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A sociological examination of Youth Academy male footballers' experiences of the transition from school to work.

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Science by Research

York St John University

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August 2019

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The dream of many young male children is often to become a professional footballer after idolising their favourite players for many years. Football is a global sport, bringing together and uniting people in support of their teams and countries. Existing research in the field has sought to begin to understand what professional footballers experience on their journey through the game. However, much of this research has focused on first team players and their professional experiences, including transitions from youth team to first team and to retirement. This study, therefore, aimed to examine players during their youth academy stage, having just arrived at one English Championship club as a scholar. This study focused on the transitional experiences of youth players and their resulting embodying of a footballer's identity. 12 semi-structured interviews with players aged 17-19 were conducted and then analysed using figurational sociology concepts such as power, interdependencies, figurations and habitus. It is argued that early specialisation in football was a prevalent factor that partly influenced the way the players experienced their transition. Factors such as leaving home, friends and family, whilst managing new norms and traditional expectations of behaviours in the club were described as positive and negative elements that contributed towards how the players felt. Players football identities were both enabled and constrained through the creation of new interdependencies with other players and coaches at the club that perpetuated their evolving habitus. The transition into the academy coincided with the transition from youth to adulthood that was arguably anything but linear as players managed the dominant hyper-masculine culture present in the club. Ultimately this study has added to existing knowledge on professional footballers, whilst highlighting that the transitions these players experience are crucial in understanding how they live and identify as a footballer.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The world of football has arguably been the curiosity, excitement and fascination of academics across the globe for many years. As a global sport, fans, critics, the media, businesses, opportunists, researchers and almost everyone in between has some interest in the 'beautiful game', with McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005, p.102) describing football as a 'surrogate religion for millions'. Since the introduction of the English Premier League in 1992, football in the United Kingdom. has attracted and continues to attract thousands of youths and children due to the appeal of 'making it big'; football is far more than a mere game where twenty-two individuals run around a pitch after a ball (Hickey and Kelly 2008). Football has been professionalised and is now an environment where multi-million-pound TV deals, global owners, merchandise sales, transfer markets and players as celebrity icons are viewed as the norm (Parker 1996; 2000; 2006; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh 2005). However, the success rate for making it to the topflight of football is a topic receiving a great deal of media publicity (BBC Sport 2014; Daily Mail 2019).

In a recent documentary by BT Sport Films (2018), viewers of 'No Hunger in Paradise' were educated on the harsh realities of making it as a top-flight footballer. Within the first few moments of the documentary starting, the statistic of only 180 youth academy players being successful in the Premier League out of an incredible 1.5 million players was broadcast, which correlates as a success rate of only 0.012% (BT Sport Films 2018). Success in football can be arguably defined as a variety of achievements such as the signing of a professional football contract and earning an acceptable salary from the sport (Roderick 2006). Players in Roderick (2006) stated that to be considered as having 'made it' was the acceptance into the first team squad and the level which the club they signed at played in. Given the widely accepted knowledge that a career in any sport is short-lived with football no exception to this, there is a high rate of labour wastage amongst young players (Bourke 2003; Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016). However, the possibilities and rewards that are awarded and available to those who are successful at the highest level such as financial security, fame and status, are arguably enticing methods that continually attract young talents to the football world (Bourke 2003; Brown and Potrac 2009). The fascination of the game and the lives led by footballers has been the source of a growing number of research publications over the years, although to penetrate the world of football is an exceptionally difficult task given their nature of keeping their innermost workings private and away from public scrutiny (Parker 1996; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Roderick 2006a; 2006b; Platts 2012). Of the

few who have succeeded in gaining access to interview players, managers and other personnel (McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh 2005; Roderick 2006a; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Hickey and Kelly 2008), their studies have featured first team players.

The purpose of a football academy is to educate and prepare young players for a career within the first team or to be sold to generate income, and unlike other industries, recruitment into an academy can take place from a very young age (Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016; Adams and Carr 2017). As a historically working-class sport, the footballing apprenticeship was predominantly populated by working-class males who sought an escape from the rigours of education and schooling (Parker 1996). Even prior to the establishment of the Modern Apprenticeship in football that was arguably a way around employing under-seventeen year olds, apprenticeships provided an opportunity for males to undertake trainee schemes in roles such as building, plumbing and carpentry that were considered to solidify and project one's masculinity to others (Parker 1996; 2000).

The creation of a trainee football programme provided young, impressionable individuals with an opportunity to be instructed to play the best technical football whilst receiving guidance on nutrition, fitness and formal education (Parker 1996; Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016); thus providing a way for the working-class male to assert himself. However, enrolling into the academy environment meant an internalisation of a set of traditional norms present in football. Embodying the expected behaviours of obedience, adopting a strategy of silence, adhering to strict managerial authoritarianism have been just some of the few sub-cultural elements present in existing literature (Parker 1996; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh 2005; Roderick 2006a; 2006b; Platts 2012). Despite improvements and a rise in attention by the world regarding the lives of sporting athletes, sport remains affiliated to hegemonic masculinity which is defined by Burgess, Edwards and Skinner (2003, p.200) as 'the culturally idealised form of masculine character'. Football remains a dominant masculine environment where individuals learn what it is to be male due to the acceptance of the environment by those within and outside of it (Parker 1996; 2000; 2006; Burgess, Edwards and Skinner 2003; Roderick 2006a; 2006b; Platts 2012). For example, Parker (1996) found that the instruction from coaches to young trainees to complete jobs was part of the process of becoming a man, as it was a rite of passage to earn your position post completion of the apprenticeship. Even progressing to second year scholar was seen as transitioning to being 'more of a man', which combined with the trainee's desires to live out of 'hyper-masculine practices of personal extravagance' such as purchasing expensive goods and materials, perpetuated the dominant masculine culture of football. Perhaps then, a study examining the prevalence of historically traditional masculine norms in academy environments

would prove useful to understand the depth of the athletic identity adopted by these individuals to be successful. To achieve this, examining the experiences of these players as they transition into the academy full-time will arguably inform us of the rawness of emotions and therefore the continual evolution of their identity at such an impressionable life stage (Elias 1978; Parker 1996). Such information could be useful for academy clubs to utilise in protecting and nurturing their players in this highly competitive and ruthless environment and therefore the following research question will be examined: What are the experiences of male youth academy players during their transition from full-time school to full-time youth team?

In order to explore these player's experiences, a sociological perspective using ideas and concepts from figurational sociologist, Norbert Elias will be used. In his book 'What is Sociology?', Elias (1978, p.13) states that 'sociology is concerned with problems of society, and society is something formed by oneself and other people together' and to understand sociology we must 'be aware of oneself as a human being among other human beings'. This description is the start of his concept of figurations and interdependencies that will be used throughout this thesis to explain how relations between individuals, such as those within the academy environment both enable and constrain each other to continually mould and evolve their athletic identity (Elias 1978).

This study will undertake semi-structured interviews to interview players at one English football club and this thesis will be formatted as follows; Chapter 2 will review existing literature that outlines the current knowledge in the field of football from both a sociological and psychological standpoint. Chapter 3 will explore the theoretical lens that informs and ultimately supports the findings of this study. Figurational sociology and Elias' notions of interdependencies, power and habitus will be defined and explained to provide the reader with an understanding of these concepts. Chapter 4 will discuss and justify the methodology chosen, covering design, sample selection and data analysis. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will explore the results of the study and discuss their meanings through the application of Elias' theoretical concepts, whilst considering the findings from existing empirical research. Finally, Chapter 8 will offer a conclusion, summarising the key findings and providing future research suggestions that could further expand our understanding of the football world.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review has been predominantly conducted based on academic literature with the use of documentaries and media articles to contextualise the academy environment. This review aims to establish what is known and understood of academy football using Parker's (1996) study entitled 'Chasing the big time: football apprenticeship in the 1990s' as a starting point. This thesis was the initial read that sparked the interest for conducting this study as it explores the youth academy as a whole and therefore the foundation on which it is built. From Parker's (1996) study, a list of key authors in the field of professional football was made and a search for relevant literature from these academics on youth academies was conducted. It soon became apparent that despite the desire to focus on youth academies, most existing literature was based on first team football. However, it was decided that this material would prove useful in establishing our current understanding of professional football, which is a 'notoriously closed social world' due to club's wishes to keep their activities private to protect themselves and their players from outsider threats (Kelly and Waddington 2006, p.149).

Parker's (1996) thesis and resulting published literature (2000; 2006) were examined for key themes pertaining to life as a youth academy player such as longstanding historical football traditions. Concurrently, during reading and preparation for using Elias' (1978) concepts of figurational sociology, the concept of 'Dreams vs Reality' was identified as an emerging and growing set of ideas that Parker (1996) and Roderick (2014) have adopted within their work. Parker (1996) alluded to home life in comparison to football as a bit of a reality shock for the players in his study and so, in the first section of this review, this idea will be used to explore how prevalent Elias' ideas on shock theory are in the transitional youth years. After the initial literature search, an expanded search of exploratory studies on transitional phases experienced by footballers from both a sociological and psychological perspective was conducted, although the majority were from a retirement angle (Brown and Potrac 2009; Nesti et al. 2012; Roderick 2014). Given a rise in the number of psychological studies on sporting athletes covering coping strategies, critical moments and mentally toughening (see Nicholls and Polman 2006; Nesti et al. 2012; Tibbert et al. 2015) their findings should be acknowledged in this study. Nesti et al. (2012) asserted that psychologists should not be blind as to view an individual without considering where that individual is located; the cultural context within which they are placed must be acknowledged in order to view an identity and understand the meaning behind it. Therefore, this study, although from a sociological standpoint, will acknowledge studies of a psychological nature to contextualise these individuals in their

social setting. Other studies (Mills et al. 2012; Morris, Tod and Eubank 2017; Clarke, Cushion and Harwood 2018) combined with Parker's (1996) established that players embody the identity of a footballer, often without fully realising. However, little appears known about how this identity influences the behaviours of school leavers as they embark on their academy journey and this will also form a key theme. A holistic discussion on the football environment focusing on findings from Parker (1996) will take place, followed by an exploration of existing literature findings on education before finally turning to transitions within and through football.

2.1.   Dreams vs Reality

The notion of occupational inevitability is a term used to describe how players assume that because they have succeeded in gaining an academy place that they will be completely successful for a whole football career (Parker 1996). This is often embodied by many trainee footballers and is a concept that stems from the dream to be a successful professional player (Parker 1996; Bourke 2003). Findings from a questionnaire completed by Irish born players suggested that in contrast to views from the media that suggest players enter the football word for economic reasons, respondents identified their love of football and their dream of playing for their country as more influential reasons for adopting a professional career (Bourke 2003). With players immersing themselves as early as five-years-old in football, it is not surprising to find that many hold dreams of scoring goals, wearing their teams' colours and winning the world cup (Parker 1996; 2000; Bourke 2003; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh 2005; Mitchell et al. 2014; Roderick 2014). Such dreams could be perpetuated as young players who successfully enrol in a youth academy have experienced success as a schoolboy player and therefore enjoyed rewards and attention (Parker 1996; Clarke, Cushion and Harwood 2018). Several players within Parker's (1996) thesis alluded to the invitations to go to trials at clubs as very welcoming and inviting, further enhancing their perceptions of fulfilling their dreams. However, as summarised by Roderick (2014) many studies have concluded that the embodied dreams of the young players combined with the knowledge that they are talented and irreplaceable does not transpire into career longevity. The reality is, the success rate is incredibly low making failure more difficult to accept in the long-term; the transition out of what is often a successful youth team into a lower ranking, less successful first team is a high possibility and the detachment of their athletic identity is a nearly impossible feat (Bourke 2003; Brown and Potrac 2009; Roderick 2014; Morris, Tod and Eubank 2017).

Upon integration into the academy, trainee players are described by Parker (1996) and Brown and Potrac (2009) as facing a stark, frank and differing situation from what was

expected. Restrictions enforced by figures of authority such as managers and coaches became the norm. The acceptance and internalisation of abusive behaviour without question, the necessary sacrifices of personal time, socialisation with the outside world and negating education were all enforced upon arrival at the academy, albeit somewhat indirectly in some cases (Parker 1996; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Mitchell et al. 2014). However, Roderick (2014) asserts that many athletes are very much aware of their exploitation, but due to their dedication and complete immersion in the environment, players were described as accepting this reality and, in some cases, insisting that it was necessary and appropriate on the path to success, particularly as managers and coaches are deemed figures of power who can control who is offered a professional contract (Kelly and Waddington 2006; Brown and Potrac 2009; Clarke, Cushion and Harwood 2018). As power is described by Elias (1978) as something that is in constant flux as will be discussed later, this study will aim to gain an understanding of how figurations and interdependencies amongst players and managers influence youth academy experiences.

The negation of education during secondary school and thus upon arrival at the academy was alluded to by participants in McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh's (2005) study, who stated that they felt they could have achieved better during school but could not due to their immersion in football. Additionally, Bourke (2003) suggests that trainees negate education further in favour of football as schools do not advocate a career as a professional footballer. In work by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), participants suggested that although they attended careers advice sessions, no advice was ever given when the desire to be a professional athlete was expressed. The placement of football at the top of the players priorities was also found in Adams and Carr's (2017) study on the creation and maintenance of friendships amongst adolescent boys in an academy. Interviews with 12, 14-15-year-old academy players from a lower English league club suggested that most players prioritised their football over maintaining friendships which could be identified as a paradox due to the assertion that during times of increased pressure and vulnerability, for example during poor performances or rejection, emotional support and a feeling of safety is often sought through friendships (Roderick 2006b; Adams and Carr 2017). Participants suggested they do not have real friends in football as the threat of competition for their place in the team is too extreme. After experiencing playing school and local league football with friends and being successful, the dream of being a footballer is cemented but the reality on entering an academy is that for many players, friendships were based on survival. However, due to trainees all experiencing the same environment, there is evidence of emotional support. Perhaps perpetuated by alienation from their friends outside of the academy due to a

lack of understanding on both parts of what the trainee footballer was experiencing and what the others outside of the academy were doing in their 'normal life', trainees felt isolated and lonely. A distinct lack of trust amongst individuals within the academy, despite referring to their teammates as friends was also present (Adams and Carr 2017). Roderick (2006a) refers to trust as a prevalent notion when players are building a network of interdependencies in which trust can be placed, but it could be assumed from this, that trust is only something that develops over time and through longevity in the football world. Thus, this study will aim to establish how the transition period from school to youth academy influences friendships and in turn one's identity, given that the interdependent relations between the players and the fluxing of power between them are crucial for the success or failure of both the team and as individual athletes (Elias 1978; Adams and Carr 2017).

In summary, this opening introductory section has sought to gain an understanding of the existing knowledge on the concept of Dream vs Reality. The dream for many upcoming, young footballers is to win trophies, score goals and play for their country. The reality is that many will not succeed; life is not as rosy as expected upon arrival at an academy where they face isolation and loneliness, which raises questions regarding the transition period from school to youth team that this study aims to tease out.

2.2.   The Football Environment and A Footballer's Identity

2.2.1. 'Chasing the Big Time'

In Parker's (1996) study on youth academy players at an English league club named 'Colby Town', life as a full-time trainee professional footballer was documented and analysed. Over the course of the 1993/1994 season, Parker (1996) observed and interviewed 20 first and second year scholars, aged between 16 and 17 as well as several members of staff including the Education Officer and Youth Team Coach to establish the behaviours and practices of young players through their experiences of sub-cultures within football. Parker (1996) wished to understand the impact of the youth trainee apprenticeship on identities and career trajectories and to gather information on life as a professional footballer that often remains a closely guarded secret. Parker's (1996) thesis documents the highs and lows experienced by young academy trainees. As gaining access to football environments is notoriously difficult given the associated risks of information leakage to the outside world, Parker's (1996) study is one of the few ethnographic studies of subjective lived experiences of professional footballers that can provide the base for this study.

Parker (1996) established that footballs' popularity as a working-class leisure pursuit of the early twentieth century was still evident, with the hegemonic masculine culture providing a distinct link to identity formation particularly during the academy trainee years where youths were in an impressionable period of their lives. Comparatively, in Roderick's (2006a) study on the uncertainty of a career in professional football, interviewed players highlighted that for many football is more than just a job, it is an embodied identity; it is who they are and playing is the only role that they know how to do. The early internalisation of football as their central being may be the root cause of the adoption of an athletic identity that stems from early specialisation in the sport and a possible cause of the exacerbation of the dominant masculine culture still found in the game today (Clarke, Cushion and Harwood 2018). Athletic identity can be defined as the extent to which an individual associates as an athlete and the level to which they embody the behaviours and practices that are part of being an athlete in that sport (Brown and Potrac 2009; Mitchell et al. 2014). Formal training can begin as young as five years old, although commitment to training throughout childhood and adolescence can result in an 'overly strong athletic identity by the age of 18 years' which in turn can have both positive and negative effects on a player's sense of self (Mitchell et al. 2014, p.1295). Furthermore, according to Roderick (2006b, p.16) 'a professional footballer's identity is rooted in his body', meaning that individuals view their body in relation to their career success. Parker (1996, p.66) found that even by the time players reached the second year of their scholarship, around the age of 18, a 'higher profile was attributed to second year status' which was 'intimately linked to becoming more of a man'. Embodying the ideologies of athlete behaviours were highlighted as instrumental in influencing the identity of these young players (Parker 1996). These included accepting club values and wearing the correct kit at the appropriate times, eating meals according to rank and withstanding regular criticism by persons of authority. It should be noted here, that the hyper-masculine culture within football is not new knowledge due to the extensive discussions in existing literature (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006a; Platts 2012) and thus any data within the study pertaining to this area will be in support of the existing literature as opposed to new claims.

Parker (1996) found an overwhelming number of interviewees suggesting the presence of authoritarian practices within the club's culture that created and conditioned the players into fully immersing themselves as a committed and obedient player. Likened to military discipline, intimidation, verbal abuse and harsh remarks were identified as a daily feature from the youth coach at Colby Town, a factor also evident in Burgess, Edwards and Skinners (2003) study on the construction of masculine identities in an Australian school setting. Parker's (1996) interviewees described the daily torrent of

shouting and threats as hard to accept after enjoying their previous amateur footballing experiences. Likewise, participants described that poor matchday performances also incensed their youth coach to the point where he ordered extra extreme physical exercise such as long distance runs or additional duties to be carried out as punishment.

Parker (1996) found the youth academy players to be somewhat institutionalised upon enrolling at the academy. The daily lives of players were controlled by the club, particularly first years who were often required to train longer than second years, with more 'jobs' to be completed after training which dramatically reduced their free time. The result of this was a segregation between first and second years and an increase in the presence of banter amongst the players, as second years strived to prove their manliness and footballing ability over the first years. The display of manliness in terms of physical prowess was described as the need to show willing, undertake any task asked without question to show dedication and a professional attitude; thus, these players highlighted that the working-class history of the game was continually reconstructed daily at Colby Town (Parker 1996). Comparatively, in a recent psychological ethnographic study by Champ et al. (2018), over 3000 hours of observations, field notes and informal interviews were conducted with players aged 16-19. The study's aim was to understand the cultural experiences of academy players at one club over a three-year period and in turn, to explore how these experiences influenced their own identity development and their welfare (Champ et al. 2018). This study found the continual reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, with players suggesting masculine qualities such as resilience, toughness and strength were highly sought if they were to be successful. Despite being a psychological study, Champ et al. (2018) did explore sociological concepts such as power balances to aid in explaining the psychological coping mechanisms their young participants described, suggesting that to fully understand these daily life experiences of youth players, it is useful to consider knowledge from both disciplines. The sociological work of Kelly and Waddington (2006) provides an example of players negotiating subcultures and therefore a place to explore the current knowledge available in this area.

2.2.2. Subcultural norms and the moulding of identity

Kelly and Waddington (2006) examined managerial control within Britain and Ireland, completing semi-structured interviews with 22 players and 18 managers from England and Ireland in the 2004/2005 season. From their manager interviews, they found that all managers prioritised rules and codes of conduct as essential to controlling players' behaviours, with player participants suggesting authoritarian behaviour from their managers was never to be questioned, regardless as to how it was delivered. Several

players described a type of fear towards their manager if they did not perform well or do what was expected of them, with one Premier League player saying: 'He was totally the hardest manager I have ever come across… He was very strict. There was a fear factor that if you didn't perform, you were out. He'd hammer you. He would verbally abuse you if you didn't do it' (Kelly and Waddington 2006, p.151). This relentless pressure to succeed and please those in positions of power, reinforces the traditional hyper-masculine culture of the sport. Interestingly, these players suggested should these negative ideologies be absent, there would be a strong desire for them to be present, as they felt it helped them to be better players, helping to solidify and evolve their identity and habitus in to that which is most desired in football; that of a strong, dedicated, dominating male (Kelly and Waddington 2006). To be unsuccessful was a risk that could transpire into not being selected and rejected from the team, which Brown and Coupland (2015) term an identity threat.

