

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF 'CRITICAL MOMENTS' IN PREMIER LEAGUE
ACADEMY FOOTBALL: A DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL
PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION**

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Abstract

Events associated with change such as de-selection, injury or retirement have been referred to collectively as transitions in the sport psychology literature. The term transition suggests that these changes are rather smooth, steady and relatively easy to negotiate when in reality, such changes are often complex and deeply uncomfortable for the athlete (Nesti et al., 2012). According to Nesti and Littlewood (2011) changes that are rapid, traumatic and personal and involve new levels of self-awareness are better described as ‘critical moments’. A ‘critical moment’ is defined as an event which is ‘...large or small, intended or unintended, and may have a positive or negative effect on a person’s sense of self’ (Nesti et al., 2012). Athletic identity is often considered to be central to the experience of career transitions and ‘critical moments’ in sport. A strong athletic identity often develops at the expense of other personal and social experiences (Brewer, 1993; Cabrita et al., 2014). As such, the athlete may become overly committed to the athlete role (Horton and Mack, 2000; Tasiemski, et al., 2004). This can affect the well-being of the athlete and may lead to inadequate coping and emotional disturbances when dealing with various setbacks (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Rongen et al., 2015). Players within an English Premier League Academy environment may be especially susceptible to experiencing ‘critical moments’. For instance, due to the time commitment imposed by the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), it is reasonable to suggest that young players may be at risk of forgoing the exploration of various identities other than that of 'being a footballer'.

This thesis explores the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ in Premier League Academy football. This is achieved through the use of descriptive psychological phenomenology as a methodology. Despite the literature highlighting the potential benefits of employing this method within sport psychology studies (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004), it has not been accurately utilised in the literature to date (O’Halloran, et al., 2016). Consequently, this thesis revisits the philosophical roots of the approach in order to discuss its modification for use within the human sciences, prior to its application within sport psychology research. The subsequent study recruited 8 participants using purposive sampling. The participants were Premier League Academy Scholars aged between 16 and 18 years. For anonymity purposes, the Premier League Academy where data collection

took place in this research will be referred to as ATFC. It has Category 1 status and is based in the North West of England. Data was analysed using the descriptive psychological phenomenological method devised by Giorgi (2009). The intra-structural higher-level eidetic constituents of ‘critical moments’ that emerged from the data analysis were: emotional and psychological disturbances, psychosocial disruption/adaptation, personal growth and an altered perception of time. The findings suggest that the ‘lifeworld’ of an ATFC Premier League Academy football player is complex. Emotional and psychological disturbances such as anxiety, uncertainty, grief and a sense of loss are experienced during ‘critical moments’ because the individual’s identity or ‘structure of meaning, which is the core of their existence’ is being challenged or undergoing a crisis (Hergenhahn, as cited in Nesti, 2004). Consequently, recommendations are made in this thesis towards a more holistic view of psychological/psychosocial support. For instance, from an existential perspective, angst and anxiety are considered to be a normal part of elite sport (Nesti, 2007). As such, confronting rather than attempting to remove the anxiety and discomfort experienced during a ‘critical moment’ may become a powerful opportunity for personal growth and creating a more authentic self (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). Implications of this research for applied practice (i.e. accreditation pathways, practitioner development, Academy staff and the Premier League) and pedagogy (i.e. BASES and BPS accreditation programs and higher-level education) are explored in the final Chapter of this thesis.

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Chapter One

Thesis Overview

1.1 Introduction

Events associated with change such as de-selection, injury or retirement have been referred to collectively as ‘transitions’ in the sport psychology literature. Nesti et al. (2012) contend that the term transition suggests these changes are rather smooth, steady and relatively easy to negotiate when in reality, such changes are often complex and deeply uncomfortable for the athlete. As a consequence, it is asserted that rapid changes that are traumatic, personal and involve new levels of self-awareness are better described as ‘critical moments’. A ‘critical moment’ is defined as an event which is ‘...large or small, intended or unintended, and may have a positive or negative effect on a person’s sense of self’ (Nesti et al., 2012, p.3). Examples of ‘critical moments’ within professional football could be career threatening injury, de-selection, being appointed as team captain, being sent out on loan or transferred to another club, being ignored by staff for prolonged periods of time, moving from the Academy to the first team or even events that may not be directly linked to the sport, such as matters to do with personal relationships (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011).

According to Erikson’s (1959) eight stages of personality development, a central component of a healthy personality occurs during the fifth stage and involves the successful development of an identity. This stage subsequently inspired the development of Marcia’s (1966) identity status model (Schwartz, 2001). Marcia’s (1966) model is considered to be the most important elaboration of Erikson’s theory (Kroger et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013). Marcia’s (1966) model proposed four identity statuses which are: identity diffusion; moratorium; identity foreclosure; and identity achievement. Of central importance to this thesis is the status of identity foreclosure. Identity foreclosure is characterised by early personal commitment to a role, occupation and ideology with little to no exploration of alternative choices (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011;

Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia et al., 1993; Marcia, 1966). It is asserted that young athletes who progress towards achieving a professional career in sport (e.g. entering a football Academy) are more likely to develop an exclusive or foreclosed identity.

Research has highlighted that English football Academies are ideologically laden and, as such, create socialised individuals who fit into the prevailing culture at the club (Cushion and Jones, 2012). In order to achieve congruence with these cultural expectations, it is argued that a player must abandon exploration or commitment to alternative ideologies. Further to this, the increased time commitment imposed by the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP, Premier League 2011) arguably restricts young players from exploring identities other than that of 'being a footballer'. An exclusive or strong identification with the athlete role is considered to be central to the experience of 'critical moments' in sport (Mitchell, 2015). This can affect the well-being of the athlete and may lead to inadequate coping strategies and emotional disturbances when dealing with various setbacks (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Rongen et al., 2015). Therefore, it is asserted that a broader awareness of the lived experience of such events is necessary in order to facilitate athlete development, mitigate negative influences, and minimize talent loss (Ivarsson et al., 2016).

This thesis will provide the first conceptualisation of the lived experience of 'critical moments' in the sport psychology literature. The chosen method in which to explore this phenomenon is descriptive psychological phenomenology. The descriptive psychological phenomenological method has not been correctly employed in sport psychology research thus far (Allen-Collinson, 2009; O'Halloran et al., 2016). By employing descriptive psychological phenomenology, the researcher aims to create new knowledge and understanding of 'critical moments' from the perspective of those directly experiencing this phenomenon. It is asserted that this approach, which emphasises

subjective knowledge and illuminates the lived-experience of an athlete through rich description, will not only strengthen the sport psychology literature, but also the knowledge of practitioners working within the applied world of professional sport.

In summary, this PhD aims to:

- (1) Critically evaluate how various personality theorists have conceptualised identity in the field of psychology, including the concept of athletic identity.
- (2) Critically evaluate the theoretical perspectives of career transitions in sport.
- (3) Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the career transition research in sport to date.
- (4) Identify the importance of investigating the lived experience of critical moments within the career of elite athletes.
- (5) Explore the philosophical underpinning of descriptive phenomenology as a methodology.
- (6) Critically evaluate the development of the descriptive psychological phenomenological method.
- (7) Identify the potential that the descriptive psychological phenomenological method holds for sport psychology research and practice.
- (8) Employ the method of descriptive psychological phenomenology to illuminate the lived experience of what Premier League Academy players perceive to be ‘critical moments’ within their career.
- (9) Explore the implications of this research for applied practice and pedagogy. This includes professional training programmes (i.e. BASES and BPS), higher level education, practitioner development, and Academy staff within the Premier League.

1.2 Structure of Thesis

Following this first introductory Chapter, Chapter 2 begins by discussing the evolution of identity research in the field of psychology. The second half of Chapter 2 begins by evaluating the literature surrounding athletic identity. Following this, theoretical perspectives of career transitions are presented. Finally, an argument for

the consideration of ‘critical moments’ in the literature is put forward based upon identified weaknesses in the career transition research.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the origins of descriptive phenomenology. Following this, an explanation of descriptive phenomenology as a philosophical method is offered. A critical evaluation of the descriptive phenomenological psychological approach in human science literature is then presented. Next, a step by step account of the descriptive psychological phenomenological method is provided. A critique of the use of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature is proposed. Finally, an argument is constructed for the potential that descriptive psychological phenomenology holds in creating new knowledge through rich description in the sport psychology literature.

Chapter 4 presents the research study. This includes a critical discussion of the findings.

Finally, Chapter 5 considers the findings of the study presented in the preceding chapter, in order to address the implications for applied practice and pedagogy in more detail. Methodological considerations are discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. Finally, recommendations for future research and practice are offered.

1.3 Glossary of Terms

- A ‘critical moment’ is defined as an event which is ‘...large or small, intended or unintended, and may have a positive or negative effect on a person’s sense of self’ (Nesti et al., 2012, p.3).

- ‘Athletic career’ refers to the deliberate involvement in a sporting activity over a number of years with the aim of achieving full potential in athletic performance (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007).
- ‘Athletic identity’ has been defined as ‘an aspect of the self-concept and the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role’ (Lantz and Schroeder, 1999, p.547). Brewer et al. (1993) define athletic identity as the extent to which an individual identifies with the role of an athlete.
- ‘Ego synthesis’ is the ability to achieve congruence between one’s inner sense of identity and the identity that one projects outwardly to others (Erikson, 1959; Boa, 2004).
- ‘Exploration’ refers to the period that individuals explore, consider and decide upon various ideological and occupational options and roles (Meeus, 2011; Marcia, 1966, 1980).
- ‘Commitment’ refers to the extent to which an individual is personally invested to their chosen roles, values and beliefs (Meeus, 2011; Marcia, 1966).
- ‘Identity diffusion’ is characterised by an absence of commitment to any roles, occupation and ideology and little to no exploration or evaluation of alternative choices in these areas (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia, 1966).
- ‘Moratorium’ is a state in which an individual is still actively exploring alternative roles and behaviours but has yet to make a decision to commit to specific occupations and ideologies (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia, 1966).
- ‘Identity foreclosure’ is characterised by early personal commitment to a role, occupation and ideology with little to no exploration of alternative choices (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia et al., 1993; Marcia, 1966).
- ‘Identity achievement’ signifies that an individual has actively engaged in the exploratory process and is now committed to a role, occupation and chosen ideology (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia et al., 1993; Waterman, 1988; Marcia, 1966).

- An ‘exclusive’ athletic identity is characterised by such a strong identification with the athlete role that it is the individual’s entire self-identity (Balague, 1999; Cabrita et al., 2014).
- ‘Self-concept’, broadly defined, is a persons’ perception of him or herself (Shavelson and Bolus, 1982).
- ‘Identity disruption’ can be explained as an interruption to the coherent narrative of a person’s life which often results in a loss of some aspect of the self (Sparkes, 1998).
- A ‘transition’ has been defined as ‘...an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships’ (Schlossberg, 1981, p.5).
- ‘Non-event’ is the term given to a transition that is anticipated but does not occur (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995).
- ‘Normative’ transitions are those which are predictable and anticipated (Schlossberg, 1984).
- ‘Non-normative’ transitions are those which occur unexpectedly (e.g. de-selection, injury) (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004).
- A ‘boundary situation’ is defined as ‘...an event, or an urgent experience, that propels one into a confrontation with one’s existential situation in the world’ (Yalom, 1980, p.159).
- Descriptive phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon that presents itself to consciousness, ‘...whether it be an object, a place, a person or a complex state of affairs’ from the perspective of the person undergoing the experience (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009, p.4).
- Real ‘givens’ are any objects given in space, time, and regulated by causality (Giorgi, 2005). Irreal ‘givens’ are phenomena that do not have a corresponding object, yet still hold meaning and are therefore an important part of our experience as human beings (Husserl, 1913/1983).
- ‘Intentionality’ is derived from the Latin verb ‘intendere’ which means ‘to point to’ or ‘to aim at’. According to Husserl (1913/1983, p.200), ‘...under intentionality we understand the peculiarity of mental processes ‘to be conscious

of something’.’ In other words, consciousness is always directed toward or conscious of something (Moran, 2000).

- The ‘natural attitude’ is our everyday interaction with the world (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009). It describes our ordinary and common-sense conception of reality, our ‘practical concerns, folk assumptions, and smattering of scientific knowledge’ (Zahavi, 2003, p.11; Aggerholm, 2015).
- The ‘phenomenological attitude’ involves setting aside ‘...everyday understandings, judgements, and knowings’ so that ‘phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense...’ (Moustakas, 1994, p.33).
- The ‘phenomenological reduction’ requires the researcher to ‘bracket’ or set aside their natural attitude and a priori knowledge and assumptions in order to remain fully present to phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009; Bevan, 2014).
- ‘Bracketing’ involves setting aside one’s natural attitude and a priori knowledge and assumptions in order to remain fully present to phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness (Bevan 2014; Giorgi 2009; Husserl 1913–1983).
- ‘Epoché’ is the technical term for ‘bracketing’ and is derived from a Greek word which means to refrain from judgement, to abstain from or to stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994).
- ‘Free imaginative variation’ allows one to imaginatively take or substitute aspects of the perceived phenomenon in order to determine whether the phenomenon is still the same as it was before (Moran, 2000).
- An ‘essence’ is defined as ‘a constant identity that holds together and limits the variations that a phenomenon can undergo’ Giorgi (1997, p.242) or that which ‘makes the phenomenon to be that very phenomenon’ (Dahlberg, 2006, p.11).
- ‘Eidetic reduction’ is a process whereby a phenomenon is reduced to its essence (Giorgi, 2009).
- ‘Lebenswelt’ translates to ‘life-world’ (Moran, 2000).
- ‘Culture’ is defined as ‘...a dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations, and practices across the members and generations of a defined group’ (Cruickshank and Collins, 2012, p.340).

- 'Organisational culture' has been defined as 'deep rooted beliefs, values and assumptions widely shared by organisational members that powerfully shape the identity and behavioural norms for the group' (Wallace and Weese, 1995 p.183).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

(i) Prelude

A ‘critical moment’ is defined as an event which is ‘...large or small, intended or unintended, and may have a positive or negative effect on a person’s sense of self’ (Nesti et al., 2012, p.3). In professional football, examples of ‘critical moments’ may include: coping with career threatening injury, being dropped permanently from the team, being appointed as captain, being transferred to another club or relationship difficulties (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). In order to discuss the concept of ‘critical moments’, it is necessary to first offer an insight into the prominent theories of personality and identity development that exist in the mainstream psychology literature. The theories to be considered are Freud’s (1930; 1961) psychosexual theory of personality development and Erikson’s (1950; 1959) psychosocial theory of personality development (which includes an emphasis on identity formation in an individual). Erikson’s theory in particular (which builds upon the work of Freud), informs the theoretical perspectives which led to the conceptualisation of athletic identity. Athletic identity is often considered to be central to the experience of career transitions and ‘critical moments’ in sport. Therefore, it will be introduced in this chapter prior to the consideration of the literature relating to these events. Although Freud proposed stages of personality development, these stages will not be the focus of this chapter. Instead, the intention is to discuss the fundamental beliefs which underpin Freud’s theory in order to demonstrate how Erikson expanded and developed upon his work. Therefore, the first half of this chapter will discuss the evolution of identity research in the field of psychology. The second half of this chapter will begin by evaluating the literature surrounding athletic identity. Following this, theoretical perspectives of career transitions will be presented. Finally, an argument for the consideration of ‘critical moments’ in the literature will be put forward based upon identified weaknesses in the career transition research.

(ii) Statement of Purpose

This chapter addresses the following aims of the thesis:

- (1) Critically evaluate how various personality theorists have conceptualised identity in the field of psychology, including the concept of athletic identity.
- (2) Critically evaluate the theoretical perspectives of career transitions in sport.
- (3) Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the career transition research in sport to date.
- (4) Identify the importance of investigating the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ within the career of elite athletes.

t1) Related Publications and Conference Presentations:

O'Halloran, L., Littlewood, M., Richardson, D. & Nesti, M. (2018). 'Identity development in Premier League academy football.' *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 36(1), 1–94. Paper presented at British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Annual Conference, Harrogate Convention Centre, North Yorkshire, U.K. 27th–28th November. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2018.1521633>.

O'Halloran, L., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M. & Nesti, M. (2017). 'The effect of 'critical moments' on identity development in Premier League Academy football players.' Paper presented at the International Conference on Social Identity and Sport (ICSIS), KU Leuven, Belgium 1–2nd July 2017.

O'Halloran, L., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M. & Nesti, M. (2014). 'Critical moments' and identity in elite Premier League Academy football. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 32(2), 12–14. British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Annual Conference, November 2014. Venue: St. George's Park. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2014.968373>.

Nesti, M., Littlewood, M., O'Halloran, L., Eubank, M. & Richardson, D. (2012). 'Critical moments' in elite Premiership football: Who do you think you are? *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*, 56(1), 23–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10141-012-0027-y>.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives of Identity Development

The study of identity development can be traced back to Sigmund Freud's (1886–1939) early writings (Schwartz, 2001). Freud is regarded as the first psychoanalyst. He is renowned for his pioneering psychosexual theory of personality development. Freud's theoretical assumptions influenced the work of many psychoanalysts at the time (Schwartz, 2001). One such psychoanalyst was Erik Erikson (1902–1994). Erikson expanded upon Freud's theory by placing emphasis on social, psychological and biological processes, rather than biological factors alone (Shaffer and Kipp, 2010). In doing so, he became the first psychoanalyst to consider personality formation from a psychosocial perspective (Erikson, 1959; Kroger, 2004).

2.1.1 Freud's psychosexual theory of personality development

Freud (1930, 1961) argued from a psychosexual standpoint that personality development occurs in predetermined, goal-directed stages during childhood (Brown, 1961; Fleming, 2004). Freud described personality as having three major components: the id, the ego and the superego (Freud 1920; 1923). Freud contended that each of these components develop at different stages in our childhood (Freud, 1923; Allen, 2006; Bernstein, 2011). The id represents the primitive, impulsive and unconscious part of personality (Freud, 1920; Rennison, 2015; Charlesworth, 2017). It is present in an individual from birth (Charlesworth, 2017). It remains infantile in function throughout a person's life and operates on what Freud termed, the 'pleasure principle' (Freud, 1920; Charlesworth, 2017). The objective of the 'pleasure principle' is to instantly satisfy impulses, regardless of the resulting consequences (Freud, 1920). When the id satisfies an impulse, pleasure ensues (Freud, 1920; Rennison, 2015). However, when the id is denied, tension is experienced as a result (Freud, 1920). The id is also where the Life instinct (Eros) and Death instinct (Thanatos) reside (Brown, 1961). Eros is comprised of the self-preservation drive and the concept of 'libido' (Freud, 1930; 1961; Brown, 1961). Defined broadly, self-preservation is a general motivation to preserve one's life and is evidenced through primary needs such as satisfying our hunger and thirst (Fischer, 1991; Charlesworth, 2017). According to Freud, the impulse to satisfy these primary needs is indicative of a drive for self-preservation (Freud, 1930). The concept of 'libido' was continually developed by Freud as his writings progressed. However, in its simplest form, it is the instinctual physiological or psychic energy associated with sexual urges and, later, with all constructive human activity (Freud, 1930; Kobayashi, 2016). In other words, libido may be conceived as a psychological term for life-energy or a life-drive (Brown, 1961; Kobayashi, 2016). 'Thanatos' comprises of the impulse 'destrudo' which

represents an innate destructiveness and aggression directed primarily against the self (Brown, 1961). As such, Thanatos suggests that we as humans are constantly striving to reduce all tensions as we move towards the ultimate tensionless state; death (Brown, 1961). According to Freud, the interaction of Eros and Thanatos, which oppose one another, produces all of the variations of human activity (Freud, 1920).

The ego begins to develop from birth (Charlesworth, 2017). As it develops, the child discovers that they are separate from the external environment (Charlesworth, 2017). The ego operates according to the 'reality principle' (Freud, 1920). The function of the 'reality principle' is to mediate between the primitive id, the external world and the superego (Freud, 1923; Charlesworth, 2017). The ego is realistic and rational and enables the individual to control their impulses (Freud, 1923). As such, the function of the ego is to devise a realistic way to satisfy the demands of the id and obtain pleasure whilst considering the external world in which an individual lives (Freud, 1923). In order to achieve this, the ego frequently postpones satisfaction in order to avoid negative consequences of society (Freud, 1923). Consequently, as a child grows up, he or she begins to comprehend that it is important to redirect impulses and drives such as 'libido' into channels that are considered to be socially acceptable (Freud, 1923; Rennison, 2015).

The superego emerges from the age of five and is developed over many years through a process called identification (Freud, 1923; Brown, 1961; Newman and Newman, 2009; Charlesworth, 2017). During this process, children imitate and internalise their parents' values, attitudes, opinions and judgements (Freud, 1920; Brown, 1961). The superego consists of a punishing function (which is carried out by the conscience) and a rewarding function (which is carried out by the ego ideal) (Freud, 1923; Newman and Newman, 2009). The conscience is responsible for identifying behaviours and thoughts that may be deemed 'improper' (Freud, 1923; Newman and Newman,

2009). In contrast, the ego ideal is responsible for identifying behaviours and thoughts that are acceptable (Newman and Newman, 2009). In doing so, the superego produces feelings of anxiety and guilt if a child considers behaving in a way that is considered to be morally prohibited (Freud, 1920). Hence, according to Freud, the superego is the mind's 'critical agency' that performs functions of 'self-assessment and self-punishment, as well as providing moral ideals and judgement' (Freud, 1930, p.136). Ultimately, the function of the superego is to control impulses from the id and to persuade the ego to satisfy moralistic goals rather than realistic goals (Freud, 1923).

2.1.1.1 A critique of Freud's psychosexual theory of personality development. The fundamental principles of Freud's theory suggest that all human behaviour is biologically determined and as such, devoid of choice, possibility or free will (Brown, 1961; Marshall and Marshall, 2012). Freud believed that psychological issues which may emerge in an individual originate without any influence from social or environmental conditions (Brown, 1961). Despite the irrefutable impact that Freud's theories have had on the field of psychology, it is argued that his theory of personality development is a morbid and reductionist conceptualisation of the human condition (Brown, 1961; Bernstein, 2011). It is further argued that such reductionism may lead to a misinterpretation of human behaviour in favour of biological causes that are easier to understand (Shaffer, 2009; Marshall and Marshall, 2012). This results in an incomplete, one-dimensional view of an individual which fails to represent the complex reasons that underpin human behaviour (Marshall and Marshall, 2012). In recognising this shortcoming, Erikson borrowed what he believed to be the functional elements of Freud's work and modified them into a more optimistic view of personality development, based on the epigenetic principle (Erikson, 1959; Côté and Levine, 2002; Fleming, 2004; Kroger, 2004; Watts, 2009). The epigenetic principle emphasises growth and healthy functioning and proposes that anything which

grows has a plan (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004; Kroger, 2004; Watts, 2009). It asserts that each part of a developing organism has a special time of ascendancy, which will eventually arise to form a functioning whole (Erikson, 1968; Watts, 2009). Accordingly, Erikson (1950; 1959; 1964) considered personality development as an evolutionary process, encompassing eight stages across the lifespan (Erikson, 1959; Brown, 1961; Kroger, 2004; Kail and Cavanaugh, 2007). As a consequence, Erikson distanced himself from Freud's deterministic views, which proposed that personality is fully shaped during childhood (Brown, 1961; Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004; Kroger, 2004; Schultz and Schultz, 2005; Watts, 2009). The following section will highlight the underlying principles of Erikson's theory of personality development. Erikson's theory subsequently inspired the development of James Marcia's (1966) identity status model (Schwartz, 2001). Marcia's (1966) model is considered to be the most important elaboration of Erikson's theory, specifically his fifth stage of personality development, identity vs identity diffusion (Kroger et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013). As such, a critique of Erikson's theory will first be offered, followed by an evaluation of Marcia's (1966) identity status model.

2.1.2 Erikson's psychosocial theory of personality development

As discussed, Erikson suggested that personality develops in a succession of eight stages over the entire life span (Brown, 1961; Schultz and Schultz, 2005). Each of Erikson's stages embody unique psychosocial challenges or 'crises' for the individual (Erikson, 1959; Kail and Cavanaugh, 2007). The crisis for each stage has its own special time of ascendancy (Sneed et al., 2006; Kail and Cavanaugh, 2007). 'Crises' occur within the ego and combine biological, psychological and social forces, rather than biological forces alone (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004; Haber, 2006; Sneed, et al., 2006a). These forces are considered to be a result of how ones' social reality affects their sense of self (Erikson,

1950; 1959; Kroger, 2004). By emphasizing these psychosocial correlates, Erikson further distanced himself from the work of Freud, who placed emphasis on biological factors alone (Schultz and Schultz, 2005). Each crisis contains both negative and positive possibilities and must be resolved by the individual in order to successfully move to the next stage (Erikson, 1950; 1959; Kroger, 2004; Haber, 2006). It is important to note that although the concept of the ego was conceived by Freud, Erikson evolved its meaning by attributing a greater significance to it within personality development. In his work, Freud viewed the ego as a mediator between the superego and the id (Fleming, 2004). In contrast, Erikson viewed the ego as the setting where an individual's crises occur and resolve (Erikson, 1959). As a result, Erikson proposed that the function of the ego is to establish and maintain an individual's sense of identity (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004).

Each stage of Erikson's theory occurs on a bipolar axis, with a positive pole and negative pole (Sneed, et al., 2006a). Crisis resolution is considered to have occurred in instances where the positive pole prevails over the negative pole (Sneed, et al., 2006a). It is argued that successfully resolving earlier crises provides the foundation for the resolution of crises that occur later in the lifespan (Sneed, et al., 2006a). Erikson's idea of a psychosocial conflict taking place within the ego contrasts with Freud's perspective which suggests that biologically driven conflicts arise as the result of a three-way struggle between the external world, the id and the superego (Erikson, 1959; Brown, 1961; Kroger, 2004). Successful completion of each stage results in the acquisition of 'basic virtues' (Erikson, 1964; 1965). Basic virtues are characteristic strengths which the ego can utilise to resolve subsequent 'crises' (Erikson, 1950; Fleming, 2004). The opposite of a basic virtue is called a core pathology. A core pathology is acquired through failure to achieve crisis resolution during any of the eight stages (Erikson, 1950; Fleming, 2004). It disrupts ego growth and can lead to a diminished ability to complete subsequent stages

(Erikson, 1950; 1959; Fleming, 2004). It is important to note that resolution and completion of a stage may occur successfully at a later time than Erikson's theory delineates (Erikson, 1991). However, this is considered to be a difficult task once one has moved on to a subsequent stage (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004). Recent research has plausibly suggested that complete resolution is not possible given the changes that one experiences throughout their life (Sneed et al., 2006b). As a result, it is argued that each stage may need to be revisited and reworked, in the context of later stages (Erikson, 1991; Sneed et al., 2006b). It is important to note that Erikson's (1950; 1959) theory focuses on the ascendancy and resolution of each crisis in an eight-stage format which does not account for re-visitation or reworking of a crisis. Although Erikson acknowledged that this may in fact be a possibility, his eight stages (discussed in Table 1 on the next page) assume crisis resolution will successfully or unsuccessfully occur prior to moving onto the next stage. It is assumed that each stage arises due to the possibility of a new dimension of social interaction as maturity increases (Rosenthal, et al., 1981). At each stage the developing child or adult is confronted with a crisis which materialises as a conflict of opposing forces (as illustrated in Table 1) (Erikson, 1950; Fleming, 2004). Both aspects of these conflicts must be experienced in order to successfully resolve a crisis (Erikson, 1950; Fleming, 2004).

2.1.3 Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development

Table 1. *Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development*

Stage	Conflict	Age	Basic Virtue	Core Pathology
1	<i>Basic trust vs. basic mistrust</i>	0–1 Years	Hope	Withdrawal
2	<i>Autonomy vs. shame and doubt</i>	1–3 Years	Will	Compulsion
3	<i>Initiative vs. guilt</i>	3–5 Years	Purpose	Inhibition
4	<i>Industry vs. inferiority</i>	5–12 Years	Competence	Inertia
5	<i>Identity vs. identity diffusion</i>	12–18 Years	Fidelity	Role repudiation
6	<i>Intimacy vs. isolation</i>	18–40 Years	Love	Exclusivity
7	<i>Generativity vs. stagnation</i>	40–65 Years	Care	Rejectivity
8	<i>Integrity vs. despair and disgust</i>	65 +	Wisdom	Disdain

Prior to evaluating Erikson's eight stages, it is important to note that, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there exists no empirical research that investigates the crises that occur during stages 1–4 using participant samples that correspond with Erikson's age groups. As a result, the existing literature surrounding these stages is anecdotal or descriptive in nature. Perhaps this is because infants and young children do not have the linguistic abilities to participate in the generation of data, such as self-report measures or interviews. Consequently, the existing research referring to stages 1–4 emphasises the impact that conflict resolution has had later on in life, rather than focusing on an individual's development during the stage itself. For instance, Constantinople (1969) developed the Inventory of Psychosocial Development (IPD), which informed the development of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) by Rosenthal et al. (1981). The aim of both inventories was to study early adolescent development through measuring respondents' resolution of the conflicts associated with Erikson's first six stages (Rosenthal et al., 1981). The authors argued that research aimed at assessing each

stage in isolation results in a failure to truly represent Erikson's theory (Rosenthal et al., 1981). It is argued that this is because each stage is intertwined i.e. conflict resolution at one stage, informs conflict resolution for the next (Erikson, 1959; Rosenthal et al., 1981). Due to a lack of available empirical research to provide critical analysis for stages 1–4, parts of the next section will remain largely descriptive. However, researchers have attempted to investigate the later stages of Erikson's theory from an empirical standpoint, particularly stage 5 (identity vs. identity diffusion) and stage 6 (intimacy vs. isolation). In such instances, a critical evaluation of the research will be presented.

2.1.3.1 Stages 1–5: Infancy to adolescence. Stage 1: Basic trust vs. basic mistrust (ages 0–1). The first component of a healthy personality is developing a sense of basic trust (Erikson, 1950, 1959). During an infants' first year of life he or she is uncertain about the world and new experiences (Erikson, 1964, 1965). As such, parents play a critical role in providing consistency in care and stability for the infant during this stage (Erikson, 1959; Shaffer, 2009). A sense of basic trust is the feeling of security and confidence toward the self and the world (Erikson, 1959). Impairment of basic trust, which may occur due to inconsistent, unreliable care and neglect from primary caregivers, leads to a sense of basic mistrust (Erikson, 1964, 1965; Shaffer, 2009). This means that the infant may lack confidence in their environment and in their ability to influence events (Erikson, 1964, 1965).

Successful resolution of this stage results in the acquisition of the basic virtue of hope (Erikson, 1950). Hope is necessary in order to meet the challenges that arise at a later stage of development; it leads to the expectation that such challenges can have a positive outcome (Fleming, 2004). Failure to complete this stage successfully will lead to a lack of hope, which may result in the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: withdrawal (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Withdrawal is characterised by

introversion as the individual does not feel that they can trust the world or themselves (Fromm-Reichmann, 1950; Erikson, 1964, 1965).

Stage 2: Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (ages 1–3). The second component of a healthy personality is developing a sense of autonomy (Erikson, 1950, 1959). During this stage, the infant begins to gain control over their bodily functions, learns to walk and begins to discover and explore different skills and abilities (Erikson, 1950, 1959). It is critical that parents exhibit patience in allowing the infant to explore their limits within an encouraging environment (Erikson, 1950, 1959; Carducci, 2009). As the infant will be investigating the extent of their abilities, the environment must also be tolerant of failure (Erikson, 1950, 1959; Carducci, 2009). This reassurance will allow the infant to develop feelings of confidence and security in their ability to survive in the world (Erikson, 1959). Therefore, the objective for this stage is to achieve ‘self-control without a loss of self-esteem’ (Erikson, 1959, p.70). Parents must take care not to reinforce a perceived loss of self-control or reduce autonomy on behalf of the infant, as doing so may result in a prevailing sense of shame and doubt (Erikson, 1959). Successful completion of this second stage results in the acquisition of the basic virtue of will (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Will is characterised by determination and self-control (Erikson, 1964). Failure to complete this stage successfully may lead to a lack of will (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). This may result in the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: compulsion (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Compulsion is characterised by a display of impulsive behaviours (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965).

Stage 3: Initiative vs. guilt (ages 3–5). The third component of a healthy personality is developing a sense of initiative (Erikson, 1950, 1959). At this stage, the child has developed the awareness that he or she *is* a person (Erikson, 1959). As such, boys and

girls become conscious of their respective genders (Charlesworth, 2017). The objective is to now discover what kind of a person he or she is going to be (Erikson, 1959). During this stage the ‘great governor of initiative, namely, *conscience*, becomes firmly established’ (Erikson, 1959, p.84). Additionally, the child will want to internalise and adopt the role of their parent of the same-sex (Erikson, 1959). This is achieved through observation and imitation (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004). Oedipal feelings commonly arise during this stage. Erikson borrowed this term from Freud (1913) who developed the Oedipus complex theory. In brief, Freud’s theory postulated that young boys experience feelings of jealousy and resentment toward their father, as they wish to be the sole benefactor of their mother’s love (Ahmed, 2012). In extreme cases, Freud suggested that the young boy may unconsciously wish for his father’s death (Ahmed, 2012). Although Erikson utilized this term in his theory, its connotations were much less extreme. According to Erikson, Oedipal feelings manifest themselves through being in competition with a parent (Erikson, 1950). Consequently, the child may experience a strong sense of guilt as a result of their feelings (Erikson, 1950).

As a sense of initiative is developed, a child begins to take more control over their environment (Erikson, 1959). Children become more active and they begin to learn how to use language in order to enquire about the world around them (Erikson, 1959). When the child finds a healthy balance between initiative and guilt, the third stage is complete. This results in the acquisition of the virtue of purpose (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004; McLeod, 2013). Failure to complete this stage successfully, (which may occur as a result of the child experiencing a strong sense of guilt) results in the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: inhibition (Erikson, 1950; Fleming, 2004). Inhibition is characterised by a reluctance to interact with others and restrained creativity (Fleming, 2004).

Stage 4: Industry vs. inferiority (ages 5–12). The fourth component of a healthy personality is developing a sense of industry (Erikson, 1950, 1959). The Oedipal impulses of the previous stage are sublimated and children ‘...learn to win recognition by producing things’ (Erikson, 1950, p.259). Children experience pleasure associated with work completion and develop a sense of industry as a result (Erikson, 1950). The child will want to observe how different tasks and activities are accomplished, after which they will try to participate themselves (Erikson, 1959). A sense of inferiority may develop as children become capable of unfavourably comparing themselves with others (Charlesworth, 2017). When the child finds a healthy balance between industry and inferiority (to allow for the development of modesty), the fourth stage is complete (Erikson, 1959). This results in the acquisition of the basic virtue of competence (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Competence is characterised by confidence in one’s ability to achieve goals (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Failure to complete this stage successfully will result in the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: inertia (Erikson, 1950). Inertia is characterised by passive behaviour towards one’s environment (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004).

Stage 5: Identity vs. identity diffusion (interchangeably referred to as role confusion) (ages 12–18). The fifth component of a healthy personality is developing a sense of identity (Erikson, 1950, 1959). This stage is considered to be the central component of Erikson’s theory (Sneed, et al., 2006). Despite this, Erikson did not provide an operational definition of identity (Waterman, 1988; Haber, 2006). However, he described that identity helps one to ‘...make sense of, and to find one’s place in, an almost limitless world with a vast set of responsibilities’ (Schwartz, 2005, p.294). Hence, identity provides stability amongst these endless possibilities, by allowing the individual to define themselves as something in particular (Schwartz, 2005).

In order to achieve identity resolution, the adolescent must find the optimal balance between identity achievement and role confusion (Erikson, 1950). As such, the objective for this stage is to transition toward anticipated adulthood by consolidating their chosen values and beliefs into their sense of identity as they strive toward ‘ego synthesis’ (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1980). ‘Ego synthesis’ is the ability to achieve congruence between one’s inner sense of identity and the identity that one projects outwardly to others (Erikson, 1959; Boa, 2004). In other words, ‘ego synthesis’ is the continuity between one’s self-concept and the self as perceived by others (Sneed, et al., 2006). It is important to highlight that adolescents do not simply ‘learn’ who they are (Erikson, 1950). In order to achieve their own identity, different societal roles, attitudes, ideologies and occupations must be explored (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004).

A strong sense of identity is necessary as it will allow the adolescent to make provisional commitments to life plans that provide a sense of belonging within society (Marcia, 1980). It is for this reason that adolescence is considered to be a time of identity crises, or in Erikson’s terms, ‘...a turning point of increased vulnerability and heightened potential’ (1968, p.96). A common cause for crises in identity is preoccupation with how one appears to others around them (Erikson, 1959). In order for an identity crisis to be considered as such, the following four conditions outlined by Erikson (1959, 1968) must be present. Firstly, a certain level of cognitive development must have been attained. Secondly, the individual must be post-pubescent. Thirdly, the individual must have made some progress toward adult functioning. Finally, societal pressures must be propelling the individual toward identity re-synthesis.

The severity of an identity crisis is dependent upon the extent of the disruption of one’s sense of identity caused by role confusion (Erikson, 1968; Côté and Levine, 1987). Erikson believed that confusion experienced during an identity crisis exists on a

continuum which ranges from mild confusion to aggravated confusion (Erikson, 1968; Côté and Levine, 1987). Mild confusion may affect one's perceived role within society and their ideological outlook (Erikson, 1968; Côté and Levine, 1987). An extended identity crisis occurs when one exhibits an inability or lack of desire to explore various roles in order to reestablish one's sense of identity for a long duration of time (Côté and Levine, 1987). Aggravated confusion occurs when the individual is unable to successfully achieve crisis resolution despite continued attempts to do so (Côté and Levine, 1987). Individuals experiencing this type of identity crisis will lack the means necessary to develop a healthy personality, until this crisis is resolved (Erikson, 1975; Côté and Levine, 2016). After successfully resolving an identity crisis, self-esteem is confirmed and grows into a belief that one is learning effective steps toward adult functioning and developing a defined personality within a social reality which they understand (Erikson, 1959). It is important to note that identity formation does not abruptly end post-adolescence (Erikson, 1956). An individual's identity will continue to grow throughout the lifespan, although this development will be largely unconscious to the individual (Erikson, 1956).

Successful completion of this fifth stage will lead to the basic virtue of fidelity (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Fidelity is achieved through truthfulness and consistency to one's core self and loyalty and commitment to their new role within society (Erikson, 1964, 1965). Fidelity affirms a sense of purpose in the individual's life and as such, enhances feelings of belongingness (Erikson, 1964; Markstrom and Kalmanir, 2001). In contrast, identity diffusion is viewed as a failure to integrate the concept of self and significant others meaningfully into one's sense of identity (Erikson, 1959). Identity diffusion may result in the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: role repudiation (Erikson, 1950; Fleming, 2004). Role repudiation may take different

forms including a tendency toward a negative identity, resignation and a reluctance to select and commit to choices (Erikson, 1950, 1959, Markstrom and Kalmanir, 2001; Fleming, 2004).

Research has been conducted in an attempt to validate Erikson's fifth stage. A study by Constantinople (1969) which recruited 952 undergraduate students, found a significant difference was reported between freshman and senior scores on identity diffusion, with the freshman group scoring higher than the senior group. Two follow-up studies showed that the freshman scores for identity diffusion decreased over 4 years. These findings were supported by a study by Stark and Traxler (1974). This research employed Dignan's (1965) ego identity scale in order to measure whether identity diffusion would be higher in an age group of 17–20 year olds than in 21–24 year olds. This hypothesis was tested on 507 college students and it was found that identity resolution was higher in the older age group, as postulated by Erikson's theory. However, it is important to note that since this research, the fifth stage of Erikson's theory has been considered as outdated and non-representative of current social conditions (Schachter, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2013). At the time of Erikson's writings and this validation study, the majority of Americans married and entered the workforce directly after completing their secondary education (Schwartz et al., 2013). Since then, the economic transition from industrial to technological jobs, which require degree qualifications, has seen attendance in third level education exponentially increase (Schwartz et al., 2013). As a result, the range of potential career choices available to university graduates has drastically risen. Young people tend to experiment with various career alternatives through selecting degree courses and areas to specialise in, rather than committing to a career straight from secondary education (Côté and Allahar, 1994). It is argued that this surge in third level education has typically meant that the time one spends dependent

upon their immediate family has increased, as well as the mean age for couples getting married (Côté, 2000). Individuals are now extending their time spent in between adolescence and adulthood and as a result, no longer commit to an occupation and a permanent adult role as early as Erikson (1950) had originally suggested (Côté, 2000). Consequently, it has been suggested that Erikson's fifth stage has been mostly unable to transcend its historical context in order to meet the challenge of the postmodern era (Schachter, 2005). To further this, it is argued that Erikson's fifth stage does not allow for cultural variability and as such, reflects a cultural bias (Marcia, 1983, Pietikainen and Ihanus, 2003; Haber, 2006). For example, certain non-Westernised cultures may restrict the exploration of ideological or occupational choices due to existing political regimes or societal roles based on gender or caste systems. In these instances, it is not possible for identity crises to occur in the way that Erikson described (Kroger, 2004). To further illustrate this, the economic conditions necessary to explore various occupational roles may not reflect the reality for a large portion of the world's adolescent demographic, particularly those who live in developing or under-developed countries (Marcia, 1983).

2.1.3.2 Stages 6–8: The three stages of adulthood. Stage 6: Intimacy vs. isolation (ages 18–40). The sixth component of a healthy personality is a sense of intimacy (Erikson, 1950, 1959). Central to intimacy, is the ability to make and sustain interpersonal commitments (Erikson, 1963). An individual who has developed a strong sense of identity and the virtue of fidelity will be prepared and unafraid to share their identity with another (Erikson, 1959, 1964). It is argued that until two people have developed a separate and strong sense of identity, true and mutual psychological intimacy is not possible (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004). The counterpart to intimacy is isolation (Erikson, 1959). Isolation occurs when the individual is afraid to risk their identity through the sharing of true intimacy (Erikson, 1964). This can be caused by an individual

being without a strong sense of identity, or as a result of a concept known as distantiation (Erikson, 1959). Distantiation is the opposite of intimacy and is ‘...the readiness to repudiate, to isolate, and, if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one’s own’ (Erikson, 1959, p.101). Distantiation can be caused by an individual whose reasoning for forming a relationship is based on self-fulfillment rather than intimacy (Erikson, 1968). In this case, an individual will be unwilling to engage in relationships with another whose values, beliefs and experiences differ to their own, as it is viewed as a threat to their ego identity (Erikson, 1968). Successful completion of this sixth stage will lead to the virtue of love (i.e. the capacity to love) (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965, 1982; Fleming, 2004). A sense of isolation may lead to loneliness, a fear of relationships and the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: exclusivity (Erikson, 1950, 1982; Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Exclusivity is characterised by lack of cooperation, an inability to compete or an inability to compromise (Erikson, 1950).

This stage of Erikson’s theory was critiqued for presenting a masculine bias (Gilligan, 1992). It is argued that in women, identity and intimacy are fused as opposed to two distinct phenomena which arise in separate stages (Schiedel and Marcia, 1985). Research has shown that some women have the ability to resolve the intimacy crisis prior to the identity crisis (Schiedel and Marcia, 1985). As such, it is argued that the fifth stage (identity vs. identity diffusion) and sixth stage (intimacy vs. isolation) of Erikson’s theory are not applicable to female psychosocial development (Fleming, 2004; Schiedel and Marcia, 1985). In comparison, males tend to exhibit a distinct separateness in these two stages (Schiedel and Marcia, 1985; Horst, 1995). This contrasts with recent research which has indicated that identity and intimacy are closely intertwined, and that both stages often work hand-in-hand throughout the adult years (Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke,

2010). However, although the sequencing between identity and intimacy has been a subject of debate (Tesch and Whitbourne, 1982), it is well-accepted in the literature that identity resolution is strongly linked with the development of true intimacy (Sneed et al., 2012).

Stage 7: Generativity vs. stagnation (ages 40–65). The sixth component of a healthy personality is a sense of generativity (Erikson, 1950, 1959). Generativity is characterised by caring for and mentoring the next generation (Erikson, 1959; Haber, 2006). Erikson (1959) recognised that fulfilment in life can be achieved without necessarily having children and that care can be given in other ways such as altruistic concern or creativity. Instances where individuals fail to achieve a sense of generativity may result in a sense of stagnation (Erikson, 1959; Fleming, 2004). This is considered to be the loss of self through self-absorption (Erikson, 1959). Stagnation may be characterised by self-indulgence and failing to find a way to contribute to one's community or society (Erikson, 1959). Successful completion of this seventh stage will lead to the basic virtue of care (Erikson 1959). This is characterised by providing care for individuals and products that one has learned to care for (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965). In contrast, stagnation may result in the acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: reactivity (Erikson, 1964, 1982). Reactivity is characterised by viewing others as inferior to oneself and exclusion of certain people or groups from ones' caring attention (Erikson, 1959, 1982). As discussed, Constantinople (1969) developed the IPD for use in empirical validation studies of Eriksonian theory. Although, this became the most popular instrument during the 1970s, it failed to incorporate stage 7 (generativity vs. stagnation) and stage 8 (integrity vs. despair and disgust) of Erikson's theory. As a result, the expanded version of the IPD (E-IPD; Boylin et al., 1976) was developed. The E-IPD included these stages, making it a lifespan inventory of psychosocial development. Research using the E-IPD has found a

significant increase in generativity in 155 participants over a 12-year longitudinal study, beginning aged 21 and ending aged 43 (Jarvis, 1992). Subsequent empirical findings have led to ambiguity surrounding the relationship between generativity and age. Some studies found no relation between generativity and age (e.g. McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992; Whitbourne et al., 1992). Research by McAdams et al. (1993), found that the midlife group (ages 37–42) and older adult group (ages 67–72) had higher generativity scores than the younger adult group (ages 22–27). Similarly, a study by Keyes and Ryff (1998) found that midlife group (ages 40–59) scored higher for generativity than the young adult group (ages 25–39) and the older adult group (ages 60–74). Both findings supported Erikson's theory that mid-life adults develop a sense of generativity. However, the age ranges tested in both studies were either outside, or short of the ages suggested by Erikson for the generativity vs. stagnation stage (ages 40–65). Although support was found for the presence of a sense of generativity, due to the wide variation in age groups tested, it difficult to conclude that this stage was empirically validated.

Stage 8: Integrity vs. despair and disgust (ages 65+). The eighth component of a healthy personality is integrity (Erikson, 1950, 1959). At this stage, the key conflict centres on the question of whether or not the individual feels that they have led a meaningful, appropriate and satisfying life (Erikson, 1950; Haber, 2006). Therefore, integrity implies that one has reflected upon their life and in doing so, accepts that their life was a well-lived and fulfilled one (Fleming, 2004). Instances where an individual feels they have not fulfilled their full potential may result in a sense of despair and disgust (Erikson, 1959). Despair and disgust is characterised by feelings of regret, guilt and resentment (Haber, 2006). A sense of despair and disgust may be accompanied by a feeling of hopelessness as the realisation will dawn on the individual that there is not enough time to attempt to start another life in the search for integrity (Erikson, 1959). This may result in the

acquisition of the core pathology for this stage: disdain (Erikson, 1964). Disdain may be characterised by feelings of depression, fear of death, hopelessness and contempt towards others, which in actuality is a true reflection of contempt for the self (Erikson, 1959, 1964; Fleming, 2004). Successful completion of this eighth stage is achieved through resolving the conflict between integrity and despair and may lead to the acquisition of the final basic virtue in Erikson's theory of identity development: wisdom (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1965; Fleming, 2004). Erikson (1982, p.61) explained wisdom as being an 'informed and detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself.' In other words, the acquisition of wisdom allows an individual to look back on their life with a sense of closure and completeness, whilst also accepting the prospect of death without fear.

Research concerning the final stage of Erikson's theory is sparse in the psychology literature (James and Zarrett, 2005). However, due to life expectancies increasing in developed countries worldwide, it is argued that enhancing knowledge of the developmental processes involved in accepting ones' life and eventual death, holds important implications in the field of psychology (Parker, 2013). Research on an elderly population (ages 60–91, n=115) investigated the way in which accepting ones' past may contribute toward attitudes in relation to death. The results found that the ability to accept the past with little regret and despair was a significant predictor of a neutral acceptance attitude towards death (Parker, 2013). A neutral acceptance attitude is the belief that death is a natural and inevitable part of life and therefore, should not be feared (Parker, 2013). This supports the eighth stage of Erikson's theory which states that resolving the integrity vs. despair and disgust conflict allows an individual to truthfully face the existential realities of their life, past and present, and subsequently, their death with less fear and anxiety (Parker, 2013).

2.1.3.3 An overall critique of Erikson's theory of personality development. Erikson has been highly commended for expanding upon Freud's biological theory of personality development to incorporate the entire lifespan. Since its inception, Erikson's theory has generated an abundance of research centering on individual development from a psychosocial perspective (Haber, 2006). However, there are a number of weaknesses pertaining to Erikson's work which will be briefly highlighted in this section. As discussed, Erikson has stated that his theory is descriptive or artistic rather than empirical or methodological in nature (Erikson, 1964; Shaffer, 2009). Erikson stated that his theory was derived from his own personal observations, intuitions and reflections (Kushner, 1993; Thorson, 2000; Fleming, 2004). As such, Erikson's theory has been criticised for its lack of empirical grounding (Coté, 1989; Haber, 2006). As identity cannot be physically observed or quantified, researchers must instead measure qualities that are hypothesized to develop during each stage. However, Erikson failed to specify the exact qualities that should be tested as part of an empirical investigation in order to validate his theory (Haber, 2006; Kroger and Marcia, 2011). To further this, Erikson's theory does not specify the experiences that must occur in order to develop the qualities that will lead to crisis resolution (Shaffer, 2009). As such, his theory is considered to be vague (Shaffer, 2009). As discussed, Erikson also failed to provide operational definitions of the key terms in each stage which has led to ambiguity in the literature (see Waterman, 1988; Schultz and Schultz, 2005; Haber, 2006). Without formal definitions, it is difficult to generate clear, testable hypotheses (Parker, 2013). Erikson (1950, p.16) arguably recognised the shortcomings in his work as he stated that 'at times, the reader will find me painting contexts and backgrounds where he would rather have me point to facts and concepts'. Therefore, it can be argued that Erikson's goal was not to provide concise definitions but to attempt to capture the full richness of identity through descriptive

accounts (Schwartz, et al., 2011). Despite this criticism, Erikson's theory succeeded in providing researchers in the field of psychology with important insights which informed decades of extensive research inquiries. Therefore, within a 'context of discovery', Erikson's theory of personality development is recognised as one of the most influential and innovative contributions to the field of psychology (Berzonsky and Adams, 1999; Sneed et al., 2006). The following section will discuss Marcia's (1966) identity status model, which, as discussed, is considered to be the most important elaboration of Erikson's theory of personality development (Kroger et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013).

