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# Researching Professional Footballers: Reflections and Lessons Learned

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Graeme Law<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In this article, the author reflects on the process of interviewing professional footballers about the sensitive issue of money and the lessons learned from this process. The article discusses a case study approach using in-depth qualitative interviews, which generates an innovative insight into a closed social world. The focus is on the difficulties of obtaining a sample where challenges faced are discussed. The article also focuses on the interview style employed when dealing with individuals who are experienced at being interviewed regularly. It also examines the issues of being an “insider” when conducting research and ways in which this can benefit the research process. The issue of research being a messy process is also discussed as when conducting this research, it was imperative that the author could deal with unpredictability and had to be flexible to conduct the research. Finally, the article discusses the insecurities of the participants and the issues of trust, as the current position of the author led him to be seen as an “outsider” by some participants.

## Keywords

professional football, interviews, qualitative research, insider, case study, convenience sampling

## Introduction

The world of English professional football is a notoriously closed social world which is “hostile to outsiders,” defined as those who have never played, or otherwise been involved in the professional game at a high level (Waddington, 2014, p. 15). Tomlinson (1983, p. 151) argues that:

Football clubs are jealously guarded worlds. Like Governments, clubs are interested in good publicity or no publicity at all. They are, therefore, quite suspicious of social researchers, and of press and broadcasting journalists whose interests lie in anything other than the straight report or the novelty item.

As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that academic literature is limited in the area of understanding the life experiences of professional footballers, with only Roderick (2006), Kelly (2010), and Law (2018) providing robust, in-depth accounts of what life is like within this secretive world of first team football.

This article examines qualitative data collection methods, using a study that focused on the sensitive issue of players’ income, and the impact this has on the relationships players develop within the professional football environment. A case study approach using in-depth qualitative interviews was employed within this study. This is where the emphasis is on

an intensive examination of a community or organization (Bryman, 2012), which in this scenario were professional footballers. The intention of this case study was to reveal the unique features of the case and give readers an insight into the secretive world of the role money plays in the life of a professional footballer.

This article offers my reflections from the process of undertaking 34 interviews with professional footballers from different levels and different eras. I also offer some details on the lessons learned within this sometimes challenging process. I describe the participant recruitment process, dealing with the unpredictability of researching professional footballers, and the interview style used. The issue of being an “insider” is also explained along with the considerations that were vital in ensuring the players felt comfortable in discussing issues that are regarded as highly sensitive, and about which very little is known in the public domain.

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## The Five Lessons Learned From Conducting Qualitative Research Interviews With Professional Footballers

### *Recruitment/Obtaining a Sample—Footballers Are Extremely Difficult to Recruit*

Researching men about particularly sensitive issues such as health, illness behaviors, and money can be very challenging within qualitative research (Olliffe & Mroz, 2005). It is also evident within literature that men are unlikely to share emotions with other people, in particular men (Cheng, 1999; Lee & Ownes, 2002), which makes the recruitment process difficult when the study is aligned to the participants sharing their own personal experiences about a topic that could be related to sensitive issues. The sampling process was particularly important within this research as with Law and Bloyce (2017, 2019) and from previous literature (Kelly, 2010; Parker, 2016; Roderick, 2006), recruiting professional footballers is challenging. Parker (2016) explains, when he was trying to gain access to a professional football academy (aged 16–18), he was advised by the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) that if he managed to gain access, which was highly unlikely due to him not being a former professional player, he would struggle to gain the trust and acceptance of the players, coaches, and manager concerned. This process, along with the experiences of others, has allowed me to conclude that without having an "insider" status gaining access to professional football players for qualitative research, is almost impossible. Therefore, the sampling used within this research was convenience sampling, that is "one that is simply available to the researcher by the virtue of its accessibility" (Bryman, 2012, p. 201). Professional football players were accessible within this research investigation as I had a career within professional football. My career in full-time professional football lasted for 12 seasons starting at youth team level and then progressing to play in League 2, Scottish Division One, and the Conference National division. I was also capped at international youth levels. My career cannot be described as one of high success, but it did allow me to be seen as an "insider" by other professional footballers (Kelly, 2008).

