick-off in the team hotel, Joe's feelings told him everything he needed to know; in his own mind, the ensuing game was make or break:

I remember sitting in the 'otel before the game against [the opponents] and thinking to mi'sen, this is sh*t or bust! So, o' course I were nervous...there was a lot riding on it [the game]. All o' the lads were rallying around me and wanting me to do well...you know, 'come on Joe, what a chance this is for you, you know you're good enough'...I was just 'oping and praying that I could nick a goal 'cos we 'ad bottom o' the league on the Tuesday and I fancied I score in that one.

Despite being buoyed by his teammates' suggestions that he was indeed good enough for Championship football, Joe confessed, '[he] 'ad a bad game...but so did everyone else', as [Club G] drew Joe's make or break game nil-nil. To confirm Joe's misery, he was subsequently dropped for the following league game where the incoming striker scored two goals in a four-two victory. Reflecting on the apparent failure of his transition back to [Club G], Joe preferred

to regard the events as 'what [he] wanted' and shared his relief when he later found himself out of the squad again:

Yeah, it could 'ave been so different if I'd scored [in his return game] and if I'd played against bottom o' the league on the Tuesday but I was relieved to be sat in the stands 'cos this time mi' [Club G] career really was over...The manager [at Club G] never said 'owt to me but he signed another two strikers the week after so he didn't need to [say anything to Joe].

Joe spent the remainder of the season on loan at [Club I]; a move instigated by one of his teammates at [Club G]. Having recently signed for [Club G], Joe's teammate held a positive relationship with the wealthy new owners of [Club I] and informed them of Joe's desire to source first team football in League One. Aware of Joe's recent goal scoring record in League One, Joe signed a loan deal until the end of the season at [Club I] that was later extended to include the whole of the following season. Once again, the manager of [Club G] supported Joe in his quest for first team football and agreed that a loan would suit all parties. Surrounded by League One players and back in an environment where he felt comfortable, Joe scored 12 goals in the remaining 18 games of the season and placed the success of the move down to his change in status and subsequent belief in his ability:

...it's weird 'cos the lads at [Club G] were brilliant wi' me once they knew I weren't a nutcase and they were no different to mi' teammates at [Club H] or [Club I]...the only difference was that I felt more comfortable in mi' ability back in League One and knew that if I played, I'd score...and maybe it 'elped when I looked around the changing room and felt like one o' the best.

Joe clearly made sense of his experiences and of his transitions in relation to his teammates on numerous occasions. This was further evidenced in his first days on loan at [Club I]. Using his interactions with teammates to gauge their evaluation of his ability, Joe offered an example of how he understood his status among his new teammates. During one

of his early training sessions, one of the players made reference to a game in which Joe was outstanding and easily had the beating of one of [Club I's] defender's; a revelation that humoured the rest of the squad:

...I'd played against [Club I] the previous season and scored two goals against the defenders that were still there...in training, one o' the lads has shouted 'eh, Joe, are you gonna let [Karl] and [Ben] out o' your pocket today and give 'im a kick [of the ball]', and all the lads p***ed 'emselves laughing...and that gave me a right buzz 'cos they'd remembered me and to me, it said they knew 'ow good I was...I felt great.

Joe considered the positive relationships that he held with his [Club I] teammates as the decisive factor in extending his loan for a further season. With a host of clubs vying for his services, Joe commented on the importance of feeling comfortable and feeling wanted. In this respect, the [Club I] manager was adamant that Joe could be the player to propel the team up the league and lead their charge for promotion. In a similar vein, Joe's teammates were constantly ringing him to ensure that he knew how much they wanted him to stay which had a notable impact on Joe's thought processes:

...signing for [Club I] again was an easy decision to make...I'd travelled in wi' a few o' the lads when I'd been on loan previously which helped massively 'cos straight away I felt comfortable and didn't 'ave to try and impress anyone wi' owt. I was their big signing and 'cos some o' the lads 'ad rang me almost begging me to go back I felt special again, everyone loved me again and that was what I'd craved I think.