2.1.4 Marcia's identity status model

Marcia's (1966) model expanded upon Erikson's fifth stage of personality development known as identity vs. identity diffusion (Schwartz et al., 2013). As discussed, Erikson viewed each stage of personality development as existing on a bipolar axis, with a positive pole and a negative pole (Sneed, et al., 2006). In other words, Erikson polarised identity resolution as either present or absent in an individual (Kroger, 2000, Marcia, 1980). In contrast, Marcia (1966) proposed an identity status model which suggested that identity resolution exists along a continuum (Marcia 1966; Kroger, 2000; Kroger et al., 2010; Kroger and Marcia, 2011). Marcia's (1966) identity status model also aimed to address the shortcomings associated with Erikson's work, particularly its lack of empirical grounding. As a result, Marcia intended his model to be 'a methodological device' used to operationally define and empirically investigate Erikson's theoretical notions about identity (Marcia, 1980; Berzonsky and Adams, 1999). Marcia (1966) proposed two criteria necessary for identity formation: exploration and commitment (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Meeus, 2011; Marcia, 1966). Exploration refers to the period that individuals explore, consider and decide upon various ideological and occupational options and roles (Meeus, 2011; Marcia, 1966, 1980). Commitment refers to the extent

to which an individual is personally invested to their chosen roles, values and beliefs (Meeus, 2011; Marcia, 1966).

In order to investigate exploration and commitment from an empirical standpoint, Marcia (1966) developed the Identity Status Interview (ISI). The ISI is a semi-structured interview which focuses on an individual's exploration and commitment in the areas of occupation and ideology (Kroger, 2004; Kroger and Marcia, 2011). Research conducted using the ISI provided evidence supporting the classification of individuals into four distinct identity statuses (Kroger and Marcia, 2011). These statuses are: identity diffusion; moratorium; identity foreclosure; and identity achievement (Marcia, 1966, 1980). Identity diffusion is characterised by an absence of commitment to any roles, occupation and ideology and little to no exploration or evaluation of alternative choices in these areas (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia, 1966). Moratorium is a state in which an individual is still actively exploring alternative roles and behaviours but has yet to make a decision to commit to specific occupations and ideologies (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia, 1966). The statuses identity diffusion and moratorium are considered to be low in commitment (Kroger and Marcia, 2011). Identity foreclosure is characterised by early personal commitment to a role, occupation and ideology with little to no exploration of alternative choices (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia et al., 1993; Marcia, 1966). Identity achievement signifies that an individual has actively engaged in the exploratory process and is now committed to a role, occupation and chosen ideology (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia et al., 1993; Waterman, 1988; Marcia, 1966). The statuses identity foreclosure and identity achievement are considered to be high in commitment (Kroger and Marcia, 2011). In a critical review of Marcia's (1966) model,

van Hoof (1999) critiqued the ISI, claiming that it only covers a fraction of Erikson's theory. In response to this paper, Waterman (1999) argued that the ISI does firmly ground itself in Erikson's writings, claiming that van Hoof (1999) had misunderstood key literature in arriving at this conclusion. Since the development of Marcia's (1966) ISI, researchers have developed and validated identity measurement inventories. For instance, Balistreri (1989) developed The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) based on Marcia's (1966) ISI. Following this, Adams (1999) developed the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EOM-EIS). Adams (1999) provided significant validity and reliability scores for the EOM-EIS (Ryeng et al., 2015). This highlights a limitation with regards to inter-scorer reliability for researchers using the ISI, as the highest reliability scoring reaches around 85% (Ryeng et al., 2015). However, when using the EOM-EIS, researchers are often required to remove participants' data when it does not meet the measurement criteria (Ryeng et al., 2015). In this instance, the discarded participants are called 'low-profile Moratoriums' (Ryeng et al., 2015). In contrast, the ISI has proven to be advantageous for data collection, as participants are rarely removed from qualitative research designs. Furthermore, an interview gives researchers the opportunity to probe participants for responses until the interviewer is satisfied that data saturation has occurred. Scoring for the EOM-EIS involves establishing a sum total of scores for each of the identity statuses (Adams, 1998). In contrast, according to the ISI scoring manuals, Marcia (1966) stressed the salience of clinical judgement, rather than simply adding scores together, when determining an overall identity status for an individual (Marcia et al., 1993). Although it may be argued that researcher bias may affect the validity of the ISI results, it may also create an opportunity to provide a more rounded insight into individuals' identity, which may often be complex and difficult to summarise using numbers alone.

Over the decades, identity status research has predominantly focused on validating the identity statuses and determining associated personality correlates (Kroger, 2000). In simplistic terms, the traditional way to validate a construct, such as identity status, is to demonstrate that each status is associated with a distinct set of variables (Waterman, 1999). Over 560 empirical validation studies of Marcia's (1966) identity statuses have been conducted in the field of psychology (Ryeng et al., 2013). This research investigated whether Marcia's (1966) identity statuses were correlated with certain personality characteristics (e.g. self-esteem, anxiety, authoritarianism; see Ryeng et al., 2013 for a meta-analysis on this research). It is argued that personality characteristics hold too much variability in measurement to provide confirmation that a construct is valid (Côté and Levine, 1988). Therefore, although this research has affirmed that the statuses can be measured (Waterman, 1999), it is argued that the construct validity of the statuses has yet to be established (van Hoof, 1999).

2.1.4.1 An overall critique of Marcia's identity status model. Although Marcia's (1966) model is widely viewed as an elaboration of Erikson's theory of identity development, researchers have argued that Marcia employs identical terms with alternative meanings to those originally intended by Erikson (Côté and Levine, 1988; Waterman, 1988; van Hoof, 1999). For example, Marcia stated that moratorium represents a state in which an individual is still actively exploring alternative roles and behaviours but has yet to make a decision to commit to specific occupations and ideologies (Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Marcia, 1966). In contrast, Erikson considered moratorium as being the period of time in which adolescents are free from adult responsibilities (van Hoof, 1999). In other words, Marcia considers moratorium to be an identity status, whereas Erikson views it as a phase. Regardless of the meaning,

empirical studies have shown that individuals in moratorium are consistently more anxious than individuals who have achieved or foreclosed their identity (Marcia, 1967).

Researchers have also contended that Marcia's model has ignored Erikson's emphasis on social context and instead focuses too heavily on identity status occurring as a result of choices made by an individual (Côté and Levine, 1987, 1988; Yoder, 2000; Bosma and Kunnen, 2001; Schwartz, et al., 2013). Lastly, the identity statuses presented by Marcia (1966), are arguably most suited to Westernised societies (Berman et al., 2011). In particular, the identity foreclosure holds negative connotations in Marcia's (1966) model. However, it can be argued that identity foreclosure in non-Westernised societies (where conformity, especially towards authority and cultural values is expected) may in fact, be the most desired identity status for an individual (Berman et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2013). This may also be applicable to certain sporting environments. For instance, a 10 month ethnographical study using observations and participant interviews (U16/U18 players n=24, coaches n=5) found that professional football Academies are ideologically laden and, as such, created socialised individuals who fitted into the prevailing culture at the club (Cushion and Jones, 2012). It is asserted that in order to conform to such cultural expectations, an individual must first abandon the exploration of, or their commitment to, other idealologies. As cultural conformity appears to be desired in such an environment, it is argued that the players who participated in this study are at high risk of foreclosing their identity in order to gain acceptance at their club (Marcia, 1966).

Despite the discussed criticisms, Marcia's (1966) model is considered to be an important expansion of Erikson's theory (Kroger, 1997; van Hoof, 1999). Researchers have since proposed alternative models of identity development, based on Marcia's (1966) work (see Grotevant, 1987, Berzonsky, 1997 and Lucyx et al., 2008). However,

Marcia (1966) was the first to derive an empirically measurable construct of identity from Erikson's theory (Schwartz, 2001). Marcia's (1966) identity statuses also provided the framework for generating operational definitions of the construct of identity (Schwartz, 2001). Although it has been widely accepted within the literature that an operational definition is incapable of truly encompassing a construct as complex and conceptually rich as Eriksonian identity, Marcia's (1966) model has provided the basis for over five decades of theoretical and empirical work (Berzonsky and Adams, 1999; van Hoof, 1999; Meeus et al., 1999, Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011). This includes more than 1,000 theoretical and empirical publications relating to the construct of identity (Berzonsky and Adams, 1999; van Hoof, 1999; Meeus et al., 1999, Meeus, 2011; Kroger and Marcia, 2011).

As discussed, Marcia focused upon the domains of occupation and ideology in order to explicate an identity structure (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that he did not consider these criteria as 'identities' in themselves (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). In more recent times, researchers have increasingly viewed identity as being multifaceted in nature (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). As such, identity status theory was extended into interpersonal domains (Grotevant et al., 1982). In other words, researchers have postulated that domain-specific identities (e.g. athletic identity) exist within an individual's overall identity structure (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). Therefore, over the years, studies covering a breadth of domain-specific identities have emerged in the literature (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). For example, mainstream psychological research has become increasingly focused on explicating the impact of domain-specific identities (e.g. occupation, ethnicity or gender) on certain cultures or environments (Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx, 2011; Fadjukoff et al., 2016).

It is argued that studying domain-specific identities in isolation from an overall identity structure allows the researcher to form a more detailed account of an individual's existence (Goossens, 2001; Fadjukoff et al., 2016). Thus, the second half of this chapter will begin by discussing the evolution of identity research in the field of sport psychology, with emphasis being placed on the domain-specific concept of 'athletic identity'. In order to introduce athletic identity, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of talent development. Within the literature, talent development models have provided a descriptive account of delineated stages which denote career progression (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999, Stambulova et al., 2009). The age ranges postulated by Côté's (1999) talent development model in particular, coincide with the stages of Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory. More specifically, Erikson's (1950, 1959) fifth stage, identity vs. identity diffusion coincides with what Côté (1999) referred to as the 'specialising' and 'investment' years. During the specialising years the child typically selects a sport that they are most skilled at to specialise in and from then, invest vast amounts of time in training and practice (Vealey et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2016). This may provide an explanation as to why athletes develop a strong identification with their sport at a young age. The talent development literature (see Bloom, 1985 and Côté, 1999) also informed the career transition models that emerged within the field of sport psychology (see Sclossberg, 1981, Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994, Stambulova, 2003 and Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). As such, the following section will begin by discussing the concept of talent development in the literature whilst explicating the potential implications for athletic identity formation. Theoretical perspectives of career transitions will then be presented. Following this, an argument for the consideration of 'critical moments' in the literature will be put forward based upon identified weaknesses in the career transition research.

2.2 Athletic Identity

2.2.1 Theoretical perspectives of athletic development

Over the decades, a number of talent development models have emerged in the sport psychology literature (Côté et al., 2012). One of the earliest to emerge was Bloom's (1985) model of talent development. Bloom (1985) examined experts in domains such as mathematics, art, music, science and sport in order to understand how world-class talent is developed (Côté et al., 2012). Retrospective interviews were employed in order to gain a description of the life story of each expert individual (Côté et al., 2012). As a result, Bloom (1985) noticed a prevalent pattern of development, which was summarized in three stages (Côté et al., 2012). These are: (1) the early years; (2) the middle years; and (3) the later years (Baker et al., 2003). Each stage is characterised by shifting demands on the child and their primary caregivers (Bloom, 1985; Baker et al., 2003). These stages will be discussed in greater detail below.

In the early years, the child becomes involved in the activity and they are identified as being talented (Côté et al., 2012). The primary caregiver assumes the leadership role through providing their child with the opportunity to participate in this activity (Bloom, 1985). The emphasis at this stage is on enjoyment and learning fundamental skills (Baker et al., 2003). In the middle years, a greater commitment on behalf of the child and the primary caregiver is required (Bloom, 1985; Baker et al., 2003). As the child increases their training and specialization, there is also a requirement from both parties to dedicate more time and resources to the activity in question (Bloom, 1985; Baker et al., 2003; Côté et al., 2012). At this stage the child's activity often dominates the family routine (Bloom, 1985; Baker et al., 2003). In the later years, the activity becomes the core focus of the individual's life and the individual reaches the

peak of their ability (Côté et al., 2012). The role of the primary caregiver diminishes at the beginning of this stage and the individual takes ownership over their future career (Bloom, 1985; Baker et al., 2003).

Although this model has been useful in broadly describing talent development, it is argued that it does not allow for individual differences across high performance sport (Côté et al., 2012). For example, in elite Academy football, players are recruited on a national scale from early adolescence (i.e. the middle years). As a consequence, young players often move substantial distances from home to be near to the training facilities. In this instance, a young player must live with a couple who is employed by the club to provide them with half-board accommodation in their family home. The club provides the young player with resources such as daily meals, transport to training/matches and financial support. Therefore, the role of the parent or primary caregiver is often greatly reduced as the child is living away from home and the club is covering the essential resources needed. This contradicts Bloom's (1985) model, which proposed that parents or primary caregivers dedicate a great deal of their time and resources to the activity in question during the middle years. Furthermore, it can be argued that this model favours those with a 'stable' upbringing (Baker et al., 2003). In other words, this model does not provide a description of the development of athletes who may be unable to access such support from their parents or primary caregiver (Baker et al., 2003).

Bloom's (1985) model does not provide an age range for each stage. This lack of specificity is a limitation for research in sport, as the stages presented are hard to distinguish and define (Côté et al., 2012). Additionally, there is a lack of clarity surrounding what measures could be employed in order to track the progression from one stage to another (Côté et al., 2012). As a result, it has proved difficult for researchers to validate the model from a scientific perspective (Côté et al., 2003). Despite this criticism,

the influence of this early model can still be seen in the sport literature to date (Côté et al., 2012). In particular, Bloom's (1985) model provided the foundation for the proposal of sport specific models of talent development. The most influential of these was developed by Côté (1999). This model will be discussed below.

Côté (1999) attempted to address the limitations of Bloom's (1985) model by developing the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP). In line with Bloom's (1985) model, Côté (1999) also included 3 stages of development, which begins in childhood and extends through to adolescence (Baker et al., 2003). The three stages are: (1) sampling years (ages 6–12); (2) specialising years (ages 13–15); and (3) investment years (ages 16+). Similar to Bloom's (1985) model, Côté (1999) emphasised the shifting demands on the child and their primary caregivers across each stage. During the sampling years, primary caregivers take on a leadership role as they provide their child with the opportunity to engage in a range of sports (Côté, 1999; Baker et al., 2003). This has also been referred to in the literature as diversification (Vealey et al., 2015). Diversification is an investment in a broad range of sports and activities (Vealey et al., 2015). As discussed, during the specialising years the child typically selects a sport to specialise in (Vealey et al., 2015). The primary caregiver assumes a facilitative role as they make financial and time commitments to their child's sport (Côté, 1999). Finally, during the investment years, the primary caregivers play an advisory or support role (e.g. emotional and financial) as the athlete commits fully to a higher level of practice and competition (Côté, 1999; Baker et al., 2003; Ericsson, 2013; Vealey et al., 2015).

Côté's (1999) model has provided researchers in sport with a valuable lens through which talent development may be viewed. However, similar to Bloom's (1985) model, it is important to highlight that this model favours those with a 'stable' upbringing (Baker et al., 2003). In other words, Côté's (1999) model does not describe the

development of athletes who may be unable to access emotional and financial resources from their parent or primary caregiver (Baker et al., 2003). Arguably, these athletes will face a qualitatively different road in order to reach expert performance levels (Baker et al., 2003). Furthermore, the demands placed on athletes is often sport dependent and the capacity required for performance excellence may also differ across sports (Stambulova et al., 2009). For instance, in complex coordination sports (e.g., diving, gymnastics, figure skating) athletes typically enter into the specialisation stage aged 5–7 years (Stambulova et al., 2009). This is necessary as early childhood is considered to be an optimal period in motor development (Stambulova, 2009). Typically, a gymnast will achieve their performance peaks in adolescence (ages 15–20) and begin the retirement transition in early adulthood (ages 20–25). In contrast, endurance sport athletes (e.g., cross-country skiing, marathon) may specialise in adolescence and achieve their performance peaks in middle adulthood (ages 25–35). This implies that the sport, rather than the age of the athlete, is the main contributory factor in determining the athletes' participation levels (Côté et al., 2007). Additionally, the model does not account for differences in the ages that young athletes access expert coaching. This is a fact that cannot be overlooked as these factors may positively or negatively influence athletic career development (Stambulova et al., 2009). For instance, in countries such as Russia and China, professional coaches work with athletes of all ages and performance levels (Stambulova et al., 2009). Although expert coaching from a young age may improve technical skill, it may also reduce enjoyment, depending on the learning environment created by the coaches (Stambulova et al., 2009). A lack of enjoyment early on in an athletes' career may lead to loss in motivation and subsequent drop-out (Bloom, 1985; Butcher et al., 2002; Wall and Côté, 2007). Nevertheless, Côté's (1999) model built upon Bloom's (1985) model by identifying age ranges for each stage of talent development

(Côté et al., 2003). The stages are identified by concepts and variables that are quantifiable and testable from an empirical standpoint (Côté et al., 2012).

Interestingly, the specified age ranges are similar to the stages of Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory of personality development. In particular, the specialising years and the investment years coincide with Erikson's (1950, 1959) fifth stage, identity vs. identity diffusion. Research states that athletes who excel, typically dedicate thousands of hours to their chosen sport throughout the specialising and investment years (Ericsson et al., 1993; Côté, 1999). Studies by Helsen et al. (1998, 2000), Baker et al. (2005) and Law et al. (2007) have shown that international soccer and hockey players, world-class triathletes and gymnasts invested or surpassed 10,000 hours of deliberate practice during childhood and adolescence. This total was found to be significantly more than their less successful peers, who did not reach the same heights in their respective sports. Whilst it must be noted that hours invested alone may not lead to expertise (as there are many other factors which may influence development) (see Aggerholm, 2015 for an existential consideration of talent development and Vealey et al., 2015), it is illustrative of the time and effort that is often invested by young athletes into their sport. Research by Hansen and Larson (2007) found that youth who spent more hours per week in an organised activity reported higher rates of developmental experience relating to constructs such as identity formation. Empirical investigations have also demonstrated that young athletes who invest high levels of time and effort into their sport may fall behind their non-athletic peers in terms of psychosocial development (Petitpas, 1981; Brewer et al., 1993). Due to the nature of the rewards and demands (both physical and psychological) inherent in competing at a high level, elite young athletes may lack the incentive or opportunity to meaningfully explore alternative roles, other than that of being an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993). As such, the athlete may be at risk of becoming overly committed to the athlete

role, or foreclosing their identity without appropriate exploration of alternative roles (Marcia, 1966; Rotella and Heyman, 1993; Hoyle and Leff, 1997; Horton and Mack, 2000; Brewer et al., 2000; Tasiemski, et al., 2004). Research has shown that this can adversely affect the emotional well-being of the athlete when dealing with various setbacks (see Brown and Potrac, 2009 and Rongen et al., 2015). Within the sport psychology literature, this domain of identification is termed ‘athletic identity’ (Visek et al., 2008). Therefore, the following section will further explore and evaluate the concept of athletic identity within the field of sport psychology.

2.2.2 Introduction to the concept of athletic identity

Athletic identity has been defined as the extent to which an individual identifies with the role of an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993). Over the years, research in sport psychology has focused on the psychological, social, and behavioural consequences of having an athletic identity (Martin et al., 1997). As discussed, elite athletes often invest substantial amounts of time and effort in sport participation during the specialisation and investment years (Côte, 1999). To further this, intense involvement with a sport and subsequent recognition for participation may cause an individual to derive a strong sense of who he/she is as a person from their role as an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993, 2010). In other words, the athlete may develop a strong or exclusive athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Individuals with an exclusive athletic identity do not view the athletic role as a facet of who they are, but as their entire self-identity (Balague, 1999; Cabrita et al., 2014).

2.2.2.1 Measuring athletic identity. One of the most widely used instruments to measure athletic identity was developed by Brewer et al. (1993). This tool is known as the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS; Brewer et al., 1993; Tasiemski et al., 2004). The purpose of the AIMS is to reflect the ‘strength and exclusivity of identification with the athlete role’ (Brewer et al., 1993, p.3). Brewer et al. (1993) proposed that athletic identity

is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of a three factor structure. These are: (1) social aspect (the strength to which athletes identify with the athletic role); (2) exclusivity (the degree to which athletes rely on their athletic role compared to other roles); and (3) negative affectivity (the degree of negative emotional response resulting from inability to train or compete) (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001; Tasiemski et al., 2004; Cabrita et al., 2014). The original version of the AIMS contained 10-items designed to assess strength of athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993; Brewer and Cornelius, 2001). These 10 items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Williams, 2007; Whipple, 2009).

As discussed, Brewer et al. (1993) considered the AIMS to be a multi-dimensional instrument. However, researchers contended that the AIMS neglected the external (social) aspects in favour of internal (personal) factors relating to athletic identity (Cieslak, 2004; Nasco and Webb, 2006). As such, the AIMS has been criticised in the literature for being a uni-dimensional measure for athletic identity (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001). In response, researchers examined its factorial structure in a sample that was collated from a decade of various administrations of the AIMS (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001; Visek et al., 2008). Results of their findings indicated that three items from the 10-item measure performed poorly and were thus deleted prior to factor analysis (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001; Visek et al., 2008). Subsequent results of the factor analysis indicated that the abbreviated 7-item AIMS was a psychometrically sound and valid multi-dimensional measure (Martin et al., 1997; Brewer and Cornelius, 2001; Visek et al., 2008).

Despite this, the AIMS has received further criticism in relation to its completeness. Most notably, researchers have criticised the AIMS for overlooking the inclusion of positive affectivity as an aspect of athletic identity (Cieslak, 2004). It is

argued that positive affectivity allows for an understanding as to why athletes continue their involvement in sport due to the positive experiences, not just negative ones (Cieslak, 2004). To further this, the AIMS does not measure the level of exploration and commitment across the domains of career, religion and politics, despite being positively correlated with identity foreclosure (Murphy et al., 1996; Hanrahan and Andersen, 2010). As such, researchers have emphasised the need to expand the AIMS to include other dimensions of identity (Anderson, 2004; Cieslak, 2004; Groff and Zabriskie, 2006; Mastean et al., 2006; Visek et al., 2008). It is argued that doing so would create a more complete instrument with a stronger factorial structure. This resulted in the development of other athletic identity measurement scales such as Public-Private Athletic Identity (PPAIS; Nasco and Webb, 2006), AIMS-Plus (Cieslak, 2004) and the Athletic Identity Questionnaire (AIQ; Anderson, 2004). However, since its development, the AIMS has been the most frequently used and cited tool for measuring athletic identity in the sport psychology literature (Brewer et al., 2001; Cabrita et al., 2014).

Despite the abundance of research on athletic identity, the majority of investigations into this area have been quantitative in nature, predominantly relying on the AIMS for data collection (e.g. Brewer et al., 1993; Grove, Lavalley and Gordon, 1997; Lavalley et al., 1997; Cieslak, 2004; Lamont-Mills and Christensen, 2006). It is argued that due to an over-reliance on quantitative approaches, the conceptualisation of athletic identity remains incomplete in the sport psychology literature. Personal identity is a deeply subjective construct (van Fraassen and Peschard, 2008). Furthermore, identity is intangible, which poses the concern that measuring a construct such as this using a Likert scale reduces its essential qualities into predetermined, non-descriptive factor structures (Martens 1979; Martens 1987; Schwartz, 2005; Keegan et al., 2014; O'Halloran et al., 2016). More recently, mixed method approaches (see Stephan, 2003) and qualitative

investigations have appeared in the literature. For instance, Sparkes (1998) and Brown and Potrac (2009) both employed the qualitative approach of interpretive biography in their research. Interpretive biography uses interviews which are reflexive in nature, with the aim of collecting biographical data (Denzin, 1989; Sparkes, 1998). Furthermore, Lavalley and Robinson (2007) utilised interpretive phenomenology and employed semi-structured interviews. However, these studies are the exception rather than the rule. A more rounded understanding of the experience of having an exclusive, strong or threatened athletic identity is necessary in order to allow practitioners to best support athletes through conflicts and events (positive or negative) that may affect athletic identity. Despite the identified limitation in the literature, the following section will discuss the salient findings of the research in athletic identity to date.

2.2.3 Athletic identity research

Research suggests that there are positive and negative effects associated with having a strong identification with the athletic role (Williams, 2007). For instance, a study has found that a strong athletic identity positively impacts life satisfaction or overall well-being (Williams, 2007). To further this, research by Settles et al. (2002) found a correlation between a strong athletic identity and psychological well-being. A study of marathon runners found correlations between a strong athletic identity and good performances, a commitment to running and an expanded social network (Horton and Mack, 2000). In support of this, athletes with high scores pertaining to athletic identity were also found to benefit socially and exhibit high levels of self-confidence (Lamont-Mills and Christensen, 2006; Wiechman and Williams, 1997). Studies have also shown that a strong athletic identity may enhance an athlete's performance, participation and long-term adherence to their training regimes (Sparkes, 1998; Lamont-Mills and Christensen, 2006). Similarly, additional research has suggested that athletic

performance might be improved through a strong, exclusive identification with the athletic role (Brewer, van Raalte and Linder, 2012). A strong athletic identity may aid an athlete in their recovery post severe injury, if focus is on rehabilitation in goal orientated stages (Samuel et al., 2015). Athletic identity may also result in positive body image and increased self-esteem (Rongen et al., 2015). However, research regarding the concept of athletic identity has shown that developing a strong or exclusive identification with the role of an athlete may also impact negatively on an athlete (Lamont-Mills and Christensen, 2006; Williams, 2007).

A strong athletic identity often develops at the expense of other personal and social experiences (Brewer, 1993; Cabrita et al., 2014). As such, the athlete may become overly committed to the athlete role (Horton and Mack, 2000; Tasiemski, et al., 2004). This can affect the well-being of the athlete and may lead to inadequate coping and emotional disturbances when dealing with various setbacks (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Rongen et al., 2015). For instance, athletes who scored high in athletic identity exhibited more positive attitudes toward playing with injury as well as higher behavioural tendencies to do so (Weinberg et al., 2013). A correlation between a strong athletic identity and the exhaustion dimension of burnout in athletes has also been reported in the sport psychology literature (Martin et al., 2013). Interestingly, the score for the sport devaluation dimension of burnout were much lower in athletes who scored high in athletic identity (Martin et al., 2013). A strong athletic identity may also result in negative psychological responses to events such as retirement, sub-optimal performances, injury and de-selection. The literature relating to the debilitating effects of a strong or exclusive athletic identity will be discussed under the relevant headings below.

2.2.3.1 Athletic identity and self-concept. Lantz and Schroeder (1999, p.547) defined athletic identity as ‘an aspect of the self-concept and the degree to which an individual

identifies with the athletic role'. Self-concept, broadly defined, is a persons' perception of him or herself (Shavelson and Bolus, 1982). An athlete who identifies strongly with the athletic role internalises this perception within their self-concept (Turner, 1982; Lamont-Mills and Christensen, 2006). The self-concept is largely considered to be a construct made up of numerous dimensions (Harter, 1998). However, those with an exclusive athletic identity narrow the focus of the self-concept into one salient dimension (Martin et al., 1997). This is important as the self-concept is inextricably linked with an individual's self-esteem (Duda, 1999; Campbell and Lavallee, 1993). This means that self-esteem is likely to be impacted when the self-concept is threatened (Harter, 1990; Rosenburg, 1989). In support of this, a study found that sub-optimal performances affected the way in which athlete with strong athletic identities defined and evaluated their competence and worth (Brewer et al., 1993, 2012). This supports the assertion by Cornelius (1995) who stated that an individual's response to successes, failures and perceptions of events are most strongly influenced by the dimensions that hold significance within the self-concept. Interestingly, studies have shown that athletes who were longitudinally dissatisfied with their performance made efforts to reduce their athletic identity (Brewer at al. 1999). This is considered to be a form of self-protection (Lally, 2007). It is employed by an individual in order to help to maintain a positive self-concept (Sedikides, 2007). This notion is similar to Freud's self-preservation drive (Freud, 1930, 1961) discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Although Freud asserted that self-preservation is a drive that is biologically determined, the function of both are comparable; to protect oneself from harm. By psychologically disengaging from an identity domain that is under threat, it is possible to preserve self-esteem and the self from definitions based on negative feedback and outcomes (Major and Schmader, 1998; Schmader et al., 2001).

2.2.3.2 Athletic identity and retirement. A strong athletic identity may result in difficulties when faced with career related decisions (Brewer et al., 2010). For instance, a study by Grove et al. (1997) aimed to investigate the relationship between athletic identity at the time of retirement and transition-related coping. In order to do so, the researchers administered the AIMS questionnaire and COPE inventory (a multidimensional coping inventory to assess the different ways in which people respond to stress) to 48 retired semi-professional athletes. Results found that individuals who scored high in athletic identity relied heavily on avoidance-orientated coping strategies, heightened stress and anxiety responses and increased seeking of social support (Grove et al., 1997). Research by Lavalley et al. (1997) aimed to investigate how individuals cope with the loss of athletic identity following retirement from sport. The participants for this study were 15 retired athletes who had previously competed at national and/or international level and were identified as experiencing highly distressful reactions to retirement from sport (Lavalley et al., 1997). The employed methodology was autobiographical in nature which involves the individual writing autobiographical accounts of a pre-established theme. In this instance, the participants were required to focus specifically on their emotional adjustment to retirement from sport (Lavalley et al., 1997). In order to measure athletic identity, the AIMS questionnaire was administered. It was reported in the findings that individuals with a high athletic identity at the time of retirement experienced higher levels of emotional adjustment difficulties (Lavalley et al., 1997). Similarly, a study by Brown and Potrac (2009) investigated the experiences of 4 young former elite footballers who were forced into retirement as a consequence of de-selection. As discussed, the employed methodology for this research was interpretive biography. It was found that having a strong athletic identity as career termination occurred resulted in emotional disturbances,

including anger, feelings of failure, humiliation and high levels of anxiety in the participants.

Athletes who retire and possess a strong athletic identity have also reported experiencing various mental health problems including feelings of loss, depression and hopelessness upon retirement (Douglas and Carless, 2006; Lavallee and Robinson, 2007; Carless and Douglas, 2009). Studies by Werthner and Orlick (1982) and Stephan et al. (2003) on retired athletes reported that retirement had an adverse effect on the athletes' subjective well-being, mental health, self-confidence and self-esteem. Interestingly, a study by Lally and Kerr (2005) on collegiate athletes found that those with an exclusive identity showed an unwillingness to consider the possibility of investigating non-sport career possibilities. Similar to the research relating to sub-optimal performances, studies have shown that athletes may counteract these effects through proactively diminishing their athletic identities prior to retirement in order to preclude a major identity crisis or loss in self-esteem (Lally, 2007; Brewer et al., 2010). Again, this supports the notion that individuals may engage in self-protective psychological processes when their self-concept is under direct threat (Lally, 2007).

2.2.3.3 Athletic identity and injury. Loss of identity is a major factor for athletes who experience an injury (Lockhart, 2010; Rongen et al., 2015). A series of studies by Brewer (1993) and Manuel et al. (2002) showed correlations between a high score for athletic identity and depression following injury. Further research similarly revealed that injured athletes with high scores for athletic identity exhibited greater levels of depression, anger, denial, anxiety and lower self-esteem immediately after sustaining an injury (Leddy et al., 1994; Harris, 2003). Therefore, it can be concluded that there are psychological costs of holding on to a strong athletic identity for an injured athlete.

Identity disassociation has been highlighted as a helpful practice for athletes who have suffered a major injury (Benson et al., 2015). The results from a study by Brewer et al. (2010) suggested that injured participants reduced their identification with the athlete role in response to a threatened identity, following ACL injuries and the difficulties they encountered in postoperative rehabilitation. Focusing exclusively on a role that may cease to exist for an individual (depending on the outcome of their rehabilitation), will arguably serve to magnify the distress associated with a disruptive life event of this nature (Benson et al., 2015). Interestingly, research on competitive athletes expecting to return to their sport following a severe injury concluded that the athletes did not attempt to reduce their athletic identity whilst injured (Samuel et al., 2015). The expectation that these athletes will continue their career in sport arguably means they do not feel the need to consider an alternative option. This is unsurprising, as previously discussed research has shown a correlation between a strong athletic identity and an unwillingness to explore other career opportunities or alternative roles during the athletic career-span (Lally and Kerr, 2005). Whilst this may facilitate the rehabilitation process (Samuel, et al., 2015), it may also lead to devastating psychological consequences for athletes who do not make a full recovery or fail to regain their place on the team (Crook and Robertson, 1991; Alfermann and Gross, 1997; Webb et al., 1998).

2.2.3.4 Athletic identity and de-selection. Athletes may experience identity loss due to de-selection (Brewer et al., 1993). Research by Brown and Potrac (2009) reported severe emotional disturbances in athletes with strong identities who experienced this event during their career. However, studies have shown that athletes who experience de-selection, may also begin the self-protection process of de-identification with the athlete role (Grove et al., 2004; Brewer et al., 2010). Athletes who hold on to the athletic role under these circumstances are susceptible to paying a psychological cost (Grove et al.,

2004). Research has found that anxiety, fear, depression, anger and humiliation are experienced by de-selected athletes with a strong athletic identity (Brown and Potrac, 2009).

2.2.3.5 Identity foreclosure. It can be argued from a psychosocial perspective, that one of the greatest threats to an athlete who has a strong or exclusive athletic identity is identity foreclosure (Marcia, 1966; Williams, 2007). To recap, identity foreclosure occurs when an individual makes a commitment to an occupation, values, and beliefs in the relative absence of prior exploration (Marcia, 1966; Schwartz, 2001). As such, meaningful reflection, planning and investment in a future self is overlooked (Marcia, 1966, 1980, 1993). Marcia's (1966) identity status model focuses on Erikson's fifth stage of identity vs identity diffusion (ages 12–18). This stage coincides with the specialising years (ages 13–15) and investment years (ages 16+) of talent development, where an athlete typically invests thousands of hours into their chosen sport (Côté, 1999). Coaches often expect athletes to drop other activities once they reach the specialising years in order to focus solely on their development in one sport (Ommundsen, et al., 2006). As such, this stage is characterised by an intense, year-round training schedule in a single sport (Malina, 2010). It can be argued that the physical, psychological and time demands associated with this type of schedule often discourages the exploration of alternative roles or activities (Good et al., 1993). As a result, elite young performers often make an early commitment to the role of an athlete (Brewer, 1993; Williams, 2007; Cabrita et al., 2014). This premature commitment to a role or occupation is characteristic of identity foreclosure (Marcia, 1966). For instance, research has found that identity foreclosure and athletic identity increased with the level of sport participation (Good et al., 1993). It has also been found that athletic identity and identity foreclosure increased with the level of competition (Good et al., 1993; Miller and Kerr, 2003). Interestingly, a negative

relationship between a strong athletic identity, identity foreclosure and realistic career expectations has been reported in the literature (Murphy et al., 1996). This indicates that an athlete who is committed to the athletic role may be unwilling to explore other occupations, activities and roles besides a full-time professional career in sport (Williams, 2007). Similarly, research in both individual and team sports has found that athletes who over-identified with the athlete role demonstrated restricted role experimentation (Miller and Kerr, 2003).

From an Eriksonian perspective, a foreclosed individual has no prior experience in resolving an identity conflict (Erikson, 1950, 1959). This may explain why such individuals are less able to cope with threats to their athletic identity (Sparkes, 1998). In more extreme cases, this may result in a crisis, as the ‘...structure of meaning, which is the core of (the athlete’s) existence’ is being challenged (Hergenhahn, as cited in Nesti, 2004; Lally, 2007). As discussed, a crisis may range from mild confusion to aggravated confusion (Erikson, 1968; Côté and Levine, 1987). Individuals experiencing the latter will lack the means necessary to develop a healthy personality, until this crisis is resolved (Erikson, 1975; Côté and Levine, 2016). Therefore, it is clear from the discussed literature that many elite athletes compromise the development of a well-rounded identity in order to pursue excellence in their respective sports (Miller and Kerr, 2003). The events presented in this section, which disrupt athletic identity, have been referred to collectively as ‘transitions’ in the literature (Nesti et al., 2012). As such, the following section will provide an insight into the theoretical perspectives of the career transition literature in sport. The reason for doing so is twofold. Firstly, it will allow for a further discussion of athletic identity in the sport literature. Secondly, addressing the shortcomings associated with this body of research will provide an argument for the conceptualisation of ‘critical moments’ in an athletic career.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives of Career Transitions

The term ‘athletic career’ refers to the deliberate involvement in a sporting activity over a number of years with the aim of achieving full potential in athletic performance (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007). As such, ‘athletic career’ relates to all levels of competitive sports. An athletic career can be local, regional, national, or international (Stambulova et al., 2009). Depending on the athlete’s status, the career can be amateur or professional (Stambulova et al., 2009). An athletic career that reaches an international or professional level, is often termed an ‘elite’ career (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007). As discussed, developmental models (see Côté, 1999) describe this journey as a succession of developmental stages beginning in childhood through to adolescence, into early adulthood. It is posited that if a high volume of training hours is accumulated in the demarcated years, an athlete may progress from novice (beginner) to master (elite) level (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999).

More recently, the career development literature has evolved from a prevailing focus on talent development toward the inclusion of psychosocial factors (e.g. emotion and cognition, social support etc.). As discussed, these factors play a holistic role in maximising an individual’s development across the lifespan (see Brewer 1993, Brewer et al., 1993 and Sparkes, 1998). This shift toward a psychosocial perspective, may be due to the mounting demands that are placed upon aspiring athletes as they make their way in an increasingly complex and challenging world (Pummell, 2008). In addition to the consistent pressure to sustain and improve sporting performance, young athletes often face expectations to achieve academically and to cope with the external stressors such as media intrusion and organisational practices, financial implications of performance outcomes, lifestyle choices and social constraints associated with their training schedules (Pummell et al., 2008; Mellalieu, et al., 2009). The psychological impact of coping with

such pressures may cause even the most talented of athletes to succumb to mediocrity (Gould et al., 1999). Therefore, it is argued that consideration of the psychosocial factors allows for a more comprehensive explanation of an athletes' experience (e.g. Gould et al., 1999; Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). As a result, an athletic career is no longer solely considered as a progression through stages of talent development, but in terms of transitions too (Stambulova et al., 2009).

A 'transition' has been defined as '...an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships' (Schlossberg, 1981, p.5). 'Non-event' is the term given to a transition that is anticipated but does not occur (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995). Schlossberg's (1981) definition of transition originated in mainstream psychology and refers to general life transitions. However, numerous researchers applied it to their work in the sport setting (see Baillie and Danish, 1992 and Wylleman et al., 2004). Within the domain of sport psychology, Schlossberg's (1981) definition of transition was initially introduced as a means to explain how athletes coped with retirement from their respective sport (Wylleman et al., 2004). With this in mind, Schlossberg's (1981) model will be evaluated in greater detail below.

2.3.1 The model of human adaptation to transition

As previously mentioned, the aim of Schlossberg's (1981) model is to explain various transitions that occur across numerous contexts (e.g. professional, personal and social domains) (Morris, 2013). According to this model, three components interact during a transition (Schlossberg, 1981; Wylleman et al., 2004). These are: the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic status, health status, psychosocial development, previous experience with a transition of a similar nature); the perception of the particular transition (e.g. role change, degrees of stress,

duration, onset, affectivity); and the characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments (e.g. physical settings, internal support and support from the organisation/institution) (Schlossberg, 1981; Charner and Schlossberg, 1986; Lavallee, 2000; Wylleman et al., 2004). As such, it was argued that the interaction of these components is of primary importance, rather than the transition alone (Schlossberg, 1981; Lavallee, 2000). The transition results in each component either increasing or decreasing in salience, which in turn produces a successful or unsuccessful adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981; Wylleman et al., 2004). In other words, Schlossberg (1981) contended that these variables may act as 'assets' or 'liabilities' during adaptation to transition. Variables that prove to be assets for an individual will aid adjustment. In contrast, variables that prove to be liabilities will impede adjustment. The ratio of assets to liabilities determines the ease of adaptation (Schlossberg, 1981).

The use of this model has been well supported in the field of sport psychology (Lavallee, 2000). Research by Swain (1991) evaluated that applicability of this model to sport termination (n=10 retired athletes). Results found that participants who perceived a lack of control over their life reported a higher degree of stress and difficulty in adjusting to their lives post sport. In contrast, athletes who perceived themselves as having control over the process (e.g. deciding to retire on their own terms) experienced a more positive adjustment to the transition. This finding supports both the perception component, and the asset and liability aspect of Schlossberg's (1981) model. In support of this, research by Sinclair and Orlick (1993) also found that the experience of each career transition depends on the way in which the athlete perceives the situation. The authors similarly contend that, depending on the individual's perception of the event, each transition has the potential to be a crisis, a success or a combination of both (Sinclair and Orlick, 1993).

Schlossberg's (1981) model has been employed as a framework to investigate transitions in various domains including education, sport, counselling psychology and social psychology (Pummell, 2008). It has received praise in the psychology literature for including positive affectivity, rather than considering the transition experience as purely negative (Crook and Robertson, 1991, Pummell, 2008). Furthermore, Schlossberg's (1981) model was commended for considering retirement as a process, rather than a singular event (Wylleman et al., 2004; Fuller, 2014). In doing so, Schlossberg's (1981) model deviated from the dominant view of retirement within the literature at the time. However, despite this advancement, it is argued that the model does little to explain or clarify the retirement process (Swain, 1999). Schlossberg's (1981) model has also received criticism within the sport psychology literature for not being specific enough to explain career transitions in the athletic domain (Pummell, 2008). In other words, this model lacks sport-specific context and variables (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994). Additionally, operational components relating to transition adjustment are arguably missing from this model, making it difficult to establish if the determining factors for a successful adjustment are specifically relevant to the athletic domain (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994; Pummell, et al., 2008; Morris, 2013). This has proven to be a substantial limitation when employing this model in sport psychology research, as it is argued that a diversity of factors which may influence the athlete in transition must be acknowledged in order to understand the athletic retirement process (Coakley, 1983). Despite such criticisms, Schlossberg's (1981) model offers some relevant predictions in regard to the experience of athletes (Crook and Robertson, 1991; Swain, 1991; Pummell, 2008). Furthermore, Schlossberg's (1981) model provided a valuable starting point from which to investigate adjustment to athletic career transition (Pummell, 2008). Research in sport has shown that the model reflects the variability in the experience of transitions,

as well as identifying possible influencing factors in adjusting to a transition (Swain, 1991). In an attempt to build on Schlossberg's (1981) work, researchers within sport began to propose sport-specific transition models which aimed to address the above criticisms. There are two sport-specific transition models that have widely featured in the literature (Stephan and Demulier, 2008). These are: the Athletic Career Termination Model (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994) and the Athletic Career Transition model (Stambulova, 2003). These models will be discussed further below.

2.3.2 The athletic career termination model

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) developed the Athletic Career Termination Model in order to create a framework that considers the unique factors associated with athletic career transitions. The authors built upon Schlossberg's (1981) model through developing a sport specific conceptualisation of career termination (Stephan and Demulier, 2008). The model denotes the personal and situational factors that influence an athlete's ability to adjust to retirement (Stephan and Demulier, 2008). These factors are: the reasons for termination, factors relating to adaptation (e.g. athletic identity, perceived control over the process, developmental experiences) and available resources (e.g. coping skills, social support, pre-retirement planning and preparation) (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994; Stephan and Demulier, 2008). Research by Coakley (2006) employed this model as a framework for investigating the sport career transition experiences of 7 recently retired NFL athletes using a qualitative approach. This study found that the majority of the participants perceived their preparation for retirement as inadequate. This resulted in a negative impact on the ex-athletes' subjective well-being. In support of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model, the researchers concluded that the career transitions in sport are complex and multidimensional in nature. As such, it was argued that the outcome of a transition is dependant upon cognitive, social, behavioural and emotional resources possessed by the

individual, as well as the amount of preparation prior to the event occurring (Coakley, 2006). A study by Alfermann et al. (2004) was also found to be in accordance with this model and the previously discussed study. The aim of this study was to assess the cognitive, emotional and behavioural consequences of sport career termination of national and international level athletes from Germany, Russia and Lithuania (n=254). Participants were required to complete the Athletic Retirement Questionnaire (which was developed by the first two authors in this study). Findings showed that planned retirement may contribute to a more positive retirement transition with reduced levels of emotional disturbance (Alfermann et al., 2004). Finally, a study by Stoltenburg et al. (2011) aimed to investigate the psychosocial effects that accompany athletic transition out of sport due to injury. This study employed a semi-structured interview approach based on Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model. The participants were former Division I and Division II collegiate athletes (n=7). Results found that 4 factors in particular impacted upon the quality of the transition. These were psychosocial development, role of education, role on the team and involvement in other activities. The study highlighted the importance of having a strong and positive support system whilst adjusting to the transition. 5 out of 7 participants who considered themselves as having very strong athletic identities, perceived their transition to be much more difficult to adjust to (Stoltenburg et al., 2011). These findings were in accordance with the suggested personal and situational factors proposed in Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model.

Overall, Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model received praise within the literature for expanding upon Schlossberg's (1981) model to create a sport-specific framework from which to study athletic retirement (Stephan and Demulier, 2008). However, over the years, empirical research has verified additional variables related to transition adjustment. As a result, this model is arguably outdated (Stephan and Demulier, 2008).

A further weakness of this model is its focus on retirement alone. This model does not try to explain factors associated with various other career transitions (Morris, 2013) and as such, it has limited applicability in athletic career transition research. In response to these criticisms, Stambulova (2003) developed the Athletic Career Transition Model with the aim of delineating transitional stages that occur across the lifespan of an athletic career (Stambulova, 2003; Morris, 2013; Stephan and Demulier, 2008).

2.3.3 The athletic career transition model

Stambulova (2003) proposed this model based on ideas from the work of Schlossberg (1981) and Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), whilst also drawing inspiration from the conclusion drawn following her own research with more than 200 Russian athletes across differing sports and standards of competition (Stambulova, 1994). Stambulova's (2003) resulting model contains three levels. On a general level, typical phases and principles can be distinguished. On a specific level, the differences between sports or cultures come into play. Lastly, on an individual level, differences in coping with transition exist relating to the athlete's personality and experiences (Wylleman et al., 1999). In order for the athlete to have a successful transition, they must utilise their resources and find a way to effectively cope with the demands that a transition may place on them (Stambulova, 2003). Whether or not an athlete copes effectively with transition, depends on a dynamic balance between barriers and resources (Stambulova, 2003). These may be internal or external and facilitative or debilitating to the coping process (Stambulova, 2003; Stephan and Demulier, 2008; Taylor and Lavalley, 2010). Examples of internal resources may include: knowledge, skills, personality traits, athletic identity and previous experiences (Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova et al., 2009; Morris, 2013). Examples of external resources may include: social, financial and coaching support (Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova et al., 2009; Morris, 2013). In instances where an athlete is unable to

effectively cope, or develop the necessary resources to successfully overcome transition barriers and demands, a psychological intervention may be required (Stambulova, 2003). From the perspective of this model, ineffectively coping with transitions may have adverse effects on athletic development and subjective well-being. Research has found that transitions can result in negative consequences such as poor performances, premature drop-out from sport, neuroses, emotional disturbance (Brewer et al., 1993; Morris, 2013), and in the more extreme cases, depression, alcohol and substance abuse (Ponizovskiy, 2013). Interestingly, from this perspective athletic identity may be viewed as either a resource or a barrier to a successful transition (Stambulova et al., 2009). In support of athletic identity acting as an internal resource, a study which analysed 6 case studies of competitive athletes who have rehabilitated from a severe injury found that a strong athletic identity may aid an athlete in their recovery post severe injury, if the focus is on rehabilitation (Samuel et al., 2015). In contrast, research has found that athletes facing career termination, who maintained a strong athletic identity, employed dysfunctional avoidance-based coping strategies (Grove et al., 1997; Pummell, et al., 2008). This supports the individual difference level of Stambulova's model (Wylleman et al., 1999).

Further research has been conducted in accordance with Stambulova's (2003) model. In particular, the following study supports the specific and individual level of this model. A mixed-gender, cross-national comparison of 157 former international French (n=69) and Swedish (n=88) athletes found that cross cultural factors existed in how effectively their retirement transition was coped with (Stambulova et al., 2007). The direction of emotional reaction was found to be more positive in Swedish athletes, whilst the perceived difficulty of starting a new career and employing avoidance-coping strategies was higher amongst French athletes. To further this, life satisfaction at the time of this study was higher in the Swedish athletes. Regardless of the nation, retirement

planning was related to more favourable emotions and coping behaviours. However, it did not influence the perceived quality or the long-term consequences of the transition. This study showed that career termination in elite sport is a dynamic, multi-dimensional, multi-level and multi-factor process in which nationality and culture plays a salient role (Stambulova et al., 2007). It is important to note that this study is not without limitations. For instance, the retrospective design employed may lead to recall bias in the participants (Stephan et al., 2003). However, it is postulated that such study designs are relied upon for this type of inquiry due to the difficulties in recruiting a homogeneous, elite-level participant sample at the same time (Stambulova et al., 2007).

From an applied perspective, research in the field has employed Stambulova's (2003) model to evaluate the youth-to-senior transition outcome in two professional football clubs (Morris et al., 2015). One club had a proactive transition programme that aligned with Stambulova's (2003) model, the other did not (Morris et al., 2014). Findings showed that the club with a transition programme had better transition outcomes amongst their players (Morris et al., 2015). This research suggests that recognising the transition levels identified by Stambulova (2003) may allow an organisation to implement the correct support mechanisms and intervention strategies (e.g. sport scientists, sport psychologists) in advance to help with the management of this process. However, in professional sport, individuals responsible for talent development and transition, along with their reporting hierarchies often vary across clubs (Relvas et al., 2010). Therefore, it may prove difficult to standardise the dissemination of these results to those who possess the authority to implement impactful and meaningful change.

In summary, Stambulova's (2003) model offered a useful expansion of existing models of transition by delineating transitional levels that exist across the lifespan of an athletic career (Stambulova, 2003; Stephan and Demulier, 2008). This model also

provided a new perspective for the consideration of athletic transitions. Stambulova's research was the first to investigate the cultural perspective of sport transition and the value of interventions in supporting athletes affected by transition (Morris et al., 2016). Despite this, Stambulova's (2003) model has received criticism in the literature. It is argued that this model failed to provide theoretical underpinning to support why adjustment to transition may profoundly affect psychological well-being (Côté and Abernethy, 2012). As such, it has been argued that the model is descriptive rather than theoretical in nature (Côté and Abernethy, 2012). Finally, Stambulova's (2003) model did not consider how transitions outside of sport may affect career development within sport. In response to this shortcoming, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) proposed their developmental model of transition. This is considered to be the first holistic model of athletic career development.