When researching particularly difficult to reach groups, it has been commonplace in qualitative research methods to use mutual friends, colleagues, or partners to act as mediators (Olliffe & Mroz, 2005). Likewise, Gorman, Morgan, and Lambert (1995, p. 166) used community consultants when researching men who have sex with other men and share needles when engaging in drug use as they are "uniquely positioned to access specific population segments, broaden networks of contacts, add to the credibility and legitimacy (face validity) of research." I also tried to develop the number of participants through snowball sampling but ultimately this proved relatively unsuccessful. This was conducted by asking those who were interviewed whether they knew anyone who met the criteria, who may be interested in participating in the study. Although many players did say yes, only six participants were

recruited in this way. Players explained that those they had spoken to said they were not willing to be interviewed; for reasons such as not knowing me personally would cause issues around trust and because of the sensitive issues that would be discussed. Some participants said they did not feel comfortable asking other players, as they did not want others to know they had participated in an interview in which issues about income and the effects this can have on relationships had been disclosed. An attempt to develop the sample further was made by sending over 100 letters to past and previous players with an outline of what the study was about, along with the participant information sheet. The response rate for this participant recruitment process was zero, highlighting the difficulty in the "cold-calling" recruitment of footballers to partake in academic research. The response rate along with the nature of the football environment highlighted the only realistic approach to take was convenience sampling. To highlight the difficulty in recruiting participants for interview, even players that were well known to the researcher were not willing to participate within the study due to the fear of discussing the topic of money in an interview environment. These issues demonstrate that this research topic would be extremely difficult to conduct unless it was possible to undertake convenience sampling using some insider contacts. The majority of players were recruited through being former teammates or being known to me within the game.

The playing careers of those interviewed ranged from levels of high success and outstanding professional careers to more modest levels of success. Some players had played at international level, while others spent the majority of their careers in the lower leagues. This allowed each level to be represented and enabled me to ascertain whether approaches or behaviors toward money were similar across the different levels.

### *Unpredictability and Being Flexible With Your Sample*

Qualitative interviewing is not a simple process as it involves entering the life of participants in the hope that they share personal information about their experiences (Opdenakker, 2006). As highlighted above, recruitment can be difficult in qualitative research, particularly when the topic is sensitive (Patton, 2002). Although a suitable sample was recruited, the unpredictability of professional football impacted on some confirmed participants attending or completing the interviews. As footballers' schedule can alter at any time, guaranteeing a player who was still involved within the sport would be available for interview on the date agreed was extremely difficult. For example, on several occasions, training sessions had altered due to bad results. Previously planned "days off", which had allowed interviews to be arranged, were cancelled at late notice due to the participants losing a match, meaning the interviews had to be rearranged for other dates. On occasions, more specific reasons lead to interviews not being conducted or being cut short. On one occasion, a high-profile player had confirmed a date and time to be interviewed but 9 days prior to the interview date, the participant was sacked by his

employers and consequently decided not to be a participant within the study. On another occasion, a player who had a high level of success throughout his career, and had agreed to be interviewed, changed his mind about being interviewed as he felt that due to media attention he had received around the time of the scheduled interview, his anonymity would be in danger due to some of the issues that would be discussed within the interview. One former premiership player who did participate within the study had to leave the interview after only 10 min as he was called into an official club meeting with the chairman because the manager had been relieved of his duties when the interview had commenced. These instances highlight some of the difficulties faced when undertaking research in this environment and reinforce the argument that Bloyce (2004, p. 161) presented which is “research is a messy process” and can be at times frustrating.

Another aspect of this research process that was unpredictable was the location that the interviews took place. It was important to be extremely flexible and be available at short notice as some players gave less than 24-hr notice to inform the researcher that they were available for interview. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest the location for conducting qualitative interviews is key to encourage participants to fully discuss their personal experiences in a safe and comfortable setting. The location for the interview was left completely up to the participants, as it was felt that this would give the best chance of choosing an environment where they felt most comfortable. Some players chose their training grounds or their home stadium. Others, predominately the high-profile players, chose their home address as they felt this would allow their anonymity to stay intact as nobody other than the participant and on occasions their partner knew they were being interviewed, along with feeling comfortable enough to openly discuss sensitive issues. Although on one occasion this location proved more difficult, when the player’s partner entered the room, the participant changed the topic when discussing issues of gambling and bonuses to topics that were irrelevant to what was being discussed at that time. This is demonstrated by the below quote,

Yeah so, we gamble on the bus on away journeys usually cards you know. Yeah sometimes I lose money, on a couple of occasions I have lost more than I should have. Erm so it’s what happens when you are with [partner enters the room] so that’s it really. After matches we will just go home and relax at home and sometimes be in for a cool down the next day . . . [partner leaves room] Sorry about that, yeah it’s a lot of gambling on away journeys.