Evaluating the success of his extra season's loan at [Club I], Joe had mixed feelings. For the first five months of the season, Joe's performances failed to reach the standards he'd set during the previous season as he was recovering from an injury sustained in the pre-season. Making a stop-start return to fitness which left him in and out of the first team, Joe's

relationship with his manager deteriorated following the club's Boxing Day fixture, where Joe was omitted from the starting eleven. Although disgruntled by his manager's actions, Joe was equally aware of the strain that his Mum's ill health was putting on his life at that time. In this respect, Joe made reference to his tendency to conceal his feelings and reflected on a sustained period of concealment that had ultimately left him ready to explode:

I was raging [at being dropped]...and that might 'ave been a release of aggression or a build-up o' frustration 'cos o' mi' Mum, I don't know. I suppose, at that time she really wasn't well and I was dealing wi' it in mi' own way...you know, I'm not one who cries a lot or shows 'is emotions...I probably bottle everything up more than I should do but I'll never change...not that I'm bothered what other people think but I'd feel really awkward crying in public.

Joe made an instant impression as a substitute in the game that he was recalled, scoring two goals in the process. Despite instigating a personal run of form, [Club I] endured a dismal end to the season and sacked their manager with a handful of games remaining. Still officially a [Club G] player, Joe immediately doubted his opportunities to sign a permanent deal with [Club I] as his interactions with his [Club I] teammates and respective relationship with the newly promoted assistant manager suggested he'd need to find another club. Here, Joe made sense of his position, and indeed future decisions in relation to those interactions with his teammates and the assistant manager's apparent disapproval of Joe's selfish approach to his game:

...when the assistant [manager] became manager, that was me done...I'd 'eard he'd been saying to some o' the lads that all I did was score goals and all I wanted was the glory so I 'ad a bit of a chat wi' 'im at the end o' season do...nothing nasty or malicious but I wanted to clear the air more than owt...he never said owt to mi' face but he said money would be tight and to me, that gave 'im the perfect opportunity to get rid o' me and that was the first time in mi' career I felt unwanted which wasn't very nice...I felt like he'd pushed me out.

At the end of the season, [Club I] predictably informed Joe that they were unwilling to match [Club G's] valuation of him and decided against offering him a permanent contract. In contractual terms, Joe would have to return to [Club G] in the following pre-season and fulfil his playing duties for the remaining year of his contract; something he viewed as a last resort. As far as Joe was concerned, he didn't want to set foot in a place where he felt worthless and therefore encouraged his agent to arrange a transfer before the season commenced. With two clubs vying for his services, Joe's decision was again based on a number of relationships with significant others; namely his own family, his Mum and Dad and his potential new (and former) teammates. In Joe's mind, a return to [Club H] was perfect:

It [Club H] was 20 minutes from mi' house, I knew the lads already from going there on loan, it was a three-year deal...but more importantly, I'd still be near mi' Mum and Dad to 'elp out whenever I could...I was buzzing 'cos the move was perfect really...knowing 'ow uncertain and insecure everything is in professional football, I suppose I was lucky to be signing such a good deal so late in mi' career.

Mentioning his Mum and Dad's situation highlighted the impact they had on his career decisions; something that would become increasingly evident in the latter stages of his career. Although his Mum and Dad never expected Joe to make decisions with them in mind, his decision to sign for [Club H] was severely affected by his Mum's deteriorating condition and with his identity as a son at the forefront of his thoughts.

C8: The Carer

Having paid 150 thousand pounds for his services, Joe was expected to spearhead [Club H's] challenge for promotion to the Championship. With mounting expectation on his shoulders, Joe made sense of his position in relation to his teammates. Firstly, Joe

acknowledged that being top earner at the club, the younger pro's would look to him as a role model that could propel [Club H] up the league. Using first team games as a prime example, Joe revealed how opponents' programmes would further reinforce the weight of expectation on his shoulders:

...every away game there'd be a piece in the programme on the 'one to watch' and it'd always be me...it gives you a buzz seeing that and maybe gives you that little boost o' confidence or self-belief in your ability...you know, you're proud kind o' thing...but also that extra weight of expectation where you know everyone is watching you...you know, I'm looking around the changing room and it's full o' young players that probably expect big things o' me.