2.3.4 Developmental model of transition

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) proposed a holistic framework that outlined four levels of transitions during athletic career development (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). The outlined four levels of transitions are: the athletic level; the psychological level; the psychosocial level; and the academic/occupational level (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Prior to discussing these levels, it is necessary to note that there are two important considerations of this model. These are: the interactive nature of transitions in different domains of life and the potential affect that transitions external to performance may have on the development of an athletic career (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). At the athletic level, it is proposed that an athletic career spans over four distinct stages: initiation, development, mastery and discontinuation. The first three stages were identified by Bloom (1985) and were discussed in a previous section of this chapter. In addition to these stages, a fourth and final stage known as discontinuation was proposed (Wylleman

and Lavalley, 2004). This stage encompasses athletic career termination. The psychological level refers to the developmental changes and transitions that occur as one matures from a child into adulthood (Wylleman and Lavalley, 2004). The psychosocial level refers to changes in significant relationships which may occur over the career-span of an athlete (Wylleman and Lavalley, 2004). Examples include friendships, coach-athlete relationships, marital relationships and various other interpersonal relationships (Wylleman and Lavalley, 2004). The final level is the academic/occupational level. This encompasses the transition through primary and secondary education, higher education and finally out into the working world (Wylleman and Lavalley, 2004). This model was the first to consider the impact that the athletes' life outside of sport may have on their career development. As such, it is consistent with other stage-based models (such as Bloom, 1985 and Côté, 1999) in considering development/transition to be a process rather than a singular event.

Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) model has been employed within the literature in order to investigate a lifespan perspective on career transitions (see Wylleman and Reints, 2010, Debois et al., 2012 and Tekavc et al., 2015). For instance, a study by Pummell et al. (2008) employed this model to investigate club to regional level transition in adolescent event riders. The authors concluded that the athletes were negatively impacted both academically and socially as a result of their transition (Pummell et al., 2008). These findings support the academic and psychosocial levels proposed by Wylleman and Lavalley (2004). The results also showed that parental and peer support was a salient factor during this transition which was also in accordance with the psychosocial level of Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) model (Pummell et al., 2008). To further this, a qualitative analysis by Bruner et al. (2008), which employed Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) model as a guide, investigated the transition into elite level hockey.

The results of this study found that athletes experienced performance and non-performance related issues as a result of their transition, which supports the holistic framework proposed by this model (Bruner et al., 2008). A study by Debois et al. (2014) aimed to investigate a lifespan perspective of the career of elite male athletes. This study employed a retrospective two-part semi-structured interview approach, based on Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model (n=9). The findings of this study suggested that career transitions concurrently impacted the athletic, psychosocial and academic/vocational domains. Results also showed that depending on the stage of the athletes' career, the impact on these levels was experienced as facilitative or debilitating (Debois et al., 2014). Limitations of this research included generalizability issues due to sample size and data integrity due to recall bias particularly as the study design was retrospective (Debois et al., 2014).

Although, the authors intended for the levels of this model to account for transitions across athletic careers in general, it is argued that this has not been achieved. For example, in professional football athletes very rarely make the academic transition into higher level education after they complete their schooling commitments. This may be due to the culture present within professional football which typically does not promote or encourage player education past B-Tech completion (Parker, 2000). To further this, the majority of young players in a football Academy disassociate themselves from the education process, as they view their sport as an occupational inevitability (Parker, 2000). Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) propose that the mastery phase begins in early adulthood and retirement occurs as the athlete enters into their early to mid 30s. However, in complex coordination sports (e.g. diving, gymnastics, figure skating) athletes typically enter into this stage much earlier than athletes who participate in endurance sports (Stambulova et al., 2009). Consequently, a gymnast will achieve their

performance peaks in adolescence and begin the retirement transition in early adulthood. In contrast, endurance athletes typically achieve their performance peaks in middle adulthood, as proposed by this model. Each sport will have individual variables and nuances that may affect how a career typically develops. As a result, it is difficult to generalise a transitional model across all sports. To further this, it is argued that a generalised transitional model may not transcend cultural variations that can influence psychosocial development. For example, underdeveloped countries may not have the social and economic infrastructure in place for young athletes to attend secondary schools or universities. In these instances, Wylleman and Lavellee's (2004) model does not accurately represent the athletes' holistic career-span development. Despite this criticism, Wylleman and Lavellee's (2004) model has made a substantial contribution to the transition literature in sport (Bruner et al., 2008). It represents a move towards a holistic approach to athletic development by suggesting that transitions external to sport also need to be considered when supporting an athlete during their career (Morris, 2013).

2.3.5 Perception of control

It is important to highlight the role that perception of control plays in the process of adjustment to transition (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995). An event may be perceived as either voluntary or involuntary depending on the circumstances surrounding it (Gordon and Lavallee, 2012). In the case of athletic retirement, an athlete may feel that they have had a fulfilled career and as such, are ready to move on (Gordon and Lavallee, 2012). However, another athlete may have their career prematurely ended due to a serious injury. The circumstances surrounding the event will influence the athlete's perception of control which will in turn affect the individual's reaction to the transition (Crook and Robertson, 1991). Research has shown that involuntary, unplanned retirement may lead to decreased self-esteem and other negative psychological reactions, such as anger,

anxiety, and depression (Crook and Robertson, 1991; Alfermann and Gross, 1997). In contrast, findings have stated that if the transition process is gradual and anticipated, a greater sense of control may ensue and therefore adaptation may be more successful (Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Alfermann et al., 2004; Park et al., 2012). These findings are important for practitioner development, particularly those who subscribe to Stambulova's (2003) model, as it highlights the necessity of establishing an athlete's perception of a transition prior to prescribing a psychological intervention. In order to achieve this, the practitioner may have to revisit the mainstream psychology literature to familiarise themselves with phenomenological concepts. In particular, descriptive psychological phenomenologists use a technique known as bracketing to become aware of their pre-existing biases, assumptions and interpretations regarding an experience being described (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009). Theoretical approaches to interventions such as Gestalt or existential therapy, utilise this approach in order to remain present in the dialogue with the client at all times (Latner, 2000). In doing so, the practitioner can truly listen to what the athlete is describing, free from scientific or theoretical interpretations (Latner, 2000). It is argued that achieving rich descriptions in this manner will allow the practitioner to develop the most suitable intervention (if any) for the athlete, based on their perception of the transition event.

2.3.6 An overall critical consideration of transition models

Although Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), Stambulova (2003) and Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) differ in their proposed frameworks associated with making a quality transition, a salient factor to emerge across all models is that effective coping is a key outcome of any successful adjustment to transition (Stephan and Demulier, 2008). Despite this, all models overlook Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory of personality development, despite distinct similarities present between both. In her model, Stambulova (2003) recognised

that athletic identity could act as a resource or a barrier for a successful transition adjustment. Stambulova (2003) called a prolonged adjustment process, which occurs due to inadequate coping strategies, a 'crisis-transition'. It is argued that every career-related transition has the potential of reaching this stage of maladaptation (Stambulova et al., 2009). From an Eriksonian perspective, a crisis-transition is similar to Erikson's notion of aggravated confusion (Erikson, 1968). As discussed, this occurs when the individual is unable to successfully achieve crisis resolution despite continued attempts to do so (Côté and Levine, 1987). Individuals experiencing this type of identity crisis will lack the means necessary to develop a healthy personality, until this crisis is resolved (Erikson, 1975; Côté and Levine, 2016). In cases where athletes are unable to cope by themselves, professional assistance may be required in the form of a career transition interventions (Stambulova, 1997, 2003, 2010).

According to Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model, the transition into adolescence (ages 13–18) coincides with the development phase of an athletes' career (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). These stages of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model are in line with Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory of identity development. Along with the external transitions occurring during these years (e.g. primary to secondary education), it is argued that considering Erikson's conflict (identity vs. identity diffusion) may provide a more holistic overview of the personal development of an athlete. For instance, due to the time invested in their sport, the athlete may develop a foreclosed identity (Brewer et al., 1993). As discussed, foreclosed individuals will not have the prior experience of solving an identity crisis (Erikson, 1950, 1959). This may lead to the individual being unable to effectively resolve the conflict caused by a threat to their athletic identity. This may result in a crisis-transition or an aggravated crisis, which may lead to the acquisition of unhealthy personality characteristics, including core pathologies (Erikson, 1950,

1959). As such, consideration of Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory within the transition literature may explain various research findings which suggest that repeated failure to cope is often followed by negative long-term consequences and emotional disturbances, such as premature dropout from sport, neuroses, depression and substance abuse (Stambulova, 2009; Stambulova and Wylleman, 2014). It is important to note however, that although there is literature readily available which discusses the negative coping processes and behaviours associated with career transition, a recent meta-analysis by Knights et al. (2015) has postulated that is no literature present which explicitly examines 'flourishing' or positive outcomes of transitions in elite athletes. This may have resulted in an incomplete view of adjustment to career transitions within the sport psychology literature.

Although the models by Stambulova (2003) and Wylleman and Lavellee (2004) cater for transitions across the athletic career, the most explored transition in the sport literature is career termination (see Park et al., 2012 for a systematic review of the career transition literature). More often than not, this transition is considered to be normative in the literature (Park, et al., 2012). Normative transitions are those which are predictable and anticipated (Schlossberg, 1984). Research is also beginning to emerge which looks at normative within-career transitions such as those detailed in Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) and Stambulova's (2003) model (see Pummell, 2008 and Morris et al., 2015, 2016). However, besides from extremely recent research on injury as a career transition (see Ivarsson et al., 2016), the role of non-normative transitions within a career has been sparsely investigated. Non-normative transitions are those which occur unexpectedly (e.g. de-selection, injury) (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Despite appearing in the athletic identity research, the associated literature views an event of this kind as an isolated, standalone incident as opposed to a career transition process (Ivarsson et al.,

2016). This may be due to the unpredictability of these events. The fact that non-normative transitions can occur and re-occur throughout an athletic career means that it is difficult to create a framework that is applicable to more than one athlete. Nevertheless, non-normative transitions constitute a definite part of the career development process (Ivarsson et al., 2016). As such, it is argued that these events should not be overlooked in the literature. A greater awareness of these experiences may enable athletes to reflect upon, understand and normalise their own experience of non-normative transitions. To further this, from an applied perspective, supporting athletes during career transitions is one of the most commonly encountered issues for sport psychology practitioners (Murphy, 1995; Lavalley and Andersen, 2000). Therefore, a broader awareness of the subjective experience of such events is necessary in order to facilitate athlete development, mitigate negative influences, and minimize talent loss due to ineffective coping strategies (Ivarsson et al., 2016). In doing so, practitioners may begin to truly appreciate the impact of these events on the career development of an athlete. Without this knowledge, sport psychology practitioners may be unprepared for the applied issues of the discipline, despite their academic qualifications.

2.3.7 Beyond the transition framework

The word transition is defined in the Collins English Dictionary as ‘the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another’. The meaning arguably suggests that a transition is steady and relatively easy to negotiate (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012). However, as the literature has shown, athletes with strong athletic identities may experience severe emotional disturbance when faced with normative or non-normative events (Brewer et al., 1993; Sparkes, 1998). As such, transitions of this kind are considered to be critical life events which must be coped with (Stambulova, 2003). It is argued that due to the often sudden, and impactful nature of these incidents, the term

‘transition’ is not a suitable word to describe what is being experienced (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012). Nesti and Littlewood (2011) suggest that the term ‘critical moments’ is a more useful and dramatic phrase to represent such experiences. The following section will introduce and discuss the concept of ‘critical moments’. The focus of the current research will then be highlighted.

2.4 ‘Critical moments’

A ‘critical moment’ is defined as an event which is ‘large or small, intended or unintended, and may have a positive or negative effect on a person’s sense of self’ (Nesti et al., 2012, p.3). The meaning of the term ‘critical moment’ is grounded in the existential psychological concept of ‘boundary situations’ (Nesti, 2004). A boundary situation is defined as ‘...an event, or an urgent experience, that propels one into a confrontation with one’s existential situation in the world’ (Yalom, 1980, p.159). As such, a boundary situation invokes anxiety, which, when confronted, instigates a radical shift in the life perspective of an individual (Yalom, 1980). Examples of boundary situations could be: retiring, switching careers, being fired, serious illness, loss of a relationship, getting married or death of a loved one (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). Within the sport psychology literature, the existential concept of a boundary situation is termed a ‘critical moment’ (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). Similar to boundary situations, a ‘critical moment’ involves the subjective lived experience of an athlete, creates an emotional response and is dependent on timing (Nesti et al., 2012). A ‘critical moment’ requires the athlete to confront the anxiety associated with a challenge or important change in their performance, career or identity (Nesti and Littlewood, 2009; Nesti et al., 2012). Despite the challenging nature of such a task, facing the existential anxiety associated with a ‘critical moment’ presents the athlete with a powerful opportunity for personal growth and creating a more authentic self (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). As such, ‘critical

moments' may become the catalyst for a positive step taken towards a new role and a deeper sense of self-understanding and purpose (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). In professional football, examples of 'critical moments' may be: coping with career threatening injury, being dropped permanently from the team, being appointed as captain, being transferred to another club or relationship difficulties (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011).

A 'critical moment' is rarely non-present in the dynamic world of high-performance sport, and such events may occur regularly in the life of an elite athlete (Nesti et al., 2012; Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). Initially, 'critical moments' may be perceived as negative as they may be perceived as threatening to the athletes' progress or success (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). However, in Premier League Academy football for example, successfully confronting the anxiety associated with a 'critical moment' may help the athlete to develop their levels of courage and self-knowledge (Nesti, 2007; Nesti et al., 2012). Such qualities may benefit the athlete as they continue their journey through the high pressure and unpredictable world in which they live (Nesti, 2007; Nesti et al., 2012). In these instances, Erikson's theory of personality development arguably parallels such moments, where conflict resolution, though desired and welcomed by the athlete, is rarely comfortable or easy to achieve (Erikson, 1959; Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). Yet, once this conflict is resolved, the individual benefits from acquiring basic virtues which contribute to a healthy personality (Erikson, 1959).

2.4.1 Identity, culture and elite Academy football

As discussed, athletes within high performance sports are likely to experience 'critical moments' at any given time (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). However, it is argued that Premier League Academy football is an environment where athletes may be especially susceptible to experiencing 'critical moments'. In order to elaborate on this point, it is

important to consider Premier League football in the following sub-categories: (1) the business side; (2) the organisational structure of a Premier League Academy (Elite Player Performance Plan - EPPP); (3) the success/failure rates; (4) the prevailing culture.

2.4.1.1 Premier League football as a business. Football may be considered as a results-driven business, where success is measurable through ‘wins’ and points accrued over the course of a season or competition (Bridgewater, 2010). In order to contextualise the pressure that exists to win, financial stakes will be briefly discussed. According to the key findings of the Deloitte Annual Review of Football Finance (2016), the twenty clubs in the Premier League generated a combined revenue of £3.3 billion in the 2014/2015 season. Based on this report it was predicted that for the 2016/2017 season, revenues would continue to grow by over 20%, to a staggering £4.3 billion (Deloitte, 2016). At the time of this report, Premier League player wage costs had exceeded £2 billion (Deloitte, 2016). Additionally, summer transfer window expenditure surpassed £1 billion (Deloitte, 2016). Consequently, relegation from the top tier of Premier League football is reported to be an extremely costly drop for the clubs involved. The biggest impact is undoubtedly felt due to the decrease in television income (Conn, 2015). From the 2013–2016 seasons, TV deals were worth a total of £5.5 billion domestically. In comparison, the TV deal which encompassed the Championship, Football League 1 and 2 over the 2012–2015 season was worth a total of £195 million (Conn, 2015). As a consequence, clubs relegated from the top tier of English football are entitled to ‘parachute payments’ from the Premier League. These payments were introduced to soften the financial burden of relegation, as such clubs will have players contracted to earn Premier League salaries. This amounts to £25million in the first year, £20million in the second year, and £10million thereafter for another two years (Conn, 2015). Despite these payments, relegated clubs report a sizeable loss in yearly income. Failure to secure the vital top four finish in the Premier League,

which is necessary for Champions League qualification, is worth an estimated financial loss of £30million to the club (Bleaney, 2016). This is not including any sponsorship deals that may also be affected. The clubs' results are published, scrutinised and analysed on a weekly basis. As a consequence, failure as a football manager is arguably 'clear cut' and managers may find their contracts are terminated in a very public manner; whether or not the collective failings of the club may have contributed to such results (Bridgewater, 2010). The financial pressure for managers to win on a weekly basis undoubtedly places a huge demand on, and intensive competition amongst players to perform at a consistently high level in order to remain in the first team (Molnar, 2015).

This need for consistent results and performances at first team level arguably filters down and implicates the Academy set-up. For instance, the success of an Academy is ultimately measured through the number of players that progress on to first team football, at their own club or another. If players are sold to another club, then financial compensation is accrued. However, despite an estimated £40million annual investment in football Academies across the UK, only between 25–30 English players aged 23 years or below play for a Premier League first team each year (Green, 2009; Bullough and Mills, 2014). As managers strive for the coveted top 4 league finish or indeed to avoid relegation, team selection arguably tends to favour those players with experience over youth when it comes to match days (Bullough and Mills, 2014). In fact, it is argued that the results driven culture of first team promotes a desire to recruit the 'finished article' rather than affording an inexperienced Academy player the opportunity to showcase what they can do in a crucial league fixture (Relvas et al., 2010). In the majority of cases, this type of player is recruited on an international scale, enticed by the lucrative salaries offered by elite clubs and the worldwide commercial success of the league (Relvas et al., 2010; Bullough and Mills, 2014). Due to these recruitment tendencies, it is argued that

the the Premier League has created an intensively competitive scenario where Academy players, in order to make it onto the first team, not only have to be ranked among the best in England but also better than the imports from the rest of the world (Relvas et al., 2010; Bullough and Mills, 2014). This may compound events such as injury and de-selection, as players are often acutely aware that there is always someone to replace them whilst they are unable to perform, or out of favour. In these instances, players may experience existential anxiety as they face a future that is, for the time being, uncertain (Roderick, 2006).

2.4.1.2 The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP). In 2012/2013 the Premier League introduced the EPPP, a document that provided a new vision for the way in which talent is developed in English football. Its primary aim was to increase the number of ‘home-grown’ players gaining professional contracts and playing first-team football in the Premier League (Premier League, 2011). The EPPP proposed that progression of English players through football Academies can be achieved through creating an elite environment that encompasses all aspects of player development (Premier League, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012; Nesti and Sulley, 2015; Roe and Parker, 2016). In addition to the technical aspect of player development, the EPPP also included an increased focus on welfare, safeguarding, education, lifestyle management and mentoring (Premier League, 2011; Roe and Parker, 2016). In doing so, it was envisaged that each player would be afforded the greatest opportunity to reach their full potential (Premier League, 2011; Roe and Parker, 2016). The EPPP categorized Academies in a four-tiered hierarchical system using an audit measure to gain their licence. This hierarchical system was primarily based upon club finances, coaching provisions and the quality of each clubs’ training facilities and resources (Nesti and Sulley, 2015; Weedon, 2015). Category 1 status is considered to be the pinnacle of English Academy football.

One of the most controversial changes to be introduced by the EPPP was the rule alteration for domestic player recruitment. Under the FA's Charter for Quality (1997), which preceded the EPPP, clubs could not sign players outside of a certain radius (90-minute drive) until they progressed beyond U16 level. The EPPP revoked this rule and as a result, Category 1 Academies are currently permitted to recruit players nationally from U12 level and above. Consequently, many young players have moved away from their family support system in order to play football at this standard. This may be quite a distressing event in the life of a player. In fact, research in the field has highlighted that 'culture shock', confusion, homesickness, loneliness, rejection and decreased self-esteem are experienced as a result moving away from home to join a football Academy at a young age (Bourke, 2002; Weedon, 2011).

Category 1 clubs have been granted up to 8,500 coaching hours over a 40–42-week period from U9–U18 (Premier League, 2011). This was based on Côté's (1999) talent development model (discussed mid-way through this chapter) and Ericsson et al.'s (1993) deliberate practice framework (which will be expanded upon in Chapter 4). It was proposed that these hours should be met across two development stages. In order to do this, Category 1 clubs are granted access to the players during the youth development years (ages 12–16) and the professional development years (ages 16–18+) on weekdays during 'core coaching hours' (Premier League, 2011). Core coaching hours are considered to be between 9am and 5pm. As a result, a 'day release' program is set-up by Category 1 clubs in conjunction with the players' schools (Premier League, 2011). As part of this program, the players are released to the Academy during school hours. It is assumed that as well as training, tutoring will take place at the Academy so the players do not fall behind in their education. However, as discussed, the majority of young players in a football Academy disassociate themselves from the education process, as

they view their sport as an occupational inevitability (Parker, 2000).

2.4.1.3 Attrition rates. An estimated 90% of youth players who embark on a professional football career do not achieve professional status (Anderson and Miller, 2011). Therefore, the termination of a football career will occur for the majority, during adolescence or early adulthood. Although the globalisation of the Premier League is an important point to consider when attempting to explain this high attrition rate, research has shown that foreign talent serves to enhance development among Academy players and adds to a richer culture in which players can learn and exchange knowledge (Elliott and Weedon, 2010; Weedon, 2011). In other words, it has been found that such migratory patterns may serve to create better players, rather than hinder development. This has its downside however, as there exists intense competition for professional contracts at football Academies as a result. A qualitative research study which employed semi-structured interviews to investigate stressors in middle adolescent Premier League Academy players (n=40), concluded that securing another contract as well as making errors, team selection, social evaluation and playing at a higher level were salient stressors in the lives of the players (Reeves et al., 2009). Although young players will have dreamed to play top level football for most of their lives, research has suggested that those who are selected to progress from the Academy to the first team are often unprepared for the move (Richardson et al., 2013). This is because, more often than not, as a player progresses from one level to another (e.g. from Academy to first team), the pressure and stress to perform and meet expectations exponentially increases also (Nesti and Sulley, 2015). Due to these factors, and the intense competition that will exist for team selection, aspiring players have reported difficulties socially integrating in first team environments (Morris et al., 2014). It is argued that an inability to effectively deal with this level of pressure to perform may contribute to the high attrition rates, rather than migratory

patterns alone. Those players who develop adequate coping strategies may go on to have a successful career (Reeves et al., 2009). However, the possibility of rejection (e.g. de-selection or being ‘released’) will remain a consistent threat throughout their professional lives (Nesti, 2010).

2.4.1.4 A consideration of culture. According to the work of Nesti (2010), which discusses the author’s extensive experience of providing sport psychology support within the Premier League, each club will have subjective nuances, which together form an overall culture. However, despite the subtle yet distinct differences amongst clubs, there are arguably commonalities present in cultural practices across professional football (Nesti, 2010). For instance, the aim of all professional football Academies is to produce players who meet the needs of the first team or Reserves, or failing this, players who can be sold to another club for financial gain. With this in mind, the finding by Cushion and Jones (2012), which detailed how Academy football coaches aim to develop ‘competent workers’ who possess the necessary skills to do the job, is unsurprising. Following a 10-month ethnography within a professional football Academy environment, Cushion and Jones (2012) reported a ‘hidden curriculum’ within coaching practices in order to achieve this aim. The results highlighted coaches’ beliefs that, in order to develop an elite footballer, a particular identity must be constructed through the internalisation of the values and perspectives of the football club (Cushion and Jones, 2012). It is argued that such practices are encompassing of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986; Cushion and Jones, 2012).

The dominant culture present within professional football may be characterised by its extremely ‘macho’, intimidating and authoritarian nature (Parker, 2000; Nesti, 2010; Kelly, 2015; Kelly, 2017). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the central task of coaching staff within a professional football Academy is to promote obedience,

collective loyalty and conformity amongst players (Parker, 1996). Within such a culture, the importance of having a ‘good professional attitude’ is emphasised to young players from the moment they join the club (Parker, 1996). Fulfilment of this obligation often requires players being socialised into displaying ‘macho’ behaviour and concealing their true feelings, such as resentment toward a person or situation (Goffman, 1959; Parker, 1996, 2000; Nesti, 2010). From an Eriksonian perspective, it is argued that Academy players are therefore socialised into neglecting the exploration of, or commitment to, idealologies other than those present at their club. In doing so, it is argued that players risk foreclosing their identity in order to gain acceptance at their club (Marcia, 1966). As a result, young players may become indoctrinated into the prevailing culture within professional football, at the expense of developing a truly authentic version of themselves. Inauthenticity, from an existential perspective, involves internalising cultural values unreflectively and pursuing actions, roles and goals of the ‘they’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p.162).

2.4.2 Summary, unresolved Issues and aims of current research

The transition literature in sport has predominantly centred on athletic retirement and normative transitions (see Sparkes, 1998; Pummell et al., 2008; Morris et al., 2015; 2016). Transition models have been proposed as a useful framework to describe the development of an athletic career (e.g. Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994; Stambulova, 2003; Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). However, it is argued that a rigid model may not provide an adequate explanation of the career development process. For instance, such models focus solely on normative transitions across a career. As a result, non-normative events within a career (e.g. incidents of de-selection and injury which may be short-term, medium-term or long-term prior to returning back to playing) have been sparsely investigated from a career development perspective despite constituting a definite part of

the process (Ivarsson et al., 2016). Athletic career development is a complex matter. As discussed, progression is often governed by many interrelated variables such as the individual, the sport, the culture (both organisational and national) and various other psychosocial and socioeconomic factors. As such, transition models which propose generalised and normative stages of progression arguably reduce the subjective experience and complex nature of a career within elite sport.

Moreover, the term transition is often an unsuitable word to describe events associated with change in the athletes' career. It has been suggested that the term 'critical moment' is a more useful and dramatic phrase to represent such experiences (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). As discussed, the meaning of the term 'critical moment' is derived from existential psychology and suggests that an individual must confront the anxiety associated with a shift in personal identity, in order to experience personal growth (Nesti et al., 2012). It is important to note that 'critical moment' may have a positive or negative affect on an individual's sense of self (Nesti, et al., 2012). However, as discussed, the research into career transitions in the past has not overly considered the positive affect of transitions in elite athletes (Knight et al., 2015). By explicitly recognising that 'critical moments' may in fact result be perceived as positive as well as negative, new knowledge may emerge which holds practical implications for practitioners who aim to facilitate the successful negotiation of athletes through their career in elite sport. To enable researchers to investigate such a complex concept, there has been a call for the sport psychology literature to move away from transitional models and quantitative methodologies, in favour of embracing a descriptive psychological phenomenological research approach (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004; O'Halloran et al., 2016). As a methodology, descriptive psychological phenomenology allows the athlete to be the 'expert', and focuses on gaining rich descriptions of the participant's lived experience of a phenomenon, which

in this case is a ‘critical moment’ (Dale, 1996; O’Halloran et al., 2016). By employing descriptive psychological phenomenology, the researcher aims to create a knowledge and understanding of the invariant meaning structure of a phenomenon under investigation, from the perspective of those directly experiencing it (Giorgi, 1997). In doing so, descriptive psychological phenomenology provides an unbiased foundation for further inquiry into important and often times misunderstood concepts within sport (Nesti, 2004, 2011).

The EPPP argues that for the first time, a pathway is now in place to allow players to secure professional contracts and progress toward a career in first team football (Premier League, 2011). As such, it may appear that the future is bright for English Academy footballers, particularly for those who enter into a Category 1 Academy. However, as discussed, youth players will arguably encounter a myriad of personal and professional challenges (i.e. ‘critical moments’) which may have a positive or negative impact on their development and/or progression (Richardson, et al., 2004). Therefore, a broader awareness of the lived experience of such events is necessary in order to facilitate athlete development, mitigate negative influences, and minimize talent loss (Ivarsson et al., 2016). In doing so, practitioners may begin to truly appreciate the impact of these events on the career development of an elite athlete. Without this knowledge, sport psychology practitioners may be unprepared for the applied issues of the discipline, despite their academic qualifications.

Accordingly, the overall aim of this thesis is to explore the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ in elite sport. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, this area has not been investigated in the sport psychology literature to date. Due to the discussed contextual relevance, youth Premier League Academy football will be used as the medium in which to do so. This will be achieved through the use of descriptive

psychological phenomenology as a methodology. Despite the literature highlighting the potential benefits of employing this method within sport psychology studies (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004), to the best of the researcher's knowledge, it has not been accurately utilised in the literature to date either (O'Halloran, et al., 2016). Consequently, it is necessary for the researcher to first revisit the philosophical roots of the approach in order to discuss its modification for use within the human sciences, prior to its application within sport psychology research. In conclusion, a novel descriptive psychological phenomenological study has been devised which aims to explore the lived experience of 'critical moments' in Premier League Academy football. This study will be presented in Chapter 4 of the thesis. The next chapter (Chapter 3) will be dedicated to developing an argument for the use of descriptive psychological phenomenology as a methodology in sport psychology research.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

(i) Prelude

Research in sport psychology has until now, shown an over-reliance on positivist approaches (Culver et al., 2003; Culver et al., 2012). Limitations of positivist approaches in sport psychology research (e.g. reducing complex experiences through the use of psychometrics) have been highlighted by researchers in the field (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Although qualitative research is beginning to increasingly emerge in the literature, it is argued that greater diversity in qualitative methodologies is also needed in order to considerably increase our knowledge and understanding of sport psychology concepts (Sparkes, 1998; Streat, 1998; Krane and Baird, 2005; O'Halloran et al., 2016). As such, researchers in the field have begun to highlight the potential of phenomenological approaches in recognising subjective experience and the essential structure of experience (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Despite this, descriptive psychological phenomenology has been used inconsistently in the sport psychology literature thus far (Allen-Collinson, 2009; O'Halloran et al., 2016). Therefore, this chapter will provide an overview of the origins of descriptive phenomenology. Following this, an explanation of descriptive phenomenology as a philosophical method will be provided. This will be preceded by a critical evaluation of the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach in human science literature. A step by step account of the descriptive psychological phenomenological method will then be provided. A critique of the use of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature will be offered. Finally, an argument will be presented for the potential that descriptive psychological phenomenology holds in creating new knowledge through rich description in the sport psychology literature.

(ii) Statement of Purpose

This chapter addresses the following aims of the thesis:

- (5) Explore the philosophical underpinning of descriptive phenomenology as a methodology.
- (6) Critically evaluate the development of the descriptive psychological phenomenological method.
- (7) Identify the potential that the descriptive psychological phenomenological method holds for sport psychology research and practice.

(iii) Related Publications and Conference Presentations:

O'Halloran, L., Littlewood, M., Richardson, D., Tod, D. & Nesti, M. (2016). Doing descriptive phenomenological data collection in sport psychology research. *Sport in Society. Special issue: Research Methodologies in Sport Scholarship*, 1–12. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2016.1159199>.

O'Halloran, L., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M. & Nesti, M. (2014). 'Critical moments' and identity in elite Premier League Academy football. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 32(2), 12–14. Paper presented at British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Annual Conference, St. George's Park, U.K. 25–26th November. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2014.968373>.

O'Halloran, L. (2013). 'Employing descriptive phenomenology within sport psychology research: Challenges encountered and resolutions explored.' Paper presented at British Psychological Society (BPS) Qualitative Research in Psychology, Huddersfield University, Huddersfield, UK 4–5th September 2013.

3.1 Introduction to Descriptive Phenomenology

For decades, research in the field of sport psychology has embraced the positivist traditions of the natural sciences (Nesti, 2004). As a result, sport psychology as a discipline has been slow to adopt alternative epistemological and methodological approaches (Whiston, 1976; Giorgi, 1985; Nesti, 2004). This has meant that sport psychology research has predominantly relied upon questionnaires for data collection and statistical tests for data analysis whilst looking at a range of complex, subjective and deeply personal constructs e.g. anxiety, self-esteem, self-worth, identity, self-efficacy and personality traits (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Although questionnaires and statistics certainly help in providing knowledge of these areas, it is argued that restricting the description of an experience or phenomenon to a Likert scale and predetermined categories is reductionistic and results in the over-simplification of experiences (Husserl, 1913/1983; Martens, 1979; Giorgi, 1985; Valle et al., 1989; Eichberg, 2013; Keegan et al., 2014; Aggerholm, 2015). To further this, it is asserted that through the use of statistical analysis, a person's individuality is compromised, as an experience is only viewed as significant when a p value has been satisfied and generalisability is achieved (Martens, 1979; Keegan et al., 2014; O'Halloran, et al., 2016).

In more recent times, sport psychology literature has begun to move from quantitative research towards qualitative forms of inquiry (see Culver, Gilbert and Trudel, 2003; Culver, Gilbert and Sparkes, 2012). However, despite this methodological shift, positivist tendencies arguably still exert their influence over qualitative inquiry (Horn, 2008; Aggerholm, 2015; O'Halloran et al., 2016). This point is reflected in the strategies that exist for 'legitimization' in qualitative research, such as the requirement to achieve trustworthiness in order to evaluate a study's worth. To expand, trustworthiness in qualitative research is demonstrated through fulfilling the following criteria devised by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- credibility – confidence in the 'truth' of the findings;
- transferability – results that have applicability in other contexts;
- dependability – results that are consistent and repeatable;
- and confirmability – a degree of neutrality or the extent to which findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias.

These criteria are supposedly exclusive to qualitative research. However, they hold a notable similarity to, and are arguably influenced by, the well-known positivist criteria for demonstrating scientific rigor (e.g. internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity). Further to this, qualitative research in sport psychology has until now, shown an over-reliance on a structured or semi-structured approach to interviews for data collection and on content analysis when analysing the data (Culver et al., 2003; Culver et al., 2012). As a consequence, it is argued that greater methodological diversity within qualitative research is needed, as well as alternative approaches to explicating data (Sparkes, 1998; Streat, 1998; Krane and Baird, 2005; O'Halloran et al., 2016). In line

with this, researchers in the field of sport psychology have begun to highlight the need to employ phenomenological approaches in order to examine the ‘lived experience’ of athletes (Whitson, 1976; Bain, 1995; Dale, 1996, Nesti, 2004; Crust and Nesti, 2006; Culver, Gilbert and Sparkes, 2012). In order to elaborate on the promise of phenomenological research for the field of sport psychology, it is necessary to first discuss the origins and subsequent development of the phenomenological approach. Providing an explanation of descriptive phenomenology as a philosophical method will allow for a critical evaluation of the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach in human science literature. A step by step account of the descriptive psychological phenomenological method will then be provided. This will provide context for a critique of the use of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature. Lastly, an argument will be constructed for the potential that descriptive psychological phenomenology holds in creating new knowledge through rich description in the sport psychology literature.

3.2 Descriptive Phenomenology: An Overview

The founding ‘father’ of modern phenomenology is considered to be the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Although phenomenological thought has existed for centuries, it remained just that; a method free style of thought. Husserl believed that in order for philosophy to be viewed as a ‘rigorous science’, a methodology would be required (Husserl 1913/1983). As a result, Husserl developed his phenomenological method for the explication of phenomena and with this modern phenomenology was established. It is important to mention that since Husserl’s founding of modern phenomenology, conflicts in opinion regarding the philosophical underpinnings of Husserl’s approach have given rise to different approaches to phenomenology (e.g. interpretive phenomenology, existential phenomenology). These

approaches to phenomenology have branched off from Husserl's beginnings to form their own distinct style of thought with both competing and conflicting tendencies (Eichberg, 2013). Despite the numerous branches of phenomenology that now exist; Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology are the most widely documented phenomenological approaches employed within human scientific research, including psychology (Lopez and Willis, 2004; Cohen and Omery, 1994). Therefore, a brief overview of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology will now be presented in order to highlight their fundamental differences.

3.2.1 Husserl's descriptive phenomenology

In order to illustrate Husserl's contribution to phenomenological inquiry, a concise timeline of his life works will now be detailed in Table 2 (on the next page).

Table 2. *A timeline of Husserl's life work.*

1859	Edmund Husserl was born into a Jewish family in the town of Prossnitz in Czechoslovakia, as it was known at that time. Husserl was schooled as a child in Vienna.
1879	Husserl began his university education in Leipzig, where he studied Mathematics, physics and philosophy.
1881	Husserl moved to Berlin in order to focus his academic learning toward mathematics.
1883	Husserl moved back to Vienna and it was here that he completed his Doctorate on the theory of the calculus of variations (Natanson, 1973). After his Doctorate, Husserl proceeded to teach for a short period of time in Berlin. However, it was not long until Husserl found himself drawn back to Vienna by the lectures of a prominent psychologist and philosopher at that time, named Franz Brentano (1838–1917) (Zahavi, 2003). Brentano's teachings had a huge impact on Husserl and ultimately resulted in his decision to pursue his studies in psychology and philosophy.
1886–7	Husserl got a job at the University of Halle in Germany, where he continued to study psychology. Husserl became a 'Privatdozent' at Halle, remaining there until 1901. It was during this period that Husserl wrote the most important of his earlier works; ' <i>Logical Investigations</i> ' which marked the establishment of descriptive phenomenology.
1901	Husserl moved to the University of Göttingen, also in Germany, where he taught for sixteen years. It was whilst at the University of Göttingen that Husserl largely developed his theories on phenomenology - which became a distinct school of thought that attracted many students, including Martin Heidegger.
1913	Husserl published what arguably became his most famous work; ' <i>Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology</i> ' which introduced his method of the transcendental reduction and marked Husserl's controversial evolution from descriptive phenomenology into a transcendental phenomenology (Zahavi, 2003).
1916	Husserl accepted a professorship at the University of Freiburg, again in Germany. Husserl took the chair in philosophy, succeeding Neo-Kantian, Heinrich Rickert (Zahavi, 2003). During Husserl's time at the University of Freiburg, Martin Heidegger (who was one of Husserl's past students at the University of Göttingen) worked closely alongside Husserl as an assistant and colleague. However, following the publication of ' <i>Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology</i> ', Heidegger became increasingly dissatisfied with Husserl's idea of a 'pure' transcendental phenomenology. This resulted in Heidegger branching away from Husserl's teachings to produce his most famous work ' <i>Being and Time</i> ', which was published in 1927. In this work, Heidegger developed his own branch of phenomenology which was ontological in nature and became known as interpretive phenomenology. This marked a radical departure from Husserl's epistemological standpoint and transcendental phenomenology (Crowell, 1990). Although Heidegger <i>did</i> follow Husserl's teachings to the extent that Heidegger also aimed to restore the subjective experience to the forefront of his philosophical enquiry (Schacht, 1972), it can be argued that this is where the similarities between both approaches ended.
1928	Husserl retired from the University of Freiburg and Heidegger was named his successor (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl continued to work after his retirement from teaching. However, during the last five years of his life Husserl fell victim to the Anti-Semitic Nazi legislation following their rise to power in Germany before the Second World War (Zahavi, 2003). Consequently, Husserl found that he was removed from the University of Freiburg's list of professors and was no longer granted access to the library; a ban which was supported by Heidegger who became involved with the Nazi regime at the time.
1938	Edmund Husserl died from pleurisy on 27 th April 1938. To this day, Husserl is remembered as the principal founder of modern phenomenology and therefore one of the most influential philosophers of the 20 th century.

Researchers using descriptive phenomenology commit themselves to an epistemological inquiry (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Defined narrowly, epistemology is the study of the nature and source of knowledge and justified belief (Childers and Hentzi, 1995). Descriptive phenomenology focuses on explicating the essence of a phenomenon (O'Halloran et al., 2016). This is achieved by entering into the attitude of the phenomenological reduction through the use of bracketing or epoché (Husserl,

1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing involves setting aside one's natural attitude in order to describe phenomena exactly as they present themselves to consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009; Bevan, 2014). Therefore, descriptive phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon that presents itself to consciousness, '...whether it be an object, a place, a person or a complex state of affairs' from the perspective of the person undergoing the experience (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009, p.4).

3.2.2 Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology

Researchers influenced by Heidegger's interpretive approach commit themselves to an ontological inquiry (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Ontology is the study of the nature of being, existence, or reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations (Creswell, 1994). In contrast with descriptive phenomenology, the central concept of bracketing is not fundamental to the interpretive phenomenological approach (O'Halloran et al., 2016; Lowes and Prowse, 2001). Instead of focusing on description and clarification, the researcher employing the interpretive phenomenological approach 'participates in making the data' through interpretation of phenomena (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Kerry and Armour, 2000, p.7). Therefore, interpretive phenomenology allows for a more personal input from the researcher in the form of theories or the researcher's own suppositions (Mackey, 2005).

Although the long and rich history of phenomenology presents a great educational opportunity, it also represents a challenge for those who seek to perform phenomenological research (Wertz et al., 2010). Firstly, as this section has addressed, there exists different approaches to phenomenology. Each of these have different philosophical underpinnings which govern the approach (Allen-Collinson, 2009, Norlyk and Harder, 2010). This means that care must be taken by the researcher to truly

understand the philosophical underpinnings of their chosen approach to avoid confusion and the merging of opposing and incongruent phenomenological strands (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Englander, 2012; Lowes and Prowse, 2001). Failure to recognise the distinct differences between these phenomenological branches may result in a ‘cross-contamination’ of research methodologies which may result in a flawed data collection and data analysis procedures (Englander, 2012; Lowes and Prowse, 2001).

The interpretive phenomenological approach has been utilised in sport psychology research and appears to be steadily growing in popularity, in the form of a derivative approach known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 1999). However, to the best of the author’s knowledge, the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach has not been explicitly or correctly used in sport psychology research (O’Halloran et al., 2016). Perhaps this absence is due to the dominance of positivist tendencies that still exist within sport psychology research (Horn, 2008; O’Halloran et al., 2016). Positivists endeavor to transform the world through interpretation of results and findings, rather than preceding interpretation by revealing, creating or identifying knowledge to be used through description (Horn, 2008). It is asserted that such tendencies have created a gravitational pull towards interpretative research methodologies, as transformation and interpretation of the world has become the unquestioned and accepted role of a researcher in the human sciences. Further to this, asides from O’Halloran et al.’s (2016) paper which offered guidelines for descriptive psychological phenomenological data collection, there exists no instruction in the sport psychology literature for a researcher who is interested in employing this approach (O’Halloran et al., 2016). In an attempt to address these shortcomings, the following section will focus provide an in-depth literature review detailing the development of

Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method and the modification of this method by Giorgi for use in psychological research.

3.3 What is Descriptive Phenomenology?

Philosophy came under threat in the 19th century due to the rapid growth of positivism and scientific enquiry in the form of the natural sciences (Caldwell, 1980). Positivists assert that there is a single, objective reality that can be observed and measured without bias using standardised instruments (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Husserl responded to positivism with the introduction of a 'scientific philosophy' i.e. the descriptive philosophical phenomenological method which aimed to bring about 'philosophical reform of the positive sciences' (Fink, 1939, p.107). Husserl (1977, p.72) recognised that the descriptive phenomenological method is not the only approach to the study of human experience, however, he stated that it 'precedes, and makes possible, the empirical sciences, the sciences of actualities.' Therefore, Husserl's argument was that no knowledge can be achieved without first referring to consciousness i.e. the foundation for knowledge, and for scientific inquiry *begins* with consciousness (Husserl, 1977; Giorgi, 2009). Husserl's descriptive phenomenology (interchangeably referred to as transcendental phenomenology in the literature) is therefore, the study of that which manifests itself or appears to consciousness (Lewis and Staelher, 2010). What appears to us in consciousness is known as the 'phenomenon' (Moustakas, 1994). The Oxford English Dictionary states that the word 'phenomenon' originated in the late 16th century from the Greek word '*phainomenon*' meaning 'thing appearing to view' and was derived from the word '*phainein*' meaning 'to show'. It is unsurprising then, that the axiom Husserl used in relation to phenomenology was 'back to the things themselves' (Husserl, 1975, p.252; Nesti, 2011). As a result, Husserl (1913/1983) criticised the natural scientific focus on empirical facts and subject/object dichotomy as being entirely

reductionistic. Instead, it was argued that the relationship between subject and object is inseparably linked in our consciousness and cannot be divided into two entities (Husserl, 1913/1983). In other words, the perception of the reality of an object is not possible without a subject to perceive it in the first place (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, Husserl's descriptive phenomenological perspective acknowledges consciousness as the most fundamental life quality that co-exists with the body (Husserl, 1977; Broomé, 2011). As such, it can be argued that positivists essentially misconstrued human consciousness by treating it *as a part of the world* (Moran, 2008) when it is in fact the subjective means through which we experience the world around us (Husserl, 1913/1983).

Husserl was concerned with the discovery of meanings and essences of knowledge and also recognised the importance of irreal and real 'givens' to subjective experience (Moustakas, 1994). Real 'givens' are any objects given in space, time, and regulated by causality (Giorgi, 2005). Irreal 'givens' are phenomena that do not have a corresponding object, yet still hold meaning and are therefore an important part of our experience as human beings (Husserl, 1913/1983). Examples of irreal 'givens' are; ideas, hopes, dreams, judgements and beliefs. Recognising and understanding these phenomena and irreal 'givens' in terms of their meanings '*...is the very stuff of subjectivity*' and highlights Husserl's radical move away from positivism (Giorgi, 2005, p.77). Husserl's philosophical method will be considered in much greater detail further along in this chapter. However, it is first necessary to clarify the meaning of the core concepts which Husserl introduced in his philosophical method. These concepts form the foundation of his descriptive phenomenology. These are: intentionality, the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude.

3.3.1 Intentionality

Husserl's descriptive phenomenology is intimately bound up in the concept of intentionality (Moustakas, 1994). The term intentionality is derived from the Latin verb 'intendere' which means 'to point to' or 'to aim at'. It is widely believed that Brentano, an influential German philosopher, first conceptualised the idea of intentionality, a concept which subsequently inspired Husserl's work (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). Brentano characterised the intentionality of all mental states and experiences as always being *directed towards* something i.e. an object that exists (Smith and McIntyre, 1982; Moustakas, 1994). Brentano found that he was widely criticised for his view on intentionality by many philosophers, most notably, Husserl (McIntyre and Smith, 1989). Although Husserl was in agreement with Brentano's notion that directness is an intrinsic feature of intentionality (Moustakas, 1994), Husserl noted that an object towards which consciousness is directed may in fact be imaginary or may not exist at all i.e. it may be an unreal 'given' (Husserl, 1913/1983; Moustakas, 1994). For example, if one imagines Thor (the God of Thunder in Norse mythology) this act is an imaginative representation 'of' Thor; but there is no corresponding object to which it is externally related. The intentional object is not a real object. According to Husserl (1913/1983, p.200), '...under intentionality we understand the peculiarity of mental processes 'to be conscious of something'.' In other words, consciousness is always directed toward or conscious of something (Moran, 2000). In Husserlian phenomenology unreal and real objects or 'givens' are both acknowledged as having meaning and therefore, as being a part of human experience (Giorgi, 2005). In support, the philosopher Descartes (1596–1650) once noted that our perceptual experiences may be unreal at times; for example, hallucinations, vivid dreams or nightmares can provide us with lifelike experiences (McIntyre and Smith, 1989). It can also be argued that the experiences of sensations (such

as pain or dizziness) are not always directed towards a corresponding object yet for many, this is a very real part of their experience (Smith and McIntyre, 1982). In summary, Husserl's departure point from Brentano's relational view of intentionality is that sometimes the object toward which consciousness is directed is in the world (real) and sometimes it is objectless (irreal) e.g. dreams, ideas, our own mental processes (Giorgi, 2005). Hence, Husserl took over the term 'intentionality' from Brentano and he proceeded to use it in a different way (Giorgi, 1997).

3.3.2 The natural attitude

We as human beings, are living naturally; judging, feeling, and willing in the natural attitude (Husserl, 1913/1983). The natural attitude is our everyday interaction with the world (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009). It describes our ordinary and common-sense conception of reality, our 'practical concerns, folk assumptions, and smattering of scientific knowledge' (Zahavi, 2003, p.11; Aggerholm, 2015). From within the natural attitude we overlook the foundation of lived experience from which our conceptual understanding gets its meaning (i.e. we do not question the existence of phenomena); we view them as facts (Husserl, 1976; Aggerholm, 2015). This means that our everyday 'being-in-the-world' is taken for granted and accepted as real. In other words, we experience the world in a form of everyday, 'naive manner' prior to any reflection upon it (Natanson, 1973; Roth, 2013). For instance, very rarely as we walk from place to place would we reflect on the composition of the solid ground beneath our feet as we move along, or question how we are managing to do this without floating into space. The ground beneath our feet is just there and we just walk. In fact, it is necessary for us as humans to live with this unreflective acceptance of our reality, otherwise every experience would be a new experience and 'our lives would become unduly burdensome'

(Giorgi, 2009, p.91). As such, the natural attitude is arguably that which makes us human (Moran, 2008).

3.3.3 The phenomenological attitude

The phenomenological attitude has caused much controversy over the decades, mostly due to misconceptions as to what Husserl actually meant by this concept (Farber, 1962). In order to enter into the phenomenological attitude, Husserl (1913/1983) prescribed an essential methodological step known as the phenomenological reduction. The phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to ‘bracket’ or set aside their natural attitude and a priori knowledge and assumptions in order to remain fully present to phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009; Bevan, 2014). The technical term for bracketing is the epoché and these terms are often used interchangeably in the literature (Aggerholm, 2015). According to Moustakas (1994, p.33) within the phenomenological attitude ‘...everyday understandings, judgements, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense...’. This is unsurprising given that the term ‘epoché’ is derived from a Greek word meaning; to refrain from judgement, to abstain from or to stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl’s explication of the phenomenological reduction in *Ideas I* (1913/1983) marked the move from descriptive phenomenological beginnings onto a ‘pure’ transcendental view of phenomenology. During this period, Husserl believed that one could detach from the empirical or ‘worldly’ self to achieve a transcendental or ‘pure’ ego through the bracketing of presuppositions and a priori knowledge, assumptions, experiences and therefore oneself from the ‘natural world’ completely. In other words, Husserl (1913/1983) posited that the phenomenological reduction allows one to

completely ‘bracket’ or ‘suspend’ the existence of the world and our natural attitude (Farber, 1962). In writing about this concept in *Ideas I* (1913/1983), Husserl boldly characterised the phenomenological reduction as ‘acting under the hypothesis of the very ‘annihilation’ or ‘nullification’ of the world’ (Moran, 2000, p.78). It was not until his much later work that Husserl began to see flaws in his own conception of the epoché and ‘pure’ transcendental phenomenological reduction. Husserl regretted having made such claims as he attempted to distance himself from harsh comparisons with solipsism and accusations of subjective idealism (Moran, 2000). As a result, Husserl developed a description of the concept of the ‘environment’ (Umwelt) and of a human world (Lebenswelt) or ‘life-world’ (Moran, 2000). In doing so, Husserl acknowledged that the idea of ‘pure’ transcendental phenomenological reduction had disregarded that our subjectivity as humans is already located in our world and intertwined in our social realities (Moran, 2000). In other words, Husserl acknowledged that experience is, in fact, intersubjective (Moustakas, 1994). Despite Husserl’s later recognition of the shortcomings in his earlier works, the damage had already been done, so to speak. Many philosophers including Heidegger, had already rejected the possibility of a complete or ‘pure’ transcendental phenomenological reduction, arguing that it is impossible for a science to be completely presupposition-less. This opposition led to Heidegger and others departing from Husserl’s phenomenological approach and resulted in the development of different branches of phenomenology, most notably Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology.