In situations such as this, it was important to stay focused on what the original question was to ensure that the information the participant was discussing was fully explained. Other players requested to meet in locations that were unfamiliar to themselves and the researcher, such as coffee shops not local to either party. In one situation, the interview took place at a motorway service station as the participant believed that he would remain totally anonymous in that location.

### *Interview Style—Interviewing Experienced Interviewees*

Interviews are interdependent relationships that involve interaction between the researcher and the participant (Fry, 2014). The semistructured interview format and the flexibility it offers demands that the interviewer engages with the interviewee. As Popay, Rogers, and Williams (1998, p. 348) point out, this produces data that are “the product of interaction.” Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2007) suggest that in qualitative research, interviews are an indispensable tool. Interviews enable participants to discuss their “own experiences in their own words” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 156). This allows interviewees to respond in greater detail than would be possible through other forms of data collection. Gratton and Jones (2010, p. 116) argued that semistructured interviews are a good way to collect data by stating that they allow the interviewer to “adopt a flexible approach to data collection.” In addition, when undertaking a case study, they are a valuable source of data collection as they provide “the richest single source of data” (Gillham, 2000, p. 65).

When conducting the interviews, the questions were adapted around the predetermined themes, depending on the responses from the participants, which allowed me to be flexible with the direction of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Probing questions were added, which allowed me to build on some issues that arose who were not expected and allowed examples to be given that offered a clearer and more detailed response from the participant. This allowed me to go beyond the set list of questions, where each question is guided by the interviewee’s response (Herman, 1994). This was key for this study given the often quite personal experiences that were being discussed, about which little was known.

In this study, footballers were asked to discuss in detail their experiences with money in the football environment and what impact, if any, this had on the relationships within their working lives. Waddington (2014) stated that interviews are very common for professional footballers, and they are regularly interviewed by journalists about past and/or future matches. These interviews tend to have some predictability about them, and many professional footballers are media-trained to ensure they answer questions appropriately. As such, these players have been taught to keep their guard up and to provide relatively straightforward and safe answers (Waddington, 2014). When conducting qualitative interviews with participants who fear repercussions, it can lead to noncooperative behavior from interviewees (Petkov & Kaoullas, 2016). This realistically makes interviewing professional sportspeople, and in particular professional footballers, as this is an aspect of training provided to all players by the PFA, different to research compared to other subject areas. Therefore, it was important to ensure that the interviews that were being conducted for the research were unlike a media-style interview. This was done to avoid receiving responses that were generic to enable data to be gathered which were providing an insight into a closed social world. Consequently, it was important for me to ask open questions (Patton, 2002), which at the beginning of the interview were

more general, relating to their career, and were not money specific. In doing this, I believed that I could try and break-down their barrier and make them feel more comfortable, and hopefully, more likely to talk openly about a sensitive issue such as income. I wanted to focus on the income of the players and the impact that had on relationships with others inside and outside of the football club.

The interviews were different to the kind that players were used to when engaging with members of the media. I had a particular area of interest to discuss, which addressed what could be perceived to be sensitive issues. Those who did participate were happy to discuss a range of experiences throughout their career and gave clear examples to support this. This indicated that the players trusted me sufficiently, and they expected me to understand and clearly interpret what they were discussing due to my knowledge and experiences within the world of professional football as an ex-professional player.