As a social construction, identity is caught up in and by the interdependencies that act upon it resulting in subjected identity fragility and instability (Brown and Coupland 2015). The presence of power both enables and constrains an identity and therefore what is normalised and embodied (Brown and Coupland 2015). When an identity is formed and arguably established and a set of desired narratives are embodied, for example, when a youth team player is offered the chance to appear in the first team, any inbound threat that can cause upset and disruption to this event can result in major consequences for the vulnerability of youth players, particularly their sense of purpose and self (Roderick 2006b; Nesti et al. 2012; Adams and Carr 2017). A psychological study on coping strategies amongst early and middle adolescent Premier League Academy footballers found that common threats include making mistakes, receiving criticism from coaches or parents and watching another teammate succeed (Reeves, Nicholls and Jones 2009). Participants suggested that acceptance of the subcultures dominating the club was crucial to coping, whilst strategies to improve, withstand criticism and blocking out anything negative from their minds were used (Nicholls and Polman 2007; Reeves, Nicholls and Jones 2009). Comparatively, Tibbert, Anderson and Morris (2015) state that 'mental toughening' is a characteristic that clubs wish their players to behold. With few players remaining at one or two clubs for their entire career, accruing mental toughness will likely sustain a player as an ideal employee and serve the player well when exposed to changes in clubs and personnel (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006b; Tibbert, Anderson and Morris 2015). However, interactions between internal and external environments can influence how an individual will cope with a threat such as rejection (Roderick 2006b).

The repercussions of not being selected were noted to influence self-perception and self-efficacy amongst players in Manley, Roderick and Parker's (2016) study. Here, the authors conducted 16 interviews with youth academy players and 5 with staff members in a Premier League club. This study aimed to establish how disciplinary power influenced the behaviours and practices of youth players, particularly how remaining silent influenced their identity. Manley, Roderick and Parker (2016) argue that players normalise remaining silent and not objecting to criticism and other negative behaviours as it demonstrates their level of discipline and dedication to the sport; a notion that is also embodied by players of other sports such as Rugby and Dance (Langdon and Petracca 2010; Brown and Coupland 2015). Furthermore, players felt that to remain silent demonstrated that they could take any criticism like a man, proving their desirability as a committed player who can conform to club expectations. Agreeing with Kelly and Waddington's (2006) findings, players perceived that such regimented behaviour and internalisation of these norms made them better players and professionals. These findings also echo Brown and Coupland (2015) who interviewed 47 personnel at a Rugby League club and suggests that players internalise the club's practices regarding conformity, highlighting a clear power balance in favour of those of superiority. However, Hickey and Kelly (2008) suggest that players are not completely controlled by others and have their own level of autonomy, thereby creating two identities simultaneously; one that displays all the qualities expected of a footballer and the second that is built alongside their athletic identity and is for post-retirement. Manley, Roderick and Parker (2016) assert that we should be mindful that not all players are as gullible as perhaps portrayed in the media and are therefore not completely powerless; being viewed as particularly disciplined may result in future career enhancement, financial rewards and stability for the sake of enduring unpleasant and regular negative behaviour. In their study, a combination of theoretical ideas from both Goffman and Foucault were used as they argue that Foucault's (1975) own work on power in relation to how an individual uses it to structure their identity is weak; rather Foucault provides us with theoretical ways to understand discourses and relationships between individuals (Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016). Thus, and as will be discussed later, although Foucault's (1975) ideas may be prudent regarding disciplinary power and the technologies of the self, Elias' (1978) ideas of figurations, habitus, power and interdependencies will be used to explore how the transition from school to full-time academy may influence the embodiment of a young professional footballing identity.

2.2.3. Being an Academy Professional

Several of the above-mentioned findings are also mirrored in Platts (2012) study entitled the 'Education and Welfare in Professional Football Academies and Centres of Excellence: A Sociological Study'. Here, Platts (2012) aimed to understand how concepts of sociology could aid in explaining how young people manage their interdependencies with others through sport and how they negotiate their experiences of education and their own welfare within an academy. By using a mixed methods approach, Platts (2012) conducted questionnaires and focus groups with 21 clubs from all four English leagues who had either an academy or a centre of excellence. This totalled 303 questionnaires and 41 focus groups. Key findings from Platts (2012) suggest the presence of 'occupational socialisation', a term used by Kelly (2010) in his doctoral thesis on the role of the contemporary manager in football. This term describes how players experienced the expectations of the professional world and thus internalised the norms of this way of life without question. In other words, upon entering the academy, players are not only taught the physical aspects of their role as a player but are educated into the accepted values and ethos held by the club, other players and the public (Christensen and Sørensen 2009; Kelly 2010). This is achieved through showing professional conduct whilst remaining grounded. Platts (2012, p.133) participants suggested that even playing for their country could be used against them to keep them grounded with one player saying: 'Yeah, I come back from England duty… and say I have a bad session or something, then he [manager] would be like: 'Oh I see you've been away with England, you think you've made it'. Platts (2012) suggests that football is still rife with key findings from Parker's (1996) study, particularly the authoritarian displays of power from managers, where regular chastising, pulling players back into their 'rightful place' and threats are used to instil discipline and obedience. Comparatively, Mills et al. (2014) found a normalisation and acceptance of this tough, masculine environment by players, adding that several participants within their study on the perceptions of how coaches influence the development of youth players, alluded to their apprenticeship as something that is good for them despite being subjected to regular chastisement and criticism. Thus, this study will aim to learn if such an ideology is still evident amongst the academy and whether the transitioning players are aware of what they may experience during their academy time.

Adherence to the values and ethos are crucial to how a player is viewed within the figuration (Parker 1996; Kelly 2010; Platts 2012; Law 2018). In his thesis on the sociology of money with professional footballers and the resulting relations money has on player's lives, Law (2018) found evidence of the creation and management of image by professional footballers through 'conspicuous consumption'; a term which can be

defined as the 'specialised consumption of goods as an evidence of pecuniary strength' (Veblen 2005, cited in Law 2018, p.56). The purchasing of goods and the resulting displaying of goods to others is a method of status and ranking that seeks to heighten one's feeling of importance, thereby cementing their standing within the club (Law 2018). Combined with the increase in wages post-introduction of the Premier League in 1992, Law (2018) found that players were met by a need to possess and display material goods to outshine their fellow players. Exacerbated by attention from the media, particularly in the Premier League, players also felt the need to meet the expectations held by the public of wealthy footballers by purchasing designer clothes for example (Law 2018). By conforming to these expectations, players felt they were proving their commitment and dedication to football in every aspect possible, which would aid the earning of a place within the starting XI and signed long term (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006a; 2006b; Mitchell et al. 2014). However, in Roderick's (2006b) book '*The Work of Professional Football: A Labour of Love?*' he alludes to the possibility of a paradox here based on interviews with 47 first-team professionals. Players must be tough, aggressive and resilient on the pitch with winning at the forefront of their mind, yet they must demonstrate a good attitude by being obedient and unobjectionable with restricted autonomy and distinct discipline. How then, do players adopt both behaviours at the same time to demonstrate dedication?

In summary, this section has outlined what is currently known about the football environment, from the high level of professionalism and dedication that is sought by clubs from players present in many studies, to the autonomous controlled daily living to the domineering hyper-masculine culture and the socialisation of players into the world of football. Arguably this is not new knowledge, yet it provides us with a background to the kind of environment that is expected that new academy players will enter if they are successful. What it does highlight, is the distinct lack of literature on the experiences of youth players and their transition from school into the academy which provides the rationale for this study.

2.3.   A 'Complete Sportsperson' and Education

Burgess, Edwards and Skinner (2003) examined the construction of masculine identity in a school setting. Young players described the pressure to project their level of dedication to all and how early specialisation in football constitutes what it means to be male from a very young age. Those who do not display interest, skill or desire to play sport or indeed dream of becoming a professional athlete, are often subjected to taunts of not being 'manly' and are automatically presumed to be homosexual (Burgess, Edwards and Skinner 2003). This level of dedication to the sport, often results in

behaviours such as swearing and name-calling that seek to further cement their masculine identity and be seen as tough and resilient as they strive to achieve a first-team place. This mission to be seen as a pure footballer and nothing else has resulted in governments such as Denmark's aiming to insist on mandatory education to broaden young people's opportunities for when they are likely to be released in the future. In their study on the effectiveness of a 'complete sports person' in Denmark, Christensen and Sørensen (2009) who conducted focus groups and interviews with 25 semi-professional footballers aged 15-19, aimed to establish how young players manage dedication to both their education and playing to a high level in line with the government's regulations of attending school in order to be allowed to play football. Ideally, a 'Complete Sportsperson' is an individual who trains both the body and the mind simultaneously and will go on to lead an 'ideal and healthy life' (Christensen and Sørensen 2009, p.117). They found that both time and parental influence are crucial to managing the workload, as players faced a huge battle between their desire to play football and to complete their education. Also, social status and demographics were crucial in determining whether individuals could achieve the government's desire to create whole sports people. Those players who had access to good transport, had strong family ties and encouragement, plus a 'Team Danmark' coordinator who was understanding of their situation, were more likely to succeed. Christensen and Sørensen (2009) state that other studies in Germany and Denmark have also acknowledged that a strong education can positively increase sporting performance (see Brettschneider 1999 and Illeris et al. 2004). However, results from 137 questionnaires completed by Scottish professional players in McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh's (2005) study indicate a contrast to findings from Christensen and Sørensen (2009). Firstly, due to nearly all respondents having left school by the ages of 17, an incomplete picture of academic potential was evident. It was apparent that it was not due to a lack of potential or social status that the youngsters did not achieve highly although those with lower abilities found it more difficult but not unachievable; it was due to a lack of capitalising on the available possibilities that resulted in low achievements.

The data revealed that a lack of advice about education and career options, plus the conflict of having to make crucial decisions during important schooling with regards to joining an academy, were factors that resulted in low levels of educational achievement and were also repetitive findings of other studies (Monk 2000, Parker 2000; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh 2005). The conclusion of Christensen and Sørensen's (2009) study was a need for unwavering understanding from clubs of the pressures faced by young people as they try to compete with global talent for a professional contract whilst upholding the agreement with the Danish government. In England, despite improvements to the provision of education as a mandatory element of the football

apprenticeship (Platts 2012), participants in both Parker's (1996) and Platts (2012) study's suggested that education was deemed a necessity due to deeply-rooted dispositions internalised during compulsory schooling, yet they held little interest in formal education. This growing habitus was identified as the reason for a continued disinterest and negative approach to the required education programmes during their apprenticeships. Described as an opportunity to have a 'day off' from football training and to have banter and fun with the lads, there was a desire to be free from the restraints of daily football life (Platts 2012).

The behaviour of trainees whilst in education was highlighted as an area of interest in Parker's (1996) study. Players who enrolled in classes deemed more difficult, such as BTEC courses, A Levels or degree courses behaved appropriately and well. Those enrolled in lower level courses, such as GCSE subjects, City and Guild courses and foundation level subjects behaved in ways that is possibly expected in that type of environment (Parker 1996; Brown and Potrac 2009). Disruption, misbehaviour, skipping out of lessons to venture to the computer rooms or library with no real agenda, were all ways of avoiding authoritarian restraints (Parker 1996). Comparatively, McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005) and Brown and Potrac (2009) assert that this may be due to their level of athletic identity; the stronger the athletic identity, the less likely the individual is to engage in education as it does not portray their level of dedication and commitment to their sport. However, isolation from building an additional career was also identified as having potential negative consequences for individuals upon retirement as there is/was no alternative career plan in place (Brown and Potrac 2009).

Parker (1996) noted that trainees used day-release at college to demonstrate their masculine prowess by asserting themselves and behaving in ways that arguably boosted their self-esteem and identity. For example, the inappropriate discussion of female anatomy and the embarrassing of the female teacher were behaviours that certain players adopted regularly:

> 'In the BTEC class… weekly debates accommodated speculation about what Finance teacher Hilary Chamberlain looked like naked and whether or not the colour of her pubic hair corresponded to that on her head' (Parker 1996, p.149).

This could be considered a paradox; the education environment is not viewed as a manly place to be seen in, yet Parker's (1996) participants used the time to enhance their masculinity by behaving in domineering ways. Despite the discipline required on the field that players were able to achieve and commit to, within the classroom, discipline and dedication quickly disappeared and targets and achievements were unmet (Parker 1996). Perhaps then, it could be assumed that players are once again showing their

level of dedication to the sport by acting in this way to live up to the desired masculinity of football.

Parker (1996) indicates a low view of education from the professionals within football, such as coaches, managers and other personnel which could go some way to explaining the lack of motivation towards education by players. Some stated that players were paid by the club to play football, not study; a statement also prevalent in Bourke's (2003) study. In one recollection, a young player was bullied by the coach for making a footballing error, which he should not have made as he 'has 10 GCSE's' and is therefore presumed intelligent (Parker 2000, p.73). Likewise, in Platts' (2012) study, participants discussed how education was not a subject to be discussed with managers and coaches as they prioritised getting a contract over education and the players were afraid that asking questions about their education would show a lack of commitment to their football: 'they think that you are thinking about something else and they'll think 'oh maybe he doesn't really want it' (Platts 2012, p.199). However, players in Mills et al. (2014) study described a very weak understanding of the role of the FA and PFA, which given results from Hickey and Kelly (2008) who suggest improved sports performance when education is undertaken, is arguably an area for exploration. Thus, this study should explore how this football club views education in terms or priority and acceptance given that 85% of players' are unsuccessful (Monk 2000).

In summary, this section has sought to gain an understanding of how education is regarded against and alongside a professional football career. It is evident that there still exists a strong discourse amongst clubs that players are paid to play football not to study, yet players feel constricted to choose between the two and often opt for football over education for fear of being ostracised (Parker 2006; Brown and Potrac 2009). Key stakeholders' policies and programmes are little understood nor utilised to their full potential. This study therefore aims to establish the views of the football club towards education and how the players perceive their options and opportunities towards gaining alternative career qualifications. It is hoped that such knowledge could be adopted by key stakeholders such as the FA and PFA, to reduce the gap between policy and practice as so far, the FA insist that players must attend further education but do not outline what is to be studied and to what level (EPPP 2012; Knight, Harwood and Sellars 2018). This review will now focus on what is known about transitions within football.

2.4.   Transitions

Morris, Tod and Eubank (2017, p.524) assert that the word transition can be defined as a period or occurrence that an individual experiences which differs from every day norms

and daily changes, adding that transitions can be 'predictable' and 'non-predictable'. Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) and Wylleman, De Knop and Reints (2011) state that normative transitions within sport such as sport initiation, youth to senior level transition and retirement have resulted in the creation of models to understand these periods. For example, Bloom (1985) identified three stages that talented individuals not just in sport will pass through in his *Developing Talent in Young People* model and these were the 'early, middle and later years'. In sport and the early years, the development of a child athlete will be led and encouraged by a parent or adult. In the middle years, the commitment to the sport will be split between the parents/adults and the child, as the child begins to take more responsibility and time for their sport. The later years involve the child/youth taking most of the responsibility for their commitment to sport, making big decisions for progression and future career choices, with the parents taking a more supportive advisory role (Baker et al. 2003; Morris, Tod and Eubank 2017). These phases are neither rigid nor definitive for each individual but can be used to encourage development (Bloom 1985). Other models such as the Development Model of Sport Participation by Côté (1999), also suggested three transitional stages; the 'sampling stage', the 'specialising years' and the 'investment stage'. These stages align with life stages that individuals will transition through, i.e. childhood, adolescence, adulthood (Platts 2012). Although these models are from a psychological perspective, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) also acknowledge the importance of considering social transitions when examining the career of an athlete (Pitchford et al. 2004; Nesti et al. 2012; Morris, Tod and Eubank 2017).

Vanden Auweele et al. (2004) cited in Morris, Tod and Eubank (2017) found that only 17% of athletes effectively managed to transition successfully from youth to senior teams with Pitchford et al. (2004) stating that there is little knowledge on athletic experiences from a child's point of view. This gap during the second phase of the lifespan model, i.e. the transition from childhood to adolescence and on to adulthood, could provide an insight into understanding young individuals identity as the adolescent period is notoriously challenging as psychological support is often sought (Wylleman, De Knop and Reints 2011). For example, participants in Morris, Tod and Eubank's (2017) psychological study which interviewed 5 male professionals on their transitional experiences, found players citing anxiety and stress as regular feelings. Combined with new pressures to succeed from family and friends, participants were both excited at their success of a first team position, yet nervous about what was to come. However, post-transition, players experienced mixed feelings; some felt a sense of relief that the physicality of the game was not as hard as expected, whereas others felt more exposed to criticism and mistakes were not taken as lightly as they were in the youth team (Morris,

Tod and Eubank 2017). This could be explained by Elias' theory of 9 possible causes of shock, where the transition into an adult environment is built upon expectations of working to the same level as those already in situ (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). This will be discussed later in chapter 3.

It is well documented that the life stage of 'youth' has somewhat extended in recent years with young people remaining at home and in education longer, as the 'boundaries between youth and adulthood have become blurred' (Lahelma and Gordon 2003, p.379). A study by Richardson, Relvas and Littlewood (2013) on the sociological influences on player development suggested that players experience a difficult transition as their initial environment is one of warmth and encouragement, whereas first team life is driven by the constant need to succeed and win. This raises the question: is the youth environment one of warmth and encouragement? Parker's (1996) study of players at Colby Town would suggest that it is not, due to the level of ability being significantly higher than in their previous teams/clubs. Additionally, poor performances in the youth squad often result in verbal chastisement and rejection. Adams and Carr (2017) also suggest this is the case as individuals in their study on adolescents boys and friendships in an academy suggest they are immediately isolated and lacking in friendships due to the competitive academy environment. Thus, this study will explore the youth environment from a sociological perspective as this could inform those in positions of authority on how to better care for their players during this crucial phase (Morris, Tod and Eubank 2017).

During the youth life stage, individuals learn to explore themselves in terms of their personalities, identity, independence and preferences and they find this through relations with space and people (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). Such freedom to explore is likely out of reach for many young people, particularly from a financial perspective, however, youth academy players are, depending on their home location, usually offered on site club accommodation and therefore the chance to expedite their independence away from the secure but perhaps controlling parental environment (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). Perhaps contradictorily then, it could be argued that youth players are missing out on the opportunity to explore their individuality and nurture themselves, as the academy environment that they are transitioning into will ultimately control their daily schedule, working hours and free time (Parker 1996, Roderick 2006b). In fact, Platts (2012) comments that despite all youth players being in the same age brackets, consideration should be given to the individual's current life stage, as it is extremely likely that each player will be at a different stage. Such a period of transition is arguably made more difficult on the journey to adulthood and exploring one's individuality by the longstanding historical ideology that successful transitioning from school into paid manual work constitutes a masculine identity (Parker 2006). Thus, it would be prudent

to suggest that whilst appearing to be offered the chance to gain independence by joining an academy, upon arrival at the club full-time, individuals are restricted to the confines of the club and its rules and regulations by powerful others such as first team players and coaches, who place control over the youth players through the reproduction of masculine football norms such as jobs and hierarchy (Kelly 2008).

In regard to the possible difficulties that are experienced by players in their transitions, Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee (2008) argue that perhaps the word transition is incorrect for what these players experience and that 'critical moments' would be a term more appropriate. The word transition implies that the move is smooth and without problems, which as indicated by Wylleman, De Knop and Reint (2011) is frequently not the case. However, Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee (2008) found critical moments to be of both positive and negative nature. On the one hand, they suggest that these moments allow an individual the chance to confront their fears, examine their available choices and become the person they wish to become. On the other hand, if ill-prepared, critical moments can cause emotional distress, increased anxiety, isolation and a lowering of self-esteem. Roderick's (2006a) interviews with first team players suggests the ebb and flow of critical moments is rife throughout a football career, with players expected to manage the moments where, for example, contract renewals are up for discussion, or new players are brought in that play in the same position as others. It is part of the masculine culture of football that such moments are not verbally discussed with others, but these players described how they managed their emotions by remaining silent and attempting to carry on as normal (Roderick 2006a; Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016).

Critical moments that involve the transition away from football completely, such as after completing an academy programme but being unsuccessful in signing a professional contract are extremely detrimental to individuals (Platts 2012; BT Sport Films 2018). In the BT Sport documentary 'No Hunger in Paradise', Kieran Bywater was used as an example, where his success story at many clubs as a youngster was eradicated when his last club removed the offer of a professional contract, leaving him lost and isolated. Both his father and Kieran himself explained that once rejected by the club, there was no duty of care offered and with Kieran needing counselling to deal with trauma of failure, both stated that they had to fight with the PFA for any sessions to be organised; in total, six sessions were offered (BT Sport Films 2018). Additionally, Arsène Wenger, former manager of Arsenal Football Club, suggested that the transition and 'integration' into first team football is a hurdle 'we' fail at, as the gap between youth academies and first teams is too large and therefore a struggle for most players to bridge (BT Sport Films 2018).