3.4 Phenomenology as a Philosophical Methodology

Husserl’s aim was to develop philosophy into a rigorous science (Husserl, 1913/1983). Therefore, the phenomenological method explicated by Husserl (1913/1983) was intended to be a philosophical method used within *philosophical inquiry* (Giorgi, 2006).

Husserl (1913/1983) stated that one should implement three methodological steps in order to conduct a philosophical phenomenological inquiry. They are to: adopt the phenomenological attitude of *reduction*, the search for philosophical essences using free imaginative variation and to describe the *essences* that are discovered (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 1997, 2006). These concepts will be explained in more detail below.

3.4.1 Phenomenological reduction

The phenomenological reduction is a methodological device developed by Husserl in order to help make research findings more precise (Giorgi, 1997). In order to enter into the phenomenological attitude, one must employ the method of the phenomenological reduction through the use of bracketing (Husserl, 1913/1983). As mentioned above, bracketing allows the philosopher to view phenomena in a fresh way, free from the interpretations and assumptions of the natural attitude meaning that full attention can be given to the phenomenon that is presenting itself to consciousness (Giorgi, 2009). It is important to note that within the phenomenological attitude, no claim is made to say that phenomena really exist as they appear, instead one perceives the phenomena as something that is *presenting* itself to him or her (Giorgi, 2008, 2009). In other words, by withholding the urge to posit the existence of a perceived phenomenon, the philosopher is left with presences, not existences (Giorgi, 2009). This in turn allows the philosopher to carefully describe the essence of the phenomenon free from the existential affirmations of the natural attitude (Husserl, 1913/1983). The examination of the phenomenon that is presenting itself to consciousness is carried out with the help of what is known as the eidetic reduction.

The eidetic reduction is a process whereby a phenomenon is reduced to its essence (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, the aim of the eidetic reduction is to identify the essential components of a phenomenon (Follesdal, 2006). This is achieved with the help of what

Husserl termed 'free imaginative variation.' Free imaginative variation was introduced by Husserl (1913/1983) in order to clarify the description of the essence of the phenomenon (Moran, 2000). Free imaginative variation asks the question 'is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete a theme from the phenomenon?' (van Manen, 1990, p.107). In other words, free imaginative variation allows one to imaginatively take or substitute aspects of the perceived phenomenon in order to determine whether the phenomenon is still the same as it was before (Moran, 2000). If the phenomenon changes when a part is removed or changed then that part is essential to the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). If the phenomenon remains the same when a part is removed or varied then that component is incidental to the phenomenon and should be removed permanently (Giorgi, 2009). Through the process of imaginatively varying and substituting different aspects of the perceived phenomenon the researcher uncovers the essence of the phenomenon (Moran, 2000; van Manen 1990).

3.4.2 Philosophical essences

An essence is defined as 'a constant identity that holds together and limits the variations that a phenomenon can undergo' Giorgi (1997, p.242) or that which 'makes the phenomenon to be that very phenomenon' (Dahlberg, 2006, p.11). It is a structure of essential meanings that explicates a phenomenon under investigation (Dahlberg, 2006). It can be argued that the word 'essence' often implies something mysterious and unexplainable when in fact, we are continuously seeing essences through our experiencing of the world (Husserl 1913/1983, Natanson, 1973, Dahlberg, 2006). According to Husserl (1998, p.41) '...the truth is that everyone sees 'essences' and sees them, so to speak, continuously; they operate with them in their thinking and they also make judgments about them. It is only that, from their theoretical 'standpoint', people interpret them away'. Therefore, Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenology

seeks to explicate, from within the phenomenological attitude, the essential structure of perceived phenomena that are overlooked within the natural attitude (Sanders, 1982; Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1998; Lin, 2013).

Philosophers consider the essential structure of a perceived phenomenon to be a universal essence (Husserl, 1913/1983; Moran, 2000). It is called a universal essence because any redundant characteristics are removed through the process of free imaginative variation leaving only that which is essential to the phenomenon (Moran, 2000). Philosophers always look to explicate the universal essence of a phenomenon, as the universal essence transcends all disciplinary interests and context (Giorgi, 2009). As such, if some of the essential characteristics of the phenomenon were to change, then that phenomenon would not be what it is (Giorgi, 2009). A very simple example of what has been discussed in this section would be a square that is red in colour. If the colour red was to be taken away would the square still be a square? The deletion of the colour red does not cause the square's essence to change. Therefore, the colour red which presented itself with the square is incidental to the square's essential structure. However, if one of the square's corners was to be taken away the square would no longer be the same phenomenon. At the end of this process the essential characteristics that constitute the essence of a square should be: 4 equal sides with each corner presenting itself as a 90-degree angle.

3.4.3 Description

Once the researcher believes that they have uncovered the essence of the phenomenon under investigation through the use of free imaginative variation, it must be described from within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction as accurately as possible (Giorgi, 2009). This description of the essential structure of the phenomenon that presents

itself to consciousness is articulated through the use of language (Husserl, 1913/1983; Giorgi, 2009). In this step, the philosopher must take care that their description of the essential structure of the phenomenon neither adds nor subtracts from the essential structure of the phenomena that is presenting itself to consciousness for example, through the addition of interpretations, explanations, theoretical assumptions etc. (Giorgi, 2009).

3.5 Phenomenology as a Methodology in a Human Scientific Approach to Psychology

Husserl recognised that his work had important implications for the discipline of psychology (Churchill and Wertz, 2015). However, if the researcher was to solely rely on the method discussed above without making any modifications then one would find themselves doing a philosophical inquiry (Giorgi, 2006). In other words, it is crucial to clearly distinguish between descriptive philosophical phenomenology and descriptive psychological phenomenology because although Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenology is a foundation for scientific inquiry; it was not intended to be the model for scientific practice (Norlyk and Harder, 2010; Giorgi, 2000; Giorgi, 1997). Therefore, the insights of Husserl's philosophy must be mediated and modified so that scientific practices can be performed (Giorgi, 2000). This is necessary because the researcher in psychology aims to examine the phenomenon at the psychological level which is worldly, rather than the philosophical transcendental level which is independent of experience (Giorgi, 2009). In order to conduct psychological research, the researcher must remain cognisant of the discipline of psychology and of psychological insights that may inform their discipline. In contrast, at the philosophical level, all worldly knowledge must be transcended. This includes one's own discipline specific knowledge, meaning that research in any discipline would not be possible as one would have bracketed their affiliation to a certain field of inquiry away (Ashworth, 1999). The descriptive

psychological phenomenological method has 3 steps based on Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method. They are; the phenomenological reduction, the search for essences and description (Giorgi, 1997). The modified steps based on Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method will be discussed below.

3.5.1 The (scientific) phenomenological reduction

In order to be considered as a scientific research method that can be employed in psychological inquiry, an important modification to Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method is the introduction of participants. In other words, the researcher is no longer describing what appears to their own consciousness, as collecting data introspectively is a philosophical rather than a scientific endeavour (Giorgi, 2009; Englander, 2012). Therefore, Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenology aims to describe the essential structures of phenomena based on descriptive data given to the researcher by participants who remain within the natural attitude (Giorgi, 1997). In Giorgi's modified descriptive psychological phenomenological method, the researcher assumes the (scientific) phenomenological attitude which, like before, is achieved by employing the (scientific) phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997; Todres, 2005).

An analysis cannot claim to be descriptive psychological phenomenology unless the (scientific) attitude of the phenomenological reduction is adopted (Giorgi, 2009). As discussed, within Husserl's philosophical phenomenological method, the researcher using the transcendental phenomenological reduction assumes an attitude of transcendental consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1983). However, transcendental consciousness is not sensitive enough for psychological clarification (Husserl, 1977; Giorgi, 2009). In fact, it is not possible to fully achieve the phenomenological reduction and bracketing in the way that Husserl's transcendental ideal posited at the psychological

level (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This is because the transcendental reduction goes beyond and transcends human, world-related consciousness by bracketing all past knowledge and experiences which means that domain specific knowledge (which is essential in order to conduct research within a certain discipline), would be transcended, or 'left behind' also (Giorgi, 2009, 2007). This can be illustrated in a sense, by the idea of the researcher leaving one realm (in which we exist) to enter into another realm, which contains no traces of the former (Natanson, 1973). Consequently, psychological research cannot be conducted from within this attitude as it requires the researcher to transcend all of their knowledge regarding the world, their own discipline and the constructs that are related to it (Ashworth, 1999).

A researcher in sport psychology is looking to study a discipline specific phenomenon. As a result, Husserl's phenomenological reduction step must be modified in order to conduct psychological scientific research (Giorgi, 1997). To do this, the researcher must maintain a mode of consciousness that is sensitive to the world and also to the discipline of sport psychology i.e. adopt a discipline specific attitude whilst within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). In other words, the researcher must, to the best of their ability, endeavor to become aware of and bracket their biases and presuppositions whilst remaining aware of the discipline of sport psychology in order to be able to identify descriptions that are relevant to the discipline and therefore, conduct research from a specific disciplinary standpoint. This is supported by Husserl who stated that at the psychological level, the less radical psychological phenomenological reduction is what is required in order to access the participant's psychological lived experiences (Husserl, 1977; Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009, p.135) explains this when he states '...the scientific psychological phenomenological reduction is a partial reduction (that) is influenced by society, culture, others and the world at large. To overlook these factors is

to miss the psychological realm, and the world at large.’ Husserl (1977) supported Giorgi’s modification of the phenomenological reduction by stating that using the phenomenological reduction on this scientific psychological level is a legitimate use of the term ‘phenomenological’. In other words, since the researcher is still operating from within a phenomenological attitude, the research procedure satisfies phenomenological criteria (Giorgi, 2009).

It is worth raising the point that it may appear contradictory to the method of the phenomenological reduction for the researcher to adopt a psychological attitude within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction. However, it is important to note that adopting a psychological attitude within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction is not the same as interpreting the data from a psychological standpoint. Adopting a psychological attitude within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction is necessary to allow the researcher to identify descriptions that are relevant to the focus of the research (Giorgi, 2009). Without this modified step in the phenomenological reduction, it would be impossible to conduct discipline specific research.

In order to adopt the attitude of the psychological phenomenological reduction, the researcher should employ the methodological technique of bracketing (Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing in psychological research requires that every effort to be made by the researcher to become aware of their existing theoretical knowledge, personal views, past experiences, underlying assumptions, judgements, personal beliefs, biases, presuppositions and perceptions (Lowes and Prowse, 2001; Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, the aim of bracketing is to ensure that past knowledge is not engaged whilst the researcher is dealing with the participants’ experience in the present (Giorgi, 2009). It is important to note that past experience is not forgotten or destroyed during the bracketing process. Instead, it is brought to the forefront of awareness so that the researcher can remain as

objective as possible by striving to ensure that the descriptions emerge free from interpretation and exactly as described by the participants. Bracketing before, during and throughout the data collection and data analysis process will allow the researcher to place critical attention upon the present experience whilst remaining open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge (Rose et al., 1995; Ashworth, 1996; Crotty, 1996; Beech, 1999; Draucker, 1999; LeVasseur, 2003; Dowling, 2004; Lopez and Willis, 2004; Moran, 2005; Giorgi, 2009, 2011). This is supported Giorgi (2009, p.93) who stated that a ‘heightening of the present is being called for, not an obliteration of the past’ and it is argued that with the right amount of effort and care, this process is achievable (Giorgi, 2009).

There are a number of methods of bracketing that the researcher can undertake including:

- (i) Writing reflective memos throughout data collection and data analysis to note reflections and ‘flashes’ of insight (Ahern, 1999; O’Halloran et al., 2016). According to Ahern (1999) these flashes indicate an area of bias that might be experienced during the reflective thinking process, and therefore should be noted.
- (ii) Keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process which helps the researcher to identify potential biases that may affect or impinge upon the research (Primeau, 2003; Chan et al., 2013; O’Halloran et al., 2016). The use of a reflexive journal is helpful in the development of bracketing skills and in facilitating decision making throughout a phenomenological investigation (Wall et al., 2004).
- (iii) Engaging in extensive discussions with colleagues/research team including reasons for undertaking the research which may uncover underlying biases etc. (Tufford and Newman, 2010; O’Halloran et al., 2016).

(iv) Writing a critical literature review focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of existing research (O'Halloran et al., 2016). It has previously been suggested that the literature review be delayed until after data collection and analysis in order to avoid informed bias in the interview and data analysis (Hamill and Sinclair, 2010). However, it is argued that doing so may hinder the uncovering of existing assumptions that may have been unaccounted for (Lowe and Prowse, 2001).

(v) Engaging in pilot interviews and data analysis to raise awareness of any unintentional preconceptions and biases or personal experiences that may have been forgotten (O'Halloran et al., 2016). The pilot interviews are also useful in raising awareness of how to manage a situation where the temptation to take control of the interview arises (O'Halloran et al., 2016).

Although it has been suggested that awareness of these very preconceptions may influence the researcher and their ability to achieve objectivity (Porter, 1993), it can be argued that this shows a lack of understanding of what the process of bracketing aims to do and why it is crucial to descriptive psychological phenomenological research. Bracketing allows the researcher to identify certain areas of knowledge or underlying beliefs and biases which may otherwise have materialised as interpretations or assumptions during the interview process or data analysis (Ashworth, 1999). An example of this would be asking the participant a leading question/making a leading statement based on personal knowledge of the experience or making assumptions about what a description means without asking for clarification. It is argued that it is with this heightened awareness that the researcher can identify times where their own past experiences may interfere with the data collection and data analysis. Therefore, it is argued that leaving these potential biases and presuppositions uncovered poses the real risk to the integrity of this research (Hamill and Sinclair, 2010). Consequently,

researchers must take every reasonable step to ensure that presuppositions are brought into awareness, acknowledged, then bracketed prior to the research beginning (Lowe and Prowse, 2001, Ashworth, 1999). Furthermore, it is asserted that this process must be continually renewed throughout the research process (Lowe and Prowse, 2001, Ashworth, 1999).

It is important to note that arguments exist in the literature for both researchers and participants to 'bracket' their assumptions about the phenomenon (Caelli, 2001). However, it can be argued that if the participant were to also engage in the bracketing process, the authenticity of participant descriptions from within the natural attitude would be lost. In fact, Giorgi (2009) argues that it is desirable to have participants remain within the natural attitude and unaware with respect to phenomenological concepts. This helps to prevent participant bias which can arise when participants feel the need to provide descriptions that correspond with what the researcher is looking for (Giorgi, 2009). From a practical standpoint, having the participants engage in bracketing would mean that there would be a requirement to educate individuals in descriptive phenomenological concepts with no guarantee that the individual will develop an adequate understanding (Giorgi, 2009). This would prove to be extremely time consuming and taxing and as a consequence, undesirable for both cohorts (Giorgi, 2009).

3.5.2 The search for (scientific) essences

A researcher using the descriptive psychological phenomenological method, seeks scientific essences rather than philosophical essences. The idea of essences is central in Husserlian philosophy, but again it is worth noting that Husserl had a philosophical analysis in mind and in order for this idea to be valid in psychological research, it must be modified (Dahlberg, 2006). As mentioned already, philosophers look to find the

universal essence of a phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). However, it can be argued that seeking a universal essence transcends psychological interests (Giorgi, 2009). For example, when searching for a scientific essence the researcher is generally searching for knowledge of phenomena within their own discipline (e.g. sport psychology), through interviewing participants and analysing data. When searching for a philosophical essence however, the researcher is concerned with the characteristics of phenomena that transcend all context and disciplines i.e. the universal essence (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, psychological dynamics and the psychological nature of phenomena are not considered in a philosophical analysis (Giorgi, 2009).

Instead of searching for essences in the philosophical sense, the descriptive psychological phenomenological method explicates the invariant structure of phenomena within the data through a modified version of Husserl's free imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2009). The fundamental modification made by Giorgi to Husserl's free imaginative variation is that in psychological research, free imaginative variation seeks to determine higher-level eidetic invariant meanings rather than a universal essence (Giorgi, 2009). These higher-level eidetic invariant meanings that belong to the structure are considered to be general rather than universal, as the findings transcend the situation in which they were obtained, but they still remain dependent upon context (Giorgi, 2009). As such, descriptive psychological phenomenological research findings should not be generalised across a population in the way that empirical research is (Giorgi, 2009). However, it can be argued that when dealing with experience, generalisability in the positivist sense is not desirable, nor is it entirely possible because psychological reality is highly influenced by the sociocultural and environmental context within which the individual experiences the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 2009).

Therefore, trustworthiness and validity in descriptive psychological phenomenological research is not the same as the role of trustworthiness and validity in empirical science and any attempt to relate descriptions to an objective reality or an empirical 'fact' to satisfy positivist criteria of validity should be set aside (Ashworth, 1999; Giorgi, 2002). In other words, the validity of research findings in descriptive psychological phenomenological research is not contingent on whether these findings are the same as those from other disciplinary viewpoints or whether the findings can be replicated (Churchill and Wertz, 2015, Giorgi, 2009). Firstly, it is argued that it is not possible to describe everything there is to know about a phenomenon from within one perspective and as a result, different viewpoints can be valid (Churchill et al., 1998; Wertz, 1986). For example, a researcher examining the same phenomenon from another disciplinary perspective will almost certainly describe the experience of a phenomenon differently than a researcher in sport psychology. However, this does not mean that one of these perspectives is wrong. Differing viewpoints are possible and it is asserted that they may contribute in a complementary manner to our knowledge of phenomena (Churchill and Wertz, 2015). Therefore, verifiability of phenomenological research findings depends on whether the reader can assume the perspective of the present researcher and follow how the analysis progressed (Giorgi, 1975, 2009; Churchill and Wertz, 2015). According to Giorgi (2002), readers should be able to adopt the attitude of a researcher, even if they are not familiar with the particular research area. Doing so should result in the reader being able to accept or refute whether the descriptions of the experience meaningfully illuminate the phenomena under study (Churchill and Wertz, 2015). In other words, the value of the findings depends on their ability to help others gain some insights into the lived experience of a phenomenon (Churchill and Wertz, 2015). This point is supported by Giorgi (1975, p.96) who stated that '...the chief point

to be remembered with this type of research is...whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoints as [those] articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw...’.

3.5.3 The descriptive step

The use of language is integral in the descriptive step, as it is the means through which the participant can communicate to the researcher their experience of the phenomenon under examination (Giorgi, 1997). The remainder of this descriptive step is satisfied during data analysis, where the researcher analyses the descriptions from within the phenomenological attitude of reduction (Giorgi, 2009). However, at this stage the researcher is required to take on a domain specific attitude (i.e. sport psychology) within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction and a special sensitivity to the phenomenon being researched (Giorgi, 2012). In other words, although the researcher is required to adopt the phenomenological attitude of reduction, and to bracket past knowledge, a discipline specific attitude is required from the researcher in order to bring a sensitivity to the analysis and a sport psychological perspective which allows the data to become manageable (Giorgi, 2006). Employing this perspective during the data analysis allows constituents and meanings relevant to the discipline to emerge. The participant’s descriptions can then be transformed from their everyday language into terms that are relevant to sport psychology (e.g. the phrase ‘getting dropped from the team’ could be transformed into the more discipline specific term of ‘de-selected’). The constituents are determined by viewing the transformations of all of the participants for convergent meanings. Still using the imaginative variation, the researcher can see the shared meanings of the participants pertaining to their general psychological consistencies. The researcher applies a descriptive word or phrase to the constituents based on their psychological givenness. This is not a process of thematizing or merely

creating nominal categories (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003). The constituent ‘title’ must be descriptive of its psychological meaning. These constituents are put together in a descriptive paragraph which is the general descriptive psychological structure (Broomé, 2011). This general descriptive psychological structure is the outcome (i.e. results) of the analysis (Broomé, 2011).

It is important to note that throughout this step, the researcher should not adopt any stance on the correctness or falsity of descriptions (Ashworth, 1999). Instead, the researcher must strive to uncover the higher level eidetic invariant meanings that belong to the phenomena from the whole account given in the raw data (Giorgi, 2009). The higher level eidetic invariant meanings are then viewed to be how the phenomenon was experienced by the individual and no claim should be made that the description of the phenomenon is a universal ‘truth’ (Giorgi, 2009). Finally, to summarise, the appropriate attitude for the analysis is as follows; adopting the (scientific) phenomenological attitude through the use of the (scientific) phenomenological reduction, a sport psychological perspective within that attitude and a special sensitivity to the phenomenon being researched (Giorgi, 2012).

3.5.4 The research question

Descriptive phenomenological research begins with the acknowledgement that knowledge is in some way inadequate or limited, or that there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience (Englander, 2012; Churchill and Wertz, 2015). This is generally identified by reviewing the existing literature (Churchill and Wertz, 2015). When conducting a qualitative study, researchers often decide upon a preferred research design prior to formulating their research question (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Typically, qualitative inquiry is viewed as aiming to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and to answer ‘how?’ and

‘why?’ questions (Marshall, 1996). It can be argued that viewing a qualitative research question in this broad sense, implies that any qualitative method can be employed to answer it. As a result, it is postulated that the importance of the research question is often neglected in qualitative research (Holden and Lynch, 2004). It is crucial that the researcher resists the temptation to allow a method to be determined prior to the research question (Baker et al., 2012). If a chosen method is not congruent with the research question and study aims, the research will be flawed before it even begins (Baker et al., 1992). In a descriptive psychological phenomenological study, research questions should look to explore the lived experiences of specific phenomena, through rich description (Norlyk and Harder, 2010; Simon, 2011). Research questions that are considered as inappropriate for a descriptive psychological phenomenological approach include those which aim to explain a phenomenon, compare experiences or determine a solution to problems (Norlyk and Harder, 2010). It is argued that such research questions would be more suited to a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an inductive approach and seeks to develop theory through the analysis of interview data (Simon, 2011; Englander, 2012).

3.5.5 Data collection

3.5.5.1 Sampling method. It is important to recognise that the sampling method used to recruit participants is influenced by the methodological approach employed by a researcher (Englander, 2012). For instance, when conducting quantitative studies, researchers aim for ‘representativeness’ based on the evaluative criteria of external validity (Englander, 2012). Therefore, the participants must be a part of the population being studied and are typically recruited using random sampling procedures (Englander, 2012). In simple terms, random sampling is an unbiased and random selection of a group of participants which, in theory, means that it the group forms an accurate representation

of the general population (Kumar, 2008). However, it is important to note that certain research methods require participants to have access to the knowledge under investigation, and random sampling strategies cannot guarantee this in the participant sample that is recruited (Kelley, 2003).

Descriptive psychological phenomenological research differentiates itself from the natural sciences in that it is not primarily interested in asking the question of ‘How many?’ or ‘How often?’ (Giorgi, 2009). Instead, researchers are interested in asking ‘What is it like?’ (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004; Englander, 2012). In order to be able to answer this question, the participants must have experience of the topic under investigation (Englander, 2012). As such, participants for descriptive phenomenological research are recruited using purposive sampling (Dale, 1996). Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling that allows the researcher to select participants who have experience of a phenomenon (Kruger, 1988; Polit and Hungler, 1999; Goulding, 2005; Todres, 2005). This is considered to be advantageous as it enables the researcher to explore specific experiences and phenomena in order to create new knowledge within the literature (Dane, 1990). However, it is the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that the recruited participants have the experience of the phenomena that is being examined in order to access the necessary data (O’Halloran et al., 2016).

3.5.5.2 Sample size. Interestingly, the phenomenological literature does not offer specific criteria regarding appropriate sample sizes. In fact, sample size recommendations found within the literature vary greatly and lack consensus. Phenomenological research studies within the human sciences by Finlay (2003) and Finlay and Molano-Fisher (2008) both had a sample size of just one participant. Although having one participant can favour a powerful idiographic and narrative element, it is argued that if the research is aiming for a general structure of the experience then a larger sample size which will represent

different aspects of an experience is needed (Finlay, 2009). In his paper discussing the descriptive psychological phenomenological method in psychology, Giorgi (2008) recommended recruiting at least three participants. Giorgi (2008) argued that having at least three participants will make it easier to discern the individual's experience from the more general experience of the phenomenon. In her book chapter detailing major design issues in qualitative research, Morse (1994) recommended recruiting at least six participants for similar reasons to Giorgi (2008). In their book on qualitative research in nursing, Speziale and Carpenter (2007) suggested recruiting between ten and fifteen participants, provided that the participants are able to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon. In a journal article on phenomenological methodology in the human sciences, Dukes (1984) recommends a sample size of three to ten participants. In contrast, studies within the health sciences literature by Mcilpatrick et al. (2006, n=6) and Morgan (2006, n=10), considered these sample sizes to be a limitation of their research. In his book on qualitative inquiry and research design, Creswell (1998) broadly recommended a sample size of between five and twenty-five interviews for phenomenological inquiry. Although this sample size range provided by Creswell (1998) covers the guidelines offered by other researchers, it has been argued that employing a sample size as high as twenty-five may result in unmanageable volumes of data (Sandelowski, 1995; O'Halloran et al., 2016). In their paper which focused on descriptive phenomenological data collection, O'Halloran et al. (2016) discuss the challenges associated with conducting the phenomenological interview. The authors highlighted that descriptive phenomenological interviews may not always be successful in providing the rich data that is being sought after. This may be due to a number of reasons. For example, if a participant is not fluent in the language of the researcher this language barrier may pose as an issue during the descriptive phenomenological interview (Nesti, 2004). The age or

linguistic capability of participants may become another challenge as young children, or indeed adolescents or adults may not be able to express themselves in the way that that method requires (Nesti, 2004; O'Halloran et al., 2016). The descriptive phenomenological interview also requires large amounts of openness from an individual (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Participants may not feel comfortable discussing and having their account of such personal experiences recorded (Nesti, 2004; O'Halloran et al., 2016). Taking the above guidelines and challenges into consideration, O'Halloran et al. (2016) argue that a minimum sample size of eight participants is desirable for descriptive phenomenological research. It is postulated that a sample size of eight covers the possibility of some interviews not going to plan, whilst still allowing for a number of high-quality descriptions of the phenomenon (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Obtaining rich descriptions should be the main factor to consider when choosing a sample size (Todres, 2005). In other words, sampling should focus on quality over quantity. Rich descriptions will allow the researcher to discern the individual experience from the more general experience of the phenomenon under investigation which ultimately, is the aim of the method (Morse, 1994; Speziale and Carpenter, 2007; Giorgi, 2008; O'Halloran et al., 2016). As discussed, the aim is not to count how many people have had a particular experience or to make quantitative comparisons between different populations of people (Todres, 2005). Therefore, the sample size within descriptive psychological research is evaluated by the completeness and quality of the information provided by the participants (Connell, 2003).

To summarise, although there exists no overall consensus as to the correct sample size for phenomenological research the author argues that a minimum of eight participants is a desirable final sample size for a project (O'Halloran et al., 2016). This sample size quota will make it possible to identify the individual experience from the

more general experience of the phenomenon and will also allow for a number of high-quality descriptions of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2008; Finlay, 2009). This is supported by Starks and Brown-Trinidad (2007), who stated that sample sizes in phenomenological studies range from one to ten participants who can provide a detailed account of their experience. Furthermore, it is argued that having too high of a sample size may result in a quantity of data which is too large to permit the deep meaningful analysis that is the *raison-d'etre* of descriptive psychological phenomenological inquiry (Sandelowski, 1995; O'Halloran et al., 2016).

3.5.5.3 The phenomenological interview. The main tool for data collection in phenomenological research is the phenomenological interview (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004; O'Halloran et al., 2016). The aim of the descriptive phenomenological interview is to create an encounter where an athlete's description of their 'lived-experience' can be explored, illuminated and gently probed (Kvale, 1996). This is achieved through the unstructured nature of the descriptive phenomenological interview where the athlete is viewed as the 'expert' (Dale, 1996). By viewing the athlete as the expert, the researcher relinquishes their control of the interview by allowing the athlete to lead the encounter (Nesti, 2004). In doing so, any perceived hierarchical barriers between the researcher and the participant are reduced, which allows the athlete to express themselves in an authentic manner through a conversational style of dialogue (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004). From the researcher's point of view, the establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical in creating a truly authentic encounter between the researcher and athlete (Nesti, 2004; Ronkainen and Nesti 2015). The idea of being 'present' during the interview is also important to the success of this encounter, as it can only take place when one really *listens* to what the participant has to say (Nesti, 2004). It is argued that in creating this authentic encounter between researcher and participant, the data collected will hold a strong

personal significance for the athlete as it will contain rich, in-depth accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Nesti, 2004).

The descriptive phenomenological interview begins with an open-ended and non-leading question related to the phenomenon of interest e.g. ‘Can you describe to me your experience of ‘hitting the wall’ in marathon running?’ (O’Halloran et al., 2016). The follow-up questions are open, non-leading and based on the descriptions provided by the person being interviewed (Dale, 1996; Crust et al., 2011). Examples of probing questions include: ‘What was that like?...What does that mean?...Could you describe this in more detail?’ The only question that can be concretely prepared in advance is the opening question, and as such, the researcher should put careful thought into what it is they want to ask (O’Halloran et al., 2016). An appropriate opening question will give the interview the best chance of success (O’Halloran et al., 2016).

Interestingly, in Giorgi’s (1975, 1997, 2009) work in which he articulates the steps of the modified descriptive psychological phenomenological method, the author does not enter into a detailed discussion regarding the philosophical underpinnings of the descriptive phenomenological interview. Giorgi (2009) identifies that the interview is a method for collecting data in phenomenological research and also distinguishes between leading and directing a participant in the interview. For instance, if a participant is no longer revealing an aspect of how they experienced a phenomenon under investigation, it is viewed as perfectly legitimate for the interviewer to provide direction during the interview (Giorgi, 2009). This may be done through asking an open-ended question during a natural pause in the conversation e.g. ‘earlier you mentioned feeling as though you were having an outer-body experience whilst feeling exhausted, can you tell me more about that?’. In doing so, the researcher must take great care to be directive rather than leading, as leading the participant (with closed questions for example) may be construed

as the researcher introducing bias (Giorgi, 2009). This suggests that Giorgi is referring to the importance of bracketing for the success of the descriptive phenomenological interview encounter. Nevertheless, the philosophical underpinnings that inform the descriptive phenomenological interview are not explicitly mentioned by Giorgi, particularly the pivotal role that bracketing plays during the data collection stage. Giorgi's failure to refer to the theory underpinning the phenomenological interview may simply be down to an assumption that the reader is already aware that bracketing is an important part of the data collection process. However, it can be argued that it is important to clearly address the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenological interview approach, as these underpinnings inform both the data collection and the data analysis process (Englander, 2012). In order to illustrate the importance of the philosophical underpinnings of a chosen phenomenological approach, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the fundamental differences between the descriptive phenomenological interview approach and the interpretive phenomenological interview approach.

The philosophical underpinnings of descriptive psychological phenomenology centre on the fundamental concept of the phenomenological reduction and bracketing (Lowe and Prowse, 2001; Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, researchers who chose to employ a descriptive phenomenological interview must strive to bracket personal biases, experiences, theoretical assumptions, preconceptions and presuppositions before and *during* the interview encounter (Lowe and Prowse, 2001; O'Halloran, et al., 2016). Failure to do so may result in data that is 'contaminated' by the researcher's own interpretations of the participant's experience (O'Halloran et al., 2016). In fact, guidelines provided by O'Halloran et al. (2016) for data collection in the descriptive phenomenological approach recommend that researchers should discard any interviews,

prior to data analysis, where bracketing was compromised in order to remain congruent to the philosophical underpinnings of this approach which centres on bracketing.

A researcher who employs interpretive phenomenology will have fundamentally different guidelines for conducting the phenomenological interview based on the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretive phenomenological approach (Lowe and Prowse, 2001). Most notably, the interpretive phenomenological approach is radically opposed to Husserl's idea of bracketing and the phenomenological reduction (Lowe and Prowse, 2001; O'Halloran et al., 2016). As mentioned previously, the researcher employing the interpretive phenomenological approach 'participates in making the data' through interpretation of phenomena rather than focusing on description and clarification (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Kerry and Armour, 2000, p.7). In other words, interpretive phenomenology allows for a more personal input from the researcher in the form of theories or the researcher's own suppositions (Mackey, 2005). This has implications for the manner in which the phenomenological interview should be conducted when employed by a researcher using interpretive phenomenology (Lowe and Prowse, 2001; O'Halloran, 2016). It is argued that a semi-structured approach to the interpretive phenomenological interview is more congruent to the aims of the interpretive phenomenological approach, as it allows the researcher to participate in the data collection process through the use of pre-prepared and closed questions (Lowe and Prowse, 2001).

As mentioned previously, there are a number of effective bracketing techniques that can be used in descriptive phenomenological research (Ashworth, 1999). Examples of bracketing techniques that may be used before, during and throughout a research study include but are not limited to: writing reflective memos, keeping a reflexive journal, engaging in pilot interviews and engaging in extensive discussions with research

team/colleagues as to the reasons why the research is being conducted (see Ashworth, 1999; Tufford and Newman, 2010 and O'Halloran et al., 2016 for a full discussion on these bracketing techniques). The aim is to allow the researcher to identify any existing personal biases, a priori knowledge, interpretations and assumptions that they may have in relation to the topic being examined (O'Halloran, et al., 2016). It is with this heightened awareness that the researcher can identify times where their own past experiences may interfere with the data collection and analysis (O'Halloran, et al., 2016).

3.6 The Concrete Steps of Descriptive Psychological Phenomenological Analysis

Giorgi's (1975, 2006, 2009) concrete steps for a descriptive psychological phenomenological analysis were employed by the researcher for the Doctoral study in this thesis. Giorgi's method for descriptive psychological phenomenological analysis is the longest established and most widely used in descriptive psychological phenomenology (Wertz, 1983; Smith et al., 2009). Giorgi himself has published over one hundred peer reviewed articles on the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach to psychology (Giorgi, 1970, 2000).

The steps of Giorgi's (1975, 2006, 2009) method are as follows:

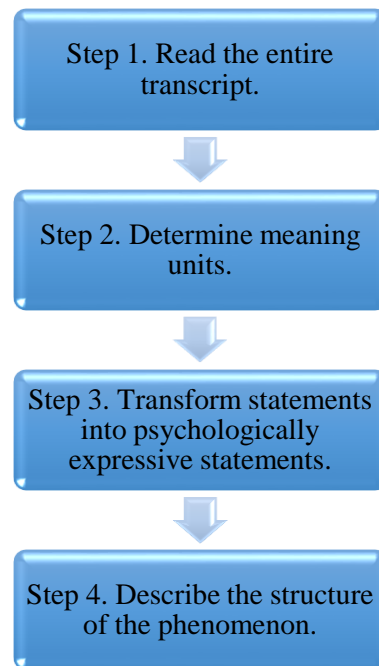


Figure 1. *The steps of Giorgi's (1975, 2006, 2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method.*

Step 1: Read the entire transcript for a sense of the whole. The aim of this step is to get a general sense of what the description is about (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). The researcher must assume the (scientific) phenomenological attitude with a psychological perspective, in order to remain sensitive to the implications of the data for the phenomenon being researched (Giorgi, 2009). The aim here is to develop a sense of what the description is about (Giorgi, 2009). As such, at this stage of the analysis, the researcher should not try to explicate the essential psychological structure of the phenomenon being researched (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). It is important to remember that Giorgi's approach acknowledges that meanings within the data can be referred to disjointedly (i.e., a participant can jump forward or refer back to certain meanings) (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, if the researcher was to begin explicating the essential psychological structure of the phenomenon without

awareness of the complete description, then this would arguably result in an incomplete analysis (Giorgi, 1975).

Step 2: Determination of meaning units. The aim of this step is to delineate ‘meaning units’ within the description (Giorgi, 2009). This is achieved by marking each time a transition of meaning occurs in the transcript (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). After this process is complete the researcher is left with a number of meaning units. Again, this step should be conducted within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude and the meaning units should be sensitive to the psychological perspective and the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 2009). The researcher should not interrogate the meaning units at this step (Giorgi, 1975, 2009).

It is important to note here that the meaning units constituted in psychological phenomenological research are ‘correlated with the attitude of the researcher’ (Giorgi, 2009, p.130). In other words, it is not guaranteed that other researchers would have the same meaning units, as there are different places where transitions in meaning may take place (Giorgi, 2009). The purpose of delineating meaning units is to make the next step of transforming the data easier for the researcher (Beck, 2013). The meaning units do not carry any ‘theoretical weight’ which means that there can be no ‘objective’ meaning units in the transcripts (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, it is argued that it is not necessary for this step to be exactly replicated by another researcher (Giorgi, 2009; Englander, 2012). Instead, it is crucial that the researcher’s meaning units are transformed through the researcher’s psychological sensitivity (discussed in the next step) which allows for explication of the essential psychological structure of the experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1975, 2006, 2009).

Step 3: Transformation of participant's natural attitude expressions into psychologically sensitive expressions. This step begins with the researcher transforming the first-person meaning units into third person statements (Giorgi, 2006). This transformation is completed in order to help in the researcher's bracketing attempt as it makes it clear that the researcher is doing an analysis of another person's experience and not their own (Giorgi, 2006, 2009). The researcher then goes back to the beginning of the third person statements and from within a (scientific) phenomenological attitude with a psychological perspective, highlights the psychological dimension of the third person statements (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). In other words, the researcher transforms these third person expressions into psychologically sensitive expressions with respect to the phenomenon being researched, while retaining the meaning expressed by the participant (Giorgi, 1975, 2009; Beck, 2013). It is important to highlight at this point that this step is a process and it may take several attempts at writing descriptions to achieve the best one (Giorgi, 2009).

Moreover, the researcher must interrogate each transformed meaning unit with the help of free imaginative variation in order to describe the invariant psychological meanings that present themselves to the researcher (Giorgi, 2009). Free imaginative variation is integral to Giorgi's method as it allows the researcher to ascertain eidetic higher-level categories across transcripts that retain the same psychological meaning but are not embedded within the same contingent facts (Giorgi, 2009). This allows the researcher write one overall description of the essential structure (also known as the invariant meaning structure) of the phenomenon.

Step 4: Description of the structure of the phenomenon. The researcher describes the essential psychological structure of the phenomenon for each individual's transcript (Giorgi, 1975). The researcher must then explicitly describe the general psychological structure of the phenomenon through determining whether or not similar higher-level

eidetic characteristics have emerged across each individual's transcript (Beck, 2013; Churchill and Wertz, 2015). It is important to note that the explicated essential psychological structure in the participant's transcripts will be intra-structural and some will be inter-structural (Giorgi, 2009). Intra-structural means that the differences are small and can be expressed eidetically, meaning it can be included in the general psychological structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). Inter-structural means that there are large differences and cannot be expressed eidetically (Giorgi, 2009). However, it is argued that it is still important to include the inter-structural differences at the individual level (Giorgi, 2009). It is also important to clarify in this section that the researcher must remain within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude through the use of bracketing prior to and throughout the data collection and analysis stage. Failure to do so may result in unwanted biases or interpretation arising during the data collection or data analysis phase (Lowes and Prowse, 2001).

When critically evaluating the discussed concrete steps and Giorgi's modification of Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method in the next section, the authors mentioned (e.g. Colaizzi, 1978; Hyncer, 1985; Rennie, 2012) reside within mainstream psychology and other human science disciplines where phenomenological approaches have been more widely used as a methodology. Although descriptive phenomenology has appeared in the sport psychology literature, to the researcher's knowledge, there have been no successful attempts to employ it thus far, which arguably means that much of the existing research in the area is flawed (Allen-Collinson, 2009; O'Halloran et al., 2016; see section 3.9 for a review of this approach in the sport psychology literature). As a result, the researcher had no choice but to venture further afield toward mainstream psychology literature for guidance and to create an informed argument for the use of this method in sport psychology research.

3.7 A Critical Evaluation of Giorgi's Psychological Phenomenological Method

The rest of this chapter aims to critically evaluate the modified steps of Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method, the use of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature and to clarify and present an argument for the use of Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method in sport psychology research in the future. Despite Giorgi's effort to clarify this method for psychological research, there exists two variances in the application of Giorgi's approach by Colaizzi (1978) and Hyncer (1985) who aimed to expand upon Giorgi's work by modifying his methodological steps and offering alternative guidelines for the use of the descriptive phenomenological approach within psychological research. Therefore, the two approaches that will be critiqued in the following section are: Colaizzi (1978) and Hyncer's (1985) steps for descriptive psychological phenomenological data analysis. A brief overview of both Colaizzi and Hyncer's steps will be presented below in order to contextualise the critique that follows.

Colaizzi (1978) was mentored by Giorgi, and his concrete steps for analysis are:

- (i) Transcribing all the subjects' descriptions.
- (ii) Extracting significant statements (statements that directly relate to the phenomenon under investigation).
- (iii) Creating formulated meanings (from the significant statements identified in the previous step. These formulated meanings should be general re-statements or meanings).
- (iv) Aggregating formulated meaning into theme clusters (sorting formulated meanings into categories or clusters of themes).

(v) Developing an exhaustive descriptive (of the phenomenon under investigation).

(vi) Identifying the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

(vii) Returning to participants for validation.

Hyncer (1985) developed his steps for students and colleagues who had not extensively engaged in philosophical psychology or the philosophical underpinnings of the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach, but still wished to use specific steps in order to carry out a descriptive psychological phenomenological analysis of interview data (Hyncer, 1985).

Hyncer's (1985) concrete steps for analysis are:

(i) Transcription.

(ii) Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction.

(iii) Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole.

(iv) Delineating units of general meaning.

(v) Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question.

(vi) Seeking independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning. Hyncer (1985) suggests that at this stage it is a good reliability check to include other researchers to independently carry out the above procedures in order to verify the present findings. It is suggested that these 'judges' have been educated in both the philosophical underpinnings of Husserl's approach as well as Giorgi's modification for use within the human scientific research.

- (vii) Eliminating redundancies (in the units of meaning i.e. those not relevant to the research question).
- (viii) Clustering units of relevant meaning.
- (ix) Determining themes from clusters of meaning.
- (x) Writing a summary for each individual interview.
- (xi) Return to the participant with the summary and themes.

The following section will highlight how the authors have failed to adopt Husserl's philosophical underpinnings correctly in their descriptive psychological phenomenological steps for analysis. Secondly, based on Giorgi's method and ideas, an argument will be created to highlight ways in which the authors have misinterpreted Giorgi's work and as a result have misquoted Giorgi and his method (Finlay, 2009).

The descriptive psychological phenomenological steps developed by Colaizzi (1978) and Hyncer (1985) aim to build on Giorgi's original method, however, there are concerning deviations present in both approaches. For example, although aiming to provide rigorous steps for analysis, in the second step of his method, Colaizzi calls for the researcher to extract phrases that directly pertain to the phenomenon under investigation (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 2006). However, it can be argued that doing so will remove the context of the participant's descriptions which is highly important for determining meanings in the analysis (Giorgi, 2006). In his third step, Colaizzi uses the phrase 'formulating meanings' and 'insights created' (Colaizzi, 1978 p.59; Giorgi, 2006). Given that Colaizzi does not clarify or elaborate on what is meant by these terms, they remain ambiguous. Therefore, it can be argued that these terms go against the Husserlian perspective of descriptive phenomenology as the meanings should not be formulated or

created (Giorgi, 2006). In the Husserlian perspective, meanings should be immediately apparent or 'given' to consciousness (Giorgi 2006, 2009). Furthermore, Colaizzi does not mention the adoption of the (scientific) phenomenological attitude in his procedure which is crucial to both Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method and Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2006). This raises the question of whether Colaizzi's (1978) steps for analysis are more in line with the philosophical underpinnings of Heideggerian phenomenology, as the interpretive phenomenological approach does not adopt the (scientific) phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2006). Although Colaizzi (1978) presents clear and concise steps for analysis which is desirable for researchers wishing to use descriptive psychology phenomenological analysis, it can be argued that his steps are lacking in the philosophical underpinnings which are central to Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological approach. As a result, it is argued that although Colaizzi claims to have created steps for analysis based on Giorgi's steps, by neglecting the philosophical underpinnings it would seem that Colaizzi has both misunderstood and misrepresented the complexity of Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method.

In his paper detailing his steps for analysis, Hyncer makes clear that he developed his steps for students and colleagues who had not extensively engaged in philosophical psychology or the philosophical underpinnings of the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach, but still wished to use specific steps in order to carry out a descriptive psychological phenomenological analysis of interview data. Similar to Colaizzi, Hyncer succeeds in providing clear and concise, easy to follow steps for analysis. However, Hyncer (1985) does not describe the (scientific) phenomenological reduction fully in his approach which gives rise to the argument that perhaps it was not understood accurately (Giorgi, 2006). Hyncer also fails to address that the researcher

must refrain from making any claims that the perceived phenomenon actually exists in the way it appeared to the researcher (Giorgi, 2006). This is an important part of the (scientific) phenomenological reduction which is essential to the Husserlian perspective. Perhaps Hyncer thought it possible to conduct a descriptive psychological phenomenological analysis purely through following concrete steps without having to engage with the philosophical underpinnings of the method. However, it is argued that by neglecting the philosophical underpinnings of the approach the researcher is engaging with phenomenology on a superficial level only (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Controversially, Hyncer (1985) and Colaizzi's (1978) latter steps both encourage the use of 'judges' and returning to participants to confirm whether they are satisfied with the descriptions. It is argued that the use of judges contradicts the researcher's role in employing the (scientific) phenomenological reduction. If the researcher is employing the method correctly there should be no need for judges. Hyncer suggests in his steps that a good reliability check is to train other researchers to independently carry out procedures of delineating meaning units in order to verify the findings. However, according to Giorgi (2009) it is not guaranteed that other researchers would have the same meaning units, as there are different places where transitions in meaning may take place (Giorgi, 2009). As such, the meaning units do not carry any 'theoretical weight' which means that there can be no 'objective' meaning units in the transcripts (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, it is argued that it is not necessary for meaning units to be exactly replicated by another researcher (Giorgi, 2009; Englander, 2012). To further this, it is argued that returning to participants with their descriptions to confirm if they are satisfied risks compromising the rich authentic accounts of the participant's 'lifeworld' that emerged during the descriptive phenomenological interview encounter (Nesti, 2004). To have someone from the perspective of the natural attitude make a decision on the phenomenon and how it

presented itself to the researcher is fundamentally undermining the approach (Giorgi, 2006). The judgements made by a descriptive psychological phenomenological researcher within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude are not the same as those made by an empirical observer (Giorgi, 2006).

Most recently, Rennie (2012) wrote a controversial paper challenging Giorgi's methodological assumptions. Rennie stated that firstly, despite all their diversity, all qualitative research methods are essentially hermeneutical. Defined narrowly, hermeneutic means 'a method or principle of interpretation' (Crotty, 1998, p.88). Therefore, what Rennie meant by this statement is that all qualitative research methods are fundamentally interpretive in nature. This would appeal to those who align themselves to the interpretive branch of phenomenology, as interpretive phenomenological methods allow the researcher to 'participate in making the data' through interpretation of phenomena (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Kerry and Armour, 2000, p.7). However, Rennie's statement goes against the entire premise of descriptive phenomenology and its fundamental concept of bracketing which opposes researcher interpretation. To address this statement, it is argued that descriptive phenomenological research and hermeneutical research are fundamentally different in what they aim to do and cannot be reduced to one single method (Giorgi, 2014; Lowes and Prowse, 2001). To further this, description cannot be reduced to interpretation (Giorgi, 2014). When the researcher makes an interpretive claim, it can be argued that it must be viewed as plausible rather than definitive (Giorgi, 2009). This is because interpretation always implies that something is not entirely clear and that an effort is required on behalf of the researcher to make the issue clear (i.e. the researcher must interpret the data) (Giorgi, 2014). In contrast, the emphasis of descriptive analysis is on *clarification* rather than explanation through interpretation. As such, description always implies that linguistic

expression or language is being utilised to describe the nature of something (Giorgi, 2014). Therefore, descriptive analysis aims to draw out implications, highlight expressions, imagine possible alternatives and contextually clarify explicit statements (Giorgi, 2014).

Rennie (2012) critiqued Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method for allowing for interpretation. Indeed, it can be argued that conducting a psychological investigation is an interpretive enterprise insofar as to research everyday phenomena, a non-necessary psychological perspective must be brought to them (Giorgi, 2014). However, without Giorgi's modification of Husserl's philosophical method to include this psychological perspective, the researcher would be unable to examine and contextualise the phenomenon under investigation from a disciplinary viewpoint. This would mean that research using descriptive psychological phenomenological method would not be possible at the psychological level as the researcher would be unable to bring any disciplinary perspective to the phenomenon. Therefore, the project is interpretive, but on the basis of method, the process is descriptive (Giorgi, 2014). However, this does not mean that the researcher is *interpreting* what is being described in the data. The aim is to *transform* the participant's descriptions into more discipline specific language. Interestingly, when discussing Giorgi's steps of analysis, Rennie (2012) fails to mention the (scientific) phenomenological reduction which is the method that attempts to eliminate researcher interpretation. Therefore, it can be argued that Rennie has misunderstood Giorgi's method, and consequently, his claims are unsubstantiated.

In this chapter so far, the philosophical foundations of descriptive phenomenology have been discussed followed by an in-depth explanation of descriptive phenomenology as a philosophical method and the modification of this approach by

Giorgi (1975, 2006, 2009) for use within psychological research. Lastly, a detailed review of Giorgi's concrete steps of the descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis was provided. This literature provides the framework for the next section which aims to address why descriptive psychological phenomenology is unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches and the potential that it holds as a research method to strengthen and diversify the sport psychology literature.

3.8 Why Descriptive Psychological Phenomenology?

Descriptive psychological phenomenology is an important mode of inquiry for qualitative research in psychology (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). Humanistic approaches to psychology in particular centre around the care of people as humans and the avoidance of reductionism which can result in misdirected care (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). Descriptive psychological phenomenological inquiry requires that the integrated whole be explored, as such, it is a suitable method for the investigation of phenomena that are important to the field of psychology and in particular for those who practice using a holistic, person-centred approach. According to Spiegelberg (1965), the descriptive psychological phenomenological method investigates phenomena in the belief that essential truths about reality are grounded in lived experience. The aim is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). Therefore, descriptive psychological phenomenology is a recommended methodology when the aim is to understand the meanings of human experiences (Creswell, 1998) or to explore phenomena from new and fresh perspectives i.e. to illicit new knowledge, free from pre-existing theories and assumptions (Sanders, 1982; Cohen, et al., 2000).

Phenomenology offers a different approach to qualitative understanding in that it rejects the traditional objectivity measures placed upon qualitative research by positivist traditions (Lin, 2013; Sanders, 1982; McClellan, 1995). In other words, descriptive phenomenology *emphasises* description, whilst qualitative methods move past description to focus on generating theory or to satisfy positivist tendencies (O'Halloran et al., 2016). However, the emphasis placed by descriptive phenomenology on description does not mean that this approach only offers unique descriptions (Lin, 2013). In fact, it can be argued that descriptive phenomenology has its own unique specification for achieving critical and objective research (Crotty, 1998). It is critical in that it problematises that which is taken for granted in the natural attitude and objective in that it reveals the essential structures that constitute human experiences (Sanders, 1982; Crotty, 1998; Lin, 2013; O'Halloran, et al., 2016).