When I was interviewing the players, I felt it was important to use language that they would be familiar with and was common within the football environment. This was decided upon during a pilot interview with a semiprofessional footballer who asked for certain questions to be explained with greater clarity. For example, when discussing aspects of image and the role this played in the life of a footballer, greater clarity on what specifically was being asked about image was required. This also enabled the interview to develop into a conversation rather than a list of questions. This was particularly important when asking about the process of contract negotiations and how these had developed over time. This was because these questions were early in the interview schedule with the aim of putting the participants at ease and provided a sense of familiarity and cordiality between participant and researcher, because the way the interviews went, I tried to make it clear that I understood the issues they were raising with me. For example, some participants asked my experiences after giving their own and by sharing my own, it gave the participant an assurance that they were not giving wrong information, something that Oliffe and Mroz (2005) stress is important to encourage participants to give open and honest accounts of their experiences. From the responses given, it seemed that this made the players become comfortable as the interview progressed and they openly discussed topics, some of which were sensitive, such as gambling and sex, in great detail, for example, a former international discussed the impact gambling had on his match performance:

There was one game I remember for the reasons I'll go into now. We were away at [names club], so long journey and overnight stay. I lost about 15 grand and I was shocking. I mean shocking. All I could think about was the money, not the game. So, after the game the manager knew I had been playing cards and I had to sit next to him on the bus from then on. That was how he tried to stop me playing.

### *Being an "Insider"—the Positives and Negatives*

There is a large amount of literature on whether or not researchers should be "insiders," meaning members of the population

that they are researching (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Being an insider, when conducting research, can allow for a shared identity and language with participants and give the researcher a certain amount of legitimacy for conducting the study (Asselin, 2003). It is also argued that the insider role allows for a quicker and deeper acceptance from participants during the interview process (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; McConnell-Henry, James, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; Talbot, 1998–1999). Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 58) suggest that the acceptance and membership of the group being studied automatically gives a level of "trust and openness" which would be unlikely to be gained otherwise.

As I was an ex-professional player, I was able to gain access to players, and this also meant they could discuss matters that they thought I would be familiar with, and thus they were, seemingly, prepared to be more open with me. Nonetheless, I explained to the players interviewed from Player 2 onward that direct questions about income amounts would not be asked as the first player to be interviewed specifically said they would not answer a question on income amounts prior to the interview beginning. I was also aware from my own personal experiences within football that directly discussing earnings would impact on what the participants discussed within the interview. It was important to ensure the participants felt as at ease about the subject matter of the interview as was possible to make them comfortable and provide what were perceived to be open and honest answers. I considered it likely that by signaling my insider status to those who I did not know personally would enhance the authenticity and depth of detail offered by the participants in the course of the interview process in terms of them being prepared to share their experiences and perceptions. It was apparent from many of the interviews that my background was of importance aiding the trust and rapport. For example, in an interview where I had no prior relationship with one of the participants, I deliberately started off by chatting about my own moderate successes as a player. This, I recognized, gave them an appreciation that I would have an understanding of certain issues they were discussing. Thus, allowing more depth and detail from the interviewees as it seemed as though the participants felt encouraged to share certain experiences with me as I would "understand" what they were discussing. A current championship footballer commented thus,

You know people who have never been involved in the game just don't understand it. Like you have played, you know how tough all of it can be, so you understand what I'm saying. If you talk to someone who has never played the game properly, they think I'm a disgrace to moan about it. They say, "you have the best job in the world, it's easy." Fair enough that's their opinion, but I know like you do it isn't easy. Those people wouldn't last 2 min in the football environment.

This is similar to the findings of Perry, Thurston, and Green (2004), who conducted a study of the life worlds of gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people. One of the researchers was a lesbian and it was believed in this research that this enhanced

the “veracity and richness of detail offered up by the young people” (Perry, Thurston, & Green, 2004, p. 140). This was because the participants believed she would understand what they were trying to convey, as the researcher openly told the participants that they were gay. This would suggest those who are discussing issues that they feel are unique will be more open with those they feel have experienced similar occurrences to them.

I was also aware that image was something of importance for footballers. This became particularly clear with the participants who played after the introduction of the Premier League in 1992. It was something I then became conscious of when meeting players I wanted to be seen as someone that understood the importance of image and made attempts to dress to standards that met the expectations of players. For example, I used a bag that was an expensive brand to carry my notepad and other equipment needed for the interview. On occasions, I also took long periods of time to decide what outfit I would wear depending on who I was interviewing. I would argue that it was important to act and dress appropriately for the individual you are interviewing to ensure, as a researcher, you are also seen as an individual that the participants can relate to and feels you understand the area they are involved in.