Mitchell et al. (2014, p.1297) suggest that there is a need 'to explore changes in athletic identity over time' whilst being mindful that focusing on an individual in isolation away from surroundings and social interactions is neither fruitful nor useful for understanding an individual's identity and actions. Thus, consideration of sociological and psychological aspects of youth academies and transitions is required. In their study on athletic identity in English professional football, Mitchell et al. (2014) asked 168 elite youth footballers to complete the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale. Several variables that were tested such as year of apprenticeship, football club, living arrangements, had no statistical significance on athletic identity. The finding with statistical significance was that of social identity amongst first years who were identified to have more association as a footballer than second years. The explanation given was that of a 'more recent positive transition from a schoolboy (i.e. part-time) to a full-time football player' (Mitchell et al. 2014, p.1297). However, other than a reference citing the League Football Education which is an organisation established by the English Football League and the Professional Football Association to deliver an Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence, there is no offer of further explanation as to where the knowledge that it is a positive transition from school to academy has originated from, highlighting that this is perhaps a rather bold statement given there are no current studies on this topic. Furthermore, Mitchell et al. (2014, p.1297) later reference Roderick's (2006a) study stating that Roderick alludes to a career from initiation to professional player that is full of 'crisis and resolutions'. How then, can Mitchell et al. (2014) draw the conclusion that the transition from schoolboy to full-time player is a purely positive one?

In summary, most of the existing literature surrounding transitions within a sporting context has been achieved through a psychological perspective (Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee 2008; Wylleman, De Knop and Reints 2011; Mitchell et al. 2014). However, there is little that does not focus on retirement or youth-to-senior team transitions, providing this study with a rationale to explore the transition period from school to full-time youth academy. This study will now turn to exploring the concepts of figurational sociology that will be used to analyse the findings.

Chapter 3

Figurational Sociology

3.1. Introduction to Figurational Sociology

This chapter will explore the ideologies and concepts of figurational sociology that stemmed from the work of sociologist Norbert Elias. According to Elias (1978, p.17) the main aim of sociology is to 'enlarge our understanding of human and social processes and to acquire a growing fund of more reliable knowledge about them'. In his book entitled 'What is Sociology?', Elias (1978, p.14) was keen to express that a 'naive egocentric' view of society exists, and it is this understanding that must be rectified. For example, Elias (1978) wished to challenge the ideology of humans as homo clausus, as sole individuals distinctively detached from others. He believed that to reduce an individual to being independent of others (process-reduction) was to understand an individual as a static entity that does not account for the relations one experiences in the human world and is therefore not a holistic understanding of the term 'society' (Elias 1978; Murphy, Sheard and Waddington 2000). Figurational sociology, or process sociology as Elias (1978) came to prefer, comprises of several concepts that explore the network of relationships between individuals and their environment. Elias (1978) was keen to express his thoughts that an individual's identity is never complete and that a person is a process due to the web of relations one forms during encounters with others. Roberts (2009, p.75) describes figurational sociology as a process that 'starts with an individual or group, or form or behaviour, then maps into the surrounding, constantly changing, figuration of which it is a part'. As this study seeks to understand the ebb and flow of relations between youth players and their environment, it was decided that Elias' concepts of interdependencies, power, habitus and shock-theory were best suited to answer the research question. As all relationships are relations of power, to understand the embodiment of a footballer's identity, Elias' concepts of interdependence provide the opportunity to examine fluctuating power balances in a socio-cultural setting (Dunning and Hughes 2013).

3.2. Figurations, Interdependencies and Power

A figuration 'is a structure of mutually orientated and dependent people' (Elias 1978, p.261). Perhaps the most quoted definition of the concept of figuration, Elias determined that a figuration was a group or network of people amongst other people, be it within a family, school, university, industry or the state. He added that the key to understanding a figuration is to not view one's self as a solo ego at the centre of the figuration (Elias 1978). To do this would provide these external structures with characteristics giving the

impression that they have needs and are separate from individuals. Elias (1978) stressed that to think in such a way is problematic given it is the individuals within figurations that create these external social structures and therefore these structures should not be reified. However, Elias (1978) further states that what is interesting and significant is the way these structures continually exert constraints over the individuals who created them; exacerbated use of personal pronouns such as 'I', 'we' and 'they', reinforces the notion that the structures exist over and above individuals. Thus, it appears that a continual circular pattern is evident, for Elias (1978, p.123) states that 'the personal pronouns represent the elementary set of coordinates by which all human groupings or societies can be plotted out'. He states that it is possible for any one person in one situation to be any of these pronouns at any one time as these pronouns are both 'relational and functional' (Elias 1978). For example, in football, the structure of the game assumes various 'I', 'We' or 'They' relationships between two sets of opposing players, where one team assumes the 'We' pronoun and allocates the 'They' pronoun to the other team. However, Elias (1978) argues that despite the two teams being opponents, to understand the dispositions of each side it must first be understood that both sides are in constant flux. This fluid movement of power within a figuration is a characteristic of any figuration and can place individuals into any one of those pronouns at any one time.

According to Elias (1978), within figurations are interdependencies. These are webs or two-way links between people that are based on relations of power balances or ratios. Elias felt that 'interdependence' was a more appropriate term to explain the involvement of power within the enabling and constraining relations of the social world (Malcolm 2018, p.54). In terms of power, Elias argued that this is an ever-present, multi-sided, characteristic 'of all human relationships' and is neither 'a thing to be owned or possessed' and is never static, but constantly ebbing and flowing within a figuration (Elias 1978, p.74; van Krieken 1998). Comparatively, Giddens (2001, p.696) states that: 'Power has many sources but can be understood as the ability of individuals or members of a group, to achieve aims and further the interests they hold'. The function of power plays a key role in the operational ability of a figuration as Elias argues that a figuration is characterised by these interdependent individuals who have their own agendas but who rely on the intertwining actions of themselves and others to produce desired social structures (van Krieken 1998). For example, a football figuration comprises of individual players who have their own career goals and desires, that form part of a team, that play against other teams that form a league. A key part of this concept however, is that due to power balances or ratios that exist between individuals that makes them interdependent, the resulting outcomes are an increase in the length of interdependent

chains as more actions are interwoven through the formation of additional interdependencies (van Kriken 1998). As the length of the chain increases, the resulting actions from interdependencies become less planned and known. This results in 'blind social processes' that neither an individual, group, network or figuration had intended (van Krieken 1998, p.52). For example, the enrolment of new first years into the academy environment could create new interdependent chains within the figuration. However, each new individual may also bring their own aims and goals to the figuration that are unknown by others in the chain, thereby possibly adding to the fluctuation of power between the existing players and the new players as both sets jostle for their position within the team. Add this to an established Under 23s team, where opportunities for first team appearances are rare due to the number of players who play in the same position and a possible result is the occurrence of unintended social processes or outcomes such as the calling up of a player for first team duties that was not seen nor expected by others. Moreover, Elias stressed that a linear link between individuals, their actions and resulting outcomes does not exist and that the unplanned consequences of being within a figuration where fluctuating power balances alter the flow of the processes are in part, what contribute to an individual's identity (Elias 1978; van Krieken 1998; Dunning and Hughes 2013; Malcolm 2018). Finally, Elias (1978) argued that viewing power as fluid and continuously in flux is a way of understanding the interdependent relation within figurations and will therefore be used to analyse the complex web of relations within the youth academy environment.

3.3. Habitus

According to Dunning and Hughes (2013), Elias' term 'figuration' was inclusive of two aspects. Firstly, as previously mentioned through an understanding of the interdependencies humans form with one another and secondly, how this is achieved through both biological necessities and social requirements. Elias argued that humans are bound to one another through fluid interdependencies but must not be considered purely biological or sociological, but as biosocial (Dunning and Hughes 2013). This fluctuating dependence on one another can be partially understood through the concept of 'Habitus'. For Elias, habitus translates as second nature or 'embodied social learning' (Dunning 2002, p.214) and is a 'function of social interdependencies' (van Krieken 1998, pp.60-61). Elias believed that habitus was a set of acquired dispositions where actions and behaviours were a result of internal familiarities or second nature beliefs (Paulle and Heenkhuizen 2012). He added that these internalised beliefs that came from 'within' often operated subconsciously as a result of social interactions and therefore a habitus is socially constructed (van Krieken 1998; Roberts 2009). For example, early

specialisation in a sport as a result of parental encouragement could explain the acquisition of second nature tendencies that young people embody. However, Elias (1978) argued that it is crucial to refrain from dichotomising the body and mind as two separate entities here; the body does not work in isolation of the mind as humans are embodied interdependent beings (Shilling 2012).

Elias (1978; 1980) was particularly interested in how individuals can create both an individual habitus and a social habitus such as gender and class. He argued that through fluid interdependent ties within figurations, a habitus is moulded and changed, although this is a slow process and can only be achieved through building upon existing dispositions (Dunning 2002). Elias believed, without question, that interdependencies are made of power balances or ratios and the second nature or habitus operating within these interdependencies can be both enabling and constraining (Paulle and Heenkuizen 2012). According to Paulle and Heenkuizen (2012, p.80), Elias believed that:

> 'people do not just need other people (for everything from physical and emotional contact to cognitive orientations); they need others-and are naturally orientated towards others- who are objectively more or less powerful than themselves'.

Elias used habitus as a tool for understanding how individuals' function for one another based on these internalised norms and to understand the reason why people respond to the social world in certain ways, which transcends into how these individuals treat their bodies, which may be useful in understanding the behaviours of academy players during their transition (Laberge and Kay 2002).

For Elias, the body is an 'unfinished entity that develops through the life course in conjunction with social forces' and the management and treatment of the body is definitive of an acceptable position in society (Shilling 2012, p.135). The body and the processes of social development experienced by the body, termed 'Sociogenesis' by Elias, should be inherently combined with the changes and adaptations to habitus, personality development and growth through which social relations act upon; termed 'Psychogenesis' (van Krieken 1998). Elias stressed that long-term figurational studies are necessary to uncover the developmental processes experienced by interdependent people, but this should be completed with both historical and sociological consultation as a habitus can only change and adapt slowly, over time (van Krieken 1998; Paulle and Heenkhuizen 2012). Additionally, Elias was, perhaps unusually for a sociologist, strongly interested in the development of individuals, particularly where their habitus developed through birth, to youth, to maturity and finally, to death (van Krieken 1998). He said that the crucial phase of youth where young people are drawn to particular social action and relations is a period where the habitus, and ultimately one's identity, is likely to

experience growth and expansion and it is this period that should be analysed for a deep understanding of what that means for the operation of figurations (van Krieken 1998; Dunning 2002; Dunning and Hughes 2013). In football then, it would appear crucial that a study pertaining to the development of youth footballers' habitus and resulting identities be conducted utilising figurational sociology to aid in our understanding of how interdependent relations and power work in these figurations.

3.4.   Established Outsider Relations

Between 1958 and 1961, Elias and Scotson completed a research project on a small suburban community on the outskirts of Leicester called 'The Established and the Outsiders'. The aim of this study was to examine power imbalances within the community. In this area, there were three different populations of people observed; the first was a middle-class group, the second was the oldest or resident working-class group and the third was a newly arrived working-class group from London (Elias and Scotson 1965). The first two groups were regarded as the established groups, having settled there for a substantial time and living in the most highly regarded streets of the area. However, although group 3 did not live in a particularly different way demographically to the other two groups, their lifestyles and choices were what differed. Opting to keep to themselves, socialising amongst only themselves and in loud, overbearing ways in public houses, over time, those in group 3 became ostracised and excluded from any potential positions of influence within local organisations (Elias and Scotson 1965; Mennell 1998). As part of this segregation from the other groups, group 3 became a topic of gossip as to how they were perceived by the other two groups. Gossip itself is arguably a tool for perpetuating the balances of power and ultimately the treatment of one group against the other. Labelled as 'rough', 'noisy', 'dirty' and so forth, the Outsider group were perceived as a 'they-group' where power relations were weighted against them by the Established groups (Mennell 1998). Mennell (1998) describes the labelling of the terms 'group disgrace' or a 'minority of the worst' for the Outsider Group due to the continuous gossiping. Through the power imbalances within this figuration, the internalisation and acceptance of these terms was adopted by the Outsiders as they were afforded little opportunity to retaliate, therefore internalising themselves as the 'we-group'. In comparison, the Established group, with power weighted in their favour, perceived themselves as superior to the Outsiders, liaising with one another successfully and thereby creating greater power chances within their existing networks (Mennell 1998). This study by Elias and Scotson (1965) can be useful to explore different groups within sporting figurations, explaining power balances within interdependencies and has been used in various sporting contexts previously (Liston

2005; Velija and Flynn 2010; Velija 2012; Lake 2013). As this chapter has so far established, power is an inherent part of all relationships and this framework demonstrates how and why some groups adopt certain characteristics and identify as included or excluded. Thus, this concept will be used to explore and analyse the various transitional experiences felt by the youth academy players in this study.

3.5. Elias' Shock- Experience Theory

In a recent publication by Goodwin and O'Connor (2015) the 'Lost Work of Norbert Elias' was uncovered and discussed. Found in the archives at the University of Leicester, Goodwin and O'Conner have re-opened a research project entitled the 'Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles' dating from the early 1960s. The aim of the project was to establish how young people experienced the transition from school into full-time employment with emphasis on the adjustments to relations with other adults, home life and leisure life (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Elias, as head of the project, was particularly interested in testing his 'Shock-Experience' theory through interviewing 882 boys and girls with varying degrees of education and time since leaving school (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Elias hypothesised that the education received by these young people would be of little use or value for experiencing employment and therefore they would experience shock.

Initially citing eight possible causes of shock, Elias adjusted this to nine after 1962. These were identified as problems or issues that the young people would potentially face when starting work and included: understanding and handling their own money for the first time; understanding and acknowledging sexual desires; the need for a group of close friends; understanding how to cope in unfamiliar work situations; understanding how to manage relations with other adults in terms of competing or co-operating; making their own informed decisions; the requirement to control and monitor their own emotional feelings and impulses; the management and learning of anticipation in certain scenarios and finally understanding the 'quest for meaningfulness' (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015, p.34). With the term childhood relatively new at this stage of the 1960's, Elias was keen to stress that to become an adult, young people needed to be exposed to adulthood through behaviours and socialisation, stating that it is a process of both sociogenesis and psychogenesis that occurs congruently that allows a child to develop (Elias 1980; Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Elias (1980) added that children experience a civilising process of their own and the transitional phase of child to youth to adult is crucial for the development of a habitus, particularly when considering the biological maturation stages combined with interweaving interdependencies that grow in chain length during this life stage.

Elias (1980) asserted that upon leaving school during this impressionable life stage, young people experience high levels of anxiety when encountering new adult relations that differ from their experiences with adults throughout their childhood and school years. He argued that this transition is anything but linear, particularly as society is a complex structure, where fluid movements of power within figurations ensure that children are in some ways subordinate to their adult counterparts, with engrained notions of how to behave and work instilled throughout school (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Upon enrolment in the working world, Elias argues that the balance of power-ratios shifts, the young people are expected to behave as though their colleagues are equals and this is unfamiliar territory that threatens their habitus and identity. This is partly due to a sudden feeling of anxiety as they are asked to alter their behaviours which for all their childhood have appeared to them as internalised norms, working within their self, as second nature (Baulle and Heenkhuizen 2012; Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Elias, as a sociologist interested in historical development of societies and culture, said that historically in this instance, individuals experienced a 'rite of passage' or transitional role that eased the anxiety of transitioning into adulthood. He said that through this rite of passage, children would learn to differentiate the difference between 'dreams and reality' (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). As a young person, the dream of being free and uncontrolled by others, in other words the fluctuation of power to make their own choices and aspire for a career of their choosing, is very much appealing for the young people preparing to leave school. However, the reality of the working world is distinctly different from what they imagined due to facing the nine problems of adjustment (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Elias adds that often, young people who dream of a particular career do not end up on that path and face a career that will meet the requirements of everyday living. This kind of acceptance of the reality of the adult world is regarded by Elias as a painful process that young people experience, thus a 'shock-experience' (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015).

In summary, the expectations of adulthood that a young person aspires to experience are often not the case. The gap between how interdependencies operate between children and adults and also between adults and adults appears, according to Elias, to be substantially large and therefore contributes to the young people's experiences of shock upon entering the working environment (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). This shock-experience theory will form, in part, the base for analysing the interview data of the young academy players when discussing their expectations of transitioning from school into full-time football.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and discuss the methodological approach to this study and explore the rationale behind the methods chosen to complete the research. The chapter will be divided into smaller subsections to discuss the research design; the sample size and selection; data collection; reflection on the process of interviews; ethical considerations and data analysis using NVivo 12 software.

4.1. Research Design

With the research question established to determine the experiences of youth academy players on their transition from full-time school to full-time youth team, it was decided during the early stages of planning that a comparative study from a subjective or interpretivist perspective would be the most appropriate way to approach the project (Atkinson 2012; Bryman 2016). This underpinning subjective perspective aligns congruently with a qualitative project due to the notions that there are different types of knowledge available and the key to deciphering these knowledges is through the interpretations of studied individuals (Smith 2010). Given that the football environment is a notoriously closed social world and that gaining access is exceptionally difficult, an empirical comparative study where the researcher adopted an overt role was deemed an appropriate option (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006a; 2006b; Atkinson 2012; Bryman 2016). A comparative study aims to identify similarities and differences between social phenomena such as attitudes, values, characteristics and notions within one or more culture or subcultures (Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Futing 2004). With this study building upon existing work by Parker (1996) and aiming to explore the social entities within this academy club, a comparative study was deemed appropriate given its purpose as a supportive mechanism for analysis of theories and ultimately, the potential for supporting policymaking which was an aim of this study (Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Futing 2004). An experimental design which seeks to test a hypothesis and alter variables would not align with learning how players deal with crucial transitional phases in their youth (Atkinson 2012). Furthermore, it would be inappropriate to assume that the findings generated through analysis of this club could be generalised and assumed to be the same in another Championship club, yet this method should allow for comparisons to be made against other club's players to provide a more holistic understanding of the experiences of these players in the future (Bryman 2016). In summary, this study aimed to establish how this particular group of players experienced the transitional process from school to the academy, thereby a comparative study approach where interpretations of the interdependencies at work amongst the group could be analysed

was deemed the most appropriate research design (Bryman 2016; Sparkes and Smith 2018).

4.2. Sample size and sample selection

This study sought to understand how youth academy players experience their transition and what prevalent subcultures influenced their time at the academy. Thus purposive, criterion, and convenience sampling were employed to gather the participants required (Sparkes and Smith 2018). Although convenience sampling often refers to gaining access to participants who are logistically accessible to the researcher in terms of financial cost, distance, travel or number of potential or available participants, this was not the case for this study (Walliman 2011; Thomas, Nelson and Silverman 2015). The supervisor of this study held a previous career as a professional footballer and therefore had contacts with several individuals, namely coaches and players in various positions within the four English football leagues. Contact with several of these 'gatekeepers' was initially made, although the first two clubs were unable to take part due to ongoing research already taking place and a gatekeeper leaving his job. However, contact was made with the club that agreed to participate and after an initial visit to the club for introductory purposes and to discuss the formalities of the study, the gatekeeper offered the participation of the youth academy players. The club were part of the English Championship league during the 2018/2019 season.

In addition to convenience sampling, the study also used purposive, non-random sampling as the research question stipulates the involvement of a particular group of people and a random selection of participants would be considered inappropriate. Selecting certain youth players to generate the data would not produce reliable knowledge and could raise issues of bias, credibility and trustworthiness (Sparkes and Smith 2018). Furthermore, it was hoped that suggestions for interventions and strategies to improve the formal operations of all football clubs could be gained from this study (Smith 2010). Although purposive sampling can attract criticisms of possible researcher bias, this was partially alleviated using the gatekeeper who provided access to the youth academy team. Each player was advised that their participation was voluntary, and no prejudice would be held should they not wish to participate or if they chose to withdraw at a later stage. The involvement of the gatekeeper removed any potential selection of participants, as the researcher was largely dependent on his decisions regarding the research taking place due to timetabling of the player's work, access being granted by the club as a whole and the nature of the football environment as a very closed social circuit. Without his involvement, access to the club would have not been granted.