In order to create a more convincing argument for the use of Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method, a more comprehensive review will now be presented which highlights the fundamental ways in which descriptive psychological phenomenology diverges from widely used qualitative research methods in the mainstream psychology literature. The qualitative methods employed within the mainstream psychology literature that will be focused upon in the following section are; grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research and intuitive inquiry as it has been argued that these approaches share the most similarities with the descriptive phenomenological approach (Lester, 1999; Biggerstaff, 2012). This is important as a review of the literature suggests that there have been no detailed accounts explaining the differences between the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach and other forms of qualitative research in the sport psychology literature (Nesti, 2004).

3.8.1 Grounded theory vs. descriptive phenomenology

Grounded theory is arguably the most widely used qualitative method in psychology, including sport psychology (Koenig, 2011; Culver et al., 2003; Culver et al., 2012; see Weed, 2009 for a review of grounded theory studies in the sport psychology literature). This method originates from symbolic interactionism, a sociological ideal which posits that meaning is constructed and understood through interactions with others in social processes (Blumer, 1986; Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). The aim of grounded theory research is to construct an explanatory theory of basic social processes, studied in the environments in which they happen (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

In grounded theory, although openness is needed in the initial interviews, personal theorizing is an important part of the overall data collection process as the researcher seeks to develop the emerging theory (Crotty 1996; Wimpenny and Gass 2000). In other words, grounded theory involves an iterative process which means that data analysis begins as soon as the initial data is collected (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000; Koenig, 2011). Ideally, each interview is coded before the next is conducted in order to allow new information to be incorporated into future interview encounters (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). This is referred to as theoretical sampling and as theory emerges it directs the subsequent interviews which are often times structured in order to saturate emerging theoretical categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Wimpenny and Gass 2000; Wertz et al., 2011).

3.8.1.1 Grounded theory interview vs. descriptive phenomenological interview.

In the initial process of data collection in grounded theory, the unstructured interview is commonly employed as the researcher requires a narrative from the perspective of the participant in order to allow the study to unfold (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). Similar to the descriptive psychological phenomenological interview encounter, the grounded

theory researcher is encouraged to demonstrate openness during initial interviews, taking care to ask non-leading questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). However, phenomenological interviews begin with a question based on the phenomenon under investigation (e.g. 'Can you tell me about your experience of empathy?'). In contrast, the grounded theory researcher is discouraged from beginning an interview in this way as it 'would preconceive the emergence of data' (Glaser, 1992, p.25). Therefore, grounded theory researchers often begin an interview with a general research question instead (Charmaz 1990; O'Halloran et al., 2016). In other words, the grounded theory researcher is required to begin the interviews with openness and as the theory emerges, the researcher begins to direct questions in further interviews that are focused upon salient categories that have been identified in the initial data collection phases (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). By asking such a direct question in the opening interviews, the grounded theory researcher will have focused on a specific phenomenon for investigation prematurely and prior to the data informing the focus of the research, which goes against the entire premise of the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

It is asserted that the directedness of the initial question in descriptive psychological phenomenology provides the researcher with a unique opportunity to focus on the participant's lived experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi 2009, O'Halloran et al., 2016). It is important to highlight that whilst the ground theory researcher guides the follow-up interviews (e.g. through the use of structured, analytical questions and formulating a hypothesis in relation to emerging categories), the openness of the descriptive phenomenological interview remains regardless of the number of interviews that are conducted (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Wimpenny and Gass, 2000).

Another crucial difference between the two approaches is that grounded theory opposes descriptive phenomenology's central concept of bracketing (O'Halloran et al.,

2016). According to Glaser (1992), in grounded theory research it is the researcher's knowledge, understanding and skills that informs the generation of categories. To further this, a grounded theory researcher is required to demonstrate a 'theoretical sensitivity' in relation to the discipline (Glaser, 1992). This is not to be confused with the discipline specific attitude that the descriptive phenomenological researcher must adopt as the grounded theory researcher is not doing so from within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude. In other words, the grounded theory researcher is actively interpreting the data using pre-existing theory and knowledge, whereas the descriptive psychological phenomenological researcher is transforming descriptions into discipline specific language (Giorgi, 2009). In this process, the meaning of the description is not changed (Giorgi, 2009).

3.8.1.2 Reading of the transcript. The data analysis in grounded theory and descriptive psychological phenomenological research begins in what appears to be a similar manner with the reading of the transcript. However, it appears that even this procedure differs between both approaches. The reading of the transcripts in descriptive psychological phenomenology commences once the data collection has completely finished. The focus of the reading is unique in descriptive psychological phenomenology as the researcher is required to read each transcript from within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude whilst employing a special sensitivity to the discipline of psychology and the phenomenon being researched (Giorgi, 2009). The aim of reading the transcript is to develop a sense of what the description is about (Giorgi, 2009). As such, whilst reading each transcript, the researcher should not try to explicate the essential psychological structure of the phenomenon being researched i.e. the researcher should not begin to descriptively analyse the data (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). In contrast, in grounded theory the researcher does not wait to read the transcripts until all of the data has been collected.

Data analysis in grounded theory begins as soon as the initial interview data is collected as the grounded theorist seeks to develop the emerging theory (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). The initial interview transcripts are read with the grounded theory researcher allowing their own interpretations and existing theoretical knowledge to inform the generation of categories throughout the research process (Glaser, 1992). Follow up interviews are then based on developing the theory that the researcher has identified as emerging (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

3.8.1.3 Coding vs. delineation of meaning units. Although the data analysis process appears to share similarities, it can be argued that the ‘coding’ of the data in grounded theory is different to the delineation of meaning units in descriptive phenomenology. Grounded theory involves a constant comparison method of coding and analysing data during three stages (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). These stages are; open coding (examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data); axial coding (rearranging data into groupings based on relationships and patterns within and among these categories); and selective coding (identifying and describing the central phenomenon, or ‘core category’ in the data) (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). In order to code the data in this way, the grounded theory researcher does not adopt the (scientific) phenomenological attitude. This is because a grounded theory researcher endeavours to code the data into units based on changes in topics or subjects that are being discussed in the text, rather than a transition in *meaning* (Giorgi, 2009). A transition in meaning is marked each time there is a significant shift in meaning identified in the text. This process is carried out from within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude and the meaning units should be sensitive to the psychological perspective and the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 2009). For example, when investigating the invariant psychological structure of the experience of ‘critical moments’

during an athlete's career, an athlete may describe, in detail, how their experience of a career threatening injury made them feel as though they had lost a big part of who they are; which when transformed into discipline specific language, means that the athlete is describing a loss of identity. The athlete may then go on to describe how each day that passed felt excruciatingly long whilst injured and unable to train (which when transformed into discipline specific language means the athlete is describing how their perception of the passage of time is slowed down during a perceived negative event that involves a high personal stake). Although the topic here remains the same i.e. the athlete is still discussing their perceived experience of injury, this would signal a transition in meaning. This is because the athlete has transitioned from describing how their perceived experience of injury affected their identity, to how their perceived experience of injury altered their perception of the passage of time. As the data analysis progresses, it becomes clear that the descriptive psychological phenomenologist's aim for the data analysis is to provide a rich description of the essential structure of the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation, whereas theoretical model building is the procedural aim in grounded theory (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007; Giorgi, 2009).

Therefore, it is asserted that the divergence between both approaches runs much deeper than just procedural differences (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). It is argued that these differences are due to these approaches having completely separate and distinct philosophical foundations (Baker et al., 1992; Starks and Brown-Trinidad 2007). As mentioned above, grounded theory originates from symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986; Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological ideal which posits that meaning is constructed and understood through interactions with others in social processes (Blumer, 1986; Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, the grounded theory approach assumes that meaning must be constructed and as such, the

emphasis is on the researcher in developing the emerging theory which subsequently drives the direction of the interviews in this approach (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). In other words, although the grounded theory approach does include some description and understanding, it quickly differentiates itself from descriptive psychological phenomenology as it moves toward the construction of theoretical categories and explanatory models that highlight theoretically relevant portions of experience (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). In contrast, Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenology, which underpins descriptive psychological phenomenology, views the lived experience as the foundation for knowledge and therefore only in need of descriptive clarification (Husserl 1913/1983; Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, the descriptive psychological phenomenological method aims to draw out implications, highlight expressions, imagine possible alternatives and contextually clarify explicit statements rather than constructing or generating theory (Giorgi, 2014).

3.8.2 Discourse analysis vs. descriptive phenomenology

Discourse analysis is beginning to increasingly appear in psychological research, particularly in health psychology (Willig, 2000) and sport and exercise psychology (see McGannon and Spence, 2010 and McGannon and Spence, 2012). Discourse analysis originates from linguistic studies, literary criticism and the study of signs or symbols, known as semiotics (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007; Biggerstaff, 2012). Discourse analysts argue that language and words are in themselves meaningless (Biggerstaff, 2012). However, meaning is created when language is used in a shared and mutually agreed upon manner (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, discourse analysts argue that language both mediates and constructs our understanding of reality (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007).

In the method of discourse analysis, written and spoken language are examined for their social significance (Koenig, 2011). Therefore, it is unsurprising that discourse analysis and descriptive psychological phenomenology share many similarities. Firstly, both approaches recognise the subjectiveness of an individual, who is viewed as a socially situated being who constructs their world through language (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007; Wertz et al., 2011). Both approaches aim to provide descriptions of meaningful structures that transcend their content and the individual whose experience is being analysed (Wertz et al., 2011). Lastly from a procedural standpoint, both approaches begin with an open reading of the interview transcript and eventually aim to illuminate material that is relevant to the research question (Wertz et al., 2011).

However, despite these similarities, discourse analysis and descriptive phenomenology are two very different methods. Firstly, both approaches are underpinned by differing philosophies and embedded assumptions and therefore aim to answer entirely different research questions (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). For example, the interview in discourse analysis typically uses a semi-structured interview approach which aims to capture the participants' language including references to other discourses (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). In contrast, the descriptive phenomenological interview is unstructured and aims to capture the subjective experience of a phenomenon through rich description (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007; Wertz et al., 2011). The semi-structured interview approach employed by discourse analysis also opposes descriptive phenomenology's central concept of bracketing (Lowes and Prowse, 2001).

Procedurally, discourse analysis uses an interpretive method which includes a 'coding' phase to identify themes (Starks and Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Again, this differs to the delineation of meaning units in descriptive psychological phenomenology. The discourse analyst also highlights the interview itself as an example of a discourse pattern

and therefore analyses the text and the interviewer-participant interaction (Wertz, et al., 2011; Biggerstaff, 2012). In contrast, a researcher using descriptive phenomenology views the interview as a means to illuminate examples of the phenomenon being investigated (Wertz, et al., 2011). In other words, discourse analysis focuses on discourse and linguistics whereas descriptive psychological phenomenology focuses on understanding the intentionalities of subjective experience and in doing so, forming rich descriptions of the phenomenon in question (Wertz, et al., 2011).

3.8.3 Narrative research vs. descriptive phenomenology

Narrative research is a widely used method in mainstream psychology research and is receiving increasing attention within research in sport psychology (see Polkinghorne, 1995; Mishler, 2006; Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Smith and Sparkes, 2009; Biggerstaff, 2012). Narrative research postulates that people construct meaning and understand their lives in storied forms (Sarbin, 1986; Creswell, 2007; Biggerstaff, 2012). These stories take the form of a plot which consists of a series of connected events which have a beginning, middle and end point (Sarbin, 1986; Biggerstaff, 2012). Narrative research is grounded in hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnography and literary analysis and deliberately avoids using fixed or rigid procedural and methodological steps (Creswell, 1998; Wertz, et al., 2011). Instead, narrative researchers aim to do what is necessary in order to capture the lived experience of an individual which allows them to theorise in insightful ways about how an individual constructs their own meaning (Creswell, 2007; Wertz, et al., 2011). This means that narrative research is an interpretive approach which aims to explore and conceptualise human experience as it is represented (Smith, 2010).

Narrative research shares many similarities with the descriptive phenomenological approach. For example, both approaches emphasise and pay close

attention to the importance of words and ordinary language in creating valuable knowledge (Smith, 2010; Wertz, et al., 2011). Both approaches also emphasise that subjective experience is dependent on the context provided in each description (Wertz, et al., 2011). However, there exists clear points at which these approaches diverge (Creswell, 2007). Firstly, narrative research is opposed to the descriptive psychological phenomenological method of bracketing, as researcher input is viewed as necessary for data generation in narrative research (Wertz, et al., 2011). Descriptive psychological phenomenology provides researchers in the field of psychology with concrete steps for data analysis, whereas narrative researchers do not subscribe to a formal or fixed method (Wertz, et al., 2011). Lastly, descriptive phenomenology aims to discover meaning in the essential structure of an individual's lived experience. In contrast, narrative researchers view meaning as solely originating in words and stories (Polkinghorne, 1995; Creswell, 2007).

3.8.4 Intuitive inquiry vs. descriptive phenomenology

Intuitive inquiry is most commonly employed in the areas of transpersonal, humanistic and positive psychology (Esbjörn-Hargens and Anderson, 2006). This is arguably because the aim of intuitive inquiry complements the topics that are generally explored within these areas of psychology (e.g. grief, joy and the spiritual) (Esbjörn-Hargens and Anderson, 2006). The aim of intuitive inquiry is to explore and understand complex experiences from the intersubjective state that exists between the researcher and the experience under investigation through a step-by-step interpretive process known as hermeneutics (Anderson, 2004). However, despite its use in other areas of psychology, to the best of the researcher's knowledge intuitive inquiry has not yet been employed as a research method in the sport psychology literature.

Intuitive inquiry was introduced by Anderson (1998) as a general approach to studying transformative experiences. As a research approach, intuitive inquiry is derived from philosophical approaches such as heuristic inquiry, hermeneutics and phenomenology (Anderson, 2004). Similar to the descriptive phenomenological approach, the intuitive researcher should begin the research process by identifying their values and assumptions in relation to the experience under investigation (Wertz, et al., 2011). However, unlike the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach, intuitive researchers are not required to bracket their identified and existing values and assumptions (Wertz, et al., 2011). Instead, these values and assumptions are used as a hermeneutical focus which allows the researcher to begin to explore and analyse similar experiences in others; thus beginning an interpretive cycle of analysis (Anderson, 2004). This is called the hermeneutic circle (Anderson, 2004). A further point of divergence between these approaches is that descriptive phenomenology is a descriptive and reflective method and therefore, does not have a transformative aim like intuitive inquiry (Wertz, et al., 2011).

This aim of this comparative section was to discuss the origins, history of ideas, and embedded assumptions of four qualitative approaches which have been argued to share the greatest similarity to descriptive psychological phenomenology (Lester, 1999; Wertz et al., 2011). In doing so, inherent qualities that make the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach radically different to these qualitative approaches were highlighted. The comparisons have highlighted how descriptive psychological phenomenology can provide psychological knowledge without theorising, placing a thematic focus on dialogue, literary analogies or theoretically based interpretation (Wertz, et al., 2011).

3.9 Sport Psychology and Descriptive Phenomenology

For decades, sport psychology literature has been largely dominated by quantitative research methods. However, more recently there has been a shift in methodological emphasis towards qualitative approaches (see Culver, Gilbert and Trudel, 2003; Culver, Gilbert and Sparkes, 2012). It can be argued that this move toward qualitative research methods is due to the tendency of quantitative research to over-simplify human experience through the use of Likert scales and statistical analysis (Valle, King and Halling, 1989; Nesti, 2004; Aggerholm, 2015). Although this shift towards qualitative research certainly signals a step in the right direction for broadening the existing knowledge of individual experience, Bain (1995) has argued that there exists minimal literature in qualitative research that truly recognises an individual's lived experience in the unique way that phenomenology can. According to Bain (1995) qualitative research often times takes an objective or researcher led stance during both data collection (e.g. structured or semi-structured interviews) and data analysis, meaning that the research fails to provide an '...in-depth analysis of meaning as constructed by the participant' (p.243).

As a result, researchers have begun to highlight the potential of phenomenological approaches in recognising subjective experience in sport. For example, Whitson (1976), Howe (1991) and Allen-Collison (2009) have called for the use of phenomenological approaches in sociological research in sport in order to recognise subjective knowledge and gain a more holistic understanding of the lived experience of phenomena through rich descriptions. Hogeveen (2011), Kerry and Armour (2000) and Muller and Trebels (1996, as cited in Martinkova and Parry, 2012) have highlighted the potential that phenomenology holds for research in the sport sciences in creating new meaning and tools for reflection. Finally, Nesti (2004, 2011) and Dale (1996) have strongly advocated

for the use of phenomenological research methods in the field of sport psychology, as phenomenological research emphasises subjective knowledge and highlights the lived-experience of an athlete.

In fact, it is argued that the most convincing account of the potential value that phenomenology holds for research in sport psychology was presented by Nesti (2004). Nesti (2004) highlighted the distinct difference between the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and those of the dominant natural scientific approach. Nesti (2004) stressed that phenomenological research emphasises subjective knowledge and highlights the lived-experience of an athlete through rich descriptions, rather than focusing on quantification and measurement in the way that the natural scientific approach does. As a result, Nesti (2004) argued that phenomenological approaches to research in sport psychology hold the potential to provide a more complete and subjective account of the athlete's 'life-world' and rich, descriptive data that is difficult to obtain using other approaches.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge the correct use of descriptive psychological phenomenological research is absent from the sport psychology literature. In order to critically review the small body of existing literature, it is asserted that it is fitting to base this critique on Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological steps, as Giorgi's method is the focus of the present thesis. Giorgi (1997) stated that within descriptive psychological phenomenology research, the following methodological criteria must be implemented in order for it to classify as descriptive psychological phenomenology:

(a) description - obtained from participants from the perspective of the natural attitude

- (b) adoption of the (scientific) phenomenological attitude through the method of the (scientific) phenomenological reduction
- (c) imaginative variation - the search for invariant meaning (essential structure) of a phenomenon.

To further this, it is argued that identification of the philosophical assumptions on which the study is based is critical and should include an articulation of Husserl's philosophical methodological keywords and, especially, how the (scientific) phenomenological attitude is adopted and maintained throughout the research process (Giorgi, 2006; Norlyk and Harder, 2010).

The following section will critique the objections to the use of Giorgi's psychological phenomenological approach in sport psychology research. In their paper on the phenomenological study of sport, Martínková and Parry (2011) argue that Giorgi's method does not qualify as phenomenology and instead is 'phenomenologically inspired empirical research' which appropriates Husserlian terminology in order to name the steps of the method (Marton, 2004, p.41). In fact, Martínková and Parry (2011) go so far as to argue that Giorgi's method could be done without any reference at all to phenomenologists or phenomenological ideas. However, this claim is unfounded as it is clear that Giorgi emphasises the cruciality of understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the descriptive philosophical phenomenological approach before its modification for use with psychological research can be appreciated (see Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi recognises that understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the descriptive philosophical phenomenological approach will result in research that is clear in its purpose, structure, and findings (Penner and McClement, 2008). Despite this, it is argued by Martínková and Parry (2011, p.197) that Giorgi's modified method is 'emptying'

Husserl's philosophical method 'of its phenomenological meaning'. However, Giorgi's modification of Husserl's philosophical phenomenological method simply means that Husserl's fundamental concepts are being applied at the *scientific* rather than the *transcendental* level. In fact, Husserl himself acknowledged that his approach held promise for use within psychological inquiry, but would first need to be modified (Churchill and Wertz, 2015).

Throughout their paper, Martínková and Parry (2011) critique Giorgi's method from a philosophical phenomenological standpoint. It is important to note that at no point does Giorgi claim to be using Husserl's descriptive philosophical phenomenological method. Therefore, it can be argued that Martínková and Parry's (2011) arguments are undermined, as they are critiquing research that is occurring at a scientific level from the standpoint of an approach that operates from a philosophical or transcendental level. As such, it is argued that the authors have misunderstood the reasons as to why Giorgi has modified Husserl's philosophical phenomenological method in the first place. For example, Martínková and Parry (2011) discuss the impossibility of describing a philosophical essence in research that requires empirical analysis. However, Giorgi clearly differentiates between a philosophical and a scientific essence and at no point claims to be describing the essence of a phenomena at the philosophical level, as doing so would transcend psychological interests (Giorgi, 2009). This is because at the philosophical level the researcher enters into the transcendental phenomenological attitude of reduction and is concerned with the characteristics of phenomena that transcend all context and disciplines i.e. the universal essence (Giorgi, 2009). Consequently, psychological research cannot be conducted from within this attitude of transcendental consciousness as it requires the researcher to transcend all of their knowledge regarding the world, their own discipline and the constructs that are related to

it (Ashworth, 1999). Therefore, psychological dynamics and the psychological nature of phenomena are not considered in a philosophical analysis (Giorgi, 2009).

Instead of searching for essences in the philosophical sense, the descriptive psychological phenomenological method explicates the invariant structure of phenomena within the data through a modified version of Husserl's transcendental phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2009). The modification of this step requires the researcher to adopt the (scientific) phenomenological attitude within which the researcher must maintain a mode of consciousness that is sensitive to the world and also to the discipline of sport psychology i.e. adopt a discipline specific attitude within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, at the scientific level, the researcher seeks to determine higher-level eidetic invariant meanings rather than a universal essence (Giorgi, 2009). These higher-level eidetic invariant meanings that belong to the structure are considered to be general rather than universal, as the findings transcend the situation in which they were obtained, but they still remain dependent upon context (Giorgi, 2009). This is supported by Husserl who stated that at the psychological level, the less radical psychological phenomenological reduction is what is required in order to access the participant's psychological lived experiences (Husserl, 1977; Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, it is argued that Martínková and Parry's (2011) claim that Giorgi's approach empties Husserl's philosophical method of its phenomenological meaning is misplaced.

Perhaps it is due to the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the existing phenomenological research in sport psychology, which will be discussed below, that has led Martínková and Parry (2011) to believe that phenomenological research is not possible at the scientific level. However, it is argued that Martínková and Parry's (2011)

critique shows a lack of understanding and is also contradictory at times. For example, the authors state that ‘in scientific enquiry, the researcher must master the concepts, methodology and equipment to be employed. So a phenomenological enquiry should be based not only on a mastery of the subject area but also on...how its concepts and methods are to be employed’ (p.194–195). This is precisely what Giorgi has achieved in the description of his descriptive psychological phenomenological method (see Giorgi, 2009). It is also interesting to note that despite the criticism imparted by the authors in this article, Martínková and Parry (2011) do not offer any guidelines themselves or procedural suggestions for how to improve Giorgi’s method. The following section will offer a critique of the use of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature to date.

3.9.1 A critique of the use of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature

An issue that has been identified in the sport psychology literature is that many researchers claim to have employed a phenomenological approach without explicitly highlighting if the approach was descriptive or interpretive etc., the philosophical underpinnings or any phenomenological terminology. For example, research by Gouju et al. (2007) claimed to have employed a ‘psycho-phenomenological’ approach to study the presence of opponents in hurdle races. The data collection method was referred to as an ‘explication interview’, and there was no mention of the philosophical underpinnings of the approach, which should drive the phenomenological data collection process (Lowe and Prowse, 2001). In fact, it is unclear from reading this study what an explication interview actually is and how it relates to a phenomenological approach. To further this, there existed no discussion of the steps used for data analysis which raises concern as to whether this approach was in fact phenomenological at all.

In her in-depth and illuminating reflective account of her experience of using phenomenology as a methodology whilst looking at the experience of extreme sport, Willig (2008) stated that she had chosen Colaizzi's (1978) steps for analysis as this was the researcher's first attempt at using phenomenology and a structured guide was desired. Although this is understandable, the author does not explicitly discuss which philosophical underpinnings her approach was derived from. Even when one places Giorgi's critique of Colaizzi's steps for analysis aside, a further issue is raised as to whether the data collected in Willig's study is congruent to the phenomenological approach employed during data analysis as the chosen phenomenological method has not been explicitly stated throughout the study. Research by Bruner and colleagues (2008) also claimed to use a phenomenological approach. However, the data collection methods in this research were focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The use of these data collection methods was justified by the authors through drawing upon the trustworthiness measures by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for qualitative research. However, as discussed previously in this chapter, these measures were intended to be aimed at qualitative research. Phenomenological research has differing criteria for ensuring that the research is rigorous (Giorgi, 2009). For the data analysis, the terms mentioned by the authors included triangulation and coding of the data, both of which are not synonymous with any branch of phenomenological research. Throughout this paper, no phenomenological underpinnings were mentioned, neither were the important methodological criteria that Giorgi (2006) identified as being a critical aspect for classifying as descriptive psychological phenomenological research.

Similarly, a recent study by Gamble et al. (2013, p.252) which investigated the role, impact and interaction of sport chaplains and sport psychologists within English Premiership Soccer, employed a 'broadly phenomenological approach'. The authors

stated that they ‘drew upon’ methodological guidelines by Giorgi and Giorgi (2008), which suggests that the research approach was descriptive psychological phenomenology. However, there was no mention of the philosophical underpinnings of descriptive phenomenology or the steps used for analysis. It is important for researchers to understand that it is not feasible to use phenomenology in a ‘broad’ sense. To further this, a researcher cannot claim to use a descriptive psychological phenomenological approach for their study and fail to make explicit the use of the very thing that makes it a descriptive approach: the (scientific) phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2006). As stated previously, researchers must make explicit what branch of phenomenology they have selected as the philosophical underpinnings of the method will influence how data collection and analysis is approached, and therefore, how the findings can be understood (Lowe and Prowse, 2001; O’Halloran et al, 2016). Similarly, research by Brymer and Schweitzer (2013) which investigated fear and anxiety in extreme sports, also failed to explicitly state what phenomenological approach had been employed. Although the use of bracketing was mentioned when describing the interview process, the authors stated that the data was thematically analysed. In fact, the term ‘interpretation’ was explicitly stated which directly contradicts the use of bracketing. By failing to make explicit the phenomenological approach used for research it is argued that internal consistency is absent between the philosophical underpinnings and the data collection and analysis phase which will affect the rigour of this study (Sousa, 2014). Lastly, a study by Clarke and Harwood (2014) employed a descriptive phenomenological approach to guide the study design. This was in the form of semi-structured phenomenological interviews and data analysis based on Giorgi’s (2009) descriptive phenomenological approach. Although the phenomenological approach employed was clearly stated, there appears to be incongruence in relation to the philosophical underpinnings. As discussed previously,

the use of semi-structured interviews is more congruent to the aims of the interpretive phenomenological approach, as it allows the researcher to participate in the data collection process through the use of pre-prepared and closed questions (Lowe and Prowse, 2001). Further to this and similar to research by Brymer and Schweitzer (2013), bracketing was not mentioned but alluded to during data collection and the term 'interpreted' was explicitly stated in the data analysis section. This directly contradicts the use of bracketing which the authors claimed to have employed throughout data analysis in this paper. This lack of clarity surrounding the approach is not surprising considering that, with the exception of O'Halloran et al.'s (2016) recently published paper, there is no literature in sport psychology at present which provides guidance on *how to* actually carry out the descriptive psychological phenomenological research in sport psychology and what is required from a procedural standpoint. However, literature discussing its strengths and value as a research tool is readily available (e.g. Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004).

Phenomenological approaches such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and interpretive phenomenology have appeared more frequently within the field of sport psychology. However, it can be argued that these approaches have not been applied consistently or accurately so far either. IPA as a research method was developed by a psychologist called Smith (1996) and is becoming increasingly popular in mainstream psychology research (Smith and Osborn, 2008; Brocki and Wearden, 2010; Giorgi, 2010). IPA claims to be rooted in the area of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Brocki and Wearden, 2010). The key aims of IPA are: to explore in detail the participant's perspective of the phenomena under investigation and to contribute to psychological understanding through interrogating or illuminating already existing research (Smith et al., 1999). The IPA approach argues that the researcher's own

conceptions are necessary in order to make sense of the participant's personal world (Smith, et al., 1999). In other words, IPA is an interpretive approach and the joint reflections of both the participant and the researcher inform the analysis and findings of the research (Osborn and Smith, 1998).

According to Smith (1996), IPA is phenomenological as it is interested in the individual's personal perception or account of an event or object and it recognises that research is a dynamic process. However, Smith and Osborn (2008, p.54) stated that 'there is no single definitive way to do IPA'. This lack of a fixed method makes the possibility of procedurally replicating an IPA study, which is a crucial for rigorous scientific research, an almost impossible task (Giorgi, 2011). To further this, researchers in IPA have referred to the use of bracketing in their studies which is a central concept of the descriptive phenomenological method. Although Giorgi (2010, 2011) argues that IPA is incongruent with his descriptive psychological phenomenological approach due to the interpretive role that the researcher plays, Smith et al. (2009) claim that IPA draws from different branches of phenomenology and deliberately so. Perhaps this in an attempt to satisfy the namesake of this approach by being both interpretative and 'phenomenological' (Brocki and Wearden, 2010). Whatever the reason, it is argued that IPA is neglectful of the philosophical underpinnings of each phenomenological method, all of which are so radically different they simply cannot be unified into a single approach. By failing to acknowledge this, it is argued that IPA is guilty of 'method-slurring' (Holloway, 2005). As a result, Giorgi views IPA as a 'phenomenologically inspired' approach rather than a rigorous phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2011).

In the sport psychology literature, the majority of studies which claim to use an interpretive branch of phenomenology do not detail the philosophical underpinnings of their chosen phenomenological approach. To further this, the steps taken to analyse the

data are not made explicit, with some researchers even citing references that advocate the use of the descriptive phenomenological approach (see Fahlberg et al., 1992, Dale, 2000, Nicholls, 2007, Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2010, Fawcett, 2011 and Lundkvist et al., 2012). This suggests that perhaps researchers in sport psychology are engaging with phenomenology on a superficial level through ‘borrowing’ some aspects of phenomenology without referring to any underpinning theory (Allen-Collinson, 2009). When this is indeed the case, it can be argued that the research may better fit the remit of another qualitative approach instead (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

This neglect of the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenological approaches in the sport psychology literature is arguably caused by a lack of awareness of their importance, as other quantitative and qualitative methods do not require researchers to possess such an in-depth knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings of the approach. Furthermore, researchers who are aware of the importance of the philosophical underpinnings of the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach may be deterred from doing so by the terminology and strong philosophical foundations which are not used in other research methods (Kerry and Armour, 2001). This means that a great deal of effort is required to understand what the approach requires (Kerry and Armour, 2001). Finally, it is asserted that perhaps the tendency in the literature to drift towards interpretative practice (e.g. thematic analysis, triangulation) has occurred because of the dominance of the natural attitude and positivist tendencies within sport psychology research, which looks to interpret relationships between factors, rather than to describe meaning (Parry et al., 2007). To further this, it is postulated that transformation and interpretation of the world has become the unquestioned, accepted and expected role of a researcher in the human sciences.

Whatever the reason, the identified issues are problematic from the researcher's point of view as the quality of phenomenological research in particular, is dependent on the data generated during the data collection (Lowes and Prowse, 2001). The phenomenological approach must be congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of the method from data collection right through to analysis (O'Halloran et al., 2016). By failing to establish and clarify their philosophical stance the researcher is in danger of shifting philosophical positions 'mid-stream' (Giorgi, 2006, p.317) and falling into the trap of considering phenomenology as one singular method meaning the analysis and results will potentially be 'contaminated' (Lowes and Prowse, 2001; O'Halloran et al., 2016). To further this, it is argued that 'contaminated' data will prevent the reader from clearly understanding how findings have been arrived at, making it difficult to identify what should be focused upon in future studies (Lowes and Prowse, 2001).

3.10 Why Utilise Descriptive Psychological Phenomenology in Sport Psychology Research?

Although descriptive psychological phenomenology and phenomenological approaches have been inadequately understood and inconsistently applied so far, it is nevertheless encouraging to note that researchers are attempting to employ it with the domain of sport psychology (O'Halloran et al., 2016). This chapter will finish by creating an argument as to why this approach holds such great potential for research in the field of sport psychology (Nesti 2004, 2011). From an applied perspective, it is argued that there is a lack of literature in the field related to the personal experience of athletes and *what it is like* to be an athlete as described by the athlete in a way that is free from interpretations and theoretical assumptions. This arguably means that both trainee and newly qualified practitioners may find themselves unprepared for what to truly expect in the applied setting when providing 1:1 support.

As discussed, a descriptive psychological phenomenological approach is used in research when little is known about an issue (Penner and McClement, 2008). By employing descriptive psychological phenomenology, the researcher aims to create new knowledge and to understand the invariant meaning structure of a phenomenon under investigation from the perspective of those directly experiencing it (Giorgi, 1997). In doing so, descriptive psychological phenomenology provides an unbiased foundation for further inquiry into important and often times misunderstood concepts within sport (Nesti, 2004, 2011). For example, descriptive psychological phenomenology can facilitate the study of a number of important terms such as spirit, courage, love, dreams, fear and hope which are rarely considered in the literature, yet are widely referred to in all types of sports (Kerry and Armour, 2001; Nesti, 2011). This is because descriptive psychological phenomenology recognises the importance of the ‘irreal’ givens, i.e. the terms and concepts such as those mentioned which do not have a corresponding object, but are hugely significant in the life of the athlete. The descriptive psychological phenomenological method allows the meaning of these concepts to be captured as the researcher sets aside their ‘natural attitude and instead focuses solely on our immediate and present experience of (the phenomenon)’ (Cooper, 2003, p.10). In doing so, descriptive psychological phenomenology makes the important move away from the dominant positivist tendencies in sport psychology literature to one of human experience and discovery (Giorgi, 2005). By shifting from a cause-effect focus towards the clarification of the invariant structures of phenomena, this approach respects and maintains the integrity of the athlete’s experience, as well as the assumption that the meaning of the participants’ descriptions arise from the intentional relations that they have with their world (Sousa, 2014).

The rigorous and systematic method of Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenological method will yield findings that may not only enhance and advance the sport psychology literature but may also provide guidance for practitioners to better understand the world that their athletes live in (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007; Penner and McClement, 2008, O'Halloran et al., 2016). Further to this, descriptive psychological phenomenological techniques (e.g. 'bracketing' whilst listening to an athlete's description of an event, responding by asking open-ended, non-leading questions) may also be drawn upon by sport psychologists in an applied capacity whilst supporting athletes during their complex and personal journey through elite sport (Nesti, 2004; O'Halloran et al., 2016). In conclusion, the use of descriptive psychological phenomenology in sport psychology research is still in its preliminary stages compared to phenomenological research in mainstream psychology and other human science disciplines (O'Halloran et al., 2016). However, this chapter has highlighted for readers in the field of sport psychology some challenges and most importantly the potential that the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach holds in allowing the athlete to describe their experiences more fully. By focusing on 'lived experiences' and allowing the athlete to be the expert, the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach may provide an unparalleled rich, unique and in-depth account of the experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, it is asserted that such an approach will not only strengthen the sport psychology literature, but also the knowledge of practitioners working within the applied world of professional sport.

Chapter Four

Research Study

(i) Prelude

As discussed in Chapter 2, Premier League Academy football is arguably an environment where athletes may be especially susceptible to experiencing ‘critical moments’. As such, the literature review for the study presented in this Chapter will explicitly highlight the organisational culture and environment that young, talented footballers exist in as they progress through the development pathway. In order to do so, the FA Charter for Quality (1997) and Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP; Premier League, 2011) will be discussed and evaluated. Current issues within Academy football will then be addressed. These areas will be considered from an Erikson (1959, 1959) and Marcia (1966) identity development perspective. In Chapter 2, a broad consideration of both the athletic identity literature and career transitions across sport in general was presented. However, as this study aims to illuminate the lived experience of what Premier League Academy players perceive to be ‘critical moments’ within their career, the research that will be reviewed in this Chapter will focus specifically on professional football. The method and results for this study will then be presented. This will be followed by a critical discussion of the findings. Implications and future research will also be considered.

(ii) Statement of Purpose

This chapter addresses the following aims of the thesis:

- (4) Identify the importance of investigating the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ within the career of elite athletes.
- (8) Employ the method of descriptive psychological phenomenology to illuminate the lived experience of what Premier League Academy players perceive to be critical moments within their career.

Related Publications and Conference Presentations:

O’Halloran, L., Littlewood, M., Richardson, D. & Nesti, M. (2018). ‘Identity development in Premier League academy football.’ *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 36(1), 1–94. Paper presented at British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Annual Conference, Harrogate Convention Centre, North Yorkshire, U.K. 27th–28th November. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2018.1521633>

O’Halloran, L., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M. & Nesti, M. (2017). ‘The effect of ‘critical moments’ on identity development in Premier League Academy football players.’ Paper

presented at the International Conference on Social Identity and Sport (ICSIS), KU Leuven, Belgium 1–2nd July 2017.

O'Halloran, L., Littlewood, M., Richardson, D., Tod, D. & Nesti, M. (2016). Doing descriptive phenomenological data collection in sport psychology research. *Sport in Society. Special issue: Research Methodologies in Sport Scholarship*, 1–12. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2016.1159199>.

O'Halloran, L., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M. & Nesti, M. (2014). 'Critical moments' and identity in elite Premier League Academy football. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 32(2), 12–14. Paper presented at British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Annual Conference, St. George's Park, U.K. 25–26th November. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2014.968373>.

O'Halloran, L. (2013). 'Employing descriptive phenomenology within sport psychology research: Challenges encountered and resolutions explored.' Paper presented at British Psychological Society (BPS) Qualitative Research in Psychology, Huddersfield University, Huddersfield, UK 4–5th September 2013.

Nesti, M., Littlewood, M., O'Halloran, L., Eubank, M. & Richardson, D. (2012). 'Critical moments' in elite Premiership football: Who do you think you are? *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*, 56(1), 23–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10141-012-0027-y>.

4.1 Introduction

Over the years, the athletic career development literature has evolved from a once prevailing focus on talent development, toward the more recent inclusion of psychosocial factors such as emotion and cognition and social support. In line with this, the sport psychology literature has begun to consider the impact that transitions may have across the career-span of an athlete (Stambulova, et al., 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2, the transition framework has moved from the model of human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981), the athletic career termination model (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994), the athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003), and finally, the developmental model of transition (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Although these models provided important advancements in the literature in relation to career development from a psychosocial perspective, none considered Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory of personality development in tandem, despite similarities being present in the career and personality

development timeframes. For instance, Erikson's (1950, 1959) fifth stage 'identity vs. identity diffusion' is believed to take place between the ages of 12–18 years. In the talent development literature, the 'specialising years' take place aged 13–15 years, followed by the 'investment years' which begin aged 16+ years (Côté, 1999). From an Eriksonian perspective, the adolescent athlete may develop an exclusive or foreclosed identity due to the large amounts of time invested into their sport during these crucial formative years (Brewer et al., 1993). As discussed, foreclosed individuals will not have the prior experience of solving an identity crisis (Erikson, 1950, 1959). As such, the athlete may be unable to effectively resolve the conflict caused by a threat to their athletic identity which likely occurs whilst dealing with a career transition (see Grove et al., 1997; Lavalley et al., 1997). This may result in a crisis-transition or an aggravated crisis, which may lead to the acquisition of unhealthy personality characteristics, including core pathologies (Erikson, 1950, 1959). As such, consideration of Erikson's (1950, 1959) theory within the transition literature may explain various research findings which suggest that repeated failure to cope with a career transition is often followed by negative long-term consequences and emotional disturbances, such as premature dropout from sport, neuroses, depression and substance abuse (Stambulova, 2009; Stambulova and Wylleman, 2014).

The most explored transition in the sport psychology literature to date has been career termination (see Park et al., 2012 for a systematic review of the career transition literature). Research is beginning to emerge which looks at normative within-career transitions (see Pummell, 2008; Morris et al., 2015, 2016). However, besides from extremely recent research on injury as a career transition (see Ivarsson et al., 2016), to the best of the researcher's knowledge, non-normative transitions within a career (e.g. de-selection, injury) have been sparsely investigated. Events such as these, are often

emotionally charged and represent extremely challenging periods in the life of an athlete (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). As such, it is argued that the word ‘transition’, which holds connotations of steadiness and an ease of negotiation, is not appropriate when describing such critical events (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012). Due to the often sudden and impactful nature of these incidents Nesti and Littlewood (2011) suggest that the term ‘critical moments’ is a more accurate and representative phrase to describe moments such as these within an athletic career.

A ‘critical moment’ is defined as an event which is ‘large or small, intended or unintended, and may have a positive or negative effect on a person’s sense of self’ (Nesti et al., 2012, p.3). Within professional football, ‘critical moments’ may include a career threatening injury, de-selection, being appointed as team captain, being sent out on loan or transferred to another club, being ignored by staff for prolonged periods of time, moving from the Academy to the first team or events that may not be directly linked to the sport, such as matters to do with personal relationships (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). Events such as these, are encountered frequently during the career of an elite football player (Nesti et al., 2012). The meaning of the term ‘critical moment’ is grounded in, and equivalent to, the existential psychological concept of ‘boundary situations’ (Nesti, 2004). A boundary situation is defined as ‘...an event, or an urgent experience, that propels one into a confrontation with one’s existential situation in the world’ (Yalom, 1980, p.159). It invokes anxiety, and when confronted, instigates a radical shift in one’s life perspective (Yalom, 1980). In sport, athletes are required to confront the anxiety associated with ‘critical moments’ which may challenge, or relate to, an important change in their performance, career or identity (Nesti and Littlewood, 2009; Nesti et al., 2012). Initially, ‘critical moments’ may be perceived by the athlete as positive or negative, particularly where change is involved or their progression or success is viewed as

precarious (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). Interestingly, initial positive or negative perceptions of a 'critical moment' may change for an athlete who views their experience with the 'wisdom of hindsight' further down the line. Regardless, it is argued that facing the existential anxiety associated with a 'critical moment' is a powerful opportunity for personal growth and creating a more authentic self (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). As such, 'critical moments' have the potential to lead to a deeper sense of self-understanding and purpose in the athlete (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). The experiencing of 'critical moments' may also help the player to develop characteristics which may benefit their journey through the high pressure world of Premier League football (Nesti et al., 2012). For instance, personal qualities such as mental toughness, courage and self-knowledge are often developed after resolving existential crises, which occur alongside the experience of a 'critical moment' (Nesti, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 2, athletes within high performance sports are likely to experience 'critical moments' at any given time (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). However, it is argued that Premier League Academy football is an environment where athletes may be especially susceptible to experiencing 'critical moments'. In order to examine this point, the next section will further consider the organisational culture and environment that young, talented footballers exist in, as they progress through the development pathway at a Premier League football Academy.

Organisational culture has been defined as 'deep rooted beliefs, values and assumptions widely shared by organisational members that powerfully shape the identity and behavioural norms for the group' (Wallace and Weese, 1995 p.183). Literature which draws upon organisational psychology in order to explain facets of athletic development has recently emerged in the sport psychology literature (see Fletcher and Wagstaff, 2009; Kaiser et al., 2009 and Schroeder, 2010). For instance, Wagstaff et al. (2011) emphasised the need to focus on organisational success factors alongside athletic development with

their notion of Positive Organisational Psychology in Sport (POPS). Building on the athletic development and transition literature discussed in Chapter 2, Henriksen et al. (2010) and Henriksen et al. (2011a) conceptualised the holistic ecological approach to athletic development. Instead of focusing on career paths and challenges that arise in athletic and non-athletic domains (e.g. Wylleman and Lavalle's (2004) Developmental Model of Career Transition), the holistic ecological approach explores athletic development from the perspective of the complex interactions between athletes and their environment. In other words, it views the environment and the surrounding culture as the critical point from which to initiate the study of athletic development (Henriksen et al., 2010; Henriksen et al., 2011; Pink et al., 2015). Despite these advances in the literature and the call for a greater consideration of organisational culture in sport, Kaiser et al. (2009, p.298) contended that scientific discussion in this area is 'still in its infancy.' A limitation of this small body research is that there is a tendency to generalise existing notions of organisational culture across all sporting domains when in reality it is dependent on the performance context (Kaiser et al., 2009). In order to address this criticism, the following section will exclusively address the organisational culture within the specific context of English Premier League football. It is asserted that doing so may offer new insight into athletic development through the lived experience of youth elite Premier League Academy footballers.

4.1.1 Implementation of the EPPP

'Many are called, but few are chosen' ~ (Matt, 22:14)

In 1997, Howard Wilkinson, the Technical Director of the Football Association (FA) at the time, presented a document known as the FA Charter for Quality (Howie and Allison, 2016). This publication contained the pioneering proposal of a club based Academy

system (Howie and Allison, 2016). Prior to this, team membership and the amount of football a young player played was unregulated. Consequently, talented youth players would often play schools, district, county, national and school representative football (e.g. Merseyside schools) (Campbell, 2017). If a player refused to play for a school representative team, the school could stop the player from representing his professional club teams (Campbell, 2017). These games would typically take place on a Sunday. Additionally, players who were signed to professional club teams were expected to be present at first-team home games at the weekend (Campbell, 2017). Such a schedule dominated talented youth players' time, often resulting in a lack of meaningful investment in other areas of their lives outside of football (Campbell, 2017).

The FA Charter for Quality (1997) aimed to address the existing set-up, and in doing so, placed a core focus on youth development. Youth players were split into 3 categories based on age. Players in the U9–11 age group could register with the club for one year at a time. They could not play for the club if they lived more than an hours drive away. They participated in 3 coaching hours per week. Players in the U12–16 age group could not be recruited if they lived more than a 90-minute drive away. They participated in 5 coaching hours per week. They were permitted to play school and club football until the age of 16. Players in the U17–18 age group could sign professional contracts with their club from the age of 17. They participated in 12 coaching hours per week. In terms of games, they played a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 30 per season. The facilities at these Academies were also standardised. Under the FA Charter for Quality (1997), there existed a requirement for each Academy to have outdoor and indoor training facilities, and a trained medical team as a compulsory part of their backroom staff. In total, players were expected to engage in a total of 3,760 hours of coaching time as they progressed through the specified age groups (U9–U18).

Table 3. *FA Charter for Quality (1997) age group recruitment and coaching specifications.*

	U9–11	U12–16	U17–18
Recruitment (distance by car)	1 hour	90 minutes	N/A
Coaching hours (per week)	3 hours	5 hours	12 hours
Total coaching hours (U9–U18) = 3,760 hours			

Although the FA’s Charter for Quality (1997) undoubtedly made important contributions to the advancement of youth football, the evolution of the talent development literature has fuelled the current view that this publication is outdated. The catalyst for this thinking arguably stemmed from the increasing interest in an article published by Ericsson et al. (1993) which investigated the role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. In this article, it is argued that expert performance is dependent upon 10,000 hours of deliberate practice over a ten-year time span (Ericsson et al., 1993). Defined narrowly, deliberate practice refers to activities that require intentional cognitive or physical effort, do not result in immediate extrinsic rewards and are undertaken with the goal of improving performance (Ericsson et al., 1993). Over time, this notion became the focus of copious journal articles, book chapters and ‘pop’ scientific literature. In fact, Ericsson et al.’s (1993) paper has been cited over 7,500 times within the talent development literature. As a result, it began to receive widespread publicity across numerous high performance domains, including sport. It is suggested that such an idea appeared attractive for individuals who, in the past, may have felt that talent alone governed success. However, it is important to highlight that most of the support for this ‘10,000-hour rule’ comes from anecdotal evidence within the ‘pop’ scientific literature. Nevertheless, the idea of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice has been accepted within English football as a valid model from which to base the progression of young players

(Premier League, 2011). This is in stark contrast to research carried by Nesti and Sulley (2015), which aimed to identify best practice at seven of the world's top clubs for youth development. From this sample, the authors reported that AJ Auxerre had the maximum number of training hours which totaled to 4,700 from U9 up to U19. Surprisingly, Barcelona had the minimum number of training hours, totaling 2,760 from U9 up to U19.

The Premier League began to update its youth development scheme and in 2012/2013, introduced the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP). The overall aim of the EPPP is to create a long-term strategy with emphasis on increasing the number of 'home-grown' players gaining professional contracts and playing first-team football in the Premier League (Premier League, 2011). The EPPP stated that the progression of English players through football Academies can be achieved through creating an elite environment that encompasses all aspects of player development (Premier League, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012; Nesti and Sulley, 2015; Roe and Parker, 2016). As such, English football Academies must incorporate a standardised program of technical and personal development into their club environment (Roe and Parker, 2016). In the technical area, the EPPP drew inspiration from previously discussed models of talent development by Bloom (1985) and Côtè (1999). For instance, the EPPP adopted notions from the previously discussed '10,000-hours rule' and the concept of deliberate practice (Premier League, 2011). To supplement this, the EPPP placed a great level of importance on the notion of phase by phase development. These phases adopted a similar timeline found in Côtè's (1999) Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP; see table 4 on the next page).

Table 4. *EPPP phases and DMSP stages with similar corresponding age ranges.*

EPPP		Côté (1999) stages of talent development	
Foundation phase	U5–U11	Sampling years	6–12 years
Youth Development phase	U12–U16	Specialising years	13–15 years
Professional Development phase	U17+	Investment years	16+ years

As discussed in Chapter 2, Côté’s (1999) ‘specialising’ and ‘investment’ years, and interestingly, the phases of development delineated by the EPPP, coincide with Erikson’s (1950, 1959) fifth stage of identity vs. identity diffusion’ (12–18 years). During the ‘specialising’ years the child typically selects a sport that they are most skilled at to specialise in and from then, invest vast amounts of time in training and practice (Vealey et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2016). According to the EPPP, during the Youth Development phase the young players engage in formal practice sessions for 12 rising to 16 hours per week. In the Professional Development phase, the formal practice sessions accumulate a total of 16 hours per week (see Table 5). Due to the time commitment imposed by the EPPP, it is reasonable to suggest from an Eriksonian perspective, that young players may be at risk of forgoing the exploration of various identities, other than that of being a footballer. In these instances, the young player will most likely develop an exclusive or foreclosed (athletic) identity by the end of adolescence (Mitchell et al., 2014). From a psychosocial perspective, the authors of the EPPP claimed to have aligned the program with the idea that the talent development process presented different demands upon players, coaches and families, depending on the phase of development the athletes were at. In addition to the technical aspect of player development, the EPPP also placed greater emphasis on the holistic development of the player (e.g. lifestyle management and education) (Premier League, 2011; Roe and Parker, 2016). However, due to the

possibility of young players developing an exclusive or foreclosed (athletic) identity, it is argued that the EPPP has helped to pave the way for the development of ‘craft idiots’ (Marx, 1955; Gray and Polman, 2004) rather than well-rounded individuals. ‘Craft idiocy’ refers to the notion that individuals may become experts at their crafts, but may lack understanding of other methods and abilities which leaves them at a disadvantage within societal interrelations, and indeed in their lives post sport (Marx, 1955; Gray and Polman, 2004). Despite this, the EPPP as a whole, provided a new and more radical vision for the way in which talent is developed in English football. The following section will discuss in further detail the main developments proposed by the EPPP. As this study took place at a Category 1 Academy, the following section will place an emphasis on Category 1 Academy rules and regulations.