Despite being filled with youth and hunger, there was one player in the [Club H] changing room who matched Joe's previous levels of personal success. While Joe recalled the level of expectation placed on his performances, there was another senior professional at the club that not only shared the same burden of pressure as Joe but also the same position. As strikers, Joe and [Tommy] were expected to join forces and score the goals they'd become renowned for. However, as a partnership and sharing many of the same attributes as players, they were soon pitted against each other to compete for the role of 'target man' at the club and vied to link up with a livelier, more agile striker. Here, Joe shared the feelings that accompanied him through his time spent on the substitutes' bench; a time where he made sense of his position in relation to [Tommy] among others:

...I knew that as soon as I 'ad 'alf a bad game then it would be me that would be dropped 'cos [Tommy] was a legend there [Club H]...and I didn't feel too downbeat about not playing 'cos [Tommy] 'ad 'ad a more successful career than me, he was a legend at the club and I respected that...but I was doing somet' I always thought of other players...where they'd go on a run and then they'd be out o' the team...when I looked around any dressing room there'd always be half a dozen

players that would be in and out o' the team 'cos they were inconsistent...and that's what I'd become.

Joe's relationship with [Tommy] seemingly helped him through what was a turbulent time away from football. Given Joe's confessions, it could be suggested that he relinquished aspects of his drive and ambition by merely settling for a place on the periphery of [Club H]. However, in the background of Joe's life, his Mum's situation seemed in constant decline; to a point where Joe questioned the importance of his professional footballer identity:

...for two or three years [Joe's] Mum was getting worse and getting worse to where she didn't know who anyone was and she was bed-ridden...mi' Dad 'ad to feed 'er and do everything for 'er 'cos she couldn't feed 'erself or do owt like that...it was so sad to see. And then I'd 'ave to try and forget about it all and go training...it was impossible...if it wasn't for the money, I'd 'ave quit [football] 'cos mi' Mum was more important than mi' football.

It was not just his relationship with his Mum that was affected by his footballing duties. During what was clearly a challenging time for Joe, his changing schedule was not only preventing him from spending precious time with his seriously ill Mother but also impacting upon his family life. Here, Joe shared his frustrations with the regular cancellation of the club day off due to poor results. In turn, the extra day's training affected Joe's identity as a father and as a son leading Joe to consider his position as a professional footballer:

...you know what football's like where they want you in on afternoons and if you lose you're in on your day off...I'd tell the kids that I'd take 'em swimming on a Wednesday but I couldn't 'cos we'd lost on the Tuesday night so I was getting p***ed off 'cos I was obviously getting no time with mi' Mum or Dad either...that's when I started to think full-time football was too big a commitment for me and I needed an easier life.

Joe also made reference to a change in his professional approach to football. With his Mum's situation irking away in the back of his mind, Joe appeared to lose elements of the drive and motivation that had seen him dominate the League One scoring charts for a number of seasons. Here, Joe recalled the impact that his personal life was having on his daily training routine. Making specific reference to one session in particular, Joe's changing motivations led him to question the overall impact of his Mum's ill health:

The manager [of Club H] put on a training session and I was trying to remember the things from shops for mi' Dad or what the kids were 'aving for tea on the night...I'd never experienced that before and it was strange...mi' love o' the game was disappearing in front o' mi' eyes. But would things 'ave been different if mi' Mum was fit and well? I don't know...probably.

As Joe alluded to previously, he began to regard full-time football as a hindrance to his familial responsibilities. In this respect, Joe's transition to [Club H] became a failure on two fronts; from a footballing perspective and from the impact it was having on his personal life. Having already spoken of the financial implications of quitting football altogether, Joe searched for a compromise that would enable him to fulfil both his financial and familial responsibilities. Here, Joe considered entering the realm of semi-professional, part-time football; a place that also had a financial appeal to it. Joe made sense of his potential drop down the leagues in relation to the rumoured contracts of other players:

I was looking in the Non-League newspaper and seeing that players were earning ridiculous money playing part-time and that's where I just thought, I'll 'ave a bit o' that...lads were saying that bang average players were picking up 12, 13, 14 'undred quid a week...and I knew that I was better than the majority of 'em they were talking about.