The criteria for player participation were determined during the planning stages and were therefore relatively easy to adhere to as this guided the clubs approached by the supervisor of this project. All interviewees needed to meet the criteria of being male, a full-time youth academy player, aged at least sixteen on the date of the interview and on at least a two-year contract with the club. The use of the entire youth academy under 18s squad (n=26), although desirable, was in fact impossible to achieve as some players were unavailable due to training needs, injury or loan and the remaining players declined to participate. In total, 12 individuals out of a possible 26 of this club participated in the interviews, 11 of whom were aged 17 and one player aged 19 also offered to be interviewed; each interview lasted between 15 and 46 minutes.

4.3. Data collection; rationale for using interviews

Semi-structured interviews are considered the gold-standard of qualitative data collection as they are ideal for allowing the participants to convey their thoughts and feelings in a flexible and rich way (Brown and Potrac 2009; Chantler 2014; Neuman 2014). Thurston (2019) also states that applying figurational sociology to qualitative research guides the creation of a research question and subsequent interview questions that will explore how individuals view their interdependencies within the figurations they are a part of. A semi-structured interview is a particularly popular qualitative research method as it provides the researcher with an opportunity to prepare an interview guide to aid with direction and answering the research question, yet it also allows for the researcher to respond inquisitively to the reflections and thoughts of the interviewee as the interview unfolds (Roderick 2003; Kvale and Brinkman 2009; Sparkes and Smith 2018). Furthermore, fourteen studies analysed for the review of literature also used semi-structured interviews as their research method, suggesting their appropriateness for gathering data in this and similar sporting environments (Parker 1996; Bourke 2003; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Roderick 2006a; Brown and Potrac 2009; Hickey and Kelly 2008; Christensen and Sørensen 2009; Mills et al. 2012; Roderick 2014; Brown and Coupland 2015; Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016; Adams and Carr 2017; Morris, Tod and Eubank 2017; Knight, Harwood and Sellars 2018).

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, initial contact with the gatekeeper by the supervisor of this study was made and a visit to the football club was arranged. On arrival, the researcher and supervisor met with the youth academy Coach and discussed the aims of the study. The researcher was introduced to the U23 and U18 academy teams and in turn, gave them a brief overview of what the study entailed and asked for their participation. The aim of this introductory meeting was to alleviate any potential

misgivings or wariness that the players may have held for the researcher as an outsider. During the address, the researcher described and explained her own professional dance background as a method of building rapport and relational anecdotes to the field of football were given during this and the interviews (Law 2019). During the interviews, it was apparent that the participants were comfortable and willing to participate as Player 10 said 'I'm really looking forward to this, I've never done anything like it before'. This was despite the researcher being female and a non-footballer, although it could be assumed that this was due to the introductions made six weeks prior through the gatekeeper. Matthews (2010), Ennis and Chen (2012) and Law (2019) state that building of rapport is necessary between an interviewee and interviewer; however, this was particularly prominent in this environment, as a form of trust had to be established to ensure the researcher was not there on a spying mission for the club or the outside world of the media (Parker 1996; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Monk and Olsson 2006). Finally, at this meeting, the requirements of the club's players were discussed and documentation including the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix B) were exchanged. The gatekeeper was also given an information sheet and consent form (Appendix C). No issues were raised by either the gatekeeper or the participants at this stage.

After the initial visit, the researcher liaised directly with the youth academy coach to organise a schedule for conducting the interviews. The interviews were arranged over a two-day period to coincide with training and match schedules. The interviews took place one-to-one, face-to-face, in a quiet education room opposite the main academy building that is used for analysis, work using computers and other education-based sessions. The start of each interview involved a brief discussion regarding the purpose of the study and the completion of the consent form by the participant. At this stage, the participants were reminded that their interview data would remain confidential and their identity would remain anonymous should the thesis be published in the future. Additionally, the audio recordings from the dictaphone would be securely stored on a password-protected university OneDrive account, with only the researcher and the supervisor having access. Finally, players were informed that pseudonyms would be allocated to each of them.

Once the dictaphone was set up to record each interview for in-depth analysis later, the interview began. Consisting of open-ended questions with some additional probing questions for more detailed answers, the questions were divided into sub-headings to maintain structure and understanding. The interviews followed a very relaxed, conversational process that followed no strict pattern which put both the researcher and participant at ease (Ennis and Chen 2012; Law 2019). These subheadings were: 'Early football experiences'; 'Youth Team core experiences'; 'Education and Career'; 'Life

outside football' and 'Youth Team life'. These questions were based on existing literature by Goodwin and O'Connor (2015); Monk (2000); Nesti and Sulley (2015); Parker (1996); Pitchford et al. (2004) and Roderick (2006), although this list is not exhaustive. With semi-structured interviews featuring predominantly in work in similar sporting environments, each interview followed a basic interview guide where more personal questions regarding their life experiences and desires were scheduled towards the end of the interview (see Appendix D). Arguably the pros to using such a method are that data that was perhaps not predicted or expected can be identified, shedding light on new areas of knowledge. This method can also allow the participant to feel more at ease and relaxed as the questions appear less formal and structured, which given the nature of the football environment was deemed a necessity to inspire the participants to open up about their experiences (Sparkes and Smith 2018; Law 2019). Despite this, the researcher was also prepared to stop the interview at any point if the participant showed any signs of distress (Ennis and Chen 2012). Towards the closure of the interview, the participants were asked if they had anything further to add before being thanked for their participation and handed a debrief sheet (see Appendix E) that contained details of charities such as 'Mind' that would offer a place for advice if an issue had arisen within the interview. No participant alluded to any issues or concerns pre or post interview.

4.4.   Reflections of using interviews

Immediately post-interview, a small reflection was undertaken by the researcher to allow for key points to be noted for later consideration. Bryman (2016) asserts that this method also aids in eliminating any potential bias; although the researcher did not undertake football as a professional, a ten-year professional dance career was completed. The reflexive journal was an audit trail method to mitigate against any bias potentially brought in by the researcher when comparing sports and also provided both dependability and confirmability (Tracy 2013; Sparkes and Smith 2018).

The success of the interview could be argued as based on the researcher's ability to manage and work various levels of what Elias (1978) termed 'involvement and detachment'. A pilot interview was conducted to allow the researcher to be familiar with the interview guide, to minimalize leading the interview to produce certain answers (Roderick 2003; Armour and Griffiths 2012; Ennis and Chen 2012). Elias as a post-dualist argued that 'involvement and detachment were not mutually exclusive… the point was more that people constantly moved between the two poles' (van Krieken 1998, p.71). As a possible subjective scientist then, Elias stressed that as researchers, sociologists are inherently caught up in and by their research as they are involved within

the figuration being analysed (van Kriken 1998). However, Elias also stressed that to extract useable, non-biased knowledge from a sociological study, a certain degree of detachment is necessary to view the figuration and those interdependencies within from an outsider's perspective (Roderick 2003). Without the combination of both involvement and detachment, for Elias, a long-term study could not hope to produce new, workable knowledge (Elias 1978). As figurational sociology is a developmental, processual framework that aims to combine the historical, psychological and social workings of figurations through long-term studies, a researcher who does not actively consider and employ these concepts is arguably not adopting and utilising a figurational approach (Elias 1978; van Krieken 1998; Roderick 2003).

Given the necessity of levels of both involvement and detachment that Elias advocated, it should be noted that this thesis does not strive to discuss theory and methodology as two separate components or a type of false dichotomy, rather they are used harmoniously with one informing the other (Roderick 2003). In other words, the theoretical approach of figurational sociology and the qualitative comparative study were combined so that the theoretical lens dictated the methods and analysis, i.e. semi-structured interviews that were used to establish the 'how', 'what' and 'why' of the transition experience for youth academy players (Crowe et al. 2011; Thurston 2019).

4.5. Ethical Considerations

During the planning, it became apparent that there would be two crucial aspects to conform to; anonymity and confidentiality. Without assurance of these, a research project of this nature would not be given the green light (Parker 1996; Bourke 2003; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Brown and Potrac 2009). Furthermore, gaining access for initial contact purposes to ask permission to do the study with a football club was also an obstacle to be crossed, as football clubs are notoriously difficult to penetrate, particularly to outsiders or 'non-footballers' who do not understand the workings of the sport (Parker 1996; Burgess et al. 2003; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Roderick 2006a; Platts 2012; Brown and Coupland 2015). The protection of the club's identity and the individuals within it, formed the basis of the ethics proposal submitted to the York St John University Ethics Committee (see Appendix A).

The submission was granted ethical approval in November 2018 and therefore the introductory meeting with the youth academy coach could proceed. At this meeting, the researcher explicitly discussed the reassurance that the name of the club would remain anonymous; all players would not be identified, and pseudonyms given so even the club and other players would not know what was discussed and by whom. The club were

also guaranteed full access to the thesis upon completion as well as an initial finding report that was requested by the club with regards to the participant's views on education. Furthermore, the club were assured that no raw transcripts would be publicly released after the thesis was completed and all the research would be kept secure as discussed (Gibson and Brown 2009).

4.6.   Data Analysis

To analyse the data, six-stage Thematic Analysis was used with the aid of the programme NVivo 12 (Braun and Clarke 2006). NVivo 12 is an effective method for management of large amounts of data as transcripts, literature and audio data can be stored and recalled for ease of analysis (Bryman 2016). Thematic analysis provides trustworthiness in the form of transferability, as the data provides the reader with the opportunity to draw their own conclusions (Lincoln and Guba 1985). For stage 1, 'Immersion', each audio recording was listened to several times whilst notes were made simultaneously to identify any reoccurring words, themes or patterns based on key literature underpinning this research project (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006a; 2006b; Platts 2012). After this process, each interview was transcribed verbatim and stored securely.

For stage 2 and 3 of thematic analysis, initial codes were allocated to groups of similar data with relevance to one another (Braun and Clarke 2006). This was done from a theoretical perspective where Elias' concepts of habitus, interdependencies, power and figurations were used as the basic foundation upon which the codes were built. Jackson and Bazeley (2019) assert that a code is often a short combination of words that is either descriptive or reflective of a situation or alternatively is analytical. Coding is a method by which a large amount of qualitative data can be continually worked and depending on researcher preference, data can be allocated a broader or more intricate code. In this project, the researcher adopted a more intricate, line by line analytical approach to establish finer nuances, however, this is only possible for the first few transcriptions due to the creation of codes that can be utilised on corresponding transcriptions (Jackson and Bazeley 2019). For example, a more difficult transition had taken place for half of the interviewees and so this code was created accordingly. As the coding process unfolded, with codes already created, it was easier to allocate text as the researcher could look for more detailed nuances to add as opposed to looking for it in its simple form (Bryman 2016; Jackson and Bazeley 2019). In total, 83 codes were created which included codes such as 'a footballer's identity'; 'future career plans'; 'early specialisation'; 'adapting to academy life'; 'daily academy life'; 'club preparation and

football education'; 'academy education' and 'school education'. These were then reworked during stage 3 for overarching themes whilst considering Elias' concepts of figurational sociology (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The organisation of the 83 codes into overarching hierarchies and stage 4 of thematic analysis, allowed for the researcher to clarify thoughts and allocate meaning to each node, thereby prioritising their relevance for answering the research question. By using NVivo, the vast amount of data produced from the interviews was manageable and patterns were clearer (Jackson and Bazeley 2019). From this stage, it was possible to identify 8 hierarchies that would form the results and discussion chapter as part of stage five of thematic analysis -identifying and naming of themes. The first and main theme to be identified led by Elia's shock theory was 'transitional experiences' and thus is the first chapter of the results and discussion section of. This theme was sub-divided into sections based on the codes created detailing the different types of transition experienced such as 'smoother transition', 'a more difficult transition' and 'an initial transitional shock'. The second chapter was determined by codes such as 'responsibility rollercoaster', 'Who Am I?', 'first team idolisations' and 'dressing-room relationships' that were deemed relevant to the concept of figurations and interdependencies and thus were reworked into one overarching theme 'Adapting to Daily Academy Life' that would then form the second chapter for the results and discussion section. The third chapter was based on Elias' notions of power and interdependencies that the players experienced and discussed both during and post transition and included 'daily routine and jobs', 'the coach-player relationship' and 'plans for the future- education and ambitions'. Finally, in stage 6 whilst ensuring that the findings were correctly understood after consultation with the project's supervisor to gain credibility, an analysis of the findings and presentation of the themes as three chapters was completed. This included extracts from the data itself as evidence for the themes (Guest, Namey and MacQueen 2012; Sparkes and Smith 2018; Jackson and Bazeley 2019). These themes will now be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Transitional Experiences

The following 3 chapters will involve detailed discussions on the key findings of this study. Firstly, this chapter will examine the various experiences of all interviewed players on their transition from full-time school to full-time youth academy player and will be divided into sub-sections given that half the players felt their transition was relatively smooth and half felt it was more difficult or more of a shock. Chapter 6 will discuss the adaptations the youth players made on joining the academy and the influence this had on their embodied footballer identity. Chapter 7 will then explore the perceptions these players have of their daily academy life, including completing jobs, coach-player relationships and career ambitions. This chapter will begin with an examination of transitional experiences.

5.1.   Critical Moments: A Smoother Transition

After a brief discussion on how each player became involved in football with all 12 players stating that they started very young around the ages of 3 to 6 in a local club team, each player was asked to describe their transition from full-time school to the academy. In line with findings from Roderick's (2006a) and Clarke, Cushion and Harwood's (2018) studies, the immersion in a sporting football environment from an early age arguably contributed towards the establishment of a footballing habitus, an athletic identity, that rooted itself firmly in the young player's self. Player 3 said:

> my dad was a footballer, so I kinda just wanted to start playing because he was a footballer, my little brother as well…literally everyone that I know in my family that was involved in football made me wanna be a footballer.

Player 10 suggested that the involvement from a young age allowed him to develop a love for all aspects of the game, including behind the scenes physical work:

> I started off at a very young age. I've really, really enjoyed it and the older you get the more you kinda knuckle down and you start realising… how much… it goes behind the scenes in football… how much you have to work. I love the work, I love the drive, it's kind of been in me since a young age.

Many players described significant parental influence in their entry into football, stating that their fathers were either managers of their local club, ex-players, or had strong footballing interests. This involvement with football inspired initial participation and eventually, trials at other clubs and academies:

P8: my dad like started off at coaching… a Saturday team, under 8s… ever since I was… being at school I just remember… being into football and then when I… turned 6, my dad just… put me in the side and I've just loved it ever since.

P4: I started when I was about… 7 I think, started playing for a local team called [name of a club] where my dad was like the manager, he had… a professional footballing career… he was coaching me when I was 7, 8, coaching me all the way thru' till I was.... 12, I think, when I got signed for [name of a club].

This early specialisation in football is arguably a deep-seated disposition or second nature according to Elias who believed a habitus was socially constructed. This could account for why half of the players did not find the transition period particularly difficult (Paulle and Heenkhuizen 2012); however, half of the players did find the transition more difficult and this will be discussed later. Player 7, who played for several outside academy clubs before joining this club, offered several childhood anecdotes about his journey into football with his father as a dominant figure in his commitment to sport, as well as a supportive secondary school that permitted absences in years 10 and 11 to attend matches. Player 7 claims that full-time academy life is no different to being at school, which is possibly due to what van Krieken (1998) alludes to as adult control over younger individuals:

I was always in that environment from a young age…. I've gone from every day, half past 8, till 3 o'clock working like in school… it's sort of similar, but you're doing something you love… I didn't see it as a major thing.

Comparatively, Player 12, an academy player at the club since Under 7, was another player who maintained the view that 'the transition was quite easy… everything was still here for me, I was still at home'. Having been at the club for 10 years and still living at home with his parents, it could be argued that very little changed for Player 12 when he left school as he said he 'hasn't sacrificed anything'. By his own admission, he expressed a drop in his attainment levels at school as he knew he had a scholarship:

P12: When I started my GCSE's, I was already offered my scholarship, so I found it less pressure because I already had my next two years planned out.

NG: did you achieve what you wanted to achieve from school?

P12: I could have done better, I still passed all my exams but I could have got higher grades. I probably took my foot off the pedal a bit because I knew what I was doing'.

According to Roderick (2006b) relocating to be either nearer a club or to join a new club is another subcultural element of football that is often necessary in order to fulfil the dream. Families or relations must simply adapt to the prospect that relocation will be an inevitable part of involvement in professional football. However, Roderick (2006b) also states that relocation can have a distinct effect on the lives of the player and their families due to its similarity to other well known, anxiety inducing life events. This does not seem to be the case for Player 12. His career ambition is to play solely for this Championship club:

> NG: So what are your career aspirations?

> P12: Obviously play here [club]. Just go as high as I can really.

He appears to have not experienced any significant and relational negative 'critical moments' as a football player and is perhaps then the reason that he perceived his own transition to have been relatively smooth (Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee 2008). Player 12's path to becoming a professional footballer has, so far, seen only positive critical moments, such as signing for the club he currently plays at a very young age; 'I got scouted by [name of club] when I was about 7. Been here from the very start'. This, according to Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee (2008) will compound his sense of self and build upon his footballer identity. Furthermore, his early immersion in football could be said to be part of his association of having a smoother transition than some of the other players who have to live away from home for example; 'I live here, everything's here'. Arguably then, Player 12 is displaying behaviours that resonate as second nature or habitus (Dunning 2002).

This compounding of Player 12's habitus was also alluded to by the youth academy coach, albeit in a non-theoretical way during a casual exchange of conversation between interviews. He said that he feared that young players were starting their football career too early, experiencing nothing other than football and were ultimately becoming institutionalised, with a disregard for their non-football future, a notion shared by Gareth Southgate and Arsène Wenger (BT Sport Films 2018). With three-quarters of apprentices/scholars never making a living from football, a concern for the mental health and wellbeing of players like Player 12, who know nothing but academy football, should be acknowledged (BT Sport Films 2018). Cushion and Jones (2014) assert that the imparting of values and norms during educational years can result in the internalisation of behaviours and practices that lead to a significant identity, in this case, that of a footballer. In relation to Elias's thoughts on identity in conjunction with social networks, individuals should not be viewed as singular entities separate from social structures. Furthermore, Elias (1978) believed that people experience different situations and

embody these experiences differently. Elias did not advocate dichotomising individuals in one place or another, rather he viewed people on more of a continuum rather than a scale, thus, it would be problematic to label these players as purely experiencing a smooth or unsmooth transition. As such, the terminology used to describe this half of the sample is that they experienced a smoother transition than the other half (Elias 1978). The problem for the player may arise then, when the player is released from the club and movement away from this figuration and transition out of this environment challenges and threatens his well-formed football identity (van Kriken 1998). It may be prudent to question whether Elias's ideas surrounding 'shock' and 'dreams vs reality' have not yet been fully experienced by Player 12 but may occur in subsequent years? Ashton and Field (1976) argue that young people do not experience 'shock' till a significant period of 2-3 years post-school has passed. Further research, perhaps of a longitudinal nature to follow these players, may enlighten and answer this question.

Similarly, Player 4 who had enrolled at his local sixth form college before being offered his scholarship, expected a harder transition than what he experienced. He suggests that he found the transition ok due to his previous academy club experience from a young age, paired with a dream to be a footballer and nothing else:

> I thought it was gonna be much harder… I think it's cos I've been at several clubs so… I've kinda grew like in the professional game, so I'm used to it… And I just know, about the football feeling. And I got used to it. Literally, didn't really phase me, cos… I don't like education. Like when I was at my sixth form, I was like what am I here, I don't wanna do this, I wanna be a footballer. When I got the chance to, it didn't faze me at all.

Once again, it could be argued that, as per Ashton and Field (1976) who appear to disagree with Elias' ideas, the amount of time that has passed between leaving school and starting employment is too short to pass judgement on whether these players experienced 'shock', as the football figuration is a norm through which they are developing their habitus. In this habitus, certain football behaviours have been normalised and this could offer the explanation for why half of these players found the transition smoother than the other half. Contrastingly, Player 3, who was aged 19 at the time of interview, suggests that it is not possible for the transition to be simply labelled as smooth as he had time to reflect on his transition into the academy. In line with Elias' ideas of experiences on a continuum, Player 3 said that there were other contributing factors, such as leaving home, living in digs and maintaining friendships that contribute towards how the transition unfolds:

P3: It was a really, really, interesting and difficult time for me.. I've moved up, away from my mates, don't know anyone up here… Like I was stuck in digs with 5 other lads… It's always difficult coming in to a group of lads that are already so close nit and you've gotta try get in that group… You know there were nights at digs where I'd get really homesick.

Player 3 echoes the fifth problem identified by Elias relating to shock whereby these young players are experiencing elements of fantasy when they join the academy as they are achieving their dream, so nothing seems untoward or difficult (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). However, the reality is, as demonstrated by Player 3 upon reflection, that the adult world of moving away from home is more difficult that first imagined. However, Player 3 suggests that he became caught up in and by the nature of the world of football in how he portrayed himself to people back home, suggesting evidence o the evolvement of his habitus as the norms of football became the norms of his life:

P3: When I got my first pay check of £100 a week I thought 'I'm the man', like I thought I was some pro footballer. I was going home in my [name of club] kit, I was thinking I was all sorts and then, its only taken me until two years ago to realise what I was doing. You get the coaches that say 'don't let it get to your head' but I think when I first signed, you've gotta have that first little bit of wow, I'm a [footballer].