4.1.1.1 EPPP categorisation. The EPPP categorises Academies in a four-tiered hierarchical system using an audit measure which is primarily based upon club finances, coaching provisions and the quality of each clubs’ training facilities and resources (Weedon, 2015). Category 1 status is considered to be ‘the pinnacle’ of English Academy football.

4.1.1.2 EPPP recruitment. The EPPP states that Category 1 clubs are now permitted to recruit players freely on a national scale from U12 level and above (Premier League, 2011). Category 2 to Category 4 Academies are restricted from recruiting players outside of a 90-minute radius until U16 level (Premier League, 2011). To further this, prior to the EPPP, a club wishing to sign a youth Academy player from another club had to agree on a transfer fee in order to do so. However, the EPPP has lowered and capped such fees, which arguably benefits Category 1 Academies who can now attract unproven youth talent from Category 2–4 Academies at relatively low financial risk. As such, remuneration for ‘lower’ Academies who lose their younger players to a Category 1

Academy is minor compared to their potential market value, particularly if the player was recruited at U16 level (Weedon, 2015). From a business perspective, this makes it difficult for Category 2 to Category 4 Academies to improve their finances which in turn impacts on their quality of facilities, contact hours, quota of employed support staff etc. In fact, since the EPPP came into effect, numerous Academies have decided to shut down, each citing financial constraints as the reason (e.g. Wycombe Wanderers, Hereford Town, Yeovil Town, and Brentford FC).

4.1.1.3 EPPP coaching hours. In terms of player development, Category 1 clubs are granted up to 8,500 coaching hours over a 40–42-week period from U9–U18, whereas Category 3 clubs are only granted 3,600 hours over the same time scale (Premier League, 2011). To fit in the number of coaching hours at Category 1 level, clubs are granted access to the players on weekdays during ‘core coaching hours’ (Premier League, 2011). Core coaching hours are considered to be between 9am and 5pm. In order to meet this requirement, a ‘day release’ program is set-up by Category 1 clubs in conjunction with the players’ schools. (Premier League, 2011). As part of this program, players are released to the Academy during school hours. It is assumed that as well as training, tutoring will take place at the Academy so the players do not fall behind in their education.

Table 5. *EPPP Category 1 Academy age group recruitment and coaching specifications.*

EPPP Category 1 Academy	U5–11	U12–16	U17–18
Recruitment (distance by car)	1 hour	National	International
Coaching hours (per week)	4 rising to 8 hours	12 rising to 16 hours	16 hours
Total number of coaching hours (U9–U18) = up to 8,500 hours			

4.1.1.4 EPPP education. As mentioned previously, the EPPP permits Category 1 Academies to recruit youth players nationally from U12 onwards. As a result, many

players must relocate in order to join a Category 1 Academy program. The players who move long distances also have to attend a new school. As a result, many clubs have a partnership with a 'link' school near the Academy. This is a school that all Academy players will attend (with the exception of some local players who may wish to enroll in a school that is known to them) when they are not on 'day release'. These 'link' schools are generally purpose built 'Academy extensions' which aim to cater specifically for the players' educational needs. Generally speaking, these extensions form part of a wider school setup. However, only players, teachers and those affiliated with the club are permitted access to this particular facility. As such, the players are separated from the other students and their peers. Category 2 Academies must also cater for players' educational needs as training sessions fall within core coaching hours. Due to the Academy operating within the 90-minute rule, less educational provisions are needed. Category 3 and Category 4 Academies do not have the option to run a 'day release' program. As these Academies cannot recruit outside of a 90-minute radius, these clubs do not require 'link' schools. This means that the specified coaching hours need to be met on evenings and weekends.

4.1.1.5 EPPP finances. Category 1 clubs typically have the largest budgets in the Premier League. These Academies will exceed £2.3 million per annum in expenditure (Nesti and Sulley, 2015). This means that investments can be made in state of the art facilities that are owned by the club itself. Category 2 to Category 4 Academies do not have to meet the same criteria as a Category 1 Academy, particularly for player education and welfare (Nesti and Sulley, 2015). As a result, the Academies in these categories receive less funding from the EPPP (Nesti and Sulley, 2015). To put finances into perspective, Category 1 Academies receive a maximum of £775,000 in funding from the EPPP whilst Category 4 Academies receive £67,000 per year in funding. As such, it is not uncommon

for clubs in the lower categories to have to share or rent facilities for their training sessions due to financial restrictions.

To conclude, the EPPP replaced the FA's Charter for Quality (1997) and aimed to standardise the development of youth football across English Football Academies. The hierarchical status attached to each Academy governs the amount of contact time youth players have with their club. As discussed, the increase in contact hours is based upon the 10,000 hours 'rule' and the idea of deliberate practice (Côté, 1999; Premier League, 2011). The status of the Academy affects player recruitment and finances. Category 1 Academies have benefitted from the freedom of movement ruling amongst domestic players from U12 level and above (Premier League, 2011). These academies also receive substantial monetary investment from the Premier League each season compared to the Academies who have been placed in the lower tiers of the hierarchy. Although the EPPP was intended to enhance youth talent development, critics argue that it is denying Football League clubs the opportunity to produce young players or to receive fair compensation if they are recruited by Category 1 Academies. In essence, it can be argued that the EPPP has served in making Category 1 Academies richer (in talent and finances), and Category 2 to Category 4 Academies poorer in the same areas.

4.2 Current Issues in Academy Football

At present, there are an estimated 12,500 players in the English Academy system (Magowan, 2015). Under the EPPP, it is envisaged that 'home-grown' players will progress from development centres, through to Academy football. The progression to U16 level is broken down into two phases: the foundation phase (U5–U11) and the youth development phase (U12–U16). Players who are considered talented enough to progress further, will be formally offered an U16–U18 Scholarship which result in a two-year full-time development programme at the Academy (Richardson et al., 2004). This Scholarship

incorporates education in the form of a B-Tech (Richardson et al., 2004). Ultimately, it provides the players with a finite window of opportunity to achieve their dream of becoming a professional football player (Mills et al., 2014). Once the two years are completed, players are typically offered a professional contract at U18 level or released from their club (Brown and Potrac, 2009). At this stage, players may find another club (professional or amateur) or drop out from football altogether. Those who are offered a professional contract will then enter into the Professional Development phase (Premier League, 2011). However, it is important to highlight that, out of all of the young boys who enter into the Premier League Academy at the age of 9, <0.5% achieve a career as professional footballer (Romeo, 2017). In fact, despite an estimated £40million annual investment in football Academies across the UK, only between 25–30 English players aged 23 years or below play for a Premier League first team each year (Green, 2009; Bullough and Mills, 2014).

As suggested by the figures above, many talented youth players enter into Academy set-ups, often hailed as the next future star. However, the vast majority will fail to perform at the expected standard that is required in order to cement their place within the professional ranks (Relvas et al., 2010). This lack of emergent youth talent is not only a source of concern for the Premier League, but for governing bodies affiliated with Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Federations also (Richardson et al., 2005; Relvas et al., 2010). In an attempt to address this issue, UEFA introduced a new rule which stated that by the 2008-2009 season, clubs who compete in UEFA competitions, which includes English football clubs, must have 4 players from their own Academy within their squad, and 4 ‘home-grown’ players too (Relvas et al., 2010). However, despite these changes in ruling and direct efforts to address this issue there still appears to be a lack of talent progression through Premier League Academies (Anderson

and Miller, 2011). For the majority, the transition out of elite level football will occur during adolescence or early adulthood (i.e. prior to U16 level or post Scholarship at U18 level) (Weedon, 2011). Therefore, despite the huge investment of time, money and resources at English Academy level football, it appears that young players are still struggling to progress, despite the infrastructure for achieving success being in place, so to speak. It is asserted that English clubs are well aware of this issue, as previously mentioned research by Nesti and Sulley (2015) was funded by a top Premier League Club so that they could gain knowledge on best practice from seven of the most successful Academies in Europe. The next section will discuss different facets of the football environment, from both an organisational and cultural standpoint, in order to provide a more holistic view of the operational aspect of football Academies. In doing so, it is suggested that certain practices, although widely viewed as being facilitative toward development, may potentially serve to hinder player progression.

4.2.1 The football industry

The 2016/2017 season marked the 25th anniversary of the English Premier League. Since it was founded in 1992, the English Premier League has developed and evolved into a globally recognised brand, which boasts ‘monetary might’ and the ability to merge the boundaries between sport, business and entertainment (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2017). To put this into context, TV deals during the 2013–2016 seasons in the English Premier League were worth a total of £5.5 billion domestically. The deal for the Premier League season 2016–2019 has increased to over £6 billion, which makes up 35% of the corporate deals on offer for sport coverage (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2017). Premier League matches are televised live into an estimated 650 million homes across 212 nations, with an estimated potential global audience of 4.7 billion viewers (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2017). In comparison, the TV deal for the Championship, Football League 1 and 2 over the

2012–2015 season was worth a combined total of £195 million (Conn, 2015). Consequently, regulation from the top tier of English football has huge ramifications for a club’s income generation and revenue. To further this, failure to secure a vital top four finish in the Premier League is worth an estimated financial loss of £30 million to the club (Conn, 2015). This is because teams outside of the top four will have missed out on securing their place in the UEFA Champions League qualifiers (Bleaney, 2016). To contextualise how lucrative Champions League qualification is for an English club, in the 2015/2016 season, the broadcaster BT Sport paid £897 million for the exclusive rights to these matches in the UK over 3 seasons (Millward, 2017). With such financial stakes in mind, it is argued that Premier League football managers are subjected to intense pressure to win their games and to justify their decision making, team selection and performance on a week to week basis. This undoubtedly has a knock-on effect on the players, who must perform at a consistently high level in order to remain in the first team (Molnar, 2015). Those who do get selected to play, will find themselves being incessantly scrutinised by the world media, fans and social media users across the entire season. As discussed, such an intense need for consistent results and performances arguably filters down and implicates the clubs’ Academies. For instance, managers tend to favour experienced players over youth when it comes to team selection (Bullough and Mills, 2014). This is arguably due to the overarching ‘win at all costs’ culture that exists within Premiership football, which forces managers to choose players whom they feel will have an immediate impact or return on investment (Mills et al., 2014). As such, the Premier League has arguably created a scenario where Academy players no longer need to be considered amongst the best domestically, but on a global scale in order to break into the first team (Relvas et al., 2010; Bullough and Mills, 2014).

It is not just the managers that find themselves under pressure for their team to

achieve consistently high performance standards. Coaches are under huge pressure to 'produce' players with the requisite competencies to progress from Scholarship to professional level, or to maintain their high performance levels with the first team on a week to week basis (Mills et al., 2014). Consequently, it is argued that coaches place core focus on player progression, and as a result develop highly competitive, extrinsically motivated environments that foster extrinsic goals and rewards (e.g. securing a professional contract, producing players for the first team). In fact, an autoethnographic paper by Potrac et al. (2012), who worked as an elite level coach in professional football, detailed how organisational life within professional football has a 'dark side' which encompasses strategic and manipulatory aspects of coaching practices amongst staff. As such, young players find themselves immersed within a ruthless, masculine culture that is fundamentally orientated toward being successful in playing/coaching football (Potrac et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2014). A paper by Sparkes and Partington (2003), which highlights narrative practice and its potential contribution to sport psychology, called for greater consideration to be given to the role of cultural factors in the sport psychology literature. Underlying this call, is recognition that one's behaviour and development is shaped by an interaction of psychological and sociocultural processes. As such, it is argued that behaviour can only be understood by considering psychological factors within the sociocultural context in which they occur (Sparkes and Partington, 2003). Thus, the following section will discuss English football Academy culture in greater detail in order to create a greater understanding of the environment in which young players exist.

4.2.2 The Academy environment

Culture is defined as '...a dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations, and practices across the members and generations of a defined group'

(Cruickshank and Collins, 2012, p.340). The concept of ‘culture’ has been discussed within the sport psychology literature as significantly impacting the thoughts and actions of group members (Nesti, 2010; Cruickshank and Collins, 2012, 2013). Despite subtle distinctions, it is asserted that the cultural climates present across professional football in England share fundamental commonalities (Nesti, 2010). For instance, English youth football is considered to be inherently challenging, and is largely characterised by its extremely ‘macho’, intimidating, authoritarian nature and the intense pressure to achieve consistently high performance standards across a season (Parker, 2000; Nesti, 2010; Mills et al., 2014; Kelly, 2015; Kelly, 2017). As such, it is unsurprising that players who enter into this environment find themselves having to contend with, and overcome, a wide range of demands, in order to have the best chance of progression (Richardson et al., 2004).

One such demand is potentially generated from the extrinsically motivated environment that the players find themselves within. This type of an environment is arguably facilitated by coaches who are under pressure to ‘produce’ the ‘next big thing’ and as such, become ego-involved in their work (Mills et al., 2014). Potrac et al. (2012) described coaching within professional football as a political activity where ruthlessness is experienced, even amongst staff. Potrac et al. (2012) article is an autoethnographic paper which details events within the lead author’s former career as a professional football coach. Autoethnographic extracts highlighted how coaches’ working relationships are competitive, calculating and uncaring in nature, with each coach actively seeking opportunities to capitalise on a bad session or poor practice from a colleague, in order to progress their own careers (Potrac et al., 2012). Therefore, it is no surprise that coaching staff within a professional football Academy display controlling behaviours with the aim to promote obedience, collective loyalty and conformity amongst

players (Parker, 1996; Mageau and Vallerand, 2003). A controlling environment such as this often requires players to display ‘macho’ behaviour and conceal their true feelings (Goffman, 1959; Parker, 1996, 2000; Nesti, 2010). As such, it is suggested that players find themselves embroiled in a form of ‘coerced affection’ (Wacquant, 1995). In brief, this means that the desire to survive within such an environment, and to ‘make it’ as a professional footballer necessitates a complex tendency to rationalise and suppress feelings of resentment toward managerial or coaching domination (Roderick, 2014). In support, a 10-month ethnography within a professional football Academy environment by Cushion and Jones (2012) reported a ‘hidden curriculum’ within coaching practices. The results highlighted the coaches’ beliefs that, in order to develop an elite footballer, a particular identity must be constructed through the internalisation of the values and perspectives of the football club (Cushion and Jones, 2012). It is argued that such practices lead to what is known as ‘cultural reproduction’ (Bourdieu, 1986). In brief, this means that processes such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills associated with the game, as well as learning the values and perspectives of the club and professional football is required when developing successful youth footballers (Cushion and Jones, 2012). Such values are associated with a highly routinized and disciplined lifestyle and a restriction of autonomy, independent thinking and individualisation (Gearing, 1999; Finch, 2003). With this in mind, it is unsurprising that Roderick (2006) and Ronkainen and Nesti (2017) described first team professional football cultures as environments where conformity, compliance and the avoidance of exploring and committing to one’s own personal values and beliefs were considered desirable (Roderick, 2006; Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017).

In such environments (where subservience and uncritical subscription to the dominant discourse is celebrated), young players may face restrictions when it comes to

developing holistically (Jones and Wallace, 2005; Potrac et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2014). When youth footballers are recruited into Academies, it is usually under the guise of nurturing environments which operate on a meritocratic basis (Roderick, 2014). Often times, players are made to feel as if their talents are indispensable and their goals achievable, and as a consequence, they are led into this monoculture which, despite huge commitment and dedication, will more than likely result in failure (Roderick, 2014). As such, the Academy environment may in fact ‘sow the seed’ for the development of a strong or exclusive athletic identity, and potential identity foreclosure (Murphy et al., 1996). In other words, it is postulated that young players may be at risk of becoming indoctrinated into the prevailing culture and managerial controls within professional football, at the expense of developing a truly authentic version of themselves (Roderick, 2014).

In support, a study by Mills and colleagues (2014) employed the Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ; Martindale et al., 2010) to investigate the perceptions of the quality of the development environment in Category 1 Academies during elite youth football players’ Scholarship programme. The TDEQ is a 59-item questionnaire which was employed to measure the extent that features of good practice were experienced by the youth footballers in their development environments (Martindale et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2014). It is considered to be a generic tool that was developed based on the key features which emerged from the talent development literature across sports, stage, age, gender and culture (Mills et al., 2014). The participants for this study were 50 elite youth football Academy players aged between 16–18 years (n=41 English players, n=9 overseas players). These players were all attending Category 1 Academies in the North and South regions of England. Results found that players reported that they were not understood by their coaches on a holistic level, with coaches

rarely expressing an interest in their lives outside of football (Mills et al., 2014). However, a limitation for this research is that the TDEQ was developed as a generic tool for monitoring the development of talent across all sports. As discussed above, the Academy environment and culture is unique to the world of English professional football. As such, the TDEQ may not be wholly applicable for use within an Academy football context. Despite this, a recent validation study by Martindale and colleagues (2012) found the structure and ecological validity of this tool to be strong. The internal consistency of the TDEQ has also shown adequate to excellent reliability (Mills et al., 2014).

Although the EPPP has placed an increased focus on player welfare and holistic development, these findings suggest that Academies may actually be falling short in this regard. This may in fact promote the extrinsic climate that is present in English football Academies, as players try to prove their worth through footballing successes alone (Wang et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2014). This, combined with the substantial increase in training hours introduced by the EPPP and managerial/staff tendencies to valorise the narrow pursuit of achieving a professional contract (Weedon, 2011), arguably places individuals at higher risk of developing an exclusive or foreclosed athletic identity. These points are supported in an article by Brewer and Petitpas (2017), which examined the role of sport participation in identity development. The authors argued that when athletes become embroiled in the sport system (e.g. an English Premier League Academy), the result is typically a minimal display of exploratory behaviour when constructing an identity due to the time commitment required for sport participation (Brewer and Petitpas, 2017). Hence, the following section will focus on the concept of identity development in football.

4.2.3 Identity development in football

A study by Gearing (1999) used biographical interviewing to understand how professional footballers in the UK coped with challenges of establishing a new identity post retirement. The participants were ex-professionals (n=12) who played prior to the establishment of the Premier League and English football League as it is now known. In today's terms however, the level that the participants played at is equivalent to the Premier League (n=3) and League One (n=9). Gearing (1999) reported that those who had been 'forced' into retirement through injury or being released found it increasingly difficult to construct an identity that was separate from the world of football, with some demonstrating unwillingness to do so. Gearing (1999) also reiterated the important role of culture in relation to identity formation and the subsequent difficulties associated with transitioning away from an established 'sense of self' upon retirement. It was described how the strong cultural values and behavioural norms within professional football created a 'gravitational pull' which made it extremely difficult for these players to adjust to the loss of their athletic identities upon retirement (Gearing, 1999). A limitation of this study is that the participants played professional football in an era prior to the formation of the English Premier League. As such, the impact of widespread globalisation and a dramatic increase in financial stakes of the game had not yet reached the scale it has today. Consequently, this research may appear to be 'dated' in terms of career progression and the demands on the modern player. Gearing (1999) did acknowledge that modern day descriptions of retirement from professional football may be very different, as there are many more compounding variables present (e.g. huge extrinsic rewards such as wages and global exposure via news and social media sites) in the modern game that may contribute to the development of strong or exclusive athletic identities. Nevertheless, this paper still provides an important insight into within-career and post-career adjustment

difficulties in former professional football players, and the potential threat that a strong or an exclusive athletic identity may pose to the psychological well-being of players.

In line with Gearing's (1999) assertion that culture plays an important role in first team environments, the Lewis Review (2007) highlighted that Academy footballers deal with many stressors, including immersion within a 'winning' culture, and the perceived need for progression. This report ensued following an invitation from the FA, the Premier League and the Football League and aimed to provide an overview of the principles and philosophies that are considered to be essential in order for a player to succeed from Academy level on to professional football in England. The report stated that Academies place '...an over-emphasis on results at all age groups' and focus '...on winning matches at weekends rather than developing talented young professional players' (Lewis Review, 2007, p.16). It concluded by suggesting that such an over-emphasis on winning leads to a climate of fear within these Academies. It would appear that since the publication of this 2007 report, cultural change has not arisen, as this concluding notion was recently supported by Nesti and Sulley (2015) who postulated that English Academy football environments may be hindering players' performances by being 'fear driven'. Due to these assertions, and in order to create a strong justification for the present study, the consideration of the identity literature will now focus on English Academy football contexts.

Research by Brown and Potrac (2009) has employed interpretive biography to investigate identity disruption in young elite footballers (n=4) who were 'forced' into retirement after their Academy Scholarship finished. It was found that having a strong athletic identity resulted in emotional disturbances, including anger, betrayal, feelings of failure, humiliation, high levels of anxiety and identity crisis post de-selection. Whilst not explicitly examining identity, a study by Sagar et al. (2010) examined fear of failure

using The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI; Conroy et al., 2002) among 81 male adolescent football players (aged 16–18 years). Fear of failure is considered as the motive to avoid failure associated with anticipatory shame in evaluative situations (Atkinson, 1957). The participants in this study were recruited from 4 English football Academies in North and South of England. All participants were actively playing and had been training with their respective Academies for 6 months at a minimum. The PFAI was used as a diagnostic tool to identify players who were high in fear of failure to partake in a semi-structured interview. Four players took part in these interviews which were subsequently analysed using thematic analysis. Results from the qualitative analysis found that players believed there are interpersonal and positive consequences of success. For example, themes which emerged included: receiving recognition from others, pleasing others and enhanced perception of self. Interestingly, themes emerged from player descriptions that are considered to be intrapersonal consequences of failure. These included: emotional cost, diminished perception of self and uncertain future (possibility of being dropped from the Academy). The authors considered the sample size for the qualitative aspect of this study (n=4) to be a limitation of the research. However, a lesser sample size is not uncommon in qualitative research (see also Brown and Potrac (2009) who also employed a sample size of four participants). In fact, it is believed that with a clearly defined research question, a small and purposefully selected number of participants (with experience of the phenomenon under investigation) can produce rich data and in-depth information for qualitative analysis (Cleary et al., 2014). Although identity was not explicitly mentioned in this study, links may be drawn between the findings of this study and the athletic identity research. For example, the emotional cost of failure, the diminished perception of self and uncertain future are descriptive of a challenged or disrupted athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993; Brown and Potrac, 2009).

To recap, a challenged identity or identity disruption can be explained as an interruption to the coherent narrative of a person's life which often results in a loss of some aspect of the self (Sparkes, 1998).

A study by Mitchell et al. (2014) employed the AIMS questionnaire to explore levels of athletic identity in youth team players aged 16–18 years (n=168) across the 4 major English professional football leagues. The results showed no significant differences in the strength of athletic identity ratings across the individual football clubs. This finding is not surprising. As discussed in the previous section, professional football clubs in England are considered to possess similar organisational and working practices (Richardson et al., 2004; Relvas et al., 2010) which are likely to lead to the formation of a strong athletic identity. Further findings reported that the AIMS exclusivity subscale was significantly different between clubs. This finding may be due to the differences in the stature of the clubs under examination. For example, the Premier League will typically host Category 1 Academies, whereas the lower leagues will typically have Category 2 to Category 4 Academies. As discussed above, Category 1 Academies have significantly more coaching hours compared to Academies lower down the hierarchy. The increase in volume of training hours introduced by the EPPP, particularly for Category 1 Academies, arguably places individuals at higher risk of developing an exclusive athletic identity (Brewer and Petitpas, 2017). Category 1 Academies also receive the largest amounts of funding annually from the Premier League (Premier League, 2011). As a consequence, these Academies can afford bigger and better facilities, which may help to 'sell the dream' to young players. As discussed, Category 1 Academies can recruit nationally from as young as U12 (Premier League, 2011). This means that young players can relocate their lives in order to chase their ambition of being a professional footballer. In such cases, it is not uncommon for parents to decide to relocate

their entire family to live close to the Academy in question. As such, the identity of the parent may become closely linked to their child's football participation (Clarke and Harwood, 2014). This arguably creates the feeling that there is more 'at stake' for these players who do not get offered a professional contract. In addition, it is not unreasonable to expect that a player at an English Premier League Academy might anticipate to make a career for themselves in the game at some level, even if this is not in the top divisions. This in turn may lead to a reluctance to explore any role other than that of 'being a footballer'. Finally, Category 1 Academies are required to provide educational facilities for their players. These may be in the form of 'link schools' which players attend on or off site, during times that fit their football schedule. In such cases, the young players arguably do not undergo respite from their role as a footballer, as even whilst they are in the classroom, they are affiliates of their club. As such, it is postulated that Category 1 Academies in particular, have the infrastructure and processes in place which promote the development of exclusive athletic identities.

Finally, a study by Blakelock et al. (2016) examined psychological distress in elite adolescent soccer players following de-selection. The participants (n=91) for this research were aged between 15–18 years, English speaking and contracted to a Premier League or Football League Academy in England or Scotland. Convenience sampling was used to recruit the participants during the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 seasons respectively. Participants completed the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12; Goldberg and Williams, 1988) at 3 separate time points. These were: 7–14 days before selection procedures, 7 days after and 21 days after selection. The GHQ-12 provides a unidimensional measure of psychological distress which encompasses symptoms indicative of anxiety, depression, loss of confidence and social dysfunction (Hardy et al., 1999; Russ et al., 2012; Blakelock et al., 2016). The GHQ-12 has

demonstrated internal consistency and test–retest reliability (Hardy et al., 1999; Aalto et al., 2012; Blakelock et al., 2016). A factorial ANOVA ($p < 0.001$) found that de-selected players experienced higher levels of psychological distress than retained players at post selection time points (Blakelock et al., 2016). This research has provided evidence that de-selected players may be ‘at risk’ of developing clinical levels of psychological distress (Blakelock et al., 2016). A limitation of this research is that the data collected, using a convenience sample, showed a low mean response rate (16.08%) and a moderate drop-out rate (47.62%). It can be argued that de-selected players who completed all of the measures may represent a more extreme group, which raises issues from a positivist perspective on whether the findings can be generalised. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, generalisability in the positivist sense is arguably not always desirable (Giorgi, 2009). This is because the subjective reality of an individual is highly influenced by the various contexts within which the experience of a particular phenomenon occurs (Giorgi, 2009). In other words, the participants’ experience of de-selection is subjective due to various factors including the sociocultural and environmental context within which it takes place (e.g. the Academy environment). As such, it is argued that experiences of de-selection across sports will differ. When looking to understand the authenticity and essence of one’s subjective experience, generalisability in this universal sense is arguably undesirable (Giorgi, 2009).

In conclusion, English Academy football appears to be characterised by its highly pressured climate for success (Sagar et al., 2010). Within this environment, these young players encounter an array of personal and interpersonal challenges that may have an impact on development (Richardson et al., 2004). This may explain the focus of the sport psychology literature when researching elite Academy football to date. For example, research has focused on stressors and coping strategies within Academy players (see

Reeves et al., 2009 and Sagar et al., 2010), the Academy environment (see Mills et al., 2012, 2014), the transition from the Academy to the first team (see Finn and McKenna, 2010, Morris, 2013 and Morris et al., 2016, 2015) and parental support and involvement (see Harwood et al., 2010 and Clarke and Harwood, 2014). Although the majority of this research has been conducted from the perspective of the players (using self-report measures or semi-structured interviews to generate data), the methods employed arguably reduce the descriptions of complex experiences to p-values or themes which aim to satisfy a hypothesis based on pre-existing literature. To further this, much of the talent development literature to date has been retrospective in nature (Mills et al., 2014). In other words, elite athletes have provided insight into their world through reflective statements at a later stage in their career (Mills et al., 2014). Therefore, as a whole, it is suggested that the present-day, subjective experiences of these elite Academy players have not been explicitly examined using a methodology which can elicit authentic, rich descriptions within the sport psychology literature (O'Halloran et al., 2016). This is despite researchers in the field of sport psychology calling for a deeper understanding of the key stages of the player development pathway (see Williams and Reilly, 2000 and Mills et al., 2014).

This point highlights gaps in the literature that warrant attention. In light of both the academic and applied need to further understand the existence of young players within an elite Academy environment, the purpose of the present study is to employ the method of descriptive psychological phenomenology to illuminate the lived experience of what Premier League Academy players perceive to be 'critical moments' within their career. As mentioned previously, the phenomenon of 'critical moments' has appeared in the sport psychology literature in relation to challenges associated within first team football environments (see Nesti and Littlewood, 2011 and Nesti, 2013). In this literature,

an operational definition of ‘critical moments’ is provided and a consideration of the impact of ‘critical moments’ on first team players is provided through use of fictional vignettes. However, these vignettes illustrate how sport psychology practitioners can effectively support first team players as they negotiate their way through ‘critical moments’. Therefore, the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ from the perspective of the first team players is not directly addressed by either author. To date, the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ in English Premier League Academy football has not been examined at all. Furthermore, despite researchers highlighting the potential benefits of employing descriptive psychological phenomenology within sport psychology studies (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004), it has not been accurately utilised in the literature to date either (O’Halloran, et al., 2016). A hypothesis is not proposed for this study, as this method is discovery-orientated, rather than verification orientated (Giorgi, 2009; Broomé, 2011). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the aim of the descriptive psychological phenomenological method is to explore phenomena from new and fresh perspectives i.e. to illicit new knowledge, free from pre-existing theories and assumptions (Sanders, 1982; Cohen, et al., 2000).

4.3 Method

For anonymity purposes, the Premier League Academy where data collection took place in this research will be referred to as ATFC. It has Category 1 status and is based in the North West of England.

4.3.1 Research question

The research question in a descriptive psychological phenomenological study should aim to explore the lived experience of a specific phenomenon (Norlyk and Harder, 2010; Simon, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 3, descriptive psychological phenomenological

research begins with recognition that knowledge is underdeveloped or incomplete, or that there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience (Englander, 2012; Churchill and Wertz, 2015). This is generally identified by reviewing the existing literature in the domain of study (Churchill and Wertz, 2015). As discussed, within sport psychology research, the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ in elite sport, and specifically Premier League Academy football, has not yet been explored. In order to address this gap in the literature, a descriptive psychological phenomenological study has been devised in order to explore the perceived lived experience of ‘critical moments’ in Premier League Academy football.

4.3.2 Sampling procedure

Participants for descriptive psychological phenomenological research are recruited using purposive sampling (Dale, 1996). Purposive sampling was used as it allowed the researcher to select participants who had experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Kruger, 1988; Polit and Hungler, 1999; Goulding, 2005; Todres, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 3, in order to conduct descriptive psychological phenomenological research, it is essential that the participants had experience of the phenomenon being explored (Englander, 2012). Therefore, the participants for this study were Scholars (U16–U18) at ATFC. This meant that each participant had entered into the full-time Professional Development Phase, as delineated by the EPPP. In order to participate in this study, the participants were required to have experience in what they perceived to be ‘critical moments’ during their career within Academy football. The U16—U18 age group were selected as the descriptive psychological phenomenological approach requires participants to have adequate linguistic ability in order to describe their lived experience of a phenomenon in the detail required (Nesti, 2011). It is argued that this

method may pose a challenge for younger age groups who may not possess such skills (Nesti, 2011; O'Halloran et al., 2016).

Key stakeholders at ATFC provided their verbal consent prior to the recruitment of participants for this research to take place. A gatekeeper was formally assigned for the data collection stage. The gatekeeper was the Education and Welfare Officer at the club. The researcher was required to contact the gatekeeper in order to set up interview slots for the players. Prior to the recruitment of the players, the gatekeeper was briefed in full on the aims and purpose of the study. A gatekeeper information sheet was provided (see Appendix 1). In order to determine whether participants were suitable for this research, the researcher provided the gatekeeper with a participant information sheet for the players (see Appendix 2). This contained the title of the study and clear details of the aforementioned inclusion criteria. It also informed those who met the eligibility criteria of the opportunity to participate in an unstructured phenomenological interview. Key details on what this interview would entail was provided (e.g. duration, recording and transcription). If the players wished to participate after reading this, they informed the gatekeeper, who then took their names and potential availability for the interview. This availability was emailed to the researcher or communicated via telephone. Due to the nature of the environment, which is ever-changing, the researcher made it known to the gatekeeper that she would be available to conduct the interviews to accommodate the players' schedule. As such, there was no formal interview timetable created. Interviews were arranged at short notice and at times, cancelled and rearranged due to a last minute change of schedule (e.g. a player being required to train with the first team). E-mail correspondence was password protected and was subsequently deleted after the final interview was completed. This stage resulted in the recruitment of 12 participants.

4.3.3 Researcher role

It is considered as good practice for a researcher engaging in descriptive psychological phenomenological research to make clear their prior knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under study (Lowes and Prowse, 2001). Therefore, this section will highlight my past experiences with the phenomenon, my reasons for choosing this methodology and the way in which I engaged in the bracketing process prior to and during data collection and analysis. Due to my past experience (which will be detailed further along in this section), I am intrinsically interested in the concept of ‘critical moments’ in elite sport. As I read through the sport literature, I found that there was no existing research which focused on an individual’s lived experience of such events. This motivated me to begin to pursue this as a research project.

I have been a football fan my entire life. However, I did not start playing the sport until I was in my early teens. As I was born and raised in Ireland, I began playing Gaelic football at the age of eight. At the age of 14, following the 2002 World Cup, I decided that it was time for me to start playing football. I joined the closest ladies football team in a larger town, about 20 minutes away. I played as a goalkeeper for this team. Although at 14 years of age, I was considered a ‘late-starter’, I felt the motor and coordination skills I had developed whilst playing Gaelic football were transferable to goalkeeping and enabled me to progress well. At the age of 15, I was selected to play football at U16 provisional level. There was a tournament each year for the provincial teams which was renowned for having the national team managers present. At the time, I had been performing well in competition and I was receiving positive feedback from my provincial coaches. So I set myself a goal; to represent my country. I was first choice goalkeeper for my provincial team in the months leading up to this tournament. I had never been substituted and I felt confident that I would make a positive impact during the

competition. The night before the opening game, the team met and we got settled into our accommodation. A team meeting was called and the squad was named for the week. I had been dropped. The decision to drop me from the team was never explained by my coaches or manager. I almost quit playing football as a result of this disappointment. I didn't attend training with my local team for a number of weeks. Eventually, my local team coach convinced me to keep playing, as did my parents in an indirect way through their encouragement.

A few months later, I experienced a small injury which required physiotherapy. My physiotherapist had just moved back to Ireland following a 3-year role as a physiotherapist in an English football Academy. He spoke to me about the discipline of sport psychology. I had not heard of it before, but I felt as though it was something I would really enjoy, given my background and experience. That same day, I researched the course opportunities in Ireland. A sport psychology degree did not exist in Ireland at the time, so I began to research my options in the UK. I found that there was a BSc Applied Psychology with Sport Science degree at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). I applied for this course.

That year, I was selected for the provincial team again. There was a different manager this time. I went to the same tournament, and I played each game in full. This time around, aged 16, I received a call-up to my country's U17 national squad for a weekend of trials. I was successful at this stage and I received a 'call back'. This achievement was short lived however, as I had to withdraw due to a serious injury sustained during extended squad training. Around this time, I received a response to my application for university. I was provided with a conditional offer to study BSc Applied Psychology with Sport Science at LJMU, pending exam results. It was close to the exam period when I was deemed fit to play again. I decided against returning to play football.

I sat my Leaving Certificate exams and I achieved the grades necessary to allow me to accept my conditional offer on the course. Three weeks later, aged 17, I moved away from my home in Ireland to begin my university education in Liverpool. I did not play football again after this. I felt as though this was the right decision for me. I wanted to focus on pursuing my university education and a career within sport psychology. As a result, I felt ready to leave playing the game behind me.

My interest in phenomenology developed during my MSc year when I was exposed to this school of thought during taught sessions. I began to immerse myself in literature that discussed different psychological schools of thought and their philosophical underpinnings. In doing so, I felt most aligned to the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, humanism, existentialism and logotherapy. I felt that certain schools of thought within psychology (e.g. cognitive, behavioural) often overlooked the deeper meanings associated with the individual's life-world (e.g. meaning and purpose) in favour of a problem-focused, surface approach to cognition and behaviour. To further this, I believed that Freud's psychoanalytical approach diminished the responsibility that we as humans have to make choices in life (i.e. it takes away our capacity to decide things for ourselves). Although I recognise that the cognitive, behavioural and psychoanalytic approaches have made important contributions to literature and practice within the field of psychology, I also feel that these approaches are reductionistic and, at times, overly simplistic when attempting to explain the human condition. Finally, my allegiance to descriptive psychological phenomenology arose after familiarising myself with the different branches that exist within phenomenology, as well as their respective philosophical underpinnings. I decided that a research approach that was epistemological in nature would be the most appropriate for this study. This is because the lived experience of 'critical moments' in Premier League Academy football

has not yet been explored. As such, I felt that it was important for this study to be one of discovery and description, rather than interpretation. I believed that it would be important to create new knowledge by allowing the participants the platform to describe in rich detail *what it is like* to experience this phenomenon, as free as possible from theory-laden interpretations or biases. I also felt that the subjective experience of ‘critical moments’ could be lost or diluted if a method was employed which relied on generalisability as an indicator of study validity and trustworthiness.

4.3.4 Data collection

The main tool for data collection in phenomenological research is the phenomenological interview (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004; O’Halloran et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 3, a descriptive psychological phenomenological interview is unstructured in nature. This meant that the interviews began with a question that related in a non-leading and open way to the phenomenon under investigation (O’Halloran et al., 2016). When employing unstructured interviews, the only question that can be prepared in advance is the initial question (O’Halloran et al., 2016). For the purpose of this research the participants were asked to describe their experience of what they perceive to be a ‘critical moment’ during their career.

As discussed in Chapter 3, bracketing is crucial to descriptive psychological phenomenological research. To recap briefly, bracketing enables the researcher to identify certain areas of knowledge or underlying beliefs and biases which may otherwise have materialised as interpretations or assumptions during the interview process or data analysis (Ashworth, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the researcher employed the following bracketing methods (as recommended by Ahern, 1999; Lowes and Prowse, 2001; Primeau, 2003; Wall et al., 2004; Tufford and Newman, 2010; Chan et al., 2013 and O’Halloran et al., 2016): written reflective memos; a reflexive journal; extensive

discussions with colleagues/research team including reasons for undertaking the research and a critical literature review focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of existing research. The researcher also engaged in a pilot interview and analysis to further raise awareness of any unintentional preconceptions and biases or personal experiences that may have been forgotten (O'Halloran et al., 2016). As this approach utilises an unstructured approach to interview questions, the pilot interview was also useful in raising awareness of how to probe the athlete with open and non-leading questions (O'Halloran et al., 2016).

Data collection for this study consisted of 12 descriptive psychological phenomenological interviews. The interview duration varied by participant. Interview length was determined by the level of detail the participant entered into and the number of probing questions that the interview inspired. Ultimately, the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. Prior to the commencement of each interview the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix 3). The interviews took place in the gatekeeper's office at the ATFC Academy. The researcher conducted one or two interviews individual on the days that data collection took place. The data was collected over a number of months. This was largely due to the participants' schedule which often changed due to their playing commitments. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. In order to remain 'present' for the entire interview encounter, the researcher quickly noted any salient points mentioned in brief by the participant on a piece of paper relating to particular experiences (O'Halloran et al., 2016). This acted as a reminder for future non-leading, probing questions once the participant had reached saturation on the topic they were currently discussing. The researcher explained the rationale for doing this to the participants prior to the interview. The participants viewed it as a means for the researcher to remain focused and present in the dialogue, rather than attempting to

remember what follow-up probing questions needed to be asked. A number of times the participants were directed back to their experience of ‘critical moments’ using such non-leading, probing questions if the dialogue moved off topic, which is in line with Giorgi’s (2009) method.

Although 12 participants were interviewed for this study, 8 interviews were included for the data analysis phase. The researcher made the decision to exclude 4 of these interviews as the participants provided limited descriptions of their experience which made responding with open-ended probing questions very difficult for the researcher to achieve. As mentioned in Chapter 3, in instances where a participant is no longer revealing an aspect of how they experienced a phenomenon under investigation, it is perfectly legitimate for the interviewer to provide direction during the interview (Giorgi, 2009). This may be done through asking an open-ended question during a natural pause in the conversation. However, in doing so, the researcher must take great care to be directive rather than leading, as leading the participant (with closed questions for example) may be construed as the researcher introducing bias (Giorgi, 2009). In the interviews discussed above, the researcher felt as though leading questions were asked in an attempt to keep the dialogue flowing. The researcher recognises that this data was potentially ‘contaminated’ with preconceived notions of the participants’ experience. In such instances, bracketing had arguably been compromised. The decision to omit this data was supported in a paper within the sport psychology literature which stated that descriptive psychological phenomenological researchers should discard any interviews, prior to data analysis, where bracketing was compromised (O’Halloran et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 3, personal interpretations, preconceived notions or biases regarding the data are not congruent with philosophical underpinnings of this approach (O’Halloran et al., 2016).

The interviews ended when a participant felt that they had fully discussed their perceptions of a ‘critical moment’ during their career. This was usually signaled through either a period of silence, or through the participant stating that they had nothing further to say. In both instances, the researcher posed a question as to whether the participant wished to add anything else to their description (Bondas, 2011). Upon the participant confirming that they had fully described the phenomenon under investigation, the interview was concluded.

4.3.5 Ethics

This study received full ethical approval (including risk assessment) from the university ethics committee (see Appendix 4). Prior to data collection, a full risk assessment was carried out and there were no identifiable risks to the participants or the staff at the Academy. The participants were required to sign a consent form prior to taking part in this study (see Appendix 3). As mentioned, the interviews were held in the gatekeeper’s office at the ATFC Academy. This office was familiar to the players. Each player stated that they felt comfortable conducting the interviews at this location. This office had windows that overlooked the training pitches and glass paneling in the door which allowed the researcher to be seen from the corridor. Participants were assured of anonymity and as a result, all names of teams and players in the transcripts are pseudonyms. This is to ensure that the interview data can not be traced back to the participant. Information that could be considered as having identifiable features (e.g. signed consent forms) were stored in a separate location to the data. The participants were provided with contact details for the researcher (university email address) on the participant information sheet and it was made clear that they could withdraw from this research at any time. If the participant wished to do so, they were under no obligation to provide a reason for their decision. Participants were made aware that they did not have

to discuss a topic if they did not wish to. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any point without providing a reason. In line with university ethics, confidential recordings were deleted 5 years post data collection.

4.3.6 Participants

4.3.6.1 Lewis. Lewis is an 18-year old Scholar at ATFC. He is local to the city where ATFC is based. He has been at the club since the age of 9. Lewis signed his first 4-year contract with ATFC at the age of 12. Lewis was awarded his Scholarship early at ATFC. Lewis has been top goal-scorer every season he has been at the club. Lewis is currently unsure of whether he will get offered a professional contract at ATFC.

4.3.6.2 Paul. Paul is a 16-year old Scholar at ATFC. Paul moved to the club last season from the south of England. Paul was playing for a lower-league professional team prior to his move to ATFC. Paul was scouted by ATFC and within 10 days he had signed and moved to the club. He is currently living with house-parents. Paul's family still live in the south of England. Paul recently underwent a knee operation for an on-going problem. This surgery requires an extended period of rehabilitation.

4.3.6.3 Tom. Tom is a 17-year old Scholar at ATFC. He moved to the club 2 years ago, aged 15. Tom's family are back at home, so he is currently living with house-parents. Tom travelled away with [his national] squad to [SA] for the U17 World Cup last summer, where he was de-selected the entire time. Tom flew back to ATFC after the tournament and began training almost straight away. Tom has not suffered an injury in two years. Consequently, Tom has not had much time off in the past year. Tom has been alternating between the U18s and Reserve sides all season, meaning that he has played nearly 40 games. Most recently, a new player of the same position as Tom has been brought in. As a result, Tom is currently de-selected, or sharing a game with another player.

4.3.6.4 Michael. Michael is a 17-year old scholar at ATFC. Michael moved to the Academy at the age of 15 from the south of England. Michael lived with house-parents for two years before moving into a flat of his own. Michael is an international player. Michael seriously injured his knee this season and required surgery as a result. He underwent a rehabilitation program for 13-14 weeks.

4.3.6.5 Jake. Jake is an 18-year old Scholar at ATFC. Jake moved to ATFC from the south of England at the age of 16. Jake is currently living by himself in an apartment. He has lived alone for 5 months now. When Jake first moved to ATFC, he lived with house-parents. Jake plays for the U18s and the Reserves at ATFC. Jake broke his hand 8 weeks ago following an accident in training. Due to his position as goalkeeper, Jake was ruled out from playing for the entire 8 weeks. He underwent a rehabilitation program. Jake returned from injury the day after the interview took place.

4.3.6.6 Reece. Reece is a 17-year old Scholar at ATFC. Reece moved to ATFC from another country. Reece's brother lives in a city close by, which means he sees him regularly. Reece's parents are back in his home country, but they fly over regularly to visit him. Reece lives with house-parents.

4.3.6.7 Kane. Kane is a 16-year old Scholar at ATFC. He was scouted by ATFC whilst he played for [his national team]. Three months later he moved to ATFC, aged 14. Kane's entire family moved to ATFC with him. Kane has been 'capped' numerous times for [his national team]. Kane sustained a torn groin which meant that he missed a substantial amount of the second half of last season. Kane returned to play for the last game of the season. Kane has also experienced de-selection whilst at ATFC.

4.3.6.8 Kris. Kris is a 16-year old Scholar at ATFC. He moved to ATFC at the age of 16 from another country. Kris had to wait 3 months for his working permit to process, in which time he could not play in any competitive matches. Kris trained with the team

during this period. Kris played 3 games in total prior to sustaining an ACL rupture, which he has had surgery on and is currently undergoing rehab for. Kris expects that he will be unable to play for 6-8 months. Kris opted to continue his education in his home country despite being at ATFC full-time, and as a result he is currently self-taught and facing into important exams. When Kris first moved to ATFC, he could only communicate using one word answers. Kris has since received English lessons. Kris plays for his national team at U19 level and is hoping to be fit for selection for the European Championships in the summer.

4.3.7 Data analysis

Step 1. Read the entire transcript for a sense of the whole. As discussed in Chapter 3, the aim of step 1 is to acquire an overall sense of each participants' description of what they perceive to be 'critical moments' (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). In order to do so, the researcher read each transcript multiple times from within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude, whilst employing a special sensitivity to the discipline of sport psychology and the phenomenon being researched (i.e. 'critical moments') (Giorgi, 2009). This step did not begin until the data collection had entirely finished.

Step 2. Determination of meaning units. As discussed, the aim of step 2 is to delineate 'meaning units' (or constituents, as they interchangeably referred to) within each of the transcripts (Giorgi, 2009). Again, this was carried out from within the (scientific) phenomenological attitude. Each 'meaning unit' signaled a transition of meaning that occurred within the transcript (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). Each 'meaning unit' was numbered by the researcher within the transcript, (e.g. ¹/ was placed at the end of an identified 'meaning unit'), and continued in numerical ascendancy until the end of each transcript. The amount of 'meaning units' differed for each transcript. They also varied in length,

from a short sentence to a paragraph. After this process was completed, the researcher was left with a number of ‘meaning units’ for each transcript (ranging from 36–101). The researcher did not interrogate the meaning units during this step (Giorgi, 1975, 2009).

Step 3. Transformation of participant’s natural attitude expressions into psychologically sensitive expressions. As discussed, the aim of step 3 is to transform the identified ‘meaning units’, which contain each participant’s descriptions from within the natural attitude, into psychologically sensitive expressions (Giorgi, 2009). In order to do this, and in line with Giorgi’s (1975, 2006, 2009) method, the researcher transformed the first-person ‘meaning units’ into third person statements (Giorgi, 2006). This was achieved by splitting the interview transcript into two columns. The original ‘meaning units’ were placed in the left hand column and the third person statements were placed into the right hand column (see Table 6).

Table 6. *An extract from data analysis showing the transformation of the first-person ‘meaning units’ into third person statement.*

Natural Meaning Units (Michael’s own words taken from his transcript).	Third person expression of the Natural Meaning Units.
‘...but in the first 5–6 weeks like I say that was sluggish, very sluggish. I was just...I wasn’t bothered at all. I thought, I just thought it was the end innit...It was hard, it was annoying. D’ya what I’m saying? Yeah when I first got injured yeah I did cry but it’s normal innit.’	Michael stated that in the first 5–6 weeks he was very sluggish and that he was not bothered at all. Michael stated that he thought it was the end. Michael stated that it was hard and it was annoying. Michael stated that when he first got injured he did cry but stated that this is normal.

Once this was completed, the researcher returned to the beginning of the third person statements. Whilst employing the (scientific) phenomenological attitude with a sport psychological perspective, the researcher then highlighted the psychological dimension of the third person statements (Giorgi, 1975, 2009). A psychologically sensitive transformation of the third person statement was written in a descriptive manner and placed next to the third person statement (see Table 7). This took a number of attempts

before the researcher was satisfied with the way in which the psychological dimension was phrased.

Table 7. *An extract from data analysis showing the psychologically sensitive transformation of the third person statement.*

Third person expression of the Natural Meaning Units.	Psychologically sensitive transformation of third person expressions.
Michael stated that in the first 5–6 weeks he was very sluggish and that he wasn't bothered at all. Michael stated that he thought it was the end. Michael stated that it was hard and it was annoying. Michael stated that when he first got injured he did cry but stated that this is normal.	Michael stated that in the first 5–6 weeks he felt very lethargic and completely unmotivated. Michael stated that he cried, but perceived this reaction as normal. Michael perceived his career as being over during this time. Michael perceived this to be a difficult and frustrating experience for him.

The researcher then returned to the psychologically sensitive transformations and highlighted the psychologically sensitive transformation relevant to ‘critical moments’. The researcher employed bracketing techniques and free imaginative variation in order to retain the meaning expressed by the participant, as well as to provide a description of the essential psychological meanings that presented themselves to the researcher (Giorgi, 1975, 2009; Beck, 2013). Again, a number of attempts were made before the researcher was satisfied with the way in which the psychological dimension in relation to ‘critical moments’ was phrased (see Table 8). Columns were left blank where psychologically sensitive transformations were deemed redundant (i.e. they held no relevance to the phenomenon of ‘critical moments’) (Giorgi, 2009).

Table 8. *An extract from data analysis showing the transformation of psychologically sensitive statements into psychologically sensitive statements relevant to ‘critical moments’.*

Psychologically sensitive transformation of third person expressions.	Psychologically sensitive transformation relevant to ‘critical moments’.
Michael stated that in the first 5–6 weeks he felt very lethargic and completely unmotivated. Michael stated that he cried, but perceived this reaction as normal. Michael perceived his career as being over during this time. Michael perceived this to be a difficult and frustrating experience for him.	For the initial 5–6 weeks, injury had a profound effect on Michael’s mood and behaviour. Michael felt extremely lethargic and amotivated. Michael perceived his career as being over during this time. Michael stated that he cried, but he perceived this reaction as normal. Michael perceived being injured as a difficult and frustrating experience for him.