However, being an insider does have some potential problems (Adler, 1990). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that being an insider can hamper the research process as participants may make assumptions about the researcher’s knowledge that can lead to them not fully explaining their personal experiences. An “insider” status can also lead to the researcher’s perceptions becoming clouded by their own personal experiences, which can make separating their own experiences from that of the participants difficult (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This according to Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 58) can lead to an interview that is “shaped and guided by the core aspects of the researchers experience and not the participants.” McConnell-Henry et al. (2009) argue that an important issue to consider when conducting research with participants who are known to the researcher is the potential for mistrust to occur. Preexisting relationships can have a negative impact on the development of rapport if the interviewee feels there is a hidden agenda, which can impact on the openness, especially if some information involves scenarios that involved the researcher themselves (Asselin, 2003). I, like McConnell-Henry et al. (2009), made clear to the participants that what was being discussed was confidential and they would remain anonymous, while also clarifying my role as the researcher.

Within this research, it was important that I gave constant thought to my level of “involvement” and the concept of involvement and detachment. The figurational concept of involvement and detachment comes from the work of Elias (1987) who explains how a man’s stance cannot be fully involved or detached because if adults were to go too far in one direction then “social life as we know it would come to an end” so the survival of networks is dependent on actions being taken from both directions (p. 226). Elias (1987) explains how detachment is unavoidably always combined with involvement,

One cannot say of a person’s outlook in any absolute sense that it is detached or involved . . . Only small babies, and among adults perhaps only insane people, become involved in what the experience with complete abandon to their feelings here and now: and again only the insane can remain completely unmoved by what goes on around them. (p. 68)

Elias (1987, p. 237) also states “in order to understand the functioning of human groups, one needs to know, as it were, from inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and one cannot know without active participation and involvement.” Due to this, Dunning and Hughes (2013, p. 158) explain how Elias encouraged researchers to conduct research into areas they were “directly interested and involved.” During the research process, the researcher needs to distance themselves from the “objects of their research, to take a detour via detachment” (Dunning & Hughes, 2013, p. 158) to ensure the findings match as much as possible to the structure and objectives of the research rather than the researchers own personal opinions. Detour via detachment means, although as a sociologist you have interests to defend positions of involvement, you firstly need to understand that distancing yourself and learning to control these specific interests, you as the researcher can return to them with the process of “secondary involvement” (Dunning & Hughes, 2013, p. 14). Carrying out research and adding knowledge to the area of social science should be the principal aim over any short-term interests but Elias, according to Dunning and Hughes (2013, p. 158), was specific when making the point that “sociologists cannot and *should not* abandon their political interests and concerns.” Moreover, as the researchers own “participation and involvement . . . is itself one of the conditions for comprehending the problems they try to solve” (Elias, 1987, p. 84). During the research, there was a need to have a suitable involvement and detachment balance that included “a capacity for reflexivity, an ability to critically examine one’s own passions and personal interests throughout the research process” (Mansfield, 2007, p. 126).

Due to my own level of involvement through my own playing career, I cannot guarantee that I have accomplished an appropriate level of balance between involvement and detachment, as all I would be providing would be a self-assessment of my abilities as a researcher and a sociologist. Readers of my study, like Dwyer and Buckle (2009), will be able to provide their own assumptions on whether a clear balance of involvement and detachment has been achieved, and whether there is a clear and nonbiased view of the role that money has on the relationships within the working lives of professional football players, and whether the study reflects a sufficient amount of authenticity.

### *Insecurities and Issues of Trust From Participants*

There are many arguments for conducting research as an outsider as there are against it as there are for conducting research as an insider (Serrant-Green, 2002). Despite having a previous

career as a professional footballer and to an extent considered an “insider,” ultimately, I was no longer a player and was not involved at any level in the sport nor I had the level of success that some of the participants had within their careers. I was a university student conducting a study on the lives of professional footballers, something that some players felt a little skeptical about. Therefore, for some participants they may have seen me as an “outsider,” as in their eyes, I may have not been seen as a member of their group or community (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I had not played at the top levels of the game, or won major trophies, nor had I earned large sums of money in my career. This could lead some players to feel I did not understand issues that were maybe common to them. However, I explained that “it was my hope to learn from them and their experience so that I and others could gain an insight into” life as a professional footballer and the impact money can have within the relationships in their working lives (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). It cannot be guaranteed that this process encouraged the participants to discuss the information they presented openly, but throughout all the interviews, each participant discussed sensitive issues, of which it is assumed they would not be willing to discuss within the football environment. The research data obtained were very rich, both in depth and breadth.