Having 18-months left on his [Club H] contract left Joe in a complex situation. Although Joe had explained his situation to the club and how his priority lay with his family which had

instigated his desire to play part-time football, [Club H] would stand to make money by selling Joe to one of a number of interested football league clubs. Joe had a decision to make. He could stay at [Club H] and pick up his weekly wages but run the risk of spending less and less time with his Mum, he could transfer to a League Two club that were willing to agree to an extra day off training during the week but where he'd take a drop in wages, or he could make the move into part-time football on even less money but that involved training two nights a week. After much deliberation, Joe's priorities dictated proceedings where his thought processes appeared driven entirely by his identity as a son:

...it [entering part-time football] was nowt to do wi' the football, it was nowt to do wi' money even though I still 'ad to pay the bills and whatever else 'cos I wasn't gonna give up an 18-month contract just for nowt, but basically it was the situation I was in...I just wanted to see as much o' mi' Mum as I could as well as helping mi' Dad out wi' everything...they'd been there for me all the way through mi' life and it was now my turn to be there for them.

A chance meeting with a former teammate of his, [Smithy] at a mutual friend's wedding gave Joe the opportunity to make the move into part-time football. As assistant manager at a local non-league club [Smithy] made Joe aware of [Club J's] interest before the agreed on a contract until the end of the season and on similar terms to the rumours that Joe had previously heard. Equipped with a substantial, tax-free 'pay-up' from [Club H], Joe was able to turn his back on a host of offers from full-time, League Two and Conference Premier clubs, yet prolong his (now semi-professional) football career, while also being able to give his Dad and sister all the help they needed looking after his Mum.

C9: The Part-Time Footballer

Having received a sizeable severance package from [Club H], Joe's transition was an immediate success, as it enabled him to focus on his main priority; his Mum. From a footballing perspective, the move was also a resounding success, as Joe reignited his goal scoring form and became the focal point of [Club J's] attack. Joe also took little time to adapt to the more laborious environment of non-league football. As the following extract reveals, Joe quickly became accustomed to the change in standard of both facilities and expectations of club staff:

Mi' first away game was at a right sh*t-'ole...but I'd prepared mi'sen and knew it was gonna be like that every week...I asked the kit man where the slips [pair of briefs] were and he just laughed...'you're not in the Football League now', he said...after the game I didn't even ask 'im for a towel...I just used one o' the lads' wet one...'welcome to non-league football', he said.

Regardless of this obvious change of luxuries, scoring goals became a habit again for Joe. Similarly, his desire to be the top scorer in the division returned and drove his desire for a further year's contract. In his own words, Joe 'was enjoying the easier life and wanted to show everyone 'ow good [he] was again...[he] knew that scoring goals would earn [him] another contract'. Here, Joe explained that the expectation surrounding his transfer was greater than at any previous club. In essence, Joe had voluntarily dropped three levels down the footballing pyramid and was subsequently expected to flourish. Joe recalled how his interactions with his new teammates, new supporters, new manager and new chairman all suggested that he needed to hit the ground running:

...it was mad [signing for Club J] 'cos almost immediately people expected things...fans were asking me if I was gonna get 'em 20 goals...the manager and chairman said I was just what they needed, someone to come in and bang in a load o' goals...and mi' teammates would joke that if I could get

20-odd in League One then I could get 40 in the Conference North...I knew I 'ad to get off to a good start.

As expected, Joe's early run of good form and glut of goals prompted [Club J] to offer him a further contract for the following season on the same money; a contract that he was overjoyed with. Unfortunately for Joe, the agreement of a further contract happened days before the somewhat expected death of his Mum; a time he remembers vividly:

I was devastated when mi' Mum died...I'll never forget it, we were away at [name of club] and I was getting back on the coach after the game and mi' phone 'ad about 150 missed calls...I just knew and mi' 'eart started racing...I rang mi' missus and just broke down and cried...I was 'eartbroken.

In the midst of a difficult grieving period for Joe, he had another big decision to make. Off the back of a fruitful period of scoring goals, Joe was inundated with offers had he wanted to return the professional ranks considering that he may still have been a professional player had his Mum's health not deteriorated so quickly. Here, Joe's relationship with the [Club J] chairman played an important role in his decision-making process. The chairman of [Club J] informed Joe that he would support him in any way he could, even suggesting that he would rip up the contract that Joe had recently signed had he preferred a return to the Football League. However, and with his Dad now at the forefront of his mind, Joe made the somewhat brave decision to remain at [Club J], a decision he didn't make lightly:

I was at [Club J] on good money and if I'm being 'onest, I don't know if I could 'ave gone to [name of Club] or [name of club] and done mi'sen justice at that level [League Two]...not only that but more importantly, I wanted to be there for mi' Dad.