Step 4. Description of the structure of the phenomenon. As discussed, the aim of this step is to provide a description of the structure of the phenomenon in question (Giorgi, 2009). In order to do so, the researcher examined the last column of transformations, using bracketing techniques and free imaginative variation, for convergent meanings that were truly essential to the phenomenon of ‘critical moments’ (Giorgi, 2009). Where essential convergent meanings emerged in a transcript, the researcher applied a descriptive word or phrase based on their psychological givenness (Giorgi, 2009). This is known as a constituent. The constituent ‘title’ must be descriptive of its psychological meaning (see Table 9).

Table 9. *An extract from data analysis detailing how a constituent was determined.*

Constituents	Essential psychological structure	Concrete descriptions
Et tu Brute? A sense of aggrievement and absence of loyalty at the end.	Lewis feels that players on big contracts are over local players during team selection at ATFC. Lewis is presently experiencing low mood states, low self-worth, uncertainty regarding what he must do in order to secure a contract and a lack of control over selection. Lewis feels he has performed consistently well at ATFC for a decade. Lewis feels that this commitment warrants him being prioritised, which has not happened. Lewis feels uncertain as to why his contribution is not enough for his coaches.	<p>‘Emm, I just see people come in here on massive money and they get put in front of you. I don’t know, it’s...I don’t really like that to be honest and, the local lads feel the same. A lot of the local lads do feel the same. It just makes you feel like they don’t care about you, to be honest. Because you would think that, because you’ve been here that long you’d [be] their main priority. But it’s not the case. In modern day football anyway.’</p> <p>‘On the negative, probably right now to be honest. I’m not playing as much as I would like to. It’s quite challenging yeah. Like, obviously people have been brought in with contracts and that and they get priority ultimately, which is a bit emmm, how can I say?...Depressing.’</p> <p>‘It might be a bit extreme but I’ve been here for 10 years, been top goal scorer every season and it’s like everything I’m doing is not enough for some reason. That’s what I feel like, at the moment anyway.’</p>

The researcher used the constituents to inform the overall description of the essential psychological structure of ‘critical moments’ for each individual’s transcript (see Table 10 and 4.4.1.1–4.4.1.8 in results section below for individual constituents and individual descriptions of essential psychological structure) (Giorgi, 1975).

The researcher was then required to view the constituents of each individual transcript, with the help of free imaginative variation, to determine whether similar

higher-level eidetic constituents emerged across each individual's transcript (see Table 9) (Beck, 2013; Churchill and Wertz, 2015). The intra-structural higher-level eidetic constituents were put together in a descriptive paragraph which is the general descriptive psychological structure of 'critical moments' (Broomé, 2011). This structure is the outcome (i.e. results) of the analysis (see Table 11) (Broomé, 2011). As discussed, pseudonyms were used to protect the club and the participants' identities. For the purpose of presenting the concrete descriptions (i.e. raw data extracts) in the results section each participant has been further allocated an individual code (e.g P1 = Participant 1).

4.4 Outcome of Data Analysis

4.4.1 Individual constituents and individual descriptions of essential psychological structure of 'critical moments'

As discussed in the previous section, the researcher utilised the constituents that emerged from the data analysis to inform the overall description of the essential psychological structure of 'critical moments' for each individual's transcript. Table 10 on the next page shows the constituents (intra-structural and inter-structural) for each individual transcript. Following this, the essential psychological structure for each transcript is presented. Concrete descriptions (i.e. raw data extracts) have been included in the descriptions to illustrate the lived experience of 'critical moments', and to allow the reader to make their own inferences from the data (Giorgi, 2009). It is important to highlight that concrete descriptions can be one or more examples of instances when the constituents were experienced (Broomé, 2011).

Table 10. *The intra-structural and inter-structural constituents for each individual transcript.*

Participant	Constituents				
Lewis (P1)	Living in ‘Limbo’: A time of uncertainty (securing a new contract and de-selection).	Personal growth: Developing of virtues needed to progress (coach-athlete relationship difficulties).	Et tu Brute? A sense of aggrievement and absence of loyalty at the end (de-selection and securing new contract).	~	~
Paul (P2)	Psycho-social implications (injury and moving away from home).	Stop the clock!: Perception of time (injury).	I’m OK, it’s OK: Self-talk and self reassurance (injury).	~	~
Tom (P3)	You’re a man now, boy: Perceived personal growth (moving away from home).	Conflict of (self)-interest (de-selection and securing a new contract).	Groundhog Day: Perception of time (de-selection).	Frustration and a sense of aggrievement (de-selection).	~
Michael (P4)	Psycho-social implications (moving away from home and injury).	Emotional disturbance (injury).	‘You’re a man now, boy’: Perceived personal growth (moving away).	~	~
Jake (P5)	Self-doubt, frustration and psychological disturbance (injury).	Snatched!: A sense that something has been lost or ‘taken away’ (injury).	Labels and expectations.	Psycho-social implications (injury and moving away from home).	A lesson learned: Perceived personal growth (moving away from home).
Reece (P6)	Initial adjustment to new surroundings.	~	~	~	~
Kane (P7)	Adjusting and adapting to a new environment.	Emotional disturbance (de-selection and injury).	Stop the clock!: The perception of time (signing for ATFC).	~	~
Kris (P8)	Emotional disturbance (injury).	‘Culture shock’: Adapting and adjusting to a new culture.	Stop the clock!: Perception of time (signing for ATFC).	~	~

4.4.1.1 Lewis (P1). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. Lewis’ relationship with his coach hindered his development at a young age. Over time, Lewis developed the courage to be a more authentic version of himself on front of his coach.

‘When I was 11 years old, I started off the season really well. For some reason, the coach that I had I felt quite shy with him, because he was such a big character. And at a young age I wasn’t used to that. I was used to encouraging coaches...So I think that I half hid in my shell a bit at the latter stage of U11. And I was close to getting released that year...So, U11 was a challenging season in that respect. That’s the closest that I’ve been to getting released.

‘It’s quite scary. I, I, I was quite scared at that age to be honest. Like, making mistakes, wondering what he [the coach] would say. Doing things that I had to do...Like I wouldn’t like to express myself at that age in front of him...In the past two years I’ve had that courage and I’ve loved him...At that age I wasn’t ready for that coach and now I’m ready

for him.'

Lewis' experience of securing a new contract affected his confidence. Lewis' confidence increased at times he was informed that he had secured his next contract, and when this happened for him earlier than his teammates. At present, Lewis is experiencing low mood states and a substantial decrease in his self-worth, as he is unsure whether he will be offered a professional contract at ATFC. It is a time of uncertainty (surrounding Lewis' career and future), anxiety and self-doubt with little to no feeling of reassurance for such concerns (in the form of a desired answer to / solution to the 'million dollar question').

'Yeah, eh, it's a bit challenging really. And I don't know [pauses] it's just the way it is, isn't it. I can't do anything about it, other than do my best. And hope they [the managers/coaches] like what [I'm] doing. It's a bit emmm, dunno, horrible. It's a horrible feeling. You feel worthless to be honest. I did ask for feedback, I did ask the other week, from the coaches for feedback...but they can't ultimately answer the 'million dollar question'.'

Lewis is presently de-selected and as a result, Lewis is experiencing anxiety, self-doubt and low mood states in relation to whether or not he will be offered a professional contract at ATFC.

'On the negative, probably right now to be honest. I'm not playing as much as I would like to. It's quite challenging yeah. Like, obviously people have been brought in with contracts and that and they get priority ultimately, which is a bit...depressing.'

Lewis is uncertain as to whether he is just being used by the club to make up squad numbers.

'A lot of the lads have already got them [professional contracts] because of being 'brought in' [bought] and because of, I don't know, doing well...and because of the amounts that are given out [wages] you sort of feel like 'will I get it?' because there's someone else who's got a contract for example, 'am I just getting brought along for numbers?' That's how me and some of the lads feel anyway. I don't know if it is.'

Lewis feels that the specific qualities that one needs to progress are unclear. Lewis is presently experiencing anxiety and uncertainty regarding what he must do in order to secure a contract.

'But now, for example it's pro [professional]. So now I'm feeling those emotions where it's a bit anxious and I don't know, a bit anxious really is the word to describe it. It's challenging mentally, because you obviously want to do the best that you can to impress

to get it [the professional contract] as early as you can. But on the other hand, you still, sometimes you don't know, what...what you have to do to get it. They might be looking for one thing and you're doing another thing for example. They might be looking for someone, rather than something...'

Lewis feels that players on big contracts are prioritised over local players during team selection at ATFC. Lewis feels he has performed consistently well at ATFC for a decade.

Lewis feels that this commitment warrants him being prioritised, which has not happened.

Lewis feels uncertain as to why his contribution is not enough for his coaches.

'Emm, I just see people come in here on massive money and they get put in front of you. I don't know, it's...I don't really like that to be honest and, the local lads feel the same. A lot of the local lads do feel the same. It just makes you feel like they don't care about you, to be honest. Because you would think that, because you've been here that long you'd [be] their main priority. But it's not the case. In modern day football anyway.'

'It might be a bit extreme but I've been here for 10 years, been top goal scorer every season and it's like everything I'm doing is not enough for some reason. That's what I feel like, at the moment anyway.'

4.4.1.2 Paul (P2). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. Paul moved away from home and had to adapt to a new environment at ATFC which has affected him psycho-socially. Paul does not feel fully comfortable living with his house-parents, as they are not his own parents. Paul behaves in an introverted manner where he lives. He is limited in his engagement with his house-parents and chooses to isolate himself by confining himself to his room, with the exception of dinnertime.

'At the moment I'm just in my room all day. The house-parents just call me down for dinner, that's when I go down and then I just go back upstairs to my room ...'

'I don't really talk to my house-parents that much. I just stay in my room.'

'As much as anyone says you can feel at home you don't feel 100% at home because they're not your parents.'

Paul was aware that his adjustment to life at ATFC was going to be difficult because he would no longer be the best player at a low level. Paul recognises that ATFC are of a much higher standard [than his previous club]. Paul has learned that if he misbehaves out in town it will quickly be brought to light. Paul feels as though he is constantly under

surveillance as news surrounding players' actions/behaviour is constantly reported back to staff at ATFC.

'...I knew it was going to be hard up here, because at UFC, I was one of the best players but obviously UFC is down here and ATFC is up here [gestures in ranking] so you've got to kind of keep your feet on the floor.'

'Say if you went to town and had like a fight with another guy at a club, someone would know here before anyone else would. So word gets around here. They do know what you are doing all the time... Well you do it anyways, but you always second thought it, because it feels like there is always someone watching you.'

Paul's experience of injury has also affected him psycho-socially. Paul feels as though his life is consumed by his injury. Paul's social life has been adversely affected due to being injured.

'I don't really have a life at the moment...It's boring but I can watch TV...they say to try and do it [machine based rehab exercises] while you sleep but it's impossible. I normally sleep on my side. If it moves like this [demonstrates movement] then you're going to have to sleep on your back aren't you? I haven't got a life like I told you, I can't do anything.'

Furthermore, Paul's rehab is restricting him from having a normal and active life. Paul is experiencing low mood states since his injury.

'Yeah. I had about 3 or 4 months here before this and I was playing a few games and doing well...Yeah it's a bit um, it's a bit...obviously it put me down having done well then knowing I'm missing out for so long.'

Paul feels frustrated watching his teammates train whilst he is on crutches.

'It's so annoying. Watching everyone train and you're on crutches. Like that's, that's the worst thing.'

Paul feels he is alone and away from family support which has caused him to feel there is additional pressure on him at this time.

'But I do feel the pressure more when I am injured...it's more pressure up here because you're on your own as well.'

Paul perceives his days as being extremely long and boring now as he is beginning to rehabilitate following an injury that required surgery.

'But the 8 hours at home, is just so boring. I just think to myself, like, if I do this it's going to get better and if it doesn't get better then at least I've done everything that I can to make it better.'

Paul had calculated the amount of time he would miss due to his injury. Paul attempted to rationalise and minimise the impact this time out would have by telling himself he has had his injury at the right time as the season was almost over.

'But look, I had an operation last week and I'm only going to miss 7 games in total. So for a 6 month injury to only miss 7 games isn't much so I've had it at the right time. We finish the season in May. May until July we have off. So I'm out at the best time innit?'

Paul used self-talk to reassure himself that his knee would improve if he completed his rehabilitation program. Paul reassured himself that if it transpired that he did not make a full recovery after completing his rehabilitation program, he would feel that he has done everything within his control to recover optimally.

'I just think to myself, like, if I do this it's going to get better and if it doesn't get better then at least I've done everything that I can to make it better.'

4.4.1.3 Tom (P3). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. For two months following his move, Tom felt unsure as to whether he liked being at ATFC. Tom felt that he moved away at a young age (aged 15). Tom developed an awareness that he needed to effectively adjust to his new environment in order to progress.

'...I'd say about a month or two months I was like '...I don't know whether I like this, I don't know whether I like this.' I was always ringing Mum...I'm thinking 'I've gotta learn, I've gotta learn quick'. Because if I'm going to be like this it's going to have an effect on my football and I don't want that to happen.'

However, initially Tom doubted his ability to cope effectively.

'I think I struggled a bit when I first came up, I thought I don't know, I don't know whether I can hack it as such because you know, being 15 and moving away from home is a big thing. I mean I had to change schools and everything. So I had to get all my school work transferred over...but, you know it's all a learning curve in life....'

Tom confined himself to his room unless he was called for dinner, in which case he would have his meal and then return to his room straight away. Tom perceived himself to have grown up quicker than he should have due to his move. Tom feels like a man, compared to how he thinks he would have felt had he not moved away from home at a young age. Tom perceives himself to have transformed from an introvert to someone who is social

and has found their comfort-zone. Tom feels that he is much more social now. Tom feels that has become his own person now. Tom perceived himself to have grown up quicker than he should have due to his move. Tom feels like a man, compared to how he thinks he would have felt had he not moved away from home at a young age.

'At some stages I was just in that room and I wouldn't come out of the room unless I got the shout 'tea's ready' then I'd go down, but I'd go straight back up again. D'ya know, I wouldn't literally go out of my room...From being that lad when I first come, who was like, oh in a little shell, to getting into your comfort zone. So I've gone from like nothing, to doing everything that I used to do. D'ya know what I mean? Like I won't be in my room at all now! So I've totally gone the opposite way.'

'I think I've grown up quicker than I should have. I feel more like, more like a man now rather than moving away from home, I don't know, let's say when I was 18...I think you have to learn quicker. It was beneficial to me really.'

Tom is experiencing uncertainty regarding selection at present. Tom has gone from being the first choice in his position all season, to sharing each game with another player. Tom finds himself in a difficult situation which has generated conflicting personal viewpoints. Tom is aware that he does not have to play because he has played enough games this season, and a day to recuperate may be good for him. However, he also feels it takes a huge toll on him mentally when he is not selected to play. Tom feels that he cannot demand a game, but he still wants to be selected to play. Tom is unable to find a suitable compromise in this situation. Tom feels that the control over whether he plays is out of his hands.

'...but then again it kills me not to play. But then you think is that too many games? Is my concentration going to go at some point? But then again when you don't play as many games you want to play more, so there's no middle ground. Like now I'm thinking 'I need a game! I just want to play!' Like we've got a game tomorrow, I don't know if I'm playing or not but I want to play. Every game that's on now I want to be on the pitch... I'm in a hard position really. I'm in the middle because I wanna play but then I think 'yeah but somebody else has got to play'...it's still hard because I'm not in the position to make that choice...'

Tom and his teammates are fighting for the same outcome – a professional contract. As such, Tom feels that there is a need for him to be selfish and to compartmentalise sentiment toward a teammate in order to succeed. Tom perceives this as a difficult but

necessary task. Tom feels that he has no true friends on the pitch. Tom classifies his teammates as acquaintances.

'I always say to my Dad, you've got your friends in the game, but as such because you're all fighting for the same place I always say to my Dad 'you've got no friends – they are all acquaintances.' ...It's all well and good being best mates off the pitch but when you get on it it's totally different because he's fighting for my place and I'm fighting for his place. So the friendship – don't say goes out the window, but I think you've got to take it as: it's me and him. It's me and him and we're fighting for the same place so the friendship has to go out at some point. When we get on [the pitch] I think it's just gotta be 'it's me and him and that's it'.

It was a difficult experience for Tom at the World Cup in M. Tom perceived the five and a half weeks he spent in M as repetitive. Tom felt as though he had no chance of being selected to play which made him feel as if he did not want to be there. Tom experienced large amounts of boredom and frustration during this time. Each day became repetitive. Tom felt as though each day was the same, prolonged, seemingly endless day.

'I was away for 5 and a half weeks it was, and it gets to a stage where you're with the same group, just imagine you being with me and this club every day – it's repetitive but you're somewhere where you don't want to be. Because it's not like I was gonna play because 3 keepers went and I was probably well I dunno – well I was no. 21 there was no. 13 and then no. 1. I'm last in line to play if anybody, so what are the chances of 2 keepers getting injured and me playing was very, very low. So you know, it was hard over there...'

'Yeah, well boredom kicks in a lot. A lot. And frustration. Because we were with the same group doing the same routine everyday, day in and day out but it's not as if the routine changed you know we could have had a change where we were training in the morning and not doing anything in the afternoon, whereas it was we'd get up in the morning have breakfast, we'd train, we'd come back in and sit down, and then we'd eat. You know, it was, it was repetitive. It just kept coming as if it was the same day but just dragging on and on and on...'

Tom attributed the fights that broke out amongst teammates to this frustration and repetition.

'...and it got to the stage where there was that much frustration that people were fighting, like teammates between themselves were fighting.'

Tom felt as though being de-selected [for his national team] took an extreme mental toll on him. Tom felt frustrated as he felt he was doing everything in his control to get selected but he was not given a chance to prove himself. Tom perceived the other goalkeeper as underperforming. This enhanced Tom's frustration at being de-selected as he was not

afforded the opportunity to impress.

'You know, in terms of frustration like I say I go away and I'm not playing. It's difficult because frustration does kick in and when you get to the stage where you're doing everything you can and you're being, you're somewhere not necessarily where you don't want to be because I wanted to be there if I was playing but when you're not playing it's extremely frustrating because you just think 'what can I do to get on the pitch?'

Tom proposed selection criteria that should be met before a player can justifiably be selected to play for their country.

'If you look at it the way I looked at it he'd played more games for [national team] than he actually did for his club...Because if he's playing for his country but not his club, how do you work that out? Because obviously if you're playing for your club then surely that earns you the right to play for your country. So how can you play for your country when you're not playing for your club? I, I just didn't understand it. It was hard because you know, mentally it killed me because I wasn't playing again.'

If the other goalkeeper was outstanding, Tom felt as though he would have recognised that this player was deserving of his selection. However, Tom perceived the other goalkeeper as falling short of this standard. As a result, Tom felt aggrieved and frustrated by the manager's decision not to select him, as he did not understand why the other goalkeeper was chosen to play over him.

'It's not as if the goalkeeper was playing outstanding. If he was playing outstanding I'd hold my hands up and say 'look, he's brilliant, he's playing really well!' You're not gonna change him are ya? If he's going to play that well, you're not gonna change him. But when he's not doing so well and you're not getting the opportunity to impress then it's extremely frustrating.'

4.4.1.4 Michael (P4). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. For the initial four months after moving, Michael did not like living at ATFC. Michael felt out of his comfort-zone.

'Well em, I was just, I was just really shy really. I didn't do anything. I didn't ask for anything. I was just shy because obviously I just felt like I was out of my comfort-zone.'

Michael behaved in an introverted manner and chose to isolate himself from his house-parents. Michael perceived not seeing his mother as a particularly difficult aspect of the experience. Michael felt depressed for the first four months following his move. After this time had passed, Michael realised that he needed to find a way to successfully cope

with the situation. Michael feels he has grown up rapidly due to this experience of moving away from home on his own. After 4 months, Michael grew accustomed to his house-parents which allowed him to adjust and feel more comfortable in his new environment.

'Well now that I'm used to the routine I cope fine to be honest. Em, before it was kind of hard because you see your Mum everyday, you see your family and brother everyday, your friends everyday and then you change environment where you don't see them, especially your Mother as well so em, it's kind of hard to be honest. I just think, 'where's my Mum to look after me?' aw 'Where's my Mum to talk?' 'Where's my Mum to tell me the things that I'm doing that are wrong?' So you kind of miss them things. You miss them jokes, you miss them little things. But then again you gotta, gotta grow up do you know what I'm saying. You gotta grow up some day and I grew up, I grew up very fast. It wasn't really an issue but yeah the first four months I was down and out and then I had to cope.'

Michael has his own apartment now and perceives living alone as allowing him a lot more freedom. However, Michael feels that he has a lot of additional responsibilities as a result. Moving away from home forced Michael to develop independence as he felt that he was isolated from his support system. Michael felt as though he needed to become an adult and take responsibility for his actions. Michael found this difficult.

'Going to house-parents, it makes you kind of, a little bit independent because obviously like you're on your own. You ain't got no family or no one you know. You kinda like have to know what you're doing and when you go to move into your apartment you have to like step it up to another level to become, to become like an adult. Be responsible for your actions, everything... Um, it's kind of hard to be honest...'

Michael was injured for 13–14 weeks. Michael perceived this to be an extremely long time. Michael also found the experience extremely difficult from a psycho-social point of view. The 13–15 weeks Michael was injured were the worst of his life. During these weeks, Michael regularly had days where he behaved in an introverted manner and isolated himself as he did not want to communicate with anyone.

'They were the worst 13, 14 or 15 weeks of my life I would say. Seeing everyone go out to train, what you love doing – I defo don't want to see myself in that situation again. It was like obviously mentally tough as well, um, the players doing good things - I'm happy for the boys but obviously I want to be a part of it, d'ya know what I'm saying? I want to be a part of all that success. They're winning games they're playing well, they're improving and you're just on a medical bed doing your same programme that you do almost every week. And yeah – it was tough, very, very tough. Some days you go home and you don't want to talk you just put on music, and sleep to it. I just had so many of those days during those 15 weeks yeah so...'

His injury had a profound effect on his behaviour and mood. He felt extremely fed up, frustrated, lethargic and lacked motivation to attend ATFC or to get out of bed. Michael's personal development regressed as a result of his injury. Michael felt that he reverted back to how he behaved when he first arrived at ATFC (in an introverted manner).

'Um, yeah when I got injured I was very anti-social. I went back to how I was when I first came.'

Michael perceived his career as being over during this time. Michael started to arrive in to ATFC late each morning. This was in direct contrast to how he behaved prior to being injured. Michael was aware that his preparation was entirely wrong. He was also aware that he had become amotivated and lethargic, despite trying to do as much as he could to increase his fitness. Michael felt that he lost his mind. Michael stated that he had to learn how to effectively cope with the experience.

'...You just get fed up. You lose the quality in the little things you do like. Say getting up – even though I was on crutches em, just getting up to come in – just, just some days you think 'awwh, awh I can't be arsed.' You stay in bed for that extra 10 minutes whereas normally if you were coming up to train you'd get up, jump in the shower, nice and bright. You'd look forward to the training session but now you just want to catch that extra 10 minutes in bed. Everything, everything, everything like your preparation is...wrong. Like, you come in say 5 minutes late. You're behind basically; you're behind em you just become sluggish like...on the bike. Let's say, obviously I'll try work hard to get fit and that, try do as much as I can but sometimes you tend to lose your mind...it's hard! Very hard.'

'... but in the first 5–6 weeks like I say that was sluggish, very sluggish. I was just...I wasn't bothered at all. I thought, I just thought it was the end innit...It was hard, it was annoying. D'ya what I'm saying? Yeah when I first got injured yeah I did cry but it's normal innit.'

When Michael could see that he was progressing in his recovery, he began to demonstrate positive and proactive behaviours again. Michael began to recover his strength and felt ecstatic when he noticed that he was progressing. Michael then started to put additional effort and work into his rehab.

'Just, you just gotta pick yourself up in the end and obviously, when I saw progress that's when I started wanting it more, that's when I started wanting to, to put effort in in the things that I did. I started to come in on time when I saw progress...'

'Awh I was over the moon when I saw progress, the knee losing a lot of swelling. Um,

getting back to how it used to be, walking on my leg again. The smiles, d'ya know what I'm saying? Then you go home and extra ice, tablets d'ya know what I'm sayin? Keep movin' your leg, keep movin' your leg, keep getting movement in it so it's....more or less I could say I worked, I worked really hard off the pitch in the gyms. Kept working hard in the gym.'

4.4.1.5 Jake (P5). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. Jake described football paradoxically. Jake finds football hard, technical, and extremely complex psychologically, yet feels that his role is very basic at the same time. Jake has begun to experience a lot of self-doubt surrounding his future, his place on the team and his ability to recover from his injury.

'...football is hard. It's really complex in the head. But it's so basic at the same time...Job description: Stop the ball from going in the back of the net...But at the same time it's so technical, so with all of this you start to doubt thinking 'oh God, like I've injured myself. I've got injured. When's my next game gonna come? Are they going to bring someone else in? Is...Am I going to come back as strong? What if I come back and the other keeper is doing well and I don't get my position back? It's kind of a lot of self-doubt.'

Although Jake's injury had a slight motivational affect, Jake felt angered by his injury. Jake felt as though he was missing out on good training sessions that his teammates were involved in. This feeling of missing out was where Jake's self-doubt manifested.

'It makes you think, 'at least I'll be back, at least...because I see them out there I'm going to work so hard. I will be back there doing better than all of them'. And I mean, that's what spurs you on. It kind of has its benefits. But at the same time it does anger you. Especially if someone talks about training like 'oh training was great today. We did this...' Like sometimes, when they ask about stuff like that it can anger you. You're annoyed...and you do feel like you're missing out. And that's where it annoys you like, 'oh I'm missing out again', and that's where the self-doubt comes...'

Being injured has been a horrible experience for Jake as it happened at a time where he felt he was at his peak and performing optimally. Jake was forced to suddenly stop playing. Jake's life is totally consumed by football so when he found himself unable to play, it had negative psychological consequences.

'It was horrible like. Just the worst feeling is when you're at your best, and you're training well and then it's just bang! Stops it. Especially when all you do every day and all you know is to play football and they finally stop you from playing football, it really like, messes with your head.'

Jake felt upset watching his teammates play whilst he was unable to. Jake experienced self-doubt when he saw other teammates performing well. Jake felt anxious about his fitness and whether he would recover and be the same player he was prior to his injury.

'...but it's hard not to get down when you see all the lads going out training, and knowing you can't be there. You see somebody make a great save and you're like 'I can't do that right now'. Like, and then you start self-doubting, like 'Will I come back as strong?' or 'Will I come back and be able to....uhh I'm going to be so unfit.'

When Jake performs poorly, he feels frustrated and experiences a low mood state. However, Jake feels that he can control how he responds to this situation. Whilst injured, Jake's control has been taken away from him against his will. Jake feels that his opportunity to improve has been taken away. Jake feels that being injured knocked his mentality for 6 weeks or more because he felt that his progress, improvements and fitness were all negatively affected by his injury.

'Injury like, if you're not playing well you're pissed off and you're in a bad mood but at the same time if you're playing badly at least you can go and do an extra session and try to make yourself better. Whereas this, is out of your hands...For 6 weeks you're not even allowed to catch a ball, it's kind of, you can't improve yourself in any way. And it kind of slows your progress down. It slows down your improvements; it slows down like your fitness, your game, your mentality. It knocks your mentality for a good 6 weeks.'

Jake feels that football environments are the most pressured environments to exist in. Jake found that there is a lot of self-doubt and anxiety associated with football. Jake feels that being injured increases such self-doubt and anxiety.

'...but at the same time it's hard because there's a lot of self-doubt. A lot of worry, a lot of worry about...I dunno, I mean football is just full of pressure. It is the most pressured environment. And I mean it adds a lot more to it.'

Jake felt frustrated because his injury prohibited him from doing the everyday tasks he was used to doing, prior to his injury. Jake likened his experience of being injured to having his livelihood taken away from him. Jake felt as though his injury had stopped him from doing his job which contributed to his feeling of frustration. Jake felt frustrated because his injury prohibited him from doing the everyday tasks he was used to prior to his injury.

'...but it stopped me doing certain things like. It's not just training wise; it stopped me doing things like, daily things. It just got really annoying. Like it was just a (sighs)...little things you couldn't do like you couldn't grip, you couldn't grip properly. You couldn't pick up a knife. You couldn't, I don't know, it just kind of stopped you doing normal things.'

'Like, it's like, somebody taking away from you what you want to do for a living.'

'...it has got a lot of negatives because, well it's your job it's what you're here to do and you're not doing it. You get annoyed because you can't do it.'

Jake is better at dealing with pressure now. When Jake first signed for ATFC, the media interest made it very difficult for him. Jake felt under a lot of pressure due to the media intrusion. This pressure Jake was under became extremely debilitating for him.

'I've gotten a lot better at dealing with pressure. I mean when I first came here it was hard. Coming from S to here was very hard. Because, it was on Sky Sports, it was on all the websites, everybody was asking for my number for interviews, all of this. And it was constant, that's a lot of pressure. I was like, I was loving it to start with, course you're gonna, you're like 'Awh yeah! Brilliant!' but you don't say anything out of turn; you act professional and you do all this. But it's a lot of pressure and it hits you hard. And that's when it kind of hits you and you go like, you go 'Crap! What am I – what [does] everyone expect(s) of me' everyone has a massive expectation of you, and now you, you've gotta go and live up to it. So that's, that's a killer.'

Jake began to consider the massive expectations that people now had of him and how he must now live up to these expectations. Jake had been labelled as 'The Next Best Thing'. Jake's confidence initially increased, but Jake also began to experience self-doubt due to these high expectations. Jake's feeling that he must to live up to these expectations resulted in him trying too hard.

'Like everyone goes and labels you. Like I know lots of players, like at S and here they go 'The Next Best Thing. He's the Next Best Thing. Next Best Thing.' And then when someone tells you you're the 'Next Best Thing' like, you can be confident like 'Yeah, yeah I am' and it gives you a nice boost. But at the same time, again you'll doubt and go 'Next best thing? Bloody hell! Everyone expects me to score every week or make clean sheets or get like, I dunno, like I need 20 assists this season' and that's when you start like trying too hard.'

Jake's label as 'The Next Best Thing' resulted in Jake comparing himself to the best thing at present, and what they were like at Jake's age. Jake's levels of confidence and arrogance increased. However, Jake realised that he has a long way to go to reach that same level and this prospect made Jake feel overwhelmed. Jake was aware that if he was

not living up to expectations associated with his label then he would be 'released' by ATFC.

*'It's a nice feeling, at the same time because again it is a massive compliment. The way I look at it, if you think about what they're saying 'The Next Best Thing' you think 'What's the best thing right now?' And you look at players now like Ronaldo and Messi. People are comparing you, at your age to them. 'You're gonna be like him.' 'You're gonna be like this.' You think 'I love him, he's so good, I want to be like him.' People are saying 'I'm gonna be like him. You're like 'Yeaaaah.' That's where you get a bit of cockiness, a bit of confidence. But at the same time, if someone goes 'You're gonna be like him.' You think 'God he's good like, that is a long way to go like. That's, that's like, I dunno you just feel all *pwhoosh*. That's a massive compliment but at the same time if people start labelling you and you're not doing what they're labelling you as, you're out the door like, the next thing.'*

Jake feels that a lot of pressure comes from external sources such as his manager, friends, family and his teammates because he never wants to let his teammates down. If he does he feels guilty. Jake wants to do his best for everyone else.

'And I mean it's lots of pressure from everyone, pressure from managers, pressure from friends, family, pressures from other players of course because you don't want to let your teammates down. You never want to let your teammates down, because again you feel bad. It's kind of; you want to do the best for everyone else, don't you?'

Despite the light hearted exchanges with his team, Jake feels under a lot of pressure relating to his contract and how long he has left, other players and their wages and new signings and their contracts. Jake ruminates regularly and questions decisions made by management.

'Like this environment, it's very...like they try to make it as relaxed as possible...But at the same time you know deep down there is a lot of pressure. You know deep down like 'How long has my contract left?' 'What's he on?' 'That new guy who's come in, what's he on?' 'How long is he going to be here?' 'Why is the manager doing this?' 'Why is.....?' And there is a lot of pressure behind...again there is a lot of thinking involved because you think 'Why is the manager doing this?' 'Why am I not doing this?' 'Why is he here?' 'Why is this happening?' 'Why is that happening?' And it's a lot of pressure on you...'

Jake withdrew himself from certain social activities with friends where he felt that he would be unable to do the activity due to injury. Jake and another player, who was also injured, have formed a good friendship because they were in rehab together. However, it was a difficult social experience overall because Jake was not retaining friendships with the rest of his teammates. Jake felt unable to do what his friends could do. Jake felt like

he was being socially awkward and incapable.

'Friends wise it's hard because you can't do everything that they can. You can't, they say 'aw come play tennis, come do this, come to the gym, come do this'. And you can't. And you feel like you're being socially awkward, or like inept to them.'

'...socially, luckily...kind of, you make friends as well through injury. Like me and him are good friends now. But we have a new lad called Rob and I'm really good friends with him because I was in physio for like 3 weeks when he joined and so was he. And we're good friends now, he lives by me and it's like 'you going town today?' like 'Yeah yeah'...Socially it can be helpful, 'cause you can meet new people and become friends with new people...but at the same time if you're not staying friends with the people you're playing with every day socially it's hard.'

Jake found the first month of living alone difficult. It was a difficult adjustment for Jake having to learn how to do housework, shopping and cooking for himself. Jake realised that he had never had to do these things for himself. Some days Jake wants to come home and have his mother there to talk to and to cook him something. Jake finds it difficult that his mother is not there. There are many events that Jake would want to talk to his parents about. Jake wants his parents to be there in person to comfort him and to reassure him. Although Jake's father would phone him, Jake feels that it is really difficult to feel comforted during a telephone conversation because he cannot see that his father is empathising or sympathising like he would do in person. Jake stated that it is very different not having this support.

'...you can't, some days you want to come home and you want someone to chat to and someone to cook you something she's [his Mum] not there, and it's kind of...and it's kind of hard...not having (your Mum) everyday makes you miss her more like...'

'...let's say at training I didn't have a great day. Like 'awh yeah I just wasn't great today', 'so and so said something to me, oh like I was really annoyed' You want them to be there to comfort you and be like 'nah nah it's cool, you'll be fine'. Or if you have a bad game you're like 'Uhh I've had a bad game'. My Dad will ring me but it's hard to explain it over the phone. It's so hard for him to go, 'Oh it was unlucky etc' over the phone. Whereas in person you can see he's empathising, like he's sympathising, like it's just really like, it's a lot different kind of not to have it.'

Jake has lived alone for 5 months now. Jake feels like he is alone due to the absence of his parents. Jake has grown up in the two years he has been at ATFC (aged 16-18 years old) and he has learned to deal with his feelings of missing physical support from his

parents.

'It's weird because you're kind of...by yourself. I'm by myself in my apartment. I live by myself at the minute. Em, I moved about (thinks, counts), it's a bit actually, about 5 months ago a couple of days ago. So it's almost 5 months I've lived by myself now. It's like you have to learn to live for yourself a lot...'

'But again, I've grown up now, I moved up here when I was 16 and I'm 18 now I've learned to live with that.'

Jake feels he has learned positive life lessons and skills which he feels has helped him greatly as a person, such as increased independence and dealing with setbacks by himself.

Jake felt that he had become a much stronger person emotionally as a result of living alone because he cannot go home to speak to his support network.

'...and it's, and I mean I enjoy it at the same time because it's a life lesson that's how I look at it. I mean it's a life lesson, you're going to have to learn to live by yourself and learn to kind of, deal with setbacks by yourself. I mean having parents for support is great but at the same time, they can't be there every day of your life so learning to kind of deal with it by yourself helps you as a person a lot.'

'And like I've become a much stronger person from living by myself. Emotionally just because I know sometimes I can't go home to someone to speak to. I can speak to them on the phone but sometimes you've just gotta be able to deal with the pressure. Deal with it all by yourself. Kind of...I dunno, it makes it hard.'

Jake is aware that he could speak to his parents on the phone but he felt that he needed to be able to deal with the pressure alone. Jake finds it difficult having to deal with this pressure alone. Following his injury, Jake felt that he had nobody to reassure him or to lift his mood in the evenings when he went home. Jake thinks that this lack of support made him stronger as a person.

'It's weird things and you've got no one to kind of go 'Awh you'll be back in a couple of weeks' or 'you'll be fine' like 'let's go out for a nice dinner' like 'we'll cheer you up' sort of thing. You've got no one to cheer you up when, when you get home. So....but at the same time it's good because it makes you stronger as a person, I think. Sometimes it does make you stronger as a person.'

4.4.1.6 *Reece (P6)*. Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. Initially, Reece found that his move away from home was a difficult experience. Reece perceived having his brother living in close proximity as a positive. It took time for Reece to adjust to living with house-parents.

'Yeah, like, d'ya know, you don't really know who they [his house-parents] are. But like obviously the club would know, you're getting to know them and they're getting to know you and getting to know what foods you like and all. And then obviously it's different because you're not with your mum and all.'

Reece felt that his house-parents were strangers and as a result he felt his living situation was very different to what he was used to at home. Reece does not feel as comfortable living with his house-parents, as he does with his own parents.

'Um, but obviously it's been really different because like, you're like way more comfortable probably around your parents than you are with your house-parents.'

As time elapsed, Reece became more comfortable in the company of his house-parents.

'But over time like you just get used to it, and you get, you get really comfortable with them.'

When Reece left home he felt that he had left his support system also. Although Reece felt excited by the move also as he would be playing football each day, he found his move away as difficult as he had to leave his friendship circle and their social activities behind.

Reece felt that moving to an unfamiliar city was a difficult experience for him.

'Um, it was um, well I moved after my GCSE's, d'ya know like, I moved in July, early July and I finished school in June so all my mates and all were off for the summer. That was hard you know because they were all going to be about but I'd been over to ATFC and that and I was going to miss all that, but I couldn't wait you know, because I'd be playing football every day. But then obviously moving away it's hard, moving away was hard like.'

Reece was unaccustomed to being somewhere he did not know without his friends. Reece's parents visited regularly which meant he still had support during the time he was adapting to his new environment.

'But like no, obviously it would be much harder for me if they [his parents] couldn't visit but because my parents are over it helps. It's hard not getting to see my mates a lot though.'

Reece views the city positively now that he has adjusted to his surroundings. Reece feels that his home and ATFC are similar culturally and aesthetically when compared to each other. This was a factor which made it easier for Reece to adjust to his move.

'Yeah um, it was just like, taking in your surroundings. Like obviously here wasn't really a familiar place like because I'm from a different country and was used to being with my mates all the time and now, you know, you don't really know anything about the city like.'

You don't know where, like directions for everywhere...walking around town you don't know where shops are and stuff.'

4.4.1.7 Kane (P7). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. Kane found it difficult to adjust to his new environment at ATFC. At first, Kane moved by himself and stayed with house-parents for a fortnight. Following this, Kane's family moved to ATFC which has helped him in adjusting to his new life at ATFC.

I went, for the first two weeks I had to stay in digs. Those houses that the Scholars stay in, and it was hard. Like, not seeing my parents and that after training. But now that they've moved up it's been a lot easier...It's a support thing. Like, after training I don't really talk to them, but just them being there it's a lot easier.'

Kane recognised that at ATFC, the standard of training, strength and conditioning and practice was different to the previous environment that he was used to. Kane's surroundings were entirely new to him.

'Yeah, everything was new to me. Like, the training sessions that we did, it wasn't, it was more tactical...everything was more...like, more serious if you know what I mean?'

Kane felt that the football element was more elite. Kane felt that although this was a positive, it was a new experience for him to have to adapt to such an environment. Kane feels fatigued when he arrives home and he rests as a result. Kane feels that his new environment is quiet without much social outlet, compared to his last environment. Kane does not have friends in his new environment. Kane felt under a large amount of pressure to perform in his debut game at ATFC due perceived expectations. Kane felt that it was necessary for him to prove why he had the reputation that preceded him and why he was signed by ATFC. After Kane performed well, he felt as though he could then begin to become comfortable in his new environment. Kane feels as though he has become accustomed to the pressure now.

'Yeah, and probably, umm, my first game for ATFC. Um, because like obviously I had a lot of pressure because I'd just came, just signed and um, I think I set up a goal and we won the game 5-0. And after that game I just settled down but I just wanted to get that game out of the way...Like, you can't, like I feel like, I felt like I had to perform really,

really good because of what I had been doing at MKFC and internationally. But now I'm used to it as well.'

Kane perceives his time at ATFC as more mentally challenging, compared to where he was before. When Kane does not feel well or his football is not going well he is aware that he must effectively deal with it. Kane feels as though his life revolves around football. Kane feels there are high expectations of him. As a result, Kane feels as though he is unable to relax or to reduce the intensity of his commitment shown. Kane finds this to be the most difficult aspect of football.

'Umm, just, it's a lot...it's a lot harder mentally. Like you can have days where it's just not going well for you or days where you're tired but you've just got to get through it...'

'Like, everyday even when you're not training you still have to...there's still loads of things you have to do. Like, in the morning before we even train, the first thing we have to do is injury prevention. So everything is related to what you do on the pitch, even when you're not training. So you can't ever relax, if you know what I mean? You have to, there's always something to do. That's probably the hardest part about it...Like, when you're tired you just want to be lazy and not really do anything but obviously because you're at ATFC and they have such high expectations of you. You have to make sure that you're always switched on in everything that you do.'

Kane found being de-selected difficult and disappointing as he was not accustomed to being dropped from his team. As a result, Kane was unsure of the correct way to react.

'Yeah, umm, at the start of last season I weren't, like I was with the U18s, even though I was the youngest I was with the U18s. But I wasn't playing, I mean I was playing but I weren't playing every game. Like I was on the bench some times and it was hard to, because I've not really been used to being on the bench. So it was hard to be on the bench, hard to react. Sometimes I'd be disappointed that I only played 20 minutes, so that was definitely a hard time.'

Kane felt disheartened and as if he no longer wanted to play football as a result of being de-selected. Kane attributed parental support as a key factor in him moving away from maladaptive coping patterns.

'Well, obviously because my parents had moved up, it was important that they were there to support, because there was times where I was just so disappointed I didn't even want to train or...but they [his parents] got me through it...'

Kane felt frustrated and stressed at being injured. This is because Kane was no longer able to train with the squad. Kane felt frustrated watching his team play as he wanted to be playing also.

'Yeah, umm, as well just when I started playing for the U18s, I tore my groin so I was out for 8 weeks. That was frustrating because just as I had started to play with the U18s, I wasn't allowed to play anymore because of injury so that was frustrating. And it was one of them injuries where, I felt fine but I weren't fine if you know what I mean? So being out for so long and like watching, every weekend watching the U18s play was just frustrating. And then I think, I was, I was out for so long that the last game of that season I was back and then the season ended.'

'Stressful, yeah. Not being able to play.'

Kane was unaware of ATFC's interest in signing him. Kane perceived the move as happening rapidly once he did know.

'Yeah, I didn't really know, no. Like my Mum and Dad knew a lot about it but they didn't tell me anything. They [parents] moved over. Everyone moved over. Yeah, it all happened so quick, you don't really get time to think about it because every day you're training or you're playing. But it's, obviously it's a good thing.'

'Yeah, it was difficult. I didn't really know that I was going to move. I remember there was a week that I went to ATFC to see how it is and then at the end of that week I just moved up. I didn't really know, it all happened so quick.'

Kane perceived making his international debut as a positive experience. Kane set up a goal. This event unfolded so rapidly that Kane was unable to recall much of what happened.

'Definitely making my international debut was a good time...Umm, I came on 30 minutes before the end, and in my first two touches I set up a goal...Yeah (laughs). And then we won the game 3-1 against NP and then...It all happened so quick. So I couldn't really remember much about it.'

4.4.1.8 Kris (P8). Description of the explicated psychological structure of the phenomenon. Due to his injury, Kris feels that his day has become solely focused on his rehabilitation. Kris will be unable to play for 6-8 months due to his injury. Kris perceives this to be a long duration to be out injured. Kris was unable to recall the moment his injury took place but he remembers the medical intervention in the direct aftermath. Kris felt disbelief, devastation and extremely disappointed when the extent of his injury was explained to him.

'I can't remember. It was painful, very painful. I was brought off and straight to ice because it went like this [imitates swelling using hand gestures]...It is hard. When they told me it is a serious injury, I was devastated thinking '6 months! This is unbelievable.'

'Oh, it was hard to see the matches here and I would think I want to play. This was for 3 months. I just played 3 matches and then I got injured...It was so disappointing.'

'Then my injury happened in the third match. It was just disappointing, very disappointing. I was just [makes crying face and is lost for words].'

The time Kris has spent injured has been his most difficult time because he cannot play football and he is not involved with the team whilst undergoing his rehab.

'When I'm injured it is the hardest time as well, when I am injured...Because you can't do what you like and you can only watch the matches and eh...I am not [struggles to find the word, acts out being in a group by making a wide circular motion with his hands and saying ['with the team]].'

Kris moved to ATFC at the age of 16. Kris felt his move to ATFC happened rapidly. Kris described how it all happened within the space of a fortnight.

'...The move here was fast, because my agent said there was an opportunity to come here and 2 weeks later I flew over for my first trial and then they said that they want me to come back and play a match. It was very fast.'

Kris experienced 'culture-shock' in the aftermath of his move and as a result, he found it difficult to adjust to his new environment. Kris estimated that it took him around 6 months to feel accustomed to his new life in the UK.

'But it was hard settling in over here. I was 16 when I moved.'

'Eh...(pause) Em, it just takes a while to get used to, it is hard to settle in. It is a big change because there is a new language, I learned English in H and I thought I was good at it but then I came here and I realised that I wasn't...People spoke way faster, and the accent and the slang, just everything. It took me about half a year.'

Kris learned English in school and felt he was proficient at speaking it. However, when he arrived at ATFC, Kris could not understand the dialect and had to translate the meaning of words from English to [his native language] in order to gain an understanding of what was said. Kris found this translation process slow and very difficult to achieve.

Kris felt that everybody thought that he was unable to speak.

'Yeah, eh, I couldn't speak [the language]. I could understand everything but I couldn't answer.'

'I just said 'yes' or 'no' or 'ok'. Because when I was thinking I was trying to translate from H to English and that was really hard. Everybody thought I can't speak.'

Kris misses his girlfriend and finds living away from home very difficult. He remains in contact with his family and friends on a daily basis.

'It is hard, sometimes hard of course. I could go home every month for the national team but of course it is hard being so far away from family, friends and girlfriend...Em, she has been here 3 times now. We can stay in a hotel and when I finish training I go to the hotel and we spend our time together. That is the hardest thing I think, missing her.'

Kris perceives the football at ATFC to be very different in pace, effort and physicality compared to the football he played at home. These differences are important factors in making Kris' adjustment to his move very difficult for him.

'It is different. Here, it is faster, harder, more physical. So it is hard.'

Kris was not eligible to play initially in matches when he moved to ATFC as his papers had not been processed. The papers took 3 months to process. Kris found this time difficult, as he was watching the games but ineligible to play. Kris wanted to play throughout this time. Once Kris became eligible, it was only 3 games later that he sustained his serious injury. Kris felt extremely disappointed by this.

'I am a defender but I have just played two games. Because of where I am from, I needed papers to be able to play and it took time to get them...Oh, it was hard to see the matches here and I would think I want to play. This was for 3 months. I just played 3 matches and then I got injured...It was so disappointing.'

4.4.2 Higher-level eidetic constituents (intra-structural) and general description of the essential psychological structure of 'critical moments'

Based on the individual analysis of the lived experiences of 'critical moments' in the Academy players in this study, higher-level eidetic invariant meanings (constituents) emerged. Higher-level eidetic meanings in each transcript can be intra-structural or inter-structural (Giorgi, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 3, intra-structural means that the differences are small and can be expressed eidetically, meaning it can be included in the general psychological structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). Inter-structural means that there are large differences and cannot be expressed eidetically (i.e. the meaning is not present in other individual essential psychological structures and therefore cannot be

included in the general description of the phenomenon) (Giorgi, 2009). However, it is argued that it is still important to include the inter-structural differences at the individual level (Giorgi, 2009). As such, these differences will be highlighted for consideration in this section also.

Table 11. *The intra-structural higher-level eidetic constituents of ‘critical moments’.*

Intra-structural Constituents	Individual Constituents
Emotional and psychological disturbance	<p>‘Living in limbo’: A time of uncertainty (securing a new contract and de-selection) (P1).</p> <p>Et tu Brute?: A sense of aggrievement and perceived lack of loyalty at the end (de-selection and securing a new contract) (P1).</p> <p>Frustration and a sense of aggrievement (de-selection) (P3).</p> <p>Emotional disturbance (injury and de-selection) (P4, P7, P8).</p> <p>Self-doubt, frustration and psychological disturbance (injury) (P5).</p> <p>Snatched!: A sense that something has been lost or taken away (injury) (P5).</p>
Psycho-social disruption/adaptation	<p>Psycho-social implications (injury and moving away from home) (P1, P4, P5).</p> <p>Initial adjustment to new surroundings (moving away) (P6).</p> <p>Adjusting and adapting to a new environment (moving away) (P7).</p> <p>Culture shock: Adapting and adjusting to a new culture (moving away) (P8).</p>
Personal growth	<p>Personal growth: Developing virtues needed to progress (coach-athlete relationship difficulties) (P1).</p> <p>‘You’re a man now, boy’: Perceived personal growth (moving away) (P3, P4).</p> <p>A lesson learned: Perceived personal growth (moving away) (P5).</p>
Altered perception of time	<p>Stop the clock!: Perception of time (injury and signing/moving to ATFC) (P2, P7, P8).</p> <p>Groundhog Day: Perception of time (de-selection) (P3).</p>

Description of the explicated general psychological structure of ‘critical moments’:

The lived experience of ‘critical moments’ evoked emotional or psychological disturbances. Participants described a sense of aggrievement and frustration at their present situation. Self-doubt, low mood states, depressive feelings and anxiety were present during a ‘critical moment’. It was experienced as a time of uncertainty. A sense

of loss was also felt. The lived experience of ‘critical moments’ elicited a period of psycho-social disruption and a period of psycho-social adaptation. Personal growth ensued as a consequence of a ‘critical moment’. Finally, a ‘critical moment’ altered the experiencer’s perception of time. The experience of a ‘critical moment’ can slow the perception of time down or increase the perceived speed of time passing.