This discussion will now turn to the other six players who found the transition difficult, before discussing those who specifically identified the experience as a shock.

5.2. Critical Moments: A more difficult transition

The life of a young professional footballer is different from that of peers of the same age as the opportunity for most young people to move away, independently of more knowledgeable adults is not something easily or readily achievable at this age (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). The possibilities given to young academy players by clubs are evident; professional football training every day, matches and a wage for fulfilling their dream whilst being in the small number of individuals who have secured a place. All players alluded to these possibilities which suggests that this allows the young players the chance to gain independence and experience the transition into adulthood (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). However, despite the opportunity to become independent and follow their dreams of becoming a professional footballer, half of those interviewed described the transition into the academy as harder than expected, more demanding and more difficult. One more difficult aspect of the transition was the physicality of playing football

every day. Even though the players knew and understood that that is what would happen, players 3, 5 and 8 described feelings of constant tiredness/exhaustion:

> P3: [before] I was able to play pre-games all week and it wouldn't be a problem, whereas I'd play two games here and I'd be absolutely blowing.

> P5: Took quite a while to get used to it… I was very tired. When I got home, I probably sleep, have tea, then go back to sleep again.

> P8: the physical demands that have to be met. It's way more physical than Under 16s.

The demands of the first few weeks of pre-season were significantly higher, even for those who had been at the academy in younger age groups. Player 6 explained that it was not purely their physical ability that they began to question, but their mental endurance. He suggested that even though he had been an academy member for a long time prior to starting his scholarship, he felt like an outsider during pre-season, as though he needed to prove his abilities to everyone:

> The first few weeks of the scholarship… was the most demanding… since I've been here. Physically, mentally, because… it was… tough on the legs, every day was running, football and it was… little recovery. I knew what I was expecting, and I knew it was gonna be a tough pre-season going into full-time football because you have to be fit. Like when I first come on trial… it was different… even being at such a young age you think everyone's so friendly… but then when you come in… you're treated a little bit like an outsider.

Player 6's comments align with the notion of Established Outsider Relations in that the newly arriving players although with same skill set, are cast into the 'Outsider' group. Those second years who are already part of the academy programme are the 'Established' group who are responsible for setting the standard of quality and talent that these new players must meet if they are to be accepted (Elias and Scotson 1965). The power balance in favour of the Established group could therefore account for these new Outsider players needing to adapt quickly or risk remaining as an Outsider, as it is the Established group who control, to a degree, who they 'allow in' to their 'we-group' (Mennell 1998). This was confirmed when Player 7, who had been an academy member at other clubs, said that he felt he must soldier on regardless as to his levels of exhaustion, to fit in, be accepted and show a good attitude:

the workload was so high obviously fitness and mentally wise… even if you're in a little training session and they'll go 'right today's a low-key day', nothings low-key cos you put your best in everything… that's what sets other players apart.

The competitive nature of the environment was distinctive upon arrival and arguably even those who had a lengthy academy backgrounds experienced both a slight change to this figuration through the power balances that allocated them to the 'we' and 'they' groups and also a threat to their identity due to new chains of interdependence being formed with new team mates and coaches (van Kriken 1998). This need to be accepted appears to indicate a psychological coping method adopted by these players to fit into their new sociological surroundings of academy life and maintain their footballer identity (Nicholls and Polman 2006). Pushing themselves to physical limits whilst admitting that this was difficult, compounds the presence of power imbalances, which aligns with findings from Law and Bloyce's (2019) study on contract negotiations as players strive to sign a professional contract. The addition of new first years in the figuration creates new interdependencies that unintentionally enable and constrain the actions of others. Player 7 alluded to a reluctance of the second years to accept the first years stating that 'there's a big split between 18s and 17s' (second and first years). He said:

> P7: This year, quite a lot of people have noticed quite a bit of friction between like the two age groups… and when you look at it in detail, he doesn't really get on with him because he's a second year, the second year doesn't get on with him cos he's a first year.

> Player 11 also alluded to a divide between first and second years, stating that it is the norm and 'the same every year'.

He also said:

> P11: You have the second years, sort of asserting their dominance in a way, sort of like-cos we're the new kids and they suffered with it last year. They sort of joke around and everything, sort of like, take the piss and then they all got a bit tetchy when obviously the decisions were being made on them… they sort of view the first years, bit sort of inferior.

Arguably then, the second years could be asserting their dominance due to their feeling of pressure to maintain and keep their position, whilst assessing what sort of threat these new players are and trying to maintain the perception that they are more powerful as they have survived the jokes of being a first year.

Another aspect that contributed towards a more difficult transition for half of these players was leaving home, friends and family and moving into digs. A few players suggested that they were aware that their friends were doing very different things, particularly friends who they had known most of their lives. Transitioning from one school to another and experiencing critical moments with a circle of friends was perhaps the norm for some of these players and therefore to now be experiencing a critical moment alone and feeling increased responsibility did not go unnoticed:

> P2: It was hard adjusting for the first couple months... obviously you're away from all your friends, who you've been with your whole life, you've moved…to completely different career... they're still all back there, they're all doing their things.

> P9: I feel like it was quite a hard transition because usually every day when you wake up you're thinking about school and seeing your mates… well it's obviously your career but like when you go to lessons, you don't think about like school do you? When you're here it's more individualised… this is… what we're here to do so I wanna be a professional footballer so you gotta think that sort of mentality. When you come in every morning you've gotta think what can I improve on? It's down to the football side of things, rather than when I wake up on a Wednesday and Thursday morning, I'm thinking school, make sure I get this done. It's just taking more responsibility for yourself… here you have to take a lot more responsibility for yourself than I did when I was at school.

Player 8 alluded to one of the other players 'changing' as a person when he moved to the club full-time in comparison to how he was at Under 16 level:

> I think it's just how you get on, just all individual really… always been good at making friends, but for some others… it is hard... some people ain't like that are they? There's one person in our group who's kinda changed from under 16, like we've seen him change… he's from [place], coming over here, big change and changes a person really. Like the change from, cos he's from [different country], coming over here, big change and changes a person really.

Interestingly, the changes in this players behaviour through transition were also divulged during informal chats with one of the coaches. He was described by the coach as isolated from the rest of the group and struggling with managing an injury and not being selected for the team. Perhaps paradoxically, the majority of those who stated they had an easy or relatively smooth transition due to their previous footballing experience, yet, these individuals and members of staff suggest that the transition is anything but linear

and smooth. Furthermore this was irrespective of their pre-academy experience which contradicts the statement of a positive schoolboy to academy player transition given by Mitchell et al. (2014). This could be explained as the unintended outcomes of power imbalances between these new interdependencies that occur during the first few weeks as a new academy player (Elias 1978). The strong competitive environment that they are now part of, although not a surprise, is compounded by the fluctuation of power that is experienced when other player's movements and actions are thrown into the mix with their own (Elias 1978).

Player 11 expands this argument by stating that the lack of timetable and structure during pre-season is another aspect that influences how one transitions into the academy:

> in pre-season cos there was obviously there was no education… the weeks were just sort of played by ear… there was no sort of set regime. Some days you'd get a day off, others you'd sort of work the whole week. So, obviously being from school with the timetable, you'd know what to expect, day in day out… with that being your whole life near enough.

The difficulties experienced by these players during their transition outline the differences in an individual's identity that mean the transition is neither linear nor predictable. For some, the whole experience was a shock, and it is to this that the discussion will now turn.

5.3.   Critical Moments: An Initial Transitional Shock

In some interviews, players used the word 'shock' when discussing their transition, with several aspects where adaption was needed, such as managing training and academy work, completing education in less time than was allocated during school, the physicality of daily football and adjusting to a rigid daily schedule. Player 1 explained:

> it really kind of hit me when I was doing this full time when the rest of mates went back to school and I was coming here. They'd be at school and I was playing football and it was… not a shock but it was, just I had to get used to it.

Later in the interview, he suggested that upon reflection his transition was smoother but only after the actual transition part was over. Arguably this is not possible and a paradox as he did not experience a distinctly smooth transition as he alludes to his transition as critical moments laden with obstacles. What he alludes to is feeling ok once he had adjusted to his surroundings and new daily routines but not during the actual transition

itself. This player provides evidence of experiencing some of Elias' problems relating to shock theory. For example, adjusting to academy life meant that he encountered problems such as managing new personal connections with others in a work scenario and managing the need for a close group of friends (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Perhaps then, he did not wish to be viewed as weak in relation to his new interdependencies created with other scholars as per findings from Fry and Bloyce (2017a) and therefore describes his transition as a critical moment with certain aspects that he needed to normalise over time.

Player 10 openly used the word shock to describe his transition period. He described at length how he found the whole experience a complete shock and how the level of football that he played for his local club was completely different to that at the academy:

> The competitive nature of being in this environment… I was really taken aback by it. I was really, really shocked… at home like I was probably one of the best players coming into every single game playing for my local club. When I came here it was just a different level and like I've been so used to being the main player, getting praise every single game, and then to come here and to have players that are miles, miles better than me, technically, physically… I was really, really shocked… coming in from club football and school football, it was a massive change. And I had to adapt very quickly.

As one of the few interviewees who did not experience early professionalism in the game, Player 10 found the transition tough both mentally and physically:

> the intensity of here, than playing in your local club… is much higher… Physically, it's sooo demanding. And I had to get to grips with that… and I think I struggled very early on with that… the difference between them two? It's fierce.

When asked how he found the transition he replied, 'for me, that was the toughest part'. He found a relentless need to sleep to battle through the physical exhaustion in the first couple of months and even began questioning his own ability:

> the big thing as well as the transition from club football was, I thought, the amount of time I would have, but we have quite long days. We get in, we get picked up about 8, might not get home till about 5… so if I'm going to sleep for an hour, 6 o'clock, get my dinner, it's about half six, quarter to 7, watch a bit of tv, chill out, and then you're going to bed about 10, half 10 because you're wrecked. I had to adapt to that as well. Cos I was coming home, and I was like, 'I'm not sure I can last'.

As an Outsider 'they' group individual, the pressure felt by this player to adapt to training affected his performance on the pitch in those initial two months as he attempted to meet the standards set by the Established 'we' group existing scholars. He described his body as exhausted, as well as having to mentally cope with the new surroundings and demands of the academy:

> I did struggle the first month or so… trying to adapt to training and like coming in and thinking 'I can't do it, is this gonna be right for me?' 'my body can't take it'… and as well as that, performance on the pitch was affected. And I was like 'jees, I don't think I can do this'. And it just, reality hits you… it's like I've gotta work… a hundred times as hard.

Although there is no evidence to suggest first years train longer than second years (Parker 1996), the pressure to get their bodies to and acceptable level of physical and mental fitness whilst managing the demands of the environment, was compounded during witnessing the second-year scholars being informed of the club's decision to sign or release them. In alignment with findings from Roderick (2003), Adams and Carr (2017) and Fry and Bloyce (2017a), the need to make friendships of convenience is evident here. To combat feelings of loneliness and to group together to manage negative scenarios, Roderick (2003) suggests friendships do form, particularly amongst those who journey through the ranks together. Player 10 appears to be one such player who made genuine friendships as he said that the releasing of players affected him as some were players that he had formed strong bonds with or interdependencies of a positive nature:

> Like you're still playing, like for a place, a shirt, it's ruthless. Absolutely ruthless… it does have an effect on you, but you try not to think about it. I think when something comes up so say if someone's being released that you get on well with, you've spoke to them, you've trained with them nearly every single day, like for the second years especially… they've been let know a couple of weeks back… and you're like 'pft, you're a decent player… you've had some good matches… you've scored goals… for them to turn round and say 'right we're releasing you, we're not gonna offer you anything' is just like 'oh my days'. And I think that affected me… because you're so used to playing with players and… when they're not there you're like 'what am I gonna do?'… they're gone!

Player 10's lengthy discussion about his transition from school to the academy, highlights sections of Elias' Shock-theory. Elias (1980) was keen to state that a youth's transition into adulthood is anything but linear and Player 10's experience confirms this. Although both school and the academy are an institution, the role of the adults and

strong players amongst the scholars arguably perpetuates power balances between individuals at the academy in line with Elias and Scotson's (1965) Established Outsider Relations. Elias states that upon entering the working world, young people are expected to behave as equals with their colleagues, however, this is not the case in this football club (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). These findings align with Elias' theory in that it is unfamiliar territory, yet this is perhaps a unique example of a working environment where young individuals are not expected to act as equals with their colleagues. The constant pressure to be competitive and stand above the rest is part of the dream of being a footballer. Elias asserts that the dream of being uncontrolled by others is what forms part of his dreams vs reality concept and this is also evident in this transition phase (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). These players dream of being footballers and being released from the constraints of a formal education setting, yet the reality is that they remain institutionalised, a concern also flagged by members of the coaching staff at the club. Here they must adhere to learning to conform to the rules and norms of the club, internalising practices and behaviours in order to be irrespective of whether the players found the transition ok, smooth, difficult, demanding, shocking or a combination of these (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). Particularly prudent during transition appears to be the need for a group of close friends, as these players alluded to a sense of separation from long-term friends and difficulty during initial integration with new teammates, plus understanding how to cope in unfamiliar work situations when fellow players are suddenly released (Roderick 2003; Fry and Bloyce 2017a). The requirement to control and monitor their own feelings and impulses was evident when players felt that they were struggling initially. Finally, these players allude to experiencing different transitions, yet no matter which type of transition they felt they had, it is evident that all had to make some adaptations to life as an academy footballer throughout their first year and this will now be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Adapting to Academy life: a footballer's identity

This chapter will seek to examine the adaptations that the academy players felt that they had to make during their first year at the academy. Although some have already been discussed such as adapting to physical demands through the difference in the standard of play, it will be argued that enrolment in the academy exacerbated the footballer identity that these players carried. Through the internalisation of the norms and practices of the youth academy environment, these players were able to begin to reinforce their habitus through the formation of new fluid interdependencies (Elias 1978; Dunning and Hughes 2013). Although a habitus is built slowly over time, these players appear to demonstrate Elias' ideas surrounding the social construction of a habitus in this figuration (Dunning 2002). As many have specialised early in football, it will be argued that the adaptation to academy life is building upon existing dispositions or second nature for these individuals and the result is the slow, processual moulding and changing of their existing habitus into one of a more prominent, determined footballer (Paulle and Heenkuizen 2012).

6.1.   The Responsibility Rollercoaster

As previously discussed, Player 9 described an increased feeling of responsibility upon arrival at the academy and a sense of adaptation was needed to fulfil daily tasks when he was so accustomed to timetabled schooling. Player 10 also discussed a weighty feeling of responsibility to manage his emotions during the first year at the academy. This suggests that Elias' seventh possible cause of shock is again present, where emotions and impulses are to be learnt and kept in check, a responsibility congruent with adulthood. At 17-years-old, Player 10's recollections align with Elias' ideas around children and youth experiencing their own civilising process through exposure to and interdependencies formed with superior others and colleagues (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). He said:

> You have to be able to adapt to it [pressure]. Cos if you don't then you're really gonna struggle… I've kind of got over it and I'm just like… this is your path, you've just gotta go through a brick wall to get it.

In reality, this means that these players must face whatever challenges come their way without hesitation even when experiencing the unpleasant jokes and challenges set by their peers- 'the second years were just telling us what to do'- if they want any chance of succeeding. Player 10 went on to say:

At the end of the day you're still fighting against the boy you're sitting next to in the dressing room. Which is reality.

How each player finds their methods to cope with whatever the figuration throws at them, is what Elias, cited in van Kriken (1998, p.80) describes as 'the 'blindness' of social development' and it seems prudent to suggest that this football environment may benefit from understanding that these young individuals do not simply enter adulthood in one swift movement and remain there, unchanged and undeveloped (van Kriken 1998). Elias strongly advised that to be aware of how interdependencies work can result in a vast understanding of how a child or youth views their relations with others. For example, Player 10 was keen to express the first year at the academy as a rollercoaster. After initially being shocked at the pace and practices of the academy, he felt he was eventually welcomed, accepted into the team and felt the desire to challenge the player in front of him for the starting XI position:

> coming into pre-season, I had a couple of boys in front of me… in my position… that kind of gave me a drive to kind of even want it even more… It's like, 'listen, get out of my way, I'm here to stay' and I… started playing really well, training, in matches, whenever I got the opportunity. Started getting on the bench… and then actually I broke into the team… got a starting position and… when I got that position, I was just like yeah! But I think after a while it became mine and I was like I've nobody else in front of me to fight and… my performances kinda lacked. And then… I had a couple of bad games, and then I'd come back, have a great game because I was motivated, I was like 'listen, this is my spot'. And then a few weeks later… your performances dropped, and it is, literally your first year goes up, then goes down, then goes up, it's a rollercoaster.

Experiencing 'rollercoaster' emotions in both positive and negative ways through interdependencies with teammates as they vie for the same position in the team and with the managers who decide who will be selected are critical moments experienced by these players during the particularly impressionable stage of youth. Arguably then, these players are susceptible to embodying behaviours of those with whom they are tied and thus this kind of socialisation contributes towards their evolving habitus (van Kriken 1998).

The emotions experienced by these players during their first year was highlighted in different ways by different individuals. Player 7 used anecdotes to describe his emotions and feelings. The interdependencies within this youth academy figuration appeared to make an impact on how this player perceived himself and his abilities. The researcher observed that he appears to be knowledgeable and wise for his age on the outside, yet

vulnerable and insecure on the inside. For example, without coercion, Player 7 answered questions in depth, or in an indirect way, using voices of others in his stories to express himself. This answer was a particularly indirect way of describing a critical moment; how he feels emotionally after a difficult period of anxiety, mistrust, poor performance and a clash with his coaches:

> he's [coach] actually gone 'right, he's struggling for confidence'. I think one day he's gone home and gone 'you know what, look how low this kid is, like performance wise and mentally. He's not playing under 18s, if I get him performing, I can get him in the 18 squad and then he can rise'. And I think since then he's been like really good to me, he's like texting me after training… 'how do you feel the session went today?'.

In terms of how Player 7 viewed his actual transition, he stated that it was easy, no difficulties and smooth. Given this anecdote and others described during his interview, Player 7 is experiencing Elias' shock theory after the initial transition phase (Ashton and Field 1976). However, it could also be said that Player 7 is evidence of Goffman's 'Presentation of the Self', where he tries to maintain a strong, unchanged persona, keeping up the act that all is fine in order to be perceived as this by his colleagues (Goffman 1959). This could explain why he does not describe his transition as a shock, as this same player was described by a member of staff as 'a mature head on young shoulders' and therefore appears to be a prime example of how the transition from youth to adulthood is complex and unexpected, where the dream of being a professional footballer starts to find short-term fulfilment (Elias 1978). Elias stated that over the course of time, dreams become less likely to be achieved as they are revealed as more fantasy driven and the real world cannot possibly deliver the expectations held. Arguably, these players are beginning to understand that their dream of being a professional footballer is tainted by unachievable aims, that in turn causes shock when faced with truths and critical moments such as the one described by Player 7. Thus, this discussion will now examine reoccurring themes on aspects of the players lives such as individual perception, wider circle perception and idolisation of first team players and attempt to explain how these players reinforced their footballer identity.

6.2.   Who am I? Perceptions of a new professional footballer

As discussed previously, there are several adaptations each player felt they needed to make upon arrival at the academy full-time. For individuals such as Players 6 and 10 who ranged from lots of prior professional experience to none whatsoever, the formation of new interdependencies and therefore the fluctuation of power between these

interdependencies, resulted in both players normalising a feeling of constant pressure to be successful (Brown and Coupland 2015). During the interview, the researcher noted a jolly, happy persona from Player 10, who was more than willing to divulge the difficulties in adapting to the level of play at the club when he arrived. However, although he admitted questioning his own abilities, he was very quick to defend himself and therefore his football identity when it came to protecting his position on the pitch. He said, 'with that kind of mentality, like, I'll be your friend but when it comes to like on the pitch, I'm not your friend'.

Player 6 also said:

> I'm the person in the changing room where we get along, best of mates… but when we step out onto the pitch, I'm fighting for your place and you're fighting for my place.