The success of Joe's transition into non-league football extended beyond his footballing performances. Training two nights a week enabled Joe to see more of his children grow up but also enabled him to plan his post-footballing life; something he felt restricted to do during his full-time career. In his own words, Joe claimed that 'I now 'ad time on mi' 'ands during the day to concentrate on more than just eating, sleeping and drinking football'. Subsequently, Joe considered a number of options before beginning a sports massage course at a local college. Having sustained an injury in the early stages of his years' contract, Joe spent much of his contact time at [Club J] with the physiotherapist and it was he who suggested Joe became a personal trainer. Buoyed by his desire to maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle, combining his studies and football was an easy transition for Joe and something which he enjoyed. Joe commented how he adapted well to his student identity and instantly warmed to his fellow student peers: 'cos we [the students] were all in the same boat [starting the same course], everyone got on well and 'elped each other out which was great...it was a friendly atmosphere'. Alongside his studies, Joe contacted an old teammate of his who was now reserve team manager at [Club K] and enquired about gaining some hands-on massage experience within a professional environment; something that he described as 'invaluable'. Joe explained how his ability to gain such vital experience stemmed from his ability to forge positive relationships:

...I 'adn't spoken to 'im [Joe's old teammate] for years but he said 'o' course you can' [help out with massages]...he was more than 'appy for me to go and 'elp out wi' the massages [at Club K]...but why wouldn't he be? I always treat everyone wi' respect and never fall out wi' anyone...I always left on good terms wi' people on purpose 'cos you never know if you might need 'em for owt further down the line.

Although Joe's wages would decrease the following season at [Club J], Joe was financially secure, as he collected a substantial tax-free sum and subsequent monthly payment as part of his pension scheme with the Professional Footballers Association (PFA). Upon turning 35, Joe suggested that he had reaped the rewards of dedicating his life to his profession; something he expressed succinctly when he stated the following:

...I was so 'appy [when Joe received his pension]...I sat in mi' chair at 'ome and just thought to mi'sen that I'd earned it...all o' the overnight trips down South, all o' the Friday nights in, all o' the boiled chicken and pasta, all o' the running mi' b***ocks off in pre-season...to me, mi' pension was somet I'd saved bloody 'ard for and worked bloody 'ard for and it was such a good feeling when I got it.

Joe explained how the release of his pension appeared to tie in with a period of frustrating injuries and that were a sign that his career was coming to an end. As he laconically conveyed, '[his] legs were gone' and he was left to battle against niggles and strains that had eluded his earlier career. Interestingly, Joe's previously ruthless and selfish approach to his football had also begun to wane and he developed an interest in the progress of a recent young signing at [Club J]. Here, Joe demonstrated a true interest in the players' potential but understood the reasoning behind his sudden change of heart while also limiting the extent of his care:

...when [Andy Wilson] came in [to Club J] I tried to 'elp 'im and I tried to give 'im as much advice and support as I could...but it was only 'cos I knew that mi' time was up and that I was nearly finished 'cos mi' legs were gone...but if it 'ad been a few years earlier then I'd 'ave stood toe to toe wi' 'im...but I saw 'im and thought he 'ad somet about 'im and was genuinely 'appy that he was doing well and scoring goals...but if someone 'ad said we'll give [Andy Wilson] a contract or you, there's no way I'd have said [Andy Wilson].

Despite the decline of Joe's physical fitness and first team appearances, he clearly maintained his self-interests. Having returned to fitness, Joe received a phone call from a former teammate of his who was manager of [Club L] in the league below [Club J] and who was keen to add Joe to their strike force. In light of his teammates' offer, Joe approached [Club J] and revealed how the manager informed him that he would be released at the end of the season and therefore agreed that a loan move was mutually beneficial. In this respect, Joe's decision was affected by his relationship with two significant others. Firstly, the manager of [Club J] played a major role by informing Joe of his expected release while the manager of [Club L], himself a former teammate of Joe's was equally influential in his decision.