4.4.3 Inter-structural differences at the individual level

As discussed in Chapter 3, it is important to include the inter-structural differences at the individual level (Giorgi, 2009). The inter-structural constituents are presented the tables below. The first column in each table contains the inter-structural constituent title. The second column in each table offers concrete descriptions of the constituent. This is to allow readers to make their own inferences from the data (Giorgi, 2009). As the essential psychological structure of each transcript has already been presented in this section, in the interest of avoiding repetition, the essential psychological structure for each inter-structural constituent will not be re-written below. Instead, the reader will be directed back to the description of the appropriate transcript above (e.g. P1, P2).

Table 12. *Inter-structural constituent and the corresponding concrete description (P2).*

Inter-structural Constituent	Concrete Description
I’m OK, it’s OK: Self-talk and self reassurance (P2).	<p>‘I just think to myself, like, if I do this it’s going to get better and if it doesn’t get better then at least I’ve done everything that I can to make it better.’</p> <p>‘But I just think to myself if I don’t do this it’ll get worse and if I do this it will get better. And if it doesn’t get better at least I’ve done everything I can to make it better.’</p> <p>‘With me like, the first day after the game where I was told I need surgery I was very sad. But then I just think to myself I’ve got plenty more games to play...’</p> <p>‘But look, I had an operation last week and I’m only going to miss 7 games in total. So for a 6 month injury to only miss 7 games isn’t much so I’ve had it at the right time. We finish the season in May. May until July we have off. So I’m out at the best time innit?’</p>

Essential psychological structure of the individual constituent: See the individual description of essential psychological structure for Paul (P2) above.

Table 13. *Inter-structural constituent and the corresponding concrete description (P3).*

Inter-structural Constituent	Concrete Description
<p>Conflict of (self)-interest (de-selection and securing a new contract) (P3).</p>	<p>‘We’re in a situation where I’ve gone from playing all these games to playing the minor <i>minor</i> games, I’m playing like the U18s sharing a game with somebody else. So I’ve gone from doing everything to doing hardly anything...It’s quite difficult because, in a sense it helps me and in a sense it doesn’t because...being a goalkeeper is not physically hard it’s just mentally it takes a toll on your body because you know, your concentration is just bang! Bang! Bang! 90 minutes, 90 minutes. And it’s not as if the games were coming – week, and then a week, they were coming thick and fast – and sometimes you’d go without having a day off all week so your concentration levels are all over the place. So I think sometimes, you know, just to have a down day as such, and to recharge your batteries if you like – but, but then again it kills me not to play. But then you think is that too many games? Is my concentration going to go at some point? But then again when you don’t play as many games you want to play more, so there’s no middle ground. Like now I’m thinking ‘I need a game! I just want to play!’ Like we’ve got a game tomorrow, I don’t know if I’m playing or not but I want to play. Every game that’s on now I want to be on the pitch.’</p> <p>‘I’ve played a season full of games already so it’s a lot of games. In terms of development, I need to play games obviously but I think I’ve played enough games to justify letting someone else play. Do you know what I mean? I’m not struggling to play. I’ve not got to play because I’ve played enough. So I’m not in the position to be saying ‘gimme a game! Gimme a game!’ because I’ve had enough. But obviously I want to play – I’m in a hard position really. I’m in the middle because I wanna play but then I think ‘yeah but somebody else has got to play...it’s still hard because I’m not in the position to make that choice...’</p> <p>‘It is difficult because like [I] said, you’re thinking ‘what can I do? What can I do to get through this rough patch?’ Because, I don’t know...do you just say ‘can I have a couple of days off just to clear my head?’ Because a mental thing it’s not like a physical thing is it? But you get to a stage where you think c’mon just get through this. But you can’t. Because mentally you just think you’re that, I dunno, I suppose it’s tiredness and you get to a stage where you just think ‘pffff I can’t, I just need maybe a couple of days just not doing anything, not even move! Just relax.’</p> <p>‘I always say to my Dad, you’ve got your friends in the game, but as such because you’re all fighting for the same place I always say to my Dad ‘you’ve got no friends – they are all acquaintances.’ ...It’s all well and good being best mates off the pitch but when you get on it it’s totally different because he’s fighting for my place and I’m fighting for his place. So the friendship – don’t say goes out the window, but I think you’ve got to take it as: it’s me and him. It’s me and him and we’re fighting for the same place so the friendship has to go out at some point. When we get on [the pitch] I think it’s just gotta be ‘it’s me and him and that’s it’.</p>

Essential psychological structure of the individual constituent: See the individual description of essential psychological structure for Tom (P3) above.

Table 14. *Inter-structural constituent and the corresponding concrete description (P5).*

Inter-structural Constituent	Concrete Description
<p>Labels and expectations (P5).</p>	<p>‘I’ve gotten a lot better at dealing with pressure. I mean when I first came here it was <i>hard</i>. Coming from S to here was <i>very hard</i>. Because, it was on Sky Sports, it was on all the websites, everybody was asking for my number for interviews, all of this. And it was constant, that’s a lot of pressure. I was like, I was loving it to start with...But it’s a lot of pressure and it hits you hard. And that’s when it kind if hits you and you go like, you go ‘Crap! What am I - what (does) everyone expect(s) of me’.... everyone has a massive expectation of you, and now you, you’ve gotta go and live up to it. So that’s, that’s a killer.’</p> <p>‘Like everyone goes and labels you. Like I know lots of players, like at S and here they go ‘The Next Best Thing. He’s the Next Best Thing. Next Best Thing.’ And then when someone tells you you’re the ‘Next Best Thing’ like, you can be confident like ‘Yeah, yeah I am’ and it gives you a nice boost. But at the same time, again you’ll doubt and go ‘Next best thing? Bloody hell! Everyone expects me to score every week or make clean sheets or get like, I dunno, like I need 20 assists this season’ and that’s when you start like trying too hard.’</p> <p>‘It’s a nice feeling, at the same time because again it is a massive compliment. The way I look at it, if you think about what they’re saying ‘<i>The Next Best Thing</i>’ you think ‘What’s the best thing right now?’ and you look at players now like Ronaldo and Messi. People are comparing you, at your age to them. ‘You’re gonna be like him’ ‘You’re gonna be like this’ You think ‘I love him, he’s so good, I want to be like him’ People are saying I’m gonna be like him. You’re like ‘Yeaaaah’ That’s where you get a bit of cockiness, a bit of confidence. But at the same time, if someone goes ‘You’re gonna be like him’ you think ‘God he’s good like, that is a long way to go like. That’s, that’s like, I dunno you just feel all *pwhoosh*. That’s a massive compliment but at the same time if people start labelling you and you’re not doing what they’re labelling you as, you’re out the door like, the next thing.’</p> <p>‘And I mean it’s lots of pressure from everyone, pressure from managers, pressure from friends, family, pressures from other players of course because you don’t want to let your teammates down. You never want to let your teammates down, because again you feel bad. It’s kind of; you want to do the best for everyone else, don’t you?’</p> <p>‘Like this environment, it’s very...like they try to make it as relaxed as possible...But at the same time you know deep down there is a lot of pressure. You know deep down like ‘How long has my contract left?’ ‘What’s he on?’ ‘That new guy who’s come in, what’s he on?’ ‘How long is he going to be here?’ ‘Why is the manager doing this?’ ‘Why is.....?’ And there is a lot of pressure behind...again there is a lot of thinking involved because you think ‘Why is the manager doing this?’ ‘Why am I not doing this?’ ‘Why is he here?’ ‘Why is this happening?’ ‘Why is that happening?’ And it’s a lot of pressure on you...’</p>

Essential psychological structure of the individual constituent: See the individual description of essential psychological structure for Jake (P5) above.

The following section will discuss the outcome of the data analysis in relation to the literature. The objective of a descriptive psychological phenomenological data analysis is to present a description of the general structure of the lived experience of 'critical moments' only. As such, ramifications of the experience have not been discussed in a detailed way in this section (Giorgi, 2009). The discussion section of the study below serves this purpose (Giorgi, 2009). In line with the descriptive psychological phenomenological method, the researcher will now signal to the reader that the analysis of the literature and existing research, alongside the outcome of data analysis will begin in the discussion section below.

4.5 Discussion

The current study had two aims: (a) identify the importance of investigating the lived experience of 'critical moments' within the career of elite athletes and (b) employ the method of descriptive psychological phenomenology to illuminate the lived experience of what Premier League Academy players perceive to be 'critical moments' within their career.

The lived experience of 'critical moments' evoked emotional and psychological disturbances. Self-doubt, low mood states, depressive feelings and anxiety were present during a 'critical moment'. P4, P5, P7 and P8 experienced emotional and psychological disturbance due to being de-selected through injury. More specifically, P5 alluded to experiencing a sense of loss whilst being de-selected due to injury. P5 likened his experience of being injured to having his livelihood taken away from him, which contributed to his emotional disturbance. Prior to his injury, P5 perceived his life as being totally consumed by football. This may suggest that P5 has a strong or exclusive athletic

identity. In support of this suggestion, Brown and Potrac (2009) and Mitchell (2015) noted in their respective research that players reported a sense of having lost their identity once they were de-selected from their respective teams. Research has shown that anxiety, fear, depression, anger and humiliation are experienced by de-selected players with a strong athletic identity (Brown and Potrac, 2009). P7 also experienced emotional disturbance due to being de-selected by his manager, despite being fit to play. Nesti (2013) observed that de-selection can lead to emotional disturbances such as decreased motivation and, in the most extreme cases, a feeling of total despair in a first team Premiership setting. Based on the findings in this study, it is suggested that de-selection may have debilitating emotional and psychological effects within an Academy environment also.

Participants described a sense of aggrievement and frustration at their present situation. For P1, this sense of aggrievement arose in relation to de-selection and contract offers. P1 felt that ATFC were not loyal to him, despite being a player at the club for a decade. At the time of this study, P1 was querying whether or not he was being 'brought along' by the club solely to make up numbers. Although P1 had not yet reached a definitive answer on this matter, a narrative paper by Roderick and Schumacker (2017) presented the tale of a first team 'journeyman' player, who was aware that he was viewed by his club as a commodity. This player in question recognised that there will be no loyalty shown to him should his services be no longer required (Roderick and Schumacker, 2017). This view was informed by his years of experience in the first team professional environment. Perhaps at Academy level, players remain shrouded by the dream of a professional career at the expense of fully understanding the ruthlessness of elite level Premiership football. That is, until they are capable of taking a more objective stance on the matter (i.e. able to reflect on their experience in hindsight). In support of

this notion, a study by Brown and Potrac (2009), which looked at de-selection in Academy football, found that players who had been released by their respective club felt a sense of betrayal as a consequence. These footballers stated that they felt as though they were ‘disposed of with little thought or care’ (Brown and Potrac, 2009, p.152) when they were no longer considered talented enough to achieve first team status. Mitchell (2015) also reported feelings of betrayal following ‘release’ in his research which focused on the role of identity in elite youth professional football.

Although P3 also felt a sense of aggrievement in relation to de-selection, the context of P3’s experience differed. P3 was de-selected whilst overseas with his national team at a World Cup. P3 felt as though he was not given a chance to impress by the national team manager, which led to high levels of frustration. It has been reported in the mainstream media that Premiership managers are often reluctant to release their players on international duty due to injury risk. Although the injury concerns have been voiced, there appears to be a lack of awareness surrounding psychological or emotional ‘injury’ within the context of international football. Such findings may have important implications at club level as players may return to their clubs with frustrations and grievances that have not been resolved. Prolonged frustration may lead to emotional or behavioural disruption which in turn, may impact well-being and performance. To the researcher’s knowledge, the potential emotional or psychological impact of international duty has not yet been considered in the literature.

The lived experience of ‘critical moments’ was viewed as a time of uncertainty by the players. Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety were omnipresent in each of the players’ descriptions. This is consistent with findings by Mitchell (2015) which suggested that football players exist in a climate that is enveloped by uncertainty. For instance, P1 feels that the specific qualities that a player needs to progress are unclear. In support, a

study by Brown and Potrac (2009) highlighted that clubs did not provide clear and reasoned information which explained why they de-selected players. This *modus operandi* was also highlighted in a study by Mitchell (2015). The findings of this study highlighted the ‘release’ of a player, and the uncertainty surrounding the reasons why this decision was made, as he had been selected to play for the entire season.

P1 is presently experiencing uncertainty, self-doubt and anxiety regarding what he must do to secure a professional contract. Interestingly, Mitchell (2015) stated that certain coaching practices may increase feelings of uncertainty, a finding which was supported by player descriptions in the present study. For instance, P1 described a feeling of little to no reassurance for concerns surrounding his future at ATFC, despite asking his coaches for feedback. A narrative paper by Roderick and Schumacker (2017, p.166–167), poignantly summarised the uncertainty regarding a career in football through their assertion that the life of a footballer is shaped by the ‘precariousness of the team sheet’. With this in mind, it is argued from an existential perspective, that Academy players have limited control over their future. In support, Nesti (2013) asserted that feelings of powerlessness are often experienced by players in professional football environments. This loss of control is likely to be a substantial source of the anxiety these players are experiencing (May, 1975).

The lived experience of ‘critical moments’ elicited a period of psycho-social disruption and a period of psycho-social adaptation. The psycho-social implications were introversion/withdrawal from activities, isolation and ‘culture shock’. P2, P4, P5, P6, P7 and P8 described psycho-social disruption in relation to moving away from home. This is supportive of Weedon’s (2015) paper which stated that youth footballers who migrate to Academies generally find themselves removed from their primary support systems, including family, friends and familiar social environments. Previous research by Smith

et al. (2015) and Bell and Bromnick (1998) found that moving away from home can be accompanied by different symptoms related to homesickness. It is asserted that the players in the present study exhibited similar emotional symptoms reported in the literature, including feelings of depression, nervousness and loneliness (Bell and Bromnick, 1998; Smith et al., 2015). P8 described an experience of ‘culture shock’ upon moving to ATFC. Similarly, a study by Bourke (2002) found that migrant players experienced difficulties and challenges in relation to ‘culture shock’ when faced with the reality of their new surroundings and the absence of family and close friends (Bourke, 2002). Key findings of this research also included that players had not overly considered the reality of club life prior to making the move across to England, which may have increased their difficulties in adjusting to life overseas. Although the players mostly agreed that their decision to pursue a professional career in football was satisfying, difficulties and challenges were highlighted in relation to the reality of their new surroundings (Bourke, 2002). Similar to the current study, players reported the absence of family and close friends and difficulties in coping with living away from home for the first time as negative facets of their lives overseas (Bourke, 2002). P8 could not understand the language when he first arrived at ATFC which further contributed to his feeling of ‘culture shock’. Research has suggested that of central importance to acculturation is the acquisition of the language spoken in the host country (Ward et al., 2001). A study by Weedon (2015) asserted that the ability to speak the native language was critical in players’ adjustment, settlement and overall experience both on and off the field.

P4, P5 and P8 perceived the football at ATFC to be very different in standard, pace and physicality compared to the football they played at home or at their previous clubs. This step up in performance level was an important factor in making P8’s

adjustment to his move difficult. This finding is supported by research by Weedon (2015), who highlighted that migrant players experienced difficulty adjusting to the frequency, intensity and physicality of training and match play in English football Academies. Interestingly, players did not foresee or anticipate the aforementioned difficulties associated with their move away from home. It is suggested that this lack of awareness of the reality of Academy life may facilitate the adjustment difficulties that players experience as they attempt to settle into their new environment, whilst also meeting intense performance demands. Ward et al. (2001) note that for adolescents such experiences of migration may be intertwined with the stress of adolescent identity and development. As such, difficulties adapting may be heightened for these youth footballers who now find themselves to be migrants, adolescents, and elite athletes simultaneously (Ward et al., 2001; Mills et al., 2014; Weedon, 2015). From this perspective, the challenge for migrant youth footballers is arguably to negotiate their way successfully through social, cultural and physiological phases of development in a highly competitive, ruthless and unfamiliar setting (Weedon, 2015). With this in mind, it is asserted that staff and applied practitioners must remain cognisant that migrant players or indeed those who have moved away from home, may encounter a range of cultural and lifestyle related issues that extend far beyond the field of play (Mills et al., 2014).

P2, P4, P5 and P8 described psycho-social disruption in relation to injury. Psycho-social challenges that arise due to injury have been noted in the literature prior to this study (see Heil, 1993). P2 and P5 felt as though their lives were consumed by their injury. They were restricted from having a normal and active social life. P2, P4, P5 and P8 each described feelings of isolation due to social restriction off the field, or being forced to stop training with the team due to the injuries they sustained. Drawing upon the literature in mainstream psychology, it is argued that individuals, and in this instance Academy

footballers, depend upon their place of work to provide primary links to other people and to develop their social identity (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998). Social identity literature asserts that having multiple social identities enhances ‘existential security’ and reduces negative consequences associated with challenges to identity or identity loss (Iyer et al., 2007; Haslam et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been postulated that multiple identities provide individuals with more sources of support during times of hardship and stress (Haslam et al., 2008). As such, players who consider team membership as an important aspect of their social identity, may also consider their teammates a source of social support. This may be particularly true for migrant players who have left existing support networks behind as a result of relocating. With this in mind, it is asserted that injured players may experience a loss of identity, not only due to their inability to satisfy their role as a footballer, but as a consequence of being isolated from their respective squad and perhaps even their support network.

The literature discussed above suggests that it may be beneficial to players to construct and nurture identities away from the football environment. In doing so, the individual may experience increased feelings of ‘existential security’ amidst ‘critical moments’ and the uncertainty of the Academy environment. Developing an authentic identity is advocated by Nesti (2013) and Nesti and Littlewood (2011). The authors, who have worked extensively in English professional football environments, asserted that encouraging self exploration and self understanding allows an individual to regain some control over ‘critical moments’ in the form of facing anxiety and making decisions regarding their future (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011; Nesti 2013; Mitchell, 2015). However, broadening an identity away from football, for instance placing great effort into other hobbies or educational pursuits, may be viewed as an act of defiance by coaching staff within a professional football Academy (Parker, 1996; Mageau and

Vallerand, 2003). As discussed, coaches are known to display controlling behaviours with the aim to promote obedience, collective loyalty and conformity amongst players (Parker, 1996; Mageau and Vallerand, 2003). Players who fail to conform, may fall out of favour with their coach, which in turn may affect their progression at the Academy (Parker, 1996). Furthermore, the researcher suggests that the increase in training hours imposed by the EPPP makes it very difficult for players at Scholarship level to meaningfully engage in other pursuits or interests. This arguably poses restrictions on the formation of multiple identities, and limits the individual to their role as a footballer.

Personal growth ensued as a consequence of a ‘critical moment’. Participants developed certain virtues (in this instance, courage and independence) needed to progress in their career. P3, P4 and P5 described developing independence and growing into adulthood following to their move away from home. In support, a study by Bruner et al. (2008), which looked at entry into elite sport, asserted that living away from home prompted the development of a sense of maturity in the athletes. P1 described personal growth over a time period where he did not have a good relationship with his coach. Interestingly, a perceived psychological benefit following a difficult experience is widespread in the literature, and acts as a form of ‘future proofing’ against future events (Bonanno and Mancini, 2008; Powell and Myers, 2017).

P1’s relationship with his coach hindered his development at a young age. P1 feared his coach. Over time, P1 developed the courage to be a more authentic version of himself in front of his coach. In his philosophically rooted paper on courage in sport, Corlett (1996) asserted that courage should be understood not as a solution to fear, but as an alternative to fear. In practice, practitioners in the field of sport psychology typically use interventions (e.g. mental skills training programs; MST), to reduce or neutralise negative emotions such as fear (Corlett, 1996). In doing so, practitioners are aiming to

develop courage with the objective of achieving a state of fearlessness (Rachman, 1978). It is argued that aligning courage with psychological traits rather than as a virtue, falsely portrays fearlessness as a more desirable state than courage (Corlett, 1996). Instead, drawing upon the translated philosophical ideology of Aristotle and Aquinas, it is asserted that courage is neither present or absent and exists on the continuum of fear and fearlessness (Aristotle, 1934; Aquinas, 1964 both cited in Corlett, 1996). In his description, P1 described how his development of courage helped him in dealing with his fear of his coach, and ultimately gave him the freedom to be an authentic version of himself in the coach's presence. With this in mind, it is asserted that practitioners in the field of sport psychology recognise the significance that philosophical ideology holds for sport (Corlett, 1996). Rather than the dominant solution-based, symptomatic level approach to practice (MST), practitioners are encouraged to reframe their practice toward welcoming approaches such as existentialism, which consider the human condition in its entirety (Nesti, 2004). This includes the acceptance rather than neutralisation of moments of discomfort, fear, anxiety and grief; all of which offer themselves as opportunities for personal growth and development (Nesti, 2004).

Finally, a 'critical moment' altered the experiencer's perception of time. Research has suggested that an individual's perception of time is affected by emotion (Eisen, 2009). From a philosophical standpoint, Van Manen (1990) asserted that there are differences between lived time and time as 'told' by a clock. Examples given by the author are how time appears to slow down or speed up depending on how the experiencing person is feeling at the time. This supports the findings in this study, as time appeared to slow down under circumstances that were perceived as negative (as was the case for P2 who was injured or P3 who was de-selected), whilst it sped up under circumstances that were perceived to be positive (as was the case for P7 and P8 when

they signed for the club or scored important goals in a game). The emotional disturbance described by players who were injured in this study may be partly explained due to the passage of time seemingly slowing down, which arguably facilitated the opportunity to ruminate over the uncertainty surrounding their future. Interestingly, Weedon (2015) found that during extended periods of rest and recovery away from training, injured players felt particularly homesick, and often lonely (Weedon, 2015). At present, rehabilitation from injury appears to be solely focused on physical recovery. However, often times, the physio or sport therapy staff at a club find themselves listening to the psychological struggles of players, as a consequence spending large amounts of time together in the treatment rooms. Anecdotal reports have suggested that therapy staff in these positions feel unprepared and untrained to deal with such information. Findings of this study have highlighted the prevalence of emotional disturbances experienced by players, and it is asserted that benefits may be had from working alongside a sport psychologist during difficult and, oftentimes, isolating experiences such as injury. A potential way of achieving this, is to involve the sport psychologist more overtly as a member of staff that is present and working toward the rehabilitation of injured players.

4.5.1 Conclusion

This study identified the importance of investigating the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ within the career of youth English Premier League Academy footballers. The descriptive psychological phenomenological method was employed to illuminate the lived experience of what these players perceive to be ‘critical moments’ within their career. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that further investigation of this phenomenon is undertaken within this hard to reach population. Although the ‘critical moments’ which emerged in this study were initially perceived as being negative, it is important to reiterate that ‘critical moments’ may be perceived as positive. In future,

it would be interesting to further examine what it is like to experience a 'critical moment' from this perspective. However, it is asserted that assigning a 'critical moment' into pre-determined categories of either 'positive' or 'negative' prior to examining an individual's lived experience would be reducing this phenomenon in a positivist sense. Therefore, to allow a greater opportunity for the lived experience of a positive 'critical moment' to emerge from the data, longitudinal studies and observations are recommended over a two-year Scholarship at an English Premier League Academy. Alongside this, additional descriptions of 'critical moments' and the impact such events may have on the identity of youth players in the English Premier League is needed. This may help to provide a balanced view of the life of these youth players, and a rich account of the inevitable highs and lows of English Premier League Academy football. Insights such as this may assist both academics and practitioners in justifying where specific player support is needed within these Academy structures. Researchers are also encouraged to continue to move away from the dominant underpinnings in the field (e.g. positivist approaches) toward mainstream psychological and philosophical schools of thought (e.g. existentialism). It is asserted that the sport psychology literature would benefit from wider perspectives and further implementation of philosophically underpinned methodological approaches such as descriptive psychological phenomenology when examining subjective experience. The final Chapter of this thesis will further expand on the findings of this study whilst addressing implications for applied practice and pedagogy. Methodological considerations will be discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of this study. Finally, recommendations for future research and practice will be offered.

Chapter Five

Synthesis, Implications and

Recommendations

(i) Prelude

This chapter will further consider the findings of the study presented in Chapter 4, in order to address the implications for applied practice and pedagogy in more detail. Methodological considerations will be discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. Finally, recommendations for future research and practice will be offered.

(ii) Statement of Purpose

This chapter addresses the following aim(s) of the thesis:

- (9) Explore the implications of this research for applied practice and pedagogy. This includes professional training programmes (i.e. BASES and BPS), higher level education, practitioner development, and Academy staff within the Premier League.

Related Publications and Conference Presentations:

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5.1 Elaboration and Implication of Findings

This section will further consider the findings of the research study in order to address the implications for applied practice and pedagogy in more detail. To recap on the findings presented in Chapter 4, the lived experience of ‘critical moments’ evoked emotional or psychological disturbances. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, it is important to note that ‘critical moments’ can be positive also (Nesti et al., 2012). Participants described a sense of aggrievement and frustration at their present situation. Self-doubt, low mood states, depressive feelings and anxiety were present during a ‘critical moment’. It was experienced as a time of uncertainty. A sense of loss was also felt. The lived experience of ‘critical moments’ elicited a period of psycho-social disruption and a period of psycho-social adaptation. Personal growth ensued as a consequence of a ‘critical moment’. This suggests that a ‘critical moment’ can be uncomfortable in the short term, but positive in the long term. Finally, a ‘critical moment’ altered the experiencer’s perception of time. The experience of a ‘critical moment’ can slow the perception of time down or increase the perceived speed of time passing.

The descriptions elicited in this study offered the reader an insight into the lived experience i.e. *what it is like* for Scholarship players to experience ‘critical moments’ during their career at a Premiership Academy. This study highlights the complexity of the players’ time at ATFC. It also illuminates the role that the organisational culture plays in the players’ lived experience of ‘critical moments’ (e.g. pressure to perform/secure next contract, periods of isolation, omnipresent feelings of uncertainty and anxiety surrounding their future and an absence of reassurance from coaches).

As discussed in Chapter 2 and 4, the culture within professional English football clubs may have an important impact on identity (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). In the Premier League in particular, the huge financial investment from sponsors and global

media interest means that results are everything (Dunning, 1999; Lago et al., 2006; Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). It is asserted that the need to achieve results consistently across an entire season has fostered a culture of volatility within Premier League football clubs with a ruthless focus on achieving success (Roderick, 2006; Nesti and Littlewood, 2011). In this sense, it is suggested that such a culture may encourage individualistic tendencies, as staff and players may sense the precariousness of their position when the club is underperforming. In support, in an autoethnographic paper by Potrac et al. (2012, p.80), the lead author recounted his experiences as a football coach by stating that ‘rule number 1’ within the professional environment is to ‘look after yourself’. Often times this came at the expense of exploiting a colleague’s weakness (Potrac et al., 2012). This is not exclusive to staff and research has stated that players have shown reluctance to seek support and confide in other team members about personal uncertainties and weaknesses due to a fearfulness of others players exploiting that to their advantage (Fletcher and Hanton, 2003). Research has also noted that players must have their own agenda and be selfish in order to afford them the best chance of securing a professional contract (Mitchell, 2015). However, it has been noted by Nesti and Littlewood (2011) that Premier League clubs also paradoxically expect their players and staff to show loyalty, consistency and willingness to work towards common goals.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the EPPP is based upon Ericsson and colleagues’ (1993) ‘10,000-hours rule’ and the concept of deliberate practice, despite most of the support for this ‘10,000-hour rule’ being anecdotal in nature. Nevertheless, the EPPP asserted that up to 8,500 coaching hours should be met by Category 1 Academies from U9–U18. From an Eriksonian perspective, such a time commitment may place youth players in English Academies at risk of forgoing the exploration of various identities, other than that of being a footballer. In these instances, young players will most likely

develop an exclusive or foreclosed (athletic) identity by the end of adolescence (Mitchell, et al., 2014). As discussed, it may be beneficial to Academy players to broaden their identities away from that of being a footballer. However, it was suggested that the culture at the club may be a barrier to this, as well as the scale of time investment that is required to meet coaching requirements. The EPPP claim to have implemented such practices in order to create an elite environment that encompasses all aspects of player development (Premier League, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012; Nesti and Sulley, 2015; Roe and Parker, 2016). However, it is asserted that over-exposure to the environment may in fact be hindering player well-being and the holistic development of these individuals. Interestingly, research by Nesti and Sulley (2015) highlighted a massive discrepancy between the coaching hours in English Academies, and its European counterparts (see Table 14 on the next page). Such differences suggest that it is still possible to achieve successful progression from Academy to first team football, with an average < half the total amount coaching hours from U9–U18. This finding suggests that increasing the volume of coaching hours does not necessarily equate to successful progression and first team careers. This can be seen with the Barcelona Academy, La Masia, which dedicates a third of the coaching hours expected by EPPP to their youth players (see Table 15 on the next page). Nevertheless, La Masia has produced exceptionally high calibre graduates over the years including Xavi Hernández, Andrés Iniesta, Gerard Piqué and Lionel Messi, all of whom went on to form a crucial part of Barcelona’s first team.

Table 15. Total number of coaching hours for EPPP Category 1 Academies vs. 7 European Academies (as cited in Nesti and Sulley, 2015).

	Hours	Age Group
EPPP	Up to 8,500	U9–U18
AJ Auxerre	Up to 4,700	U9–U19
Ajax	Up to 4,380	U9–U19
Bayer Leverkusen	Up to 3,980	U9–U19
Bayern Munich	Up to 3,900	U9–U19
Feyenoord	Up to 2,960	U9–U19
Barcelona	Up to 2,760	U9–U19

According to the EPPP, the psychological provisions that must be met for U17–U21 players are stress management, focussing, imaging and lifestyle management (Premier League, 2011). As discussed above, such support draws upon a solution-focused approach, usually delivered in the form of MST programs. It is asserted based on the findings from the study in Chapter 4, that anxiety experienced during ‘critical moments’ is due to uncertainty surrounding the future. An existential approach to practice would view this anxiety as normal in elite sport and as an opportunity for personal growth (Nesti, 2007). It is believed that offering an intervention based on the MST provisions outlined in the EPPP, would at best temporarily reduce physical symptoms of anxiety and at worst, hinder personal growth whilst failing entirely to address the players’ real needs. As such, it is recommended that practitioners in the field of sport psychology draw upon existential principles to work alongside athletes to embrace ‘critical moments’ rather than to ignore or anaesthetise inevitable discomfort through the use of MST programs (Nesti, 2007). To expand on this point, existential psychology is radically different to MST as it considers fundamental questions regarding the human condition including authenticity, situated freedom, spirituality, courage and personal meaning (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). It

looks to understand the subjective reality of an athlete and the meanings that emerge from their experiences, instead of aligning their thoughts and behaviours with theories and assumptions regarding performance enhancement techniques (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). As anxiety appears to be entwined with existence in an English Premier League Academy football environment, the existential notion of learning to embrace and welcome it appears to be most congruent approach for the players' needs (Nesti, 2007).

Despite the potential impact that such an approach to practice may have, existential psychology is absent from sport psychology textbooks and is scarcely employed by practitioners in the field (Lavalley and Wylleman, 2000; Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). At present, the majority of content on BSc Sport Psychology and MSc Sport Psychology degree programs is MST based theory, whilst a technique driven approach to practice dominates the applied field (Corlett, 1996; Lavalley and Wylleman; Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). In order to address this, education and research must begin to truly embrace the philosophical underpinnings of psychology, theoretical perspectives and approaches from mainstream psychology, and alternative epistemological and methodological approaches other than the dominant positivist traditions of the natural sciences (Whiston, 1976; O'Halloran et al., 2016). Doing so may help the practitioner to develop an understanding of the predicaments and 'big questions' of human existence (Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). It is also asserted that accreditation programs consider perspectives and approaches derived from mainstream psychology (e.g. existentialism, humanism), philosophy (e.g. phenomenology) as well as existential approaches to practice, to supplement the MST based interventions which tend to dominate these programs (Nesti, 2007; Ronkainen and Nesti, 2017). In supporting Academy Scholars with an approach to practice that is congruent to their needs during 'critical moments', it is argued that the practitioner may assist in the holistic development of players. This in

turn may mitigate negative influences, and ultimately may help to minimize talent loss due to ineffective coping strategies during difficult career events (Ivarsson et al., 2016).

5.1.1 Methodological considerations

The findings in Chapter 4 should be considered in light of the study's limitations (Wood et al., 2017). As discussed in Chapter 3, descriptive psychological phenomenology research begins with the acknowledgement that knowledge is in some way inadequate or limited, or that there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience (Englander, 2012; Churchill and Wertz, 2015). By employing descriptive psychological phenomenology, I aimed to create a knowledge and understanding of the invariant meaning structure of a 'critical moment', from the perspective of those directly experiencing it (Giorgi, 1997). The lived experience of 'critical moments' had not been investigated in the sport psychology literature prior to this study. Consequently, it is asserted that the findings of descriptive psychological phenomenology provide an unbiased foundation for further inquiry into important and often times misunderstood concepts within sport (Nesti, 2004, 2011).

A limitation of this study is that using a method like descriptive psychological phenomenology requires the participant to be comfortable in using their own 'everyday' language to articulate their experiences to the researcher, and vice versa. This means that the descriptive psychological phenomenological interview may not be suitable for an individual with poor oral and verbal skills (Nesti, 2004; O'Halloran et al., 2016). When recruiting for the descriptive phenomenological interview, the researcher must remember that the success of this approach is heavily dependent upon linguistic ability (Giorgi, 2009; O'Halloran et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 4, 12 participants were interviewed for this study and 8 interviews were included for the data analysis phase. I

made the decision to exclude 4 interviews as I felt that the participants provided limited descriptions of their experience, which made responding with open-ended probing questions difficult to achieve. I felt as though I asked leading questions in an attempt to keep the dialogue flowing. I recognised that this data was potentially ‘contaminated’ with preconceived notions of the participants’ experience. In such instances, bracketing had arguably been compromised. As discussed in Chapter 3, the quality of descriptive psychological phenomenological research is dependent on the data generated during the data collection stage (Lowe and Prowse, 2001). In other words, the data collection process must remain congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of the approach. I felt it was necessary to remove these interviews prior to data analysis. A challenge of this method was upholding ruthlessness in cutting data in these instances, in order to adhere to the philosophical underpinnings of the approach. Although this was achieved, I felt as though it was a frustrating experience. Another challenge when employing the descriptive psychological phenomenological interview, is that the researcher does not impose any rigid or pre-existing framework on the interview process. This inarguably represents a significant methodological risk, as participants are essentially given the control throughout the encounter. Besides from an opening question, the interview has no pre-determined structure and ‘is intended to yield a conversation, not a question and answer session’ (Thompson et al, 1989, p.138) meaning that the researcher must rely heavily on their own interpersonal skills to facilitate a meaningful encounter. Further to this, it is important to consider that top level athletes may also be unwilling to truly open up in the way that this approach requires. Perhaps given the masculine culture which exists in most English football clubs, the 4 interviewees mentioned may not have been comfortable or even accustomed to expressing themselves in an emotive way (Nesti, 2011; O’Halloran et al., 2016). Consistent with male mental health literature, the participants in such an

environment may feel the need to conceal what they might perceive as ‘weaknesses’ surrounding emotional vulnerability and mental health difficulties behind a stage character and brave face (Wood, 2017). With this in mind, it is asserted that it is difficult to determine whether or not an individual is being truly ‘authentic’ or honest during the interview encounter. However, I argue that this limitation is not exclusive to descriptive psychological phenomenological data collection and is a potential consideration in all qualitative research that employs interviews.

A further limitation is that the data analysis phase was extremely time consuming to carry out. As this method requires total transparency on how each step was carried out to allow the reader to make their own inferences from the data (Giorgi, 2009), my data analysis from Chapter 4 generated a word count of 177,543. To further this, no ‘how to’ guide exists in the sport psychology literature, besides from O’Halloran et al.’s (2016) paper on data collection in descriptive psychological phenomenology. However, explicit examples of how to employ the steps of data analysis has not been provided in the sport psychology literature. As such, I spent a lot of time figuring out how to present each step in a way that would be trustworthy, easily understood by, and transparent to, the reader.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the use of ‘bracketing’ is central to this method (Giorgi, 2009). It has been argued in the literature that bracketing during the interview encounter holds the potential to destroy rapport and result in interviewee’s perceiving the researcher as indifferent or hostile (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). In response, I argue that there are ways in which to establish rapport whilst bracketing without offering opinion or being perceived in a negative way. For instance, demonstrating empathy, listening and remaining ‘present’ during the encounter are noted as ‘rapport building’ qualities in the literature (Nesti, 2004). In order to remain ‘present’ during the interview encounter, I noted salient points mentioned in brief by the participant on a piece of paper relating to

particular experiences (O'Halloran et al., 2016). I explained the rationale for doing this to the participants prior to the interview. The noted points provided a reminder for future non-leading, probing questions once the participant had reached saturation on the topic they were currently discussing. I felt that the participants viewed this as a way for me to remain focused, structured and present in the dialogue, rather than attempting to remember future follow-up probing questions, whilst attempting to attend to their present descriptions (O'Halloran et al., 2016). Support for this approach may be found in the counselling literature as Levine (2007) argued that note-taking during a counselling session supported his ability to think coherently and analytically during an encounter with a client (Levine, 2007).

Further to this, debate within the literature exists on whether the researcher compromises their bracketing efforts by conducting a literature review prior to data collection (see Lowes and Prowse, 2001; Hamill and Sinclair, 2010; O'Halloran et al., 2016). I am of the view that most academics engage with a project due to their inherent interest in the phenomena under investigation and as such, already possess extensive knowledge of the area prior to undertaking literature searches. Reviewing the literature prior to conducting my study was an important part of my bracketing process as it helped to highlight my preconceptions toward theoretical concepts that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. This assertion is supported by Lowes and Prowse (2001) who stated that a review of the literature should be regarded as a useful bracketing technique in descriptive psychological phenomenological research (Lowes and Prowse, 2001). Furthermore, it is asserted that a literature search is necessary to determine if the phenomenon under study has been researched previously and if so, whether another study will add to the literature (Morse, 1994). It is important to establish this prior to data collection, as involving participants in unnecessary research is considered to be unethical (Lowes and Prowse,

2001). Therefore, I argue that pre-existing knowledge of the literature is somewhat unavoidable and does not undermine bracketing efforts as the aim is to reduce bias, not to eradicate existing knowledge. The following section will offer recommendations for practice which are informed by the findings of the study in Chapter 4.

5.1.2 Recommendations for practice

Based on the findings of the study in Chapter 4, a need has been identified for practitioner training pathways to consider organisational culture and the impact this may have on practitioner's ability to practice in an authentic manner. The professional practice accrediting bodies for sport psychology support in the UK are the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). Although both accrediting bodies have distinct differences, in the interest of space points of divergence will not be addressed here. Of relevance in this discussion, is that both BASES and the BPS offer mandatory supervised experience training pathways in order to obtain accredited practitioner status. It is argued that at present, both supervised-experience practitioner training routes (i.e. BPS and BASES) do not wholly address the complexity of the organisational culture of an elite Premiership football club. As a consequence, ways in which to meaningfully support athletes experiencing 'critical moments' or indeed how to 'survive' as a practitioner within such a demanding and ruthless environment is overlooked. This point is of particular importance for BASES, as sport science practitioners working in Premier League football are now required to hold this accreditation.

During BASES supervised experience one of the ten core competencies that must be evidenced is 'Understanding of the Delivery Environment'. The intended outcome for this competency is for trainee practitioners to be able to demonstrate a knowledge of and integration into, the specific delivery environment. However, a consideration of the

challenges and constraints of an elite sporting environment is not present, nor is it a requisite to demonstrate an understanding of the culture at the organisation/institute and how this may influence one's practice. Instead the focus is on understanding client needs and building/maintaining relationships. In the BPS Stage 2 training program, a key aim is for trainees to appreciate the significance of wider social, cultural and political domains within which sport and exercise psychology operates. However, the word 'culture' (or a derivative such as 'cultural') does not appear in the document again. As discussed in Chapter 4, the concept of 'culture' has appeared within the sport psychology literature and is considered to impact the thoughts and actions of group members (Cruickshank and Collins, 2012, 2013; Nesti, 2010). Despite this, the focus of the training program appears to surround an understanding of legislation that impacts an organisation, rather than the role that culture may play in helping/hindering the role of a sport psychologist. It is important to mention that the competencies highlighted on BASES and BPS training routes are important skills for a practitioner to possess. However, it is asserted that despite achieving full practitioner status after two or more years of supervised experience on either training route, the newly qualified practitioner may find themselves ill prepared for their role in English Premier League football, particularly when it comes to achieving congruence between their individual identity as a practitioner and the overarching cultural identity at the club (Nesti, 2010). Research by Chandler et al. (2014), which explored the contribution of personal qualities to the effective delivery of sport psychology service provision, supports this assertion through the findings that practitioners not only require a strong theoretical knowledge base and good professional skills, but a 'blend of characteristics' (e.g. self-awareness, self-knowledge, trust, empathy, agreeableness, friendliness) combined with the ability to read and understand the environment in which they work. Accreditation bodies should ensure that trainee

practitioners are exposed to, and challenged by, these considerations. It is recommended that this is also addressed in the form of reflective practice, exposure to case studies, ethnographies, narrative studies and the willingness to branch out toward reading in mainstream psychology. More specifically, it is recommended that broader theoretical perspectives including existentialism, cultural studies, sport-social psychology and even philosophy are adopted within education (BSc and MSc programs) and training (BASES and BPS) in the field (Nesti, 2007; Nesti and Ronkainen, 2017).

Further to this, the potential detriment of the EPPP for player well-being and holistic development has been highlighted. In an idealist world, Eriksonian inspired recommendations would be made for Category 1 Academies. Firstly, it would be recommended that the EPPP reduce coaching hours between the ages of U9–U18 to allow the players the opportunity to invest in other areas of their identity. This in turn may lessen the risk of identity foreclosure. A further recommendation would involve clubs reforming their cultural practices to create a more nurturing environment for young players. As a realist however, the researcher accepts that this is unlikely to happen in the near future (if at all). Instead, it is asserted that applied practitioners, trainee practitioners, accrediting bodies and educators develop an astute awareness of the potential impact of the cultural practices on the psychosocial development of youth footballers within English professional football. In order to do so, an openness to the above recommendations for practitioner training must develop within university level teaching, BASES and BPS accreditation pathways and applied practice. More specifically, it is recommended that applied practitioners develop the courage to move away from the MST focused approach stated within the EPPP, toward existential approaches which challenge players to embrace ‘critical moments’ rather than to eliminate inevitable discomfort

(Nesti, 2007). It is argued that based on the findings from Chapter 4, an approach to practice such as this is most congruent with the players' needs.

5.1.3 Recommendations for research

It is recommended that broader research methods such as descriptive psychological phenomenology be considered within degree and Masters programs to allow for a greater appreciation, and perhaps utilisation, of this approach. Arguably further research is needed on 'critical moments' within other Academies and tiers of the EPPP. It is suggested that research on 'critical moments' within organisations that have different cultural practices and values to those in the English Premier League (e.g. European Academies) is needed within the literature also. Investigations of this kind are also needed within the first team environment. Finally, branching out from English Academy football to the lived experience of athletes in elite sport (both team and individual) may prove a valuable contribution to the literature also. From an applied perspective, accessible research describing the lived experience of an athlete is extremely useful for practitioners who wish to better understand a client's experiential world (Lee-Hill, 2001).

5.1.4 Concluding thoughts

An important contribution of the present thesis is that it provided the first conceptualisation of the lived experience of 'critical moments' in the sport psychology literature. The chosen method in which to explore this phenomenon was descriptive psychological phenomenology. The descriptive psychological phenomenological method had not been correctly employed in the sport psychology literature prior to this study (Allen-Collinson, 2009; O'Halloran et al., 2016). By employing this method, the researcher created a knowledge and understanding of the invariant meaning structure of 'critical moments' from the perspective of those directly, and currently experiencing it

(Giorgi, 1997). In light of this, applied practitioners may begin to recognise the potential impact a ‘critical moment’ may have on the well-being and holistic development of a young Academy footballer in the Premier League. As a result of such knowledge, practitioners may find themselves more prepared for the applied reality and issues of the discipline. Recommendations for applied practice and pedagogy based on the findings of this thesis have been made.

The descriptions elicited in this study offered the reader an insight into the lived experience i.e. *what it is like* for Scholarship players to experience ‘critical moments’ during their career at a Premiership Academy. At present, the psychological provisions that must be met for players as asserted by the EPPP are stress management, focussing, imaging and lifestyle management. As discussed above, such support draws upon solution-focused approach usually delivered in the form of MST programs. It is believed that to offer an intervention to the experiencing players in the form of MST, would at best resolve symptoms of anxiety and at worst, prove unethical whilst failing to address the athlete’s real needs.

This study highlights the complexity of the players’ time at ATFC. It also illuminates the role that the organisational culture plays in the players’ lived experience of ‘critical moments’ (e.g. pressure to perform/secure next contract, periods of isolation, omnipresent feelings of uncertainty and anxiety surrounding their future and an absence of reassurance from coaches). It is argued that at present, the psychology practitioner training routes (i.e. British Psychological Society; BPS, and British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences; BASES) do not wholly address the complexity of the organisational culture of an elite Premiership football club, or how to meaningfully support athletes and ‘survive’ as a practitioner within such a demanding and ruthless environment. As such, it is asserted that despite achieving full practitioner status after

two or more years of supervised experience on either training route, the newly qualified practitioner may find themselves ill prepared for their role in elite sport. Accreditation bodies should ensure that trainee practitioners are exposed to, and challenged by, these considerations. Furthermore, it is asserted that learning outcomes of sport psychology degree programmes must also look to include considerations of the reality of applied practice, alongside the MST based theory which tends to dominate these programs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPER INFORMATION SHEET



Title of PhD research project: The lived experience of 'critical moments' in Premier League Academy football: A descriptive psychological phenomenological exploration.

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty:

Lisa O'Halloran, PhD Candidate School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, UK.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experience of 'critical moments' in Premier League Academy football.

A 'critical moment' is an event within an athletic career which may be large or small and planned or unplanned. A 'critical moment' creates an emotional response and may positively or negatively affect the way in which an athlete views him/herself. In professional football, examples of 'critical moments' may be: coping with career threatening injury, being dropped from the team or being appointed as team captain.

Who is eligible for the study?

Players who are aged 16-18 and currently a full-time scholar at an English Premier League Academy and have experienced what they perceive to be a 'critical moment' during their career are eligible to take part.

Players who are eligible are not obliged to take part in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary. Withdrawal from the study can occur at any time, without giving a reason. If a player would like to have their data removed from this project, the gatekeeper can contact me on the email address provided below and this will occur with immediate effect.

What will happen to the players who take part?

Players will be required to sign a consent form. They will then be required to take part in an unstructured interview which will appear conversational in nature. The aim of the interview is to collect a rich account of the players' lived experience of a 'critical moment(s)'. The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone. After the interview the researcher will answer any questions that the participants may have regarding this research. The estimated time that will be required from each player is 30-90 minutes in total.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no identifiable risks to taking part in the study.

Is feedback provided on the interviews?

Specific feedback on the interviews will not be provided to the staff or the players at the club. However, following the study write up an overview of the entire project in journal article format can be sent to the gatekeeper upon request.

Will the study be kept confidential?

The information provided by the players will be kept strictly confidential. The players will be asked to provide the researcher with their name on a dated consent form. These consent forms will be kept secure and separate from the data analysis. As mentioned above the researcher will transcribe the interview verbatim in order to conduct data analysis. All names mentioned including the name of the club, teammates, coach or manager will be changed within the text in order for all data to remain confidential and for participants to remain anonymous to readers. After transcription has been completed in this way, the interview will be destroyed by electronic deletion.

Contact details of researcher:

If you have any questions/issues please contact me:
L.O'Halloran@2006.ljmu.ac.uk

Appendix 2

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Title of PhD research project: The lived experience of 'critical moments' in Premier League Academy football: A descriptive psychological phenomenological exploration.

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty:

Lisa O'Halloran, PhD Candidate School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, UK.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide on whether or not you would like to participate it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information please contact the researcher before proceeding further. Take the time to decide if you want to take part or not.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experience of 'critical moments' in Premier League Academy football.

A 'critical moment' is an event within an athletic career which may be large or small and planned or unplanned. A 'critical moment' creates an emotional response and may positively or negatively affect the way in which an athlete views him/herself. A 'critical moment' may be perceived as positive or negative. This is because the event itself may be seen as helpful or threatening to progress or success.

Am I eligible for the study?

If you are aged 16-18 and currently a full-time scholar at an English Premier League Academy and you have experienced what you perceive to be a 'critical moment' during your career, then you are eligible to take part.

Do I have to take part?

You are not obliged to take part in this study. If you do take part you will be asked to provide written consent where your name will be recorded should you wish to withdraw at a later date. Your involvement is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Should you decide to take part, you will be required to sign a consent form. You will then be required to take part in an unstructured interview which will appear conversational in nature. The aim of the interview will be to collect a rich account of your lived experience of a 'critical moment(s)'. The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone. After the interview the researcher will answer any questions that you may have. The estimated time that will be required from you is 30-90 minutes in total.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no identifiable risks to taking part in the study.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

If you consent to take part in this research, the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and any other personal identifiable information submitted will be kept secure and separate from the data analysis. As mentioned above the researcher will transcribe the interview verbatim in order to conduct data analysis. All names mentioned including your own name, the name of your club and teammates, coach or manager will be changed in order for all data to remain confidential and for participants to remain anonymous. After this process has been completed the interview will be destroyed by electronic deletion.

Contact details of researcher:

If you have any questions/issues please contact me:
L.O'Halloran@2006.ljmu.ac.uk

Appendix 3

**LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM**



Project title: The lived experience of ‘critical moments’ in Premier League Academy football: A descriptive psychological phenomenological exploration.

Name of researcher: Lisa O’Halloran

Name of faculty: School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.

3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential

4. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed

5. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised.

6. I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 4



Dear Lisa,

Satisfaction of Provisos - Full Ethical Approval

With reference to your application for Ethical approval:

Critical moments, social support and identity development: A phenomenological investigation into the experiences of elite youth footballers in English football Academies.

On behalf of Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (REC) the Chair of the Committee has reviewed your response to the request for further information related to the above study. The Committee is now content to give a favourable ethical opinion and recruitment to the study can now commence.

Approval is given on the understanding that:

- any adverse reactions/events which take place during the course of the project will be reported to the Committee immediately;
- any unforeseen ethical issues arising during the course of the project will be reported to the Committee immediately;
- any substantive amendments to the protocol will be reported to the Committee immediately.
- the LJMU logo is used for all documentation relating to participant recruitment and participation eg poster, information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires. The JMU logo can be accessed at www.ljmu.ac.uk/images/jmulogo

For details on how to report adverse events or amendments please refer to the information provided at: http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/RGSO/RGSO_Docs/EC8Adverse.pdf

Please note that ethical approval is given for a period of five years from the date granted and therefore the expiry date for this project will be **9th June 2016**. An application for extension of approval must be submitted if the project continues after this date.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Kerrigan', is positioned above the printed name.

Brian Kerrigan
Chair of the LJMU REC
Tel: 0151 904 6463
E-mail: j.m.mckeeon@ljmu.ac.uk