This finding echoes that of Fry and Bloyce (2017a) friends as enemies' in professional golf paper, where it was determined that relations between these professional athletes were enabled and constrained by the convenient need to have these friendships for success. Although an individual sport, protecting one's self to ensure individual success and a strong persona to guard against any colleagues finding weaknesses is a key aspect that is clearly evident in this team sport. Like Bourke (2003), who found that possession of physical capital increased the likelihood of a starting XI position, a display of physical prowess and success on the pitch expresses to others a sense of masculinity. However, Player 6 suggests that a poor performance on the pitch can soon alter this perception of masculinity in the eyes of others:

> I think people won't say it, but your performance has an impact on… like how you play and… has an impact on how well the team receives you.

This ebb and flow of emotions both enables and constrains the individual's evolving habitus and therefore causing the adoption of different psychological coping strategies such as problem-focused strategies like improving fitness and concentrating on long-term goals (Nicholls and Polman 2006). Player 2 was particularly frank about the cruel nature of the environment and the constant feeling of pressure that they are under, which is consistent with findings from Roderick (2006b), who said that regular participation in the team reproduces and gives meaning to the player's masculine identities. The result is that players acknowledge that they must be seen to be a team player yet cannot rely on the outcomes of the actions of others in long chains of interdependence to cement their starting XI place (Roderick 2006b):

> within football there's a lot more pressure and a lot more, like wanting… everyone else around you… either wanting you to fail or wanting you to do well, so there's a lot more pressure, whereas at school… you were an individual… no one cared about if you… done something, if you didn't, but now, football you're as a team, but you're an individual in a team sport.

This harsh reality of being isolated and alone in a team game, particularly when these individuals expressed such enjoyment from playing the sport at a young age with their friends, is yet another example of how the interdependencies within this figuration contribute towards the slow emergence and definition of their professional footballing identity. At a time when friendships are crucial to negotiate insecurities such as poor performance (Adams and Carr 2017; Fry and Bloyce 2017a; 2017b), these players are caught in the paradox of needing friends to manage the transition into adulthood yet needing to prioritise themselves if they have any chance of success. This is evidence of Elias' (2001) concept of loneliness through which he states that individuals will develop personal pronoun social networks of 'we- groups' to maintain their position and protect themselves within a figuration (Fry and Bloyce 2017a). It may be prudent then, for the academy to acknowledge and consider that all players, although aged 16 upon arrival, will be at their own life stage and it should not be generally assumed that they will all act and behave the same way, as they strive to protect their evolving football identity (Platts 2012).

Adapting to academy life is arguably a very confusing time for these individuals with ungenuine friendships borne from fluxing interdependencies, combined with high pressures to succeed (Elias 1978). Findings from Fry and Bloyce (2017a) suggest that professional golfers felt that their friendships with other golfers were simply convenient liaisons rather than true friendships. Participants alluded to using other golfers to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation whilst on tour in social settings, but upon the start of a game, these 'friends' became 'enemies' who threatened their potential to succeed (Fry and Bloyce 2017a). Here is arguably evidence of Elias' 'I', 'we' and 'they' pronouns as for these young footballers, they cannot control whether they are chosen to make the under 18s team based on their recent display of ability; this is down to the manager and ultimately can result in complicated feelings of tension and unsettlement for and between the players and a threat to their identity (Elias 1978; Reeves, Nicholls and Jones 2009; Tibbert et al. 2015). In other words, these young players can feel a multitude of emotions regarding their social position within the figuration that can fluctuate on a daily basis according to their own performances both on and off the pitch. In some cases, the players will feel part of the 'we' group when they are selected for the starting XI; in other cases, they will feel part of the 'they' group when they are substituted or not selected.

As per Player 10 who said that the reality is that they all are fighting against one another, they are at all times within the 'I' pronoun (Elias 1978). This fluctuation between pronouns was also evident when players were keen not to just display their 'power' on the pitch; the changing room was another environment where power balances and the fluctuation of power was found.

6.3.   Dressing Room Relationships and Banter

In the interviews, all players were asked about dressing room relationships. Of the 12 participants, 5 stated that everyone in the academy 'got along' and were friends. This is perhaps interesting, given the remaining 7 said that it was not possible to be friends and teammates due to rivalry and the competitive nature of the environment. Players 4 and 9 strongly described a sense of unity amongst the academy players saying 'we're all good friends', whereas Player 1 alluded to groupings of players, particularly by those who live in digs together. Player 12, a second-year scholar, suggested the atmosphere in the dressing room was better this year compared to last year:

> last year it was probably more difficult to be fair because we were bottom of the league and didn't really win many games so there was probably more conflict between people.

The league position for the team was cited as a reason for a divide between the first- and second-year scholars by 7 of the 12 players. Some stated that the divide was present particularly at the start of the season, whereas others said that there was still evidence of this divide almost a year later. The actual configuration of the academy building means that the scholars are split into two changing rooms, which some said, contributed towards the 'divide'. Player 5 said, 'I'd say truthfully there's a bit of a divide between the first years and second years', yet Player 1 said:

> you've got the first and second years, the second years have already been here for a year together, so, there's a little bit of a divide which is kind of expected.

Player 12 stated that he felt that it was a good thing to have a mixture of first and second years in the dressing room as he felt it helps new players coming in to integrate as some will not know anyone. This finding aligns with Parker's (1996) study who suggested that traditions of the domineering masculine environment are still present, where these young players enter the academy aware of long-standing traditions in terms of academy operation, which were to be adhered to without question. Player 11 adds to this by suggesting it is the same every year in terms of dressing room relationships and should not come as a shock to anyone:

there was a couple of divides earlier on in the year, especially at the start… it's the same every year really… you have the second years, sort of asserting their dominance in a way… cos we're the new kid- and they suffered with it last year.

Player 7 explained that the divide between the first and second years is not only evident at the academy, but outside as well. He said:

there's a big split between 18s and 17s. At college, the 17s sit one side of the school… 18s sit at the other side. So, you get on well with the people in your age group. But this year, quite a lot of people have noticed quite a bit of friction between-like the two age groups, but it's been really weird. That we're actually second in the league. And when you look at it in detail, thinking well, 'he doesn't really get on with him because he's a second year, the second year doesn't get on with him cos he's a first year' and all that back and forward and yet on a football pitch, we bitch to each other a bit, but we're still second in the league going for the first…you would have thought… they should be near the bottom.

Player 7 then, contradicts Player 12 who states that low league position was a cause for friction, as he suggests the friction is there permanently, yet they can succeed on the pitch as a team when it matters. This 'bitching' and divide as per Player 7, concurs with Elias and Scotson's (1965) notion of Established Outsider Relations where acts of gossiping perpetuate levels of 'we' and 'they' group divisions. Through this segregation, power fluctuates between the two groups as both need each other to succeed in a match, however, the Established, or the second years, view themselves as superior to their Outsider counterparts off the pitch (Mennell 1998).

During the discussion on dressing room relationships, the researcher asked about the prevalence of banter in the dressing room, as banter is a strong part of the masculine football identity that is continually produced and reproduced as a traditional element of English football (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006a). There was a unanimous agreement amongst all players that banter is still part of the dressing room and even between players and staff. Many players described how the banter and interaction in the dressing room is 'really good' and 'everyone knows when it's taken too far and when to stop' (Player 1). Player 11, in agreement with Parker (1996), Roderick (2006a) and Platts (2012) suggested that the domineering second years, although not malicious, assert their hierarchical place in the football environment by joking and 'character building' with the first years. Player 8 was very keen to explain the amount of banter present in the dressing room and was quite contradictory as he stated that 'everyone takes it and likes it', yet in the next sentence stated that it's part of the football environment and 'some people may not like it'. Player 3 reiterated this:

you get banter, you get boys in there with the egos and reputations and then you get the quiet ones in the corner… the characters of football are no different to the characters you get anywhere else, you just see more of them and you just have to put up with them, you can't leave them.

None of the players interviewed were keen to discuss any examples of banter at work in the dressing room; when probed further, there were nods or generic one-word answers. However, a little later when discussing the benefits of educational workshops on life as a professional footballer, Player 8 discussed the benefits of the 'Kick It Out' workshop relating to racism. It was at this point that he divulged the type of behaviour that occurs in the dressing room:

P8: We had a kick it out workshop the other day… About racism and how, cos it's kind of involved in the changing room… Like with the banter and stuff… like swearing as well, we had it about it swearing, we didn't realise how much we swear.

NG: Yeah?

P8: We swear quite a lot. Be racist quite a lot (laughs). It's not like, how people get offended by it, cos we're all like the same.

These analogies echo Parker's (1996) findings that suggest the working-class shop floor culture that is strongly associated within the heritage of football is still present and perpetuating these young, impressionable players into strengthening their footballer identity. In a study by Collinson (1988) which examined types of humour and masculinity in workforces, specifically a lorry producing factory, three types of humour were identified. One was to alleviate boredom, the second was to show conformity to the working-class hyper-masculine culture such as swearing, ogling women and displaying male prowess and thirdly, humour was used as a form of power over those who were deemed to not be part of the group (Collinson 1988). Findings suggest these types of humour often went too far but were also a tool for differentiating the working-class employees from their line managers as a form of unity; in other words, 'we' and 'they' groupings. The 'we' group shop-floor workers, with power against them and little opportunities to counter this as they were continually instructed, created their own forms of allegiance with one another to survive. Initiations of new employees to this 'we' group were often degrading and humiliating but led to acceptance (Collinson 1988). Although no player in this study exclusively discussed the extent to which banter occurred and through how new players were 'accepted' into the group, Player 3 suggested that the banter in the dressing room does echo other masculine work environments as it is not

dissimilar to other physical work places such as that discussed by Collinson (1988). Additionally, findings from Fry and Bloyce (2017a) suggest that engaging in extreme banter was a coping strategy that the professional golfers adopted to appear strong, thereby not releasing any weaknesses to the other players and again, despite golf being an individual sport, this appears evident within football. However, it was also noted that for the professional golfers, the impact of participating in banter can intensify and influence an evolving identity which given Player 8's divulgence on the amount of swearing and racist behaviour along with the 'we' analogy, suggests a normalisation for this kind of traditional football behaviour. Furthermore, Platts (2012) suggests banter reinforces sub-cultural masculinity and a type of 'pecking order' within the club, where academy players are reminded of the fragility of their career and that they have a long way to travel before they are a successful first team player.

6.4.   First Team Idolisations

All players interviewed alluded to integration and involvement with the first team players at the club as distinctly positive. Although it should be noted that the club building was not particularly large and therefore youth team players regularly came into contact with first team players, several players discussed the relations between themselves as good and inspiring. Parker (1996) and Morris, Tod and Eubank (2017) found a strong presence in their studies of youth academy players idolising first team players, which was echoed in this study. First team, 'home-grown' players that had been around the club for a length of time, were identified as welcoming and instrumental in the academy players settling in:

> P10: They'll take a couple of min[utes]- especially [name of first team player] and [name of first team player]… the two big boys in the team. They're… really, really good characters. And I think it's really, really good to have cos I think… that's kind… had an impact on me settling in.

> P4: I'm quite close to a couple of the first team players… when I first come here… I was all quite new to it obviously. A couple of the first team players welcomed me... made sure I was alright.

For some players, the sight of and liaison with the first team players appeared to nourish and strengthen their masculine football identity. Those players who had been involved with the football world for the majority of their life, they described their links with the first team as strong and even 'street-wise':

P7: I get on with some of them. One of them very well. Like we're in contact every day laughing and joking over social media. We're tagging each other in jokes like saying that, just winding each other up…there's always a good like bond between the first team at this club. I think that's good and I think I've actually been a little bit street wise In the concept that if I get to know the first team really well, and then I get on with them, if I made that progression to the first team, it's not like an outsider on their first day.

It could be said that liaisons with first team players arguably makes the transition for new academy players decidedly easier, as Player 7 was one of those who stated that his transition was relatively smooth. Player 3 alluded to the fact that watching how the first team behave provides valuable lessons that will aid them on the road to success, thereby suggesting that if viewed as a critical moment, the interaction with first team players is regarded as distinctly positive, therefore influencing a positive effect on the academy player's sense of self (Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee 2008). This positive self-efficacy appears to encourage and reproduce a strong work ethic built on a good attitude (Roderick 2006b). This is due to football being viewed as 'an institution through which masculine identities are constructed and reconstructed' (Roderick 2006b, p.45). The current first team players undoubtedly experienced watching their former first team when they were academy players and dreamt of aspiring to their level. They are arguably less threatened by academy players and more welcoming than the second years as they have already secured their place. This cycle is perhaps part of the reason why the masculine norms associated with football and success are continually produced and reproduced. Player 3 said:

I've probably received loads of advice, not necessarily direct advice, almost indirect advice, from watching how they are… especially seeing the pros… who've done in this, you know been in this game for years. I think their experiences is so valuable and you know, just little things, like learnt how to behave and… your mannerisms around staff, other players, fans, everything… the way in which they conduct themselves is something you can always learn from.

However, when asked about relations with first team players Player 6 suggested that the arrival of the new manager at the club preferred to keep the academy players separate from the first team players, indicating the adoption of the 'we' and 'they' groups by the new manager:

P6: Before, it's weird because before, [name of manager] left, I don't know if you're aware of him? and the team he had… I feel we used to interact with the

first team a lot more than when the new players have come in. If you see them, they'd say hello, but it's rare that we'd interact with the new first team players, whereas the old ones we used to get along with… All the ones that are left they used to say morning… and have a conversation with them… So, it's changed.

The arrival of the new manager is indicative of Established Outsider Relations as the new manager brought some new players to the club. The youth academy players having less opportunities to interact with the first team is evidence of a lower amount of power in their favour. Unable to challenge practices such as this reinforces the Established group's superiority and therefore the first team may perceive themselves as stronger, better players, ultimately reproducing their football identity (Mennell 1998). For the youth players, they are reminded that they have not yet succeeded in the eyes of the new manager and are required to demonstrate that they are willing to do anything to succeed by internalising and normalising practices such as this (Elias 1978).

By not objecting to the changes brought in by the new manager, players arguably display both a good attitude and behaviour, both of which are deemed necessities of football (Parker 1996; Platts 2012). However, a good attitude is a quality that one is not born with but is socially constructed through interdependencies within a figuration (Roderick 2006b). First team players, it seems, are aware of their position as one of influence and that of an idol and are required by the club to demonstrate 'psychological acceptance of institutionally defined hegemonic masculine requirements' (Parker 1996, p.200). Thus, the relations between the academy players and the first team players seeks to heighten the young player's sense of self-confidence and possibilities of becoming a man and therefore exacerbates the footballing dream, regardless as to the low statistics of success (Roderick 2006b). This is perhaps something to be considered by football clubs when restricting and encouraging liaisons between teams.

In summary, this chapter has sought to examine how adapting to life within the academy has both enabled and constrained the youth academy player's habitus and football identity. From understanding how they perceive themselves as new professional footballers, to managing position rivalries and dressing room relationships, these youth academy players are arguably continually evolving throughout the whole academy year. As per Elias, their identity is never complete, and each individual is more representative of a social process.

Chapter 7

Living the Youth Academy Life

This chapter will focus on several components that have been indicated as prevalent to daily academy life for the youth players. Firstly, it will be argued that the expectations to complete 'jobs', for example, boot cleaning, first team equipment preparation, dressing room cleaning, ball inflating, is still a distinctive part of being a youth academy player that appears to have altered little from Parker's (1996) study. A brief discussion of the daily expectations of youth players will include their views on living in digs or at home, followed by a discussion on their relationships with their coaches and managers. The chapter will then turn to discuss their perceptions on their future careers in both football and non-football roles whilst analysing their thoughts on the low statistical success rate of youth academy players in England. Using concepts from Elias, such as Dreams vs Reality, it will be argued that despite the low success rates, most of the interviewees were still determined to strive for football success, whilst a surprising percentage have considered alternative careers. It appears that although aware that the chance of making it as a professional footballer is a slim reality, these young players realise their current success level just to make it to the academy. Through this and early specialisation, and in agreement with Parker (1996) and Platts (2012), these players are too heavily invested in their footballer identity to renounce their dream.

7.1.   Daily Routine: Expectations and Jobs

Each of the 12 players were asked to describe a typical day as a youth player and all gave very similar answers. They were very specific on timings and what happens on certain days of the week, which could be argued is an extension of a type of school environment where the players know what is expected of them at certain times and days of the week. This rigid structure, which was suggested by Player 8 to be 'a bit repetitive but enjoyable', arguably perpetuates the habitus of these individuals and suggests a possible reason for why some of these players were so unsettled or found the transition difficult during the untimetabled pre-season, as they craved the stability and expectations of the norms of the football environment. The structure of the day was highly routinised and gave the youth players very little control as they were instructed to complete training and jobs in a format that prioritised the first team's use of the club and facilities. For example, all explained how upon arrival on a morning, it is expected that they will begin completing jobs, i.e. cleaning the education rooms or first team boots, before going out onto the pitch for pre-activation, which was described as a pre-warm up activity. Following this, training would take place till around lunch time, when the

players were expected to return to the dressing rooms, shower and continue with their next set of allocated jobs. Player 11 said: '[we're] training half 10, quarter to 11, back in… Shower, wait for lunch, cos we have to wait for the first team and 23s… that varies depending on what they've done'. A noticeable form of hierarchy is evident at this club, with first team players prioritised over youth players for something as simple as eating lunch and this was a practice instilled regardless as to the change of managers or personnel. None of the players expressed negative opinions of this hierarchical behaviour; their portrayal of their day's schedule was discussed with the attitude that this kind of schedule and operation is the norm and has been internalised by the young players from the very start. These young players dream of becoming first team players and can clearly see what they will receive and where they will be if they are to make it into the first team. The reality is, these youth academy players seek to earn their right to be a first team player through a form of transitional passage and acceptance (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006b).

When asked to describe their day, the inclusion of jobs was discussed by all players with no prompting from the researcher. With 5 of the 12 not disclosing their opinion either way, 3 of the remaining 7 players claimed that jobs are a positive, standard-maintaining task that promote discipline and masculine characteristics that are desired by the club:

> NG: Do you feel the jobs are a good thing?
>
> P4: Yeah, definitely. Up to our age as well cos second year scholars… after that then it's under 23s next year and you don't have to do any jobs. It's good. It just like, keeps us, cos otherwise it's like laziness and that can creep in and…I think it's a good thing that the standards are high.
>
>
> NG: Do you think they're a good thing? The jobs?
>
> P12: Yeah, I think they keep us disciplined.

Player 4 indicates that the completion of jobs is a riteful passage of the masculine journey on the way to the next stage of achievement; to make it to the Under 23s. Both Player 4 and Player 12 indicate a subconscious understanding to display the correct attitude and abide by the rules without confrontation. This could be said is part of their embodied habitus as these are dispositions are deeply rooted within them which are produced and reproduced by the presence of power by those over and above them within the figuation (Dunning 2002; Paulle and Heenkuizen 2012). Player 9 echoed the same feelings:

P9: it's quite strict but I feel like, we've all gone along with it, we're all playing a part and we've all kept to the standard, we've not really dropped below.

NG: Do you think it's a good thing then?

P9: Yeah, I think it's a really good thing cos as the Gaff's come in, the new Gaffer, I feel like he's come in and brought a mentality where standards are everything.

NG: Yeah?

P9: So, cleaning up around the club at the end of the day, making sure everything's presentable for any of the younger boys coming in can see that.

This apparent need to display a show of professional conduct to younger academy teams was suggested to be a matter of high priority when the new manager arrived at the club during the 2018/2019 season. Although it is not within the realm of this study to analyse managerial and academy player relationships, there appeared to be an unwritten, silent conformity that these players adhered to whatever was put in place in terms of rules and regulations due to their ever evolving habitus (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006b and Kelly and Waddington 2010). Additionally, the appointment of the new manager brought new rules that perhaps indicate a continuation of a lack of standardised managerial guidelines or a job description for football managers (Kelly and Waddington 2006). This also evidences the continuous social process that these individuals are, through their need to adapt and mould their habitus to protect their football identity (Dunning 2002). Likewise, Player 3, the Under 23s player, describes the difference between different manager expectations and what that meant for the players:

NG: Do you still do jobs?

P3: Sometimes... When the 18's aren't in. The 18's do most of 'em… so last year we did nothing, like under [name of manager], we were treated as 23 players, the 18s did this, if the 18s weren't in, the 18s would have to come in and do it. The 23s were treated as 23s players, borderline first team players… Under the new manager, lot harsher on you know, jobs… we have to wait… we can't leave after everything's done until we get a member of staff to come and look at the changing room, make sure the changing rooms tidy, boots are done, no mud about… kits gone down to laundry, all this. We've gotta make sure everything's done.

Player 3 suggests that the new manager prioritises jobs higher than the previous manager who viewed the Under 23s as borderline first team players as he believes that

even the Under 23s still have another segment to pass on their journey to be a man in the first team. Player 3 continued:

> I think sometimes they, not forget about us… they don't care like, if we came to them saying 'look the changing rooms done', it could be another hour or so till they come down and look at it… cos they have other things to do... and it's not them going, 'right I'll leave them for an hour', it's them going 'right I've got a phone call to make, I need to make this and then I'll do that', cos we're not priority… I don't think we should be a priority, but I think there should be that trust, that right, we're gonna do this, we're gonna get it done and then we'll go… and if it's not adequate, then fine us.