Prior to his eventual retirement, Joe had previously failed to retire on two occasions. On each occasion, Joe was thwarted by former teammates' desperation and urgent appeals for his services. While still at [Club L], and reminiscent of the very beginning of his career Joe had a contract offer withdrawn which instigated his first 'retirement'. Having torn his hamstring in the final league game of the season, Joe was informed that he could return to the club's pre-season training schedule in the hope of securing the contract he'd agreed. Unenthused by [the manager] suggestion, Joe hung up his boots and concentrated on attracting a core base of PT clients. Here, Joe shared his thought processes which had ultimately driven his first decision to retire; a decision seemingly affected by [the manager's] change of heart:

...I just thought it [Joe's hamstring tear] was mi' body's way o' telling me to quit 'cos I'd pulled mi' thigh, mi' groin and now mi' 'amstring...and 'cos [the manager] 'ad pulled the plug on mi' deal, I didn't wanna go on trial anywhere 'cos football wasn't that important any more...I'd 'ave signed if the deal was still on the table but I was more interested in attracting clients to mi' PT business.

Joe's initial retirement was to last a mere three months, as [the manager] convinced him to make an appearance for [Club L] in their second league game of the season due to a string of injuries to key first team regulars. Joe's decision to make his unexpected appearance seemed a genuine gesture to help out an old teammate and where he cast aside the disappointment from having his contract withdrawn only three months previously:

...I was p***ed off that he'd [the manager] pulled the plug on mi' deal but at the end o' the day he was looking after the club...they couldn't guarantee I'd be fit so I understood where they were coming from...he rang me three times practically begging before I agreed but in the end, I knew it were a one-off and all I were doing was 'elping 'im [the manager] out.

This was indeed a one-off game for Joe who shared his negative experiences of a game against opposition he labelled 'angry scousers'. Joe's cameo appearance served as an instant reminder that his love of football had diminished. In this regard, Joe recalled the precise moment in the game where his former identity as a competitive [semi-] professional footballer had deserted him. Furthermore, Joe made sense of his changing identity in relation to opposition players:

I've gone up for this 'eader and this kid 'as come right through the back o' me...took the ball, took everything and so there I am, sprawled out on the floor...years ago, I would 'ave got up and looked at 'im as if to say 'right then, let's 'ave a go, if that's 'ow you wanna do it', but for the only time in mi' career, I just couldn't be bothered...and I stayed away from 'im for the rest o' the game.

Joe clearly made sense of his identity in relation to others during his cameo appearance. Similarly, Joe used his one-off appearance to evaluate the success of his transition out of [semi-] professional football. In this respect, Joe was confident he'd made the right decision and again attempted unsuccessfully to finally hang up his boots. Some fourteen months after his cameo appearance for [Club L], Joe was contacted on several

occasions by a former YTS teammate of his from [Club A] and was persuaded to play a league game for [Club M] who plied their trade two leagues below [Club L]. While Joe was undoubtedly convinced he'd made the correct decision to retire, he saw the game as more of a favour than a chance to impress or resurrect his career:

...[the Club M manager] kept ringing and saying 'I'm begging you...just 'elp us out for this one game'...and he was fearing for 'is job. I 'ad absolutely no intention o' playing any more than that one game but he was desperate...even though I was rubbish, I'd 'elped 'im out and I felt good about mi'sen that I'd been able to do 'im a favour.

During the period of interviewing, Joe stated that he had not kicked a ball for over two years and so I had little reason to doubt that his playing career was finally over. Since retiring from playing both professional and semi-professional football, Joe has also been through three main transitions in his working life; transitions that will be examined in the following section.

C10: The Working Man

As previously mentioned, Joe's entrance into his first 'real job', as he labelled it stemmed from conversations with the club physiotherapist at [Club J] and Joe's desire to maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle himself. Almost immediately, however, Joe became disillusioned with the rewards of his own commitment. Firstly, Joe's clients preferred to conduct their training sessions around their working life which resulted in Joe working both early in the mornings and late in the evenings. Subsequently, Joe was seeing very little of his three children that he had grown used to spending time with. Here, Joe recognised the

importance of being a good father to his three daughters and made sense of his working life in relation to the time spent with his family:

Since [Emily] was born, I've turned into a proper family man...you know, I'd rather go to the park with mi' girls than go watch football in the pub...one o' mi' main goals in life now is for mi' girls to be 'appy and to spend as much time wi' 'em as I can...when I was a PT I'd be sat at 'ome all day while they were at school and then go out to work when they came 'ome...I didn't see 'em and that was 'orrible.