Despite the fact that many of the participants are regularly interviewed, many players demonstrated signs of nerves and were keen to ask what type of questions and how long they should talk for prior to the interview being conducted; because as many stated, they have never done anything like this before. This would suggest that there are power relations in qualitative research. Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach (2009) argue that the power balances that exist between participant and researcher are highly hierarchical. As I, as the researcher, knew the questions that would be asked along with having a position of employment different to the participants, which many referred to me being “too clever to be a footballer,” meant I was more in control of the interview than they were. It was important to rebalance the power to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible to try and ensure the interview was conducted in a way to get the participants to share their real-life experiences (O’Connor & O’Neil, 2004). Convenience sampling may have allowed for this to take place as I already had a relationship with many of the players, so building a rapport was relatively easy and the interview became more of a conversation (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). As with Roderick’s (2003) work, a player who did not have a previous relationship with me, a general conversation and rapport were built prior to the interview.

Peters, Jackson, and Rudge (2008) explain how researcher self-disclosure is the process of revealing information to the participant to encourage greater engagement by the participants. With participants that I had no prior relationship with, it was invariable to try and ensure that I discussed my own modest career, and this led the participants to ask me questions about my experiences and achievements as a player. It was important to facilitate these discussions to encourage the

participants to feel more at ease in an effort to demonstrate “insider” status and that I did have an understanding of the working life of a professional footballer. It is presumed that this discussion allowed trust to be built, as it gave the participants the knowledge that I was not a complete “outsider,” and during this time, I also reassured them about confidentiality and anonymity.

On many occasions, players asked who else had been interviewed in the study prior to them being interviewed. At times, this was repeated for several minutes and, on occasions, was conducted quite intensely with what was presumed a test whether I would maintain confidentiality under high-pressured questioning. By refusing the information the participants expressed they felt more comfortable undertaking the interview knowing their name was not going to be divulged to others. However, it also highlighted some of the insecurities the participants had about discussing issues that were sensitive to them. Interviews of the players asking about previous participants were conducted after the players had signed the consent form and read the participant information sheet that detailed this information clearly. This could have been because the players required further reassurance or that the participants did not fully read the consent form and information regarding the study. As Oliffe and Mroz (2005, p. 258) argue, “the generally accepted masculine tradition [of] not to read instructions” could give a justification for the questions asked about other participants. Something I learned from this was to repeat the information on the consent forms and information sheets to reinforce that everything was confidential and that they would remain anonymous. This was also repeated on several occasions through the interview, which seemed to reassure the participants and encourage them to discuss issues that could be considered to be sensitive.

## Conclusion

The reflections I have presented along with the lessons I have learned and described are intended to offer insight to some considerations and preempt an awareness of the complexities, as well as the value of interviewing professional sportspeople. Oliffe and Mroz (2005) identified that recruitment was difficult when interviewing men about issues related to health and fitness, and recruitment was best achieved by being introduced through a mutual friend, colleague, or partner. Within my study, this method allowed me to interview six further participants, which despite being seen as an insider, I would have not been able to access due to these participants not been previously known to me. It was also vital within the interviews that I shared my own experiences. This allowed the participants to feel more comfortable and led to some discussing sensitive topics and demonstrated I was an “insider” and did have an understanding of the working world of a professional footballer. Perry, Thurston, and Green (2004) offered a detailed reflection of the methods process when studying the life worlds of gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people and found that the lead researcher openly telling the participants they were gay

allowed a more in-depth range of data to be collected. Despite similar work being conducted within qualitative research, it has not been discussed when interviewing professional footballers about a sensitive topic such as money. Therefore, I genuinely hope that by detailing my experiences, researchers will consider and reconsider the difficulties faced when interviewing individuals who are in the public eye and are part of a closed social group. The expectation that they will discuss any topic openly is a very restricted viewpoint, and several key points highlighted within this paper need to be considered prior to undertaking the research.

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