Likewise, when asked about his thoughts on the necessity of completing jobs, Player 8 said:

> we have to sweep the hallways, especially now with the new manager. He's really cracked down on it. Like... hoovering the floors. Everything. We've got a lot of jobs to do.
>
> NG: What do you all think about that?
>
> P8: (raises his eyebrows) Wouldn't like to say.

This answer arguably demonstrates the level of conformity these players will adhere to, no matter how much they may internally disagree with the rules and regulations, which echoes the findings in Manley, Roderick and Parker's (2016) study on the discourse of identity and maintaining silence in a sporting environment. Remaining silent is arguably a coping strategy to deal with the fluxing power balances between themselves and the personnel who control their daily routines, yet it should be noted that these players are not completely powerless, they choose to normalise these expectations to show that they have a good attitude and are disciplined enough to be a success (Elias 1978; Brown and Coupland 2015; Manley, Roderick and Parker 2016).

The internalisation of the norms of the football environment were, in some cases, a slightly easier part of the transition into the youth academy in comparison to moving away from home. Seven of the players lived in digs at the time of interview, although one had recently moved back home after feeling he could not manage the demands of the academy and living away from home. Three found moving into digs particularly difficult, whilst out of the 7 who lived in digs, 6 said once the initial transition was complete and they became accustomed, they found the whole scenario completely fine. This acknowledgement, irrespective of any other considerations concerning the

transition from school to the academy, again argues against Mitchell et al's. (2014) statement that the transition is a positive one as there are too many factors to consider for such a bold statement. For example, Player 11 suggested that being paired with other academy players into one house was beneficial as they could manage the transition and discuss how they were feeling and therefore settle in together. Player 3 said that the family he was placed with had 'been doing digs for years… they absolutely love it'. He also said, 'if I'd been moved into another place instead of where I was, I think my experience would have been completely different, but because I was stuck in with 5 lads, I made those friends from living with them'. This statement suggests the need for friendships is regarded a priority by some of the players to manage moving away from home and to bolster their self-confidence when entering the new workplace. This can be identified as a similarity to the findings from Fry and Bloyce's (2017a) study on golfers who made friendships for convenient purposes whilst away from home on tour. Elias (1978, p.130) states an 'interdependence of the players, which is a prerequisite of their forming a figuration, may be an interdependence of allies or of opponents'. These players are arguably aware of the upcoming challenges that they face to be success, as all players knew that only 0.012% of academy players are successful at Premier League level (BT Sport 2018). Thus, facing such challenging times but with allies as opposed to opponents could be determined as a coping strategy adopted to lessen the isolated threats that these players may experience (Nicholls and Polman 2006).

This finding highlights the difficult task the football club must undertake to liaise with appropriate accommodation providers for these young individuals to live in. Player 6 suggested that he would struggle if he had to move away from home and felt that dealing with such changes 'could have an effect on how they play as well'. Player 9 echoed this stating that he 'felt like I'd enjoy football a lot more if I was in my home environment'. Arguably then, the transition to full-time academy is difficult for many and those who must move into digs are at risk of isolation, loneliness, longing for home and poor performance. In agreement with Lahelma and Gordon (2003) who stated that a home environment often symbolises safety, material meanings, emotional connections and support networks through social interactions with significant members of an individual's close circle, these players are struggling to manage the transitional change into adulthood that leaving home creates, plus, managing new and perhaps strange employment requirements that differ from the norms experienced during school (Elias 1978). Thus, it should be acknowledged that those academy players forced to move into digs to attend the academy are perhaps the ones who transition into adulthood in a more difficult way than those who have been at the academy since the age of 7 and have never been required to leave the family home, such as Player 12. Elias' concept of

loneliness offers an explanation here, as he states that despite individuals being surrounded by other people and forming new interdependent chains, the feeling of loneliness and isolation can intensify when the individual feels they have no positive feelings towards others (Elias 2001). This perpetuation of loneliness may also be a cause for concern when these youth players experience their next critical moment of an extension to their scholarship, transition into the Under 23s/first team or being released. Thus, a study to follow these individuals into their next transitional stage would be pertinent to understand the fluctuating social relationships that these players construct and reconstruct throughout their journey.

7.2.   The Coach-Player Relationship

Existing literature by Kelly and Waddington (2006) and Roderick (2006b) focused on first team players and their relationship with managers and the uncertainty of life as a professional footballer. Within these studies, the coach-player relationship was a common theme of discussion and as key authors in this area, these topics were used in this study as guidance for creating the interview guide. It was hoped that it would be possible to learn of the interdependencies between players and coaches at this academy and the influence these relations had on the player's transition and daily academy life. In Kelly and Waddington's (2006) study, the authors discussed rules and codes of conduct and resulting expected behaviours that were normalised by young players. This was present within this academy club when Player 3 said: 'they're always gonna be there to tell you what you can and can't do'. Player 6 said: 'They expect you to give your maximum… that's the minimum'. All players alluded to an understanding of known boundaries when it came to their coaches with most of the players claiming that their relationship with their coaches was good, or strong, with Player 5 stating that their relationship was growing stronger as the coaches 'adapted to his weaknesses and strengths'. Of this majority, none alluded to any form of verbal abuse or intimidation that was prevalent in Kelly and Waddington's (2006) study as they mainly referred to their managers and coaches in a positive light, although it cannot be directly assumed that it was not present as no direct question of this nature was asked. Likewise, in Roderick's (2006b) study, he alluded to an ever-present strain between players and managers as the latter are constantly in need of a return on their investment in terms of player performance. In this study, there did not appear to be regular experiences of fear for the players, rather they discussed their coaches as instrumental in their development:

> P12: I think all the coaches are very supportive to all the players. All want to make us better people and players.

P3: I think the majority of the coaches here are fantastic. I think they have that respect. You know the coach is, not your boss, but they're in charge of you… you listen to them, you respect them, but when they respect you back and they tell you in the right way… I think it's a lot better.

P1: It's that, not just bond… on the football pitch, but off it as well. It's kind of knowing you as a person, just so if you have an off game, they know how to get you… back on form and know how to talk to you properly, cos you can't talk to everyone the same, they don't react the same.

P10: Throughout the season, [if] we've come off the pitch and we're just like 'oh, we've had a crap performance or something' and the coach would come in and try get the spirits up… instead of lashing out.

These findings suggest a positive fluxing of power within this figuration as these young players are benefitting from positive rewards and constructive criticism from their coaches that will make them better players. Perhaps then, this demonstrates the implementation of existing research into the world of football where managers and coaches are adapting how they behave towards these young, impressionable individuals (Parker 1996; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Roderick 2006a, 2006b; Platts 2012). For example, although the masculine subculture is still very much evident in the academy, it seemed refreshingly enlightening given existing research that suggests otherwise, that these players felt that they could approach their coaches and ask for advice, with Player 10 saying: 'you could just go knock on the door and they'd say come in'. However, there was one player who suggested that his relationship is not always positive, and he has experienced some negativity that has affected his performance, confidence and team selection. When asked about his relationship with his coaches, Player 7 said: 'well, it depends what time of the season you ask me'. During his interview, the researcher felt that Player 7 needed to relay the very detailed version of events that led to a meeting with his parents and the Manager of the academy after an altercation. As noted earlier, this is the same player who experienced a drop in his self-confidence levels and needed significant support from his coaches to rectify that and keep his footballer identity intact. In his story, he explained that he was given mixed signals of encouragement and retribution regarding his performance. As this was discussed solely by Player 7, it could be surmised that this was a 'one-off' scenario. However, given that 14 players did not want to be interviewed at all for this study, or were not available, there is some doubt as to whether this could be the case amongst the remaining academy players.

7.3.   Plans for the future: Education and Ambitions

As only 180 youth academy players out of 1.5 million will become a successful footballer (BT Sport Films 2018), it was crucial that this study took the opportunity to gauge an understanding of how these players perceived their future opportunities and potential failure as a player. This was achieved through establishing the players perceptions of their current mandatory educational studies and whether they had a second career option. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all the player's aspired to become a professional footballer. However, in contrast to Parker's (1996) study where the term 'occupational inevitability' was used to describe the academy player's thoughts on making it as a professional and therefore a resulting disregard for potential failure, 8 of these 12 players in this study had a 'Plan B' career option. For some, this was to remain in a sporting role such as that of a physio, or sport scientist, whereas others wanted to go into Business, Law or Engineering, with enrolling at university mentioned by several participants. What is perhaps more relatable to participants in Parker's (1996) and Platts (2012) studies was that 9 players said that many academy players did not take their mandatory education seriously, despite knowing the success rates. However, this was not perceived as related to findings in Parker's (1996) study where to want to complete an education was to admit that a football career was unlikely. In this study, the main reasons for disregarding education were boredom, purely wanting to play football, or the course being too like one done previously at school. No player indicated that education would be frowned upon by the club, should they wish to pursue more qualifications. Thus, it cannot be said for certain whether the assumptions made by McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005) and Brown and Potrac (2009) where a stronger athletic identity results in lower educational commitment are evident in this study, as over half of these players specialised early in the sport, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, those who did specialise early do not exactly correlate in a linear fashion to those who do not engage fully in education. For example, Players 2 and 11 played from a very young age but were the only two players who said they take their education seriously. Players 3 and 10 did not start professional football till later, with the former completing what was necessary and the latter engaging in extra business study A Levels, proving that it is not a simple matter of those who have specialised early as the ones that disregard education, it is more complex.

When asked about their views on education now they had left compulsory schooling and were enrolled on a mandatory BTEC in Sport Studies at a new college close to the academy, all 12 players suggested that they view education as an important part of their lives. However, it was very clear that like those players in Parker's (1996) study,

attending college on a Wednesday was a necessary evil for most of the players yet an opportunity to express their masculinity and footballer identity to outsiders:

> NG: do you think as a team you all feel the same about education?

> P1: (*laughing*) no… no, there's some boys who just think you know, I'm gonna be a footballer… I'm here full-time, I've pretty much made it, I don't need to do this.

> P3: we went and did it at a local college and then everyone just went nuts. Cos you get people trying to stunt, looking like 'oh look at me I'm a footballer in a college'.

Player 1 continued by saying that this view is 'expected' in this kind of environment with Player 2 interestingly adopting an 'us' analogy:

> Some of us are [interested], some of us just get on and work… some of us, hate it, some of us can't, some of us won't do it, some just get bored too easy.

This kind of description suggests a unity of identity, where the perception is that they all feel and act the same way due to their embodied footballer habitus. Parker (1996) stated that the behaviour of these individuals during their educational classes was another notion that was expected; teachers expected these footballers to not want to be in the class, to behave poorly and to attempt the work in a mediocre way. Likewise, these players suggest that banter is a present behavioural subculture that follows them from the academy to the college. Player 10 said that at the new college, which is Rugby-orientated, himself and the other academy players feel segregated from the full-time pupils, despite assurances from academics that they will be welcomed and integrated. The youth players are outweighed in the power balance struggle and in the minority outsider group, as they are made to feel like outsiders by their established, rugby-playing fellow students (Elias & Scotson, 1965). This is perhaps interesting, as within the club itself, there is a division of Established second years and Outsider first years, yet at college, all youth academy players feel the need for reassurance amongst one another:

> P10: we're not really classed as students in the school… they don't speak to us… we tried speaking to each other but that didn't last very long… I don't really mind, because I've got the lads to have the banter with.

Despite some players wanting to study additional A Levels and other subjects, the outside world's perception of these players as elite athletes precedes them in other

environments, therefore, no matter how hard they try to integrate, they are isolated, and constrained to maintain the footballer stereotype that has dominated the football world for many years (Parker 1996).

Despite the disregard for education, the players did allude to a punishment system orchestrated by the club should they not complete their education on time or to an accepted standard. The punishments were given on a strike system, where one strike was to coach one of the younger academy groups one evening during the week. A second strike was to miss training and a third was to miss a match completely. Given the percentage chances of being in the starting XI anyway, this strike system was described by most players as effective because it meant the work was completed and football could be played. To miss a match because of not completing their education was regarded as foolish as it could allow someone else to take their place:

> P10: if the education isn't up to date then you could miss training, you could miss matches and that, that puts your place up in jeopardy, so if you're playing well every week and you're not doing your education, you could be on the side lines. You might not even be in the squad.

This finding differs from Parker's (1996), Monk's (2000), Brown and Potrac's (2009) and Platts' (2012) studies that found clubs were not over enthusiastic regarding education as to do well or be interested in gaining an education was to admit failure as a footballer. This study shows that this club regarded education as important to complete regardless as to individual opinions, as players suggested that the club's views on education were positive and encouraging. The appointment of an education officer at this club reinforces the club's apparent value of education which was a remark Hickey and Kelly (2008) stated was crucial if players were to manage both successfully. Additionally, Bourke (2003) found Irish trainee players felt English players had substantial time to complete their studies, which all players in this study confirmed. Some players however, did allude to difficulties in managing their education and football, with Player 7 stating that he could have done more education yet he feels at an advantage that he didn't as he states that 'some of the boys are doing business, some of the boys are doing History. They're behind in our work because they're trying to do that as well'. Player 8 said that he found it difficult to self-teach and complete the work in one day and a morning compared with the amount of time they'd be given to do the same course if at school. It was also indicated in Bourke's (2003) study that an improvement in relations between academies and educational institutes is necessary if players are to be individually motivated to complete their studies. With their educational officer a keen drive for these players to gain good qualifications as well as the club moving their players to a new college

recently, this club arguably takes their player's education seriously and is very keen to improve on relations with the college and the qualifications gained by their players, yet there is still room for improvement. For example, the players provided both positives and negatives of the new college, as well as in terms of football education provided by the academy. However, perhaps of concern was that upon being asked about their knowledge and understanding of key stakeholders such as the PFA, only 2 players were able to offer an explanation as to the PFA's role. Nine players said they had heard of the PFA but did not understand what they do, other than that they are lifetime members and they can 'get their car insurance with them'. One player had not heard of the PFA at all. Given the aims and values of the PFA, plus career uncertainty, this is arguably a major area in need of investment both from the club's perspective and the PFA themselves who need to invest in making their organisation more accessible and known to all levels of English football, if players are to be aided throughout the career transitions.

Regarding career ambitions, these players were unanimously clear about their dream of becoming a professional footballer and that they would complete anything that was asked of them, which demonstrates Elias' notion of power and its continuous fluctuation that both enables and constrains these players. This was even evident when the players were asked if they would play in lower leagues to still identify as a footballer. Most of the players answered yes, which is in stark contrast to the findings in Bourke's (2003) study that said English players will not consider lower league opportunities. These players identify as a footballer, the habitus is continually evolving through continued high-level exposure to the environment and they are extremely aware of their success in gaining an academy place. They are driven by their childhood dreams to make it on the main stage, despite the harsh realities that they may not succeed.

In summary, this chapter has sought to argue that there are still some elements of the historic notions of working-men's football culture evident in the game today. Set rules and behaviours dominate the club environment with jobs still a reproducing element of this hyper-masculine environment; yet at this club there appears to be a movement towards a more acceptable coach-player relationship where young academy players can respect their coaches whilst being respected themselves. This club is an advocate of education and although this finding cannot be generalised to other clubs in the Championship, this club is proof that improvements are being made regarding the strong anti-education stereotypes prominent in the football world. The prevalence of banter and perceptions of the outside world of these players is still present, but they appear to create a form of unity and solidarity; an 'us' identity whereby they will stick together and support one another through the hardships of professional football. Their career ambitions are high, their dreams are exceptionally high, yet unlike what is commonly perceived, these

players know those terrible statistics that probably mean only 1, if any, of the 12 players interviewed will make it, they appear content with that reality and most importantly, the majority have a Plan B.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine youth academy male footballers' experiences of their transitions from full-time school to full-time professional academy. Using a comparative study design, this thesis drew upon concepts of figurational sociology as tools for explaining the transitional experiences that were identified by the participants. Specifically, Elias' frameworks surrounding figurations, interdependencies, Established Outsider Relations, power, habitus and his more recently found research regarding his shock theory were utilised to offer explanations (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015).

Three types of transitional experience were identified by the participants including 'a smoother transition', 'a more difficult transition' and 'an initial transitional shock', with half expressing their experiences as generally more smooth and the remaining half suggesting they experienced a more difficult or more shocking transition. In line with findings from Roderick (2006a) and Clarke, Cushion and Harwood (2018), it is argued that early specialisation within football has a profound effect on how these players perceived their critical moments/transitions. These players displayed strong athletic identities as a result of sustained engagement in football from a young age, with parental influence perpetuating their football habitus. The result of this was the internalisation of the norms of the environment which shows that the hyper-masculine culture so readily spoken about in existing literature, is still a prominent feature of football today. These player's responses suggest that the likelihood of a change in the masculine norms within football is incredibly slim. The presence of long-standing historical traditions, such as the requirement to complete menial tasks or 'jobs' that included cleaning and maintaining equipment and caring for first team needs were heavily identified by all participants. This has not changed since Parker's (1996) study. The enrolment into the Under 18's scholars programme, combined with these traditional elements served to exacerbate the strong athletic footballer identity that these players already possessed. It is clear, that player discipline and travelling on a rite of passage journey without question is still considered the only way to become a man in the game. Ultimately then, if we are to progress in our care for the youngsters coming into and through academies in the future and support them on this continually reconstructed hyper-masculine journey, it is imperative to understand the sociological influences of the environment. For example, the formation of new chains of interdependence are how and why some players find the transition period relatively smooth or more of a shock. The fluctuation of power within the figuration further perpetuates these young player's identities and habitus, cementing their desire to be a footballer as all participants spoke of their

professional player aspirations. If the authoritarian behaviour of those in higher, more powerful positions is lacking, these players crave it, stating that it improves their discipline and gives them the ideology that they are more likely to succeed as a professional (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006a). This again demonstrates that traditional subculture norms are present within the football environment but perhaps suggests that research examining early specialisation in professional football academies may also provide a deeper understanding of how to care and educate these players in their subsequent transitions.

The word transition is perhaps not wholly accurate for all participants in this study as half of them described their transition as more difficult or more of a shock (Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee 2008). This study found it was more appropriate to consider their transitions as experiences that featured critical moments as in contrast to Mitchell et al. (2014), some of these player's critical moments were a combination of positive and negative experiences. This was due to their own internalised perceptions of these experiences; therefore, they cannot be simply labelled as positive. When applying Elias' shock-theory to analyse these varied critical moments, it was found that all 9 causes of shock are present, proving that the critical moment where the individual moves from school to the academy is non-linear and consists of new interdependencies that form as a result of adapting to the situation. Moreover, when considering that each player is an individual at their own life stage, transitioning from youth to adulthood is a blurred, unplanned time (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). This highlights that the youth stage of life is indeed longer than historically understood and whilst understanding behaviours and identity formation is improving, adopting a generic approach towards individuals during their academy time is neither fruitful nor sensible. To consider these players as individuals whilst acknowledging how interdependencies enable and constrain their relationships with others in the academy, would arguably benefit the club by providing an environment where this knowledge can be used in a positive manner to yield success both on and off the pitch.

Despite the continuous reproduction of the masculine environment as per Parker (1996; Roderick 2006), this study has found that at this Championship club, the youth environment does possess elements of warmth and encouragement. Although in agreement with Parker (1996) who suggested that life at Colby Town was anything but encouraging due to the difference in technical abilities at an academy compared with an amateur club, this club's values uphold traditional elements, yet all players described easy accessibility to their coaches should they need emotional support. Plus, rather than receiving verbal chastisement following a poor performance, most of the players alluded to coaches expressing words of encouragement rather than punishment, which

suggests that the football world may be changing the way it operates. Certainly, at this club, although the same cannot be generalised to other Championship clubs, the coach-player relationship was distinctly positive with an open-door policy which contrasts to findings from Kelly and Waddington (2006). This indicates the removal of barriers between coaches and players and suggests the movement for improved mental health amongst athletes that is prevalent in the media, may indeed be penetrating this football club. Similar studies on other Championship clubs would offer a more holistic view of how prevalent this positive coach-player relationship is.