While the unsociable hours negatively affected Joe's relationship with his three daughters, it was his relationship with his clients that ultimately drove the failure of his transition. Furthermore, Joe made sense of his own identity in relation to the personality of his clients. Despite engineering sufficient interest to prolong his business, Joe grew frustrated with the people whose physical condition he was expected to improve. Here, Joe explained the reasoning behind his failure to remain committed to a career as a personal trainer and placed the blame of his failure down to a conflict of interests between himself and his clients:

...it [Joe's failure] was all about other people...the people who I wanted work from were people who I don't like...people who 'ave no get up and go...I'd be trying to motivate someone who wasn't really bothered and who'd probably 'ad a bag o' crisps and two Mars bars but was conning 'emselves that they were doing somet good.

Joe's previous remarks suggested that he struggled to relate to people who lack motivation and dedication; something that he had an abundance of during his professional football career. Had Joe possibly returned to a club environment, such as [Club K] and worked amongst players that possessed many of his own characteristics then perhaps his career in strength and conditioning would have been successful. However, instead Joe moved into the second stage of his working life where he and his sister opened up a sandwich shop. Here, Joe and his

sister's thoughts coalesced around their goals of having the greater freedom of being their own boss while benefitting from attractive working hours. In turn, Joe informed his clients of his intention to leave his role as their personal trainer but felt unable to share the true reason behind his departure:

...I couldn't tell 'em [Joe's clients] that they all p***ed me off and were a bunch o' lazy, unmotivated so and so's...I just told 'em all I was starting up another business and all o' mi' time would be focused on that...I left on good terms wi' 'em all as I always do 'cos who knows, I might need 'em again in the future.

Within two months, Joe and his sister had put their plans into action and opened up their own sandwich shop. Although initially Joe and his sister appreciated the freedom that they had coveted, the added incentive of greater freedom around more sociable working hours was a non-event. Similarly, the sandwich shop failed to bring in the financial profits that Joe and his sister had envisaged. In this respect, Joe made sense of his occupation in relation to other forms of employment and questioned the advantages of running his own business:

The aim o' the sandwich shop was to earn good money but also to enjoy the freedom o' being mi' own boss and working more sociable 'ours...but I wasn't earning 'owt more than I would 'ave been sweeping the streets and I was putting all sorts of 'ours in...[I was] working all 'ours for next to nowt...financially, it just wasn't worth the 'assle.

The fact that the sandwich shop failed to make the profits they had envisaged again highlighted the importance of money within Joe's life. Had the sandwich shop made the profits they had hoped for then perhaps they would have continued their ownership for the long term. However, this experience was instrumental in Joe's future planning. While he had wanted to be his own boss and enjoy the accompanying freedom, the six months that he and his sister had owned the shop had signposted Joe to where his future lie. Looking back over

his time as a sandwich shop owner, Joe reflected on both the success and failure of their venture when he made the following comments:

...it's [having his sandwich shop] both the worst and best thing that I ever did 'cos it taught me to just go and get a normal job...it was too stressful worrying all o' the time about your own business...like whether rain would affect our earnings or if people would just stop coming...we even 'ad to cancel our family 'oliday 'cos we'd 'ave 'ad to shut the shop for a week but we couldn't afford to do it...it made me just go get a normal job and get rid o' the pressure.

Joe perused the job sections of local newspapers and the internet in search of the 'normal' job he craved and which proved a harder task than he imagined. However, Joe eventually made a decision that suited himself and his family. Irrespective of what other people thought, Joe could live the life he so desired with his family at the forefront of his priorities. Although Joe made his decision entirely by himself, he still considered what other people have thought of his decision. To this extent, Joe recalled how his wife's initial response was also one of surprise:

I'm looking for jobs on the Internet, didn't 'ave any academic qualifications, and I saw Sainsbury's...literally, stacking shelves...a week later, I'm a shelf-stacker...so, I'd gone from 'aving the best job in the world [as a professional footballer] to a dead-end job...but I couldn't care less what other people think about me...even mi' missus said, 'oh my God, are you 'aving a laugh' but I genuinely don't care.

Joe's belief that his new occupation would be regarded as a 'dead-end' job was irrelevant during his application. In line with the majority of Joe's narrative, he was unconcerned what anybody else thought about his new role. As he expressed succinctly yet again, he 'couldn't care less'. Not only did he not care what outsider's may have thought about his new job, but he was also unaffected by his wife's initial thoughts. All that mattered for Joe

was that he would be doing something that enabled him to pay his bills and live the lifestyle that his family had become accustomed to. While still claiming his PFA football pension, part-time, shelf-stacking on nights allowed him to spend the quality time with his kids and his Dad that he craved while ensuring that he could still maintain pleasurable aspects of his lifestyle, such as days to the races with his three best friends, nights out with his wife or family holidays.

Joe has remained a part-time shelf-stacker at Sainsbury's for the best part of two years prior to the period of interviewing. While Joe isn't earning anywhere near the salary that he used to command playing professional football, he is in a position where he considers himself 'content'. His desire to progress that had entrenched his football career was no longer evident. He remains happy doing exactly what he is doing now; enjoying the omission of pressure from his working life. Comparing his identity as a shelf-stacker with his previous identity as a professional footballer, Joe noted the following:

...mi' life isn't full of ups and downs depending on 'ow I'd played at the weekend... 'cos if I 'adn't 'ad a good game or scored a goal then I'd be sulking and looking after mi'sen in preparation for the next game...whereas if I'd banged an 'at-trick in we'd [Joe's family] 'ave a Chinese [takeaway] so there isn't that fluctuation like there was in football which is really nice to be 'onest.

Despite Joe's portrayal of Sainsbury's as this pressure-less organization, there were aspects of his shelf-stacker identity that mirrored the dedicated, motivated footballer he had earlier described. In this respect, Joe continues to have pride in his work, irrespective of its salience to others. Furthermore, Joe unveiled the inherent motivation that has pervaded his life. Seemingly, while the context is ever-changing, Joe's motivations continue to drive his actions:

...nine times out o' ten, I'll wanna be the best shelf-stacker on the shift and I'll want the manager to see that I've been the best shelf-stacker...and that's 'cos I've got pride in what I do and if I'm gonna do somet then I'm gonna do it well...I've taken that with me all o' the way through mi' life...even cleaning the 'ouse, I can't stand it if it's not done properly.

Clearly, all that had changed in Joe's life was his occupation. He retained the characteristics that had permeated his football career. As he admitted, they may not have been utilised to the same extreme as in football, but they were still in circulation, as Joe's dominant work ethic was evidenced throughout his 'normal' working life. Albeit to a lesser extent, Joe continues to evaluate others' perceptions of him. Similarly, Joe still attempts to manipulate people's perceptions of him for his own end gain, as the following example demonstrates. To this extent, Joe appears as driven as ever to succeed and through the inclusion of a less than glamorous example of his daily interactions, identifies ways he achieves his goals, whatever they may be:

...the s***ty job [at Sainsbury's] is stacking the freezers 'cos it's freezing and it's 'orrible on your 'ands so no one wants to do it...but 'cos we don't normally 'ave to do it, I said I'd do it...one o' the other geezers said, 'what are you doing Joe'? But that's mi' ruthless streak...'cos after the last day o' school all o' the kids and the Dad's go to the local boozer and so when I asked mi' boss if I could swap mi' Friday for the Wednesday there wasn't a problem and he was more than 'appy for me to do it...but I said to the geezer as well, next year when me and you both want New Year's Eve off and only one of us can 'ave it, who do you think he's gonna give it to?

Joe's illustration of his characteristics in action emphasized the continuous nature of their being. Dedication, determination, and single-mindedness were not qualities that Joe employed in football they were qualities that he employed in life. All that had changed was their extent and their purpose. To this end, Joe continues to make sense of his identity in

relation to others and through his interactions with his connections; with the aforementioned characteristics helping him achieve both short and long-term goals.