Whilst discussing daily academy life and the norms it entailed, many of the players discussed the prevalence of banter in the changing rooms as well as a divide between the players, particularly first and second years. Some players suggested that banter is accepted by all, whereas others alluded to normalising it for the sake of fitting in. As tradition is a vehicle for legitimising positions of power, this study's data suggests that young academy players are constructing and reconstructing their masculine identities by maintaining elements of tradition, such as banter and hierarchical behaviour to protect themselves in the ruthlessness of the industry (Parker 1996; Roderick 2006b; Platts 2012). For example, it was apparent that relationships in the dressing room were evidence of fluctuating power balances as second years sought to display themselves as more powerful than the new scholars, by making them complete jobs and engage in various forms of banter. These discussions on banter and in line with Fry and Bloyce's (2017a) work, suggest that these players regard banter as an environmental norm which they engage in to refrain from displaying any weaknesses to others. Some participants suggested that everyone was friends, whereas others described a kind of usage of one another. In other words, off the pitch these players used one another to rid themselves of feeling isolated and lonely with no friends, but during game time they purely focused on themselves and working to succeed as an individual (Fry and Bloyce 2017a). These participants demonstrate that football is indeed a group of individuals in a team sport as their identities are continuously evolving through the interdependencies and power balances to which they are subject (Elias 1978).

Within this study, several areas of daily life were discussed, particularly that of first team idolisations and relations. It was found that liaisons with the first team were strongly desired by the youth players and after the appointment of a new club manager, the opportunities to engage with the first team were limited and ultimately missed. These players view first team players as idols and role models as per Parker (1996) and Morris, Tod and Eubank (2017). Once again, the importance of acknowledging interdependencies within the figuration appears imperative. The club are arguably missing out on the opportunity to improve the responses of their players as they face

future critical moments in their movements into the Under 23s and the first team. The importance the academy players place on liaising with first team players is what further cements their football habitus and identity. To ignore this could prove detrimental to a player's welfare as was indicated by Player 7 who alluded to feeling alienated from his own academy teammates yet felt more at home with the first team players. Ultimately, liaisons with the first team could dramatically reduce the gap between youth team players and first team players that Arsène Wenger commented on (BT Sport 2018), thus improving the success rate and employment of 'home-grown' players.

Regarding employment and in contrast to Parker (1996), players in this academy did not associate with the term 'occupational inevitability'. All players were knowledgeable on the low statistical success rate of making it as a professional and many even had a 'Plan B' for when their career finishes. Despite this, many did not speak particularly positively about their mandatory educational requirements, although they did understand the value of education, which could be said is an indication that headway is being made in terms of understanding the unlikelihood of being successful. This club upholds a positive mentality towards education and through the appointment of an Education Officer, encourages youth players to undertake additional qualifications, which again contrasts to findings from Parker's (1996) study. However, what was of concern and perhaps in need of modification immediately, is the apparent lack of understanding on the player's behalf of the role and aims of the PFA. None of the players, bar one, were able to explain what the PFA does or is. This is perhaps quite alarming given their aim to protect the welfare of all players under employment in English football. It is suggested therefore that amendments to the delivery of wider football education such as governing bodies and organisations like the PFA be made, particularly as almost all the players would consider playing in lower leagues if it meant that they could still be a footballer and protect their identity (Bourke 2003). If the ambition of these players is to stay in the game for as long as possible as they are not ready to give up on their dream, then the continued efforts by this club to educate their players is essential, although better involvement from the FA and PFA to improve player longevity and reduce the gap between policy and procedure is also essential.

In conclusion, the findings from this study offer some unique contributions to the knowledge of professional football. Whilst elements of tradition show that the hyper-masculine culture long associated with football is still heavily present and the norms of the environment are continuously working to enable and constrain these young player's identities through the formation of new chains of interdependence within the figuration, these players are well aware of their limited chance of success and show resilient characteristics as they manage and negotiate through the waves of adaptations

necessary to succeed even at academy level. This chapter will now look to examine limitations and future implications for further future research.

8.1.   Limitations, future recommendations and implications for research

Upon reflection, there are some possible limitations to be discussed. Firstly, it could be argued that more participants would have provided more depth and understanding of the power balances at play within this club. However, as described earlier, this was simply unachievable as the remaining 14 players of the youth academy were either injured, on loan or did not wish to participate, therefore the maximum number of available participants were used. Additionally, there were at times, opportunities where further probing may have established more detail with which to understand the adaptations made by these players. For example, further probing into life outside the academy would have provided data on how these players live as professional footballer, however, this was not the purpose of this study and therefore could be a possible avenue for a future research study.

Given the lack of existing literature available on professional football because of the closed social world within which it sits and based on findings from this study, future research examining the transition out of the game for these players would be beneficial in providing the academic world with an increasing longitudinal understanding of the career journey these players undertake. More specifically, transitions out of the academy at the ages of 19 or 20 given that many of the 26 players at this championship club will not make it past their scholarship programme, would provide a more holistic view of how this influences these players identities. Finally, a comparative study on another league club from the Premier League down to the Conference would be beneficial to contextualise the findings in this study. Such knowledge could pave the way to understanding and aiding these players as they experience these critical moments in their professional career.

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Appendix A – Ethical Approval Letter

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York St John University,
Lord Mayors Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX

30th November, 2018

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York St John University Cross School Research Ethics Committee
(Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business)

Dear Nicola,

Title of study: A sociological examination of present subcultures amongst Youth Academy male footballers and their experiences in the transition period of school to work.

Ethics reference: Gledhill_30112018

Date of submission: 05/11/2018

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the Cross School Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Application for ethical approval form	30/11/2018
Responses to feedback form	30/11/2018
Provisional Interview guide	30/11/2018
Participant information sheet and consent form	30/11/2018
Debrief sheet	30/11/2018

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study.

Yours sincerely,

Nathalie Noret

Appendix B- Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet

Name of school: School of Sport, York St John University
Title of study: What are the experiences of Youth Academy football players during the transition period from school to full-time youth team?

_____

Introduction

You have been invited to take part in a research project exploring your experiences of transitioning from full-time school to full-time youth team player. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information, please contact me Nicola Gledhill, (postgraduate student in the School of Sport, York St John University) or my supervisor Dr Graeme Law, using the contact details on the following page.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The aims of this study are to understand how young football players experience the transition period from full-time school to full-time youth team player and to gain an understanding of if being a part of a young football team influences individuals into adopting a particular identity, whilst exploring what practices and behaviours are considered the norm within this football environment. In conducting this study, I am trying to gain an understanding of how the demands of the football industry may or may not influence an individual's perceptions of their self and how they view themselves within a global sport.

What will you do in the project?

Part of this study involves interviews with male youth academy football players aged 16+. You will be asked to take part in one interview, with approximately 30-40 questions that will cover topics that include: the start of your participation in football, what your experiences of moving from school to the youth team were like, what your education experiences are, your career aspirations, life outside football and more specifically day to day experiences of the Youth Team.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study, but your contribution would be greatly appreciated. You will not be treated any differently, whether you choose to take part, or decide not to do so. If you do decide to take part, you may later withdraw from the study without giving a reason and without penalty.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this project because you have the desired attributes and skills that this study requires, i.e. you are male; are aged 16+; are a full-time Youth Team player and have a contract for at least two years.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

Due to the nature of this study there are minimal risks that may arise from your participation and there will be no preparatory requirements. If you should feel that you wish to discuss any topic areas or sensitive subjects with another, support will be available to you; information regarding this can be found on the debrief sheet which will be given to you accordingly. You do have the right to withdraw from this project at any point, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the project by informing me that you wish to do so via the email at the end of this sheet. If you withdraw from the research, any words used by you will be removed from the data that has been collected. You may request that the information you have provided is removed from the study by 15/04/2019.

What happens to the information in the project?

All interviews will be audio recorded for transcribing purposes, but all answers will remain confidential. A participant number will be used for you and pseudonyms for any organisations or people that you mention in order to maintain anonymity. All data collected whilst conducting this investigation will be stored securely on the password protected OneDrive storage system and password protected computer account, which is used for the storage of research data at York St John University, in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation. The information collected whilst conducting this project will be stored for a minimum of 6 months. The information will not be shared with the outside research community; only the information used in the final thesis will be available for others to read.

What happens next?

If you are happy to take part in this project, you will be asked to sign a consent form in order to confirm this.It is possible that the results of this research project will subsequently be published. If this is the case, appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that all participants remain strictly anonymous. If you do not want to be involved in the project, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading the information above.

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the Ethics Panel in the School of Sport at York St John University.

Researcher contact details:

NICOLA GLEDHILL	**DR. GRAEME LAW**
School of Sport,	School of Sport,
York St John University,	York St John University,
Lord Mayor's Walk,	Lord Mayor's Walk,
York,	York,
YO31 7EX.	YO31 7EX.
Email: nicola.gledhill@yorksj.ac.uk	Email: g.law@yorksj.ac.uk

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought, please contact: Nat Noret, Chair of the Cross-School Research Ethics Committee for Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business, York St John University, Lord Mayors Walk, York, YO31 7EX, or email: n.noret@yorksj.ac.uk

Appendix C- Gatekeeper Information Sheet and Consent Form

Dear Youth Academy Manager,

As part of my postgraduate Masters by Research, I am completing a research project examining the experiences of the transition of youth academy football players from full-time school to full-time youth team. I request your permission to use your Youth Academy team players to complete my research study.

What does the study involve?

The study will involve one-to-one interviews with each member of the Youth Academy team (players only), where approximately 30-40 questions will be asked about their experiences of the transition period from full-time school to full-time youth team. I have included further information about the study in the accompanying Participant Information Sheet.

What happens with the study findings?

Only myself and my Masters supervisor will have access to the information from this investigation. All information will be stored in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Participant numbers will also be used to protect the anonymity of all participants, with pseudonyms given for any people and organisations who are mentioned or take part in the study.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

My details are at the top of the page. Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor:

Dr. Graeme Law (01904 876485 / g.law@yorksj.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns, queries or complaints regarding the research project please contact Nathalie Noret (Chair of the Cross-School Research Ethics Committee for Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business at York St John University) on 01904 876311 or n.noret@yorksj.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours Faithfully,

Nicola Gledhill

nicola.gledhill@yorksj.ac.uk
Masters by Research in Sport, York St John University.

Please sign below if you are happy for me to complete my research with your Youth Academy team.

I have read and understand the above information and **do give my consent** to this study taking place.

 Signature: .... Date: ....

Participant Information Sheet for Gatekeepers

Name of school: School of Sport, York St John University
Title of study: What are the experiences of Youth Academy football players during the transition period from school to full-time youth team?

Introduction

I would like to invite your Youth Academy team to take part in a research project examining the experiences of individual players transition period from full-time school to full-time youth team member. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information, please contact me (Nicola Gledhill, postgraduate student in the School of Sport, York St John University) or my supervisor (Dr Graeme Law, School of Sport, York St John University) using the contact details on the following page.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The aims of this investigation are to understand how young football players experience the transition period from full-time school to full-time youth team player and to gain an understanding of if being a part of a young football team influences individuals into adopting a particular identity, whilst exploring what practices and behaviours are considered the norm within this football environment. In conducting this investigation, I am trying to gain an understanding of how the demands of the football industry may or may not influence an individual's perceptions of their self and how they view themselves within a global sport.

What will you do in the project?

Part of this study involves male youth academy football players aged 16+ in order to gain their perspectives and experiences of life as a full-time youth team player. Participants will be asked to take part in one interview, which will ask about the start of the players participation in football, their experiences of moving from school to the youth team and what these were like, what their experiences of education are, their career aspirations, what life is like outside of football and more specifically what their day to day experiences are of being in the youth team. The investigation will take place at the training ground at times agreed between us at the convenience of your club.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like your Youth Academy team to take part in this study, but your contribution would be greatly appreciated. You will not be treated any differently, whether you choose to take part, or decide not to do so. If participants from your Youth Academy team decide to take part, they may later withdraw from the study without giving a reason and without penalty up to two months after the date of their individual interview.

Why have you been invited to take part?

Your Youth Academy team has been invited to take part in this project because your club has the desired attributes and skills that this study requires, i.e. the team players are male, aged 16+, are full-time Youth Team players and have a contract for at least two years.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

Due to the nature of this study, i.e. interviews, there are minimal risks that may arise from participation and there are no preparatory requirements. Participants will have the right to withdraw from this project at any point, without giving a reason, by informing me (the researcher) via email that they wish to do so. Participants will be able to request that the information they have provided is removed from the study by two months from the date of the interview.

What happens to the information in the project?

All interviews will be audio recorded for transcribing purposes, but all answers will remain confidential. Participant numbers will be used for any people and pseudonyms for any organisations that are mentioned in order to maintain anonymity. All data collected whilst conducting this investigation will be stored securely on the password protected OneDrive storage system and password protected computer account, which is used for the storage of research data at York St John University, in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation. The information collected whilst conducting this project will be stored for a minimum of 6 months. The information will not be shared with the outside research community; only the information used in the final thesis will be available for others to read.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written in this form.

What happens next?

If you are happy for your Youth Academy Team to take part in this project, you will be asked to sign a consent form in order to confirm this.

It is possible that the results of this research project will subsequently be published. If this is the case, appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that all participants and organisations remain strictly anonymous.

If you do not want to be involved in the project, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading the information above.

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the Ethics Panel in the School of Sport at York St John University.

Please use the contact details above should you wish to discuss any aspect of the project.

Appendix D- Interview Schedule

Interview Guide   **AGE:**

<u>Early Football Experiences</u>

In this first section I would like to ask you about how you got into football and what your experiences were.

1. Can you describe your football journey from when you started up until now?
   a. How did you become a Youth Team Player?
   b. What age? School year?
2. Can you tell me what it was like to train whilst you were still in full time school?
   a. Did you miss much school/ other things?
   b. What was it like trying to be in school and play football at the same time?
   c. Did /do you have any other hobbies?
   d. How did your friends find it?
3. Can you tell me about when you were offered your Youth Team contract?
   a. When was that? What happened?
   b. How did this impact on your school? Family and friends?
4. How did you socialise **before** you became a full-time Youth Team player?
5. How do your previous experiences in amateur or club football compare to being in the YT now?
6. What are your career aspirations?
   a. What you want to achieve from the Youth Team?

<u>Youth Team Core Experiences</u>

This next section will look at your Youth Team experiences and how you found the transition from school to full-time Youth Team.

7. What is the aim of the Youth Team at the club?
   a. What expectations do you feel you have to abide by to be a Youth Team player?
8. What does the club expect from you?
9. Can you describe a typical day of being a Youth Team player?
   a. Is there an expectation to complete domestic chores on a daily basis like we know used to be the case in years gone by? Can you explain? How do you feel about this? Is there value to it?
   b. What is your football training like? How often? What do you do?
10. Are there any other forms of physical training besides football that you do? Mandatory or by choice? Please explain.
11. Can you describe your transition from school into full-time Youth Team?
    a. What was it like? Did you know anyone already? How was it emotionally?
    b. Are you playing in the same position as you were prior to joining?
12. Can you recall the day you left home? What was that like? Can you describe what your living arrangements are like?
    a. How did you find making new friends? Did you already know lots of people or were you completely new to the squad?
13. How do you feel you have adjusted from full-time school to full-time youth team?
    a. What do you feel (if anything) you have had to adapt to the most?
    b. Is there more pressure?

      c. Any changes between yourself and family or friends?

      d. Did anyone you know have the same transition as you, or were they different? Please explain.

14. Can you describe what you do in your free time?

15. What is it like in the Youth Team dressing room?

      a. Does everyone get along? Are you all friends? (Tensions, banter?)

16. Those of you who play in the same position on the pitch- what are your relationships with one another like?

      a. Are there any differences in privileges between first and second years?

      b. Would you say there is a hierarchy amongst the players? (Are any players considered favourites? Or in charge?)

17. Is there a difference both on and off the pitch in how everyone gets along?

      a. Do you all mix or are you all segregated?

18. Can you describe what you do in your free time after training/ matches?

      a. How often can you go home?

      b. Are there any restrictions on what you can and can't do?

19. What is your relationship like with the first team players?

      a. Do you see them much?

      b. Do you they offer advice/ coaching?

20. Do you feel there is a 'footballing image' that you need to live by? (Clothes, material goods etc).

Education and Career

Next, we will discuss education outside of the club and your career plans.

21. Are you (still) in further education? Please explain.

      a. What qualifications outside of football do you have?

22. Now you have finished full-time school what are your reflections on your education up until now?

      a. What are your views on the importance of education?

      b. Did you achieve as much as you should or could have done?

      c. What career would you have chosen if this youth team position had not been awarded to you?

23. What are your experiences of the training in your college/on your course?

      a. If you needed to, have you got an alternative career path prepared? Can you explain.

24. What is the relationship like between the club and the educational institute?

25. What are your views on how the coach values an education outside of football?

      a. Do you think he promotes it? Condones it?

      b. What are your opinions on mandatory education and skills training outside of football now you are in the Youth Team? Has it changed from when you were in full-time school?

26. How is your schedule designed so that you can complete your work from your college/course/institute?

27. How do you all collectively feel about completing your work outside of football?

      a. Do you all work together?

      b. Does everyone hold the same or different views on education?

28. How seriously do you think the education part of being in the youth Team is taken by the club and its staff?

      a. How seriously do you think the education part of being in the youth Team is taken amongst yourselves and your team mates?

      b. What are the managers views on education?

    c. Are some staff more encouraging of completing an education than others?

    d. Are there any consequences from the club if you do not do well, or do not attend your offsite education/ training?

    e. Likewise, are there are rewards from the club for doing well outside of the club in your education? / If there were rewards…?

Life Outside of Football

We will now focus on your life outside of football, discussing your friends and family and home circumstances.

29. How much do you feel your parents and friends influence your football career? Do you consult with them?
    a. What do you think your significant others (gf, bf, family, friends) feel about a career in football?
30. Since becoming full-time in the youth team are there any rules or codes that you must live by outside of the club and training ground?
31. Can you describe any habits that you or any others you know have picked up as a result of having each day planned out/timetabled for you?
    a. How have you adapted to being scheduled for the majority of your time?
    b. What are your views on this?

Youth Team Life

Finally, we will look at life within the football club and your experiences of it.

32. Can you describe what the relationship is like between your manager and you? Compared to the rest of the players?
33. How do you feel when you think about your future in football?
    a. How long do you think a football career will last?
    b. I am assuming that I would be right in thinking that your dream or expectation is to make the first team. What do you think the reality of that is?
    c. The statistics for players making regular first team appearances in the premier league are very low. How does this make you feel?
34. What are your views on how the club and manager prepare you for first team appearances?
35. What are your views on first team football compared to youth team?
36. What are your views on playing in lower leagues?
37. What is your footballing education like within the Youth Team? (Quality of training? Sport Science information? Nutrition, Physio, Biomechanics etc).
38. Do you get guidance on things outside of football by people within the club?
    a. What about things like drugs, alcohol and gambling?
    b. Have you been given any advice on those types of things?
    c. Money is huge aspect of football. Do you get any advice on money? (What to do with it? Investments? Savings?)
39. What do you understand about the role(s) of the PFA?
40. Have you heard of the Players Trust / LAPS/ Switch and do you know what they do?

That concludes the interview. Thank you very much for your participation.

Consent Form

Name of school: School of Sport, York St John University
Name of researcher: Nicola Gledhill
Title of study: What are the experiences of Youth Academy football players during the transition period from school to full-time youth team?

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, please circle the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If there is anything that you do not understand and you would like more information, please ask.

- I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form by the researcher. **YES / NO**
- I understand that the research will involve: a one-to-one interview in quiet, pre-arranged setting for approximately 20-40 minutes and will be audiotaped. **YES / NO**
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation. This will not affect my future care or treatment. I understand that I should contact you via email if I wish to withdraw from the study and that I can request for the information that I have provided to be removed from your investigation at any point. **YES / NO**
- I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study. **YES / NO**
- I understand that any audiotape material of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of your research. **YES / NO**
- I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with your supervisor at York St John University. **YES / NO**
- I consent to being a participant in the project. **YES / NO**

Print Name:	Date:
Signature of Participant:	

Appendix E- Debrief Sheet

Participant Debrief Sheet

Name of school: School of Sport
Name of researcher: Nicola Gledhill
**Title of study: What are the experiences of Youth Academy football players
during the transition period from school to full-time youth team?**

**Thank you for taking part in this research project. I greatly appreciate the fact
that you have taken the time and effort to help with this study.**

As explained in the Participant Information Sheet that was provided before you
decided whether to take in this project, there were some potential, minimal risks of
becoming involved.

If you have been affected in any way as a result of your involvement in this project,
please be aware that impartial support, advice, help or guidance may be available from
the following groups or organizations:

Name of organization	Telephone number	Website/ Email
Mind	020 8519 2122 (General)	www.mind.org.uk
Sporting Chance	01904 643364 (York branch)	www.sportingchanceclinic.com
	0870 2200714	
Professional Football Association (Welfare Officers)	07500 000 777	www.thepfa.com

Thank you again for your time.

Best wishes,

Nicola Gledhill

Postgraduate Student,
School of Sport,
York St John University,
Lord Mayor's Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX.